

Faculty and Staff Perception of Their Role in Student Success

by

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ABSTRACT

Faculty and staff can create barriers by not understanding their role in student success. This study began with an artifact analysis of 20 documents to better understand how faculty and staff at Concordia University Texas were operationalizing student success. The results of the artifact analysis showed a lack of recorded dialogue around student success at regular business meetings, as well as pattern of deficit language approach to policy and procedure in the student handbooks. Next, this study evaluated the impacts of using a Community of Practice as a change agent to help faculty and staff better understand their roles in student success and specifically to establish a definition of student success. Using a mixed method, action research approach, results showed that the Community of Practice was successful in terms of transfer of knowledge and creating a sense of purpose for participants regarding their role in student success. Results showed that participating in a Community of Practice was successful in helping faculty and staff not only understand their own role in student success, but understand their place amongst others in the unified goal to help students succeed. The Community of Practice participants completed the research with a better understanding of how and why collaborating with different department's enables faculty and staff to better help students. Additionally, the participants concluded that a visual reminder of student success (figurines, students' stories, student pictures) ensured that student success was the first thing they thought about when completing their daily work.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to women. The women of the past who laid a foundation of change. Margaret Measday who kept the books anyway, Mignon Pearson who taught me to love reading and question everything, Jackie Walters who was the most creative educator I have ever met, and JoAnn Zerchausky who simply expected great things from me. The scholarly women who showed me the educational path I could pursue, Dr. Tina Bertrand and Dr. Joan Bybee. The mothers who pitched in to take care of my family and me: Donna Measday-Bryant, Linnea Pospisil, and Rachal Eriksen. My tribe, who listened, gave advice, encouragement, laughter, lots of drinks, or just silent space to think and write: Kristin Coulter, Janelle Eriksen, Lynette Gillis, Kristi Kirk, Sally Licavoli, Liz Medina, Megan Pearson, and Jennielle Strother. And to the future, Lilymay Margaret, you can do anything and be anything – the world is your canvas, just paint.

To my most special men, who are the most supportive men a woman could ask for. Kingsley, my mini me, keep knowing everything and be curious about all things. And most of all, Michael, to which all this would be impossible without your support, encouragement, humor, patience, and most importantly your love.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

Results from studies have shown student services and student engagement play a large role in student success (Williams, et al., 2002). Students whom are already at high risk for attrition have the most challenges in navigating college for a variety of reasons. Many of the buzzwords that are used to categorize students who are at higher risk for attrition (e.g. first generation, academically under-prepared, underrepresented) lie on the shoulders of the students. However; there are other barriers to student success that are independent from the students. Namely, barriers that are created by academic departments, faculty, and staff when processes do not run smoothly. In a high stress situation where a student feels uncomfortable and inadequate, receiving different information from or feeling tension between departments creates barriers to success. Furthermore, when faculty and staff don't have a clear understanding of their role in student success, an opportunity is missed to help students succeed. A unified front by all staff and faculty creates an environment for students that leaves little room for students to be befuddled or confused.

Students come to college with unique challenges to success. Faculty and staff can play a key role in not only helping students overcome these personal barriers, but ensuring their work is devoted to eliminating any potential new hurdles students may come across while trying to navigate college life. In this research project, I focus on developing a community of practice (CoP) among faculty and staff with aims of: (1) identifying faculty and staff roles in student success, (2) understanding how faculty and

staff can improve their impact on student retention, and (3) identifying ways faculty and staff can impact student success. For the purpose of this study, a CoP is a “group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner, & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The CoP framework and theory will be covered in more detail in Chapter Two. This study is an action research study, meaning it was cyclical in nature, having gone through several iterations of research before the cycle highlighted in this dissertation. Additionally, action research is defined by the role of the researcher in that I am both the researcher, primarily, as well as a participant (Herr and Anderson, 2015).

Faculty, staff and administration will be referenced in this study frequently and their various roles described throughout; however, for context, I provide the following definitions.

- Faculty – full time teaching faculty.
- Student facing staff – employees that directly interact with students on a daily basis.
- Non-student facing staff – employees who do not directly interact with students on a daily basis.
- Administration – executive level administration consisting of president and area vice-presidents/provosts.
- Students – all populations of students, regardless of level or modality in which they take their classes.

Finally, for the purposes of this work, student success is defined as students progressing towards graduation with a positive experience.

Broader Context

Student success and retention are viewed as “wicked” problems; they are “dynamic [and] characterized by changing requirements and solutions that are difficult to

recognize because of complex interdependencies” (Jordan, Kleinsasser, & Roe, 2014, p. 417). There are many variables that can affect student success. For example, a student’s background, support system, and outside influences, all of which are outside the control of the university, can be instrumental in the success or failure of a student... In a study conducted to examine factors that influence attrition at a small, private, selective liberal arts school, researchers identified factors other than academic under-preparedness that affected attrition. The study showed that many students in good standing with GPAs between 3.05-3.5 did not retain. These students did not appear to be struggling; however, the academic rigor created heightened mental health issues for some students, and the mental health resources on campus were not prepared to deal with the volume of students seeking assistance (Gansemer-Topf, et al. 2014). This study highlights how attrition fits Rittel and Webber’s definition of a “wicked” problem in that “every problem can be considered a symptom of another problem” (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p 165). It is also fodder for the premise that colleges and universities cannot improve student success simply by addressing high risk issues like academic under-preparedness. Academic under-preparedness can be an issue for many students, but it is merely a symptom of larger problems, for example, from poor K-12 educational experiences. Furthermore, putting all the blame and responsibility on the student for items outside their control does not lead to adequately addressing student need. Universities must become adept at finding barriers to student success, and be able to address them quickly and efficiently.

Concordia University Texas

This study takes place at Concordia University Texas, a small liberal arts, faith based university in Austin, Texas. CTX is an ideal location for this study due to its small size, its core values, and the makeup of the student body, faculty and staff. The six core values at CTX are (1) Christ-centered, (2) caring for people, (3) vocation, (4) life-long learning, (5) trust, and (6) courage (Mission, Vision, Values, n.d.). Thinking deeply about student success and reflection on our own role in that success aligns well with our values, specifically “caring for people” and “life-long learning.”

Students.

Concordia University Texas (CTX) has a diverse student body, yet with a total enrollment of approximately 2500 students, we are small. Approximately 1200 students are considered traditional students, meaning they are in a daytime undergraduate program on the main campus. A quarter of these students, approximately 300, live on campus in residential housing, another quarter live in apartments within walking distance to the university, and the remaining students live 20 minutes or more from campus. An additional 450 students are non-traditional, meaning they are enrolled in an evening undergraduate program or online. The remaining 850 students are in one of our four online or face-to-face graduate programs. Each of our programs includes a diverse student population with respect to race/ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and academic preparedness. Our traditional student population faces many of the same risk factors as students at colleges and universities across the country, particularly in Texas. Currently, 70-80% of our incoming first-time

full-time freshmen are categorized as high risk for attrition, meaning they fall in one or more of four categories: first generation college student, underrepresented race/ethnicity, Pell Grant eligible (estimated family contribution of \$5000 or less annually), and academically under-prepared (enrollment score of just above admission requirement). Interestingly, our students sit on two extremes of the spectrum: either they meet two or more high risk categories or they have little financial aid need and are very academically prepared. We have very few students who rest in the middle in regards to finances and academic development. Our history in the Lutheran Church brings us students from affluent backgrounds and high achieving high schools. Our location and mission, however, lend us to be an institution of access, attractive to a diverse student body from the Austin, Houston, and Dallas Ft-Worth metropolises. This presents a unique body of students: those that need additional student support and do not seek it, and those that do not necessarily need additional student support but are often the first to utilize the many resources we provide. Regardless of risk category, undergraduate or graduate, evening or daytime, online or on-campus, student success is an important aspect of our mission and vision. Student success should be a priority of all employees, but operationalizing that priority is easier said than done (CTX SIS, 2019).

Student facing staff.

In 2012, I became the director of our one-stop-shop, Student Central. Student Central was established in 2010 as an answer to several years of scathing student surveys and reports that students felt like they were getting the ‘run around’ and finding barriers to their educational goals in the form of poor customer service and burdensome processes

and procedures. Coupled with a first-time, full-time freshman retention rate that ranged between 50% and 65%, the Associate Provost of Student and Enrollment Services decided a one-stop-shop might be the answer (CTX SIS, 2019). By the time I took over in 2012, Student Central was just getting established and students were finally starting to recognize it as the place to get help.

Student Central started as a partnership between the Registrar, Accounting, and Student Financial Services (financial aid) with those independent offices still running the back-end, day-to-day operations and Student Central acting as a liaison between those offices and students. Over time, the only partnership that has kept this model is Student Financial Services and Student Central. The Student Central staff has taken over most of the student facing processing of the Registrar's Office and Accounting such as processing academic petitions in the Student Information System (SIS), taking payments, and managing the student payment plan software. As this transition was unfolding, I witnessed an interesting phenomenon. As each of these departments became further removed from students and Student Central became the liaison between students and other departments, the other departments became less aware of their effect on students. This was evident in the policies and procedures they would implement. The one-stop-shop model hadn't changed the run around, the poor customer service, or most importantly, the barriers to educational goals. Instead, Student Central became the scapegoat because they were 'in between' the student and the service, and they were most visible to the student. The staff members in Student Central became advocates for the students, while bearing the blows when things did not go according to student

expectations. With staff members' time being spent trouble shooting, problem solving, and smoothing things over with students, they were not able to focus proactively on students' engagement and success goals like identifying struggling students and getting them connected to resources. Although the university observed some improvement on student services surveys, we were not observing the increase in retention that was anticipated. It has been eight years since I started working in Student Central, and organizational structure at the university has changed over the course of the last decade. However, the experience of watching a one-stop-shop grow, allowed me to see the different experiences of a student facing and non-student facing staff member. For the purpose of this research, a student facing staff refers to employees that directly interact with students on a daily basis as part of their job. They are who students interface with in order to either take care of business or experience college outside of the classroom. This includes employees like those that work in Student Central, but also those that work in Student Affairs (student activities and residence life for example).

Non-student facing staff roles in student success.

In my observations, many staff members do not see a connection between their daily tasks and student success. Because we have a one-stop-shop for students, staff members from other departments often do not understand the effects their decisions have on students, especially those from offices that have limited interactions with students. Since we are a small university, with a small campus, it is unrealistic that a person could work at CTX and not interact with students at all. For this research, non-student facing staff refers to employees who do not directly interact with students on a daily basis in the

course of their job. Some examples include staff accountants, maintenance, and lab managers. Further, some staff members do not consider how aspects of their jobs might affect student success because they consider only certain parts of their work a part of student success. They do not realize other aspects of their jobs can adversely affect students. For example, when the accounting department contracted with a new vendor to accept payments from students, they chose a vendor that did not accept payment from foreign banking institutions. At the same time, the university was in the middle of an initiative to recruit more international students who do not qualify for federal aid and had to show proof of payment ability in order to obtain a student visa. Because of the change in vendor, our increased international population had no way to pay their bill. This issue could have been prevented if accounting had included student facing staff in the vendor selection process, or considered our student demographics when making their decision. Although student success is part of our university vision statement, we have not clearly defined what it means, or clearly articulated the vision so everyone feels responsible to ensure it is happening.

Faculty roles in student success.

Faculty are another stakeholder in student success. Naturally, what happens in the classroom greatly impacts students, and classrooms are where the faculty can be most impactful; however, there does not seem to be a general consensus of the role of faculty outside the classroom. When asked, faculty cite many things from mentoring, involvement in extra-curricular activities, advising, etc. Student success awareness could

involve how a faculty member prepares for the in-class experience and their attitudes toward student success as a whole.

Currently, there are no defined, published guidelines on the role of faculty in student success outside of the classroom. Due to the lack of specific guidelines and definitions and the lack of a common understanding, faculty have different interpretations of the role each person plays in student success. In turn, this can lead to faculty ignoring or unaware of some of the real situations our students are facing that impact their success.

Previous Cycles

Action research projects consist of several cycles of research and a clearly defined problem of practice. While the idea of studying the impact that faculty and staff have on student success has always been central, my previous cycles have helped inform the focus of my study. In my first cycle of research, I surveyed students in order to determine who they identified as part of their support team. The survey included questions asking whose role it was to guide them through various aspects of college life (e.g. financial aid and paying the bill, academic success in the classroom, life issues outside of class). My results showed for questions regarding finances, students look to Student Central in the same proportion as looking to their parents for answers. It also showed that when it came academic success, students looked to faculty in the same proportion as their parents and their friends for answers or help. More importantly, this research cycle helped me to determine that I am most interested in the way faculty and staff, rather than students, perceive their role in student success.

In the second cycle, I interviewed four people: two non-student facing staff members, one student facing staff member, and one faculty member. All participants were asked questions regarding what prevented them from enabling student success, or what challenges prevented them from putting student success first. The results of the interviews showed that four challenges must be overcome to enable student success: (1) understanding who our students are and their stories, (2) understanding what our colleagues do, (3) increasing communication, and (4) sharing accountability. More importantly, the results of the survey revealed that not all staff and faculty understand or believe they have a role in student success. The act of talking about their role in terms of student success was the first time two of the four participants (both non-student facing staff) considered that they have an impact on student success.

The third cycle of interviews concentrated on faculty and their role in student success outside the classroom. The goal of this cycle was to develop a common definition of the faculty role in student success outside the classroom. There were some commonalities in what faculty believe their role should be in enabling student success; however, there were also consistent themes regarding the lack of defined roles, resulting in some faculty that do not contribute to student success at all. One important contribution from this cycle was confirming that most faculty have a narrow view of who contributes to student success. Namely, faculty felt the role of student success fell solely on them; they did not bring up any other employees sharing the role of ensuring student success.

Research Questions Guiding the Project

This dissertation discusses my fourth and final cycle in my action research project, specifically addressing the following research questions:

1. How do faculty and staff at Concordia University Texas currently operationalize “student success”?

Specifically, how do faculty and staff use student success when making decisions, setting policy, and conducting their everyday work?

2. How and to what extent does participating in a community of practice based on organizational change theory help faculty and staff understand their role in student success?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The president at CTX once told me, “If it is everyone’s job, it is no one’s job.” At the time, we were speaking primarily about retention, but his point was about the importance of having a champion or leader for a cause. The adage has been true in many ways because any initiative can easily be pushed lower on a priority list if it appears that everyone else is working on it. However, there is something to be said about everyone truly understanding their influence on the most important cause that the organization is pursuing. In the world of higher education the most important cause is student success, more than just retention, this has become the circle of life for the institution—student to graduate to alumni to donor.

In this chapter, I describe theoretical perspectives and research guiding the project of implementing a student success mindset across the university; in essence, making it everyone’s job and making it work. First, I discuss student success, specifically related literature regarding the academy's role in student success. Second, I discuss the community of practice (CoP) framework. Third, I review leadership theories that have informed organizational and culture changes at institutions. Finally, I discuss the intersectionality of using a CoP framework as an agent of organizational change.

Student Success

Student success is difficult to measure and define. Arguably, students earning a degree is the ultimate measure of student success, regardless of where that degree is earned. George Kuh, one of the most prolific researchers on student success defines

student success as “increasing the numbers of students from different backgrounds proportionate to their age cohort consistent with national goals for postsecondary attainment who participate in high-quality educational programs and practices culminating in high quality credentials (e.g., certifications, certificates, degrees) and proficiencies that enable them to be economically self-sufficient and civically responsible post college” (Kinzie, & Kuh, 2017, pg. 20). The reality institution like Concordia is students successfully earning those “high quality credentials” and graduating from Concordia, rather than another institution, is much better for the university. In a fiscal context, earning a degree and feeling supported and positively influenced by the faculty and staff on campus can have implications on giving back to the university later in life. From a missional context, preparing students to be “leaders for lives of service” (Mission, Vision & Values, n.d).means providing a positive experience and the means to serve their community. Fostering a positive environment that promotes successful completion of a degree is a critical component of the mission, vision, and values at CTX.

