The Ritual Lens: Student Success in Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

A college degree is vital to the economic and social well-being of the entire nation and its citizens. Yet, community colleges — which serve half of all students in higher education — have low graduation rates. Lack of academic preparation, competing personal and work demands, and economic stress make earning a degree difficult for many. As part of a national agenda, community college leaders are searching for new ways to help students succeed. Student success theories have historically provided practitioners with frameworks to understand how students navigate the educational environment. This dissertation analyzed a selection of student success theories and ritual theories to contribute to new ways of thinking about student success through ritual theory and practice. Using Critical Interpretive Synthesis, two common themes emerged: Emplacement and Passage. The concept of Emplacement reflects community college students' need for academic and social challenge while anchored in their communities of origin. The concept of Passage reflects students' need for structured guidance, including the formulation of goals and the celebration of milestones. The dissertation's product includes a number of recommendations for practitioners in the creation of well-constructed and impactful rituals. Rituals are more likely to be successful if they involve some physical movement, build on existing traditions and calendars, utilize local geography and culture, and serve both practical as well as symbolic functions. Rituals that build community, such as festivals, are particularly important for community college students.

Key words: community college, higher education, student success, persistence, retention, graduation, ritual theory, ritual studies, emplacement, passage.

Dedication

To my husband, Seth Dunn, and my children, Abby and Benson Luddy-Dunn.

This doctorate belongs to each of you.

With love.

Acknowledgements

To say that this dissertation required bravery is not a boast, but an acknowledgement. Three different faculty members from UMUC's DMCCPA embraced the unknown in approving the project, the Ritual Lens. Dr. Pat Keir, as the initial primary advisor, took a leap of faith with this new area of study: rituals in community colleges. Dr. Gena Glickman, secondary advisor, provided continuity, and a focus on community college practice.

And finally, Dr. Trudy Bers. As any dissertation author knows, the final stretch can be a longest one. As my primary advisor, Dr. Bers helped reshape the entire document by clarifying research questions and methodology; contributing new sources; posing questions as the literature emerged; and helping to translate complex concepts into practice. She demonstrated enthusiasm for this project through her rapid turnaround of drafts and concise and thorough feedback.

A special note of thanks to my lifelong friend, Julius Lester, who also contributed as a panelist, lending his unique perspective as a teacher and a passionate ritualist. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Matt Reed and Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell for serving as expert panelists, two people with whom I had no prior professional affiliation.

In the end, family made it all possible. During this three-year period, my brothers and sisters were tremendous supports. (Thanks guys for taking such good care of Mom and Dad.) Ultimately, this dissertation came about through one of the most ancient rituals: sacrifice. My husband and my two children have waited patiently for three years to resume some weekend normalcy. The challenges we encountered as a family during this period are inscribed on every page, on every letter of this dissertation.

Completion of a dissertation is a wonderful thing, made even more so by a beautiful day in Northampton, Massachusetts. I will surely enjoy it, with thanks to all.

J.L.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Before degree completion was embraced as a national goal (O'Banian, 2010), student attrition was recognized as a problem throughout all sectors of higher education. In 1985, Brint wrote: "Approximately 70 percent of two-year college entrants ... say their educational goal is to obtain a bachelor's degree ... but only about 15 percent ... do" (p. 20). Tinto (1987) opened his famous work on student departure with these words: "More students leave their college or university prior to degree completion than stay" (p. 1). This sense of urgency intensified at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2010, the Obama administration called for an additional five million graduates by 2020 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017a), and all colleges, including community colleges, were asked to focus on student success (O'Banian, 2010). National organizations, including the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the Association of Community College Trustees, and the Lumina Foundation, called on community colleges to increase the number of Americans with degrees (O'Banian, 2010).

This focus on completion was a departure for community colleges. As noted by the Community College Research Center (2011): "Community colleges have been primarily designed for low-cost access" (p. 1). This shift in focus emerged as student populations presented with more educational and social needs. Academically underprepared, first-generation, low-income, and racially and ethnically diverse, many community college students often struggled to meet the demands and expectations of college (Smith Morest, 2013). More than half of all undergraduates in the United States who identified as first generation (53%), single parent (56%), or disabled (51%) attended community colleges (AACC, 2015a). More than two-thirds of community college students take developmental, pre-college coursework

(AACC, 2014). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), half

of all students attending college in the United States went to a community college, and half of

those students identified as ethnic and racial minorities (AACC, 2015b).

Despite the historic focus on access and the challenges inherent to an open admissions

institution, many community colleges have embraced the challenge of increasing student

success by re-examining and transforming pedagogy, policies, practices, course sequencing

and requirements. As McClenney, Dare, and Thomason (2013) stated: "But community

colleges now must address interlocking goals: to significantly improve outcomes, including

degree completion, for an increasingly diverse student population; to achieve equity in those

outcomes across student groups; and to do so at a lower cost per successful outcome" (p. 14).

Many of the initiatives are designed support the entire student body in a holistic fashion rather

than focusing on specific populations. For example, the Center for Community College Student

Engagement (2015) emphasized the widespread value of choosing a program of study and

following a plan that outlines a sequence of required courses. For students not yet ready to

decide on a specific program, "meta-majors" allow students to focus on a more generalized

academic area while still remaining on a path toward degree completion (Waugh, 2016).

Throughout the nation, individual colleges have crafted initiatives based on empirical

evidence of factors known to influence student success. For example, the Center for

Community College Student Engagement (2014) identified fourteen "high impact practices"

(p. 4) that were highly correlated to student success nationally, including orientation, tutoring,

supplemental instruction, first-year experience, student success courses, learning communities,

academic goal setting and planning, and experiential learning beyond the classroom. Evidence-

based practices have provided many community colleges with the impetus to reconsider some

of their approaches in favor of new ways of doing business. However, in the words of Pettrigrew (1979), "In the pursuit of our everyday tasks and objectives, it is all too easy to forget the less rational and instrumental, the more expressive social tissue around us that gives those tasks meaning" (p. 574). Specifically, Pettigrew noted that institutional leaders faced with challenges often neglected to analyze an organization's foundational culture in favor of technocratic solutions. While perhaps "less rational" Pettigrew insisted that various aspects of culture directly influence the concrete outcomes of an organization.

The identification of institutions of higher education as cultures opens up this analysis to cultural artifacts, such as ceremonies, rites, rituals, symbols and narratives "that place the culture on visible display and frequently dramatize important beliefs and values" (Levin, 2000, p. 89). As culture in organizations is in a state of constant renewal and renegotiation, rituals change in form and function. Kroeze and Keulen (2013) described how businesses invent ritual "as a way to understand and strengthen the identity of the organisation, as means to create corporate memory and as a tool to connect past, present and future" (p. 1265). The research on rituals in corporate sectors was preceded by centuries of development of definitions and theories, that reflected differences among the writers, the times they lived, as well as their academic disciplines. Reflecting a more religious orientation, Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep (1909/1992) described rituals as ceremonies, whereas Goffman (1967/1982), a sociologist, recognized rituals in everyday human interactions. The discipline of ritology has recognized the power of rituals as both cultural receptacles and cultural determinants (Trice & Beyer, 1984). The field of ritual studies emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to define the roles of rituals in ancient and modern life (Stephenson, 2015). Bell (1992/2009) described rituals as activities, thus separating them from symbols and beliefs: "Ritual is then described as

particularly thoughtless action — routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic — and therefore

the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas" (p. 20).

Alternatively, Quantz, O'Connor, and Magolda (1997) provided a generic working definition

of ritual as "that aspect of action that is formalized, symbolic performance" (p. 23).

Some definitions of ritual are more categorical. Grimes (2006), for example, sought to

define ritual through examples, such as actions, places, times, objects, groups, language,

sounds, attitudes, beliefs, qualities and quantities, intentions and emotions (p. 109). Science

provided its own perspective, with Huxley's theory of ritual inspired by observations of animal

behavior (Stephenson, 2015). In his compilation of rituals, Stephenson described the biological

roots of ritual underlying human culture:

> Ritual, like language, tool use, symbolism, and music, is one of the constituent
>
> elements in the mix of what it means to be human. The cultural record reveals
>
> the persistence and pervasiveness of ritual. The archaeological record suggests
>
> that ritual was present at the dawn of humanity. The biological record shows that
>
> ritualization is a fundamental feature of animal behavior and contributes to
>
> evolutionary processes. To think about ritual, then, is to reflect on human nature,
>
> sociality, and culture. (p. 1).

How has this human feature present since "the dawn of humanity" (Stephenson, 2015,

p. 1) expressed itself in educational settings? Rituals have been documented and studied in

educational settings, including primary and secondary institutions (Peterson & Deal, 2002;

Bernstein, Elvin, & Peters, 1966). Higher education rituals include formal ceremonies, such as

graduation with medieval academic regalia (Manning, 2000), and more informal, student-

generated residential traditions, such as those seen in Greek life (Bronner, 2012). The literature

also describes how rituals serve very different functions depending on the institution. Some rituals, such as formal dining at Cambridge College in England, initiate students from all socioeconomic classes into upper class expectations (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010). Rituals and traditions are central to the social fabric of Black women's colleges (Collin & Lewis, 2008) serving to orient students to success, and compelling and symbolic organizational sagas are retold at Reed, Swarthmore, and Antioch (Clark, 1971) to provide a "competitive edge" (p. 183). While rituals may take unique forms at each institution, successful rituals share common characteristics. As Young (1999) stated: "A good ritual deliberately connects individuals to other people and to time" (p. 12).

Centuries of literature on ritual theory and decades of research on rituals in higher education, described in Chapter Three, the literature review, suggests that there is much more to learn about rituals in institutional life. Opportunities for research exist in all institutional types, four-year and two-year, public and private. The literature on rituals in four-year institutions is largely ethnographic, serving to describe specific rituals without measuring effectiveness. Most relevant to this dissertation, as of this date, little has been published on rituals in community colleges. While Manning (2000) suggested that rituals are less developed in community colleges compared to the private institutions she studied, research has not been conducted on rituals in these institutions. Variations among community colleges in ritual practice may exist, and even vary by region or presidential leadership styles. Without specific research, how ritual manifests in community colleges is not entirely understood, or its power appreciated.

Nonetheless, thousands of years of ritual practice, centuries of ritual theory, and decades of research on rituals in organizations, including colleges, would suggest that rituals

are important to the student experience. As described in the next section of this chapter, community colleges across the country are searching for ways to help students reach their goals, shifting their mandates from access to success. The need for new approaches to support student success is highlighted by the national focus on the sector. During this period of invention and innovation, ritual has both practical and theoretical implications. Ultimately, community college practice will be strengthened through the appraisal of existing student success theories and the incorporation of propositions from other disciplines. As noted by Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora (2000), through continued research and the evolution of practice, "revisionist models and theory refinements" (p. 129) will bolster emerging practices, particularly for non-traditional student populations. Rituals and ceremonies, documented as influential and illuminating features of organizational culture (Trice & Beyer, 1984), are timely additions to the field of community college practice.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore theories of ritual and theories of student success to propose how rituals may promote student success in community colleges, and to develop guidance for leaders in support of their creation.

THE PROBLEM

A college degree is vital to the economic and social well-being of the entire nation and its citizens. Yet, community colleges — which serve half of all students in higher education — have low graduation rates. With declining resources and increasing pressures, community college leaders are searching for new ways to help students succeed.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

National data on student success reveal significant challenges throughout higher education, particularly among community colleges. According to the National Student Loan

Clearinghouse Research Center, 39.3% of community colleges students who started their

educations in Fall 2010 graduated within six years from a two-year or a four-year institution, in

contrast to the 62.4% completion rate for students who started at public four-year institutions

(Shapiro, et al., 2016). Differences between sectors are evident early in students' educational

careers, based on measures of persistence. In a study of new students from Fall 2014, 60% of

community college students returned within a year, compared to 82.3% of four-year public

college and university students (National Student Loan Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016).

Concerns about low graduation rates among students in community colleges surfaced in

larger discussions about the country's future. The Obama administration's focus on higher

education reflected national concerns about economic and social inequality as well as global

competitiveness (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), evidenced in decades of economic and

social data. Between 2003 and 2013, wages in the United States either declined or remained

flat for the bottom 70% of the wage distribution (Jacobs, Perry, & MacGillvary, 2015).

Education is vital to the economic and social future of American families. Baum, Ma, and

Payea (2013) found that American citizens without college degrees faced lifetimes of

diminished earnings and also scored lower on other social indicators, such as wellness, civic

engagement, and family life. As more jobs require post-secondary education, college

completion and affordability emerged as national priorities for both four-year and two-year

institutions.

The challenge of increasing college access while maintaining, or even increasing

student success, has presented itself during a period of significant social and demographic

transition. As Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt and Associates (2005) noted:

The college-going stakes are higher today than at any point in history, both in

terms of costs and potential benefits to students and society. Indeed, virtually all

forecasters agree that to be economically self-sufficient in the information

driven world economy, some form of postsecondary education is essential, with

a baccalaureate degree being much preferred. The task is to do something at a

scale never before realized — to provide a high-quality postsecondary education

to more than three-quarters of the adult population. (p. xiii).

As the American public has become more aware of the value and necessity of a college degree,

enrollment has increased among older students. In 2011-2012, 28% of community college

students were 30 or older, and 33% worked full time (Ma & Baum, 2016). Faced with

competing life demands, these students often have less time to study. Students from diverse

backgrounds or who come from families with low incomes have historically faced barriers

assimilating into the culture of higher education (London, 1992). In Fall 2014, Black students

comprised 14% of public community colleges; Hispanic students, 22% (Ma & Baum, 2016).

Economic challenges are associated with differential academic outcomes. Students reporting

family incomes below $30,000 per year are less likely to earn an Associate degree in six years

(14%) than students with family incomes exceeding $106,000 (20%).

Students' expectations, often based on subtle or direct communications from their

families, may influence where they go to college, what they study, how they study, and their

overall likelihood of success when they get there. Weidman's (1989) socialization model,

further described in the literature review in Chapter Three, emphasized the role of parents in

determining educational trajectories. Data from the community college sector describes the

educational backgrounds of many students and their families. In 2011-2012, 36% of

community college students reported that neither parent had any college experience (AACC, 2014). These students work more hours for pay, are more likely to drop out, and earn fewer credits than students whose parents attended college (Ishitani, 2006). Further, as open admissions institutions, community college students frequently arrive unprepared for college level work (AACC, 2014). Lacking requisite skills and mature study habits, these students enter college with unclear expectations of what is required. Time spent in pre-college courses adds semesters and prolongs the date of graduation, prevailing against a student's evolving sense of identity as a college student.

Statistics on student demographics suggest that many personal and demographic factors contribute to student success. Improving student success, however, requires researchers and practitioners to consider a larger picture, one that includes not just the student, but the institution, and society as a whole. An early theorist, Meyer (1969), described how every institution has a distinct charter that influences what students expect and how they behave, and the value society ascribes to the degrees it produces. In other words, Meyer's student success theory placed the onus on society's expectations, which are often reflected in the resources society allocates. The negative perceptions held about community colleges by students before they matriculate may be highly fatalistic. An institution's structure and design may also influence differential outcomes. For example, the multipurpose nature of the community college, along with its largely non-residential and often part-time student body, may contribute to academic and social fragmentation within institutions (Nguyen, 2015). Institutions with broader, more diffuse missions, and fewer resources, such as community colleges, are disadvantaged in comparison to more focused and resourced institutions.

The literature affirms that student success is not just an individual, but an institutional endeavor. While differences exist across sectors, each institution has the capacity to develop policies and practices within its own organizational culture to meet the needs of students. According to research by Calcagno et al. (2008) on students who attend multiple institutions, community colleges are not monochromatic, and institutional differences in financial aid allocation, part-time faculty, and expenditures on instruction, administration, and student services can increase students' chances of success. According to the Community College Research Center (2011), increasing the number of college graduates is possible when an institution transitions from an access-based to a success-based framework. Institutions focused exclusively on access may not provide the direction and structure that many students, particularly first generation students, require. For example, while the highly flexible "cafeteria" (Bailey, 2017, p. 34) model of choosing courses has contributed to access, it has also led to the accumulation of empty credits through a reactive approach to advising.

Despite the challenges community colleges face, they are vital to the economic future of the United States. Not only do community colleges serve over half of all students in higher education, they provide educational access to first generation, low income, and ethnically and racially diverse students. As institutions, community colleges play "an important pathway to postsecondary education for many who would not attend college otherwise" (Ma & Baum, 2016, p. 21). Students who are academically unprepared for college-level work are able to take advantage of community colleges' open admissions policies. Students who are geographically tethered to their communities, due to family and work commitments, may attend college and live locally. Ultimately, the same institutional characteristics that promote access often contribute to less favorable institutional outcomes. For example, open admissions policies that

provide pre-college, developmental or remedial coursework for students, are often associated with lower graduation rates and additional semesters of coursework.

Despite the recognized challenges, community colleges continue to play an important role in educating students for middle-skills jobs, such as advanced manufacturing and nursing, that require postsecondary education, but not necessarily a four-year degree (Kochan, Finegold, & Osterman, 2012). As the sector strengthens the economy through its students and programs, community college student success is national priority. Student success, however, is not just recognized as a challenge for community colleges. As Johansson and Felten (2014) stated:

> We live in transformational times. Colleges and universities are struggling to
>
> adapt to a radically new environment. The economic crisis has devastated
>
> budgets just as demands for accountability and outcomes continue to increase.
>
> Student demographics are shifting, redefining the characteristics of a typical
>
> undergraduate. Emerging technologies are challenging long-held assumptions
>
> about where, how, and when faculty teach, why students need to live together
>
> on a campus, and what it means to learn. (p. 1)

In other words, student success is not formulaic, and the theories that will be described in this dissertation do not always accomplish their goal of explaining student behavior, particularly during times of rapid social and technological change. As the lines between sectors blur, community colleges can become a source of innovation for all institutions of higher education.

This dissertation defines student success as persistence, retention, and graduation, or its antithesis: drop out. It is important to note that other definitions of student success are used by community colleges and other institutions of higher education. According to Johansson and

Felton (2014), college can "play an important role in cultivating transformation understood as an ongoing process of intentionally aligning one's actions and behaviors with one's evolving sense of identity" (p. 1). This transformation includes several phases, including disruption, reflective analysis, verification and action, and integration (Johansson and Felton (2014, p. 3). This is a process that aligns with the ritual theory of rites of passage, put forth by van Gennep (1909/1992), and later absorbed by Tinto (1975) in his Interactionalist Theory. Ultimately, while this dissertation focuses on graduation as a measure of student success, the research process and product is relevant to other definitions of student success as well.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe and analyze theories about ritual and student success in order to inform community college leaders as to the role of rituals in contributing to student success in their institutions. The development of new and more comprehensive ways to boost student achievement is vital to increasing the number of graduates.

Serving over 50% of the nation's college students and receiving considerably fewer resources than other sectors of education, including vocational schools and undergraduate institutions, community colleges are challenged to find creative and cost-effective ways to support the success of their students. Research on student success has informed the development of "high impact practices" (The Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014, p. 4) that are highly correlated to student success nationally, such as orientation, supplemental instruction and learning communities. Some colleges have crafted initiatives based on empirical evidence of factors known to influence student success. Yet, ultimately, "To achieve substantial gains in productivity, community colleges will have to

make more fundamental, systemic changes in the way they operate" (Community College Research Center, 2011, p. 1).

The word 'operate' (Community College Research Center, 2011, p. 1) implies the application of rational mechanisms based on empirical evidence. According to Jarnagin & Slocum, Jr. (2007), writing of the corporate sector, "Managers typically go to rational tools like structure and policies alone without ever going to the power that meaning develops through myths, rituals, and policies working as a coherent whole" (p. 291). The adoption of rational tools, however, does not diminish the potential power of rituals. Through academic studies of organizations, rituals have emerged as significant shapers of institutional culture and determinants of organizational performance. Trice and Beyer (1984) recognized categories of ritual in corporate culture, including rites of passage, rites of degradation, rites of enhancement, rites of renewal, rites of conflict reduction, and rites of integration. Serving multiple functions, rituals served as tools through which leaders set a tone, establish and dissolve hierarchies, and communicate standards and priorities (p. 657). Leaders who are successful in building narratives from the reservoir of ritual can become mythopoetic leaders (Jarnagin & Slocum, Jr., 2007), creating organizational cultures that inspire employees to accomplish the extraordinary.

Rituals are a part of every culture. In schools, in churches, and in corporations, they are used to explain, to celebrate, to challenge, to transform, and to heal. Can they help students in community colleges succeed? What do theories of rituals and student success have in common, and how do they differ? How can ritual theories transform practices to improve student success? Student success theories upon which many student success initiatives have been based were inspired by ritual theory. For example, foundational theories of student success emphasize a student's connection to the institution in the same way that ceremonies, rites,

rituals, and symbols connect individuals to an organization. Rituals in four-year institutions have been studied, and their impact on students has been recognized while not always measured (Manning, 2000; Bronner, 2012). However, ritual and traditions —recognized as receptacles and determinants of culture — are not as deeply rooted in two-year institutions as four-year institutions. Community colleges have not yet developed symbols, rituals, and traditions to communicate purpose, unify constituents, and most importantly, inspire and guide students to succeed.

This question is therefore relevant: Why study ritual in community colleges at all? The lack of prior research may suggest that the topic lacks real-world relevance. However, the absence of sector-specific qualitative and quantitative research does not invalidate the pursuit: Ritual has been studied in primary and secondary educational settings, and ritual theory has influenced educational theory. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975), building on the work of Spady (1970), integrated the ritual theories of Durkheim and van Gennep. The intersections between student engagement and rituals are theoretically evident: Fundamental to both student success and ritual is an emphasis on belonging and the creation of meaning, collective and individual. In practice, many initiatives developed to support student success in higher education refer to theories by Tinto (1975) and Spady (1970) who credited ritual theory with the development of their own theories. In Chapter Three, the literature review, this historic link between student success theory and ritual theory will be described.

The research suggests that student success is highly complex and multifactorial (Calcagno et al., 2008). Community college students arrive with academic, social, and economic challenges, and some colleges have responded by implementing new initiatives targeting smaller segments of the student population at only one point in a student's career

(Bailey, 2017). Underlying all interventions are educational theories developed over decades. As most theories of student retention were developed with four-year institutions in mind, two-year institutions are challenged to adapt and customize (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Through examining ritual theory, particularly the functional elements of rituals, this dissertation crafts a new lens through which to view student success in community colleges. As a student success tool, ritual is flexible and nimble, and its implementation can be either targeted or holistic. The defining power of ritual—to transform the way people feel and think—may provide a vital, additive element to consider in the elaboration of theories about student success, and the delineation of practices.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

STUDENT SUCCESS THEORIES

Student success theories in higher education emerged in response to concerns about student 'dropout' from four-year institutions. Decades after his original formulation of his Interactionalist Theory (Tinto, 1975), Tinto (1987/1993) placed theories into a number of categories: intellectual, psychological, organizational and societal (including conflict, and structural-functionalist, and economic). For example, intellectual theories of student success proposed that withdrawal was mainly an academic matter, whereas the psychological theories identified emotional status as influential, if not predictive, of student success. Intellectual and psychological theories, the most original student success theories, were never entirely abandoned: intellectual and psychological theories have been integrated into subsequent student success theories as part of a student's background. Societal theories include conflict theories, which identify how institutions serve the elite through structured inequality. Under societal theories are economic theories, which explain persistence through a student's

estimation of the value of higher education. Finally, organizational theories seek to explain student behavior and outcomes by institutional characteristics and practices. Tinto ultimately integrated these theories into one Interactionalist Theory (1975): yet, each stands alone with merit and informs this dissertation's directions and conclusions.

While Meyer's (1969) societal theory viewed student outcomes as an expression of social class, Spady's Empirical Model of the Undergraduate Dropout Process (1970) conceptualized dropout as a problem of academic ability, performance, and social integration. Family background was prominent in the pictorial representation of the Spady's model of student success: in fact, institutional characteristics are absent (p. 58). Spady's theory describes student success as a personal challenge rather than an institutional problem. The importance of the institution became more dominant in later models. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975) and Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984), for example, conceptualized student success as the interplay between the student and the institution. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory describes persistence as being influenced by an array of characteristics, including student background, goal commitment (initial and subsequent), integration (academic and social), and institutional commitment (initial and subsequent). Both Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975) and Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984) emphasized integration. However, Astin's Theory of Involvement was less concerned with pre-college conditions and characteristics, placing the onus on the institution to create conditions that favored student involvement.

The theories of Tinto and Astin were more generalized in that they were broadly applicable to the study body as a whole rather than on specific groups. In subsequent decades, theories emerged to incorporate the needs and orientations of non-traditional students. Bean's value model (1983), Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson's (1983) commuter model, and Rendón's

(1994) emphasis on validation were proposed to consider the needs of student populations who fell outside of the more traditional and residential model. Bean's (1983) student success model, for example, borrowed from industry, posited that a student's perception of value is likely to influence persistence.

The capacity of the institution to identify student needs, and to meet them, figured prominently in organizational theories, including Berger and Braxton's (1998) institutional model, Baird's (2000) institutional climate model, and Kuh and Love's (2000) work on campus culture (2000). Kuh and Love suggested that student success was determined by a student's culture and an institution's ability to adapt to that culture. Addressing the academic and social aspects of college, in *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt and Associates, 2005) noted practices that are common to successful colleges. Chapter Three summarizes student success theories in detail.

In addition to the theories that focused on the individual student's role and/or the institution's role in student success, societal theories continued to reemerge that placed institutions in larger contexts. Such theory enhancements and critiques noted that colleges are often microcosms of a larger culture that does not equitably apportion economic and cultural capital. Berger (2000), for example, described how cultural capital, related to economic capital, remains a major determinant of student success.

THEORIES ABOUT RITUALS

Ritual theories describe how rituals serve individuals and society in particular cultural and historic contexts. Early ritual theorists, including Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep (1909/1992), emphasized the religious roots of ritual while acknowledging that it simultaneously served other functions, including social stability (Durkheim) and social

transition (van Gennep). Turner, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, defined ritual

as "formal behavior prescribed for occasions not given over to technological routine that have

reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers (Stephenson, 2015, p. 72). In Turner's

definition, ritual was always rooted in belief—a belief expressed through action.

As ritual theories evolved with the field of ritology in the 1970s and 1980s, the role of

belief in ritual was diminished in favor of other forces, such as society. Moore and Myerhoff

(1977) identified secular rituals as opportunities for groups of people to assemble, celebrate,

and recognize significant and often difficult life transitions outside the boundaries of faith.

Describing rituals in a Jewish home for the aged, Moore and Myerhoff highlighted the positive,

community-building aspects of ritual. In some ritual theories, geography is dominant, and ritual

takes the form of demarcating space. While Smith's (1987/1992) theory of Emplacement is

rooted in religion and traditional society, its essential message—the search for home—reflects

Durkheim's (1912/2008) emphasis on affiliation. Other ritual theorists, among them Bell

(1992/2009), focused on some of ritual's hidden features. Bell's theory of inscription

emphasized the role of the body in ritual, noting that ritual often serves the interests of society

by enforcing values, sometimes unconsciously, on subjects.

The word 'ritual' is often synonymous with 'ceremony' in religiously-based definitions

of ritual. Turner's (1969/1995) descriptions of ritual both adhered to and defied these religious

roots. Writing in the sixties, during a decade of social change, Turner recognized that ritual

could take discordant forms. In addition to stabilizing society through structure, the opposite of

structure—anti-structure—promised a kind of ritualistic revelry as boundaries and hierarchies

dissolved. To Turner, rituals of festival are as important as ceremony. Turner's ritual theory of

structure and anti-structure is descriptive of the ebbs and flows of institutional life. Further, the theory provides a place for another essential human need: enjoyment.

