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The Impact and Lasting Effects on Students Involved in a Campus Closing

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THE IMPACT AND LASTING EFFECTS ON STUDENTS
INVOLVED IN A CAMPUS CLOSING

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Julie Caldwell

May 2013

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**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

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entitled

The Impact and Lasting Effects on Students Involved in a Campus Closing

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

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Abstract

Despite the prevalence of campus closures, there is a lack of literature discussing the impact on a variety of constituencies. This study was conducted to explore one particular campus closing. The study sought to answer the following research question: How and in what ways does the closing of a branch campus affect the traditionally-aged, full-time, residential, undergraduate student over time? Employing the qualitative research methodology of narrative research design, the researcher conducted interviews with seven participants who met the pre-determined qualifications. The interviews provided themes shared by the participants, which led to a more complete perspective on what students faced due to the campus closure and a representation of the overall campus closing experience. The key findings of the study were the following: the importance of relationships and the campus community, the prevalence of change in emotions and feelings, and the lasting effects on students. Summarizing the themes, the participants all expressed emotional closure from the experience and voiced their thankfulness for enduring the situation.

Acknowledgements

As this chapter of my life comes to a close, I have much to be grateful for. I am forever indebted to the people around me during these past two years as they challenged and supported me to become a more holistic person. The past two years have been a journey of learning and self-discovery I would not trade for anything.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The closing of a college campus is not an uncommon event. Between 1966 and 2006, the number of colleges and universities expanded remarkably as the population increased. Though more than 1,800 campuses were established during this time period, a total of 583 colleges and universities closed (Rhodes, 2006). Despite these numbers, the data and research on campus closings remains sparse. While the differences, characteristics, and circumstances of closings run the gamut, most of the institutions forced to close were smaller in size (Jaschik, 2008). The size of most of the institutions, coupled with the variety of external factors that led to their closings, contributes to the lack of data and research.

Implications of a Closing

A campus closing affects students in ways seen and unseen with differing magnitude dependent on situation, circumstance, and personality. The closing of a campus can be such a traumatic experience for the student that it initiates the grief process. In the book *On death and dying* (Kübler-Ross, 1973), the grief process is explained as a six stage process that outlines the typical responses through which an individual progresses. The stages are denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and hope (Kübler-Ross, 1973). Whether a student experiences the grief

process or not, he or she will experience a transition because of the life-altering nature of a campus closing.

An essential part of a campus closing is the inevitable transition that must occur for everyone involved. The definition of a transition is an event resulting in differences in routines, relationships, assumptions, and rules. Schlossberg's theory of transition describes what a transition is, its different forms, the transition process, and factors that influence those transitions (Evans et al., 2010). Transition theory is just one of the theories used within this study to address the theoretical foundation when exploring the topic area of a campus closing.

The grief process and transition theory were aspects of the literature addressed within a qualitative study about the experiences of students during their involvement in a campus closing (Mabie, 2009). The campus which closed in the study was a small branch campus of a larger, faith-based institution in the Midwest. Mabie's study explored the experiences of students a few months after the announcement of the closing, but before the actual closing. The findings indicated that the nature of each student's experience was based on several criteria and could be subdivided into the themes of academic system, self-system, and social system (Mabie, 2009). Mabie did not assess the long-term impact of the campus closing on the students in his study, and it is from this gap that the present study emerges to examine how students are affected over a longer period of time by the closing of a university campus. This study serves as an extension of Mabie's study by exploring the closing of the same branch campus. For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity, the university in this study will be referred to as University J.

Importance of the Study

As mentioned previously, the number of campus closings in the past century is substantial, but has received minimal attention in existing research. Because of the increasing costs of college and the ever-present threat of the loss of federal aid, the prevalence of campus closings will not likely decrease in the near future (Nelson, 2012). Such a broad framework reinforces the importance of the study.

On a micro level, this study in particular is important for two reasons. First, conducting the study at present is timely. The distance of a few years from the actual closing of the branch campus allows for the decision and ensuing emotions to settle, creating an air of peace that provides the space for a conversation to start the healing process. The campus closing is still fresh enough to discuss properly and could help the participants as they move toward understanding more completely the lasting impact it will have on their lives. Second, the study is important to the overall breadth of knowledge and research on the subject matter of campus closings. The results and findings of the study provide implications for practice and further research in an era of increased closures, providing a basis for moving forward.

Research Question

The purpose of the present study was to observe and report the effects of a branch campus closing on students enrolled at the time. Tying together transition theory, the grief process, Chickering's theory on identity development, and the prevalence of campus closings, this study sought to answer the following question: How and in what ways does the closing of a branch campus affect the traditionally-aged, full-time, residential, undergraduate student over time?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Higher Education

Higher education is a broad and complex field of research, engaging in a plethora of different subjects and ideas. The two major aspects of higher education to consider for the purpose of this study are the development, impact, and involvement of students in college and the current landscape of higher education overall and through the lens of the national economy.

Development, impact, and involvement. College is a time when students typically develop and change at a much higher rate than the teenage years they are completing. This concept was popularized by Chickering's identity development theory outlined in his seminal work *Education and Identity*, which configured seven vectors of development that are not stages, do not have to be sequential, and are not exclusive (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The seven vectors are a) developing competence, b) managing emotions, c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, e) establishing identity, f) developing purpose, and g) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In addition to the seven vectors of development, Chickering presented the idea of seven factors in the educational environment that influence students, including a) institutional objectives, b) institutional size, c) student-faculty relationships, d)

curriculum, e) teaching, f) friendships and student communities, and g) student development programs and services (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The theory demonstrates how students develop their identity in college through individual areas with the influence of several institutional factors.

However, identity is not the only aspect of a student's life that changes in college. The involvement of a student is another area of interest that has been investigated by Alexander Astin. In his book *Four Critical Years*, Astin (1977) states, "Given the great variety of institutions and programs, it is necessary to assess the impact of college *characteristics* and collegiate *experiences* rather than 'college' as such" (p. 30). With this in mind, Astin established his involvement theory that defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). The theory is comprised of five postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects.
2. Regardless of the object, involvement occurs along a continuum.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 298)

Astin's theory focuses on the factors which facilitate development rather than examining actual development (Evans et al., 2010).

Astin's involvement theory informs the current study by shedding light on the relationship students have with the university they attend, highlighting the elements which cultivate development in students. In this study, involvement theory helps to explain the impact of the characteristics and experiences of college on students. This provides clarity in understanding and exploring the long term effects of a college campus closing on students. The hope is to show how students' level of involvement during college impacts their experiences in the long term.