There is not a long history of student support in higher education institutions. Prior to the 1960s “American colleges and universities were rarefied places populated mostly by white males from middle- or upper-income families” (Brock, 2010, pg. 110). The general consensus in society was “a college education was not needed to make a decent living” (Brock, 2010, pg. 111). The students that did attend college came with a home support network of families familiar with the college process. The universities were similar in nature serving a homogeneous population. The 1960s and 70s turned the world of higher education on its head. The introduction of the GI Bill after World War

II, the increased population of the Baby Boomer Generation, and the Civil Rights Act among other social and political reforms changed the collegiate campus. Access to a college education reached new populations, namely women and underrepresented populations. Not only did the demographics change, but colleges and universities enrollment exploded overnight. In addition to an increased demand in predictable student needs, new students brought a unique set of challenges, and they looked to the university to help guide them through. With more people attending college, expectations around education began to shift (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013).

Today, there are fewer options for people without a college degree; thus, more students seek to enroll in and complete higher education. With such a rapid change in the makeup of student populations, institutions have struggled to keep up with the changing demographics and exploding population. It wasn't just a matter of hiring more people to support, but rewriting what the organizational structure looked like. To help combat the rising cost of overhead that came with adding student support staff, colleges and universities tried to get creative to meet the demand for more faculty and more support staff. Asking adjunct faculty to take on different support staff roles, or asking support staff to also be adjunct faculty are two ways to meet teaching and student support needs at a lower cost. While student success takes collaborative efforts on the parts of support staff and faculty, these two groups are no longer completely distinct individuals leading to confusion in truly understanding by employee their role in student success (Brainard, Fain, & Masterson, 2009).

Studies on student success.

Student success, or challenges in student success have been seen as “a symptom of another problem” because it has been difficult to pinpoint the exact cause and effect (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p 165). For example, there have been numerous reasons that have accounted for lack of success among students including not going to class, having to work, losing their scholarship due to a low GPA, and being academically under-prepared. Institutions that are able to identify where the challenges are for their own students are better equipped to address them. For this reason, student success requires work by the entire campus, as everyone on campus plays a role in helping students navigate college. As outlined in Chapter One, for the purposes of this study I have categorized employees into three main categories; (1) non-student facing staff, (2) student facing staff, and (3) faculty. It is important for faculty and all staff to understand their role, regardless of position.

In a 2009 Higher Education Chronicle article studying the increase in support staff positions in the academy, it was noted the difficulty in labeling university employees as staff or instructors, "That bright line doesn't exist in reality...Numerous people they've consigned to 'back office' duties have enormous amounts of interaction with students” (Brainard, Fain, & Masterson, 2009, p.5). This highlights the idea that even if you wear multiple hats within the university, every aspect of your job will engage or touch on student success. Every aspect of the university affects students, and every employee of the university should be aware of that fact (Schmitt & Duggan, 2011). In my observations, that has been a difficult concept to accept for those who have viewed

student success as being the exclusive purview of student facing staff. I believe the so-called ‘back office staff’ or non-student facing staff that do not have regular interactions with students often fail to see the roles they play. In a study on support staff in higher education it was stated, “Administrative support, success of teaching and research which has previously been seen as a peripheral function, has now become more central when fulfilling these new demands and, thereby, has also become essential for the success of teaching and research” (Ryttberg & Geschwind, 2017, p. 334). A study on exploring staff effects on retention stated, “These interactions could well make a difference in whether or not a student has a successful college experience...Institutions that understand more fully these interactions can better craft an atmosphere that fosters them, improving campus climate and culture” (Schmitt & Duggan, 2011, p. 188). Part of that problem may be our own perception of these roles. The same study found that support staff roles, “are seen by managers as providers of valuable services, but not as supporting the outcome of organizational performance” (p. 335). The focus of this research has been primarily on the role student services has played in the “quality of [student] learning experience and [student] academic success” (Ciobanu, 2013, p 170). Thus, there is still much research to be done to better understand the influences of all student services work and faculty members’ efforts alike on student success, specifically with respect to indirect facing staff or indirect faculty tasks (Williams, et al., 2002).

There is plenty of research on the role of front facing staff in student affairs or academic affairs and how they help shepherd and guide the student. The research does suggest that an institutional culture of student success from the top down is important,

“educational advantages can be sustained and perhaps enhanced even under difficult circumstances when institutional leaders and others are committed to student success” (Kuh, et. al., 2011, p. 14). Another study speaks to the importance of mid-level managers in higher education institutions stating that, “midlevel professionals interact and participate with students, faculty members, and the public, and they can reflect the institution’s overall spirit and vitality” (Rosser, 2004, pg. 318). Finally, and arguably most important, Cruz and Haycock (2012) identify, “leaders at successful institutions recognize that efforts to improve student success are not solely the purview of student affairs” (p. 51). Student facing staff have a job to interact with students and very plainly ensure their success, however as Cruz and Haycock suggest, the very existence of a student affairs department can confuse other staff into believing they do not have to think about the student in their day to day work.

How faculty understand their role in student success is the basis of this research and some literature does give indication of how faculty feels about their role and the impact these perceptions can have on student success. A study done on faculty organizational commitment and citizenship suggests that the faculty’s perceived role of the importance or greater reward for their research or scholarship plays a role in how they view their service to the institution, which in this study includes advising and other non-research non-teaching activities (Lawrence, Ott, & Bell, 2012). In other words, the reward or benefit of the scholarship a faculty member does is greater than the reward or benefit of the service a faculty member does. One of the attributes that makes this

research unique is that there is very limited research on smaller, non-Research One institutions like Concordia.

The lack of a consistent definition of what the faculty role is in student success has created differing opinions on what faculty ‘service’ to the institution entails, especially at CTX. While some articles like the one mentioned above define service as administrative duties, others define service as building a culture of student success with a key component of “faculty and staff that guide, mentor, and support students” (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017, pg. 24). Even with the lack of consistency in how service is defined or what is expected of faculty, there is research that shows the importance of the faculty/student relationship both in and out of the classroom. However, even these studies have an inherent inconsistency of how this works. Many studies on faculty/student relationships use course-based models to build the relationship outside the classroom. For example, a study of the role of faculty interaction in a service learning course described results as “confirming the vital role of communication between faculty and first-generation students and the potential for service-learning courses, in combination with other programs and strategies, to enhance student academic success” (McKay & Estrella, 2008, pg. 368). This type of faculty involvement is still embedded in a class, even if it is an unconventional course.

Community of Practice

In his book *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identify*, Etienne Wenger (1998) characterized a Community of Practice (CoP) as a group a people who “engage in their pursuit [of a shared enterprise] together...” (p. 6) with the pursuit being

whatever learning or goal established by the community at that moment in time. Individuals often participate in several CoPs at the same time. They may have participated at the core of one CoP and been a loosely connected member in another. CoPs operate within a structure that include four main components—meaning, practice, community, and identity. Wenger writes about meaning as “a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful” (Wenger, 1998, p5). As Wenger uses the word, practice is how we use resources and perspectives in our engagement. Community refers to the “social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as a worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence” (p 5). Lastly, identity refers to who we are as it relates to the community we are referring to (p 5). Participation is used “to describe the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social engagement” (Wenger, 1998, p. 55). Wenger used reification to describe taking an abstraction and turning it into a concrete material (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). In the same way, used a CoP to turn the abstract idea of their role in student success, and turned it into something concrete faculty and staff can infuse into their decision making process and day to day work.

Studies on community of practice.

There are some studies that link CoPs directly to student success through the use of CoPs in the classroom or the education setting. However, many of them involved students, not faculty and staff, as CoP members. Studies using CoP in this setting find great value in learning items like work life-balance and research from peers (Crede, et al,

2010). Additionally, studies that used CoP in the educational setting believed that “a CoP confined to an organization such as a school could benefit greatly from partnership and meeting with other schools, professional organizations and businesses” (Woo, 2015, p. 173). Janne Morton (2012) explored creating a CoP in the classroom for an architecture program. Although students were taking the course to prepare for entry into the professional community, the classroom serves as an informal CoP (Morton, 2012). This action research project even included spatial considerations, using different furniture like table groups versus desk rows, to promote a CoP. This allowed the students to see communities of practice in a physical sense to help establish the concept. The conclusion of the study resulted in a “reminder that the classroom is not a closed system” (p109), and students need to understand they can be members of several communities of practice that intersect and engage with one another. This same concept will be explored in this study. Faculty and staff are all a part of an informal CoP within their own departments, however the act of forming a CoP can promote engagement in and a better understanding of individual’s role in student success through knowledge sharing with others.

A similar study was conducted to create communities of practice both inside and outside the institution for students to serve as a type of experiential learning opportunity and exposure to communities of practice in the professional arena (Hodgkinson-Williams, Slay, & Sieborger, 2008). This study was conducted to examine whether students who were exposed to CoPs in the actual community (outside the institution) would be more disposed toward collaborative learning inside the classroom, after having experienced what a CoP could do for teamwork. Pieces of this study can show how a

CoP can increase collaborative learning, or in this case collaborative awareness in regards to the impact each faculty and staff member have on student success. Another study using CoPs in the classroom found “that helping students to cultivate a sense of value as members of the class community contributed to their sense of ownership of their learning” (Gauthier, 2016, pg. 10). Examining the manner in which faculty and staff perceive their roles in student success, particularly giving attention to non-student facing staff perception is something that has not been researched as fully, thereby the reason for this study (Ryttberg & Geschwind, 2017, p. 334).

The last study is most similar to the action research in this study as it reviewed the concept of communities of practice in the curriculum reform process. This study has a more indirect impact on students, and therefore most relevant to the type of study this project conducted. The research analyzed the curriculum change process through a CoP framework. Meaning, CoPs were not intentionally and strategically created and used to develop the curriculum. However, there were 27 scholars representing 40 different departments to work through a new curriculum. Through interviews, the researchers found a CoP dynamic established the mechanism in which the work was completed. Specifically, due to the nature of curriculum and faculty, the authors observed, “despite the curriculum being reified as an institutional document, its creation is inevitably preceded by negotiations of meaning” (Annala & Mäkinen, 2016, p 1). In this case the CoP is ineffective without enough material (or understanding of the material) to “anchor the specificities of coordination and to uncover diverging assumptions” (Wenger, 1998, p 65). This study referred to the mutual engagement as one of the pillars of the

communities of practice, citing the “ways of and networks for communicating and responding to each other’s actions regarding the curriculum process” (Annala & Mäkinen, 2016, p 4). The challenges the university in the study faced around curriculum change is best explained in *Change Leadership in Higher Education: A Practical Guide to Academic Transformation* in describing the “IKEA effect” in which someone assigns a disproportionate amount of value to something because they themselves created it (Buller, 2014, p.18).

Components of community of practice.

Creating a CoP can create opportunities for reification, which would force participation. One of the six values at Concordia is “caring for people,” something our community takes very seriously. However, sometimes it can be difficult to truly care for people if you are not aware of the impact you have on their day to day lives. Creating a CoP about the role each individual plays in student success allows employees to better understand barriers to student success and thus care for people in a more impactful, meaningful and even strategic way. The communities have to be more purposeful in participating - in essence personify the idea of student success; create a need for hard deliverables to force soft practices. This is done by creating visual representation of their roles in student success faculty and staff can reference when thinking about their own role, or encouraging team members to do the same. This could potentially be student stories, quick student stats, or CoP members they can quickly call on to talk about ideas and how they might affect students. It is important for the CoP to determine what those hard deliverables are so they are most impactful.

Careful consideration is needed to avoid the pendulum swing of only practicing the engagement of student success with no real strategy. They really go hand in hand, “what it means to be a person and what it means to be a thing both involve interplay of participation and reification” (Wenger, 1998, p 70). Strategic implementation of communities of practice may help bridge the gap in student success being the first priority of the university. Bringing together stakeholders from different departments and perspectives, i.e. different administrative areas and faculty from different disciplines, to engage in “respectful, deep, rich, constant, and sometimes contentious dialogue” moved toward fulling the participation part of the meaning behind a CoP (Jordan, Kleinsasser, & Roe, 2014, p 425). Creating some sort of reification that drives this can move us in the direction of changing a culture and a mindset of how we all impact student success.

Leadership and Change Theory and Studies

While CoP is the main theoretical framework for the study, the practice is influenced by organizational change theory in an effort to use the CoP to enact change in regards to faculty and staff perception of their role in student success. For traditional American universities, most change theory can be an imperfect fit. Most change theories are designed for a hierarchical organization, one that is not organized in a shared governance model. In Jeffery Buller’s book *Change Leadership in Higher Education* he states, “Declaring that change is necessary and tantamount to concluding that the members of the organization ‘got it wrong’ when they first set those policies and procedures” (2015, pg. 19). Additionally, the “Telling-Is-Leading Fallacy” is the “false belief that effective leadership is demonstrated by strong authoritarian guidance from

supervisors” (2015, pg. 180). This is especially true when working with faculty who use academic freedom in both a legal and philosophical way to resist being led by anyone at all (2015, pg. 180). Understanding this concept, using a CoP to explore the perceptions of the faculty and staff role in student success allows individuals to come to the conclusion themselves. Another change practice outlined in Buller’s books is the “Rules of the Red Rubber Ball” which uses the idea of a person’s interests and passion to find meaningful work (2015, pg. 200). For Buller’s higher education adaptation he uses the six steps in finding ones passion, to finding ways to operationalize the universities passions. This includes defining our purpose (in this context defining what peoples’ roles are in student success), hiring people that support that purpose, find innovative ways to operationalize that purpose, set the foundation, challenge old ways, take advantage of the unexpected (2015, pg. 202-204).

There is also a leadership change theory that applies to this study in more than one context. The Argyris Theory Y as opposed to Theory X. In summary this theory states that Theory X believes all people are “inherently lazy and require structure and directions...” while Theory Y believes “people are not lazy, want to do a good job, do not require close supervision, and prefer work that is meaningful and challenging” (Burke, 2011, pg. 173). Argyris states that managers tend to say they believe Theory Y while acting as those that believe Theory X (Burke, 2011, pg. 174). CTX claims the role of student success falls on everyone, but Research Question One seeks to determine how they operationalize that claim. In this regard, does CTX follow Argyris theory by saying we believe in Theory X, but behaving as though we believe in Theory Y? That is one

way this theory applies to the study. It could also apply to the study from change theory at the individual level. Do faculty and staff believe they have a role in student success, but behave as if they do not?

Community of Practice as Change Leadership

The intersectionality of CoP and organizational change is most applicable to this study. The use of CoPs to create, introduce, or push organizational change is not a new concept and has been used since Wenger first started conceptualizing the framework. For some organizations it has been found as an effective and efficient way “of leveraging the dispersed knowledge and expertise of their employees” (Cordery, et al., 2015, p. 644). The disbursement of knowledge in a practical way is found in many studies regarding the use of CoPs as an organizational change agent, or training tool. In their book *Leveraging Communities of Practice for Strategic Advantage*, Hubert Saint-Onge and Debra Wallace succinctly described CoPs used in this way as “groups of people who are drawn to each other because of a common purpose. They get together to share their existing knowledge, create new knowledge, and apply their collective knowledge to either increase their own capabilities as practitioners or improve their practice— the sometimes technical processes to the extreme art that is required to succeed at their work” (2003, p. 50).

