

SENIOR THAW: CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN APPLICATION AND MATRICULATION
AMONG STUDENTS IN A RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING

By

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ABSTRACT

The study of Senior Thaw expands on the phenomenon of "summer melt" among high school seniors, where students accepted to college experience doubts or lack motivation, often resulting in failure to matriculate. Rather than just the summer, it begins at the time of application during the fall of a student's senior year of high school and is referred to in this study as Senior Thaw. This mixed methods study aimed to understand the factors influencing college matriculation at Lenoir Community College (LCC) and develop a communication plan to support students between acceptance and enrollment. The goal was to close the gap between students who apply and those who matriculate.

The study utilized Schlossberg's transition theory, which focuses on four elements: situation, self, support, and strategies. These factors helped with identifying resources and barriers that influence students' transitions from high school to college. The study sought to improve communication and support to increase matriculation.

The first research question examined aspects of the admissions process that affect matriculation. Financial factors, such as affordability and proximity to home, were key

motivators, along with a straightforward application process. