

Prospectus:

**A Comparative Study of 18-22 Year Old Students in an Online and Face-to-Face Learning Environment and their Persistence at a 4-Year, Private University in New Hampshire.**

Scott Tierno

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Dr. Jim Lacey

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## Prospectus

**Biographical Sketch and Learning Plan**

My academic work began with my attendance at Plymouth State College, where I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1987. My degree was in interdisciplinary studies, where I concentrated on business, music, and communications. Working with the Dean of the college, I designed my program with the hope to pursue a career in arts administration.

The spring of my senior year the Director of Student Activities suggested that I look at a career in student affairs, which I pursued at Northeastern University and graduated with a Master of Education degree with a concentration in Student Personnel and Counseling in 1989. During my studies I worked in the student activities and student center as a graduate assistant.

Both degrees prepared me to work in student affairs, where I started as Assistant Director of the University Union & Student Activities at Shippensburg University. I continued my career as Director of Student Activities and the Student Activities Center at Gannon University. My most recent stop is at Southern New Hampshire University where I am currently the Director of Student Life and the Student Center.

These career stops, as well as the interest for career advancement, have led me to pursue my advanced degree from Franklin Pierce University. Where I am enrolled in the Doctor of Arts program with a focus on leadership. Currently I am almost finished with my course work and plan to take the Dissertation Seminar in the fall of 2010.

In preparation for pursuing my dissertation project I plan to convene a committee that will help me navigate the process, as well as provide feedback on my topic and the methods I will use to assess my target groups. I am still thinking about who would be the Chair of my committee.

My thought is someone that has an extensive background in Student Affairs and higher education, considering that is my area of focus.

During the past fifteen years of my career I have had a lot of experience with developing programs and activities that support retention of students. These range from orientation events to leadership training activities. This background offers me the opportunity to observe how students interact in the higher education community, and drives the pursuit of my research question.

### **Overview of the situation, problem statement, research question, hypotheses**

#### Problem Statement

Students are “shopping around” and find no problem with attending 2, 3, or even 6 schools before completing their degree. The perceived reason this occurs is not because of dissatisfaction with the institution, but because they are looking for a better deal or experience.

#### Research Question

As a result of the current economic crisis it is imperative for businesses and organization’s to find ways to keep customers coming back for their product. This challenge exists in all types of industries, including higher education. In the higher education community institutions are trying to find successful delivery methods for course content beyond the physical walls of a classroom. This is known as online, or Internet based education. The question that is posed is what motivates students to persist until graduation at a 4-year, private university in New Hampshire. The intention is to conduct a comparative study of students who are studying in an online and face-to-face learning environment.

#### Hypothesis

There will be a significant difference between why students in the online and face-to-face

environment continue to graduation. Students in the face-to-face environment will feel more connected to their learning experience and will graduate from the institution.

### **Preliminary Literature Review**

#### **Article 1:**

Desler, M. K. (1985). A Test of Tinto's Theoretical Model of College Student

Persistence Among Transfer Commuter Students. *ProQuest*

*Dissertation Database*. (UMI No. 8603395)

#### **Question:**

“The study testes the explanatory power of Tinto's (1975) theoretical model of college student attrition in the describing the persistence/withdrawal behaviors of 623 first-time transfer commuter students at an urban university” (Dessler, 1985).

#### **Methodologies employed**

The two statistical techniques used to analyze the data were multiple regression and path analysis.

#### **Findings:**

The author concluded “the findings of this study suggested that Tinto's (1975) model is a useful framework for understanding the process of persistence/withdrawal among transfer commuter students in urban university environments” (Dessler, 1985).

#### **Article 2:**

Bettes, D.A.. (1985). Correlates of Student Withdrawal from the

Community College. *ProQuest Dissertation Database*. (UMI No.

9835247)

**Question:**

“The present study was conducted to investigate the establishment of a functional model that could serve to identify correlates of student aptitude, interest, and background with student withdrawal from the community college” (Bettes, 1985).

**Methodologies employed**

“Subjects for the present study were selected from the 1983-84 student population of a two-year community college in a south central state. The student population was composed of a cross section of academic capabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, geographic areas, and high school size.