Two themes emerge from the use of CoPs in organizational change – the transfer of knowledge and creating a sense of purpose. Again, Saint-Onge and Wallace outline it as “In essence, a community of practice is a vessel for conversations to take place, conversations that lead to increasing capabilities. In order for people to commit to these productive conversations, there needs to be a purpose, a sense of achievement that flows

out of their collaboration, an ability to measure improved personal performance or identify advances to the practice.” (2003, p. 50). Another study found CoPs to have merit in the management of people. CoPs can have a long lasting impact on organizations if they are used operationally to conduct business. In other words, people do their work better when CoPs are used for as a procedure for conducting work (Cordery, et al., 2015, p. 659). Creating a sense of purpose within the CoP gives employees the space and comfort needed to ensure a better understanding of whatever knowledge is being shared, as found in one study stating, “...thus education, training, and technology design generally focus on abstract representations to the detriment, if not exclusion of actual practice. We, by contrast, suggest that practice is central to understanding work” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p. 40).

The second theme of transferring knowledge showcases the effectiveness of using CoPs and can be found at the heart of many studies, finding the “important way in which CoPs are predicted to benefit organizations is by facilitating the transfer of best practices” (Cordery, et al., 2015, p. 644). However, it is not just about passing along the knowledge, but rather being in a space where participation in acquiring the knowledge has a longer lasting effect. More than one study found learning to be different than training, stating “conventional learning theory, including that implicit in most training courses, tends to endorse the valuation of abstract knowledge over actual practice and as a result to separate learning from working and, more significantly, learners from workers” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p. 41). Studies that, “illustrates that learning occurs when there are adequate opportunities for participation and practice” distinguish learning

that happens through participation (Iyer & Reese, 2013, p. 27). These studies using CoP as a training tool found improvement beyond just the employee knowledge, but positive effects on the operating system as a whole (Cordery, et al., 2015).

That all being said, one study highlighted an important note that “It cannot be assumed that effective communities of practice exist due to structures being in place or that communities of practice will be effective because educational institutions assume and expect institutional commitment, collaboration, inclusive education and community membership” (Iyer & Reese, 2013, p. 35). Creating an environment that will allow for CoPs to thrive can be a challenge, and needs to have clear goals as found in a study on creating a CoP for preservice teachers, concluding, “by reiterating the importance of establishing proactive communities of practice to ensure success in learning and practice for this group of preservice teachers” (Iyer & Reese, 2013, p. 27). If the setting can be made, CoPs have great potential as a change agent in the higher education landscape, especially if the participants can buy into the “composite concept of "learning-in-working" best represents the fluid evolution of learning through practice. From this practice-based standpoint, we view learning as the bridge between working and innovating” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p. 41).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Goal

At Concordia University we believe everyone plays a part in student success, but our behavior does not always reflect this belief. For this action research project, I explored the understanding faculty and staff have of their own role in student success. I also studied how participating in a CoP helped faculty and staff better understand their role. I conducted research in two connected but distinct phases of research and innovation. The first included an artifact analysis of external and internal documents to identify the current discourse regarding faculty and staff role in student success to internal stakeholders. The first phase also included a survey to the faculty and staff community at CTX to determine a general perception of their role in student success. The second phase was the innovation, implementing a CoP with a small group of faculty and staff to shape the way they perceive their role in student success.

Setting

CTX has a diverse student population in regards to demographics, socioeconomics, and academic preparedness. Student success initiatives reach all of our students, but can be most beneficial to students at high risk for attrition, such as high financial need, academically under-prepared, underrepresented race/ethnic group, or first generation college student. As mentioned in Chapter One, in the current structure at CTX, there is a one stop shop for students to handle business and academic services. However, we are a small university and students interact with multiple people across

campus every day. Everyone has a role in student success whether it is helping a student in the hall or making department level decisions that will affect students processing life in college. The current system, makes it difficult to keep student success at the forefront of every employees' work. Therefore, we do not currently have a cohesive definition of student success, agreed upon metrics, or clearly defined roles.

Currently, we have 200 active employees at Concordia (not including student workers or adjunct professors). Of those 29% (57) are faculty, 63% (128) are full time staff, and 8% (15) are part time staff. As defined in earlier chapters and further discussed in the results section, there are two categories of staff: student facing and non-student facing. However, these are not official categories at the university. For survey and interview results, participants have self-identified as a student facing or non-student facing staff based on the definitions provided in the survey which correspond with the definitions outlined in Chapter 1. Student Facing staff interact with students as a part of their daily work (e.g. admissions, student activities, student central). Non-Student Facing staff are staff who do not regularly interact with students as a part of their daily work (e.g. accounts payable, maintenance, mail room).

Research Design

Discussed in more detail below, this research implemented a mixed methods research plan, including: artifact analysis, a survey, interviews, and journaling. The artifact analysis and survey established the current culture and attitude of faculty and staff regarding their role in student success. Interviews and CoP participant meeting dialogue allowed me to dig deeper into the effect a CoP has on shaping the mindset of faculty and

staff, as well as determine themes and patterns that occurred during the journey of implementing the innovation.

This project is considered action research. As a member of the CTX community and combined experience in student services, I am deeply connected to the work. Herr and Anderson describe action research as “an inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community” (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This type of research works well with the CoP framework. Like CoP, “action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation” (Herr & Anderson, 2015). What is unique about this approach is the research is about exploring how faculty and staff begin to understand their own stake in the problem, and how a CoP can transfer knowledge and establish a common goal.

Phase One: Artifact Analysis and Survey

The first phase of this action research plan was to conduct an artifact analysis and a campus wide survey to faculty and staff. The survey was conducted at the start of the 2019 fall semester, prior to phase two. The artifact analysis started in the summer of 2019, and continued throughout the research process.

Artifacts.

The artifact analysis began by gathering internal artifacts and was done with a goal of answering RQ1: How do faculty and staff operationalize student success? Internal artifacts included faculty and staff meeting minutes, university mission statements, student and employee handbooks, and the university strategic plan. I analyzed these artifacts to look for the current discourse regarding faculty and staff role

in student success to internal stakeholders. For example, do faculty talk about student success when considering changes to a course or program? Most artifacts were collected through the intranet, which is available to all employees of the university. Some artifacts, like faculty meeting minutes, were obtained from the College or School Directors. The artifacts sought to answer the research question, “How do faculty and staff at Concordia University Texas operationalize student success?” The artifact analysis showed this in a more authentic manner because it is not staged or pushed or suggested through some sort of action like interviews or surveys. The artifacts were created for external or internal, non-study purposes and examined to see what the current culture and attitude is regarding who is responsible for student success. For the artifact analysis I used a context analysis approach in which “analysis should seek to locate documents within their social as well as textual context” (Coffey, 2014, p.5). The document analysis allowed me to better measure the culture of the university because, “Documents uncover meaning, develop understanding and help the researcher discover new insights about the research problem,” (Atchan, Davis, & Foureur. 2017, p. 54).

Artifacts data.

Forty-Five different artifacts were collected for this analysis. The collection consisted of four categories: student and faculty handbooks, faculty meeting minutes, and the current university strategic plan. I was able to obtain eight different handbooks. Of the eight handbooks, seven were written for students and one for faculty. The authors of the handbooks also varied. Five of the student handbooks were academic handbooks about different programs and were written by faculty and faculty administrators. Two of

the student handbooks were for different programs (student conduct and student workers) and were written by staff. The only handbook where students were not the intended audiences was, of course, the Faculty Handbook, written for faculty by administration. A complete list of handbooks can be found in Table 1, with corresponding word counts. Not all programs have corresponding handbooks at the institution and currently there is not a cohesive handbook creating or vetting process, something that was evident in the contradictory and outdated information found in the handbooks. All handbooks together totaled 103,716 words, and with so many program handbooks from the College of Education, much of the material was redundant. It was decided to narrow down the list of handbooks to a manageable but comprehensive collection. I selected Handbook of the Faculty, Undergraduate Nursing Handbook, Student Work-study Handbook, CTX Student Handbook, and MED Program Handbook. This selection provided handbooks written by faculty, handbooks written by student facing staff, handbooks written by administration, and handbooks written by non-student facing staff.

Table 1

Handbook List

Handbook Title	Author	Audience	Word Count	Selected
M.Ed.-Adv Lit Program	Faculty	Students	4,124	No
Handbook for Faculty	Administration	Faculty	22,244	Yes
DCE Practicum	Faculty	Students	4,218	No
M.Ed.-Ed Admin Program	Faculty	Students	9,122	No
M.Ed. Program	Faculty	Students	8,326	Yes
Ed.D. Program	Faculty	Students	8,150	No
Student Work-Study	Non-Student Facing Staff	Students	1,525	Yes
UG Teacher Ed Program	Faculty	Students	8,324	No
UG Nursing Handbook	Faculty	Students	19,929	Yes
CTX Student Handbook	Student Facing Staff	Students	17,754	Yes

I was able to obtain faculty meeting minutes from College of Education, College of Nursing, and the College of Business and Communication. From the College of Arts and Sciences, I was able to obtain meeting minutes from the School of Natural and Applied Sciences and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The School of Fine Arts was unavailable. Lastly, I was able to obtain the meeting minutes from Executive Council of the Faculty (ECF). For a full list, with word count, see Table 2. This generated 53,380 words of artifacts. Since the meeting meetings included some business carried from meeting to meeting, there was redundancy in the artifacts. I narrowed down

the minutes to include a random selection of two meetings from each college/school and four from the ECF.

Table 2

Meeting Minute List

Body	Date Range	Word Count	Selections
ECF	August 2018-July 2019	39,701	June 10, April 12, Mar 29, Feb 22
SNAS	January 2019-November 2019	2,645	Aug 13, Mar 6
COE	September 2019-October 2019	1,343	September 4, October 2
CON	August 2018-March 2019	1,848	Mar 1, Nov 30
HASS	February 2019-November 2019	3,711	Mar 6, Nov 06
COBC	January 2019-January 2020	4,132	December 17, September 4

The CTX University strategic plan had 2, 674 total words. Of the artifacts, 65% of the data (words) was handbooks, 33% faculty meeting minutes, and 2% the strategic plan.

Artifacts analysis.

The artifact analysis used a “qualitative content analysis” method outlined by Margrit Schreier in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. This method is useful for a large volume of data. The method “requires the researcher to focus on selected aspects of meaning, namely those aspects that relate to the overall research question” (p. 2). Starting with the research question in mind, coding frames were created for a section of each document type: handbook, meeting minutes. From this exercise a coding framework emerged that contained six categories with 31 subcategories. The

complete list of codes can be found in Table 3. The coding framework was used to look specifically for instances of these codes, as outlined in this particular method of coding. This resulted in a total of 304 selections coded.

The six categories were selected based on selections of the material in an attempt to answer Research Question One. Since the analysis was done throughout the research process, starting prior to the community of practice and continuing through the interviews, specific themes and words were looked for to answer the question based on the experience of the CoP and the survey; specifically the attitude around student success and any dialogue related to student success. Because the survey results that showed such a high percentage of participants who interact with students regularly, whether their job calls for that or not (more information in the survey section), the artifacts were reviewed for ways in which interaction with students was described, particularly in relation to student success tasks, initiatives, or strategy. Because the CoP and the interviews spoke about the importance of collaborating with other departments to ensure student success, I evidence of information around collaboration around student success was specifically examined. Also in connection with the CoP, the documents were reviewed to find places in which student success tasks, initiatives, or strategy were recognized or promoted through professional development. Last, based on what was reviewed in all three of the categories of documents, (handbooks, strategy, and meeting minutes) an additional category for specific policies and procedures that were about or impacted student success was created. Each code category had three to eleven sub categories.

Table 3

Artifact Code List

Code Group	Code
Attitude about Student Success	A: develop A: punitive A: understand student issues
Collaborate for Student Success	C: formal meeting for shared info C: interdepartmental strategy C: no strategy C: Student Experience for SS
Dialogue about Student Success	D: success D: support D: violation
Interact with students	I: available outside the classroom I: Career Advising I: friendly face I: Great Teaching I: provide help to students I: share in accomplishments
Policy and Procedure regarding students	P: Exclusive of some students P: Faculty Control P: faculty rights P: guidelines for student behavior P: hold student accountable to expectations P: limited options for student self-advocacy P: Min Faculty Expectations P: pathways to access P: student rights P: student self-advocacy/help with self-advocacy P: train students
Recognize/Identify Good Practice for Student Success	R: F&S Development R: Faculty Control R: share best practices R: Strategic Recognition

Survey.

I surveyed faculty and staff to determine their perceptions of the role they play in student success. This allowed me to set a baseline which I could later use to compare against the perceptions at the end of the CoP. The survey can be found in Appendix A. The survey is loosely adapted from a survey by Ana Gil Serafin on faculty satisfaction (Serafin, 1991). The original survey sought to measure how working with students in various ways connected to faculty satisfaction. The questions provided a format in which I could edit the focus on faculty, or staff, perception of how they help students. The survey asks a series of 14 questions regarding the participant's role in student success using a five-point Likert scale. The questions are designed to measure to what degree a faculty or staff considers student success in performing their day to day tasks. This survey was used in part to answer Research Question Two: To what extent do faculty and staff understand their role in student success?

Participants.

In order to gain an inclusive perspective of student success across campus, it is important to include different facets of the university community. The survey was sent to all full time faculty and staff totaling 200 people on September 10, 2019. The goal was to reach 30-40% participation rate, which was achieved with 59% response rate with 118 responses. Four surveys were eliminated due to logging error - no questions were answered other than the participant role. The survey was completed anonymously.

Phase One and Two Connection

My mixed methods research was conducted in a sequential model, using the quantitative and qualitative data procured in phase one from the artifact analysis and faculty and staff survey to inform the CoP in phase two. The connection is both developmental and expansive as described by R. Johnson and A. Onwuegbuzie as “using the findings from one method to help inform the other method...seeking to expand the breadth and range of research by using different methods for different inquiry components” (Johnson, et al, 2004, p 22). As I will expand below in phase two, the phase one data was presented to the CoP participants to use as a baseline of the campus culture and perceptions of faculty and staff role in student success. The phase two data is the dominant data for RQ2, as it shows the impact that the CoP process had on individuals.

Phase Two: Innovation

My innovation was to create a CoP to encourage faculty and staff to consider their own role in student success. The innovation was carried out in six steps: (1) building a CoP, (2) creating a student success lens, (3) defining participants’ own role in student success, (4) creating reminders, (5) identifying and recognizing behavior, and (6) rewarding behavior. It is important to note that although the steps are listed in order of launch, some steps are continuous throughout implementation, whereas others have a specific, delimited timeframe. It is also important to highlight that the word ‘change’ was not used in the CoP. This was done intentionally to avoid feelings or perceptions that participants don’t care about student success and that their job requirements or duties needed to change. Rather, the goal was to see how a better understanding of student

success and each individual's role in student success impacts that community and their own perception of their roles. Research Question Two specifically asked how a CoP uses organizational change theory to help faculty and staff understand their role in student success. Recalling the literature in Chapter Two, there are two ways in which the CoP will do this. The first using the organization change theory presented by Buller's book *Change Leadership in Higher Education* which talked about the "Telling-Is-Leading Fallacy" which suggests allowing people to discover for themselves or for CoP participants to participate in the transfer of knowledge with each other to define the common knowledge together. The second is again borrowing from Buller's book the modified "red rubber ball theory" which asks the organization to find the sense of purpose, another framework akin to the CoP, coming together to find the groups sense of purpose around student success (2015, pg. 180).

Community of practice participants.

In order to gain an inclusive perspective of student success across campus, it is important to include different facets of the university community. The CoP must be diverse in representation, including faculty, student facing staff, and non-student facing staff students. The CoP should also be relatively small, six to eight participants. If the CoP is too large of a group, it slows progress and team cohesiveness is harder to establish. In order to reach as many areas of the university as possible, it was determined to narrow to four different departments or types of position: faculty members, student support staff, academic administration staff and operations staff. Also considered in this mix was longevity at the university. These participants allow for a mixture of direct and

indirect student influence. After conducting other small research studies in this area, it became obvious that it is important to appreciate the value of including people who are new to the university, those that are not ingrained in the culture just yet and may see things from a different perspective.

Participant selection.

Linked to the anonymous survey was a form to volunteer for the CoP. The form explained the research project, gave an expected commitment timeline and asked the volunteer for their name, position and years they have worked at Concordia. A total of 34 volunteers completed the survey, 39% of the total survey response. The CoP needs to be six to eight participants in order to establish trust and cohesiveness with each other in a short amount of time. Using a stratified sampling to identify a diverse group of participants for the CoP, a list of volunteers was created. Then each individual was categorized by the user-provided positions into four categories: faculty, student support, academic support, operations. The researcher also included the number of years they have worked at CTX: less than two years, two to five years, five to ten years, and more than 10 years. Since this study concentrates on non-student facing staff (Academic Support and Operations) and faculty, the decision was made to include three faculty members, two academic support staff, two operations staff, and one student support staff. After creating the final list, I confirmed that none of the selected individuals work directly for me or are in my chain of command.

Formal invitations were sent to the group of eight people and invited them to the first meeting. Two people decline to participate due to time commitments and so I

randomly picked two people to replace them based on the categories mentioned above, both of which agreed to participate. Each participant was assigned an identification number (P-1, through P-8) which was used throughout the notes, interview transcripts, and coding process. Through the CoP meetings one participant stopped after the second meeting, citing time commitment challenges. The participant agreed anything said thus far could be used in the research.

Step one: building a community of practice.

The first step is to build a CoP. In the survey, from Phase I, participants were recruited by asking them to include their name and email address if they were interested in participating in the CoP. Once that list of interested individuals was compiled, participants were selected to represent a wide level of years at CTX and role representation (faculty, student facing staff, non-student facing staff). Since there was no extrinsic motivation for participating (money, gift cards, time off, etc.), the study relied on the intrinsic motivation of interest in exploring their role in student success. It was important to create a diverse group as described above, so the final selection needed to match those same diverse qualities.

The CoP met to introduce the work that will take place over the course of the semester. Additionally, as outlined above, research from the faculty and staff survey was shared with the CoP in an effort to demonstrate the current perceptions that faculty and staff have regarding their role in student success. This was one, one hour meeting in which the researcher facilitated, explaining the CoP framework, the survey data, the

research questions, as well as the outline of the group meetings. My role as the researcher is outlined below in further detail.

Step two: create a student success lens.

The second step was for the CoP to create a ‘student success lens.’ As mentioned in Chapter 1 and 2, non-student facing staff may not understand what student success means. Similarly, faculty may or may not define student success outside the academic activities of the classroom. In this step, the CoP created a student success lens they can then view their day to day decision making and job tasks through. What does student success look like for a student at Concordia University Texas? As mentioned in previous chapters, the lack of a consistent definition might be a contributing factor to each individual having difficulty in understanding their own role. The CoP needed to define this together, with guidance from both researcher and participant. The ‘lens’ must align well with the university’s mission and vision, as well as strategic plan initiatives. This was done through a brainstorming activity that utilized student stories of struggle and success from CTX information, included in Appendix E. While these students’ stories stem from the researcher’s ten plus years working in student services, there were anonymizes and some details changed to protect student identity. For each story, the student situation was read and posted for the group and they explored what role they may have had in contributing (indirectly or directly) to the situation or what role they may have had in helping the situation. The group conducted two iterations of this exercise. At the conclusion, the group took a look at the comments and found similarities, differences, and reflected on items they did not think about. This was the first activity the

group did together, as step one was an introduction to the project that required little interaction with one another. Therefore, part of this step was getting comfortable with each other, and establishing a trust as a group to be open, transparent, and honest. This activity took one, one hour session. At the end of step two, the CoP began to develop a shared definition of student success, which will provided a lens with which to view new scenarios. The final definition was completed in step three.

Step three: continue to establish the student success lens.

The third step is to continue to develop an understanding of their individual roles in student success. The CoP developed this understanding with the help of the rest of the members of the CoP using their newly created “student success lens.” Hearing other perspectives had value in working through the process of understanding the daily impact one can make in the process of doing their job. The definition must align with the university’s values as well as the individual’s job description and team dynamics. The same brainstorming activity used in step two took place, using the two previous student situations, and adding one new situation for the group to work through. The same exercise of talking about the situation, what their individual role or department’s role may have been in contributing to the situation, and how they may help solve the situation or prevent a similar situation in the future. This was practice thinking about student success using the newly created “student success lens” as well as a better understanding of their own role. This took one, one hour session.

Step four: behavior change reminder.

The first half of the innovation steps were exploring and learning, while the second half of the steps were putting the new found (or better defined) knowledge to practice. The fourth step was to create habit changing cues for the CoP. In the book *Switch*, Chip and Dan Heath talk about the success of establishing cues in one's environment to assist in behavior change. This could be visual reminders like posters or small strips of paper on the computer screen or desk. It could also be action cues like pouring a cup of coffee means to complete a team meeting that will then prompt a different task such as checking a shared email address or checking department key performance indicators). It could also be a routine act, like writing out "student success?" every time you are engaged in a new task. There is ample evidence for using various habit changing reminders to enact permanent change (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 201). The CoP came up with their own individual reminders, something that would work for each person. Some samples include intentionally adding a line on each agenda for meetings, or posting a picture of a graduating student next to the computer screen. This was done after the first three steps are completed. This was completed in one, one hour meeting.

Step five: monitor behavior.

The fifth step is to start monitoring behavior. There were two purposes to this step. The first was for the individuals to start to identify and track their role in student success. Each participant was asked to briefly document each time they make a decision or perform task framing their work in the student success lens defined in step two. The

documentation included a brief notation of no more than a couple sentences. These notes were shared with the rest of the CoP at progress meetings. This further solidified the CoP itself, providing a place for “members [to] engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information” (Wenger-Trayner, & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The second purpose was to collect information as to whether a participant showed a difference in understanding their role in student success. This was combined with step six resulting on one meeting for a little over an hour.

Step six: recognize change.

The sixth step was to create a way to recognize and reward behavior that the CoP has defined as ‘good.’ Part of the reward was when CoP members shared during the meetings their tracking logs of using the student success lens to do their daily work. However, a larger scale reward system was considered. Considering the campus culture and the desire to care for people, a reward system where staff and faculty members are more widely recognized, especially by students, would be appropriate, inexpensive, and deeply meaningful. CTX already has a ‘Kudos Wall’ on the intranet where people can recognize good work in their colleague, which has been moderately successful. If students can recognize faculty and staff, it would have more meaning. However, that becomes a challenge for the staff working in-directly with students who won’t really know how this person is making a difference. As the CoP meet to report on progress, they also discussed a scalable reward system.

Timeline of Innovation Implementation

The CoP met over the course of two months, October through November. The first month was spent in a weekly meeting working through steps one through three, establishing the CoP, creating a student success lens, and defining their individual roles in students' success. The second month consisted of meetings reporting back identified and tracked behavior and individual interviews. See Table 4 for a complete list of hours.

Table 4

	<u>Total Hours</u>	<u>Date</u>
Step One	1	October 11, 2019
Step Two	1	October 25, 2019
Step Three	1	November 6, 2019
Step Four	1	November 13, 2019
Step Five/Six	1	November 22, 2019
Interviews	15 min	November/December
Total*	5 hours and 15 min	

* Each participant was interviewed once individually for approximately 15 minutes. This table represents the total for each participant's time. My total time for interviews was approximately 2 hours.

Role of the Researcher

I have worked for Concordia University Texas for eleven years in various roles. I started in admissions recruiting and am now the Vice President of Academic Operations. I have spent the majority of my career in student service departments. I work very closely with the Provost, the VP of Enrollment, the VP of Student Affairs, VP of Strategic

Partnerships, and the Dean of Teaching and Learning. Due to my position, I am privy to many discussions and decisions regarding faculty welfare and how faculty can affect student success.

This organizational structure ensures that someone at the decision making table is always thinking about the student experience from multiple perspectives and how student success might be affected by various strategic decisions. It is also important to note that I do not come without bias. I often deal with the ‘messy’ problems created by students, faculty, or staff in regards to the student experience. I am the person students are escalated to when they feel they have exhausted all their resources in dealing with a faculty or staff person.

There were times in the process where a faculty member or staff brought up an experience that I knew from a different perspective, and it was important to bring that knowledge into the analysis. However, that is the role of the action researcher. In the text *The Action Research Dissertation*, Herr and Anderson state, “With the advent of highly educated professionals who have acquired research skills and are enrolled in doctorate programs, action research dissertations are often done by organizational insiders who see it as a way to deepen their own reflection on practice toward problem solving and professional development” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 2). My day-to-day consists of constant problem solving, and my ‘insider’ perspective coupled with the information I am able to attain from multiple parties led to a better innovation.

Instruments and Data Sources for Phase Two

Phase two included two data sources, interviews and journals.

Journals.

The research was recorded in two types of journals. The first was the researcher's journal, particularly observations during the meetings of the CoP. This journal served several purposes, meeting notes, observations, as well as keeping my own thoughts in front of me to identify bias. Participants were also asked to keep a record to identify and track when they considered student success when making a decision or conducting a work task. The CoPs used these records as a discussion point in step five. Participant records were not collected but the researcher's notes from the CoP do refer to these incidences. This data was used to answer Research Question Two: How does participating in a community of practice help faculty and staff better understand their role in student success?

Interviews.

Individual interviews were conducted with each CoP participant at the conclusion of the six steps. The questions covered themes like change in understanding/behavior, reflections on the experience, and asking about perceptions of participants' role in student success. The CoP meetings informed what questions were asked. This allowed for a better understanding of their thought process behind the perceptions they hold. The interviews sought to answer both research questions. Interviews were recorded.

Interview data.

The CoP started with eight participants. After the third meeting, one participant dropped out leaving seven active participants. All seven participants were interviewed within two weeks after the completion of the CoP meetings. The seven interviews were

an average of 15 minutes and 58 seconds (Standard Deviation: 7 minutes and 20 seconds). Interviews were transcribed into text files for analysis. As stated above, the CoP participants were assigned random IDs of P-1 through P-8.

Participants were asked the Likert scale questions from the original survey in the interview, see Appendix A: Faculty and Staff Survey. They did not complete the survey again, the questions were just used to start the interview. They were reminded that the original survey was anonymous so there is no record of their individual original answers. The participants were not asked to answer the question using the Likert Scale, but rather asked to talk about if their answer had changed, or if they thought about the question differently. The intent was for participants to explore whether they thought differently about the questions and why. They were asked four follow up questions.

1. Did they engage in discussions with the group outside of the CoP meeting times?
2. If one of the group members asked if anyone would like to keep meeting and keep discussing the topic after the innovation was concluded would they be interested?
3. Was participating in the CoP a good use of their time (reminding them that this was part of a research study and no personal feelings or negative reactions would be taken by the researcher if it was a waste of their time)?
4. Do you have any final thoughts or comments?

Interviews analysis.

The transcribed interviews were then analyzed in three different cycles using three different coding techniques outlined in Johnny Saldaña's book, *The Coding Manual*

for Qualitative Researchers. After coding the interviews in the three different cycles, the results were further analyzed in the context of each research question.

Cycle A.

The first cycle used one round of concept coding and one round of descriptive coding. Concept coding, as defined by Saldaña, “assigns micro or macro levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress” (Saldaña, 2016, pgs. 292), while descriptive coding assigns a code word or phrase “summarize...the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2016, pgs. 292). Although the two coding methods are very similar, it allowed a deep look at the participants’ thoughts regarding the process and participants’ role in student success. This process resulted in 16 concept codes and 14 descriptive codes shown in Table 5. A second phase of Cycle A used pattern coding to look for similar patterns among the different concept and descriptive codes and found three main themes, again outlined in Table 5. Once Cycle A was complete, the process started over fresh for Cycle B.

Table 5

Interview Cycle A Coding

Pattern Themes	Codes
Reaction to CoP	Concept: CoP = Build community Concept: CoP influence better faculty agreement Concept: record/share experience of CoP Concept: scale CoP Descriptive: CoP good use of time Descriptive: CoP new Perspectives Descriptive: CoP no difference Descriptive: powerful message Descriptive: faculty hurdles
Job Perception	Concept: admin work - supporting student Concept: everything is a part of job Concept: evolve for student Concept: student advocate Descriptive: collaboration is norm Descriptive: outside job not student success Descriptive: Provide counsel
Reaction to Student Success	Concept: accessible education Concept: available to students=SS Concept: Classroom Teaching=student success Concept: common def of Student Success Concept: Dependability=SS Concept: graduation=student success Concept: Mission=SS Concept: Personal Relationships=student success Descriptive: defining Student success Descriptive: reactive input Descriptive: reminder Descriptive: sometimes unaware/didn't know how unaware Descriptive: student Descriptive: students don't understand affirmation

Cycle B.

The second cycle used a value coding model defined by Saldaña as “the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and

beliefs, representing his or her perspective or worldview” (Saldaña, 2016, pgs. 298). This coding model was chosen in particular to attempt to answer how they operationalize student success (RQ1) by looking for evidence regarding the values, beliefs and attitudes surrounding the topic. There were 18 total codes that emerged as a belief, value or attitude regarding both student success and the participation in the CoP, see Table 6.

Table 6

Interview Cycle B Coding

Value	Codes
Attitude - “the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, thing, or idea.”	A: Admin example A: Available to Students A: Change with student needs A: Graduation=SS A: SS is more than graduation A: Student Affirmation=SS A: Students don’t understand my actions are for SS
Belief - “part of a system that includes values and attitudes, plus personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world.”	B: All Job responsibilities point to SS B: My Role is Student Advocacy =SS B: Need Reminders B: Personal Relationships=SS
Value - “the importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing, or idea.”	V: Adaptability=SS V: Collaboration=SS V: Commitment to helping students V: Define SS together V: Different Perspectives/Interdepartmental V: Good Teaching/Classroom = SS

Saldaña Johnny. (2016). The coding manual for qualitative researchers (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Cycle C.

Cycle C used a Hypothesis method of coding, which required predetermined codes to test a predetermined hypothesis. The hypothesis was that participating in a CoP

would lead to a deeper understanding of what student success is and a personal greater connection to ensuring student success. It also allowed for testing of patterns emerging from the previous two coding cycles. Hypothesis coding cycle included five code groups in the form of a question with specific answers to total 18 different codes shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Interview Cycle C Coding

Hypothesis Question	Coding
Participation result in a change of thinking	Yes No
The CoP created...	CoP created - Collaboration CoP created - define what SS means to me CoP created - different perspectives CoP created - interdepartmental understanding CoP created - reminders to keep it fresh
Important to Student Success is....	Important to SS - adapting to students Important to SS - Advice Important to SS - everything I do Important to SS - personal relationships Important to SS - student advocacy Important to SS - Teaching
Student Success is defined as	graduation Many different things
Who is responsible for “What is Next”	What is next - WE or Participants What is next - YOU or researchers role What is next - YOU researchers role participant will help

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Research Questions Review

As outlined above, the data collection and analysis for this research sought to answer two research questions. The first, how do faculty and staff at Concordia University Texas operationalize “student success,” was answered by review of the artifact analysis and the CoP participant interviews. The second, how and to what extent does participating in a CoP based on organizational change theory help faculty and staff understand their role in student success, was answered by the survey, the CoP observations, and the CoP participant interviews.

Artifacts Analysis Results

The artifact analysis was done to answer RQ1, “How do faculty and staff at CTX operationalize student success?” By analyzing documents in which university faculty and staff conduct business, I hoped to find evidence of what faculty and staff do to promote students success. Some data was able to show how faculty and staff operationalize student success, but I believe more telling is the way the artifact documents did not show how faculty and staff operationalize student success. Particularly evident in student handbooks is an absence of language involving student success, support, or assistance and the abundance of language around failure, probation and dismissal. Additionally, language around student success is missing from faculty meeting notes. The language used approaches policy and procedure from a deficit mindset.

Of the codes, the handbook sources made up the largest percentage of the coding at 68%, but they also had the greatest volume of words at 65% of the total word count. Naturally, the largest category of codes at 58% of all the codes for handbooks was *policy and procedure*. This is not a surprise since the purpose of handbooks are to outline policy and procedure for the intended audience and does outline ways in which a student could be successful. However the language used is from a deficit mindset instead of a development mindset. Most of that 58% fell into the sub-category of *guidelines for student behavior*. What was not a large percentage, 1%, was information about *student self-advocacy or help with self-advocacy* for students. Furthermore, while *guidelines for student behavior* and *holding students accountable to expectations* where the two highest number of codes in the category at 28% and 8% respectively, only 3% of the codes included information about *minimum expectations of faculty around student success* and this includes the Faculty Handbook! The next two highest categories were *attitudes about student success* and how people *interact with students* at 17% and 18% respectively. However, in the code category of *attitude about student success*, the subcategories showed about 50% were attitudes about *developing* students and 50% were attitudes that were *punitive* in nature when it came to student success, or not being successful. An example of a developmental attitude is “Goal of nursing program is to develop students’ abilities to serve as Christian leaders in professional nursing roles and to be contributing members of the profession of nursing” (College of Nursing Handbook, 2019). In contrast, the following are examples of punitive attitudes: “Failure to comply with all policies and procedures may result in dismissal from a class, lab, or practicum

session, which will be treated as an unexcused absence” or “Students who fail the Dosage Calculation Exam by the designated date will fail the associated practicum course and will be withdrawn from all co-requisite courses” (College of Nursing Handbook, 2019).

The meeting minutes were perhaps the most uninformative artifact. While the word count total made up 33% of the artifacts, they made up only 23% of the codes. Furthermore, there were some artifacts that had no codes. There was little consistency in the way meeting minutes were taken. Some were almost like transcripts of the meeting, while others were bullet point lists of the agenda. All of them were very transactional in nature, speaking to policy, rules, and curriculum with hardly any mention of students’ success at all. Again the top two code categories were *policy and procedure* and how people *interact with students* with 36% and 23% respectively. The largest subcategory code from both categories was *minimum expectations of faculty* at 12% of all the codes in meeting minutes. Very little coding in actual *dialogue about student success*, which is where this category should have been highest – as this is the only artifact that specifically recorded dialogue. Only 9% of the coding for meeting minutes was about *dialogue* and of that 9%, 83% was about students *violating* some policy or procedure, for example when talking about an academic integrity procedure, “If the focus is on the violation of academic policy by students, then maybe the title should reflect this” (ECF Meeting Minutes). Additionally, in the category *attitude about student success*, 60% of the sub codes in were *punitive* in nature while zero were about the *development* of students.

The university strategic plan at only 2% of the word count had 10% of the codes. There was also a wider spread of codes between categories with *attitude about student*

success at 24%, *collaborate for student success* at 24%, *interact with students* at 38%, and *recognizing/developing good practice* at 7%. Of the codes in the category *attitude about student success* 71% of statements were about *understanding the student*, for example, “Concordia will meet the differing needs of students by offering flexible programs in multiple deliveries” (CTX Strategic Plan). Of the codes in the category *how we interact with students* 36% were about *great teaching* and 27% were about mentoring or *providing help for students*, which is more indicative of everyone having a role in student success. The codes for the 7% in *recognizing/developing good practice* were for the only faculty awards in the handbook, which all have a component of ensuring student success in the qualifications for the awards.

The artifact analysis did not reveal a clear answer to the research question of: “How do faculty and staff operationalize student success?” This selection of artifacts suggests that faculty and staff do not explicitly operationalize student success. There are, however, limitations to this data. Just because student success dialogue, discussion, and expectations did not make a strong appearance in these documents, does not mean that it is not operationalized. However, these artifacts documents *could* make better use of describing everyone’s role and expectations in student success and the research at least showed opportunity for improvement in the deficit mindset language used to outline student behavior. . Overall, what *wasn’t* in the artifacts was more interesting than what was in the artifacts, but given the information and analysis assumptions and conclusions based on what is not there were not implied.

Survey

In this section I will review the data from the survey conducted in Phase I of the research process which laid the foundation to answer Research Question Two: How and to what extent does participating in a CoP based on organizational change theory help faculty and staff understand their role in student success. The survey served as a baseline of the culture of the university around this topic and something to share with the CoP to start the conversation.

Survey analysis and results.

The survey results gave strong data points to establish a foundation to answer Research Question Two, by demonstrating how people understand their role in student success. After completing the CoP and the interviews, it has been further determined that the survey is an accurate reflection of the perception of faculty and staff and their understanding of their role in student success, as evidenced in the learning process by the participants throughout the participation in the CoP.

Demographic results.

Within the desired 40% response rate, those that chose to respond represented different demographics. For the roles listed at CTX, 39% of the participants identified as faculty, 33% student facing staff, and 28% non-student facing staff.

Similarly, the questions regarding longevity at CTX were equally distributed between more than 10 years at 27%, 5 to 10 years at 30%, 2 to 5 years at 20% and less than two years at 23%. Further demographic analysis showed the different roles were

again fairly evenly represented by longevity at Concordia as shown in Table 8, with the exception of the faculty role who had more people in the five to nine year categories.

Table 8

Longevity by Role

	<i>n</i>	< 2 years	2 to 5	5 to 10	>10 years
Faculty	44	16%	16%	43%	25%
Student Facing Staff	38	32%	26%	13%	29%
Non -Student Facing Staff	33	21%	18%	30%	30%
Total	115	23%	20%	30%	28%

While the demographic representation does not directly address the research question at hand (RQ2), an argument can be made that the volume of respondents as well as the equal representation indicates, at the very least, an interest in the subject of student success. By opening and responding to the email, 40% of the full time employees at CTX demonstrated the importance of student success, which is an indicator of minimum understanding their own role.

Perception results.

The next section of analysis highlights the answers to the Likert scale questions broken down by role. The overarching results show a perception of engagement and ownership of student success with 96% either agreeing or strongly agreeing to the idea that the “decision I make in my role can impact student success”(Q7) and 89% strongly agreeing or agreeing to the statement “when doing my work, I think of our current

students to help guide strategy.”(Q9) When broken down by role, 100% of faculty strongly agree or agree to Q7 and 91% strongly agree or agree to Q9. Student facing staff and non-Student facing staff are very similar with an 89% and 85% respectively in strongly agree or agree with Q9. Again, survey results show general consensus that faculty and staff perceive themselves to have high engagement and ownership of student success.

Table 9

Perception of Engagement and Ownership by Role

		Q7: Decisions I Make*	Q9: Think of Students*
Strongly Agree or Agree	<i>n</i>		
Faculty	44	100%	91%
Student Facing Staff	38	95%	89%
Non-Student Facing Staff	33	91%	85%
Total	115	96%	89%

*Q7: Decisions I make in my role can impact student success.

*Q9: When doing my work I think of our current students to help guide strategy.

Another result from the survey shows a faculty and staff who perceive themselves to be very accessible to students outside their specific role. 93% of faculty and 89% of student facing staff report daily interaction with students, which does not come as a surprise. At a university where 52% of the courses are taught by adjuncts, then it is expected that most fulltime faculty teaching 48% of the courses would be teaching students five days a week (CTX SIS, 2019). However, of the non-student facing staff,

60% interact with students either daily or one to two times a week. Only 38% reported to rarely interact with students and only one person reports never interacting with students (See Table 10). What is interesting about this particular data point is to remember the role of the participant was self-selected by the participant. This is especially important for the two different staff roles - it was the participants who self-identified as a non-student facing staff member, someone who does not directly work with students, yet even though they identified as non-student facing 58% of them said they interact with students on a daily or weekly basis. Again, they did not see themselves as student facing and yet they said interact with students every day or almost every day.

Table 10

Student Interaction by Role

	<i>n</i>	Daily	1-2/wk	1-2/mo	Rarely	Never
Faculty	44	93%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Student Facing Staff	38	90%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Non -Student Facing Staff	32	16%	44%	0%	37%	3%
Total	114	70%	17%	2%	10%	1%

Additionally, the responses to the questions “Students come to me with questions outside of course topics” (Q3) and “Students come to me with questions outside of my job duties” (Q4) were high in faculty and staff who strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. For Q3, 90% of the faculty participants strongly agree or agree with the statement. Many of our staff teach courses, thus several (74%) found the question

applicable to them. Of student facing and non-student facing staff, 71% and 36% respectively reported strongly agreeing or agreeing to the question, see Table 11. Q4 had similar results. Of the faculty and student facing staff, 82% and 87% respectively reported students come to them questions outside their job duties. Of the non-student facing faculty, 52% reported strongly agree or agree to the question. Not only do 60% of the non-student facing staff interact with students daily or one to two times a week, but 52% of them establish enough of a relationship that students come to them with questions outside their job duties, see Table 11. Again, this indicates a perception of high engagement with students, but the survey questions do not demonstrate whether or not this participant population perceives that as part of student success, or just aligning with our organizational value of *Caring for Others* (“CTX Strategic Plan,” 2016).

Table 11

Perception of Engagement and Ownership by Role

		Q3: Help outside course*	Q4: Help outside job*
Strongly Agree or Agree	<i>n</i>		
Faculty	44	90%	82%
Student Facing Staff	38	71%	87%
Non-Student Facing Staff	33	36%	52%
Total	115	69%	75%

*Q3: *Students come to me with questions outside of course topics.*

*Q4: *Students come to me with questions outside my job duties.*

A final result from the survey is a very high perceived collaboration with other departments in an effort to ensure student success. Question 10 asks participants to agree or disagree with the statement, “When doing my work, I seek feedback from departments who interact with students directly to help make decisions” (Q10). At 74% of those strongly agreeing or agreeing to the statement, a perceived high value on collaborating and understanding the need to seek feedback from those that work directly with students on a daily basis. While only a small percentage strongly disagree or disagree, at 11%, this is the only question regarding participant behavior (as opposed to student behavior like ‘students come to me with questions outside of class’) to have any participant mark ‘strongly disagree.’ This becomes more significant when compared to the interview results and the highly consistent theme that the CoP provided a mechanism for collaboration. Participants didn’t know they needed to collaborate together in order to impact student success, further explored in the interview section.

Table 12

Collaboration by Role: I seek feedback from other departments

	<i>n</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Faculty	44	27%	43%	16%	14%	0%	0%
Student Facing Staff	38	34%	42%	15%	3%	3%	3%
Non -Student Facing Staff	32	39%	33%	9%	9%	3%	3%
Total	114	33%	40%	14%	9%	2%	2%

3% of non-student facing faculty did not answer the question, 1% of the total

The survey was intended to set a baseline for faculty and staff perception of their role in student success, with the next phase holding a CoP to dig deeper into the understanding. The survey answers part of RQ2 in that faculty and staff perceive to understand their role in student success. Though, as stated above, there are some data points that show that this perception includes a limited understanding of what student success really means. One, the fact that 58% of self-identifying non-student facing staff report that they interact with students so frequently. However, this same population believe they interact with student primary regarding items outside their job. Indicating they believe in the value of ‘caring for people’ but do not believe it is directly connected with what they perceive to be student success. Two, the results are incredibly high across the data results to indicate faculty and staff have a high level of ownership over student success with 96% of the participants believing decisions they make impact student success. However, this is coupled with the low but important, statistics around collaboration with others being unnecessary to student success. Again the number of people who disagreed with the statement were low, but this data set was the only item with strongly disagree and non-applicable, whereas all other data sets stopped at neutral or disagree.

Community of Practice Presentation

The focal point of the innovation was participating in a CoP around the topic of student success. This section will outline the participant selection process. During the CoP detailed agenda notes were kept, as well as recordings of three of the five sessions to

refer to when conducting the analysis. Each meeting is outlined in detail below with an account of the meeting, as well as significant observations throughout the process.

Meeting one.

The first meeting of the CoP took place one month after the survey was distributed. Two participants could not attend the first meeting, so those participants and met with the researcher two days prior. Both meetings were an introduction into the innovation. Participants reviewed, signed and returned consent forms keeping a signed copy for themselves. They learned what a CoP is, a quick synopsis of the theory, the purpose of the research, and the two research questions.

Participants were given preliminary results of the survey, particularly the Likert scale questions that will be shared in more depth below. A few comments were made regarding their agreement with the survey results, a general consensus the Concordia University Texas cares deeply about student success and everyone has a role in it. The conversation did not go beyond general agreement.

Participants were very interested in the CoP theory and the idea of using a CoP to create organizational change. Some participants requested links to articles that had been used in the literature review because they were interested in the topic.

The group also scheduled future meeting times that worked best for the most schedules. This, not surprisingly, was the most challenging aspect of the innovation. Finding a time slot of eight participants and the researcher, including three faculty teaching schedules and three separate planned conferences, was a challenge.

At the end of the meeting a participant requested we all introduce ourselves and our roles at CTX. As someone who is actively involved in nearly every aspect of campus, I often forget there may be people that don't know each other. For this group of people, each participant had never met at least one other participant. We are a small university (less than 200 employees), so it is likely that people have worked with at least one other group member on one project or another at some point. However, after talking in this session it was established that no one had worked closely with another participant specifically around student success.

Meeting two.

The second meeting took place two weeks after the first meeting. All participants were present with the exception of Participant P-4. The agenda for the meeting was to create a 'student success lens' giving participants a parameter in which to think about student success. The goal was to agree on a common definition of student success at Concordia and how we view our day-to-day through that frame of reference. In order to accomplish this goal participants were asked to keep two questions at the top of their mind, 'What does student success look like at CTX?' and 'How do you ensure that happens?'

In order to facilitate the discussion, the group followed a PowerPoint presentation with an outline of the agenda (see Appendix E). To complete this activity, they were shown a slide show with six different fictional student situations. It was anticipated we would only have time for two or three situations, but had extra material in case a situation did not resonate with the participants. Participants were asked to review two student

situations without talking and in their mind (or take notes) think about the answer to the questions ‘What about your role or your department may have led to this situation, if anything?’ and ‘What is something your role or your department could do to fix this situation and prevent this situation in the future?’ The goal was to have participants reflect on two different situations without being influenced by discussing the first situation. The two situations were as follows:

***Situation #1:** A new traditional student comes in to Student Central on Wednesday of the 3rd week of school of the fall semester after receiving a phone call that they have a balance. They have an estimated family contribution (EFC) of \$5000, meaning they are Pell Grant eligible, but have just received a bill from CTX for \$3000. The student finds out the Parent Plus Loan has been denied. The only payment plan available at this date is a three month plan, requiring the student to pay \$1000 per a month. This is not possible. The student seeks to withdraw from the university, but it is past the refund period and doing so would result in the student owing \$9000 after federal aid has been returned. The student can stay enrolled, but will not be allowed to register for spring until the balance is paid in full. No transcripts will be released until his balance is paid.*

***Situation #2** Joanne is a senior sitting in the back of her Fundamentals of Com course. The course is filled with mostly freshman. She is terrified of public speaking and has delayed this course until her second to last semester. She has been able to avoid any presentations in her major classes up until now. She is considering quitting school. Nobody knows about her terror and she has no idea who to talk to without becoming completely embarrassed. She has never spoken to one student in this class. The teacher can't remember her name.*

For reference to all situations, please see Appendix E. I gave them about two minutes to reflect on each situation.