Ritual theories have also sought to explain how rituals come to be, and why some, and not others fade, while others persevere. How rituals emerge, and are maintained over time, is relevant to this dissertation, as creating new rituals may be appropriate in some circumstances. Grimes (2006) noted that powerful rituals are often based on daily activities, or those that serve a practical purpose as well as a symbolic one. Powerful rituals take something familiar, such as bathing or eating, and add stylization to convey a larger meaning.

This dissertation embraces a broad definition of ritual that includes structured and ceremonial activities that transpire in institutional contexts. While rituals can be conducted in isolation, personal rituals are not the focus of the dissertation. Further, this dissertation includes theories of ritual to capture the more social and routine experiences rather than the exclusively ceremonial. In contrast to the vast majority of ritual theorists who defined rituals as episodic or rarified, Goffman (1967/1982) recognized them in everyday human interactions. Goffman's theory of ritual suggested that much of what transpires between people is largely scripted, with implicit rules and expectations. Goffman's interaction ritual theory is included in this dissertation as a framework for understanding rituals outside of official ceremony, encapsulating the majority of time spent at institutions.

As Stephenson (2015) claimed, "Definitions of ritual are legion" (p. 72). This dissertation embraced the manifold definitions of *ritual* in its analysis of rituals in higher education. Further, this dissertation also embraced *ritual theory* as a way to organize, understand, inform, and alter perceptions (p. 5). In Chapter Three, ritual theories and student success are summarized, and in Chapter Four, ritual theories are analyzed and integrated with

theories of student success. Chapter Five includes recommendations for practitioners in the creation of rituals, and in the application of ritual theory.

Practitioners may not choose to create rituals, but the exploration of the topic leads to an understanding of institutional culture and how culture shapes student experience. This perspective, the Ritual Lens, will support educational practice through enhancements to student success theory or the generation of new rituals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the research for this study:

1. What are the different theories of student success in community colleges?

2. What are the different theories of ritual, and which are most relevant to student success?

3. How might ritual theories and student success theories intersect to provide insights into strategies for college leaders to promote student success?

DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Organizational Climate and Organizational Culture: Climate and culture are sometimes used synonymously. In one definition, climate is the subjective experience of culture (Allen, 2003).

Persistence: According to Berger, Ramirez, and Lyons (2012), "Persistence refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within higher education from beginning year through degree completion" (p. 12).

Retention: According to Berger, Ramirez, and Lyons (2012), "Retention refers to the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation" (p. 12).

Ritual: There are myriad definitions of ritual reflecting historical context and discipline. To facilitate the process of analysis, this dissertation provides the following definition: Ritual is

action, collective or solitary, that imparts meaning by transforming an action into a symbolic and meaningful enterprise.

Saga: A story that describes events of an institution in memorable terms (Trice & Beyer, 1984).

Secular Ceremony: A ceremony or ritual conducted in a non-religious context (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977).

Student Success: While there are different definitions of student success, this dissertation defines success as completion of a certificate or a degree. As stated by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014):

> Today's nationwide focus on college completion is central to both individual and societal success. For individuals, attaining a credential has become essential to earn a livable wage and support a family. In addition, as each person's educational attainment increases, so does his or her capacity to contribute to the economy, his or her community, and the democratic process. (p. 2)

Symbol: A sensory object that conveys meaning (Trice & Beyer, 1984). A symbol can be visual, auditory, or take the form of a person or a position. A symbol can take the form of architecture or the name of an organization (Ulrich, 1984).

SUMMARY

This chapter described the challenge of student success in community colleges and other institutions of higher education. While there are multiple definitions, this dissertation defines student success as graduation, and its precursors, including persistence and retention. Initiatives have been designed locally and nationally to promote student success. As these interventions continue to evolve, this dissertation proposes an examination of community

college rituals. This inquiry is strengthened by the ritual foundations of Spady's Empirical

Model of the Undergraduate Dropout Process (1970) and Tinto's Interactionalist Theory

(1975).

In Chapter Three, the Literature Review, student success theories and ritual theories are

summarized to develop a conceptual model. In Chapter Four, the Conceptual Model is

explained through the synthesis of student success theories and ritual theories. Finally,

recommendations to support specific community college practices, and future research, are

outlined in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores theories of ritual and theories of student success to propose how rituals may promote student success in community colleges, and to develop guidance for leaders in support of their creation. The University of Maryland University College Doctor of Management in Community College Policy and Administration (DMCCPA) program proposed a methodology called systematic review as a "rigorous method of planning and executing an exhaustive synthesis of existing literature — and other kinds of evidence —for the purpose of finding the weight of the evidence in answer to identified research questions" (UMUC, 2014, p. 7). In the absence of sufficient empirical literature, the guidelines stipulated that other methodologies could be explored. Ultimately, UMUC faculty suggested Critical Interpretive Synthesis (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006), or CIS, as an alternative, to analyze the literature on rituals and student success for common themes on which to build practice.

The purpose of Chapter Two is to describe the choice of research methodology, Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS), as opposed to the standard UMUC method, systematic review, and to provide an overview of the research steps over the period that the dissertation was written. UMUC dissertations are developed over a three-year period consisting of three separate semester-long touchpoints. This structure allowed for alternate periods of exploration, depth, and consolidation suited to Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS).

DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE OF METHODOLOGY: CRITICAL INTERPRETIVE SYNTHESIS

Systematic review is the recommended methodology for doctoral dissertation research in the University of Maryland University College doctoral program in Community College Policy and Administration (UMUC, 2014). Systematic review, like other research synthesis

methods, plays "an important role in disseminating research knowledge and in shaping further

research, policy, practice, and public perception" (Suri & Clarke, 2009, p. 395). Systematic

reviews are most useful when there is a specific research question and empirical research

studies exist, allowing for the aggregation of the results in order to test a hypothesis or a theory

(Dixon-Woods et al., 2006).

But what if the area of inquiry is uncharted and a body of empirical research is not

available to aggregate? This dilemma has emerged in multiple fields, including social work,

public health, and nursing. CIS was developed by Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) to expound upon

the notion of 'access' when the researchers found the concept too narrow and insufficient to

explain health care utilization. While empirical research was available, the researchers felt that

the existing literature did not always explain personal health care choices. Dixon-Woods et al.

(2006) developed the CIS research methodology to analyze literature to search for and develop

alternative conceptual frameworks. In CIS, the research question only provides initial direction

and may itself undergo transformation during the research process. Further, the literature

search, while governed by specific terms, may become wider or narrower as the research

question evolves.

The literature on student success is robust, including both empirical and theoretical

research. The research on rituals and higher education proved to be more elusive. During the

preliminary scoping of the literature in Chapter One, no relevant qualitative or quantitative

studies specific to rituals and community colleges were located. Working with dissertation

advisors, it was determined that this topic required a more expansive approach to assemble and

organize relevant themes from many different disciplines to inform practice. Critical

Interpretive Synthesis (CIS), rooted in Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), was

proposed by UMUC dissertation advisors to assemble information from disparate sources and

disciplines and allow new ways of thinking to emerge. CIS offered the researcher the

opportunity to approach the research question more broadly, to expand the literature search

across disciplines, to use multiple types of research, and to find patterns and themes not yet

proposed or tested in the literature. Table 1, adapted from Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) and

Markoulakis and Kirsch (2013), compares the traditional systematic review with CIS.

Table 1. *Systematic Review and Critical Interpretive Synthesis*

	Traditional Systematic Review	Critical Interpretive Synthesis
Goal	To pool data to prove a theory or a hypotheses	To interpret data, generate a theory, understand theoretical relationships
Review Question	Specific, static, and well-formulated.	General, directional, and changeable
Analysis	Comparative	Inductive
Approach	Qualitative or quantitative	Qualitative
Inclusion Criteria	Articles critically evaluated for research quality	Articles included for relevance and critiqued for contribution to emerging framework
Search	Comprehensive identification and inclusion of all relevant literature	Review includes a sampling frame
Discipline	Focus on one field	May cross disciplines
Approach	Validates and tests hypotheses	May challenge basic assumptions
Output	Reproducible	Plausible but grounded in evidence
Attitude	Trustful: The data is a source answers.	Critical: The data is a source of direction, and more questions

RESEARCH STEPS

As a methodology, CIS has been described in standard ways; yet, its implementation is

creative, and markedly unique, to each study. While it is perhaps inadvisable to generate a

series of *strict protocols*, the rigor of this dissertation will be strengthened by *commonly*

accepted methods for analyzing data employed in other CIS studies. These protocols and

methods were executed in four steps, the first and third of which were derived from Grounded

Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), including Theoretical Sampling and Purposive Sampling

(Step 1), and Theoretical Saturation (Step 3). The second step and fourth steps, Authentication of the Research Question through the Expert Panel, and Translation of the Conceptual Model into Practice, are required by University of Maryland University College in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Management in Community College Policy and Administration. In summary, the research was conducted in four steps:

Step 1: Theoretical Sampling, Purposive Sampling, and Definition of the Research Space

Step 2: Authentication of the Research Question through the Expert Panel

Step 3: Literature Review, Analysis, and Theoretical Saturation

Step 4: Translation of the Conceptual Model into Practice

STEP 1: THEORETICAL SAMPLING, PURPOSIVE SAMPLING, AND DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH SPACE

Theoretical Sampling consists of accessing multiple available data sources, or "slices of data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p. 65), to assemble a broader sample of potentially relevant materials. The process employed UMUC Library's OneSearch, which provided access to 45 academic databases in a single search, as well as six optional resources: ABI/INFORM Complete, Dissertations and Theses (ProQuest), LexisNexis Academic, the UMUC Library Catalog, LION: Literature Online, and Safari Books Online.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

As permitted by the CIS methodology, articles and books were chosen for inclusion based on relevance rather than on strict academic criteria, such as journal type and citation number. Peer-reviewed and academic articles were analyzed along with grey literature, including doctoral dissertations. The searches were conducted agnostic of publication dates,

country, or journal type, allowing for the inclusion of classical and international sources in the analysis.

During the exploratory phase, prior to the development of the research questions, a list of synonyms emerged in the execution of the search. The word "ritual," for example, was inserted along with "tradition," "rite," and "symbol". "Student success" was included as a search term along with "graduation," "retention," "persistence," "involvement," "belonging," and more historic terms, such as "dropout". Through this informal process of exploration, a number of articles and books were located, read, and placed in the researcher's mental "bookshelf" to consider for future research. For example, during the exploration process, the researcher accessed Kroeze and Keulen's (2013) work on invented traditions in corporate settings; and Tisdell's article (2007) on spirituality in education.

Research Questions

Ultimately, the tripartite research question emerged, and the research was executed in three directions: rituals in higher education, student success theory, and ritual theory. The research process assumed the triangular shape depicted below. As the literature review was implemented in Chapter Three, the research space was revisited and expanded with insight, serendipity, and dissertation advisor input.

Theories of Student Success in
Higher Education

Ritual Theory

Rituals
in Higher Education
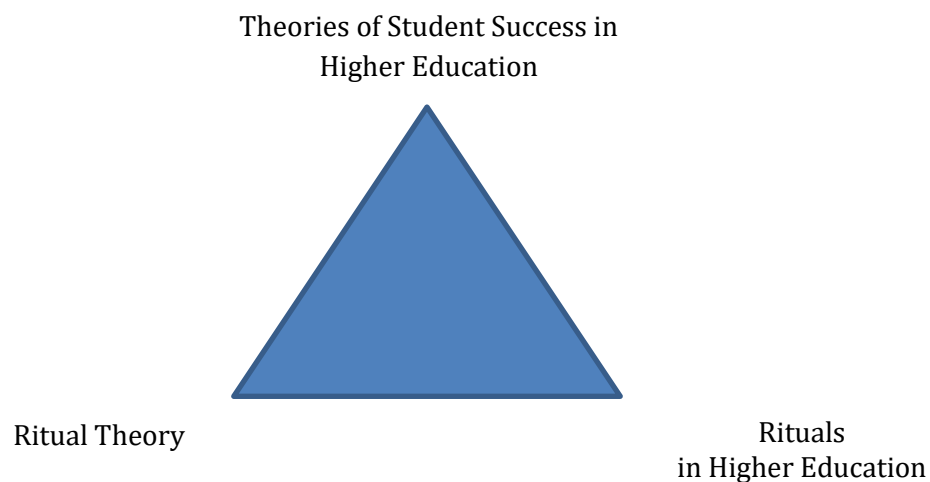
Figure 1. The Research Space. This figure describes the three main areas of research directions for the dissertation.

Rituals and Higher Education

As the title search on the terms "ritual" (and synonyms) and "community colleges"

yielded no hits, the search was then expanded to higher education, including the words

"college," "higher education," and "university." The term "ritual" and associated terms were

included in the Title field search to limit the retrieval to this area of focus. The word "student"

was employed as a subject term in order to exclude studies that focused only on organizational

and administrative attributes. This approach yielded a total of 191 articles, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Search Terms: Rituals in Higher Education*

Search Terms	Hits
'college*' OR 'higher education' OR 'universit*' (subject term) AND 'ritual*' OR 'rite*' or 'ceremon*' (Title) AND Student (subject term)	191

As a methodology, it is typical for CIS to generate numerous research articles to be

scanned for relevance (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). Through the next step, "purposive

sampling" (p. 3), the articles were chosen for inclusion based on their potential contribution to

the research questions. Through this process, articles about local graduation ceremonies, or

references to hazing rituals, were excluded. Further, through "snowballing" (Petticrew &

Roberts, 2006, p. 121), or using research to locate other relevant research, the source list was

expanded.

Table 3 provides a comprehensive list of sources.

Table 3. *Final List of Books and Articles: Ritual and Higher Education*

Author and Year	Title
Blumenkrantz, D. G., & Goldstein, M. B. (2014)	Seeing College as a Rite of Passage: What Might Be Possible
Collins, A. C., & Lewis, B. F. (2008)	How Rituals and Traditions Are Used as Tools of Socialization at Black Women's Colleges

Author and Year	Title
Dacin, M. T., Munir, K., & Tracey, P. (2010)	Formal Dining at Cambridge Colleges: Linking Ritual Performance and Institutional Maintenance
Gildersleeve, R. E. (2017)	Truth-Telling, Ritual Culture, and Latino College Graduates in the Anthropocene
Magolda, P. M. (2001)	What Our Rituals Tell Us About Community On Campus: A Look at the Campus Tour
McCusker, K. M., & Witherow, L. B. (2012)	Bereavement on the College Campus: Establishing an Affective Ritual for the Classroom and Beyond
Young (1999)	Examining our Rituals
*Bernstein, B., Elvin, H. L., & Peters, R. S. (1966)	Rituals in Education
*Bronner, S. J. (2012)	Campus Traditions: Folklore from the Old-Time College to the Modern Mega-University (Book)
*Hallinger, P., Chantarapanya, P., Taraseina, P., & Srliboonma, U. (1996)	Nourishing the Spirit: The Role of Ritual in Building Learning Communities
*Karnieli-Miller, Frankel & Inui (2013)	Cloak of Compassion, or Evidence of Elitism? An Empirical Analysis of White Coat Ceremonies
*Kuh, G. D., & Gonyea, R. M. (2006)	Spirituality, Liberal Learning and College Student Engagement
*Manning, K. (2000)	Rituals, Ceremonies, and Cultural Meaning in Higher Education (Book)
*Martin, Moriuchi, Smith, Moeder, & Nichols (2015)	Brand Communities
*Nielsen, C. (2011)	Set in Stone: Legends, Traditions, and Symbols Influencing Place Attachment for Southern Utah University Students
*Quantz, O'Connor, & Magolda (2011)	Rituals and Student Identity in Education: Ritual Critique for a New Pedagogy. (Book)

*Articles located through snowballing.

Student Success

As this dissertation focused on theory, the search on student success was tailored to

search for articles that included the word "theory or "theoretical model" in the title. Further, as

the research question focused on graduation, the title search included the following synonyms:

"success," "graduation," "persistence," "retention," "dropout," "departure," "completion," and

"attrition." The search was not restricted to community colleges as theory evolved largely

from four-year institutions. This broad search retrieved 76 articles.

Through "purposive sampling" (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006, p. 3), articles were excluded

if they sought to test or evaluate existing theories rather than advancing new ones. In the past

century, as more theories about student success in higher education were advanced, research to

test the validity and comprehensiveness of these theories followed. Such articles were excluded

from the analysis as the three main research questions were specific to the content of student

success theories and not relevant to the process of evaluating their effectiveness. Table 4

describes the search terms used and the number of articles located.

Table 4. *Search Terms for Student Success in Higher Education*

Search Terms	Hits
'theory' or 'theories' or 'theoretical model' or 'theoretical models' (Title) AND 'success' OR 'graduation' or 'persistence' or 'retention' or 'dropout' or 'departure' or 'completion' or 'attrition' (Title) AND 'higher education' or 'college*' (Title)	76

The number of sources reviewed swelled through the process of snowballing, or the use

of retrieved sources to locate other relevant research. For example, Tinto's (1987/1993)

seminal work, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, was

discovered through articles generated from the initial search. Further, through intellectual

exchange with dissertation advisors, a number of sources were added to strengthen the student

success framework. The final list of books and articles is listed in Table 5.

Table 5. *Final List of Books and Articles: Student Success Theory*

Author and Year	Title
Aljohani, O. (2016).	A Comprehensive Review of the Major Studies and Theoretical Models of Student Retention in Higher Education
Bean, J. P., & Eaton, S. B. (2000)	A Psychological Model of College Student Retention
Bean, J., & Metzner, B. (1985)	A Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition
Berger, J. B., & Braxton, J. M. (1998)	Revising Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure Through Theory Elaboration: Examining the Role of Organizational Attributes in the Persistence Process
Braxton, J. M., Hirschy, A. S., & McClendon, S. A. (2004)	Understanding and Reducing College Student Departure (Book)
Braxton, J. M., Milem, J. F., & Sullivan, A. S. (2000)	The Influence of Active Learning on the College Student Departure Process: Toward a Revision of Tinto's Theory
Jacoby, B. (2015)	Enhancing Commuter Student Success: What's Theory Got to Do With It?
Laden, B. V., Miles, J. F., & Crowson, R. L. (2000)	New Theoretical Directions: New Institutional Theory and Student Departure
Morrison & Silverman (2012)	Retention Theories, Models, and Concepts
Schmidt, H. G., Cohen-Schotanus, J., van der Molen, H. T., Splinter, T. W., Bulte, J., Holdrinet, R., & van Rossum, H. M. (2010)	Learning More by Being Taught Less: A "Time-for-Self-Study" Theory Explaining Curricular Effects on Graduation Rate and Study Duration
*Astin, A.W. (1984)	Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education.
*Baird (2000)	Revising Tinto's Theory: College Climate and the Tinto Model
*Bean, J. P. (1983)	The Application of a Model of Turnover in Work Organizations to the Student Attrition Process
*Berger (2000)	Revising Tinto's Theory: Optimizing Capital, Social Reproduction, and Undergraduate Persistence
*Duckworth (2016)	Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance
*Dweck (2006)	Mindset: The New Psychology of Success
*Kuh, G. D., & Love, P. G. (2000) *Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., and Whitt, E. J. & Associates (2005)	A Cultural Perspective on Student Departure Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter (Book)

Author and Year	Title
*Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B.K. & Hayek, J. C. (2006)	What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature
*Meyer, J. W. (1969)	The Charter: Conditions of Diffuse Socialization in Schools
*McQueen, H. (2009)	Integration and Regulation Matters in Educational Transition: A Theoretical Critique of Retention and Attrition Models
*Palmer, R. T., Davis, R. J., & Maramba, D. C. (2011)	The Impact of Family Support on the Success of Black Men at an Historically Black University: Affirming the Revision of Tinto's Theory
*Pascarella, E. T., Duby, P. B., & Iverson, B. K. (1983)	A Test and Reconceptualization of a Theoretical Model of College Withdrawal in a Commuter Institution Setting
*Próspero, M. Russell, A. C., & Shetal, V. G. (2012)	Effects of Motivation on Educational Attainment: Ethnic and Developmental Differences Among First-Generation Students
*Rendón, L. I. (2002)	Community College Puente: A Validating Model of Education
*Schuetz, P. (2008)	A Theory-Driven Model of Community College Student Engagement
*Spady (1970)	Dropouts from Higher Education. Toward an Empirical Model
*Tierney, W. (1992)	An Anthropological Analysis of Student Participation in College
*Tinto, V. (1975)	Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research
*Tinto, V. (1987/1993)	Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition (Book)
*Valentine, C. (1971)	Deficit, Difference, and Bicultural Models of Afro American Behavior
*Weidman, J. C. (1989)	The World of Higher Education: A Socialization-Theoretical Perspective

Ritual Theory

The goal of the literature search on ritual theories was to evaluate theories for relevance and potential applicability in the higher education environment, specifically for student success. The first step in this process was executed through the literature search on rituals and higher education, summarized previously in Table 4. The ritual theories referenced in works retrieved through the initial literature search on rituals and higher education served as the basis

for the literature review. For example, Bronner's (2012) book on campus traditions referred to van Gennep's (1909/1992) theory of rites of passage; Manning's (2000) book on rituals and higher education integrated the ritual theories of Durkheim, van Gennep, Turner, and Moore and Myerhoff. The original sources for these theories were acquired, read, analyzed, and used to identify other sources. For example, Moore and Myerhoff's (1977) book *Secular Ritual*, included an essay by Goody that was incorporated into the literature review.

As this process alone would not contribute to the development of novel connections between ritual theory and higher education, the number of sources was expanded in two ways. First, Stephenson's (2015) synthesis of ritual theories provided sufficient information to evaluate additional theories for relevance. Second, a subject term search on 'ritual theory' yielded 384 references that included articles and book reviews related to ritual theories from various disciplines, including sociology, religion, and anthropology. The standard of relevance was particularly important at this point, as the field of ritual studies is multidisciplinary in nature, and many ritual theories fell outside of this dissertation's focus on student success. With researcher discretion, a ritual theory was deemed as potentially relevant if it was:

- Descriptive of human, and not just animal behavior

- Descriptive of group, rather than just individual behavior

- Descriptive of institutional behavior

- Explanatory as to the effectiveness of some rituals compared to others

- Explanatory as to the human need for ritual

- Relevant to secular, and not just religious, contexts

- Relevant to contemporary as well as historic contexts

- Representative of classical or foundational theories

- Representative of new ideas

This process of selection, or purposive sampling, was influenced by the insight, subjectivity, and even imaginative leaps of the researcher. For example, some rituals theories were deemed relevant to student success even when they were more historic than sociological in nature. In fact, through this process, ritual theories were included when they contributed a particularly new insight. For example, Smith's (1987/1992) spatialized concept of ritual was, at first glance, too historic to be relevant. Yet, his theory was included in this dissertation because it reflected a distinctive geographically-bound approach. The final list of books read and integrated into the dissertation are listed in Table 6.

Table 6. *Final List of Books: Ritual Theory*

Author and Year	Book
Bell, C. (1992/2009)	Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (Book)
Durkheim, E. (1912/2008)	Elementary Forms of Religious Life (Book)
Goffman, E. (1967/1982)	Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior (Book)
Grimes, R. L. (2006)	Rite Out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts (Book)
Moore, S. F., & Myerhoff, B. (1977)	Secular Rituals (Book)
Smith (1987/1992)	To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual (Book)
Stephenson, B. (2015)	Ritual: A Very Short Introduction (Book)
Turner, V. (1969/1995)	The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (Book)
Van Gennep, A. (1909/1992)	The Rites of Passage (Book)

STEP 2: AUTHENTICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT THROUGH EXPERT PANEL

The research topic was of interest to the researcher and supported by dissertation advisors. However, the lack of literature specific to rituals and community colleges would suggest that the topic was not of sufficient interest or relevance to justify a practice-based dissertation. The research questions, ultimately, could only be answered through a methodology that could manage the pooling of information from disparate disciplines, the

integration of different types of data sources, and the management of a non-linear process. As a methodology, CIS allowed for thoughtful exploration of the topic, allowing for the research questions to evolve with more information. Ultimately, through the preliminary scoping of the literature in Step One, the academic relationship between student success theories and ritual theories emerged, along with the specific research questions.

As a next step, to authenticate the research proposal to sharpen the research questions, Chapter One was sent to three experts selected based on their professional roles in higher education and their academic qualifications. Panelists were chosen to represent a balance of theory and practice, administration as well as instruction, and diversity. All three of the experts identified as faculty at some point in their careers, and one panelist had also served as an administrator; two had worked at community colleges, and one at a university; two of the panelists had published academic work in the field of ritual; one panel member was Jewish and African-American; and one was female.

The first expert was Dr. Matt Reed, Vice President for Learning at Brookdale Community College, and author of two books, *Confessions of a Community College Administrator* and *Confessions of a Community College Dean*. Dr. Reed is the author of the popular blog on Insider.High.Ed.com, Confessions of a Community College Dean. He earned a B.A. from Williams College and Ph.D. in Political Science from Rutgers University.

The second expert was Mr. Julius Lester, Professor Emeritus of Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. An African-American convert to Judaism, Mr. Lester authored 44 books: eight nonfiction, 31 children's books, one book of poetry and photographs (with David Gahr), and three adult novels. He also published more than 200 essays and book and film reviews for such publications as *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Boston*

Globe, *Moment*, *Forward*, and *Dissent*. As a convert to Judaism, Mr. Lester developed rituals that reflected Jewish and African-American themes. As a faculty member, he received numerous awards for his teaching at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

The third expert was Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell from the Pennsylvania State University - Harrisburg, Adult Education Program. Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell received her Ed.D. in Adult Education from the University of Georgia, and holds an M.A. in Religion and Religious Education from Fordham University. Her research interests include spirituality and culture in adult learning and in the health and education professions; medical education; critical media literacy and financial literacy among adult learners; and critical, feminist and social justice issues in higher and adult education. Dr. Tisdell was selected to reflect upon the religious roots of ritual and to provide her perspective on the needs of adult learners.

The Expert Panel provided feedback through a standard form that included nine questions on a Likert Scale from one (poor) to five (excellent). Panelists were invited to evaluate Chapter One for 1) accuracy and completeness of the problem description, 2) significance of the problem to the community college environment, 3) adequacy of the evidence supporting the problem statement, 4) relevance of the management and learning theories to the research issue, 5) completeness of the theoretical background, 6) scope and focus of the research questions, 7) organization, 8) quality of writing, and 9) adequacy of the list of major references and scholarly works. Panelists were invited to provide additional comments outside of the nine criteria

Two of the panelists opted to fill out the official form, while one chose to provide narrative feedback. All provided critical input, encouraged the pursuit of the research project, and honed the research questions. These findings are included in Chapter Four.

STEP 3: LITERATURE REVIEW, ANALYSIS, AND THEORETICAL SATURATION

The literature review of the three topics areas, rituals in higher education, student success theory, and ritual theory, included the identification of common themes. According to Braun and Clark (2013), "A theme is a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question" (p.121). This point of relevance is particularly important because an analysis of the literature from the three areas of inquiry resulted in a significant number of common themes, not all of which were related to the dissertation's focus of student success. Following Braun and Clark's methodology, the coding process included the application of "pithy labels for important features of the data of relevance to the (broad) research question guiding the analysis" (p. 121). In Chapter Three, themes derived from the literature on ritual theory and student success theory were described and then organized under larger categories. Ultimately the multiple themes were collapsed into two overarching themes described in Chapter Four.