Method used was DIRECT with options 5, 6, 7, and 12 requested; statistics requested for this method were 1, 2, 3, 56, and 7” (Bettes, 1985).

**Findings:**

“Results of this study indicate that for student interest the linear combination of student background, cognitive aptitude, and congruence, does covary significantly with community college student status (withdrawal/persistence).

The combined results of the statistical analyses could lead to a conclusion that congruence alone, as defined in this study, is an effective functional model for predicting student withdrawal/persistence in the community college” (Bettes, 1985).

**Article 3:**

Harrell II, I.L. (2006). Using Student Characteristics to predict the

Persistence of Community College Students in Online Courses.

*ProQuest Dissertation Database.* (UMI No. 3216495)

**Question:**

“Which student characteristics (learning style, locus of control, computer experience, demographics) can be used to best predict the persistence of community college students in online courses?” (Harrell, 2006).

**Methodologies employed**

“To address the research question, a correlational research design was used” (Harrell, 2006).

**Findings:**

“Through the use of a logistic regression equation, with an appropriate cut point, a students auditory learning style score, GPA and basic computer skills scores can be used to classify him or her as a potential persister or a non-persister” (Harrell, 2006).

**Article 4:**

Llanes, J.R., & Salinas, A. (2003). Student Attrition, Retention, and Persistence: The Case of the University of Texas Pan American. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 2; 73.

**Question:**

“The study compares the characteristics of the cohort who left UTPA before graduation, those who were retained and graduated within 6 years, those who left and did not return, and those who returned and ultimately graduated from the institution. Using persistence models, the study reveals a pattern of student behavior and student characteristics to each group that provides indications of how to identify and assist students in danger of not completing their education” (Llanes & Salinas, 2003).

**Methodologies employed**

“The method used to conduct this study is known as causal comparative or ex post facto research. This method attempts to determine the cause for outcome differences in the sample, which can be linked to preexisting differences. It is similar to descriptive research because it describes conditions that already exist, but it differs in that it attempts to determine the reasons for the existing condition” (Llanes & Salinas, 2003).

**Findings**

“In conclusion, this case study points to some early warning indicators, which can be empirically linked to opting out or transferring to 2-year colleges. These indicators primarily reside in a reduction of student credit hours taken after the first year but also include the students’ reactions to probation and suspension. The lack of integration into the college student life seems to come from students’ commuter status, lack of intention to persist, and financial situations that cause them to remain employed while attending school and limit their ability to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities” (Llanes & Salinas, 2003).

**Possible Methodological Approaches**

The primary approach I plan to use in my research is Grounded Theory.

**Literature Review**

Using the steps of an advanced literature review as outlined in the text, *The Literature Review* (Machi and McEvoy, 2009) my plan would be to implement the following steps:

1. Select a topic
2. Search the literature
3. Develop the argument
4. Survey the literature

5. Critique the literature
6. Write the literature review

### **Research Methodology**

The reason I think that Grounded Theory is the best appropriate is because it allows for a organic development of understanding the question.

### **Data collection**

1. Interview students – persisted to graduation and did not re-enroll at institution after a year (6 terms online / 2 semesters face-to-face.
2. Develop standard questions utilizing an appreciative inquiry approach.
3. Students profiles will be similar – 18-22 years / domestic students.
  - a. Online Students
  - b. Face-to-Face
4. After reviewing current articles and research to help define the key issues/terms associated with persistence theory and developmental milestones of students in this group, using a mind-mapping tool, I will develop key areas associated with decisions to continue to graduation or stop.
5. Once the common themes are identified I will use this data from my control group to develop a survey tool. This survey will be administered to a larger cohort of students that have the same characteristics as the control group.

### **Discussion of Findings (preliminary)**

The result of this survey will be used to validate the reasons students persist and decide not to continue to graduation.



### **Conclusions and Recommendations (preliminary)**

Based on the anticipated outcome of this research I would hope that it would provide program administrators a theoretical foundation that would help highlight why students persist in their program. These findings would be used to emphasize to the current students what drives their peers to complete their degrees. Also, the data could be useful with identifying areas of improvement in order to keep students engaged in their education.

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