Higher education in the United States. Higher education in the United States has changed tremendously over the past forty years. A *Chronicle of Higher Education* article by Rhodes (2006) outlines and explains the many changes in higher education since the beginning of the publication in 1966. The first observation was that colleges and universities have increased in number alongside the population; today, over 4,000 colleges and universities exist in the United States, an increase from 2,329 in 1966 (Rhodes, 2006). The second observation was the prominence of for-profit institutions, which currently account for about 8 percent of student enrollment in colleges. In 1966, for-profit institutions were largely unknown and, in 2006, Rhodes (2006) identified around 908 such institutions. Rhodes' (2006) third observation focused on the demographic makeup of the student body, which has changed along with the improvement in access to higher education. Females and minorities have exponentially increased in enrollment and degrees earned. In every level except the doctorate, female degree recipients outnumber men (Rhodes, 2006). These three observations merely skim the depth and breadth of changes Rhodes (2006) included in his article about overall higher education in the United States.

Colleges and universities are also influenced by factors outside the realm of higher education. One of the major factors that influences higher education is the national economy. Universities around the country, regardless of size, have taken measures to prepare for the recession (Goodman, 2009), including evaluations of financial stability and viability and intentional efforts to decrease uncertainty about the future of the economy as it pertains to institutions of higher learning (2009). As mentioned before, the number of colleges and institutions have risen in the past forty years to accommodate the growth in population. However, due to various reasons including the economic climate, higher education has also experienced a great deal of colleges closing in the same timeframe. In his article, Rhodes (2006) stated that, in the past forty years, around 583 colleges and universities closed their doors, 48 of which were public and 535 private. Despite growth and positive changes for higher education, colleges have closed, presenting students with a challenging situation for which they could not plan.

Campus Closings

The closing of a college campus is not uncommon, as Rhodes noted, but every occurrence is singular, a different situation with a uniquely blended group of students, faculty, and staff within a specific type of institution and culture. This section discusses the theories behind the impact of a closing on students, a model for campus closings, and then provides examples of colleges and universities that have closed.

Student transitions related to campus closings. Schlossberg (1984) developed a transition theory which included what constitutes a transition, the different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions (Evans et al., 2010). According to Goodman et al. (2006), a transition is defined as “any event, or non-

event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). To understand the meaning a transition has on an individual, the type, context, and impact of the transition must be explored (Goodman et al., 2006). According to Schlossberg’s theory, there are three types of transitions: anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevents. The context alludes to the person’s relationship to the transition and to the setting of where the transition takes place. The impact is established by the level of intensity in which a transition alters the person’s daily life. Although the transition can stem from a single event or nonevent, addressing a transition is a process that lasts for a period of time. With these building blocks from the work of Schlossberg et al. (1995) and from others, Goodman et al. (2006) developed the concept that transitions consist of a series of phases termed “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out,” language originally provided by Schlossberg (1989). Within this broad framework relating to transitions, it is important to understand the theory in more detail, specifically focusing on a student’s experience throughout a transition.

Goodman et al. (2006) provided the “4 S’s” that categorize an individual’s ability to cope with a transition, which are situation, self, support, and strategies. Situation involves the trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, and assessment of the transition. Self is divided into two categories: personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. The personal and demographic characteristics are socioeconomic status, gender, age, health, and ethnicity/culture, which all form how a person views his or her own life. Psychological resources are comprised of ego development, outlook, commitment, values, spirituality, and resilience. Support is made up of three components: types, functions, and

measurement. The support facet refers to social support and includes these types: intimate, family, friends, and institutional support. The functions of support are affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback, while the measurement of social support is divided into stable and changing supports. The final facet to the transition theory is strategies, which incorporates three categories and four subsequent coping methods. The three categories are modify situation, control meaning, and manage stress in the aftermath, while the four coping methods that can be employed are information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior.

Looking at the whole of the transition theory, including the contributions of Schlossberg (1989) and Goodman et al. (2006), helps to uncover how the closing of a campus marks a significant change in a student's life and moves him or her through the process of transition. Transition theory seeks to explain the elements of change a student works through during a life event. The closing of a campus is a significant change in a person's life and, therefore, can be said to lead a student through transition. The current study sought to identify and understand how a student's initial transition through the closing forms and affects him or her in the long term. As students experience the transition a campus closing brings, they will face uncertainty and difficulty as they seek to cope during crisis. Because of this, students potentially could experience the grief process as they wrestle with a campus closing. A student's interaction with the grief process over such an event does not compare to the depth a bereaved individual experiences, however it is important to note that, to some degree, this is part of what students experience through a campus closure. To aid in the understanding of what a student involved in a campus closing might experience in the grief process, Kübler-Ross'