Saturation is a term used in qualitative research to indicate that a sufficient number of interviews have been conducted to draw meaningful conclusions (Rowlands, Waddell, & McKenna, 2015). It has also been defined as the point at which "no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category" (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p. 61). In this dissertation, the researcher defined saturation as the threshold at which the literature review could sufficiently respond to the three research questions, providing theory enhancements as well as meaningful recommendations. In Chapter Three, each research question was addressed through a summary of the literature on ritual in higher education, student success theories, and ritual theories. In Chapter Four, common themes were identified and integrated into a Conceptual Model. A total of nine student success theories and eight

ritual theories were included in the final model. Twenty-three major themes were identified

through an analysis of the literature. To develop an actionable and understandable Conceptual

Model, the twenty-three themes were categorized into four themes, and then collapsed into two

dominant themes most representative of the entire body of theory on student success and ritual.

STEP 4: TRANSLATION OF CONCEPTUAL MODEL INTO PRACTICE

Chapter Five includes recommendations for community college practice and future

research. This contribution responds to a gap in the literature on rituals and higher education.

While rituals have theoretical resonance, there is little available guidance about how to create

rituals, and even less evidence about their effectiveness. Drawing from student success theories

and ritual theories, this dissertation identified approaches community college leaders may take

to develop rituals on their campuses.

As Markoulakis and Kirsh (2013) noted, CIS is a methodology that "does not proceed

in discrete stages of literature searching, sampling, data extraction, critique, and synthesis" (p.

79). After reviewing and synthesizing the literature, new areas of interest emerged and new

sources were located. For example, while writing Chapter Five, sources on fundraising,

spirituality, diversity, and ritual, that had been excluded earlier in the process of the review,

were determined to be helpful in the development of practical recommendations.

CONCLUSION

Chapter Two described the application of the research methodology, Critical

Interpretative Synthesis (CIS), in the construction of this dissertation titled The Ritual Lens:

Student Success in Community Colleges. The dialectic between ritual theory and student

success theory that was sparked by Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) has been in a place of stasis.

The methodology used in this dissertation, Critical Interpretive Synthesis, advances the

discussion for the sake of theory enhancement and practice. CIS was an appropriate

methodology to explore this topic as few articles on rituals and higher education were available

as the research process unfolded. CIS was recommended as an alternative to systematic review

in the absence of relevant empirical research, and the need for intellectual flexibility in

pursuing the multi-disciplinary research topics.

While adhering to some structure, the application of CIS in this dissertation was

flexible and dynamic, allowing for shifts in focus as new information emerged. The research

itself was conducted in four steps: Theoretical Sampling, Purposive Sampling, and Definition

of the Research Space; Authentication of the Research Question through the Expert Panel;

Literature Review, Analysis, and Theoretical Saturation; and Translation of Conceptual Model

into Practice. Theoretical Sampling and Purposive Sampling was based on Grounded Theory

(Glaser & Strauss, 1965).

Through Step One, Theoretical Sampling, Purposive Sampling, and Definition of the

Research Space, three areas of focus emerged: rituals in higher education, student success

theory, and ritual theory. Higher education articles that sought to test theories were excluded.

Further, through "snowballing," books and theories were located and included ultimately in the

final list of articles to be reviewed. Dissertation advisors contributed to the research space by

suggesting sources about success outside of the higher education framework that did not

emerge through the formal search terms. After completing Chapter One, which included

preliminary research questions and an exploration of the literature, the author proceeded to

Step Two, Authentication of the Research Question Through the Expert Panel. Through this

UMUC requirement, Chapter One was subjected to review by experts determined to have a

good theoretical and practical understanding of the research.

Through Step Three, Literature Review, Analysis, and Theoretical Saturation, articles relevant to ritual theory and student success theory were reviewed and categorized into themes. A potentially infinite process, the researcher ceased to add sources once a conceptual model was created. Saturation, in the case of this dissertation, took the form of the emergence of a conceptual model described at the end of Chapter Three. In Step Four, Translation of Conceptual Model into Practice, specific recommendations for practitioners were described and supported by the literature. The results of this analysis are included in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three includes a review of literature relevant to rituals and student success in community colleges. The literature is categorized into three areas: 1) Rituals in institutions of higher education, 2) Student success theory, and 3) Ritual theory. All of the student success theories summarized in this dissertation focus on persistence, retention, and graduation, or its antithesis: dropout. Finally, the Conceptual Model describes how the literature from these three disciplines was integrated to provide useful recommendations for practitioners.

RITUALS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Young (1999) focused on the multiple functions of rituals on campuses, defining them as "behavioral patterns that are repeatable, have purpose, and have acquired a sense of rightness among the people who participate in them" (p. 11). Rituals that reinforce social connections are particularly important for commuter students who must re-establish themselves in a new environment every semester. The capacity of rituals, legends, and traditions in higher education to foster social cohesion and manage transition have been described in a number of books, drawing examples largely from four-year institutions. Bronner (2012) applied a functionalist perspective and suggested that students engage with traditions to "feel a part of something larger than themselves" (p. xiii). Specifically, Bronner described how traditions help participants work through a period of uncertainty, when they are "simultaneously separating from and longing for childhood and home left behind, adjusting to place, anticipating an uncertain future….." (p. xiii). College traditions are psychological responses to what Bronner calls the student state of being "betwixt and between" (p. xvi).

Bronner (2012) identified the presence of strong narrative traditions in modern American institutions of higher education and linked them to ritual theories. In particular, Bronner referred to Turner's (1969/1995) theory of ritual as a way to address "liminality," or the state of being between two different developmental phases. According to Bronner, ritual can serve to "dissolve and reorder reality" (2012, p. xvii) and "confront the ambiguities" (p. xvii) inherent in situations that are changeable. Bronner depicted the modern college campus as full of ambiguities and stark contrasts: serious academic pursuits amid parties, tall modern buildings within pastoral settings.

Even with such rich descriptive scholarship, the question remains: what impact do these traditions have on students? In her dissertation, Nielsen (2011) interviewed 17 students at Southern Utah University about their attachment to the institution. The study found that students who were less involved in campus activities demonstrated the same level of attachment to place through legends and traditions as those students who were very involved on campus. The ambient nature of legends and traditions has a unique capacity to influence students because participation is not a choice: students cannot opt out. The author noted that while creating legends and traditions may seem frivolous, they may have an identified impact on persistence and graduation while laying the groundwork for students' lifelong connection with the institution through alumni. While Nielsen's research was conducted on only one campus that was residential in nature, her work has implications for any institution that seeks to develop a sense of place.

The function of rituals in higher education was studied by Manning in her book *Rituals, Ceremonies, and Cultural Meaning in Higher Education* (2000). Manning noted that rituals "play a central role in the cultural work of human meaning making" (2000, p. 2). Students

placed in new environments "hunger for knowledge about the community and clues about how they are to act in their newly adopted home" (Manning, 2000, p. 9). Both cognitively and emotionally, rituals engage, orient, inform, regiment, signal, direct, and structure the behavior of participants. Examples of higher education rituals include convocation and commencement, building dedications, class galas, tree-planting ceremonies, alumni groups, and founders' commemorations. Ritual opportunities for criticism and parody release tension by allowing members to make fun of themselves and ultimately re-examine campus practices.

In contrast to Bronner (2012), Manning (2000) was most interested in more formalized rituals at colleges, those that were either created by or ultimately sanctioned by the administration. Her book provided examples of private institutions engaged in meaningful ritual and ceremonial practice. Through ritual events, institutions communicated values and priorities as well as an understanding of institutional power relationships. Presidential inaugurations, for example, marked with symbols of knowledge and power, including the mace, the presidential medallion, and the college seal, communicate stability during transitions. Manning also described how rituals, such as opening day and graduation, marked changes in status. The foundations of Manning's work reflect a structuralist approach that assumes there is:

> an inherent, natural order to culture. This order is uncovered through the
> anthropological study of social lives, organizations, myths, and rituals.
> Ritual theory, for example, highlights the relationship between universal
> human needs (community, love, family). Rituals call attention to these
> needs, assist us to see the relationship between and among them, and
> remind us of their importance. (p. 27)

Relevant to this dissertation is Manning's (2000) categorization of rituals and her identification of theories to explain how they function on campus. To Manning, rituals on campuses fell into three categories: "rites of passage, secular ceremonies, and cultural performances" (2000, p. 3). Rites of passage were first recognized by van Gennep as rituals that marked phases of "separation, transition, and incorporation" (1909/1992, p. 4). While many rites of passage are religious in nature, such as baptism, others are secular. Manning referred to the work of Moore and Myerhoff (1977) by describing higher education rituals as belonging to a special group called "secular ceremonies" (2000, p. 4). While secular ceremonies and religious ceremonies share some characteristics, such as repetition and distinctiveness, secular ceremonies serve more general practical and social functions. The graduation ceremony, for example, confers a degree while also serving a symbolic function to manage transition and celebrate success. Other secular ceremonies, such as class picnics and proms, are more recreational in nature.

Manning's (2000) analysis of ritual in higher education drew from the work of Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep (1909/1992), whose theories are explored later in this chapter. Categorizing rituals, Manning (2000) identified rituals of reification, which validate participant choices; rituals of revitalization, which communicate and support the underlying values of an institution; rituals of resistance, which challenge formal authority; rituals of incorporation, which welcome new members into the community; rituals of investiture, which endow leadership; rituals of entering and exiting, which delineate the demands and expectations of academic entity from that of world outside; and rituals of healing which are enacted when there is a time of crisis (p. 8). Manning also described a special category of ritual

called "cultural performances" (p. 4) that builds community. Hispanic graduation ceremonies, later described in this dissertation, are examples of cultural performances.

Through ritual theory, Manning (2000) identified college ceremonies and rituals and categorized them by their larger purpose in human interaction. For example, Manning described graduation as a form of "frontier crossing" (2000, p. 8) and convocation as a form of initiation. While Manning claimed that rituals' "abundant presence on college campuses makes an argument for their importance even more convincing" (2000, p. 37), she suggested that the purely structuralist approach to studying ritual in higher education was inadequate to explain or appreciate the power of ritual. By structuralist, Manning referred to the work of van Gennep (1909/1992) who focused on the universalistic nature of ritual. Manning hypothesized that the diversity of rituals both between and within institutions of higher education discredited any notion of uniform experience. The highly variable nature of rituals at different colleges and universities reflected unique institutional histories as well as student compositions. Manning noted that the comparative lack of ritual at some colleges, such as community colleges, and the wide variety of rituals at others, underscored the difficulty of assuming one common ritual function.

Manning's (2000) noted that her focus on private institutions was a limitation in her own research, and many questions merited further exploration:

Many people debate whether all campuses, particularly community colleges or

recently established institutions, have rituals. Does a college have to be old with

a rich history for the events to be rituals? What can administrators and students

do to perpetuate rituals that build community spirit? How do they know that

they performed the rituals correctly? Why do these events continue, even after

their usefulness appears to be finished? And, my favorite question: can an institution start "new rituals"? (Manning, 2000, p. 11).

Manning's (2000) questions serve as points of departure for this dissertation. Institutional complexity, the universalistic themes of separation and transition, and the fundamental human needs for solidarity and belonging, would assume ritual prevalence at community colleges. However, the absence of rituals in community colleges, as suggested by Manning (2000), contradicts the universalistic, even biological nature of ritual (Stephenson, 2015). The capacity for rituals to function as emotional and spiritual mediators is particularly important in secular institutions such as community colleges. As Manning (2000) stated, "Rituals' ability to tap into our spiritual and transcendent side makes them an extremely important human activity" (p. 37). Kuh and Gonyea (2006) recognized that higher education struggles to incorporate spiritual dimensions. Pertinent to the community college student population, this 'transcendence' may be particularly important for groups who have been traditionally disenfranchised from society. One of the expert panelists, Tisdell (2007), referring to the work of Abalos (2007), suggested that students from oppressed groups reclaim four faces: the personal, the political, the historical, and the sacred. Secular ritual may provide a tool for reclaiming the sacred in the secular space of community colleges.

Collins and Lewis (2008) contributed to the literature on rituals in higher education by analyzing how rituals and traditions are used as tools of socialization at two Black women's colleges, Bennet and Spelman Colleges:

Traditions are interwoven into the collegiate experience for students from the moment they step onto the campus. They are greeted by campus artifacts and

symbols. Traditions allow for interaction with the members of the community

that seek to influence them and it is the vehicle by which history of the past

connects with the future. (p. 48)

Using a qualitative case-study approach, the authors described a hooding ceremony, senior day,

and a sisterhood induction ceremony. Many of the ceremonies used architecture, such as

prominent gates, to symbolize the entering and exiting of a transient college culture. Collins

and Lewis suggested that these rituals were efficacious because they were representative of an

authentic institutional focus on the needs of students. Specifically, "In order for socialization to

be successful, participants of these two college cultures must influence those seeking entrance

into the community, both knowingly and unknowingly" (2008, p. 56). The capacity for ritual to

have an unconscious impact on students was also described by Nielsen (2011) in her research

in Southern Utah University.

Quantz, O'Connor, and Magolda (2011), in *Rituals and Student Identity in Education:*

Ritual Critique for a New Pedagogy consolidated multiple theories of ritual and applied them

to American education institutions which "work to advantage the few over the many" (p. 155).

The authors rejected the focus on technical solutions, such as instructional methods or

curriculum, claiming that many problems are cultural and not technical in nature. Instead, the

authors suggested that schools place more emphasis on non-rational elements, such as respect

and trusting relationships that can be ritualized. Examining classroom behaviors through the

lens of ritual, Quantz, O'Connor, and Magolda (2011) presented several case studies from

varied educational settings, including a college classroom. In these learning environments, the

authors recognized ritual aspects of "costuming" (p. 87) and scripting that communicated

values and redistributed power as much as content.

As Manning (2000) observed, rituals at colleges reflect the diversity of institutional purpose as well as the diversity of the student body. Both the particular and universal nature of ritual in colleges is evident in the literature. Among higher education rituals, the white coat ceremony is particular to graduating medical professionals. A study of 18 different white coat ceremonies found considerable thematic overlap in both private and public medical schools based on an analysis of words and phrases commonly spoken at the ceremony (Karnieli-Miller, Frankel & Inui, 2013). While each ceremony was different, common themes emerged, including "professionalism; morality; humanism, and spirituality" (p. 99).

As Manning (2000) and Bronner (2012) suggested, four-year institutions are replete with myth, legend, ceremony, and ritual. Similarly, "brand communities," or non-geographical social networks based on identification with a product, event, or other psychological focus point, are evident at four-year institutions (Martin, Moriuchi, Smith, Moeder, & Nichols, 2015). The development and maintenance of strong brand communities are particularly important for lifelong affiliation, and are fundamental to successful fundraising. In their study, the authors hypothesized that rituals and traditions strengthened brand communities. A survey of 19,541 alumni (1,227 responding, or 6.3 percent) evaluated the relationship between alumni involvement, satisfaction, and knowledge of traditions and rituals. As these results suggested that knowledge of rituals and traditions were correlated with all levels of alumni loyalty, the authors concluded that "Relationships with alumni should be cultivated while they are students through traditions and rituals and working within the framework of the four brand community relationships" (p. 116). While this study is more relevant to a residential institution, the results suggest that rituals and traditions may have a long-term impact on participants and even influence future behavior.

While much of the literature on higher education and ritual focused on either student or administratively-driven activities, examples of classroom rituals have also been documented. Hallinger et al. (1996) described how Brother Blue at Lesley University started each course by breaking bread. DiMaggio (2009) described how students used ritual memory to "relate their present to their past" (p. 145) through writing. In one example, she described how an immigrant student's recounting of a Famadihana ritual of Madagascar, or the exhuming of corpses, led to discussions about the importance of maintaining a relationship with one's ancestors even as higher education and professional advancement separated them from the cultures that shaped them. Rituals have been more extensively studied in primary and secondary school settings, leaving a research gap and an opportunity for further exploration. Examples of research from these sectors are included later in this chapter under the section, Rituals in Education.

The universal nature of ritual is evident in the scholarship conducted on higher education rituals outside of the United States. Dacin, Munir, and Tracey (2010) interviewed 57 students to understand their experience of formal dining at Cambridge College. Using Grounded Theory and naturalistic inquiry, the researchers interpreted the highly scripted formal dining experience as a social performance through which the actors, the students, were integrated into upper class life. The authors concluded that "titles, designations, roles, seating position, artifacts, language, robes, and many of the other objects present are invoked to reinforce hierarchy and create boundaries that separate students from Fellows and staff" (2010, p. 1408). Respondents said that formal dining was one of the most intense experiences at the college, and through it they experienced a shift in social status. This article summarized how

rituals can be embedded into everyday experience, transforming participants' lives while serving to maintain a social order.

STUDENT SUCCESS THEORY: FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

The literature of rituals and higher education is largely descriptive and ethnographic. A few articles have emerged to consider the possibility of ritual creation, or at least ritual revival. Focusing on transition, Blumenkrantz and Goldstein (2014) adopted van Gennep's (1909/1992) *rites of passage* as an apt descriptor, equating 'separation' with 'going to college,' and the adjustment period with the 'liminal' phase. Building on this notion, the authors noted that few institutions of higher education "have capitalized on the natural power of college as a place of initiation" (p. 85). Blumenkrantz and Goldstein argued that van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage provided a useful lens with which to actively construct meaningful milestones. Through rites of passage, for example, practitioners may ask themselves: How do we welcome and orient students? To what degree do the institution's actions and offerings align with what was professed or publicized? Do the offerings truly align with beliefs, and do beliefs align with activities and actions? How does the college help form relationships, particularly guiding ones throughout the institution? Do various college constituents speak in one voice? Ultimately, rituals have the potential to communicate values, ethics, and commitment to the college community.

The articles and books reviewed thus far described students as passive actors in ritual exchanges. Students participating in a campus tour, or a graduation ceremony, are recipients of information and structure. In contrast, Gildersleeve (2017) categorized Latino graduation ceremonies as ritualized "truth-telling" (p. 101) exercises, or "parrhesia" (p. 105), as described at 11 different sites, including community colleges. Gildersleeve described parrhesia as

"speaking truth to power" (2017, p. 106), a mechanism to hold institutions and society accountable for systemic inequities. In the ceremonies described, graduates were afforded time to speak to the audience, to recognize significant others and mentors, and to make statements. In this new context, the graduation ceremony evolved from a rite of passage to an act of social transformation:

> To conceive of the Latino graduation ceremony as parrhesia – as a public
>
> pedagogy of the self — is to recognize the affordances of parrhesiastic actors
>
> not only tell the truth for the sake of their own self, but for the benefit of the
>
> greater public good. (p. 109)

In exiting the institution, these graduates took advantage of the opportunity to impart the wisdom of their experience without repercussion, strengthened by the authority conferred by their newly earned degrees. Gildersleeve's (2017) work is an example of how ritual continues to evolve in higher education to serve students, institutions, and society.

RITUALS IN EDUCATION

The search terms used in this dissertation focused on higher education and did not include primary and secondary education. Yet, the process of snowballing led to inclusion of at least one work that was specific to ritual theory in primary and secondary institutions rather than ritual practices. Bernstein, Elvin, and Peters (1966) wrote about ritual in education during the 1960s in England, a period of rapid change. The authors associated ritual with "the transmission and internalization of the expressive culture of the school" (1966, p. 436) emphasizing ritual's capacity to "create consensus, revivify the social order within the individual, deepen respect for and impersonalize authority relations" (p. 436). Distinguishing between consensual and differentiating rituals, consensual rituals unified and created common

purpose, whereas differentiating rituals demarcated levels of accomplishment. A consensual ritual, such as a morning sing, brought students together, whereas a differentiating ritual, such as an award ceremony, might set them apart. Pertinent to this dissertation, Bernstein, Elvin, and Peters (1966) suggested that during times of change and contexts of "social heterogeneity" (p. 433), the lack of social consensus diminished ritual's effectiveness. Similarly, Manning (2000) also suggested that rituals in private four-year institutions reflected a level of consensus that may not be found at other types of institutions.

Do rituals always require an environment of social homogeneity to take root? Can rituals emerge in community colleges with such diverse student populations, and be effective? The literature review and analysis provides the context for these questions through a review of review theory and student success theory. These questions are addressed in Chapter Five along with recommendations for practitioners.

STUDENT SUCCESS THEORY: FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Prior to the articulation of institution-based theories of success, Meyer (1969) developed a generalized theory of higher education that did not use the words 'student success,' 'persistence,' or 'retention,' because he defined success as access to, and a reflection of, social status. Reflecting a sociological approach, Meyer emphasized an institution's "ability to influence values, personality needs, and social roles or identities, which he referred to as their charter" (1969, p. 69). Meyer was most concerned with how the charter of elite institutions socialized its students to assume higher status roles in society through "diffuse socialization" (p. 6), or the adoption habits and attitudes that develop from being part of the environment. Diffuse socialization was more likely when the college was isolated, provided maximal opportunity for interaction within the college, exerted control over norms, and

professed a "distinctive ideology" (p. 27). While's Meyer work did not directly allude to

community colleges with open admissions policies, his description of the relative influence of

different institutional charters has broad application in student success.

Early institutional models of college student retention focused on four-year institutions

(Morrison & Silverman, 2012). In her comprehensive review, Aljohani (2016) described

Spady, Tinto, and Bean as the "most distinguished student retention models of the last four

decades" (p. 2). At the time Spady conducted his 1970 study of 683 first-year students at the

University of Chicago, the word 'retention' was not used, in favor of the word 'dropout' which

placed the onus on individual characteristics and behaviors. Using both college records and

interviews, Spady proposed that Durkheim's theory of suicide shared common ground with

college dropout, as both were caused by a lack of "collective affiliations" (p. 39). To Spady,

college was a social system like any other:

> It regards the decision to leave a particular social system as the result of a
>
> complex social process that includes family and previous educational
>
> background, academic potential, normative congruence, friendship support,
>
> intellectual development, grade performance, social integration, satisfaction,
>
> and institutional commitment. (1970, p. 38)

In other words, both academic and social integration are necessary. In addition to formulating

one of the first theories of dropout, Spady's research included a number of variables previously

undefined in the literature, including cosmopolitanism, family relationships, and normative

congruence. Cosmopolitanism was based on religious, ethnic, geographic, and parents'

professional characteristics. Family relationships were defined as perceptions of a happy early

life based on positive relationships with supportive parents, preferably as part of a two-parent

family. Normative congruence was defined as fit with the college based on academic and social preparedness, including institutional commitment. Spady's inclusion of psychological, along with demographic characteristics, reflected a more individualized theory of dropout. In Spady's analysis, psychological factors interacted with gender to influence student dropout. Using multivariate analysis, Spady found that men were much more likely to drop out because of academic difficulty whereas women were more likely to drop out for social reasons, including lack of institutional commitment.

While Morrison and Silverman (2012) stated that Spady's model "focused on the interaction between the student and the college's academic and social systems" (p. 69), a closer analysis of Spady's (1970) Empirical Model of the Undergraduate Dropout Process suggests individual rather than institutional factors were dominant. In fact, a pictorial representation of his model did not even include the institution (Spady, 1970, p. 58), but rather family background, academic potential and performance, social integration, and commitment. Cognizant of the limitations of his own research, Spady (1970) observed:

> Not until the forces that influence loyalty to the institution are understood, I
> would argue, can the major components in the dropout process be specified with
> some conceptual adequacy. (p. 39)

In other words, while much of dropout was quantifiable, much was a mystery. Later, Braxton and Shaw Sullivan (1997) stated, "institutional rates of student departure constitute a puzzle, one which might be labeled the departure puzzle" (p. 107).

Buildng on Spady's work and decades of research, Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975) aimed to "conceptualize" (p. 90) dropout. Emphasizing both social and academic integration:

the process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of

interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the

college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measured by

his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and

institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying

forms of dropout. (p. 94)

Tinto (1975), crediting Spady, drew from Durkheim's theory of suicide, as well as cost-benefit

theory to develop an institutional theory (rather than a systems theory) of dropout. According

to Tinto, dropout, like suicide, is a result of "malintegration," a response to a lack of "personal

interaction with other members of the collectivity" or holding values that are "divergent"

(Tinto, 1975, p. 91). Tinto constructed the theory based on research that found a relationship

between extracurricular involvement, friendships, and personal relationships with faculty or

college personnel and retention. Tinto noted that college success requires integration in both

the academic and the social structures as dropout can result from failure in either or both areas.

　　　　　According to Tinto (1975), individual characteristics and prior experiences are less

important than the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college

that most directly related to retention:

Given prior levels of goal and institutional commitment, it is the person's

normative and structural integration into the academic and social systems that

lead to new levels of commitment. (p. 95)

In other words, while Tinto identified personal characteristics as having a role in student

success, including demographics (including family background) and goals, they were only

important in as much as they had an effect on integration.

Tinto (1975) acknowledged the limitations of Durkheim's approach: suicide, like dropout, is influenced by a number of personal and demographic factors and cannot be entirely explained by an individual's navigation or a response to an environment. These characteristics included, for Tinto:

> background characteristics of individuals (such as those measured by social
>
> status, high school experiences, community of residence, etc., and individual
>
> attributes such as sex, ability, race, and ethnicity) but also expectational and
>
> motivational attributes of individuals (such as those measured by career and
>
> educational expectations and levels of motivation for academic achievement).
>
> (1975, p. 93)

Social status is particularly important, as "students of higher social status are more likely to graduate at all types of institutions than are lower status students" (Tinto, 1975, p. 114). Low grades, for example, are more likely to result in dropout for lower status students than for higher status students.

Similarly, Tinto (1975) underscored the impact of external factors on integration "that can affect integration within the more limited social and academic systems of the college" (p. 97). Tinto suggested that the job market was one such influential external force as perceptions about the value of the educational endeavor as compared to its costs (time and money) play a part in attrition. Acknowledging the non-rational nature of the process:

> Finally, the model of dropout proposed here accepts, as central to the process,
>
> the notion that perceptions of reality have real effects on the observer, and, for a
>
> variety of reasons, persons of varying characteristics may hold differing
>
> perceptions of apparently similar situations. In both integration into the

academic and social systems of the college and in the evaluation of the costs

and benefits of that and alternative forms of activity, it is the perceptions of the

individual that are important. (Tinto, 1975, p. 98)

Tinto described academic integration as both grades and perceptions of learning obtained.

Social integration, according to Tinto, also took many different forms, including a student's

perceptions of "fit" (1975, p. 107) as well as a student's success in navigating the social

environment "through friendship associations, of sufficient congruency with some part of the

social system of the college….." (pp. 108-109). Tinto acknowledged the presence and

influence of subgroups in the lives of students, and ultimately, in their decisions to withdraw.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Astin published a number of research articles attempting

to predict student retention based on personal factors and experiential factors (Morrison and

Silverman, 2012). Personal factors included academic history, parents' education, and study

habits. Experiential factors included what happened after college entry, such as living on

campus or having a part-time job on campus. In 1984, Astin published his Theory of

Involvement, emphasizing integration, similar to Tinto's Interactionalist Theory. However,

Astin's theory was distinct in that it was less concerned with conditions and characteristics

prior to college: instead, the onus fell on the institution to create experiences that favored

involvement. Involvement Theory made a critical contribution to student success theory by

suggesting that student success was achievable under the right conditions.