After reflection I asked the participants to remember the questions regarding how they may have contributed to the situation and how they could help. The discussion started with four of the eight participants stating their area did not have anything to do

with Situation #1, that it was an ‘Admissions or Student Central’ issue. Two participants talked about the responsibility of the student in the situation, they should have ‘figured it out.’ Participants in the group who have firsthand knowledge of this type of situation (student facing staff in Admissions or Financial Aid) explained to the group how different processes work. Faculty and non-student facing staff participants were very surprised that this was a common issue. One faculty member stated, “I never thought of their ability to pay their tuition as part of student success”

Participants were asked to move on to short and long term solutions. Immediately two participants with no connection to financial issues to students started thinking about out of the box ways their department could help. Participants had even more suggestions for long term solutions, asking those in the room that are more familiar with this situation and processes at CTX questions to clarify how everything works. Hiring more student facing support staff was suggested more than once by several participants as an easy way to address student success by offering more people on the ‘front lines’ to help students. Another discussion topic was access to directory information so everyone knows who to send students to for different information. Participants were highly engaged and very keen to think about and implement long term solutions, systematic action items to fix this particular situation. It was challenging to steer them back to the topic at hand, which was reflecting on their own role in the situation

Next the participants were asked to discuss Situation # 3. This particular situation dealt with academic advising and faculty participants were more engaged in how they may have contributed to the issue at hand. Several participants, faculty and staff alike,

talked about ways in which all faculty and staff can engage more with students on a daily basis and then have a mechanism to share this information. The consensus was finding the ability to identify a problem before it gets ‘unfixable’ is key to enabling student success. One participant shared that she actively engages with students outside her typical job description because she is an alumnus and she feels in that context it is her job and duty to “give back to students that are where I once was”

The discussion was rich and engaging. Participants were genuinely curious about how students navigate college, what other people do, and how to implement long term solutions to make sure these situations don’t occur. Participants had to be reminded to think about their own role in the situation, the objective of the exercise. The meeting began to demonstrate the first of the organizational change/CoP theme transfer of knowledge amongst participants around student success.

Meeting three.

Meeting three convened one week after meeting two. Participant P-7 was not in attendance. I met with the participant at a later date to go over the discussion during this meeting.

The first agenda item for this meeting was to go through another student situation in the same manner as meeting two. The original intention for meeting two was for each participant to focus on themselves/their department as they reflected on the situation. The purpose of meeting three was to broaden that scope to focus on themselves and each other. During meeting two participants did focus on their own role, but were keen to discuss and learn more about others as mentioned above. Thus meeting three allowed the

participants to just do the same exercise, but after having spent a week reflecting on meeting two. The participants were given a new situation, Situation #3 from the slide deck found in Appendix E:

***Situation # 3:** Max is in his third semester at CTX. He is a biology major. After pulling his grades at the end of the semester, he sees he has failed MTH 0320 Intermediate Algebra. He took MTH 0313, Fundamentals of Math his first semester, failed, retook it and passed. This means he will have to retake MTH 0320 and will not be able to begin his first BIO requirements until the first semester of his Junior year. By that time he will have completed his GEN ED requirements, and will be left with taking one BIO course at a time until his senior year. His four year degree has turned into at least 7 years due to the chronological order of the first three biology requirements and developmental math.*

Again, several participants asked questions regarding process and logistics of how the student could have gotten to this situation. However participants soon began talking about strategies to prevent the situation and interestingly, the discussion quickly turned to the idea of the “professor power gradient” and how students perceive the options they have available to them. The participants also talked about the importance of connection with the students, and the realities of making that happen. The theme for this meeting circulated around the paradox of the student’s responsibility in their success and our (faculty and staff) responsibility for the students' success. This discussion started to include themes about the diversity of cultures and the expectations of students who may not have been “exposed early in life to white middle class value systems” and our expectations that they have. This led to an interesting discussion on how participants’ perceptions of their own role in student success is influenced by the implicit expectations they have of students. For example, when speaking about the first situation where the student ran into financial trouble, one participant commented that they would never start

something without having the full financial picture and completely understanding the cost, which lead to a discussion about the financial literacy of many of our students. Another example was a non-student facing staff member completely appalled that an instructor might not know the name and story of every student in their class, but another faculty member explained they have over 120 unique students in one semester, there are definitely times where they don't remember every single name, let alone have the time to learn each students story. Finally, this led to a conversation about what the students should or should not be expected to bring to the table, like responsibility for understanding financial deadlines, where to get help when struggling, how to identify when they are in academic trouble versus the class is just challenging, and many more expectations we may not know we have of our students.

The next agenda item was to attempt to write a statement that described the student success lens in which they intentionally view their work. A participant started with a statement which was written on the projector screen. The participants then wordsmith the phrase. Participants called out when they felt the definition was only applicable to faculty or only applicable to front facing staff. The participants felt that defining 'student success' was important and a deep discussion ensued regarding whether graduation is the only measure or definition of student success. The participants agreed on the following definition they felt captured both their role, and what student success means: *My role in students' success is to ensure students feel seen/heard/noticed and be a connector and influencer to achieve their goals and be satisfied with their learning experience.* The act of creating this definition or lens fulfills the second organizational

change/CoP theme of creating a sense of purpose amongst participants around student success.

Meeting four.

Meeting four took place one week after meeting three. The agenda for meeting four was to discuss ways in which to remind oneself of the newly created student success lens. During the meeting research was shared regarding ways in which to change habits and the creation of some sort of cue, generally a visual cue in order to keep the goal present in our minds.

The meeting started by asking the participants to reflect on the days since the last meeting and whether or not they had changed their behavior in any way. Four participants spoke up regarding scenarios in which they thought about or thought differently about student success than they would have prior to the previous two discussions. This was especially so for one non-student facing participant who was able to give several examples of ways in which they never thought about students before. For example, how policies and procedures for the university can effect students or how navigating where to find assistance for any number of questions can impact performance in the classroom.

After some reflection and discussion we talked about reminders. Several ideas were suggested like adding a line to meeting agendas, stickers, badges, miniature figures, pictures hanging in the office, pictures on desktops or cell screens, meeting reminders on the calendar and posted statistics for how many times a person did something to support student success. One participant stated that faculty didn't need reminders because that

“was their job, their only job and they saw ‘reminders’ in the class every day.” Some participants pushed back on faculty needing reminders, stating that in their personal experience, just because a faculty member ‘saw’ students every day did not mean they were thinking about their success, especially in a holistic way beyond their success in that particular class.

Another theme regarding this topic was the student affirmation serving as a reminder - students come back and say ‘thank you’ or are able to provide feedback on what worked for them. A faculty participant suggested the ‘reminder’ for non-student facing staff would be actual students, setting up a program that puts students in front of them like a mentoring program or student workers within their office. Another suggestion was to create student profiles that are passed out to people so that they can personify this thought process. Another suggestion was a daily or weekly email ‘story’ that is shared with faculty and staff to remind them about students.

The group was very keen to create a mentor type program or somehow assign each student a ‘go to’ person if they are in a situation where they don’t know who to go to, they know this person will help them. The group talked at length about the benefits of this. However, since this reminder needed to be implemented for this particular study and time would not allow for that level of detail and time, participants were asked to keep that in mind for a later date.

At the end of the discussion, the participants were asked to pick something that would help them remember to think about student success, whatever works for them. A picture or calendar reminder or something they could implement. They spoke again of a visual something they could put on their desk, in their car, or other places. Based on this conversation the researcher created comical figurines seen in Figure 1. Each participant received the figurine the next day to use if they wished. The participants were asked to keep a tally of when they intentionally thought about student success using the student success lens, and if/when they used a specific cue. The same participant who stated they didn't need a visual reminder later said, "I didn't want [the physical reminders] to work, but dang it did" speaking about the graduate figurine he was given.



Figure 1. Reminder figurines. Visual reminders given to the CoP participants.

Meeting five.

Meeting five occurred two weeks after meeting four. Participant P-4 and P-2 were not in attendance, but were met with separately at a later date to catch them up on the conversation. Due to time constraints and the flow of the prior meetings, it was decided to combine steps five and six into one meeting. Step five was to monitor behavior and keep track of how many times participants intentionally thought about student success in their day to day work and then share with the CoP. Step six was to have a discussion

about ways to incentivize people to change their behavior to think about student success more intentionally and frequently. Both these discussions took place in meeting five.

The participants started by reflecting on the last week and a half and the ways in which they changed their behavior, if any. Every participant had at least one, if not several, instances in which they intentionally thought about student success using the student success lens established by the group. One participant thought to ask about it in an interview for a potential candidate for a Dean position. Another participant talked about a collaboration they led with their department to change some wording and the name of a form from the “probationary plan” to a “success plan.” The form name changes to a more positive outlook, but arguably more important, instead of having the student and the faculty member create two separate plans to improve student success, the faculty and student work together to make one plan for success.

Another participant who typically is not front facing, had the opportunity to temporarily do a project directly with students. She felt her participation in the CoP allowed her to be more effective in that job because of the insight she had with several different perspectives. A third participant marveled at how effective the comical figurine was, that when they caught a glimpse of it out of the corner of their eye their thoughts were immediately drawn to thinking about how the current work, conversation, task, etc. tied to student success. A fourth participant talked about how they better appreciated how everything they did should and could tie to student success, even the mundane, like spreadsheet, matters. “The less enjoyable work matters too” As a whole, the participants felt strongly that while the visual cue was helpful, it went hand in hand with the

conversations, the participation in the CoP. One would not have been as effective without the other (speaking of the visual and the conversation). The different perspectives of experience and work made a large impact on each person. One participant stated that had a student success goal been handed to them or a metric been given, it would not have meant as much as participating and creating it on their own.

The second part of the agenda was meant to talk about ways in which we could incentivize individuals to think more about student success. While we still talked about that, a recurring theme in this meeting was ‘what is next?’ In the first couple of meetings it was the participants spending time thinking of specific ways in which they could implement things to prevent some of the situations from occurring - long term solutions. As the CoP progressed to reflecting on how each of them think about student success in their daily work, the conversation transitioned into ways to scale or replicate the experience we were having. So a large part of this discussion was how to do just that.

The group again reiterated the importance of the CoP experience in formulating their thoughts on their own role in student success and infusing this in their everyday work. One participant articulated it well that diverse interdepartmental “groups remind us we each have a piece in students success,” that we learn from others. “We are like a spider web with students in the center and everyone branching out.”

The idea of different departments coming together to talk about this resonated strongly with the group. One participant mentioned in her world she rarely works with anyone outside her own department. The participants felt this was key to the success of a

CoP, that if this was replicated within a department it would fall flat, not be as effective, and feel disingenuous.

Many ideas were floated on next steps or ways to systemize this sort of thinking. One suggestion was to require a student success related topic in the mandated institutional effectiveness plans of each department, however, participants were hesitant that would work as it would not encourage the co-mingled group. The meeting concluded with participants stating they were glad they participated and looked forward to seeing how this could be implemented university wide.

Community of practice conclusion.

These sessions were the most interesting part of the innovation. Observing the participants reflect and think deeply about their role in student success was a fascinating exercise. The participants were highly engaged in the process. One of the six values of the institution is “Caring for Others” (Mission, Vision & Values, n.d.) and it is evident by the passion I witnessed from these employees of the university for the students (even fictional situations) that they deeply hold this value (“CTX Strategic Plan,” 2016). At times it was challenging for participants to remember the overall agenda for the CoP, which was to better understand their individual role in student success. Enacting systematic change could be the byproduct of better understanding their role, but was not the end game for this study.

Non-student facing staff seemed the most keen to better understand, which surprised me. While I did observe them more disconnected from the student, they were most open to better understanding.

Interviews Results

In this section I will review the data from the interviews conducted at the conclusion of the CoP. I will outline the process in which I collected the data and what comprises this dataset. I will document the process in which the data was analyzed. And finally share the results from the interview data and how this data set answers both RQ1, how faculty and staff operationalize student success and RQ2, how a CoP changes faculty and staff perception of their role in student success.

The interview was intended to answer both research questions, and it did. For RQ1, the interview results clearly identified different ways in which participants either currently operationalize student success, or their changed understanding of how to operationalize student success. The interviews also answered RQ2 with several ways in which participating in the CoP enhanced their role in students success, something that was further highlighted when comparing the data from the survey.

Cycle A.

In the analysis of Cycle A, 137 codes were created across three themes: Participants' thoughts or reactions to the CoP experience, thoughts or reactions to the concept of their role in student success, and their perceptions about their job as it relates to student success. Overall code frequency results in the bulk of the coding falling in five different codes. The highest frequency theme was their reactions to participating in the CoP with 45% of the codes. In particular, the code with phrases and words regarding the concept that a CoP builds community around the goal of student success, for example "I think we need to do more of that, more of those direct conversations and working

together rather than [as] one person,” totaled 18% of all 137 codes. This speaks to RQ2 in the CoP participants have a better understanding of their role, specifically in understanding the value of the CoP because of the difference in thoughts surrounding student success. The next most frequent code at 8% of the code was the theme perception of job was the concept that everything they do impacts student success and is a part of their job. This speaks to RQ1 in believing every aspect of their job contributes to student success is how they operationalize student success, however it should be noted participants spoke to a better understanding of this concept after participation in the CoP. Other frequent codes at 7% were “participation in the CoP provided new perspectives,” “students don’t understand what we (the participants) do”, and “participation in the CoP was a valuable and a good use of time.”

There were only three codes that were found in all seven interviews. These three codes were also found in the most frequent found codes overall: “the CoP experience builds community,” “everything dealing with student success is a person's job”, and “the CoP was a good use of time”. It should be noted that a specific question asked was “Do you think the CoP was a good use of your time?” and thus the fact that every interview had this code is less surprising. The two prior codes again support the fact that participating in the CoP does change participants understanding of their role in student success. It also again supports the idea that the way in which participants operationalize student success, is the understanding that every aspect of their job contributes to student success. The only other code that is found in more than four interviews is the code representing words or phrases about the next steps to expand the CoP experience to other

faculty and staff. All but one participant had this code, and it was not a specific question. However, for each participant with this code, it appeared when asked, “Anything else I (the researcher) should think about as I analyze this research?” This data is an indirect way to support the fact that the ‘CoP was a good use of time.’ If participants all, without prompt, asked how this program would be expanded to reach the larger campus community, that speaks to how they value the experience, again this answers the extent to which participating in the CoP changed their understanding AND the idea that participation in the CoP would be a good way to establish organizational change regarding the concept of student success.

When broken down by participant role, the code frequency did show a slightly different picture. While the theme of CoP creating community was still the highest at 21% of the faculty codes, 10% of the codes were about classroom teaching being the main contributor to student success. This is closely followed by 7% in each category from the theme the CoP experience in that “the CoP was valuable and a good use of time”, “the CoP gave new perspectives they did not previously have”, and “that using the CoP framework could improve faculty agreement and collaboration with each other and the rest of the university”. For faculty, participating in the CoP did not change their perception that teaching was the most important factor in student success - that is the primary way faculty operationalize student success - but it did increase their awareness of other components to student success, and this did impact their understanding of the holistic role.

As with faculty, segregating the student facing staff resulted in a slightly different breakdown. Student facing staff frequency counts were more homogeneous in nature, with the code ‘everything is a part of my job and leads to student success’ ranking highest at 17% and the rest of the codes split between 7% and 3.5% frequency. This again shows how staff operationalize student success at CTX. Finally, the non-student facing again had a high ranking of the CoP building community coding with 19%, and 11% of students don’t understand what I do. However, ranking higher than the other two groups, non-student facing staff had 8% frequency count for the idea that a reminder regarding the importance of student success is needed and effective. This was the first time in this cycle reminders came up higher in frequency, which is understandable if they do not interact with students in the context of their daily job. Remember the survey showed that staff who self-identified as non-student facing had a high student interaction frequency, but also a high rate of student coming to them for questions outside their job. Survey results and interviews suggest non-student facing faculty need reminders to make the connection between their day-to-day work and how it affects student success.