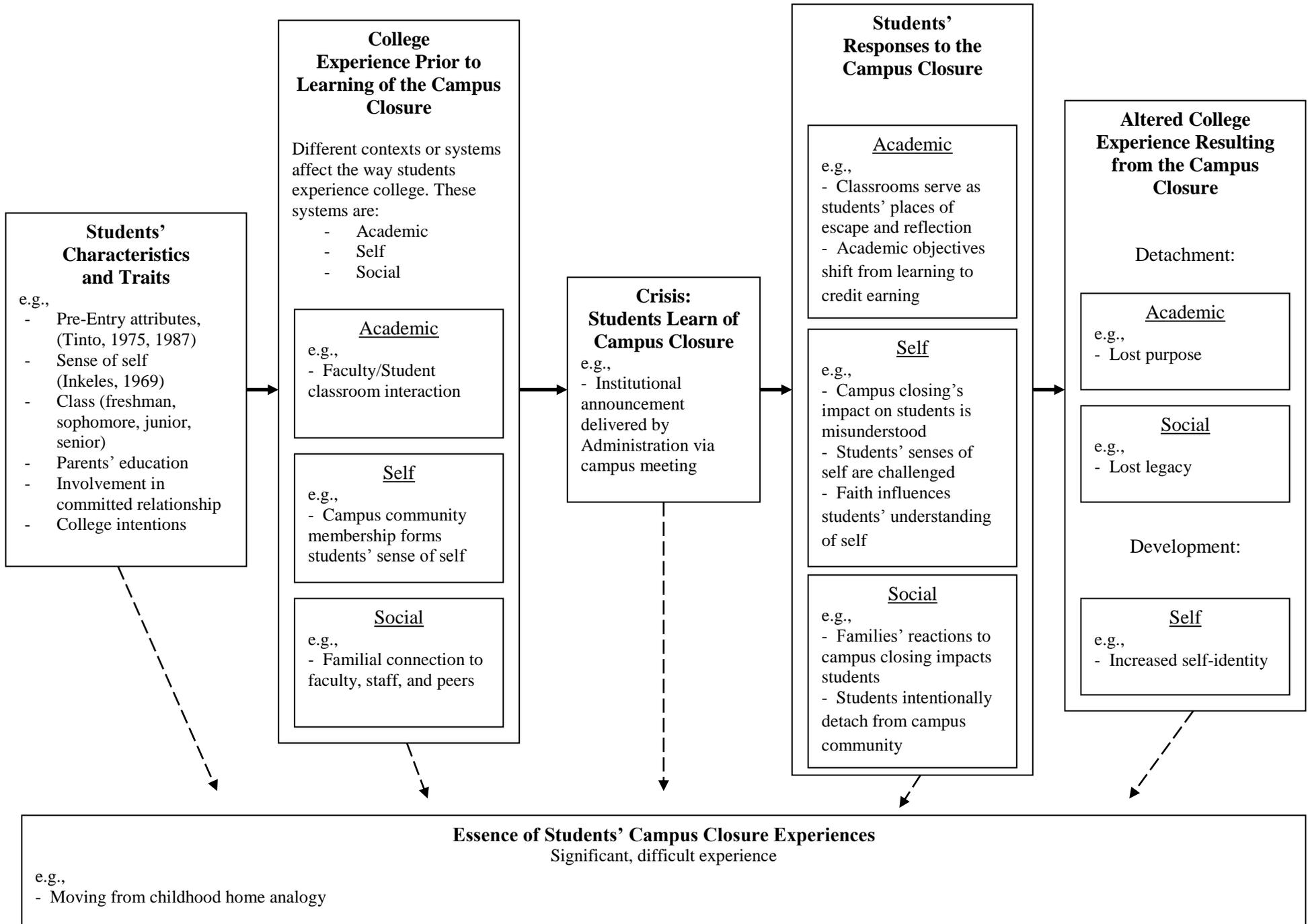
(1973) explanation of the process as a series of six stages is vital: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and hope. In a campus closing situation, the first stages of the grief process would occur following the announcement of the closing, followed by the other stages as students process the experience. Because the present study involved participants who were four years removed from the campus closing, the participants had worked through all the steps of the grief process.

A model for campus closings. Mabie (2009) explored the impact of a closing on students at the same branch campus as covered in this study. His research commenced after the announcement of the intent to close the campus, but before the actual closing occurred. Mabie's (2009) phenomenological qualitative study led to the development of a model for students' experiences of their campus closure. The model was divided into six sections, which included students' characteristics and traits, college experience prior to learning of the campus closure, the crisis of the students learning of the campus closure, students' responses to campus closure, altered college experience resulting from the campus closure, and the essence of students' campus closure experiences (Mabie, 2009). Built on theoretical framework and themes discovered in the interviews, Mabie found that students operated out of three different contexts or systems: academic system, self-system, and the social system (Astin, 1970, 1984, 1985; Chickering, 1969; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Inkeles, 1966; Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Weidman, 1989). Mabie's model (2009) is the foundation for the present study, which focused on the long-term effect of the closing as determined through discussion of the academic system, self-system, and social system.

Examples of campus closings. As Rhodes (2006) reported, 583 colleges and universities have closed between 1966 and 2006, ranging in size, type, and reason for shutting their doors. Following, a few campus closings are presented and their relevance to University J's branch closing is discussed.

The first example is Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which, at one time, had been considered one of the most prominent liberal arts colleges in the nation. Over the years, Antioch College developed a new identity, creating new and modern campuses in places such as Los Angeles and Seattle to target adult students (Fain, 2007). Because the institution started focusing time, energy, and finances on the branch campuses, the original campus began to face problems and struggled financially (Fain, 2007). For years, the branch campuses covered Antioch College's deficits until the Board of Trustees could allow it no longer. The trustees voted to suspend the operations at the main campus of the college in July 2008, with the intent to reopen in 2012 with an improved campus and new curriculum (Fain, 2007). Between the initial closing announcement and the actual closing, alumni groups tried to raise funds through pledges and gifts to avoid the campus closing (Fain, 2008). Despite these efforts, they did not raise enough in the allotted amount of time and the campus did close. While Antioch's branch campuses were more successful than the main campus, the opposite was true for University J and its branch campus. The branch campus of University J was sustained and kept open due to the financial stability of the main campus. University J's ultimate goal for the branch campus was to make it self-sustaining, but it was the lack of progress in achieving that goal which

Table 1. A Model of Students' Campus Closure Experiences.
(Mabie, 2009)



led to the closing of the branch campus.

The second example of a campus closing is the Colorado Institute of Technology, which opened in 1999 and had ambitions of rivaling powerhouses such as Caltech and MIT (Fischer, 2006). The institute was built around the idea of providing certification in and grants for programs in science, engineering, and technology, which took a major hit when the Internet economy spiraled downward in 2000 (Fischer, 2006). The institute could not sustain itself through the rest of the year, since they relied heavily on public support and private donations. After six years, in March 2006, the Board of Trustees voted to close their doors at the end of April of the same year. The economic downturn in the United States over the past fifteen years has been one of the main contributing factors in many of the campus closings around the country. Though the reasons differ, the Colorado Institute of Technology faced financial difficulty as did University J, leading to the closing of the campus.

The third campus closing of note is McIntosh College in Dover, New Hampshire. Starting in 2007, Michael Hoyle became the president of the college with an understanding that closing was a very real possibility (Hoyle, 2009). Hoyle assumed the college would be sold and thus would remain in operation, shifting away from being a for-profit institution owned by a large corporation to a more traditional model. Though McIntosh College had been in operation for 112 years, Hoyle (2009) decided to close it following a teach-out, a move that involves accepting no new students, yet finishing the degrees for the remaining students. While McIntosh chose the method of a teach-out to meet the needs of the students enrolled during the decision to close and cease enrollment,

University J's branch campus offered the possibility of its students finishing their degrees at the main campus, allowing all credits from the branch campus to transfer.

Yet another example is Kelsey-Jenney College, a private two year institution in San Diego, California. In March 2002, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges put them on probation, warning that a plan for "financial emergencies" must be developed, suggesting a revamp in the way the college dealt with its governing board (Lowery, 2002). The college filed for bankruptcy, was stripped of its accreditation immediately, and closed their doors without making the news readily available to students. Like the other colleges and universities mentioned, the branch campus of University J struggled to stay open through the years and relied on the funds of the main campus to remain open.