In contrast to early psychological theories, Astin (1984) was more interested in

behavior than motivation. Students with low motivation, for example, can be supported

through providing behavioral adjustments in the environment as long as these adjustments

favor involvement. Astin cited studies that suggested that living on campus, holding a job on

campus, involvement in sports, fraternity or sororities, or ROTC, and honors programs

promoted involvement and, therefore, retention. In the classroom, through active learning,

faculty could promote retention. In sum, the theory:

> Thus, all institutional policies and practices — those relating to nonacademic as
>
> well as academic matters — can be evaluated in terms of the degree to which
>
> they increase or reduce student involvement. Similarly, all college personnel —
>
> counselors and student personnel workers as well as faculty and administrators
>
> — can assess their own activities in terms of their success in encouraging
>
> students to become more involved in the college experience. (Astin, 1984, p.
>
> 529)

Astin's theory assumed institutional fit. As Astin stated, "The origin of such effects probably

lies in the student's ability to identify with the institution. It is easier to become involved when

one can identify with the college environment" (1984, p. 524).

In addition to proposing a Theory of Involvement, Astin placed student success

literature into categories. For example, Astin suggested that many institutions operate under

"resource theory" (1984, p. 520) that link more faculty, better students, and increasing

extracurricular offerings with student success. Astin suggested that this operating theory does

little to make sure that the students who need the resources take advantage of them. Further,

the individualized theory states that the more institutions tailor offerings to meet the individual

student, the more likely students are to succeed. Critiquing both of these practices for failing to

take into account student involvement, he noted that highly involved students devote time and

energy on campus studying and interacting with faculty and other students. Uninvolved

students are not engaged socially or academically, dedicating little time to campus activities or relationships.

Spady, Tinto and Astin constructed their theories using scholarship from the fields of anthropology, psychology, and sociology, including ritual theory. In contrast, Bean's (1983) student success theory borrowed from industry, specifically, the Price/Mueller model of workplace turnover (Price & Mueller, 1981) that proposed that students, like employees, respond to compensation or reward. Bean (1983) replaced the concept of financial compensation with other academic and social rewards such as grades, practical value, and development. Specifically, grades were the proxy for compensation as "the closest surrogate to pay in work organizations" (p. 133). In addition to grades, compensation for students also took the form of perceptions of educational value and levels of self-development. Reflecting Price/Mueller's model, Bean used student satisfaction to replace work satisfaction, as measured by student satisfaction with courses and membership in campus organizations. These elements were quantified through a 98-item survey of more than 4,000 students in the Midwest in the spring of 1979. Similar to the model of industrial turnover, satisfaction was measured on inputs, including routinization, participation, communication, integration, and distributive justice. Using path analysis, Bean found that satisfaction, practical value, intent to leave, and opportunity were significantly related to dropout, with intent to leave — an indicator of institutional commitment — emerging as the strongest predictor. This finding reflected Spady's observation that all models of dropout must integrate "forces that influence loyalty to the institution" (Spady, 1970, p. 39).

As scholars reflected on the theories put forth by Spady, Tinto, and Astin, a number of critiques emerged that contribute to this dissertation's understanding of student success.

Tierney classified Tinto's (1975) model as "general" rather than "individualistic" (1992, p. 605) and further questioned the very ritual foundations of Tinto's Interactionalist Theory:

> Tinto has suggested that we ought to think of colleges in light of Durkheim's and Van Gennep's work. Following Durkheim, Tinto argues that to the degree participants are integrated into the institution's fabric, the greater likelihood exists that the individual will not develop a sense of anomie, and will not commit "suicide" by leaving the institution. In effect, a college is an institution designed as a rite of passage that functions in much the same manner as ritualized institutions in other societies. (Tierney, 1992, p. 606)

Tierney rejected that assertion that all individual must integrate, or adhere to "a uniform set of values and attitudes" (1992, p. 607). Further, Tierney suggested that Tinto's adoption of van Gennep's ritual theory of rites of passage required cultural displacement. According to Tierney, "An American Indian who sets foot on a mainstream campus undergoes a disruptive cultural experience not because college is a rite of passage, but because the institution is culturally distinct from the Indian youth's own culture" (p. 608). Further, Tinto framed staying or leaving an institution as choice, whereas van Gennep's rites of passage were not personal choices, but events that occurred in closed systems.

Other theoretical models focus on the process of becoming a college student, rather than the outcome once a student arrived. While Weidman (1989) affirmed Tinto's emphasis on the importance of both social and academic integration, Weidman's socialization model integrated the larger world of relationships, including those outside of college, into college experience. Focusing on norms, Weidman's (1989) model included interpersonal and institutional relationships as they helped to establish norms. Norms, he stated:

provide the basic standards for the regulation of individual behavior in groups

as well as in the larger society. Social integration, from this perspective, refers

to the extent to which the society or subunit (e.g., institution, organization,

group, etc.) is characterized by a shared experience of common norms that are

reflected in solidarity, of that included external factors, including parents and

non-college peers. (pp. 88-89)

Weidman's socialization model emphasized several factors not explicit in previous work. First, borrowing from Thornton and Nardi (1975), Weidman (1989) described four stages of socialization: "anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal" (p. 91). "Anticipatory socialization" (Weidman, 1989, p. 90) occurred as students projected into the future about what would be expected of them in the college environment, while the formal, informal, and personal occurred after the student arrived at college. In other words, according to Weidman, socialization begins even before students come on campus. Weidman's model also explicitly emphasized the role of external influences: parents. In his conceptual model, parents were placed at the top of the hierarchy, and their influence touched all subsequent domains.

Weidman's (1989) model did not allude to student success, or its antithesis, dropout. Yet, his work is included in this dissertation because of its effective description of multiple influences, including those that occur prior to enrollment. This concept was not entirely new: Spady, Tinto, and Astin included background characteristics in their model. However, Weidman's description of anticipatory socialization suggests that students can be shaped prior to matriculation with thoughtful intervention.

In the decades after Tinto first proposed the Interactionalist Theory, his theory was subject to revision and enhancement. These theory enhancements reflect the influence of

student attributes as well the contributions of institutions, including the classroom experience.

Bean and Eaton (2000), for example, suggested that leaving college is psychologically

mediated in that students who "adopt an attitude that they fit in certain academic environments

are likely to become more academically integrated" (p. 49). Rather than advancing a new

theory of student success, the authors suggest that Attitude-Behavior Theory, Coping

Behavioral Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Attribution Theory, may be relevant to academic

and social integration through students' personality characteristics. Similarly, Berger's social

reproduction theory (2000) emphasized how students' sociological backgrounds may influence

not only college choice but dropout behavior, suggesting that students are not making choices

as much as they are acting out social expectations. Some theory enhancements considered how

institutions influence student success through the decisions they make. Laden, Milem, and

Crowson (2000) suggested that student retention may reflect institutions' strategic choices,

including investment in student-faculty relationships.

Revisionists to Tinto's Interactionalist Theory also proposed a focus on campus

climate. Baird (2000), for example, described colleges as four composite parts: "the physical

setting, organizational factors, the human aggregate, and social climate" (p. 65). While both

social integration and academic development influenced persistence, Baird (2000) emphasized

that they are based on students' experiences that include:

> friendliness or cohesiveness of the student culture, warmth or quality of faculty-
>
> student relations, flexibility and freedom versus rigidity and control of academic
>
> and other programs, overall rigor of academic standards, emphasis on personal
>
> expression and creativity, emphasis on research versus concern for undergraduate

learning, importance of fun and big-time sports, and sense of a shared identity or

mission. (p. 70).

While some of what a student experiences on campus may be subjective, it may also reveal

objective realities that merit critical evaluation in any exploration of student success.

While some scholars focused on theory enhancements and revisions, other scholars

shifted the discussion from the individual or the institution to the culture. Kuh and Love (2000)

encouraged colleges to adjust Tinto's Interactionalist Theory to each institution's unique

composition. While acknowledging Tinto's theory applicability, Kuh and Love pointed to

difficulties with his model, particularly for "historically underrepresented groups" (2000, p.

196). Specifically, Kuh and Love (2000) advocated for a cultural framework:

> An institution's culture represents both product and process. That is, it is
>
> manifested in accumulated understandings acquired and expressed through daily
>
> interactions and routines, common symbols, and special ceremonies and
>
> traditions. At the same time, culture is constantly evolving, albeit imperceptibly,
>
> shaped by interactions between old and new members and contact with other
>
> people from other organizations and cultures. (p. 198)

Kuh and Love (2000) argued that campus culture was not monochromatic, but instead

"manifested in accumulated understandings acquired and expressed through daily interactions

and routines, common symbols, and special ceremonies and traditions" (p. 198). In other

words, student success was informed by students' interaction with a campus culture with the

capacity to "change both the students and the larger institutional environments and

subenvironments" (p. 198). By describing higher education as a culture, the onus shifted from a

singular focus on the student or the institution to "cultural forces" (p. 198). While stating that

the propositions "do not constitute a theory nor are they the products of an exhaustive, comprehensive account of all cultural influences on persistence" (p. 200), the authors suggested these propositions as a "lens" (p. 196) to view student success:

1. The college experience, including a decision to leave college, is mediated through a student's cultural meaning-making system.

2. One's cultures of origin mediate the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.

3. Knowledge of a student's cultures of origin and the cultures of immersion is needed to understand a student's ability to successfully negotiate the institution's cultural milieu.

4. The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin and the cultures of immersion.

5. Students who traverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.

6. The amount of time a student spends in one's cultures of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.

7. The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's sociocultural connections to the academic program and to affinity groups.

8. Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence. (p. 201)

Similar to Spady and Tinto, Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) categorized student success theories into five major perspectives: sociological, organizational, psychological, cultural, and economic. Rather than applying the pipeline analogy, college was depicted as a "meandering" path (p. 12) that begins with pre-college experiences and proceeds with college experiences. College experiences are mediated by institutional characteristics as well as student behaviors, or engagement:

> At the intersection of student behaviors and institutional conditions is student engagement. Student engagement represents aspects of student behavior and institutional performance that colleges and universities can do something about, at least on the margins. (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 13).

Through the phrase "at least on the margins" (2006, p. 13), the authors alluded to the enormity of the task. Student success, even when narrowly defined as graduation, was complex, and colleges could only exert some influence.

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt and Associates (2005) further contributed to the student success literature through describing characteristics of 20 DEEP (Documenting Effective Education Practice) colleges:

- A "living" mission and "lived" educational philosophy
- An unshakeable focus on student learning
- Environments adapted for educational enrichment
- Clearly marked pathways to student success
- An improvement oriented ethos
- Shared responsibility for educational quality and student success. (p. 24)

While none of the colleges were community colleges, at least one employed ritual in the orientation of students. For example, at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina, a predominately Black college, new students were introduced to the college culture through a pinning ceremony. After speeches by "the Chancellor, Miss WSSU, and other dignitaries, the first year 'Lambs' walk through the Arches for good luck" (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt and Associates, 2005, p. 56).

Theories of student success continue to develop, some outside of the United States. While retention rates in the United Kingdom are higher than the United States, they are declining as participation in higher education increases (McQueen, 2009). Seeking to enhance existing student success theories, such as Tinto's Interactionalist model, McQueen suggested greater emphasis on the emotional lives of students and that existing models may be strengthened through integrating Merton's (1938) concept of anomie, the disorientation society members experience when they are unable to meet cultural expectations.

Describing low graduation rates in European countries, Schmidt et al. (2010) suggested that the predominance of lecture rather than active learning may negatively correlate with student success. The authors proposed a new theory called "time for self-study theory" and tested it in medical schools, finding higher graduation rates in institutions less reliant on lecture. Despite the limitation to one unique environment, this exploration suggests that the process of theory generation is not over, and that classroom experiences warrant further consideration. Further, the time for self-study theory reflects Tinto's inclusion of academic integration and Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan's (2000) work on active learning and retention.

STUDENT SUCCESS THEORY: TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

As stated earlier in this chapter, Aljohani (2006) described the 1970s as the decade of "building theories" (p. 2). Early theories were constructed in response to four-year institutions. Tinto (1975) suggested that his theory may not effectively describe commuter students, as confirmed by the research of Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983), who distinguished the commuter experience from the residential experience through a follow-up study. In 1979, a sample was taken from 579 incoming commuter freshmen from the Midwest who completed the American Council of Education (ACE) survey. The ACE instrument, which measured student motivation and background characteristics, was supplemented by a survey about the first-year experience, to which 260 (45%) students responded. Through analysis of the data, the authors found that background characteristics were highly correlated with student success in a commuter institution. Second, the authors found that academic integration was more important than social integration for students in a commuter school. Institutional and goal commitment were ultimately not significant predictors of retention. The researchers concluded that commuter students are distinguishable from residential students not just in terms of their academic and social backgrounds but also in how the college experience socializes them.

As research evolved, a conceptual model for non-traditional students appeared. Bean and Metzner (1985) described "older, part-time, and commuter students" (p. 485) to be less concerned about the social environment than the learning environment. For such students, environmental variables, including finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity for transfer, were considered to be more influential than institutional variables for non-traditional students. Perceptions about the usefulness of the degree were particularly important to non-traditional students. While Bean and Metzner

captured some of the social circumstances that challenged non-traditional students, their model described commuters in monochromatic terms that did not always reflect the diverse range of interests, needs, and cultures of this group.

That Tinto's Interactionalist Theory did not address the specific conditions of racial and ethnic minorities was noted by researchers. Tierney (1992) acknowledged that Tinto's Interactionalist Theory was an accurate description of some students. For example, full time students were more likely to persist than part time students; residential students were more likely to persist than commuters, and younger students more than older students. For Tierney, however, it was not sufficient to identify some student groups as at risk without identifying how conditions can be changed to ameliorate the risk. As Braxton and Sullivan (1997) indicated, Tierney perceived theory generation as having a "prescriptive function to identifying marginalizing discourses, which by their nature systematically frame populations as 'outsiders,' and consequently liberate those populations oppressed by those discourses" (p. 152).

Specifically, Tierney (1992) found Tinto's use of van Gennep's model of ritual transition as inapplicable to marginalized groups. According to Tierney, the rites of passage studied by van Gennep were based on transitions *within* one culture (from childhood to adulthood for example), and not intended for application to transitions from one culture to another. While it is true that for many mainstream Americans, college is a rite of passage with "functional vehicles for incorporating the young into society by way of their integration into the college or university" (Tierney, 1992, p. 606), for lower socioeconomic groups it is a departure from their norms. Tierney based his argument on his study of American Indian college students. Through interviews with 200 students on community college campuses, a

common theme emerged: integration that required first separation from a culture of origin is in direct conflict with traditional cultures.

Research on the struggles faced by non-traditional students in higher education were preceded by explorations into cultural differences in society. Valentine (1971) proposed an alternative way of looking at African-American culture as not one of cultural deficit but of cultural difference. Biculturalism is a way to show "how people learn and practice both in the mainstream culture and ethnic cultures at the same time" (Valentine, 1971, p. 143). As institutions of higher education became more diverse, theoretical models emerged to emphasize the role of race and ethnicity in student success. Rendón (1994) proposed that "colleges and universities, originally designed by and for the privileged, in many ways, still function as such" (p. 34). Through student interviews, Rendón observed that while traditional students (who she defined as majority students) saw themselves as likely to succeed, nontraditional students, including community college students, expressed reservations. These students were in need of validation from individuals who could directly or indirectly address any beliefs on the part of students that they were not in the right place and could not achieve their goals. Specifically, Rendón (1994) stated:

1. Validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development.

2. When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable. Lacking validation, students feel crippled, silenced, subordinate, and/or mistrusted.

3. Like involvement, validation is a prerequisite to student development.

4. Validation can occur both in- and out-of-class. In-class validating agents

include faculty, classmates, lab instructors, and teaching assistants. Out-of-class

validating agents can be 1) significant others, such as a spouse, boyfriend, or

girlfriend; 2) family members, such as parents, siblings, relatives, and

children; 3) friends, such as classmates and friends attending and not attending

college; and, 4) college staff, including faculty who meet with students out-of-

class, counselors/advisors, coaches, tutors, teaching assistants, and resident

advisors.

5. Validation suggests a developmental process. It is not an end in itself. The

more students get validated, the richer the academic and personal experience. (p.

44)

Validation, however, would require an understanding of different student cultures.

Rendón (2002) applied this emerging theory of validation to a program called Community

College Puente that was initiated at Chabot College in 1981. Community College Puente was

designed to increase the number of Hispanic community college students transferring to four-

year colleges and universities. This program, according to Rendón, had all the aspects of

validation, including support from in- and out-of-class agents, both academic validation and

interpersonal validation. The validation model proposed that institutions proactively engage

students first-generation, low income, and students of color who do not have the confidence or

the knowledge to navigate the system.

Rendón's (1994) validation model was based on the premise that some groups more

than others require social support to strengthen their resolve to persist in higher education.

However, research has been conducted to evaluate this underlying assumption. In Palmer,

Davis, and Maramba's (2011) interview of 11 Black underprepared male college students at a historically Black institution, family emerged as central to student identity and success. Family members, including parents, grandparents, and siblings were found to be sources of motivation and support, even if they themselves did not attend college. In other words, the requisite of Tinto's model, separation, may not be appropriate for all individuals and groups

In their revision of Tinto's Interactionalist Theory, Berger and Braxton (1998) focused on the role of campus climate in the social integration process. Tinto's revised model (1987/1993) emphasized the role of "congruence" (p. 50) in the student decision to stay or leave an institution, focusing on more everyday social interactions. In contrast, Berger and Braxton posited that institutional cultural characteristics, including presidential and administrative styles, may have an impact on student success. Perceptions of fairness, consistent expectations, clear communication, as well as decision-making may impact students' decisions.

Research by Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) summarized thirty years of research on student retention and devoted considerable attention to what they define as "commuter colleges" (p. 35). The authors suggested that Tinto's Interactionalist Theory "lacks explanatory power in commuter institutional settings" (2004, p. 17). For example, as family relationships were important for commuter students, theoretical models of separation and integration were not as applicable. In their theoretical model, Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon proposed sixteen elements of a successful commuter experience, categorized by the authors as economic, organizational, psychological, sociological, and institutional.

Economic: The lower the cost of college attendance incurred by students, the

greater their likelihood of attending college. (p. 36)

Organizational: The more a student perceives that the institution is committed to the welfare of its students, the lower the likelihood of the student's departure. The more a student perceives that the institution exhibits institutional integrity, the lower the likelihood of the student's departure. (p. 38)

Psychological: Motivation to graduate from college exerts a positive influence on student persistence. Motivation to make steady progress toward college completion also positively impacts student retention. (p.38). The greater a student's need for control and order in his or her daily life, the greater the student's likelihood of departure (p. 38). The stronger a person's belief that he or she can achieve a desired outcome through his or her own efforts, the less likely the student will depart from college. (p. 39). The greater a student's awareness of the effects of his or her decisions and actions on other people, the greater the student's likelihood of departure (p. 39). The greater a student's need for affiliation, the greater the student's likelihood of departure (p. 39).

   Sociological: As parents' educational level increases, the likelihood of student departure from a commuter college or university also increases. (p. 40). Support from significant others for college attendance decreases the likelihood of student departure from a commuter college or university. (p. 40). The probability of student departure from a commuter college or university decreases for students who participate in communities of learning. (p. 40). The probability of student departure from a commuter college or university increases for students who engage in anticipatory socialization before entering college. (p. 41).

Institutional commitment: Student entry characteristics affect the level of

initial commitment to the institution. The initial level of institutional commitment

to the institution affects the subsequent level of commitment to the institution. (p.

41). The greater the degree of academic integration perceived by students, the

greater their degree of subsequent commitment to the institution. The greater the

degree of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of

student persistence at college. (p. 42).

While Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) did not attempt to generate a new

theory, their work strengthened Tinto's Interactionalist Theory through these enhancements for

commuter students.

In some instances, instead of proposing new educational theories, theories from other

disciplines were imported to enhance the student success discussion. Schuetz (2008) explored

self-determination theory as a lens to understand community college student success, using a

mixed methods approach. According to Shuetz, self-determination theory "is a well-validated

theory of motivation asserting that students' innate psychological needs for belonging (or

relatedness), competence and autonomy must be satisfied for optimal engagement to emerge"

(p. 311). Schuetz evaluated the theory through 30 interviews with adult students, triangulating

the results with 1,000 student responses from the Community College Survey of Student

Engagement (CCSSE). This study sample included community college students over 18 who

worked at least 25 hours per week, focusing on belonging, competence, autonomy, and

engagement. According to both the analysis of interviews and the CCSSE survey results,

campus characteristics influenced student success through reinforcing specific student

behaviors.

Próspero, Russell, & Shetal (2012) also studied self-determination theory and student success in a group of first generation Hispanic college students. The authors described three types of self-determination: intrinsic (enjoying classes, learning, or challenging oneself), extrinsic (going to college because of the rewards or because others are doing it), and amotivation (going to college but not seeing the value, either intrinsic or extrinsic). In their study, a total of 252 community college students, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, filled out the Academic Motivational Scale based on the three categories. The results suggested that Hispanic first-generation students were more likely to have intrinsic motivation than their non-Hispanic first-generation counterparts. The findings suggested the inclusion of cultural characteristics into the student success model. Motivation, for example, as included in Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's model on persistence among commuter students (2004) may have distinct manifestations across ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups.

New ways continued to emerge to reconceptualize student success for groups who may not live on campus. Jacoby (2015) focused on commuter students in his exploration of theories to understand their pathways. Through applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Jacoby suggested that commuter students cannot access the full richness of their institutions because they are on the outside in very basic ways. Further applying the theory of marginality by Schlossberg, students who feel outside of an institution are less likely to succeed and ultimately "institutional policies and practices should make all students feel that they matter, that they are central rather than marginal" (Jacoby, 2015, p. 5). In his work, Jacoby does not succeed in describing how these theories may be used to make significant changes to institutional culture to support student success.

SUCCESS AS DEFINED OUTSIDE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This dissertation focused on theories to explain how students succeed in institutions of higher education. Tinto (1987/1993) placed student success into four categories that emerged chronologically: intellectual theories, psychological theories, societal theories and organizational theories. Even though psychological theories are less dominant in higher education at this time, two recent books, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Dweck, 2006) and *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (Duckworth, 2016), explored the psychological dimensions of success.

In the book *Mindset,* Dweck (2006) asked: "How can a simple belief have the power to transform your psychology, and as a result, your life?" (p. 15). Dweck described personal character, or makeup, as more important than ability, or what she defined as "fixed traits" (p. 52). In her observation of pre-med students, Dweck observed that success was less determined by ability than by motivation and the ability to develop strategies to succeed, and to change them as needed.

In exploring student success, this dissertation is focused on theories with practical implications. To what degree can an individual's general attitude and approach be altered and improved, and how? *Mindset* suggested that the subtle and not-so-subtle messages society sends influences how learners react to challenges. For example, by praising speed and by associating success with native intelligence, teachers, leaders, and peers risk constructing a falsity of guaranteed success that undercuts the essential values of persistence and hard work. Dweck's work would suggest that institutions have the capacity to improve students' likelihood of developing a success orientations and resilience in the face of challenges.

In *Grit*, Duckworth (2016), proposed a similar theory. Through case studies, Duckworth explored why some individuals succeeded under duress while others did not. In her study of West Point students, Duckworth observed that some students dropped out from the rigorous demands of a particularly difficult period, called Beast, while others did not. Those who persevered evidenced an unusual amount of determination and resilience as well as a clear focus on what they wanted. Grit, Duckworth suggested, defined this combination of attributes.

To study grit, Duckworth developed and implemented a scale at West Point, before applying it to other contexts, including the Chicago Public Schools. Duckworth found that responses on the grit scale had a greater relationship to graduation than other domains, including study skills. Relevant to education, Duckworth found that students who earned more degrees were grittier than those who earned fewer degrees, and students who earned credits without earning a degree scored lower on the grit score than those who graduated.

Duckworth applied her theory to many other contexts, including a spelling bee contest, and Ivy League college students. Through her study of Ivy League college students, Duckworth found that SAT scores were inversely related to grit scores. This led Duckworth to surmise that talent does not always determine achievement. Based on her experience teaching mathematics, Duckworth observed that the most naturally talented math students were not always the ones who excelled. The force behind success was more likely to be focused effort, and as a teacher Duckworth questioned how she could support students' capacity to persevere. Rather than viewing grit as an unchangeable personality trait, Duckworth noted that grit scores grow with age and can be modified through the process of developing interests, investing in practice, finding purpose, and embracing a positive attitude about challenges and setbacks.

Early theories of student success focused on individual psychological traits and ignored the influence of the environment (Tinto, 1987/1993, p. 84). More recently, the theory enhancement proposed by Bean and Eaton (2000) served to remind practitioners of the power of psychology, noting that students who "adopt an attitude that they fit in certain academic environments are likely to become more academically integrated" (p. 49). Yet, the inclusion of character traits into student success models is only justifiable if they are conceived of as changeable. In two separate works, Dweck (2006) and Duckworth (2016) proposed that character is malleable, and can shape a life toward success.

RITUAL THEORY

Stephenson (2015) described the importance of rituals: "Ritual, like language, tool use, symbolism, and music, is one of the constituent elements in the mix of what it means to be human" (p. 1). Rituals are evident in every society and organization throughout history, from prehistoric to modern. Deal and Kennedy (1983) recognized rites and rituals in corporate culture as "dramatizations of the company's basic cultural values" (p. 62). Collins (1994) noted that studying ritual is difficult because sociologists, micro-sociologists, and anthropologists use the term in slightly different ways. This dissertation embraced the multitude of definitions in order to expand notions of ritual and its potential role in student success.

In his book, *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction*, Stephenson (2015) underscored the biological roots of human behavior in ritualization theory, or the "conspicuous anatomical features and behavioral repertoires in animals" (p. 10) that then evolved to "enhance communication, create social bonds and hierarchies, appease aggression, establish territory, share food, regulate mating, and reduce intragroup hostilities among individuals" (p. 11). According Stephenson, ritual was always part of the human experience: "It is not as though we

evolved as human beings and then at some point decided to start doing ritual; rather, ritualization played an adaptive role in the course of both biological and cultural evolution" (2015, p. 21). The hypothesis that human ritual behavior evolved from animal ritual behavior reinforces the essential role of ritual in human emotional and social life.

The list of ritual theories included in this chapter is not comprehensive. Ultimately, they were selected based on their relevance to the research question through the process described in Chapter Two. Ritual theories were included in this dissertation if they were referenced in student success theories, such as van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage in Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975). Other ritual theories were included that sought to explain the dynamics of complex human behavior in social, and not just religious, contexts, or if they sought to explain institutional behavior.

DURKHEIM

The study of rituals in organizations is based on the foundational works of several nineteenth century sociologists and anthropologists. In his book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim (1912/2008) provided a basis for all work on ritual. For Durkheim, rituals and symbols were elementary forms that served to bind members of a society to each other. Through his study of Australian tribes, Durkheim recognized that clans were often represented symbolically by totems in the form of animals. Different tribes sharing the same totem experienced solidarity and a sense of duty toward each other. Totems were not displayed at home: they were worn, tattooed on the body, or enacted. During imitative rituals, men of tribes mimicked the behaviors of local animals, developing a kind of peace and comfort with the local environment. During representative rites, tribe members reenacted mythical events as a way to reinforce tribal unity. Rituals were performed during times of stress, such as illness, or

transition, such as death. The social function of ritual behavior was rooted in religion, which he described as the "division of things into sacred and profane" (Durkheim, 1912/2008, p. 167).

Durkheim's emphasis on assembly in ritual was echoed in the works of later scholars. While some rituals (and totems) can be private, many rituals took the form of assemblies that shared space and emotion. Summarizing Durkheim, Alpert (1938) viewed ritual as an asset that prepared individuals for the world through discipline, social cohesion, social structural maintenance, and finally, emotional release.

VAN GENNEP

In addition to Durkheim, Tinto was inspired by van Gennep (1909/1992) who studied how rites of passage eased social transitions from one life phase to another. In *Rites of Passage*, van Gennep (1909/1992) wrote:

> The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts, like those which make up apprenticeship in our trades. (p. 3).