Cycle B.

Cycle B used value coding in an attempt to answer RQ2 by analyzing the values, beliefs and attitudes of the participants in regards to their role in student success and their participation in the CoP. A total of 102 codes were assigned across the 7 participant interviews, with just less than 50% of the codes belonging to the values code group. The most frequent code at 22%, similar to cycle A, was the value that “high collaboration among departments created a student success environment”. The “belief that all job

responsibilities can affect student success” had the next most frequent at 12%. Both of these codes were found in all seven participant interviews. From the CoP experience, participants stated they gained different perspectives and/or greater interdepartmental understanding with 9% of the coding. However, this was not mentioned across all participants, only five of the seven. One participant in particular mentioned this belief five times within the interview - the highest single code within a single interview of any other code at all. 42% of the coding was spread between three different codes mentioned above.

When broken down by the type of participant (faculty, student facing, and non-student facing) the code groups spread changed significantly for the non-student facing staff, with more codes relating to attitude and values, with slight dip in the belief category in belief, see Table 13. This could be due to the less frequent opportunity for personal experience in working directly with students.

Table 13

Attitude, Belief, Value Coding by Role

	<i>n</i>	Attitude Codes	Belief Codes	Value Codes
Faculty	55	16%	31%	53%
Student Facing Staff	22	18%	32%	50%
Non -Student Facing Staff	26	38%	23%	38%
Total	103	22%	29%	49%

Cycle C.

Cycle C resulted in 107 different codes across 5 different themes. The first theme looked for words or phrases where the participant talked about participation in the CoP changing or not changing their thinking regarding their role in student success. This resulted in 17% of the codes: two participants discussed how the CoP did not change their thinking; four participants had phrases regarding how participation had changed their thinking, and one participant spoke equally about how the CoP did *and* did not change their thinking.

The second theme was comprised of five codes related to different positive effects of participating in the CoP. This theme had the most frequent use of codes with 39% of the codes falling into this theme. The most frequent code, was the idea that the CoP provides a way to collaborate with others. Each of the rest of the codes in this theme had a frequency percentage of 7% each.

The third theme looked at different things important to student success such as personal relationships with students and the classroom experience, comprised of six different codes made up 34% of all the codes in the cycle. No one code had a significantly higher frequency than the others, with half of them with 7% each and the remaining three with 4-6% of the total codes. Interestingly, the two non-student facing participants had very few codes in this theme. While they both spoke extensively about student success and talked about their better understanding and how they think about it more, they did not have these specific codes in their interview. One participant had no codes and one participant had only one code.

The final two themes may or may not directly align to the two RQs, however, the topics came up frequently in the CoP, and therefore added to the list for this coding to look for frequency. The first was whether or not student success could be defined by things other than graduation. While at the surface this may not align with either of the two RQs, as defining student success was not a question, it was part of the process in gaining a deeper understanding of the participant's role in student success. For example, if graduation is the only measurement of student success, it is more difficult for individual staff to see how they play into that one measurement. This question had a frequency of 4% with an even split between student success could be measured by many different items and half made a comment about graduation being the ultimate measurement of student success. The final question was regarding the next steps for this research or how to expand the CoP experience. As mentioned previously, this indirectly answers RQ2 as the participants thought the experience impactful enough they believe the rest of the campus community need to also have this experience in order to better understand their role in student success. This coding theme had a 7% frequency and every participant with the exception of one brought it up, unprompted. The codes in this theme looked for whether the participants used words on next steps that "YOU" (the researcher) are going to take to implement this program campus wide, or used words on next steps the "YOU" (the researcher) with help from me (participants), or used words on next steps that "WE" (the collective). When broken down by role, faculty all had codes with the responsibility of what's next falling to "YOU" (the researcher) with one mention of "YOU" (the researcher) with help from "ME" (the participant). While student facing

staff consistently coded with “YOU” (the researcher) with help from “ME” (the participant). Lastly, non-student facing staff were all coded with collective “WE”.

Summary

The data analysis answered the two research questions for this project. The first research question: “How to faculty and staff at CTX operationalize student success?” was answered in the artifact analysis and CoP participant interviews. The artifact analysis showed very little discourse in the artifacts, especially the handbooks and meeting minutes, around faculty and staff role in student success, or really about student success at all. This could be the result of the artifacts chosen, or that the way student success is operationalized is not present in these materials. The CoP Participant interviews showed through coding, that faculty and staff believe every aspect of their job contributes to student success, but after participating in the CoP, they came to understand their particular role more, especially as it related to collaboration with each other. A better understanding of what others do, in turns helps individuals better know how to support students.

The second research question: “How and to what extent does participating in a CoP based on organizational change theory help faculty and staff understand their role in student success?” was answered by the survey, the CoP observations, and the CoP participant interviews. The survey showed a perceived high understanding of their [faculty and staff] role in student success. Especially, in regards to actively collaborating with each other. Although a high percentage said they do that by seeking feedback from

other departments about students, the participants of the CoP revealed in the interview analysis that understanding others and creating an environment for collaboration was the most useful part of the CoP. In other words, they didn't realize how much they didn't know about other departments and how much they weren't working together. Additionally, the survey showed for this particular question the only real negative numbers, admitting they do not seek feedback from other departments or they don't even see it as a part of student success.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

I started this research wanting to know more about the disconnect I perceived between faculty and staff and their role in the success of our students. After careful consideration and cycles of research, I saw a need to better understand how faculty and staff perceive and understand their own role in student success. After forming a CoP and collecting data, I was able to answer the two research questions. This chapter will explore the “so what and now what?” First, I will talk about items that did not directly answer my research questions, but were worth noting and why. Next, I will take a moment to outline what is next, from both a local and larger context. I will discuss future plans for scaling the innovation at CTX. I will also speak to the limitations and delimitations of the study and what I would recommend changing in future iterations.

Worth Noting

There were three findings that did not directly answer the research questions, but are worth further discussion. The first is the frequency in which non-students facing staff interact with students. The survey asked employees to self-identify their role, one option was non-student facing staff, meaning staff whose job does not directly interact with students. Of the total number of participants 28% self-identified as someone who does not directly work with students, yet of those 58% also say they interact with students every day or two to three days per week. If I were to do another cycle of this research, I would look specifically into this employee set who do not feel their job is to directly work with students, yet spend three or more days a week interacting students presumably

about items that have nothing to do with their job. This could speak to our culture and small school mentality. With voluntary chapel every day and only two buildings on campus that are both classrooms and office space, it is possible that we are just 'friendly'. At the start of my research I had my own perception of a large disconnect non-student facing staff had with the realities of the student, while my research in the CoP showed some disconnect with how their day-to-day work connected with specific student issues, it did not show a complete disconnect. Non-student facing staff are clearly connected to students and eager to take responsibility for their part in enabling student success.

A second matter from the research is the faculty disconnect, not with the students but with the rest of the university. While the research focused on the faculty's perception of their role in students' success and found faculty perceive themselves to have a large role both in and out of the classroom, all the faculty in the CoP had little understanding of everyone else's role. In some ways, the faculty seems to believe student success was their sole responsibility. While they acknowledged different student facing departments and their role at the university to help the students, they seemed not to consider how students working with these different departments could impact the student's success. There seemed to be an overarching theme with faculty, at least those that participated in the CoP, of a lack of holistic understanding of the student experience beyond the relationship with the faculty. Themes of collaboration between faculty and everyone else on campus helped to answer the Research Question 2 in regards to understanding their own role in student success, however, I think this result is a little different. This leads me to consider a fourth cycle of research that explores why faculty do not acknowledge the rest of the

university as a team to enable student success. It could be that faculty have little experience with teamwork or are used to working alone, especially at a small private institution where many academic departments are only one to three faculty in that discipline.

The final item that came to light, but did not directly answer a research question, was the CoP's eagerness to know the next steps in the innovation. All but one participant, responded to the question "anything else I should think about or reflect about" with questions, suggestions and/or thoughts on how and when the CoP group could/should/would be expanded to the rest of the campus community. First, this spoke to the importance each participant believed the group sessions to have. While that contributed to the research results and answering RQ2, the way in which the participants framed the suggestion or question was the interesting piece. All of the faculty asked how and when I [the researcher] would expand this to the rest of the campus community. Each of one of them asked how I [the researcher] would expand the program. The research results showed the faculty to find the CoP very enlightening and after participating had a better understanding of their role in student success. As mentioned before, faculty seemed to feel the burden of ensuring student success was theirs alone. Survey results showed faculty feel they have a large impact on student success. However, at the end of the day, all three faculty clearly felt it was my [the researcher] responsibility to make sure everyone else on the campus community understood their own individual role. This is understandable as I am an administrator. The interesting part comes when I analyzed how the rest of the participants framed this information. All

of the student facing staff also answered the questions with dialogue about getting the rest of the university to experience the CoP. They, too, framed this information with how am I [the researcher] going to scale the CoP, BUT they also indicated in the dialogue (unprompted) they wanted to help. In other words, ‘How/when are you going to facilitate this with the rest of the campus community and can I help?’ Again, I recognize my position of authority and the idea that administration would coordinate, but they (student facing staff) want to be involved. Most interesting was the way the non-student facing staff - those with the least direct connection to student success. They, too, in some way brought up the feasibility of the rest of the campus sharing in this experience. However, all of them framed the thought as, ‘how are WE [the collective] going to scale this. The non-student facing faculty clearly felt the most collectively in regards to the idea that everyone has a part in student success.

Connection to Previous Literature

The theoretical framework used in the research centered on Community of Practice, a theory developed by Wenger-Trayner. In particular Wenger uses the word *reification* to describe taking an abstraction and turning it into concrete material (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). In the same way, I believe I was able to successfully use a CoP to turn the abstract idea of their role in student success into something concrete that faculty and staff can infuse into their decision making process and day to day work.

The change leadership theories used in this research proved to be particularly relevant. In particular, the “Telling-Is-Leading Fallacy” is the “false belief that effective leadership is demonstrated by strong authoritarian guidance from supervisors” (Buller,

2015, pg. 180). While I predicted the act of developing rather than being told their role in student success would be especially important for faculty who use academic freedom in both a legal and philosophical ways to resist being led, I was surprised that the non-student facing staff made specific comments in the CoP meetings that if they were ‘told’ what their role is in student success it would not be as meaningful as working with a team to deeply understand and develop their roles based on everyone’s experience with students. Using a CoP to help faculty and staff discover the role they play in student success highlights the importance of having individuals come to the conclusion themselves versus simply receiving a mandate from leadership.

The main theoretical application was to use a CoP as Change Leadership. This happened in two ways. First, knowledge was transferred in a practical way, replicating many studies that have used CoPs as organizational change agents or trainings tools (add citations). Second, the CoP was used to create a sense of purpose and encourage people to do their work better (Cordery, J., et al., 2015, p. 659). The goal to transfer knowledge and create a sense of purpose were both achieved. More specifically, having a CoP comprised of participants across multiple departments allowed for a transfer of knowledge about their work and their experience with students. A better understanding of how everyone else works with students enabled participants to better understand their own roles, and thus created a sense of purpose at both the individual and group levels.

What is Next?

Local context.

As many of the participants suggested, I would like to scale this innovation to reach a larger number of the campus community. The research very clearly showed the CoP was successful in helping faculty and staff understand their own role in student success. In the participant interviews, participants were adamant that it was the experience of the CoP that truly helped them explore their own role in student success and encouraged behavior changes. More than one participant stated that if they were given a specific definition of student success and how they contribute, they would not have found it as meaningful or impactful. It was the act of coming to the definition together, and understanding not only their own role, but everyone else's role. In understanding what others do, they then could better understand themselves. This seem to be particularly relevant to faculty, as stated above, because prior to participation in the CoP they believed to be the only ones that could affect student success.

The groups must remain small and an interdepartmental mix. They also need a facilitator to keep the group on track and provide insight. The concept of having student situations or scenarios worked very well. It gave the group something to dissect and attempt to apply to their own department, while also learning what other departments do. One item to note is that all the participants of the CoP volunteered to participate. The act of volunteering their time, could signal they had at least some interest in student success, or a sense of responsibility about student success. This research does not predict what

would happen if there was a person in the group that did not believe they have some sort of role in student success.

In order to reach the entire campus, this innovation would have to happen in phases. Past participants could be trained to become facilitators. Five to six groups in a semester would result in 40-50 people participating in a CoP. The facilitated pre-planned CoP meetings would take place over a semester, additional meetings after that would be up to the group. Another round of participants would then be selected the following semester. This allows for continuous groups formed semester after semester with new employees mixed with old.

There are two approaches to this scale. The first is to make participation mandatory. When selected, the mandatory participation would take place over the course of the semester, after which time employees would not have to participate in the CoP any longer. This would be framed as training or a professional development initiative. This would require buy in from the top down in administration. While this is something I could propose to the decision makers of the university, it also has cons. Mandatory participation does not have the same enthusiasm. Furthermore, there is a risk to one person influencing their CoP in a direction the university is not in favor of, simply because they do not want to participate. There could also be a risk of disingenuous participation and lose the positive aspects of the CoP.

The alternative is a voluntary approach. Working with administration to find incentives would help to continue the practice. The con to this approach is not all people will be represented. And, similar to students who take advantage of the resources on

campus, those who readily volunteer may not be those that need the innovation the most. Last, measurable outcomes would need to be implemented to track the success of the CoP to ensure the time is useful and well-spent.

In addition to scaling the entire CoP, there are specific aspects that may be scalable. For example, there were several ideas about the reminders ranging from a student mentor program to daily student stories sent out to the campus community. Many of these reminders were not possible given the short time frame in which the research had to take place. However, with a program free from the constraints of a student's semester, there is potential to implement some of these ideas. The best option would be for the next round of CoP participants to come up with and help implement these reminder ideas.

There are three additional recommendations for CTX specifically, outside of scaling the CoP experience. The first is a set of guidelines for the creation of handbooks that encourages a look at the deficit mindset language and changes that to a developmental mindset. Currently, there is not a review process for handbooks and this research showed that is needed in order to make sure program policy and procedure align with the universities policies as well as with the overarching mission, vision and values of the university. The next iteration of the strategic plan is a prime opportunity to operationalize a process in which handbooks become an encouraging tool that truly reflects the work and attitude of our faculty regarding the success of our students.

A second recommendation for CTX is to encourage every formal meeting to include something on the agenda about student success. While the meeting minutes should not be a transcription of the dialogue at a meeting, it should include agenda items

and main topics of conversation. If topics relating to student success were added separately or within each agenda item, it would reflect the importance of talking about the success of students within official business.

A final recommendation for CTX is to create a ‘reminder’ campaign as the CoP did in this research. This could possibly be a part of the CoP scaling project outlined above, but at the very least, a regular reminder of who are students are and why we are here in the form of a story and not just demographic statistics could be impactful practice with very little resource expenditures.

Larger context, research replication.

This innovation was highly tailored to CTX, considering its own history in student support services, current mission/vision/values, and its future strategic initiatives. With some tweaks to fit the institution at hand, the idea of using a CoP to help faculty and staff better understand their role in student success is not an impossible innovation to transfer elsewhere. However, I would make some changes. First, I would track CoP participants’ pre-survey answers in order to allow for pre/post analysis and better evaluate the impact the CoP had on perceptions. Second, I would run two CoP groups. There would be greater gain in doubling the people without sacrificing the trust and intimacy of the small group. Additionally, comparing and contrasting the two groups would provide stronger qualitative data to show change.