Summary

The overall purpose of this study is to explore the long-term effects of a campus closing on students. While the examples of institutions or branch campuses that have closed are plentiful, there is a lack of information and research done on the students involved in each of these campus closings. This particular study on the branch campus of University J is important due to the timeliness of the study, the availability of students involved in the closing to participate, and the ease with which the implications of the closing of University J's branch campus may apply to other campus closings. Chickering's identity development theory and the current landscape of higher education coupled with Schlossberg's transition theory and the grief process served as a foundation for the study through the pre-existing literature.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of the current study is to observe and report the effects of a branch campus closing on the students enrolled at the time. This study utilizes the qualitative research methodology of narrative research design. Qualitative research focuses on the views of participants, data mainly in the form of words, and then looks for themes that develop out of those responses (Creswell, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were used to gain information from participants through the narrative research method. Creswell (2008) explains the significance of such methodology: “Narrative research designs are qualitative procedures in which researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individuals’ lives, and write narratives about their experiences” (p. 61). Narrative research is conducted through several steps. First, the researcher must identify a phenomenon to explore and purposefully select an individual from whom to glean information about the phenomenon through collecting stories about personal and social experiences. Then the researcher retells the individual’s story and collaborates through all phases of research, after which the researcher writes a story about the participant’s personal and social experiences, making sure to validate the accuracy of the report (Creswell, 2008).

Participants

The branch campus of University J was under the ownership and management of University J for fifteen years with the goal of helping the branch campus become self-sustaining. After years of no movement toward a self-sustaining model, University J decided to close the branch campus. At the time, the branch campus enrolled 213 traditionally-aged, full-time, residential, undergraduate students. While the branch campus closing affected all students, the focus of this study is on the full-time, residential students.

The study consists of a sample group of sixteen people chosen through stratified sampling. Creswell (2008) states stratified sampling as the following: “The researchers divide the population on some specific characteristic and then, using simple random sampling, sample from each subgroup of the population” (p. 154). This study divided the population by two stratum, gender and years at institution as determined by class. Because of stratification, the study should have yielded four students randomly for each class, two males and two females. Due to random selection, the institutions and career paths pursued by students after the closing allowed for varied experiences shared within the interviews, creating greater breadth in the study.

Validity

One item of clarification regarding the study is needed: the researcher was a student at the branch campus at the time of the closing. Therefore, some participants may have been known to the researcher. To ensure validity, the researcher took steps to maintain credibility and clearly state the known and relevant biases. This was done in two ways. Before the interview began, the researcher presented a document to the interviewee

stating her relationship with the branch campus and the main campus. To maintain credibility, the researcher did not share her experience with the interviewee until releasing a statement at the end of the interview about what she believed to be the effects of the campus closing on her own life.

Measures and Procedures

Potential participants in this study were provided with the premise and goal of the study in addition to information about the voluntary and confidential nature of the research. After agreeing to engage in the study, participants' names were changed for confidentiality reasons. For the researcher to collect and measure data, participants took part in personal interviews carried out between January and February 2013, which were conducted in quiet, confidential locations. The interviews were semi-structured with a set of basic questions for each participant, yet freedom for the researcher to ask clarifying or more in-depth questions, depending on the course of the interview. This structure was outlined with the participants before the interviews began, and the interview did not have a time restraint so the participants could share all they felt comfortable sharing.

Data Analysis

To ensure the accuracy of the data, each interview was recorded and transcribed. As the data was transcribed, the researcher sifted through the results, drawing out themes and tying the results back to the established literature, exploring different forms of narrative discussion that would be beneficial to include (Creswell, 2009). In the process, the researcher ensured that the interviews provided a clear picture of each student's overall reaction to the campus closing and the implications he or she experienced because of it.

Chapter 4

Results

Through the interviews, the information and subsequent stories of seven individuals were collected to explore the lasting effects of a campus closing on the lives of the students involved. The following portrays their individual stories as a collective story drawing themes from individual interviews. The results are organized into the main sections of the campus closure experience as seen in Table 2 (p. 21): experience prior to announcement, announcement of campus closure, post-announcement prior to actual closing, after the closing, and distance from closing.

Experience Prior to Announcement

The story of a campus closing does not begin with the announcement of the impending closing. It starts with the initial decision of students to attend the university and their experiences prior to the campus closure announcement. Though a couple of the participants were hesitant at first, each wanted to attend the branch campus of University J. While the reasons varied, the overarching desire to attend focused on the fact that the branch of University J is a small, Christian college campus. Whether the environment was what the students expected or not, each of the participants attended the branch campus of University J and assimilated into its culture.

Each of the participants shared about their life on campus before the announcement with most highlighting the connections to people on campus and the

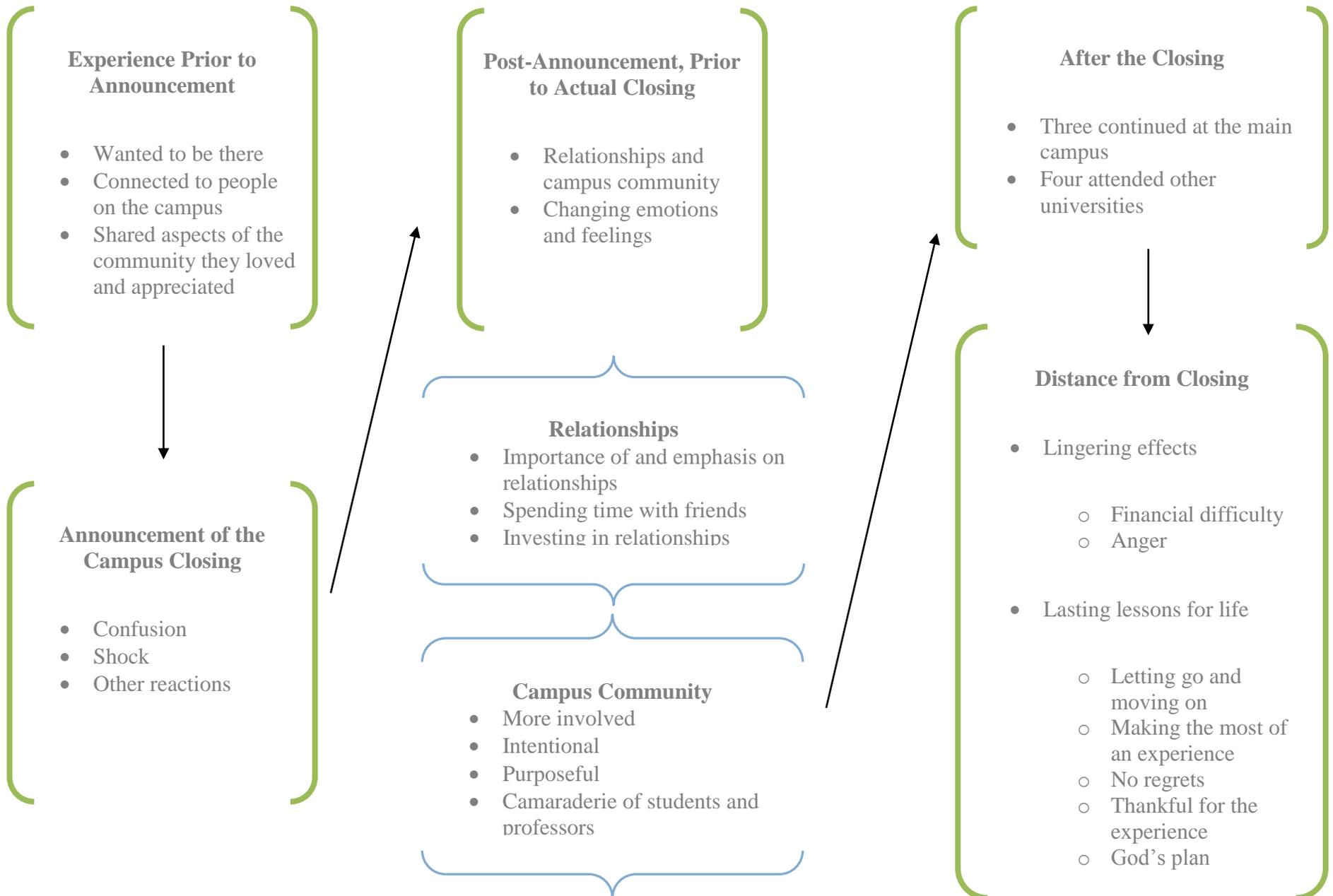
overall campus community. Kate stated, “I just felt like no matter what major you were in or no matter what clique you were in or no matter what dorm you were in, you still would always be acquaintances at the least with other people.” Along with feeling connected, most participants shared aspects of the college community that they “loved” and appreciated; from interacting with professors and upperclassmen to being immersed in the residence hall, participants loved their time at the branch campus. One participant stated that she was not very involved in campus activities, but expressed that there were aspects of the campus community that she liked and appreciated. Their experiences, whether they were on campus for months or years, factored into their reactions and responses to the campus closure.

Announcement of Campus Closure

The announcement of the campus closure was what Schlossberg (1984) would describe as an unanticipated event. The life-changing day was October 15th, 2008, and began with a statement during chapel about a meeting in the dining commons at one that afternoon. The official announcement of the campus closure occurred at the afternoon meeting, which was not mandatory though all students were strongly encouraged to attend. Six of the seven participants attended the meeting, and they described two common initial reactions as confusion and shock. Students were confused with the actual wording of the announcement, but also regarding why the campus was closing. Mario said the following,

And when I first...it took me a while to process exactly what [President of University J] was saying because of the words he used. Um, it took me a while to parse through all of that but once I did it finally hit me that what he was saying

Table 2. Campus Closure Experience.



was essentially [the branch campus] is not going to be around anymore, I just started crying.

The participants also described their reactions to the announcement as feeling that it was not fair, they did not see it coming, they did not know what to do, they were upset, it was the worst thing at the time, and they cried. Heather said, “I didn’t really know what to say, what to think, what to do.” These reactions would shape how the students responded in the time following the announcement before the actual closing.

Post-Announcement, Prior to Actual Closing

In the time after the announcement, all but one participant finished out the academic year at the branch campus of University J. The interviews with the participants provided a plethora of data, yet two major themes arose about their lives and their overall campus experience in the aftermath of the announcement: relationships and campus community and changed emotions and feelings.

Relationships and campus community. The announcement of the impending closure of the campus caused change in both the sense of community on campus and the relationships within that community. Two participants voiced that some students shut out the community and stuck to themselves. However, the remainder of participants explained that people were more involved in the campus community and invested in relationships. Jessica said, “As a community, [we] grew stronger together because we were going through something no one else could understand.” Many participants commented that experiences became more intentional and purposeful. Emily stated, “We were like we’re going to spend as much time together as we possibly can,” and “people started to make being intentional very purposeful.” Another aspect of change in the

community was the camaraderie of the students and professors. Two participants attributed the idea of camaraderie due to the bond through mutual suffering and a desire to stick together no matter what. Through the intentionality purported by these students, the second sub-theme emerges: the significance of relationships.

Relationships were addressed by participants in various ways, but each voiced their thoughts on the importance of and emphasis on relationships during their remaining time at the branch campus. Emily said, “I think that just the relationships that I cultivated during that time made it easier to get through.” Most of the participants described the importance of spending time with friends and investing in relationships with the time remaining on campus. One participant even voiced how relationships took precedence over academics.

Relationships were of the utmost importance to a few participants. “But I would say that the majority of my experience after the announcement was just a bunch of relationships with people, which was great,” said Emily. Jessica voiced her thoughts with the following:

I tried to live every day to remember it. Like just to be a part of something that wasn't going to end. Even though the school was going to close, I wanted to like make those memories last so like I did everything.

She went on to say she wanted to spend as much time with the people she cared about, since life would never be the same with people going in many different directions. As the campus community evolved and relationships changed, the participants experienced a wide range of emotions and feelings.

Changing Emotions and Feelings

The participants recalled a mixture of emotions and feelings during the time at the branch campus after the announcement of the closure. As time continued, emotions and feelings transitioned.

Emily shared, “It was painful at first, but eventually it became very lighthearted and we realized that it wasn’t the end of the world.” After the uncertainty passed, those remaining on campus accepted everyone regardless of what they planned to do after the campus closure. She did mention the atmosphere was characterized by sadness once again at the end of the second, and final, semester.

Laura was only on campus until the end of first semester. To the best of her memory, she thought the campus community was different and the mood of people changed. Brandon did not have much to say about the emotions after the announcement. From his perspective, the community felt weird for about a month, but then seemed normal again. Kate finished out the year at the branch campus and spoke primarily on relationships taking precedence and the difficulty in determining priorities as professors were more lenient.

Jessica said the remaining time on campus was good, but it was not easy knowing everyone would not be back the next year. She said,

So I wanted to spend it with those people and remember it for the best instead of being sad. Even though like that was always in the back of your mind—you were just sad because you knew it was over. I didn’t want to live it out that way. So I think just having a good—we just had a good time. Just tried to do as much as we could in the time that we had left together.

She focused on living her final months at the branch campus to the fullest. She did not want to look back and regret anything about how she finished the year.

Heather finished the year at the branch campus and felt everyone was numb during that time. She stated that a few friends shut down, but she pushed through and tried to finish the year well. She went on to reiterate the feeling of numbness across campus. She also mentioned the time being a mixture of emotions due to the current numbness juxtaposed by the excitement for the chance to move on. She said, “You didn’t know how to handle everything.”

Mario was at the branch campus until the very end, attending the final graduation. Soon after the announcement, he tried to navigate through his anger and the outlet for that anger was a short-lived effort by students to save the branch campus. He voiced his thoughts that chapel attendance seemed to increase as students clung to any sense of unity they could. However, he followed with this statement:

I felt like everyone could sense that the campus was dying and it was kind of a—I mean a depressing thing. So I could definitely feel sort of a palpable sense of depression over the campus as a whole and if that made people less—made people desire to do fewer things.

He said people stuck to themselves in his male residence hall and there were fewer campus activities. He felt as if the whole process was like a death march.

While each of the participants shared different stories and experiences of their final days at the branch campus, they all shared about relationships and the emotions they faced during that time. This would be the first step to moving on and truly continuing in their journey through life.

After the Closing

In May 2009, the branch campus of University J officially closed its doors. The seven participants interviewed for this study were forced to move on before completing their degrees. Three of the seven participants completed the duration of their college education at the main campus of University J; the remaining four attended other universities. All of the participants have now graduated from college. The three who attended University J finished their degrees on time, within four years. Of the four who did not complete degrees from University J, one participant finished her degree faster and the other three took longer than the traditional four years. With college completed, the memories fade, but all participants expressed that the effect of the campus closing remains.

Distance from Closing

The main focus of this study was how the closing of the branch campus of University J has affected students over time. From the study, two themes emerged: lingering effects and lasting lessons for life.

Lingering effects. The actual closing of the branch campus left lingering effects on all participants of the study. One such effect was financial issues. Two of the participants talked specifically about the financial hardships they were facing at the time of the interviews because of the campus closure. Laura discussed this as follows:

Even now, my whole intention was to make it through college and not transfer and had friends who just racked up so much debt and now I'm in that boat. So it is just like if I wouldn't have transferred how much money would I really have saved.

Brandon lost 17 credits, about \$30,000, and had to start from the beginning in his program of study at a different university.

The second lingering effect was anger. Emily described entering her sophomore year of college angry at her situation. Her sadness morphed into anger as she transitioned to the main campus of University J. Over time, her lack of involvement and anger toward the people around her dissipated. Jessica shared how she had a time of being mad, angry, and bitter. Mario continued to experience bouts of anger when certain topics come up. He said his wife thinks he is still somewhat bitter about the situation. Both Laura and Brandon made comments about possessing less optimism in life and expecting bad things to happen, which alludes to an underlying sense of anger. The lingering effects of the closing of University J's branch campus are evident still in the participants, however, the lasting lessons for their lives abound.

Lasting lessons for life. Students involved in the closing of the branch campus of University J provided several examples of lessons they learned through the experience. After the actual closing of the branch campus, letting go and moving on became a crucial aspect of these students' lives. A few participants specifically described learning to move on and let go of the past. Laura shared that she made lots of new friends at the institution she transferred to, which helped her move past the pain of the closing. The lack of thinking about the situation and amount of time elapsed allowed students to let go. Strong emotions and feelings dissolved as life continued for each participant. Mario described letting go and moving on as psychologically healthy. He described this healthiness as, "Accepting reality, moving on, and trying to make your life better from there instead of always trying to cling to the past." Heather demonstrated growth in this area in

explaining that she missed the people she knew from the branch campus, not necessarily the actual campus. Jessica summed up letting go with the following statement:

I don't know—it sucked and it was really hard. But it showed me that we have to move on from things that happen. There are going to be things we can't control, but if we move on and we do it the right way, God is going to bring good out of those things and he is going to make us stronger from them.

Letting go and moving on was a crucial step for participants in the process of closing one chapter of life and beginning another.

Participants shared in various ways the important lesson of making the most of an experience and the idea of living life with no regrets. In asking about regret attending the branch campus, the four participants who answered shared they had no regrets. Brandon did not regret attending the branch campus of University J for two years, but did wish he had been more serious and intentional during that time. Jessica answered, “No, I don't have any regrets. I think that it was exactly where I was supposed to be at that point in my life.”

On the topic of making the most of an experience, participants shared what it should look like and how it should have been lived out during those last months on campus. One participant explained how things in life happen for a season, and it is important to make the most of each of them, no matter how long the season lasts. Mario learned “things should be taken in stride.” Heather discussed how she would have lived differently and with more intentionality during her last few months attending the branch campus.

Three of the participants voiced the closing of the branch campus as helpful to their lives. Heather said the experience allowed students to experience more and provided opportunities they would not have otherwise had. She continued, stating,

I think now I look back and at that time, I thought it was the worst thing I will ever go through in my life. But now I look back and I'm like that is a piece of cake. I can handle anything cause I made it through. I survived. And yeah, I have learned that I can accept hard things, especially when it is losing something so close to your heart.

Along those same lines, Jessica alluded to the resiliency that the experience instilled in her. She noted the way it strengthened her and how she faced other challenges in the past three years more easily because of her experience with the campus closure.

Five of the participants indicated that they were thankful for the experience and reiterated it was worth enduring. A few participants specifically communicated their thankfulness for having two different college experiences, since they completed their education elsewhere. Both Mario and Jessica said they were thankful to attend the branch campus for that period time and would not trade it for the world. Both highlighted the relationships they built as part of that experience. Jessica stated, "I wouldn't trade it for the world because it was an experience that no one else is going to ever get to have."

Most of the participants shared at some point during their interview the concept of God's plan for their life. Heather said, "God's hand was in all of it. I think he knew what he was doing." Looking back on the experience, Kate wished she could tell herself that it would all work out in the end. Jessica explained that when bad things happen, God will

still bring good in the situation. She found comfort knowing that God has a plan for everything.

A few participants questioned what their lives would look like presently if the campus closure did not happen. One participant had given considerable thought to how his life would have altered had he initially attended the main campus of University J or another university. Emily shared, “I enjoyed my time at [both campuses of University J] so I can’t help but think how different life would have been if we would have stayed down the road. I’m sure it would be extremely different now.” While participants will never answer the ambiguous question of how life would be different, all experienced growth and a conclusion to a confusing, tumultuous, and difficult chapter of their lives through the closing of the branch campus of University J.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Conducting interviews with students involved in the closing of the branch campus of University J provided an inclusive and full depiction of the overall campus closure experience. The data collected reinforced the established literature delineated within this study, yet despite these connections, the study had limitations. In this section, the themes and findings converge to create implications for practice and further research.

Findings

The findings from this study condensed into four themes, which include involvement on campus, moving on well, maturity, and the bigger picture. The themes of involvement on campus and moving on well tied into the established literature presented in Chapter 2. The other themes of maturity and the bigger picture did not have direct correlations to the literature, though they were significant enough to merit discussion and provide potential areas for further research.

Involvement on campus. According to Astin's involvement theory (1984), involvement is "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). Within his theory, he outlined five postulates to demonstrate how development is facilitated instead of examining development (Evans et al., 2010). Tying together the findings of the study with Astin's theory, three postulates arose as directly applicable. First, the postulate regarding "the investment of physical and

psychological energy in various objects” (Astin, 1984, p. 298) was evident in the way the participants developed as a result of their investment in the campus community prior to and after the announcement of its closing. Second, Astin’s postulate about “involvement occurring along a continuum” (p. 298) was applicable to the study as manifested in students’ differing levels of involvement and their amount of time in college before the campus closure. Third, the postulate stating “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (Astin, 1984, p. 298) was also applicable to the findings of this study. The quantity and quality of the student’s involvement in the campus community and their education determined the amount of student learning and development they experienced prior to the announcement, after the announcement but before the closing, and then after the closing. This was important not only in the college setting, but led to understanding the involvement those individuals would have in other areas in their lives. Involvement in the campus community and the impact of the closing established a predicament for students of if and how they would move on in their lives.

Moving on well. The theme of moving on well was evidenced in responses from participants about accepting their situation and moving on with their lives. Some of the ways in which students accomplished this included understanding the situation was out of their hands, developing friendships at the transfer institution, and the amount of time that had elapsed between the closing and the time of the interviews. The theme of moving on well tied into the literature, particularly well with relation to Schlossberg’s transition theory. The process of moving on well was similar to the idea in transition theory where

an individual moves from the “moving through” phase to the “moving out” phase (Schlossberg, 1989). The second relatable aspect from transition theory was the concept of the 4 S’s—situation, self, support, and strategies— and examining how the individual responded and worked through the transition (Goodman et al., 2006). This process of moving on well was important for two reasons. One, development during the young adult years is crucial and moving on well allows for the development to continue. Second, moving on well is important for further learning and an individual’s maturity which should be cultivated over time.

Maturity. In the findings, maturity emerged as a theme of the participants and was cultivated in participants who were involved in the campus closure. As the students developed more, their maturity increased as well. The evidence of their maturity was seen in their ability to move on and change their emotions about the closing as time progressed. The participants had to rise to the challenge given the situation they faced.

Bigger picture. As the participants gained maturity, each of them began to see the bigger picture of the situation. Over time, participants realized their campus closing was a small speed bump in their life journey. Perspective, moving on, and maturity allowed students to understand the bigger picture as time progressed.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was the unique situation of the closure of the branch campus of University J. Due to the closing of the branch campus only, this study and the results found were fairly specific in nature, which may limit the application of the study’s results and implications when addressing the closure of other campuses. Another limitation regarding the specificity of this study was due to the faith-based foundation of

University J, a significant aspect of the branch campus's community identity. This could present differences compared to institutions without a religious affiliation or emphasis on faith.

The second limitation pertains to researcher bias, which had potential to be a significant factor in a qualitative study utilizing individual interviews. The researcher for this study realized the many elements of bias involved and tried to accommodate for as many as possible. The noteworthy and known biases included the following: the researcher was a student involved in the closing of the branch campus and knew all the participants who took part in the study, the researcher continued undergraduate studies at the main campus of University J, which could have created bias for participants and those who declined to participate in the study. Another known bias was the fact that the researcher pursued a graduate degree at the main campus of University J and held an assistantship on the university's campus.

The third limitation pertains to the make-up of the sample. The population for the branch campus of University J was approximately 1,000 students in the fall of 2008. Approximately 224 students fit the criteria for this study of traditionally-aged, full-time, residential, undergraduate students attending the branch campus. Thus the population itself was a limitation to the study. Another limitation was sample size. The researcher asked thirty individuals who fit the criteria for an interview about their experiences with a campus closure. Only seven individuals responded and agreed to be interviewed. In contacting students, the researcher had to rely on insufficient contact information to connect with the former students. Some individuals may not have received the introductory emails if they did not use the email address on file.

Representation was a limitation to this study in two ways. First, there was a lack of equal representation in gender: the study had five female participants and two male participants. Second, there was a lack of class representation. Despite the number of individuals contacted, the researcher only found one freshmen participant, four sophomore participants, and two junior participants. As mentioned within the methodology, the goal had been one male and one female from each class level. The lack of equal representation in both gender and class were a significant limitation to the study.

The last limitation to the study was the difficulty participants had recalling their experiences during the time of the campus closure. Since the students had not spent much time thinking about the experience immediately prior to the interviews, it was hard for them to reflect on their thoughts and feelings from three years prior. Because the research question and the goal of the research project were to determine and assess the lasting effects of a campus closure on the students' lives, the study needed to be conducted in the way it was. However, if the researcher had asked participants to reflect on their experiences prior to entering the interview, this limitation may have been avoided.

Implications

Campus closings are unique to each institution and contain an array of singular characteristics and circumstances. However, this study provided insight for practitioners who may encounter a campus closure. In addition to implications for practice, this section also includes potential areas for further research.

For practice. Higher education professionals who engage with students will face difficulty upon learning their campus is closing. Implications for practice based on the

findings of this study could be divided into three categories: preparation, response, and realization.