According to van Gennep (1909/1992), rites of passage included life changes, such as birth, puberty, and death, as well as temporal changes, such as months and seasons. Further, he subdivided rites of passage into "rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation" (p. 11). As examples, funerals fall into the category of rites of separation, marriage into the category of incorporation, and pregnancy into transition.

Tinto's application of van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage to his Interactionalist Theory did not incorporate the expanse of van Gennep's work. A categorizer, van Gennep

divided rituals into distinguishing features, "direct" (p. 8) rites, or those intended to create

immediate effect, from "indirect" (p. 8) rites, or those designed to act on conditions or people

over the long term. Van Gennep further recognized passage rituals that carry an individual

from one physical terrain to another, such as the Jewish practice of touching a *mezuzah* upon

entry or departure from the home. Most relevant to this dissertation, van Gennep recognized

that not all of the members of any society have the same access to resources. Speaking

metaphorically, van Gennep wrote:

> An individual or group that does not have an immediate right, by birth or
>
> through specially acquired attributes, to enter a particular house and to become
>
> established in one of its sections is in a state of isolation. (1909/1992, p. 26)

In other words, rites occur in a complex social context, whereby they may function to intensify

or reduce demarcations: either way, they have individual psychological as well as social

implications. As an example, van Gennep (1909/1992) described the ritual treatment of "the

stranger" (p. 26) in different cultures. Even as specific rituals to ease the transition may differ,

they all culminate in a ceremonial incorporation, including eating and drinking or the exchange

of gifts that symbolize the "confirmation of a bond" (van Gennep, 1909/1992, p. 29). The

provision of a gift provides a level of social control, as "Exchanges have a direct constraining

effect: to accept a gift is to be bound to the giver" (p. 29).

In observing African and Australian tribes, van Gennep (1909/1992) witnessed how

changes in physical or social status can constitute a crisis for an individual and the society,

observing the role of ritual in helping individuals navigate change. Van Gennep was the first to

recognize the "liminal" (p. 22), a state denoting confusion when society members are between

identities. This phase was later described in the work of Tinto (1975) as descriptive of college students.

GOFFMAN

Definitions of ritual and its functions transitioned throughout the twentieth century, from a focus on the rarified to the quotidian. In *Interaction Ritual*, Goffman (1967/1982) focused on "face-to-face interaction in natural settings" (p. 1) where individuals became "sacred objects" (Collins, 1994, p. 45). In modern terms, these objects may include "the individual self" (Collins, 1994, p. 45), which is elevated in importance. Goffman (1967/1982) stated:

> Every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him either in face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants. In each of these contacts, he tends to act out what is sometimes called a line -- that is, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through that his evaluation of the participants, especially himself. (p. 5)

Goffman defined "face" as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5) or "social situation" (p. 167). Goffman defined the social situation as:

> …any environment of mutual monitoring possibilities that lasts during the time two or more individuals find themselves in one another's immediate physical presence, and extends over the entire territory within which this mutual monitoring is possible (p. 167).

Rituals in the Goffman tradition included greetings, signaling the continuation of a relationship as it was left off, and farewells that symbolized a commitment to an ongoing

relationship. Goffman identified ritualized behavior among young boys engaged in a coin toss, and social manners and etiquette as forms of social ritual. He studied behavior among residents of a psychiatric ward, a "logical place to learn about personal proprieties is among persons who have been locked up for spectacularly failing to maintain them" (p. 48). Goffman also removed ritual from a conception of particular culture to a reflection of a more universalistic culture. As he stated:

> Throughout this paper it has been implied that underneath their differences in culture, people everywhere are the same. If persons have a universal human nature, they themselves are not to be looked to for an explanation of it. One must look rather to the fact that societies everywhere, if they are to be societies, must mobilize their members as self-regulating participants in social encounters. One way for mobilizing the individual for this purpose is through ritual; he is taught to be perceptive, to have feeling attached to self and a self-expressed through face, to have pride, honor, and dignity, to have considerateness, to have tact, and a certain amount of poise. (p. 44)

Can we be "taught to be perceptive" as Goffman suggested, through ritual? This theory of ritual put forth by Goffman provides a rich canvas upon which to consider momentary social interactions as templates for teaching and transformation in institutions. According to Collins (1994), Goffman believed, "Ritual takes place in a condition of situational *copresence*" which can become "a full-scale counter by becoming a *focused interaction*" (p. 43). Ritual was distinguished by Goffman not by repetition, structure, or ceremony, but by the deep level of focused participation engaged in by the actors.

Goffman's definition of ritual was embraced by educational scholars Quantz, O'Connor, and Magolda (2011) in *Rituals and Student Identity in Education*. While they did not propose a discrete theory, they consolidated historic ritual theories and applied them to the field of education, including higher education, concluding:

> One rule of ritual is that the more we recognize it as ritual, the less likely it is to affect us; while the less we realize we are participating in a ritual, the more likely it is that its effects will be realized. (Quantz,, O'Connor, and Magolda, 2011, p. 2)

TURNER

In *The Ritual Process,* Turner (1969/1995) focused on the ways in which groups "achieved order and meaning" (p. vii). According to Quantz (1999), Turner saw society as "dynamic and amorphous rather than static and clearly defined" (p. 500), and ritual was a way for its members to restore balance in the midst of change. In addition to recognizing how the "liminal" phase was ritualized in post-tribal societies to create community, according to Quantz (1999), Turner made a major contribution to the field of ritual by recognizing that individual members of society can ascribe somewhat unique and independent meanings to the same ritual or set of symbols, creating solidarity between participants while simultaneously maintaining independence of thought and meaning. As an additional contribution, Turner distinguished between ceremony and ritual: While ritual serves to dissolve social hierarchies, "ceremony reinforces structure" (Quantz, 1999, p. 505).

In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Turner (1969/1995) observed how the 1960s counterculture emphasized community over hierarchy: "They stress personal relationships rather than social obligations, and regard sexuality as a polymorphic instrument

of immediate *communitas* rather than as the basis for an enduring structural social tie" (Turner, 1969/1995, p. 113). According to Bell (1992/2009), Turner viewed ritual as a mechanism to reduce conflict and to renegotiate relationships creating, not just reaffirming, this unity through "social drama" (p. 39). To Quantz (2011), Turner emphasized the transformative capacity of rituals.

In his analysis of van Gennep's work, Turner (1969/1995) suggested that rituals in a tribal society have an equivalent in modern societies: "work" (p. 39). The use of the word "work" in this context did not refer to economic activity as much as certain activities conducted on behalf of, or with others. In other words, according to Turner, ritual can also encompass a number of leisure activities, including festivals or games that create a spirit of "communitas" (1969/1995, p. 52), or shared experience during times of great stress. Turner (1977) later applied the term "liminal" to individuals and groups going through significant transitions. Bronner (2012) applied Turner's definition of ritual and "liminal" to college campuses, viewing campus traditions as a means for college students to deal with change and also to carve out a sense of community during a time that is intense and transitional.

The capacity of ritual to transform is underscored in Mayer's (2006) study of ritual celebration in a prestigious Mexican college in the 1800's during a time of political unrest. Like Quantz, Mayer also credits Turner for recognizing ritual as a transformative agent: During this time in history, rituals helped "groups adjust to internal changes and adapt to their environment" (Mayer, 2006, p. 38). The transformative potential of ritual is of interest in the dissertation in order to identify areas of potential impact on students' lives.

MOORE AND MYERHOFF

The writings of Durkheim and Turner emphasized the religious roots of ritual. In contrast, Moore and Myerhoff (1977), editors of the book *Secular Ritual*, noted that "Durkheim did not explore at any length what ceremony might be or create in secular contexts nor in heterogeneous and changing society full of skeptics" (1977, p. 6). The authors coined the term "secular ritual" to describe public rites and ceremonies that are maintained outside of the religious sphere. The authors noted, "much ceremony in modern industrial societies does not refer to mystical powers" (1977, p. 21). Unlike religious ceremonies, secular ceremonies do not always need to be attached to a rigid belief system, and the locus of concern can be more narrow than expansive. Examples cited in their book include groundbreaking ceremonies, political events, and monthly birthday parties at a home for the aged. While secular rituals, like religious rituals, can function to reinforce prevailing beliefs and systems, they can also reorganize "existing social relationships and existing modes of thought" (1977, p. 5). Specifically, the authors noted, "Ritual may do much more than mirror existing social arrangements and existing modes of thought. It can act to reorganize them, or even help to create them" (p. 5).

How can ritual serve such seemingly opposite purposes, to both support the status quo and then disorder it? Through a number of devices, "ceremony can traditionalize new material as well as perpetuate old traditions." (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977, p. 7). Moore and Myerhoff (1977) described the characteristics that differentiate ritual from other types of interaction, including repetition, acting, stylization, order, staging, and collectivity (p. 8-9). It is the process of transformation that empowers secular ceremonies: instead of appealing to the cosmos, a transformation can take place in the mind. Through participation in the ritual and interacting

with symbols, participants and observers can emerge with altered perspectives, although it is difficult to measure the long-term impact of any ritual, religious or secular.

According to Moore and Myerhoff (1977), secular ritual was distinct from the religiously based notion of ritual, provided by Durkheim, on a number of grounds. First, Durkheim viewed rituals as tools to increase the likelihood of group survival. In contrast, secular ritual involved the coming together of strangers for a very specific purpose. Citing an example from higher education:

> When a building was dedicated on a University campus the ceremony
>
> assembled for a "once and only once" occasion certain wealthy donors,
>
> administrative officers of the College, and a handful of professors and students
>
> who would ultimately use the building. A more motley crew is hard to imagine.
>
> Such a ceremony was not celebrating the existence of a corporate group of any
>
> sort, but rather marked the temporary conjunction of some persons and groups
>
> at one of the many network-crossroads of modern life. (Moore and Myerhoff,
>
> 1977, p. 9)

The word *temporary* is central to the concept of secular rituals. Secular rituals cannot always function to maintain group solidarity, because, in fact, a group does not always exist in permanence. Nonetheless, in such situations, the ritual marks an important moment in time for all involved. This point will be explored further in Chapter Four and Chapter Five as rituals in community colleges are imagined, along with recommendations.

BELL

In the book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell (1992/2009) used the term ritualization to apply the concept of ritual to technological societies. In this context, ritualization served to

legitimize social relationships: "That is, intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself — to various degrees and in various ways — from other ways of acting within any particular culture" (Bell, 1992/2009, p. 90). Bell's theory of ritual emphasized that ritual is a social activity that involves some level of physicality and is "rooted in the body" (1992/2009, p. 93). To Bell, ambiguity was the source of ritual's power. For example, although music and song may accompany ritual, their meaning is not always explicit to either participants or observers.

Bell (1992/2009) characterized ritual as a powerful social determinant, acknowledging that Durkheim was the first to recognize it as a mechanism of social control. But how does ritual actually function? Bell's contribution to ritual theory, particularly in relation to this dissertation, is to ponder how ritual actually functions to alter or solidify social patterns. Questioning the role of ritual in communicating belief, Bell (1992/2009) pointed to "growing evidence that most symbolic action, even the basic symbols of a community's ritual life, can be very unclear to participants or interpreted by them in very dissimilar ways" (p. 183). This observation is relevant to this dissertation's focus on ritual in secular contexts, such as community colleges. In other words, the absence of shared belief, common in secular institutions, should not inhibit the sharing of a ritual space, or the power of ritual to influence thought. In other words, solidarity can result from shared experience even when beliefs are not shared.

Stephenson (2015) also noted that Bell's (1992/2009) theory of ritual recognized ritual's capacity to influence and wield power. Like Durkheim who viewed ritual as a way to maintain social order, Bell described how ritual could be applied to enforce certain values, sometimes without participant awareness. Stephenson noted:

The notion of inscription is closely associated with the thought of Catherine Bell,

who, in the tradition of Pierre Bourdieu, takes a rather suspicious view of ritual.

For Bell, ritual is mainly about the production of "ritualized" bodies. Ritualists

are imagined as a kind of malleable wax, into which ritual impresses values,

beliefs, and social roles and statuses. Bell refers to the ritualized body as

containing "socially instinctive automatisms," suggesting that the body engaging

in ritual is not really engaging at all but is more of a passive receptor of codes

and scripts that lie outside, in our wider social world. The language of

"inscription" and "automatisms" removes agency from ritual actors, placing it in

ritualized practices. Bell further suggests that those engaged in ritual

fundamentally "misrecognize" what they are doing. Gift-giving, for example,

seems an act of generosity; what we are really doing, however, is establishing a

tacit relationship of power in which the recipient becomes indebted to the gift-

giver. If we were to recognize what was really happening, the function of gift-

giving (establishing lines of authority and dominance) would implode, hence

Bell's basic assumption that ritual necessarily proceeds on the basis of

misrecognition and "false consciousness." (Stephenson, 2015, p. 94)

In Stephenson's (2015) analysis of Bell's theory of inscription, ritual participants were

portrayed as potential victims of society that sought to enforce its values. Bell made a unique

contribution to ritual theory through observing how rituals can manipulate even when the

participants are unaware. Inscription is pertinent to this dissertation as educational institutions,

through their offerings and structures have the capacity to 'inscribe' values.

SMITH

Student success theories focusing on the cognitive and social aspects of learning have largely ignored the spatial aspects of institutional life. A small number of articles have been published on the topic, such as Nielsen's research into student place attachment (2011) and Broussard's (2010) article urging practitioners to recognize the value of campus spaces that have emotional, traditional, or spiritual meaning. Yet, to locate theories that recognize the human relation to space, higher education practitioners must go outside of the literature of higher education. In developing a theory of ritual, Smith (1987/1992) described how rituals transformed space from something incidental to something meaningful. In his book, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Smith (1987/1992) focused on sacred spaces, some mythical and others geographic. As an example, in the Australian aboriginal myth of the divine being Numbakulla, the world was created and maintained by a pole that had been fashioned from a gum tree and anointed in blood. Through the pole, the Achilpa maintained connection with the divine, making all space they walked on sacred. Through this myth, the sacredness of space, in heaven and on earth, was reliant on a single physical object that held together both spaces: Catastrophe would ensue if the pole were broken. As a second example, Smith offered the writing of the biblical prophet Ezekiel, who described in detail an idealized temple fourteen years after the First Temple was destroyed. Writing from his vantage point in the Babylonian exile, Ezekiel envisioned several structures, including a mountain, a wall, and multiple zones through which sacredness and power were communicated.

According to Smith (1987/1992), human beings perennially search for a place in the world, or Emplacement (p. 104). Citing humanistic geographers who defined place as "a locus of meaning" (p. 28), Emplacement is not just a nostalgic search for home; it is how individuals

transform space into meaningful place. In the two examples, the Achilpa and the sacred pole, and Ezekiel and the Temple, the relationship is precarious. For the Achilpa, the breakage of the pole would sever of the relationship between two worlds. For Ezekiel, the destruction of the Temple, the center of Jewish national and religious life, resulted in both spiritual and physical displacement. In both cases, rituals undertaken within the space intensified the relationship between individuals and the space. Ritual is powerful in its capacity to maintain a connection to place even when individuals are no longer able to interact physically within the space, as in the example of the Jewish Diaspora. Ultimately, it is through ritual that Jewish life renewed itself in the Diaspora, after the destruction of the Temple. To Smith, ritual can both intensify the ongoing relationship with space, or in the case of the Jewish Diaspora, maintain the ritual relationship with space even after the physical relationship is no longer maintainable.

Smith's (1987/1992) definition of ritual embarked from a sense of place, how humans search for it, define it, lay claim to it, and how they seek to maintain a relationship with it once the physical connection is lost. Smith also recognized that time and space were linked; a change in one sphere was often reflected in a shift in the other. Ritual often combined both time and place, functioning to carve out idealized environments:

> … ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables
> (the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced precisely because they are felt
> to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Ritual is a means of performing
> the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are. (Smith,
> 1987/1992, p. 109)

In other words, ritual does not need to reflect reality; in fact, it cannot. Just as the rituals that were created after the destruction of the Temple could not entirely replicate Temple activities,

many rituals can only provide some representation of what "ought to be" (Smith, 1987/1992, p. 109), or should have been.

GRIMES

As an ethnographer, Grimes focused on field research rather than theory (2006, p. x), analyzing rituals in the public sphere as performances. Yet, through his critique of Smith's (1987/1992) theory of Emplacement, a "spatialized theory of ritual" (Grimes, 2006, p. 105), Grimes' personal, comprehensive theory of ritual evolved. Citing numerous examples, Grimes critiqued Smith's proposal that ritual is driven primarily by location, or that the combination of location and ritual leads to the construction of symbolic systems. In contrast, Grimes proposed a multidimensional theory of ritual through which space is just one element (2006, p. 109). This framework is organizational, providing the essential elements of all ritual. While focusing of ritual as an activity, the framework also includes the assimilation of meaning as either an individual or a collective act. Grimes's table, represented as Table 7, describes this comprehensive understanding of ritual:

Table 7. *Components of Ritual (Grimes, 2006, p. 109)*

Component	Example
Action……………………………………	dancing, walking, kneeling
Places………………………………….	shrines, sanctuaries
Times………………………………….	holidays, seasons, eras
Objects………………………………...	fetishes, masks, icons, costumes
Groups………………………………...	congregations, sects, moieties, nations
Figures and roles……………………...	gods, ancestors, priests, shamans
Qualities, quantities…………………...	circularity, seven, red
Language………………………………	myths, stories, texts, orations
Sounds…………………………………	music, songs, chants
Attitudes, beliefs, intentions, emotions	belief in ritual efficacy, thankfulness, ecstasy

OTHER THEORIES

Drawing a line between theory and definition, this dissertation focused on theories of ritual and not on its multiple definitions and redefinitions. In doing so, some notable challenges to prevailing theories were not included, but are important to note. For example, Goody (1977) challenged the underlying assumption that ritual always implies meaning, pointing out that ritual can signal compliance without belief. Goody cited the forced conversions of Jews in Spain during the Spanish Inquisition, or the compulsory performance of rituals in the Greek city state, as historic examples of how rituals demonstrate obedience rather than transformation or elevation. This definition is not included in the analysis of Chapter Four, but is included in this section to describe the variety in definitions, and the tremendous opportunity to understand the human circumstance through ritual theory.

THEMES

This review summarized literature on rituals in education, the theories underlying student success in higher education, and the definitions and functions of ritual in society.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RITUALS

Rituals and ceremonies are well established in many organizations (Quantz, O'Connor, & Magolda, 2011), including institutions of higher education (Manning, 2000). Sports games, for example, strengthen solidarity, while graduation ceremonies celebrate accomplishment, and transition participants to the next phase of their lives. Rituals function to celebrate, communicate values, motivate, reduce conflict, and relieve stress (Manning, 2000).

The presence of international literature on rituals (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010).in higher education suggests that rituals are universally recognized as essential to institutional life. Universal, but as Manning (2000) suggested, perhaps less prevalent at community

colleges. While research on ritual in higher education has focused on four-year institutions, the extent of ritual adoption in community colleges has not been researched and is unknown.

STUDENT SUCCESS THEORY

Qualitative and quantitative research on student success in higher education have identified factors that may influence a student's likelihood of success in higher education. These include psychological factors, academic preparation, demographic factors, social origins, institutional factors, motivation, perceived value, residential status, faculty interactions, and institutional type. Various models have emerged to describe how students navigate, including Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975), Bean's (1983) economic value theory, and Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984). Tinto's model has been critiqued as integration may be inappropriate for students coming from diverse backgrounds, including first-generation college students (Tierney, 1992). Alternative models have emerged, including Rendón's (1994) validation model, which suggests that students of color seek validation in the environment rather than integration. Kuh and Love's (2000) focus on culture placed the onus on institutions to consider students' background in the development of receptive and inclusive college environments. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt and Associates (2005) described the characteristics of colleges that focused on deep and meaningful student engagement in multiple aspects of campus life.

Psychological, or characterological theories, were among the first theories of student success, and Spady (1970), Tinto (1975), and Astin (1984) included student personality in their success models. The emphasis on student traits faded throughout the 1980s and 1990s, reappearing later in at least one article (Bean & Eaton, 2000). The work of Dweck (2006) in

Mindset and Duckworth (2016) in *Grit* suggest that character traits have reemerged and established a place in student success models.

RITUAL THEORY

Ritual theories reflect discipline, sub-discipline, and history. Durkheim described rituals in religious terms as expressions of belief: "It is possible to define the rite only after we have defined the belief" (1912/2008, p. 2). To Durkheim, rituals support social cohesion and solidarity, while van Gennep (1909/1992) viewed rituals as a way to ease transitions from one level of status to another, or rites of passage. Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep (1909/1992) emphasized ritual's role in creating and fortifying structure and delineating differences. In contrast, Turner (1969/1995) recognized ritual's role in transforming individual and society, creating *communitas*, a momentary, exhilarated place where structures are dissolved. The dissolution of these boundaries, however, was only possible because structure pre-existed anti-structure.

As ritual theory transitioned from its religious roots to embrace changing social circumstances, the fundamental social purpose of ritual remained central. As a ritual outlier, Goffman (1967/1982) identified ritual behavior in daily interactions rather than in ceremonies. Studying everyday social behavior, Goffman concluded that human behavior is tightly proscribed. Yet, formal ceremony retained a place of importance during the twentieth century. Moore and Myerhoff (1977) described how rituals formalized non-religious communities through secular rituals. The hegemonic feature of ritual was emphasized by Bell (1992/2009) who theorized that ritual can subtly reinforce social values through symbolic, non-verbal communication.

Some ritual theories remain grounded in religion. Smith's (1987/1992) theory of Emplacement emphasized how human beings share a common longing for home, or a place to belong. In his examples from religious settings, rituals often reenacted a sacred relationship to place after the physical relationship was severed. While Smith did not attempt to contemporize his theory, it is applicable to the college experience in multiple ways. First, the entire process of integration, as described by Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975), reflects a student's process of redefining 'home'. Smith's theory of Emplacement reflects an instinctive human attachment to place throughout the lifecycle. In this fashion, even van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage can be reconceived as ceremonies of displacement, during which individuals undergoing the rituals of adolescence or marriage often experience transitions in residence along with changes in social status.

What is the common ground between the myriad definitions of ritual? All schools of thought link rituals with culture. Collins (1994) noted that the 1960s witnessed a huge shift in the definition of culture: from something that is fixed to something that can be created. For this dissertation, this shift is important, for if culture can be created, so can rituals. All institutions, including community colleges, have the capacity to create rituals to reflect emerging organizational needs.

The Conceptual Model

The Conceptual Model in Figure 2, The Ritual Lens: Ritual Theory and Student Success, presents twenty-three themes that are common to ritual theory and student success theory. In Chapter Four, these themes will be developed further into two major concepts, Emplacement and Passage. In Chapter Five, these themes will form the basis of specific recommendations for practitioners.
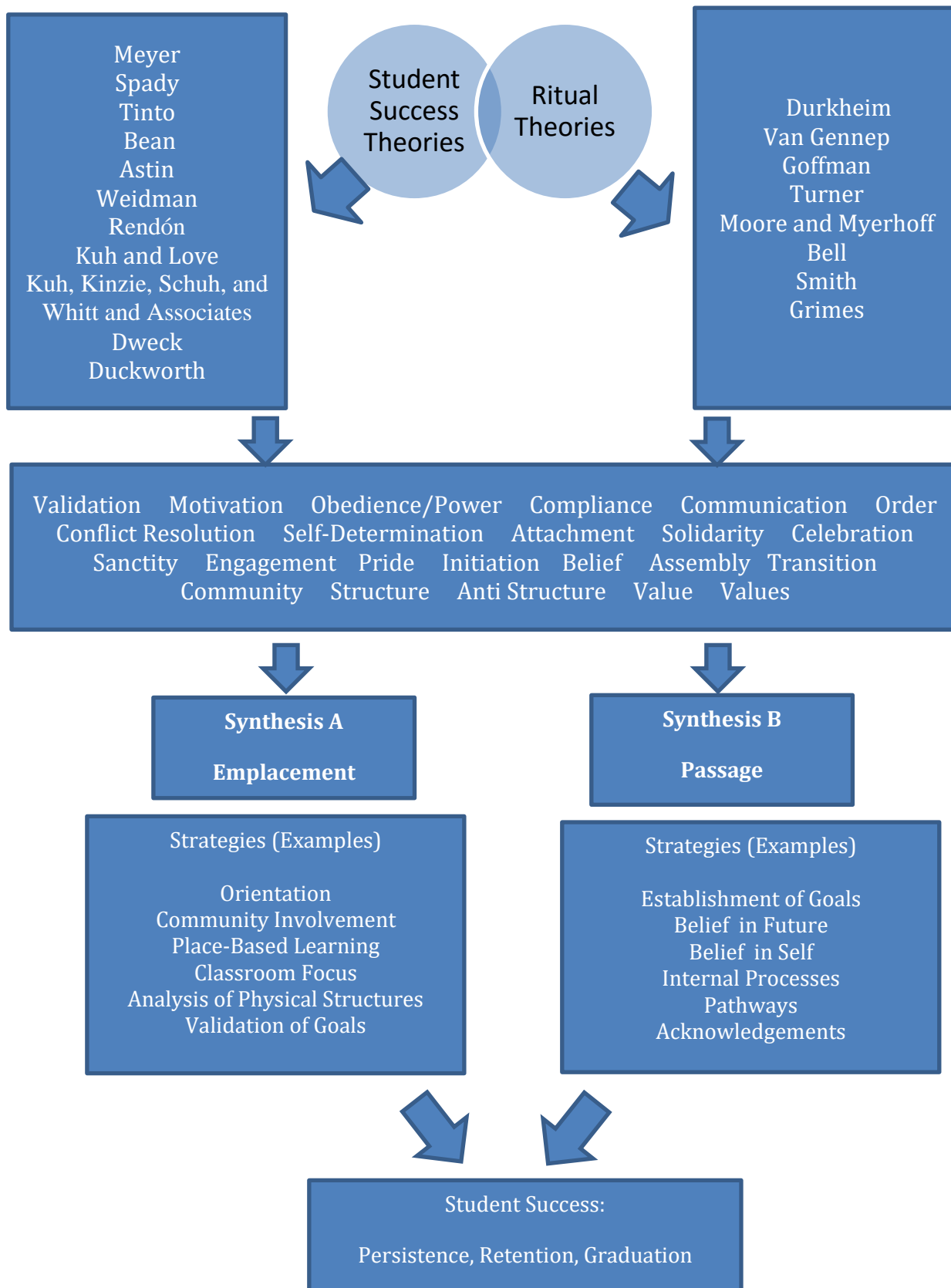
Figure 2. The Ritual Lens: Ritual Theory and Student Success. This figures describes the Conceptual Model constructed from the literature review.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have been charged with increasing student success. This dissertation employed an interdisciplinary approach to addressing this challenge through the ritual theory, a discipline rooted in anthropology, sociology, and religion. While formal rituals are not as embedded in two-year institutions as four-year institutions, Chapter Three, the literature review, described their profound role in many ancient and modern institutions. Similarly, the theory and practice of ritual may inform the development of effective educational cultures to promote student success.

This dissertation was developed in several parts. First, Chapter One explored the literature, described research questions, and the process of identifying expert panelists. Chapter Two outlined the methodology, Critical Interpretive Synthesis. Chapter Three presented literature on rituals in higher education, as well as student success theories and ritual theories. The conceptual model in Chapter Three illustrated how community college student success practices may be improved through examining student success theories and ritual theories. This examination may result in creating new rituals or renewing existing ones. Alternatively, the recognition and explication of significant themes in ritual theory and student success theory may support the emergence of new student-success focused practices or support existing ones at community colleges.