I am not sure how well this innovation would work in a large school. While not all participants knew each other at the start of the CoP, all knew *most* of the other participants and many had worked closely with at least one other participant. The ability

to create a feeling of trust and mutual respect was expedited by this familiarity with the groups. That is not to say it cannot be created at larger institution, but the potential challenge is worth noting for replication. It may also be hard to scale the innovation in regards to having cross departmental representation. At a small university, the departments are small enough that each person has a working knowledge of their individual department as a whole. That may not be true the larger the departments get. Overall, it is important to have a variety of departments represented so people learn more about each other's role in context of their own.

Limitations and Delimitations

There were some limitations and delimitations in the study. The biggest limitations to the study, items outside of the researcher's control, would be the time frame in which the study had to be conducted. Since the research needed to be completed within the semester, there was really only a four month window for the CoP to select, establish, meet, and conclude. This meant we could only meet a few times and some ideas the CoP wanted to implement to improve their and others understanding of student success could not be completed within the time frame of the research. Without the time constraints, a longer CoP meeting time would have occurred with more documentation of mindset change.

There were a couple delimitations, some of which have been mentioned already. The first is the decision to keep the survey completely anonymous – thus not having a true pre and post-test for the CoP Participants. A pre and post-test would have allowed for a data set that measured understanding of their role in student success. Another

delimitation was the self-selection of the CoP participants. As mentioned above, a CoP that has participants that didn't volunteer may change the outcome of the CoP and would certainly require more time in the CoP. Participants that volunteer to participate have an open mindset to learning something different, where as someone asked or required to participate may be more reticent to be open to different ideas. The last delimitation of note is the artifacts chosen for the artifact analysis. While they proved valuable to the research, especially in regards to how we can improve the deficit language in handbooks, they may not be the best representation for how faculty in particular operationalize student success. In my experience outside the context of the research, I believe faculty talk and think more about student success than is represented in handbooks and meeting minutes. Furthermore, faculty and staff may not understand the importance or impact of *not* talking about student success in these artifacts and the message that can send to students and other external audiences. Further review of where and how faculty and staff record their work and processes for student success may lead to a better indicator of how they operationalize their work in this area.

Conclusion

There is a well-known, probably fictional, story about President John F Kennedy and his visit to the NASA Space center in 1962. It is said that he passed a janitor in the hall and asked him what he was doing. The janitor responded that he was helping to put a man on the moon. The idea that no matter how small or menial a task, it can contribute to the greater goal. It is my firm belief, after 15 years in higher education, that every person can impact a student's success. I started out to determine if everyone working in

higher education believed they had a role and if so what their perception of that role was. A search of the literature showed many studies speaking to the different facets of student success, the different ways college and universities mitigate the struggles students have in their pursuit of a degree, and the different ways staff and faculty can impact their success. Finding studies about non-student facing staff and their role in student success was a little more challenging. After further review of the literature, I specifically sought to answer two research questions: (1) How do we operationalize student success at Concordia, and (2) How and to what extent does participating in a community of practice based on organizational change theory help faculty and staff understand their role in student success? Having worked at CTX for over 11 years, I know that most people have a deep care for our students as well as each other, but transferring that specifically to student success, from my perspective, seemed to be a gap. Using a community of practice as a theoretical framework to allow faculty and staff to work through the process of understanding their role fit well with my goal.

Collecting documents to analyze how we operationalize student success was the first deep dive. I found very little discourse around student success in the artifacts chosen. Conducting a survey asking people about their role showed high engagement and a high perception that employees believed they have an impact on students' success. The survey was highly positive and showed little variance in answers. Creating a community of practice to dig a little deeper into the survey results revealed that faculty and staff believe they impact student success, but didn't really have a deep understanding of how until they talked about it with an interdepartmental group.

Combining the survey and interview data sets together provided the most useful information. If I had only conducted the survey, I would have formed the impression that faculty and staff perceive student success to be not only important but also something they were already working towards on a daily basis. However, the results of the interviews after the community of practice, as well as my process notes from the community of practice meetings showed great change in thought. Participants' thoughts regarding their role in student success didn't differ from the survey, but the reality of how they actually operationalize and understand the complexities of their and others role certainly did. This intersectionality of the two data points was pivotal in answering my research question.

Everyone can have an impact on student success. Being in tune with who our students are is essential to creating an environment that fosters students' success rather than creating needless hurdles and barriers. But understanding how we each do this unwittingly in the context of getting our work done is a little harder to comprehend. When faculty and staff deeply think about student success in their day-to-day work it can have great impact on the success of our students. Research like this provides a way in which a greater understanding and sense of purpose around student success can be created in each member of the university staff

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APPENDIX A
FACULTY AND STAFF SURVEY



Faculty and Staff Role in Student Success

My name is KC Pospisil and I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Ruth Wylie in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am also the Vice President of Academic Operations at Concordia University Texas. I am conducting a research study as a student on faculty and staff perception of their role in student success. The purpose of this survey is to better understand the current situation with respect to establishing the perception of individual roles in student success.

I am asking for your help, by participating in this survey concerning your knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about your understanding of your role in student success. I anticipate this survey to take 10 minutes total. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. Your responses will be anonymous. Results from this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name and other identifying information will not be used.

I am also seeking a small focus group to meet throughout the Fall semester to discuss the findings of this survey and other topics related to understanding your role in student success. Time commitment would consist of 10 -15 total hours spread out from September to December. If you are interested, please follow the link at the end of the survey to submit your information.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: KC Pospisil at 512-739-9654 or Ruth Wylie at 480-727-5175. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. If you wish to be a part of the study, [click here](#) to access the survey.

Survey adapted from: Serafin, A.G., (1991). Faculty Satisfaction Questionnaire.

Directions

Read each statement carefully. Using the following rankings, indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement. Please mark only one response.

Strongly Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

Faculty and Staff Role in Student Success

	Agree				Disagree	
My classroom teaching makes a difference to students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My engagement (meetings, mentoring, support in extra curr. activities, etc) with students outside the classroom/office impacts student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students come to me with questions outside of course topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students come to me with questions outside my job duties.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students understand what I do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I help students in ways they may not see or notice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decisions I make in my role can impact student success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My day to day work affects students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When doing my work, I think of our current students to help guide strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When doing my work, I seek feedback from						

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScZLzqzDF-48QeQHISGSnsIBV761Nsudf1IQOhCMwLvezagDg/viewform>[2/22/2020 9:41:28 PM]

Faculty and Staff Role in Student Success

departments who interact with students directly to help make decisions.

Directions

Please select the most appropriate answer.

I work in the following department:

- Faculty
- Staff whose role requires regular direct interaction with students
- Staff whose roles does NOT require regular direct interaction with students

On average, I interact with students

- Daily
- One to two times a week
- One to two times a month
- Very rarely
- Never

I have worked at Concordia for

- 2 years or less
- 2 to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- 10 years or more

Are you, or have you ever been a student at Concordia University Texas?

Yes

No

Focus Group Invitation

I am also seeking a small focus group to meet throughout the Fall semester to discuss the findings of this survey and other topics related to understanding your role in student success. Time commitment would consist of 10 -15 total hours spread out from September to December. If you are interested, please click on this link provided on the next page. Your responses on this survey will remain anonymous.

Submit

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Forms

APPENDIX B

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE VOLUNTEER FORM

Faculty and Staff Role in Student Success

My name is KC Pospisil and I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Ruth Wylie in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am also the Vice President of Academic Operations at Concordia University Texas. I am conducting a research study as a student on faculty and staff perception of their role in student success. I am also seeking a small focus group to meet throughout the Fall semester to discuss the findings of this survey and other topics related to understanding your role in student success. By participating in the focus group you will not only explore what your role is in student success, but gain a better understanding of the important impact each person has on our students. Time commitment would consist of 10 -15 total hours spread out from September to December. If you are interested, please fill out the short form below. If selected, I will contact you with more details and consent form information.

* Required

Email address *

Name *

Position at the University *

I have worked at Concordia for *

2 years or less

Faculty and Staff Role in Student Success

- 2 to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- 10 years or more

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

This form was created inside of Arizona State University. [Report Abuse](#)

 Forms

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APPENDIX C
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE CONSENT FORM

My name is KC Pospisil and I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor Ruth Wylie in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am also the Vice President of Academic Operations. For my doctoral studies and as a student at ASU, I am conducting a research study on faculty and staff perception of their role in student success. The purpose of this survey is to better understand the current situation with respect to establishing the perception of individual roles in student success. I am inviting your participation in a focus group I call a *Community of Practice*, which will discuss, explore and seek to understand your own role in student success. The time commitment will consist of 10-15 total hours spread out from September to December and will include group discussions and one individual interview. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Although there is no monetary benefit to you to participate in the research, the possible benefits of participation are a better understanding of your impact on students, a deeper appreciation of the how your work integrates with others, and higher intrinsic job satisfaction. Research gathered from this project could be used to benefit the university at large, influencing future programs to support student success initiatives both at CTX or other colleges or universities. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

There are no foreseeable risks participation. While not intentional or planned, there could be some discomfort as we discuss your role or others' role in student success.

Confidentiality will be maintained. Raw information from this focus group will not be shared by anyone other than the research team and the other members of the focus group present. By participating in the group, you will be expected to maintain confidentiality regarding the focus group discussions. Notes and documentation will be kept on a secure Google drive through Arizona State University, and not on the researchers work computer. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. Due to the nature of focus group as well as the small size of Concordia, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed; however, published results will remain confidential. Please see additional guarantee from Dr. Kristi Kirk, Provost and Executive Vice President below regarding your participation. Finally, while I am conducting this research as a doctoral student at Arizona State University, I also acknowledge my position as Vice President of Academic Operations at Concordia University Texas.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: KC Pospisil, kwalter7@asu.edu or Dr. Ruth Wylie, Ruth.Wylie@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

By signing below you are agreeing to be part of the study. A signed copy of this consent agreement will be provided to you.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

I would like to audio record the individual interviews and the focus group sessions. The interviews nor the focus group sessions will be recorded without your permission. If you agree to be audio record, please sign below.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX D
PROVOST LETTER

Dear Participant,

Thank you for considering to lend your time as a participant in this research for KC Pospisil. For this purposes of this study, KC is acting in her role as doctoral student, not in her role of Vice President. As outlined in the consent letter above, full confidentiality will be maintained. However, as an added assurance, I would like to reiterate that I am supportive of this research and want to make sure all participants feel comfortable. Information obtained through this research will in no way be used for evaluation purposes.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristi Kirk" followed by a horizontal line.

Kristi Kirk
Provost & Executive Vice President
Concordia University Texas

APPENDIX E
COP-CREATE A LENS

Creating a Student Success Lens



Goal

Agree on a common definition of student success at Concordia and how we view our day to day through that frame of reference or lens

**What does
student success
look like at CTX**

**How do you
ensure that
happens?**

What is my role?

What about your role or your department may have led to this situation, if anything?

What is something your role or your department could do to fix this issue?

What is something your role or your department could do to prevent this issue?

Situation #1

A new traditional student comes in to Student Central on Wednesday of the 3rd week of school of the Fall semester after receiving a phone call that they have a balance. They have an EFC of \$5000, meaning they are pell eligible, but have just received a bill from CTX for \$3000. The student finds out the Parent Plus loan has been denied. The only payment plan available at this date is a three month plan, requiring the student to pay \$1000 per a month. This is not possible. The student seeks to withdraw from the university, but it is past the refund period and doing so would result in the student owing \$9000 after federal aid has been returned. The student can stay enrolled, but will not be allowed to register for spring until the balance is paid in full. No transcripts will be released until his balance is paid.

Situation #2

Joanne is a senior sitting in the back of her Fundamentals of Com course. The course is filled with mostly freshman. She is terrified of public speaking and has delayed this course until the her second to last semester. She has been able to avoid any presentations in her major classes up until now. She is considering quitting school. Nobody knows about her terror and she has no idea who to talk to without becoming completely embarrassed. She has never spoken to one student in this class. The teacher can't remember her name.

Situation #3

Max is in his third semester at CTX. He is a biology major. After pulling his grades at the end of the semester, he sees he has failed MTH 0320 Intermediate Algebra. He took MTH 0313, Fundamentals of Math his first semester, failed, retook it and passed. This means he will have to retake MTH 0320 and will not be able to begin his first BIO requirements until the first semester of his Jr year. By that time he will have completed his GEN ED requirements, and will be left with taking one BIO course at a time until his Sr year. His four year degree has turned into at least 7 years due to the chronological order of the first three biology requirements and developmental math.

Situation #4

It is mid-November and Todd has managed to maintain his ability to sleep in his car on campus without anyone noticing. He works out in the gym and showers early in the morning and moves his car to a different parking space. He parks the car by 3:00 PM, busiest time in the parking lot, and walks to work so nobody notices a car coming on campus late. He 'studies' in the library when he doesn't have anywhere else to go. However, it is getting cold, and staying his car is becoming difficult to sleep. He is falling asleep in class and was late to work when he took a small nap in the chairs in Building C. But he is keeping up with school work and only has one more semester.

Situation #5

Jose is from Mexico. He came to Texas with his brother and aunt when he was three years old. His mom joined him later when he was 11. He is a "Texas Resident" but not a US citizen. He is working toward his citizenship, but does not have an official sponsor because everyone he knows is not a legal resident. He is working with an immigration lawyer. Concordia has accepted him, given him some aid, and his grandfather in Mexico is sending him money for tuition.

He lives at home to save money and commutes to campus. He has gotten multiple tickets because he does not have a parking pass. But the parking pass requires a valid driver's license, which he does not have. It is insured by his grandfather. The tickets are stacking up and he is worried he will owe so much money they will not let him return.

Situation #6

Dan hates school. He doesn't have any dramatic circumstance, he is just unhappy. He pays his bill with some assistance from parents, and lives in the residence hall. He stays in his room most of the time except when he goes to class. He sits by himself and twice now a professor has had to ask on his behalf if he could join a group for a group project. He has started to lose interest in school work and misses most assignments. He is not sure how he could catch up, or if he even wants to. He knows there are people in worse circumstances and feels he would bother anyone by talking about his mood. He is not sure if anyone would notice if he wasn't around.

Common Themes

**What does
student success
look like at CTX**

**How do you
ensure that
happens?**

APPENDIX F

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY TEXAS IRB APPROVAL LETTER



August 7, 2019

Ms. Pospisil:

Thank you for submitting the revisions required by its conditional approval of your research project, *Faculty and Staff Role in Student Success*. Based upon these revisions, this application is now fully APPROVED and you may begin the recruitment of participants for your study. Please note the following limits and requirements of this approval:

1. **Length of Approval:** Exempt studies are approved by the IRB for one year. If the study is active beyond one year from the date of this letter, you must request an extension from the CTX IRB.
2. **Modifications to Approved Study:** The CTX IRB must be notified of substantive changes to the approved research protocol and subsequently required to undergo additional IRB review and approval.

Using the irb@concordia.edu email address, please respond to this notification indicating that you understand these limits and requirements and that your study will conform to them. Any questions regarding the IRB approval process or conducting research involving human participants at Concordia University Texas, please contact either of us using the contact information provided below.

Trey Buchanan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Administrator
Concordia University Texas
irb@concordia.edu
512-313-5002

Carl Trovall, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Concordia University Texas
irb@concordia.edu
512-313-5312

APPENDIX G

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL LETTER



EXEMPTION GRANTED

[Ruth Wylie](#)
 Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
 480/727-5175
 Ruth.Wylie@asu.edu

Dear [Ruth Wylie](#):

On 7/18/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Faculty and Staff Perception of Their Role in Student Success
Investigator:	Ruth Wylie
IRB ID:	STUDY00010350
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey Consent, Category: Consent Form; • Focus Group Consent, Category: Consent Form; • ASU IRB Form, Category: IRB Protocol; • Survey, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Focus Group Outline, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above); • Letter, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above); • Interview Protocol, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 7/18/2019.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: KC Pospisil
KC Pospisil
Ruth Wylie