Higher education professionals need to prepare for interaction with students upon knowledge of an impending campus closure. They need to be prepared for the fact that students will have a difficult time with the announcement and will likely struggle with the situation. Preparation can lead to a plan for how to interact with students in order to help them navigate the situation. In the case of the branch campus of University J, practitioners did not know about the campus closure until the day of the announcement to students. This did not allow for much preparation, which hindered their ability to support students in this case. Preparation for such professionals should include: processing through their experience prior to interaction with students, reading relevant literature to inform practice, and collaborating with colleagues to form a unified campus response to the situation.

Response from professional staff needs to happen immediately. The interviews provided examples from students of how this was done well at University J. Due to the magnitude of such an announcement, the administration should cancel activities for the duration of the day to provide students the space to process the information they have been given. In the days following, higher education professionals need to listen well and demonstrate an ethic of care to students. Students will rely on the professionals to exude grace and understanding throughout the duration of their time on the campus. Professionals can do the following to further aid their students: discuss life after the closing, provide support in decision making related to furthering their education elsewhere, and encourage them in finishing well their time at the campus.

Throughout the preparation and response, higher education professionals need to realize their roles in the whole situation. Students will struggle during this time and possibly consider it the worst thing to happen to them. They may struggle to comprehend how life will go on. Practitioners who realize their students will not understand everything by the time the campus actually closes will further help their students. While it may be difficult, practitioners need to understand they may never see or hear about the good aspects of the campus closure on the lives of students involved.

For research. Campus closings have been occurring for decades and the current financial and educational landscapes suggest this phenomenon will persist. As higher education costs continue to escalate, the likelihood of campus closures may even increase. Because of this, further research on campus closures is necessary. It is important for research to engage how to effectively close a campus with proper care for its students. Developing best practices for this difficult aspect of higher education would be beneficial for the campus closures of the future. In addition, conducting a longitudinal study with a closing campus by looking at both the initial effects of a college campus closing and the lasting effects over time would be helpful in determining the actual developmental changes in the students. Such a study would greatly expand the value of the literature on campus closings. Finally, research on the role of the administration in the process of closing a college campus would be interesting to compare with the results of studies, such as this one, which focus on the students. Such research focusing on the administration would need to be released at least a year after the closing to show sensitivity to all parties involved and the situation as a whole. Another potentially interesting aspect for further research would be exploring the nature of University J's status as a faith-based

institution, especially in determining how faith plays a role in the lives of students involved in a campus closure. The presence of faith was evident and seemed to make a difference in the reaction and overall experience of the students involved in the closing of the University J branch campus.

Summary

Campus closings are uncommon events which are increasing in prevalence, but little research exists on the subject. This study sought to explore one particular campus closing, the closing of the branch campus of University J, attempting to answer how and in what ways the closing of a branch campus affected traditionally-aged, full-time, residential, undergraduate students over time. Employing narrative research design, a qualitative research methodology, the researcher conducted interviews with seven participants who met pre-determined qualifications. The interviews provided themes shared by the participants, which led to a more complete perspective on what students faced as a result of the campus closure, along with a representation of the overall campus closure experience. The results from the interviews correlated with the existing literature despite limitations of the study. This study on the closing of the branch campus of University J added to the literature on campus closures, but should be seen as the start of an increase in related literature. The hope of the researcher was for the study to bring clarity to what a campus closing experience entails and to serve practitioners who may encounter a campus closure in the future.

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Appendix A

Taylor University Informed Consent

The Impact and Lasting Effects on Students Involved in a Campus Closing

You are invited to participate in a research study of the effects of a branch campus closing on the students enrolled at the time. You were selected as a possible subject because of your enrollment at a branch campus that closed while you were studying there. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is being conducted by Julie Caldwell, a student in Master of Arts in Higher Education program at Taylor University.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to observe and report the effects of a branch campus closing on the students enrolled at the time.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

If you agree to participate, you will be one of eight subjects who will be participating in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things: You will participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview can take place in a safe and quiet place wherever you feel comfortable. The researcher will provide location options to help. The interview should take approximately one hour. The researcher has a specific set of questions for the interview, but could ask clarifying questions. After the interview is complete, nothing more will be asked of the interviewees.

RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

While on the study, the potential risks are emotional and social. First, the interviews about the initial campus closure and the experiences afterward could bring up a plethora of emotions for the participant because of the life altering nature of the closing and it being unforeseen. The researcher will encourage participants that emotions are a natural part of sharing their story and reassure them that any and all emotions can be shared during the interview. Second, the interviewee may experience emotions that were never realized before. Third, there is the potential social risk to participants if peers who are still unhappy about the closing find out about the interviewee's involvement in the research project. The researcher will ensure the interviewees of complete confidentiality.

This risk would only be possible if the participants share about the project. If you feel uncomfortable or do not want to answer a particular question, please tell the researcher.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

The benefits to participation that are reasonable to expect are the opportunity to anonymously share your unique story and to further process your experience over the past few years. Participation in this study will provide others the chance to hear how it affected your life. Studying this campus closing could benefit other campuses who will close in the future as they strive to do it well for all parties involved.

ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

Instead of being in the study, you have these options: The only alternative is to not participate in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published. All data collected will be password protected on a password protected laptop. When the project is complete, all interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Taylor University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) etc., who may need to access your research records.

COSTS

Taking part in this study should not cost you anything.

PAYMENT

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

In the event of physical injury resulting from your participation in this research, necessary medical treatment will be provided to you and billed as part of your medical expenses. Costs not covered by your health care insurer will be your responsibility. Also, it is your responsibility to determine the extent of your health care coverage. There is no program in place for other monetary compensation for such injuries. If you are participating in research which is not conducted at a medical facility, you will be responsible for seeking medical care and for the expenses associated with any care received.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

For questions about the study or a research-related injury, contact the researcher Julie Caldwell at 765-461-3180 or email at julie_caldwell@taylor.edu. For questions or problems, you can also contact the Taylor University Institutional Review Board at 765-998-4315 or email at irb@taylor.edu.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Julie Caldwell or Taylor University.

SUBJECT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

Subject's Printed Name: _____

Subject's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Questions for Interviews

1. Describe your decision to attend the branch campus of University J and your experience prior to October 15, 2008.
2. What was your initial reaction to the announcement of the closing?
3. What was the rest of your time at the branch campus like? Please include how long you were there, the experience, and the feelings, emotions, and thoughts as you closed that chapter.
4. What have you done with your life since leaving the branch campus?
5. With over three years of distance since the closing, what have you learned, processed, and/or experienced?
6. What would you tell the Fall 2008 version of yourself having gone through the past few years? What would you tell your fellow classmates, the professors, the president of the university, and the main campus population?