Chapter Four illustrates the relationship between ritual theories and student success theories to inform student success practices at community colleges, organized by Expert Feedback, Analysis of the Research Question One, Analysis of the Research Question Two, and Analysis of the Research Question Three.

EXPERT FEEDBACK

To fulfill the dissertation requirements for the Doctor of Management in Community College Policy and Administration, a review of a dissertation draft by "a panel of experts" (UMUC, 2016, p. 13) is required. After the preliminary scoping of the literature, Chapter One was sent to three experts to substantiate the research project and to validate the methodology. The selection of reviewers represented a balance of theory and practice, and a mix of administrative and faculty perspectives. The first expert was Dr. Matt Reed, Vice President for Learning at Brookdale Community College, and author of two books, *Confessions of a Community College Administrator* and *Confessions of a Community College Dean*. The second expert was Mr. Julius Lester, Professor Emeritus of Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. An African-American convert to Judaism, Mr. Lester authored 44 books: eight nonfiction, 31 children's books, one book of poetry and photographs (with David Gahr), and three adult novels. The third expert was Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell from the Pennsylvania State University - Harrisburg, Adult Education Program. Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell received her Ed.D. in Adult Education from the University of Georgia, and holds an M.A. in Religion and Religious Education from Fordham University. Dr. Tisdell was selected to reflect upon the religious roots of ritual and to provide her perspective on the needs of adult learners. Two of the experts used the UMUC form, and one chose to respond in a narrative. The numeric ratings from two of the experts, summarized below in Table 8, as well as the narrative responses, supported the continued pursuit of the research direction.

Table 8. *Summary of Expert Panelist Comments*

#	Questions	Average Rating
1	How accurate and complete is the description of the problem/issue to be researched?	3.75
2	How significant is the problem/issue to community college managers, leaders, faculty, or students?	4.25
3	How well does the student support the statement of the issue's/problem's existence and importance with evidence, scholarly citations, and expert opinions?	4
4	Do the theories described seem relevant to the problem or issue being researched?	4
5	Is the theoretical background described by the student expansive or complete enough to provide perspective on the problem?	4
6	Are the research questions of sufficient scope and focus to lead to valuable research that will improve practice in the field?	4
7	How well organized is the document?	4.25
8	How closely does the quality of the writing match doctoral standards?	3.75
9	How adequate is the list of major references and scholarly works the student has found up to this point to define and support the significance of the problem?	3.75

Reviewer comments also provided additional insights and direction. Dr. Matt Reed was concerned that newly created rituals may lack authenticity to participants, and recommended that the dissertation locate theories to provide practical guidance. In response to this suggestion, the ritual theories of Bell (1992/2009) and Grimes (2006) were added to the ritual theories of Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep (1909/1992) that were based on traditional societies. In his review of Chapter One, Mr. Lester noted that the classroom experience, and student interactions with faculty, were absent. In response, the research shifted its focus from administrative rituals to rituals to promote student success. The role of faculty is addressed in Chapter Five. Finally, in response to Dr. Tisdell's concern that that the number of research questions in the original draft, five, was excessive, the number of research questions was reduced to three that focused the most on student success. Dr. Tisdell was also concerned about the research methodology, Grounded Theory, that is used to develop theory. With this

feedback, and with support from dissertation advisors, Chapter One was rewritten to focus on student success through three research questions. Ultimately, the dissertation shifted from developing a new theory to understanding how ritual theory could shape student success practices.

QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT THEORIES OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

This section summarizes student success theories at both four-year and two-year institutions based on the literature search process described in Chapter Two. As recommended by dissertation advisor Dr. Trudy Bers, two additional books on success were included, *Mindset* (Dweck, 2006) and *Grit* (Duckworth, 2016). While outside of the original search parameters, their inclusion is acceptable in the flexible methodology provided by Critical Interpretive Synthesis. These two books describe personal characteristics that contribute to success, contributing to a more general understanding of the concept outside of higher education.

THEORIES OF STUDENT SUCCESS: FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Summarizing Berger, Ramirez, and Lyon (2012), Aljohani (2016) described the 1970's as the decade of "building theories" (p. 2) for student success in higher education. Building the foundation of student success theory, Spady (1970) proposed a model of student retention that incorporated psychological attributes, family background, academic characteristics, and institutional attributes to understand the complexity of student decisions. While Spady defended the complexity of his model, his theory was based on his observation that the decision to stay or leave an institution was also influenced by an individual student's level of institutional commitment and loyalty that could not be understood or predicted by the data.

Successful integration of the individual student into the environment was identified as essential for success through Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975). According to Tinto, students who separated from their old environments and integrated into their new environments succeeded; others dropped out. To Tinto, student success depended on a student's ability to find a new home in a new culture, a process that simultaneously demanded the shedding of a previous identity. The role of the institution was highlighted in subsequent theories as research identified and quantified differences in institutional approaches. Astin (1984), for example, proposed a pragmatic model that identified an active role for both students and institutions in creating conditions for success. 'Involvement' was the responsibility of both the individual student and the institution. Involved students are more likely to succeed, but student involvement depends on an institution's capacity to create such opportunities inside and outside of the classroom.

Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975) served as the foundation for subsequent theories, and also served as the reactionary point of reference for enhancements. Pertinent to this dissertation, Tinto suggested that his integration model may not apply to commuter schools. In a critique of Tinto's Interactionalist Theory, Tierney (1992) suggested that while Tinto's model was inclusive of multiple student success factors, he questioned its theoretical roots. First, according to Tierney, college is not so much a distinct culture but a grouping of subcultures where students take up only temporary residence. For that reason, integration is not always necessary, and further, integration may require levels of cultural conformity that may negatively impact retention.

Tierney (1992) placed theorists and practitioners in a bind: If integration is not always possible, or desirable, as proposed by Tierney (1992), but yet important for success, what are

colleges to do? Involvement may be difficult for students if they feel outside of the prevailing campus culture. Rendón (1994) proposed that campuses design programs to validate rather than integrate students. Kuh and Love (2000) proposed that an institution's cultural responsiveness can have a significant impact on student success.

Proposing a theoretical model of socialization, Weidman (1989) emphasized the power of socialization through norms, including "anticipatory socialization." In other words, prior to entering an institution, students develop habits and expectations. Weidman's socialization theory served to explain how a student's background characteristics may continue to influence student behavior in the institution, and, pertinent to this dissertation, how ritual and ritual theory may find a place in the process even prior to enrollment.

All of these models view student departure on social or quasi-psychological terms, using such terms as cultural "fit," "involvement," or "integration." Using economic models, Bean (1983) addressed student departure from the viewpoint of value, expectation, and reward: Students are less likely to drop out if they feel that the compensation is adequate. The compensation may be psychological and educational, as well as monetary. Some students may see their own academic and social development as having value, while others may see the degree in and of itself as offering value for their future.

What of the classroom? All of the models summarized above describe the importance of institutional climate in broad terms, referring to social and academic integration without ascribing more importance to one domain than another. Specifically, Tinto's (1975) model of integration visually depicts academic integration and social integration on the same par; and Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984) privileges social and extracurricular domains. In contrast, Braxton, Milem and Sullivan (2000) focused on the classroom, finding that students

who learned with faculty who offer active learning opportunities are more likely to stay at the institution. The importance of faculty, underscored by Mr. Julius Lester, suggests that the ritualized model of student success must incorporate faculty and the classroom experience.

THEORIES OF STUDENT SUCCESS: TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

While recognizing the unique characteristics of community colleges, student success theories developed for two-year institutions were profoundly influenced by theories formulated in four-year institutions. It is at this juncture that the word 'theory' often morphed into alternative phrases, including 'theory enhancements,' 'theoretical frameworks,' 'theoretical models,' and 'theoretical critiques.' This dissertation applied the term 'theory' liberally to its inclusion of work specific to community colleges. Ultimately, all of the literature shared a common focus on describing and optimizing social and academic environments for student success

As defined by Tinto (1975), student success required both academic and social integration. Tinto recognized that his Interactionalist Theory, which required separation from one's community of origin, may not resonate with two-year institutions whose students remain embedded in their communities of origin. This theoretical and practical gap was addressed in subsequent research on commuter students. Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983), and Bean and Metzer (1985), proposed that commuter students were less concerned about social integration and involvement and more concerned with the classroom. Commuter students, they suggested, were in college to meet specific goals, and an institution's ability to help them meet these goals determined whether students stayed or left an institution.

Tierney's (1992) critique of Tinto included the application of van Gennep's rites of passage, which, according to Tierney, asked students to displace themselves from their cultures

of origin in favor of a new culture. The weight of Tinto's theory and the validity of Tierney's

concern create a theoretical bind. If students are more likely to succeed in college when they

integrate (Tinto, 1975) or become involved (Astin, 1984), is there another model to describe

how students from two-year institutions can succeed? Studies of non-traditional students in

two-year institutions attempted to reconcile this conflict by building new theories. In her study

of Puerto-Rican students, Rendón (2002) posited that community college students do not need

integration as much as they need validation. Validation occurs when students feel that the

institution is responsive to who they are: when students feel that their choice to enter college

and persist has value and meaning; and when institutions acknowledge their particular needs

and strengths, incorporating them into the culture of the institution.

Other theories of student success in two-year institutions emphasized the importance of

shaping the environment to meet highly individualized needs. For example, Schuetz (2008), in

her study of commuter students working more than twenty-five hours per week, employed self-

determination theory to describe how colleges must allow students both belong and be

autonomous. Schuetz's theory underscored the challenges community colleges confront in

constructing environments to address often multiple and conflicting needs.

SUCCESS THEORIES BEYOND HIGHER EDUCATION

Dweck (2006), in *Mindset,* and Duckworth (2016) in *Grit*, described success in

individualist terms relating to personal attributes, including a willingness to prevail under

adversity, absorb criticism, and see the bigger picture. Both *Mindset* and *Grit* echo some of the

early psychological theories of student success. Tinto (1987/1993) placed psychological

theories into a separate category that represented some of the earliest conceptualizations of

student success. Psychological theory surfaced in Tinto's Interactionalist Theory as part of a

student's background, but received far less attention than socialization. By acknowledging the role of character, *Mindset* and *Grit* echo some of the early psychological theories of student success. However, the characteristics described by Dweck and Duckworth are less fixed, more fluid, with the potential to grow and change as people age and are shaped by experience. Pertinent to this dissertation, institutions can play a role in the development of character by influencing behavior.

SUMMARY

The table below summarizes major theories of student success. Student success theories ascribed different weights to the influence of students, their families, institutions, and society. Meyer (1969), for example, placed more emphasis on conditions in society, suggesting that student success was in part determined by an institution's charter, or its status in the social hierarchy. Spady (1970) focused on student characteristics, with institutional characteristics playing a minor role. Tinto (1975) conceptualized student success as an interaction between students and institutions, but placed more emphasis on the individual student's ability to shed a previous identity in order to integrate into the new college culture. Bean (1983) proposed an economic theory, claiming that students' decisions are sensitive to economic realities and perceptions of degree value. Through his theory of involvement, Astin (1984) described how student behaviors within institutions influence student success. However, according to Astin, while students play a part, it was the responsibility of the institution to create conditions for students to become involved and to succeed. As institutions of higher education became more diverse, and as gaps and achievement were identified, theory enhancements focused on marginalized groups. Rendón (1994) proposed activities to validate students, and Kuh and Love (2000) promoted a cultural approach to student success that emphasized student

engagement inside and outside the classroom, and the identification and appreciation of student

subgroups, including ethnic minorities and commuters. Finally, an interest in the role of

personality and character has been renewed with the work of Dweck (2006) and Duckworth

(2016).

Table 9. *Themes of Student Success Theories*

Theorists	Theme
Meyer	Charter/social reproduction
Spady	Background
Tinto	Separation and integration
Bean	Value
Astin	Involvement
Weidman	Socialization
Kuh and Love	Culture
Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt and Associates	Engagement
Rendón	Validation
Dweck	Mindset
Duckworth	Grit

Student success theories in higher education are varied and complex as they attempt to

capture and predict individual choices in very diverse institutional contexts. This dissertation

suggests that new models may emerge to support practice.

**QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT THEORIES OF RITUAL, AND WHICH ARE MOST
RELEVANT TO STUDENT SUCCESS?**

In Chapter Three, ritual theories explained how rituals served society and individuals

through communicating beliefs, strengthening social bonds, supporting social structures, easing

transitions, and imparting values. This section describes theories most relevant to student

success: those that reflect how individuals think, believe, and act. Despite its critics, van

Gennep's (1909/1992) *rites of passage* remains the most relevant ritual theory to higher

education, including community colleges. The process of separation and integration reflects a

universal human experience, and the state of liminality accurately depicts the psychological,

sociological, and financial states of many community college students as they seek to succeed

academically while balancing multiple challenges.

VAN GENNEP

Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975) was informed by van Gennep's (1909/1992)

theory of rites of passage. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory has been subjected to claims of

cultural bias because of its use of rites of passage as a framework for college transition. For

example, critics suggested that the phases of separation and integration identified by van

Gennep are culturally bound, and that van Gennep's theory only holds us when changes within

a culture are described (Tierney, 1992). On the contrary, van Gennep's original work included

examples of transitions between cultures and not just within a culture.

In Chapter Three, in the literature review, Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975) was

described alongside van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage. Strongly rooted in religion,

van Gennep emphasized how rituals support society and its members through stressful life

transitions called rites of passage to guide members from one level of status to another. Van

Gennep emphasized the "liminal" status of those undergoing transitions, and the raw

psychological experience of living in multiple worlds and balancing different identities. Tinto

adopted van Gennep's rites of passage as a metaphor for college students moving from the pre-

college environment to the college environment. Tierney (1992) challenged Tinto's

Interactionalist Theory based on the assertion that van Gennep's rites of passage reflected

transitions within cultures, and not between cultures. According to Tierney, the process of

separation and integration required by Tinto suggested a displacement from one's culture of

origin that may not be beneficial or culturally appropriate.

However, a closer analysis of *Rites of Passage* suggested that van Gennep's theory

(1909/1992) remains relevant to community colleges and utilitarian as a Ritual Lens. As

expressed in *Rites of Passage*, van Gennep was not only concerned with lifecycle transitions,

or those demarcating transitions from one state to another within a culture. Van Gennep

devoted chapters in *The Rites of Passage* to rituals that accompanied many significant physical

and social transitions, including territorial passages, as well as rites that navigate relationships

between different cultural groups.

Van Gennep's (1909/1992) theory of rites of passage is highly effective in

understanding both the social and psychological status of community college students and their

needs for conceptual and actual bridges to navigate their complex lives. Tierney (1992) may

have underutilized van Gennep's ritual theory, reflecting an incomplete reading of his work.

The applicability of van Gennep's ritual theory is evident in his description of the

psychological and emotional challenges that society members experience during times of

transition. As described by Manning (2000), this passage is a struggle with no guarantee of

success. "Initiands" (p. 29), who are unable to embrace a new identity persist in the liminal

phase as "liminoids" (p. 29). Employing van Gennep's ritual lens, community college students,

caught in multiple worlds, may persist in a liminal place of psychological distress that can

impact success. Van Gennep's rites of passage is descriptive of the challenges community

college students face as they manage multiple responsibilities and social contexts.

Ultimately, this researcher contends that Van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage is

expansive, describing how individuals and groups move from one physical, psychological and

social state to another; and further suggests that higher education practice will be strengthened

through a focus on the word "passage." Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975) described a

process of integration that followed period of separation from one's community of origin.

Community college students, however, are embedded in their communities of origin. Unlike

the students described in Tinto's traditional paradigm, they are not separating: they are

passaging. Applying van Gennep's rites of passage to community college students, it is upon

the college to actively 'passage' students from the pre-college to the college to the post-college

milieu. In this paradigm, 'passage' is not a noun but an active verb, and van Gennep's

identification of rituals as navigators is still highly operational and applicable to higher

education theory.

TURNER

Turner (1969/1995) enhanced van Gennep's (1909/1992) concept of rites of passage

with the focus on *communitas*. Turner interpreted van Gennep's rites of passage:

> Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage, or "transition" are marked by
>
> three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying "threshold" in Latin) and
>
> aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior
>
> signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed
>
> point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from
>
> both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual
>
> subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that
>
> has few or none of the attributes of the past or the coming state. (1969/1995, p.
>
> 94)

Turner's contribution to ritual theory includes his identification of the psychological

burden of liminality, or the "betwixt and between" (1969/1995, p. 95) moment that the ritual

subject has separated from the original status, a place of fear and confusion—a concept clearly

articulated by van Gennep (1909/1992). Further, Turner (1969/1995) recognized liminality as opportunity. To Turner, social life was divided into two phases: *structure and antistructure*, as his book was titled. During liminality, the unstructured phase, the individual and society can renegotiate identity and status. Further, Turner redefined this phase as one of *communitas*, an opportunity for renewal through the dissolution of old structures. While Turner based his theory on research in Central and West Africa, he succeeded in broadly applying the concept of liminality and *communitas* to more industrialized societies, locating the concept in the American holiday of Halloween, in all millenarian movements, and in the 1960s counterculture. *Communitas* could be found anywhere, according to Turner, when structure dissolved, roles are switched, and the lines of authority are upended.

How does this apply to community college students? As liminal institutions with liminal students, community colleges have the opportunity to help students create new communities inside and outside classrooms. While students may come to institutions with unique histories and experiences, much is also shared, including physical assembly and a psychological experience of marginality and liminality. It is in this place that new communities can be created, and new identities forged.

DURKHEIM

According to Durkheim (1912/2008), the need to belong dominates the human condition. In addition to borrowing from van Gennep (1909/1992), Tinto's Interactionalist Theory 1975) drew from Durkheim's theory of suicide. Durkheim's emphasis on solidarity echoes throughout all foundational theories of student success, including Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984), and the models of Rendón (1994) and Weidman (1989). In their research on rituals and legends in four-year institutions, Manning (2000) and Bronner (2012) described

rituals as sources of solace, belonging, and meaning for students making transitions to adulthood both physically, psychologically, and intellectually. As Manning (2000) stated:

> Rituals fulfill primordial, fundamental human needs. While a structuralist approach……. offers some explanations for ritual practice, its shortcomings cannot conceal the fact that human beings need ritual in order to live in their communities. Rituals' ability to tap into our spiritual and transcendent side makes them an extremely important human activity. Their abundant presence on college campuses makes an argument for their importance even more convincing. (p. 37)

Yet, does the absence of ritual at community colleges assume that first generation students, young and old, diverse, multilingual, and often poor, need rituals any less? The convergence of ritual and student success theory would suggest quite the opposite: the liminal aspect of community college experience would suggest an even deeper need for community and therefore ritual. The challenge for practitioners is to understand what form this engagement should take both in and outside of the classroom, and how ritual can play a role in strengthening the basic and common need for human connection. Without Durkheim (1912/2008), practitioners might forget that community college students, like all others, are driven by the need to belong.

SMITH

Smith's (1987/1992) ritual theory of Emplacement explains ritual activity as the expression of human need to identify with a physical place in the world. As an example, Smith described how Temple rituals were part of Jewish life and served to strengthen the relationship between Jews and the Temple before its destruction. After the destruction of the First Temple,

rituals took on a new form to maintain the relationship between Jews in the Diaspora and the Temple. To Smith, ritual served to intensify the relationship with space, transforming it into place, or space with a memory.

From the point of view this researcher, it might be facile to ignore Smith's work because of its largely historic points of reference. Yet, while Smith (1987/1992) did not attempt to contemporize his theory of Emplacement, it is relevant to any convergence of people and space, including college campuses: Ultimately, any college campus is a collection of spaces within which human beings search for meaning, or Emplacement. Further, the subject of space on campuses is *au courant*: In her article, Downes (2016) defended the importance of spaces that provide students with a sense of safety. Most recently, Bruni (2017) described the conflict at Evergreen State University related to the Day of Absence when White students were asked to leave campus. Spaces are symbols of power, and rituals can serve to strengthen the connection between people and place.

Smith's (1987/1992) theory of Emplacement is particularly relevant to community colleges and their students. As described in Chapter One, community college students face a number of challenges both academically and socially. As first-generation college students, many are unfamiliar with the process of navigating a new institution with different expectations. A major challenge is physical: students in community colleges must navigate multiple spaces/places, balancing work, home, family, and institution. Community college students rarely live on campus and benefit from opportunities for collective interaction and involvement, requirements for success according to Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984). Smith's (1987/1992) theory of ritual suggests that despite these challenges, students have a deep need for Emplacement in the physical environment. While Nielsen (2011) did not draw from

Smith's theory of Emplacement, her research described the importance of students' physical and emotional connections to space. In her study of college students in Utah, Nielsen found that:

> Creating a sense of attachment through campus legends, traditions, and symbols may be an important step as students develop a collective identity with their institution and those who are also part of that community. (2011, p. 142)

Smith's (1987/1992) contribution to ritual theory also includes perspectives on ritual authenticity, suggesting that concerns about authenticity be deemphasized. In his description of religious rituals, including Jewish rituals after the First Temple's destruction and Christian rituals after the crucifixion, Smith underscored that rituals are ultimately either reenactments that represent history or idealized representations of a desired future state. In other words, rituals, are, by definition, inauthentic because they are always representational and somewhat hypothetical. But that does not mean they are ineffective. The fact that rituals seek to replicate, duplicate, or idealize some state of being does not diminish their potential. Relevant to this dissertation, rituals in community colleges can utilize ritual to communicate idealized, institutional and individual aspirations by providing a link between what is, or the present, with what can be, or the future. Even as society emerges to work and learn online, location, or Emplacement, is meaningful, and therefore included in this dissertation as a significant ritual theory.

BELL

Bell (1992/2009) consolidated centuries of theory about ritual and emerged with her own emphasis on ritual's role in exerting power and influence. Through inscription, rituals enforce values on individuals and society, often without their assent. Bell's theory is relevant

to community college success in that it emphasizes the importance of shared action over belief. According to Bell, a shared philosophy or point of view is not essential to participating in ritual. Rituals have impact because the participants share an experience, not belief. To Bell, rituals can influence how people think and feel even when those involved in a ritual do not share common reference points. In environments as diverse as community colleges, the concept that community can be created through shared action and space can inform how practitioners intentionally create connections between students between vastly different backgrounds. Most important for community colleges is Bell's assertion that rituals can be created:

> The tendency to think of ritual as essentially unchanging has gone hand in hand with the equally common assumption that effective rituals cannot be invented. Until very recently, most people's commonsense notion of ritual meant that someone could not simply dream up a rite that would work the way traditional ritual has worked. Such a phenomenon, if it could happen, would seem to undermine the important roles given to community, custom, and consensus in our understanding of religion and ritual. (1992/2009, p. 223).

GOFFMAN

Goffman (1967/1982) recognized ritual in everyday interaction:

Specifically, whenever the individual is in the presence of others, he is pledged to maintain a ceremonial order by means of interpersonal rituals. He is obliged to ensure that the expressive implications of all local events are compatible with

the status that he and the other present possess; this involves politeness,

courtesy, and retributive responses to others' slighting of self. (p. 169)

Goffman believed in the power (1967/1982) of the moment. What transpired between

people in a moment was not entirely spontaneous, but relied on some ritualized scripting of

words and mannerisms. These moments demonstrated values, beliefs, and power. Goffman's

framework has been applied to many different institutional settings, including a school library

(Chelton, 1997). As a ritual lens, Goffman's framework of interaction ritual is applicable to

administrative and educational encounters in higher education. Further, Goffman's focus on

interpersonal interactions suggests that ritualized behavior can shape individual character.

Goffman (1967/1982) devoted two chapters to the subject of character (pp. 214-258), drawing

his examples from social extremes, including bullfighters and gamblers:

>These capacities (or lack of them) for standing correct and steady in the face of
>
>sudden pressure are crucial; they do not specify the activity of the individual,
>
>but how he will manage himself in this activity. I will refer to these maintenance
>
>properties as an aspect of an individual's character. (1967/1982, p. 217)

Examples of character enumerated by Goffman (1967/1992) included courage,

gameness, integrity, gallantry, and composure. Goffman defined gameness as "the

capacity to stick to a line of activity and to continue to pour all effort into it regardless

of set-backs, pain, or fatigue, and this is not because of some brute insensitivity but

because of inner will and determination" (pp. 218-219).

How does Goffman's recognition of character relate to ritual? To Goffman

(1967/1982), an individual's character may generally be fixed but it has the potential for

change depending on circumstance. A social response is a "self-oriented evocation in ritualized

form of the moral scene arising when such duties are exercised" (p. 239). To Goffman, there is nothing small about these ritual moments between people.

> Individuals must come to all of their little situations with some enthusiasm and concern, for it is largely through such moments that social life occurs, and if a fresh effort were not put into each of them, society would suffer. (p. 239)

Using Goffman's (1967/1982) ritual lens, higher education can be reconceived as a series of highly ritualized encounters between students, faculty, and staff—opportunities to promote the success of students.

MOORE AND MYERHOFF

Moore and Myerhoff (1977) emphasized the power of secular, or non-religious rituals, in social life. While Durkheim (1912/2008) emphasized ritual's role in strengthening group ties, Moore and Myerhoff proposed that powerful secular rituals were being created and recreated in society to pull together disparate groups of people, often lacking shared histories or experiences. In their example of a dedication ceremony in higher education, which brought together college officials, donors, and students, the bonds between the participants were not strengthened: That was not the purpose of the ritual. Instead, the ritual was conducted to mark an important milestone for an institution and its members, symbolically represented by the participants.

Moore and Myerhoff (1977) also analyzed secular ritual in the context of Durkheim's (1912/2008) understanding of rituals as ways to demonstrate beliefs. As stated elsewhere, Durkheim's fieldwork was executed in smaller, closed social systems rooted in religion and magic. In contrast, secular ritual may take place outside of the religious domains, inside people's homes and in institutions, where religious belief is not the underlying or organizing

principle (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977). While some secular ceremonies, such as a Red Army

parade, and other political spectacles, may reflect a belief system, this is not always the case.

While shared belief is not mandatory for ritual participation, during the actual execution

of ritual, beliefs *are* made explicit through an explanation of rituals and accompanying

symbols. According to Moore and Myerhoff (1977), a secular ritual was marked by five

characteristics: explicit purpose, explicit symbols and messages, implicit statements, social

relationships, and culture versus chaos (p. 16). As they stated:

> Every ceremony is par excellence a dramatic statement against indeterminacy in
>
> some field of human affairs. Through order, formality, and repetition it seeks to
>
> state that the cosmos and social world, or some particular small part of them are
>
> orderly and explicable and for the moment fixed. (1977, p. 17)

In other words, ritual does not require agreement, or even strong, durable relationships.

Secular rituals can serve momentary purposes through what appear to be random assemblies.

Myerhoff (1977) applied the term "nonce rituals" (p. 201) to those that met a specific and

temporary purpose. Using the example of a graduation ceremony for a Yiddish History class in

a Jewish Senior Citizens' Center, Myerhoff (1977) described how ritual succeeded in

assembling immigrants with varied historic, social, and religious experiences to celebrate their

learning accomplishments. The ritual also served to redefine the community in new ways

through the insertion of American and Israeli symbols as well as Yiddish, English, and Hebrew

languages.

One could argue that rituals may not have a place in highly diverse community

colleges. For example, Manning's (2000) description of rituals in higher education drew from

smaller private institutions that reflected a greater degree of demographic homogeneity than

what would be typical of a community college. However, through their research, Moore and Myerhoff (1977) demonstrated that many ritual participants do not need to share a common identity, history, or a belief system. Specifically, Myerhoff's (1977) analysis of ritual in a Jewish Senior Citizens' Center demonstrated that rituals can be powerful even when beliefs are shifting and not necessarily shared: "In ritual, not only is seeing believing, doing is believing" (1977, p. 223).

The work of Moore and Myerhoff (1977), and Myerhoff (1977), suggests that the paucity of rituals in community colleges should not be attributed to a lack of shared identity and ideology. Further, the creation of new rituals should not be hindered by the same.

QUESTION 3. HOW MIGHT RITUAL THEORIES AND STUDENT SUCCESS THEORIES INTERSECT TO PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO STRATEGIES FOR COLLEGE LEADERS TO PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCESS?

Ritual theories may strengthen, or even give birth to, student success theories as in the case of van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage and Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist Theory. Further, ritual theories have provided a framework for researchers who sought to categorize and understand rituals on campuses. Manning (2000) and Bronner (2012) employed theories from Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep (1909/1992) to describe rituals on their own campuses. Further, Manning referred to Moore and Myerhoff's (1977) secular rituals in her description of rituals in private colleges. In other words, ritual theories have been continuously applied to deepen our understanding of campus rituals. However, ritual theories have not, since Tinto (1975) first advanced the Interactionalist Theory, reemerged to contribute to new theoretical models in higher education.

This section analyzes ritual theories and student success theories through the process of thematic categorization. First, ritual theories are described by their theoretical functions.

Second, four specific themes common to both ritual and student success theories are

designated. As a final step, two themes are chosen as dominant, placing the other themes as

subthemes. To illustrate the theoretical linkages, in Table 10, ritual theories are categorized by

their level of incorporation into student success theories or use in research on student success.

The first column identifies the theorist, while the second column summarizes the themes. The

third column defines the social context used by the theorist to develop the theory. The fourth

column describes the ethos of the theory which reflects both the themes and the context, but

also provides information on how the theorist perceives his or her theory in the context of time.

The theories are divided into three groups:

Category 1-Those already incorporated into higher education theory;

Category 2-Those applied to research on rituals in higher education, but not

incorporated into student success theory, and

Category 3-Those theories neither incorporated into educational theory nor yet applied

to research on rituals in higher education

Category 1 includes Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gannep (1909/1992) whose focus

on belonging and solidarity provided theoretical support for Spady's (1970) theory as well as

Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975). In addition, Tinto employed van Gennep's rites of

passage to describe deeply transitional status of college students. As of this writing, van

Gennep and Durkheim represent the only two ritual theories to have ever been integrated into

higher education theory. Table 10 demonstrates the continued strength and relevance of

Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep's (1909/1992) ritual theories to higher education.

Durkheim's focus on the need for belonging, often expressed in ritual, reinforces to

practitioners what can never be forgotten: that every student, commuter and non-commuter, traditional and non-traditional, is in the process of seeking solidarity and cohesion, to belong.

As stated in a previous chapter, van Gennep's (1909/1992) rites of passage remains a highly persuasive model for student success as it emphasizes the active possibilities of rites of passage in addition to the more passive aspects overemphasized by scholars. Van Gennep's application is strengthened through the work of Turner who expounded upon the concept of liminality. The liminal space is highly descriptive of physical and emotional states of community college students, and theory enhancement, and practices derived from these enhancements, must focus on the difficulties and the possibilities inherent.

Table 10 also demonstrates where there are opportunities to develop the relationships between ritual theories and student success theories. Moore and Myerhoff (1977) are the only ritual theorists in Category 2, as their description of secular rituals has been used to research and categorize rituals in higher education (Manning, 2000). Unlike Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gannep (1909/1992), however, Moore and Myerhoff's ritual theories have not been specifically incorporated into student success theory. The majority of the ritual theories and theorists fall into Category 3, suggesting that ritual theory has the capacity to continue to inform educational theory, and educational practice. Turner (1969/1995), Goffman (1967/1982), Bell (1992/2009), and Smith (1987/1992) provide additional perspectives that can be used to enhance student success theory. These theories do not overturn Durkheim (1912/2008) or van Gennep (1909/1992), but shift the emphasis.

How can these theories from Category 2 and Category 3 be used to inform and shape student success approaches? Moore and Myerhoff's (1977) secular rituals suggested that ritual can be used to create community among diverse peoples despite a lack of shared history and

narratives. The fact that the residents at a home for the aged immigrated from different

countries and did not share common personal histories did not prevent them from reinventing

themselves as being part of new community based on their current circumstance. In this case,

ritual was employed as a time travel machine, using ritual conducted in a *shared place and*

time, to unravel complex historic and personal histories and to reinvent a new history and

narrative. Another common theme is that shared experience, in both space and time, or place, is

privileged over belief. Turner (1969/1995), for example emphasized the importance of

assembly, or sharing *space*, over shared belief, in order to dissolve differences between

participants to arrive at a sense of *communitas* that can be truly transformative for individuals

and society. Smith (1987/1992) conceived of ritual as a search for physical belonging, *or*

Emplacement. Bell (1992/2009) underscored the capacity of ritual to influence participants at

the unconscious level through inscription, proposing that rituals are being created in the

present. Most relevant for this dissertation is that ritual does not require shared belief, only

shared assembly *in the same space and time*. In diverse community colleges, with classrooms

filled with students from different life phases and cultures, these theories of ritual that

emphasize the power of shared space and assembly may empower community college

practitioners to reevaluate how community may be shaped and reshaped through the power of

assembly.

Table 10. *Ritual Theories: Theme, Context, and Ethos*

	Theme	Context	Ethos	Category
Durkheim	Solidarity Cohesion and Stability Belief Hierarchy and Social order	Closed societies	Historic, fixed	1
Van Gennep	Transitions Rites of passage Physical passage	Closed and opening societies	Historic, fixed	1

	Theme	Context	Ethos	Category
Turner	Communitas Structure and antistructure	Closed and open societies	Historic, evolving	3
Goffman	Everyday interactions Character	"The situation"	Evolving	3
Moore and Myerhoff	Belonging and Identity Narrative shaping Celebration and Pride	Open societies	Historic, evolving Nonce	2
Bell	Inscription and Power Unconscious		Historic, evolving	3
Smith	Emplacement Attachment to place	Societies in transition	Historic, evolving	3

Category 1=integrated into higher education theory; Category 2=applied to research on rituals in higher education but not integrated into educational theory; Category 3=neither integrated into educational theory nor applied to research on rituals in higher education

As the Conceptual Model on page 92 elucidated, there are multiple intersections between ritual theory and student success theory. As Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) found ritual theory instructive in the development of their own theories, ritual theories may continue to support the emergence of student success theories. As a next step, Table 11 underscores major thematic intersections between student success theories and ritual theories. This process required placed each theory into a unique thematic category, when possible. Four themes emerge: emplacement, confirmation, passage, and character. Emplacement refers to the need for students to "own" and shape their environments; confirmation is the conviction that the college is responsible for student success, as that students are capable of meeting college expectations; passage include institutional structures and policies that help students accomplish their goals; and character is the student's capacity to make maximal use of resources available.

Table 11. *Common Themes: Success Theory and Ritual Theory*

Theme	Success Theory	Ritual Theory
Emplacement	Tinto Astin Kuh and Love	Smith Moore and Myerhoff Turner
Confirmation	Rendón Meyer	Durkheim Bell

Theme	Success Theory	Ritual Theory
Passage	Tinto Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt and Associates	Van Gennep
Character	Dweck Duckworth Weidman	Goffman

As a final step, four themes merged into two major themes: Emplacement and Passage. This decision was made because of the simplicity of the two themes, and the recognition that both Confirmation and Character may be subsumed under Passage. In this model, Passage includes activities, structure, pedagogy, strategy, policies and procedures that strengthen personal traits, or character, to manage challenging tasks, while Confirmation includes activities, structure, pedagogy, strategy, policies and procedures that strengthen students' beliefs in themselves and the institution.

Table 12. *Themes of Emplacement and Passage: Ritual and Student Success*

Theme	Success Theory	Ritual Theory
Emplacement	Charter (Meyer) Separation and Integration (Tinto) Involvement (Astin) Engagement (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt and Associates) Climate (Baird)	Emplacement (Smith) Belonging (Durkheim) Shared experience (Bell) Communitas (Turner) Secular Rituals (Moore and Myerhoff)
Passage	Character and Confirmation Grit, Hope, Purpose (Duckworth) Mindset (Dweck) Self-determination (Schuetz) Validation (Rendón) Value (Bean) Socialization (Weidman)	Character and Confirmation Belief (Durkheim) Character (Goffman) Inscription (Bell) Parrhesia (Gildersleeve) Routines (Goffman) Rites of Passage (Van Gennep) Secular Rituals (Moore and Myerhoff)

EMPLACEMENT

Spady, Tinto, Astin, and other educational theorists described student success as the interaction between the student and an institution. The student is a historic subject who brings to the institution personal characteristics, loyalties, and external commitments. The institution is an historic entity as well, a receptacle of attitudes, routines, and structures shaped by the past. A sense of belonging is built by finding *a place* in the institution through affiliating with its people, its offerings, or its culture, which Schein defines "a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group" (2010, p. 18).

Ritual theorists emphasized different aspects of the human experience. Durkheim (1912/2008) emphasized solidarity, or as least equilibrium. Van Gennep (1909/1992) emphasized the process of rites of passage to transition students from one framework to another. Both Durkheim (1912/2008) and van Gennep (1909/1992) were employed by Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) in their theory development. This dissertation, however, reached beyond these theories to embrace alternative and emerging theories of ritual to inform student success. One such theory, Smith's ritual theory of Emplacement (1987/1992), provided another lens through which to perceive the student experience. To Smith, affiliation with space, or place, is a fundamental human need that drives human activity. Ritual has served historically to intensify the human relationship with space, or to replace it when the relationship with space was physically severed.

Applying Smith's (1987/1992) theory to community colleges, Emplacement is the intensification of a student's psychological, sociological, and physical connection with the institution and the community within which the student resides. According to Smith, place is an emotional and physical concept. As students seek to belong, they are also searching for

place, or Emplacement. This concept is particularly relevant for community college students who exemplify the 'liminal' state. Truly between worlds, often living at home, surrounded by the familiar, but yet enrolled in an institution of higher education, a student's sense of Emplacement is vital to success.

Researchers and practitioners have found gaps when applying theories of student success developed for four-year institutions to community colleges. Tinto (1975) personally critiqued and then elaborated on this own proposed theory to acknowledge diversity among students and institutions. Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist Theory has been critiqued for its emphasis on social, cultural, and psychological separation. This theory has lacked relevance in conceptualizing success among community college students who remain locally embedded in their home environments. Tinto's framework, however, has remained fundamentally intact with its emphasis on some degree of separation from a former identity to embrace a new context. As an alternative, Emplacement builds upon this framework, acknowledges the need for belonging as well as the process of separation and integration, involvement, and engagement. Emplacement validates the simultaneous need for separation and integration: as Smith (1987/1992) stated, "Ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference" (p. 109). College *is* different from high school; it is a different *place* even though for many community college students this experience is occurring in the same or a similar *space*.

While the application of the ritual concept of Emplacement is new, educational and ritual theories have alluded to it, strengthening the conceptual validity of this dissertation. In Rendón's (1994) concept of validation, students require reminders that they are in the right 'place'. According to Bell (1992/2009), "As part of his study of ritualized transitions through the social order, van Gennep (1909/1992) collected many examples of rites in which changes

in spatial location are used to designate changes in social identity" (p. 36). In other words, the

importance of physical place, with its psychological and social dimensions, has been a part of

ritual theory even before Smith's Theory of Emplacement (1987/1992).

As a theoretical enhancement, Emplacement provides opportunities for both separation

and integration through the process intensification. Intensification includes opportunities to

explore, understand, and interact with local history and culture, businesses, and assets. Finding

place requires not only orientation to a new environment with new demands, but also requires

students to conceptualize the local, "familiar" environment in different ways. Practically

speaking, this would include place-based learning, co-ops, and on-campus work study.

Ritually, this involves the incorporation of rites and symbols that reflect local geographic

space, as described by Nielsen (2011) in her study of legends, symbols, and traditions in

Southern Utah University. This concept of Emplacement, includes both the aspects of

separation through intensification, as well as integration, as described in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Emplacement through Separation and Integration. This figure describes how community college students can develop a sense of Emplacement during the process of separation and integration described by Tinto (1975).

PASSAGE

Passage is the institutional process of guiding students to success through defining new

norms, habits, and outlooks, and articulating steps students must take to be successful. Passage

is rooted in a close reading of van Gennep's (1909/1992) *Rites of Passage* that emphasized the

psychological and social difficulties experienced by individuals as they move from one state, or status, to another. These transitions can be physiological, territorial, or social. In this model, community college students are *passaging*, not just to the goals of graduation, but to different levels of status in society.

The transition of "going to college," implies movement. Community colleges, however, pose ritual challenges. Students and families may not recognize the exceptional aspect of what is occurring, and in some cases, students are not physically *going anywhere*. To borrow from van Gennep (1909/1992), community college students are "liminal" in that they remain embedded in the social fabric of their communities and do not fully integrate into a campus residential culture. Unlike Emplacement, Passage embraces van Gennep (1909/1992) and separation. Passage suggests that separation, or breaking away from previous social groups, habits, and identifications must precede integration. In a residential four-year environment, this takes the form of the parent "drop off" and development of a new institutional identity. However, in a commuter environment, when students return to their homes at night, and remain often employed in the same jobs, separation does not occur physically. In this dissertation, it is the psychological and intellectual construction of separation that is most important, as well as how it may be ritually and symbolically mediated.

As a concept, Passage encourages practitioners to ask critical questions. How can community colleges help students identify more fully as college students? How can the new norms and expectations be communicated through rituals and symbols? If separation from a previous identity is important, is it not important to create policies and practices that do not refer to students' former selves, such as placement testing? What symbols or rituals can be used to create a sense of true geographic "separation" for commuter students who study where

they live? How can rituals help students passage in these circumstances? Further, as

community college practitioners, do we sometime contribute to the liminal status of our

students? Community colleges are liminal places where the actual degree conferred, the

associate degree, is often forgone in pursuit of the four-year degree. Through this lens, no

wonder community colleges have low completion rates!

The concept of Passage is relevant beyond the first day a community college student

enrolls or enters into the classroom. Using Weidman's Theory of Anticipatory Socialization

(1989), the process of Passage occurs early in the process, prior to matriculation. Using Bell's

(1992/2009) theory of inscription, rituals and symbols can be used to communicate new norms

and values through the acknowledgement of milestones. Milestones may serve to ritually

validate the right path, in addition to providing clear steps to success. Further, Goffman's

(1967/1982) definition of rituals in everyday routines encourages a critical look at the

messages inherent in everyday interactions at the college, both inside and outside the

classroom.

The themes of confirmation and character are subsumed under Passage. Confirmation

encompasses a belief in self and a belief in the institution. Changing an individual's beliefs,

particularly about the self, requires huge psychological shifts. Yet, Rendón's (1994) theory of

validation suggests that it is important for students to feel personally validated in order to

envision scenarios of success. Ritual theories suggest that ritual can play a role in shifting

beliefs. Parrhesia, or speaking out (Gildersleeve, 2017), employed during Hispanic graduation

ceremonies, is a ritual expression of self-affirmation. While one might argue that parrhesia

expresses a belief in self, the act of parrhesia may actually serve to formulate self. Belief in

student success does not reflect doctrine, but faith in the future. Students must clearly believe

in the endeavor, including the value of the pursuit (Bean, 1983). This belief can be supported

through socialization (Weidman, 1989), including anticipatory socialization. Rituals can

support the belief in the endeavor (Durkheim, 1912/2008), or even inscribe it (Bell,1992/2009).

Institutional sagas or ritualized storytelling, may be used by some college to encourage belief

in, and loyalty to, institutions.

Ritual theory contributes to student success through a combination of belief and action.

Yet, there is a paradox: Beliefs are highly transient and changeable, but exceedingly difficult

to *change*. Community colleges are positioned to change student behaviors through key

strategic decisions, thereby providing students with the means to succeed. Rituals can shape the

adoption of social forms, habits and routines, milestones, or new community groups. These

rituals, however defined, can lead to shifts in a student's psychology, as proposed in both

Mindset (Dweck, 2006) and *Grit* (Duckworth, 2016).

Passage also includes the importance of recognition. Recognition (Durkheim,

1912/2008) authenticates the experience by validating that the student in on the right path, even

the right 'place'. The process of accomplishment is mediated by smaller steps whereby the

student is able to recognize what success actually looks like, in its ultimate form, such as

graduation, but also in its intermediate forms. Opportunities to recognize smaller steps toward

accomplishment is an important aspect of the model.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was not to develop a classification or schema for rituals and

community colleges, but to demonstrate how ritual theory and student success theory can

integrate into a conceptual model that is useful to both scholars and practitioners. The Ritual

Lens provides a way to reflect on current practices and ask critical questions. The themes of

Emplacement and Passage represent the consolidation of ritual theory and student success theories as understood by the researcher. The Ritual Lens is flexible, however, allowing for interpretation according to the needs of each institution. The Ritual Lens does not provide discrete answers but rather a process of inquiry and evaluation. Through inquiry, community colleges can improve their outcomes, increasing persistence, retention, and graduation rates with new strategies.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, PRODUCT, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation was constructed on the intellectual terrain shared by ritual theories and student success theories. The literature review and analysis affirmed that rituals have the potential to promote student success in community colleges. Yet, the lack of specific, research-based recommendations for practitioners to create rituals on their campuses constitutes a significant gap.

The product of this dissertation includes the synthesis of student success theory and ritual theory to enhance theory, used to make specific recommendations. Chapter Three, the literature review, summarized student success theories, described the varied purposes of rituals and how they can be most effective. Chapter Four, Analysis, gleaned two themes, Emplacement and Passage, from the nexus of student success theory and ritual theory. The purpose of Chapter Five is to make recommendation to practitioners, and to note implications for future research. This product reflects the University of Maryland University College's DMCCPA scholar-practitioner model that blends theory with application (UMUC, 2014). This chapter enumerates a number of practices to strengthen institutional culture and student success. Chapter Five is organized into four parts: 1) Arguments to Support Ritual Creation on Campus; 2) Ritual Theory to Ritual Effectiveness; 3) Limitations; and 4) Future Research.

The section called Ritual Theory to Ritual Success includes a list of specific recommendations to build campus rituals. Explicated in detail later, they are also listed below.

- Conduct a Ritual Audit

- Involve Students and Faculty

- Examine How Rituals Can Influence Student Behavior

- Recognize and Address Generational Bias

- Explore Classroom Ritual

- Develop Rituals with a Clear Purpose and a Respect for Institutional History

- Embrace Universal Themes

- Celebrate College History

- Study Local Habitat for Rituals

- Embrace Fun and Festival

- Involve Students in Formal Administrative Rituals

- Develop Ritual Milestones to Recognize Ongoing Success

- Embrace Essential Ritual Elements: Action, Space, and Timing

- Use the Ritual Lens

ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT RITUAL CREATION ON CAMPUS

This author proposes that rituals can be created in community colleges and that well-constructed and authentic rituals can have a positive and powerful impact student success. Yet, some faculty and administrators may be ambivalent, or even skeptical, about the development and execution of rituals in colleges. As ritual is rooted in religion, community college practitioners may be particularly dubious due to the secular nature of their institutions. Recalling the resistance to attempts to ritualize the events of September 11 on campus, Grimes stated:

> The proposal was rejected: We don't do that kind of thing here. Here, ritual is out
> of place; we have no ritual tradition, no ceremonial vocabulary, on which to draw.
> We are a university, a place of higher learning. (2006, p. 76)

During the process of writing this dissertation, the author listened to colleagues' doubts about a place for rituals in community colleges. These arguments generally fell into four categories: student ambivalence; diversity; generation gaps; and the non-residential nature of community colleges. To promote a discussion about rituals on campuses, it is important to anticipate these arguments in advance. These arguments, with counter arguments, are listed below.

ARGUMENT NUMBER ONE, STUDENT AMBIVALENCE, WITH COUNTER ARGUMENT

Some suggest that students will not participate in rituals or find them meaningful. This belief is grounded in a limited notion of ritual to public ceremonials, and an association with religion. This dissertation demonstrated that rituals may be embedded throughout college life, in businesses processes and in classrooms, with the potential to deepen the connection between students and the institution. The challenge is intentionality: what do we want to say as practitioners, and how do we want to say it?

Nonetheless, an analysis of rituals on campus will include ceremonials, the most public of which is graduation. While it is true that some students may be uncomfortable with public ceremonies, it is important for practitioners not to overgeneralize the student body. The literature suggests that community college students may have experience with rituals through their families or countries of origin (DiMaggio, 2009). To understand or gauge different student groups' interest in ritual, the dissertation author recommends starting with an internal analysis of graduation attendance. Of eligible students, which are more likely to attend the actual ceremony? What does this information tell us about students' openness to ritual?

For community college students, ritual may provide an alternative form of involvement. Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement emphasized the importance of social connections as

well as more immersive campus activities, such as work study and ROTC. While student success would be fostered by more time on campus, students who attend part time and often juggle multiple work and family responsibilities are not positioned to do so. As an alternative, rituals can be designed to be "bite-sized," offering students who are not able to spend time on campus with a quick infusion of expectation, motivation, clarity, validation, socialization, connection, and solidarity. Such rituals, called "nonce rituals" (Myerhoff, 1977, p. 201), are deemed highly effective because they are purposeful, specific, and time limited.

ARGUMENT NUMBER TWO, DIVERSITY, WITH COUNTER ARGUMENT

Some argue that the community colleges are too diverse to develop rituals that are meaningful for everyone, and that differences in race, religion, culture, and age prevail against shared experience. In this dissertation, however, a number of theories underscored how rituals and ceremonies can effectively bring individuals together despite their differences, suggesting that rituals allow for multiple and divergent perspectives on the same experience.

In fact, rituals can be designed to address the needs of various types of students. For example, the literature on student success suggests that practitioners recognize the spiritual dimensions of learning (Kuh, & Gonyea, 2006). However, as secular institutions, there are few options to integrate this important aspect of students' lives. Rituals, when well-constructed, can provide a pseudo-religious experience for students, awakening a connection to something larger than themselves. Examples in the literature of ritual's capacity to inspire awe include many graduation ceremonies, white-coat ceremonies (Karnieli-Miller, Frankel & Inui, 2013), and passage ceremonies during times of loss and grieving.

While diversity is not a persuasive argument against the development of ritual, the characteristics of the student body should shape ritual. This point will be discussed in the next section, Ritual Theory to Ritual Effectiveness.

ARGUMENT NUMBER THREE, THE GENERATION GAP, WITH COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Some may suggest that the community colleges are too diverse in terms of age to develop rituals that are meaningful for everyone. The generational argument stipulates that students from different age groups have so little in common that it would be impossible to develop meaningful rituals. Generational concerns about ritual are valid: Rituals are social endeavors, and students from different life phases may not respond to the same rituals. However, the national data suggests that 51% of community college students are under 21, with the median age of 24 (AACC, 2017), sharing many generational characteristics. Further, while much is written about the technological generation gap (Stone, 2010), there is some evidence that adults are actually more likely to use certain social media, such as pinning and instagramming, than teenagers (Davis, 2013). As student success theory and ritual theory mature and integrate technology, virtual rituals may emerge to dissolve the demographic lines between students.

ARGUMENT NUMBER FOUR, THE NON-RESIDENTIAL NATURE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES, WITH COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Students attend community college because they need to, or want to live closer to home. Some may claim that this facet of community college student life will prevent the development and maintenance of rituals. While the preponderance of literature on rituals in higher education favor four-year institutions, the residential argument ignores the fact that community colleges are deeply embedded in their communities of origin, and are simply

participating in a different type of residential experience. Rather than viewing this as a weakness, community college practitioners can recognize off-campus residence as a strength, and an opportunity to build upon local connections, history, and traditions. To build upon these local connections, practitioners can ask themselves the following questions as they develop rituals: What local traditions, festivals, and rituals are students familiar with? Do students participate in them, and if not, why not? How can these events be used to assemble students from different backgrounds and provide a shared experience?

RITUAL THEORY TO RITUAL EFFECTIVENESS

Chapter Three, the literature review, included student success theories and ritual theories. Student success theories described what students need to be successful, and ritual theories described how ritual can help individuals and groups in many different contexts to survive and thrive. In addition, the literature described why some rituals are more effective than others. For example, the rituals described by Collins and Lewis (2008) at Spelman College and Bennett College were deemed effective because they reflected an actual student-centered focus. Manning (2000) suggested that new rituals be "consciously built on past practice" (p.124), recommending the use of music and accessible campus symbols to communicate messages. Bell (1992/2009) described the use of the body for ritual efficacy. Both Bell (1992/2009) and Quantz, O'Connor, and Magolda (2011) noted that rituals are most powerful when the participants are not entirely conscious. Turner (1969/1995) emphasized the importance of rituals that dissolved structure and hierarchies, such as parties and festivals.

The literature also described some of the universalistic aspects of ritual that contribute to their durability and their capacity to transcend transcend demographic boundaries. Durkheim's (1912/2008) focus on belonging and social solidarity, Smith's (1987/1992)

privileging of place, van Gennep's (1909/1992) description of rites of passage, all refer to the

universalistic applications of ritual. Through the literature review and the conceptual model, a

number of recommendations emerged.

CONDUCT A RITUAL AUDIT

An analysis of rituals on campus can reveal important information about institutional

conflicts and weaknesses that impact students. In his analysis of the campus tour, Magolda

(2001) recommended a 'ritual audit' in order to:

> reveal whether intended outcomes are achieved and whether gaps between
>
> espoused values (for example, recruit a more diverse group of students) and
>
> enacted values (for example, nontraditional-age students are less welcome than
>
> traditional-age students) exist. Revisiting the tour would provide a venue for
>
> coordinators to contemplate important ideological questions such as these:
>
> Whose interests are being favored, and whose are being ignored? Who is at the
>
> cultural center, and who is on the margins? To what ends do and should these
>
> rituals serve? (For example, should the tour give the people what they want or
>
> provide information that attendees are entitled to know but might not
>
> embrace?)". p. 6

The literature provides models for this process. Peterson and Deal's (2002) *The*

Shaping School Culture Fieldbook, invites participants to analyze and reshape primary and

secondary school culture through a study of rituals. Similarly, Blumenkrantz and Goldstein

(2014) developed a series of questions to recognize institutional gaps in welcoming and

integrating students (pp. 92-93). A product of this dissertation, Table 13, is designed to assist

community college practitioners in the analysis of their environments for student success. The

questions reflect the intersection of ritual theory and student success theory, and emphasize the

two cornerstone ideas, Emplacement and Passage.

Table 13. *The Ritual Audit*

Formal Welcoming of New Students: Describe the events that welcome new students. When do they occur and who attends? What is the tone or atmosphere of the event—informational, recreational, or both? Are students divided by program or another characteristic? Do returning students have speaking roles? Is there food, and if so, what kind? Which parts of orientation are recreational and which are informational? Are families and friends invited? Do speakers inspire and invite students to think about the future, such as graduation? Do faculty speak at the event? Are they available for conversation or engagement?
Informal Interactions Are all college employees friendly and approachable? Do students hold doors open for each other when they enter or exit a building? In general, do people on campus say hello to people they do not know?
Welcoming Returning Students: What events are planned to welcome back new students? Are they informal or informal? Are faculty invited, and do they attend?
Space: Are there any public spaces that stand out as remarkable, memorable, or meaningful? Is art displayed? What landmarks surround the college? Are informal spaces available for students to interact? Where is the cafeteria, how late is it open, and what type of food is served? Are student services located in a prominent place? Are maps prominently displayed? How are classrooms designed? Does the president or faculty come and visit students in student spaces?
Recognition of Intermediate Accomplishments: How is persistence and retention recognized as a personal student accomplishment? Are other milestones in addition to graduation recognized? Are students recognized for successes, such as certain grade point averages or social contributions? Does the college encourage membership in PTK or other honor societies? Are there opportunities for students to demonstrate their work to the college community? Are there contests and awards? Are scholarships available for students based on merit and other specified criteria?
Cultural and Recreational Events: How are secular American holidays recognized? How are international students invited and included? Are holidays from other cultures noted on college-wide calendars? Are there public events at which students engage in theater, dance, or music? Are families invited to such events? How is the local community incorporated into the event? Does the college offer any sports? Does the college have a logo? A mascot? How are these associated with events? How were these symbols created? Did students have a role?

An analysis of rituals throughout the student engagement process is an important part of

'the ritual audit.' Through anticipatory socialization (Weidman, 1989), rituals can

communicate information and expectations early on. Even before entering college, students are

in the process of defining their place in the institution. Communications, gestures, and events

designed for students early in the engagement process have the potential to support student success by preparing students psychologically and academically for the transition.

INVOLVE STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Rituals represent the core of an institution. In particular, public rituals are declarations of values and a vision for the future. The conversation about rituals, existing and new, will be enriched with the participation of numerous stakeholders. For example, in evaluating commencement, the most public college ritual, it is important to ask: Is there a commencement committee? If so, who serves on the committee? Are students part of the committee? Student Affairs staff can provide the bridge between students and administration. Are recent graduates ever asked about their experiences or to provide feedback about the graduation ceremony? If not, the institutional research office, working with student affairs staff, can develop a survey to gather this information. Do faculty serve on the commencement committee? Faculty are uniquely situated because of their knowledge of current students, as well as their own institutional memories. How has commencement changed over time? What has worked and what hasn't?

Once a committee is convened, how do we analyze rituals? Grimes' list of ritual components in Table 7 can serve as a template.

Action: What are the physical actions of participants?

Place: Where does graduation take place? Is it on campus or off campus? What type of building? Is it historic or modern? Outside or inside?

Time: Is it in the day or evening? During the week or weekend? Once a year or several times a year? How does season influence the ceremony?

Objects: What do participants wear? Is there variation between participants, or uniformity?

Groups: Is the procession organized by department or division? Do students sit with faculty? Who is invited to the ceremony? Do both full-time and part-time faculty attend?

Figures and roles: Who speaks? Who confers the degrees?

Qualities, quantities: What symbols, including images and colors, are part of the ceremony? Are they explained in any way? In addition to degrees, are there awards? Is food served after? What kind of food? Is it formal or informal?

Language: What language is used? What stories are told, and who tells them? Do students speak? Do faculty speak?

Sounds: Is there music? What kind? Who performs? Is it participatory?

Attitudes, beliefs, intentions, emotions: What is the overall tone of the event? To what degree does the ceremony convey themes of success and gratitude?

Using this information, commencement can become a ritual that belongs to the entire college community, communicating the institution's core values. This participatory model can serve as the basis for the exploration and evaluation of other rituals on campus.

EXAMINE HOW RITUALS CAN INFLUENCE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

While ceremonies inspire and celebrate achievement, student success is less likely to be determined by a singular event than by the quality and texture of interactions moment to moment. Daily interactions, as well as college policies and procedures, have the capacity to shape student attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that will guide them to success. Characteristics such as perseverance, motivation, goal orientation, and resilience were described by Dweck (2006) in *Mindset*, and Duckworth (2016) in *Grit.*

How can ritual be used to develop these characteristics? Ritual theories suggest that repetition can reinforce behaviors and attitudes. In exploring the role of ritual in socialization, Bell's observation (1992/2009) is particularly relevant: Rituals are most effective when participants are entrained without their knowledge. Structures and policies, including scholarships, that motivate and reward hard work and determination, may shape student behavior. First-year experience courses, the overall campus climate, and specific policies and procedures communicate values that students incorporate. Goffman's (1967/1982) small gestures, or everyday ritual interactions, speak volumes. In this perspective, every employee on campus is a powerful messenger, and should be challenged to take on a "face" of student success.

RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS GENERATIONAL BIAS

The involvement of students, faculty, and staff in the evaluation of existing rituals or the creation of new rituals requires the collective thinking of multiple generations. As younger students coalesce around the language, symbols, and even rituals specific to their demographic, a ritual that may have worked twenty years prior may not reflect the needs of current students, regardless of their age. An understanding of popular culture can provide practitioners with a more realistic sense of what may excite, engage, or inspire students. The symbols and sounds can help generate new ritual or infuse an existing one with energy.

How do community college practitioners find ritual opportunities in popular culture? The experts may be the students themselves, and for that reason, their involvement in the creation of rituals is key. In execution, many colleges, including community colleges, offer courses in popular culture to draw from. Through conversations with students, staff, and faculty who are deeply engaged with students of all ages, practitioners can locate events,

themes, and symbols that resonate. Professional development can help bridge the gap if an anthropological approach is employed. It is important to prevent generational conversations from devolving into critiques, but evolve instead into exciting and whimsical explorations into the artifacts of other age cohorts.

Student affairs can play a central role in the evaluation of existing rituals and the creation of new rituals. This process must be conducted with some sensitivity, as any campus activity that assembling different stakeholders involves some risk of dissention and discomfort. Wallace (2007), for example, observed that some students do not feel comfortable participating in ritual. Rituals may be divisive if some students feel excluded. Conversations should begin early in the process about protocols to address points of conflict.

EXPLORE CLASSROOM RITUAL

This dissertation focused on institutional rituals that were largely administratively or student driven. As Mr. Lester, an expert panelist, suggested, students are largely shaped by the classrooms and the faculty who teach them. Faculty may serve as advocates for the addition of rituals, and the process of exploring rituals can support thoughtful analysis of pedagogical techniques through the Ritual Lens. There are also opportunities for integrating the classroom experience with the ritual experience. Faculty teaching psychology, sociology, religion, anthropology, communications, and other subjects can integrate an analysis of campus rituals into their classrooms by inviting their students to evaluate college rituals, or participate in committees that are conducting this work.

What is a classroom ritual? According to Quantz, O'Connor, and Magolda (2011), classrooms are rich with rituals and routines, including performances. Rituals are part of the classroom even if faculty or students do not define them as such. The manner in which students

are greeted, oriented, and evaluated may seem on the surface to be procedural or routine. However, with intentionality, these routines can become rituals.

The transformation from classroom routine to classroom ritual requires a change of consciousness. Professional development at the college can play a role in applying the Ritual Lens to the classroom. Again, Grimes' (2006) list of ritual components in Table 7 can serve as a template for ritual development. Rituals are made up of action; place; time; objects; groups; figures and roles; qualities and quantities; language; sounds; and attitudes, beliefs, intentions, emotions. It is likely that some faculty members are already employing classroom rituals, and their expertise will be a source of knowledge and inspiration to others. Outside of the institution, educational professionals from primary and secondary institutions, some well-versed on the place of rituals in institutional cultures, can support this process of understanding and developing classroom rituals.

DEVELOP RITUALS WITH A CLEAR PURPOSE AND A RESPECT FOR INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

Developing a new ritual is a bold endeavor. Manning (2000) pointed out that the zealous importation of rituals from other contexts is rarely effective. Clarity of purpose is important during the process of ritual construction, or the evaluation of existing rituals, such as commencement. As the conceptual model in Chapter Three suggested, rituals can serve multiple and often divergent purposes, including celebration, demarcation, validation, structure, dissolution, compliance, transition, conflict reduction, or values clarification. The most successful rituals meet both a practical and symbolic purpose (Bell, 1992/2009). Graduation is an example of the fusion of the practical and the symbolic. A ritual that does not serve both a functional and symbolic purpose, and that is not well-constructed with an end in mind, will be perceived as unnecessary by time-stressed students, faculty, and administrators.

The efficacy of rituals is also influenced by perceptions of authenticity. The literature suggested that a sense of authenticity may be fostered by using existing events to build ritual rather than importing rituals from other institutions (Manning, 2000). The Hispanic graduation ceremony described by Gildersleeve (2017) in Chapter Three is an excellent example of how students can adopt an existing ritual, graduation, and transform it into an alternative cultural experience. Specialized graduation ceremonies may be employed by different student groups, including non-traditional students, to validate their own unique experiences.

While authenticity is important, the work of Smith (1987/1992) provides an important reminder that all rituals are somewhat derivative, with an embedded level of inauthenticity.

EMBRACE UNIVERSAL THEMES

Ultimately, the most effective and unifying public rituals embrace universal themes. Durkheim's (1912/2008) theory of ritual reflects common human emotions: belonging, love, fear, loss, hope, and awe. While the diversity of the community college sector may shape ritual aesthetics, universal themes can formulate the core of a public ritual. For example, in a community college setting where students continuously engage in academic challenge, all students will identify with the common themes of fear, success, and failure. Recognizing these common emotional experiences, rituals can be constructed to develop traits that help students persevere in the face of challenge.

CELEBRATE COLLEGE HISTORY

Along with its universal aspects, rituals have the capacity to recognize and celebrate the institutions students attend. This is vital because students are more likely to succeed when they have pride in their institutions. Some institutions have been more successful, and perhaps more intentional than others, in incorporating institutional history into the student experience.

Manning (2000), for example, described rituals surrounding founder Mary Lyon's birthday at Mount Holyoke College. This ritual celebrated the values of the college's founder and instilled a sense of pride in attendance by uniting multiple generations of students through an annual event.

The founder's day celebration at Mount Holyoke College and others is not the norm at community colleges. In fact, as community colleges are open access, students may not feel a sense of pride in attending one. The institutions themselves are not always successful in elevating the public institution to a place of respect. Yet, community colleges have a compelling story to tell, one that can rival the saga of any private institution. Rituals to celebrate this saga have the potential to elevate the image of community colleges in the minds of students and in the perception of the public. In this process, there is an important role for faculty and students in the classroom. For example, students can research and describe the historic establishment of community colleges, or their own specific community college, in sociology, education, or writing classes. The community college story can be developed and expressed through art, photography, and theater. Orientation, and first-year-experience courses, can also provide opportunities for students to learn about the history of community colleges in the United States, and how their institution played a part.

STUDY LOCAL HABITAT FOR RITUALS

The most successful campus rituals, such as Hispanic graduation ceremonies, are built on existing practices. However, some practitioners may seek to develop new rituals to address emerging needs. In these instances, local history, symbols, ecology, and geography can be integrated into new rituals, supporting student Emplacement in the community. Rituals based on local legend and lore can provide students with a sense of identification with not only the

college but the larger local community. Further, this process will might lend authenticity to rituals in addition to serving an educational function. Note that while some students may be familiar with symbols and stories from the surrounding community, they may not be entirely knowledgeable about local history. In such cases, ritual serves both symbolic and educational functions.

EVALUATE RITUALS FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS

As described in the literature review, many four-year institutions, both public and private, employ rituals to welcome and guide students. Community college students, many of whom are first generation, require guidance to understand college's new expectations. The literature on rituals in higher education provides expert examples in the use of ritual and ceremony to communicate new standards and expectations. Manning (2000), and Collins and Lewis (2008), described formal and informal, sometimes serious, sometimes fun and frivolous, examples of welcoming students into the particular culture of higher education. Table 14 lists examples of selected rituals at Bennett College and Spelman College described by Collins and Lewis (2008), and suggests how they might be modified by a community college. As the importation of rituals from other colleges to one's own campus can present challenges in terms of buy-in and authenticity, Table 14 provides examples, and cannot be construed as recommendations.

Table 14. *Private College Rituals and Community College Implementation Examples*

Bennett College and Spellman College Rituals	Possible Modification for Community College
Big Sister or Brother for new students	First-year students provided with mentoring from second-year students, alumni, board members, local community leaders, local volunteers.

Bennett College and Spellman College Rituals	Possible Modification for Community College
Senior Day, when graduates wear their academic regalia	Students can be encouraged to wear their academic regalia on campus one morning before graduation, inspiring other students toward graduation.
Involvement of new or newer students in graduation	By providing new students with a role in graduation, the importance of the goal will be emphasized and recognized as attainable.
Hymn recitation	During the process of developing the institutional saga, involve the music program in the development of a school song. Hold a contest.
Matriculation book	The name of every incoming student can be entered into a book during orientation, and displayed at the library. Due to the size of the incoming class, this ceremony can be implemented at the department or divisional level.
Plantings	Work the community garden or landscaping opportunities into ceremonies, allowing for new students to plants trees or flowers when they arrive on campus.
Alumni Day	Provide recognition for students whose parents or siblings also attended the college; invite alumni to speak in classrooms.

In studying rituals from other institutions, students are in the best position to identify rituals that will speak to them. Rituals that reflect student interests are more likely to be successful than administratively-driven approaches. Rituals are also more likely to be successful if they are approached in smaller units. For examples, rituals evolving from a specific discipline, such as music or theatre, will be more manageable and meaningful from a student perspective than larger events. These smaller events can grow into larger, institution-wide events with careful planning and analysis.

EMBRACE FUN AND FESTIVAL

What can community colleges learn from rituals at other institutions, particularly

private institutions? In the development of rituals, community college practitioners should

recognize that many of the rituals from four-year institutions, both public and private, express a

lighter and more festive side of college life. While these rituals and traditions can be easily

misconstrued by observers as purely recreational, they are, in fact, vital, community-building

activities. If there is mounting pressure at a community college to eliminate activities, such as

sports and celebrations, due to cost, ritual theory presents a compelling case for preservation.

Further, in constructing new rituals, practitioners should be inspired by the more festive aspects

of rituals in other institutions. Even though most community college students do not reside on

campus, social engagement is important, particularly for younger students. In addition to

providing opportunities for engagement, social events can provide practitioners with an

alternative point of entry into students' lives, and opportunities to impart values and to

influence their pathways.

INTEGRATE ALUMNI, FAMILY, AND OTHER LOCAL RESOURCES

The integration of alumni, or other significant adults from the local community, into

rituals will strengthen students' sense of connection, while providing role models and lifelong

contacts. As potential sources of social capital, rituals and ceremonies that involve local

institutions, including churches, businesses, historical societies, and hospitals, can provide

students with linkages to resources to call upon in the future. These connections are vital: The

literature suggests that cultural capital, related to economic capital, is a major determinant of

student success (Berger, 2000). This process also strengthens students' sense of Emplacement,

developed in Chapter Four. By increasing the value of the experience, students are more likely to persist and succeed.

While the future is important, a link with the past is essential to the development of institutional attachment. In this regard, community colleges are at a disadvantage: in general, community colleges do not have the hundreds of years of institutional history to draw from.. Yet, as community colleges age, so will multigenerational attendance. This sense of shared history, or legacy, will increase as community colleges and multiple generations report attending the same community college. Now is the time to develop rituals and traditions as a bridge between the past and the present. Inviting family members to ritual events, both alumni and non-alumni, will reinforce the value of the institution to students and the community at large. Over time, as rituals become embedded into a campus culture, they can become a point of continued affiliation, providing inspiration and networking for students.

INVOLVE STUDENTS IN FORMAL ADMINISTRATIVE RITUALS

Official, 'non-student ceremonies' can also provide students with an entrée into the adult world. The "motley crew" (Moore and Myerhoff , 1977, p. 7) of faculty, administrators, business people, and students assembled to commemorate the opening of a university building, highlight the perfect execution of secular ritual. One can only imagine how, 40 years after, the event shaped the participants, or if they recall it at all. However, analyzing the event retrospectively through the ritual lens, combining ritual theory and student success theory, its value can be estimated. As a result of participating, students were most certainly exposed to professionals from different walks of life and received a glimpse of what is possible. Expectations for behavior were established, and most likely followed. These types of

opportunities are particularly important for first generation college students as they forge their identities as professionals.

Practitioners are in a position to find ways to harness the power of these events that occur regularly on campus. By inviting students to administrative ceremonies, the institution can provide important and potentially transformative learning experiences. Attendance at such ceremonies, embedded into the curricula of classes, may once again provide linkages between the classroom and the larger institution.

DEVELOP RITUAL MILESTONES TO RECOGNIZE ONGOING SUCCESS

Socializing for student success is particularly important for community college students who attend part-time and are challenged to balance multiple life responsibilities. As the path to graduation is long and difficult, touchpoints to acknowledge significant intermediate accomplishments are important for students' confidence and sense of efficacy. In addition to orientation and graduation, practitioners should work to identify other milestones to recognize student progress. These may include the completion of a student's first college-level course, such as English 101; the accumulation of a certain number of institutional credits; or the completion of all courses in an academic pathway. The ritualization of milestones prior to graduation builds on the concept of Passage, described in Chapter Four, and draws from van Gennep's (1909/1992) ritual theory of rites of passage.

EMBRACE ESSENTIAL RITUAL ELEMENTS: ACTION, SPACE, AND TIMING

In a campus of ideas, it is important to emphasize the active and the physical. In creating or evaluating rituals, practitioners must incorporate three important elements: physical action, space, and timing. Ultimately, ritual is an action within a certain space and time. These

three elements determine the degree to which students will participate in a ritual, and the effectiveness of the experience.

The ritual theories in this dissertation emphasized the physical aspect of ritual. In particular, Bell's theory of inscription (1992/2009) focused on the physical body's engagement with ritual. One example of bodily engagement in ritual is evident in the graduation ceremony procession. Physical action is central to ritual activity, and without it, ritual is not ritual. In developing rituals, practitioners should provide opportunities for kinesthetic involvement, modifiable according to students' comfort level and physical abilities.

Ritual theories also emphasize the importance of physical space in conducting ritual. Space sets ritual apart from everyday activity, making it special. The space can be permanently designated as sacred, such as a chapel, or it can be modified temporarily, such as a gymnasium transformed into a ceremonial space for orientation and graduation. In addition to incorporating a spatial theory of ritual into student success, this dissertation identified space as an artifact of institutional culture. The quantity and quality of the space is revelatory: a campus devoid of informal places of assembly reinforces the transient, commuter culture, whereas the allocation and use of such space denotes strong student Emplacement. Every college campus, including community colleges, should make physical places available for students for informal interaction. It is in this space, often, that student-generated rituals are born.

The final element of ritual, time, underscores the importance of working with academic calendars. Even as the traditional notion of semesters is transformed, there still remains a seasonal and temporal order to the academic experience. Rituals can reinforce these natural points of passage. Veterans Day and Thanksgiving are two examples of secular holidays with historic significance that can provide points of assembly, celebration, and even debate. Secular

holidays—even the whimsical ones, such as Halloween—are important opportunities for

international students to learn about aspects of American culture. As community colleges

become more diverse, some students may want to bring some of their own traditions to

campus. Recently, a group of students organized a summer Ramadan feast at Middlesex

Community College in Massachusetts, inviting faculty and staff to celebrate and learn about

Islam. This event provided a social and educational opportunity for students and staff.

Ultimately, the incorporation of religiously-based traditions into secular institutions will

require careful implementation.

USE THE RITUAL LENS

In addition to providing practical ideas to implement rituals, the Ritual Lens can lend

perspective on many student success challenges. The Ritual Lens is distinct from 'the ritual

audit' proposed by Magolda (2001). Whereas 'the ritual audit' is a way to analyze existing

ritual practices for efficacy in order to refine, perfect, and when appropriate, create new rituals,

the Ritual Lens is an alternative way of analyzing institutional practices to promote student

success by building on the key concepts of Emplacement and Passage.

As an example, the Ritual Lens can be applied to address the dilemmas faced by

institutions as students arrive on campus unprepared for college-level work. On many

community college campuses, the use of placement tests has remained *de rigeur*, even with

questionable accuracy. As scholars evaluate the accuracy of testing, one can argue, using the

Ritual Lens, that placement tests actually compromise Emplacement. As Emplacement requires

separation from previous conceptions of self and social status, does not the placement test,

which is reflective of past achievement, simply magnify the past that students are challenged to

separate from? The Ritual Lens, in this example, does not provide a recommendation, but provides another framework through which to explore prevailing practices.

LIMITATIONS

This dissertation on rituals and student success in community colleges utilized secondary sources to describe how rituals can be employed in these institutions. As empirical studies evaluating the effectiveness of rituals in colleges were unavailable, this dissertation employed ritual theories and student success theories to develop a model for action. The adoption of rituals to support student success will be strengthened with continued research on student success on community college campuses.

As described in Chapter Two, the methodology, this dissertation was heavily reliant on research on rituals conducted at four-year institutions. While two-year and four-year institutions have much in common, they are distinguishable by campus residency and selectivity. For example, the residential nature of most four-year institutions generally provides an immersive environment that is more prone to ritual creation and maintenance. Further, selectivity may influence how students perceive their institutions, and value them. As rituals are often expressions of value perceptions, some rituals from selective institutions may be not be instantly transferable to community colleges. While this dissertation provided alternative ways of looking at residence, and proposed ways for practitioners to embrace off-campus residence for community college students as a strength, rituals and traditions described in the dissertation were gleaned from more residential college environments. Further research will contribute to an understanding of which rituals are transferrable to the community college context.

There remains much to learn about rituals on community college campuses, and how they can increase student success and strengthen institutions. These areas will be addressed with future research.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation analyzed literature on rituals and student success to develop recommendations for practice. Research on rituals and higher education, particularly in community colleges, remains preliminary. Community college practice continues to evolve, as do ritual theories. This section describes future research directions to support community college practices.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Seidman (2012) noted that student success will continue to be a major policy issue with the national emphasis on accountability and the emergence of knowledge and technology as economic drivers. Further, in the twenty-first century, the impact of organizational climate on all students, and specific student groups, will grow as a focus of research. As Seidman stated:

> We can anticipate that the scholarship in this arena [student success] will
> continue to grow as will the search for institution-specific strategies to increase
> retention among underrepresented/underserved students. In fact, there is
> growing recognition that successful retention of underrepresented groups may
> require that campuses move away from the assumption that successful retention
> requires integration as a one-way street, and may become more successful as
> campuses find better strategies for adapting to the increasing diversity of their
> populations. (p. 29)

The effectiveness of rituals in supporting student success will only be understood through research. In Chapter Three, the Literature Review, rituals in four-year institutions were described through ethnographic approaches (Manning, 2000; Collins & Lewis, 2008; Bronner, 2012). As of this date, similar work has not been endeavored in community colleges. Advancement in this field will require surveying and interviewing community college faculty, administrators, and students to develop a more complete understanding of ritual practices. In addition to research on the extent of ritual practices in community colleges, empirical research will clarify how different groups (age, race, and gender) embrace and respond to ritual.

Modality shifts in education must also be considered in future research into student success (Seidman, 2012). Do rituals have a place in online environments? If rituals consist of some type of focused attention, what would online rituals look like? Can these rituals be created to support course completion? None of the ritual theories in this dissertation could have envisaged online education. As the use of technology becomes more commonplace, how rituals can be conducted virtually should be studied.

Research into methods and approaches to support student success in community colleges will provide insights into other educational contexts, including four-year institutions. While the community college student population was described in unique terms in Chapter One, students at four-year institutions experience similar challenges: identifying as first generation, attending college part time, managing jobs and family responsibilities, and enrolling with academic difficulties. Similar to community colleges, four-year institutions strive to increase persistence, retention, and graduation rates as costs increase and resources decline. This dissertation's product, both the concepts of Emplacement and Passage, as well as the specific recommendations for ritual implementation, may also be useful for students in

four-year institutions, providing guidance, inspiration, and structure. Large and small colleges, old and new, liberal arts and professional, public and private, may benefit from an infusion of ritual.

THEORY DEVELOPMENT

This dissertation focused on a selection of ritual theories and theorists: there are many others that can provide insight into student experience in higher education. Wallace (2007), for example, employed Girard's (1961/1986) theory of mimesis in his classroom. Stephenson (2015) noted that some ritual theories focus on the management of conflict. Inasmuch as college campuses support inquiry, there remains the potential for polarizing disagreements as learners convene and bring disparate experiences and perspectives (Bruni, 2017).

There is also opportunity to develop new theories of ritual through the process of exploring rituals in higher education. As rituals are often the consequence of significant historic or life events, rituals serve are generational markers. A generational transmission theory of ritual would be useful to support the development of rituals of some duration. Rituals can provide opportunities for student to intentionally leave a legacy to guide others in the future.

This notion of time begs another question: How much time must pass for a ritual to be a ritual? If students are engaged in the same ritual activity every month for several years at a community college, but the ritual ceases after the group departs, was it, or was it not a ritual? This question is not just academic, but practical. In the creation of rituals at community colleges, practitioners may find the timestamp for some rituals to be narrow, a matter of months, maybe years, but probably not decades. After centuries of theory development, there is still no consensus about how rituals are created and maintained throughout history. In 1994,

Collins published *Interaction Ritual Chains* to describe how new rituals and symbols are created through the process of "emotional entrainment" (p. 11). More research will support the intentional development of rituals in many different sectors, including higher education.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

This dissertation focused on the role of rituals in supporting student success. While recognizing the significant role of leadership, this dissertation focused more specifically on students rather than the role of leaders. Yet, the role of ritual in the development of leadership is an important one, particularly as presidential responsibilities become more complex. As Tierney (2006) suggested, "Those who will be seen as academic leaders in postsecondary organizations will be individuals who are actively engaged with multiple constituencies in the external environment" (p. 2). This dissertation demonstrated how rituals can serve to set a tone, unify constituents, establish priorities and expectations, manage conflict, and communicate values. Research conducted in corporate settings is available to help community college leaders employ rituals to address the needs of diverse stakeholder groups and navigate the multiple demands of community college leadership.

Interest in rituals and traditions at community colleges will increase as institutions seek new ways to promote long term institutional affiliation in the interest of fundraising. This endeavor can be supported through research conducted in four-year institutions. For example, in their study of alumni giving, (Martin, Moriuchi, Smith, Moeder, & Nichols, 2015) identified universities as "brand communities" (p. 107) that are reinforced by rituals and traditions. As of this date, no studies have been conducted to evaluate the role of rituals in fundraising at two-year institutions. Future research may provide insights into how lifelong connections can be forged through rituals and traditions.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of ritual theories and student success theories described in this dissertation do not begin to even tender the surface of the vast intellectual and practice history at our fingertips. Ritual theories have much to teach community college practitioners, and perhaps vice versa. Success is central to the mission of educational institutions, including community colleges. As practitioners, we believe that education can transform both the teacher and learner, and the society that we live in. At the same time, this dissertation noted that change can be difficult. Graduation rates among college students remain stubbornly low. As practitioners, we are challenged by what we experience as stasis in our institutions, the existence of roadblocks and conditions that seem intractable. This dissertation endeavored to transform how scholars and practitioners conceptualize student success by adopting an entirely different lens through which to consider these challenges and solutions. The Ritual Lens is the coming together of two different disciplines, ritual studies and higher education, reuniting higher education theory with its roots where Spady and Tinto, two great educational theorists, found inspiration in Durkheim and Van Gennep.

Ultimately, this dissertation was a rite of passage reuniting theoretical strangers, ritual theory and student success theory. This meeting was marked by moments of curiosity, awkwardness, and fear. As van Gennep (1909/1992) described, the meeting of strangers is ultimately accompanied by celebration. It is on that festive, and thankful note, that this rite of passage ends. But just temporarily. It is my hope that this dissertation launches further study and reflection on the power of rituals in institutions of higher education, particularly community colleges.

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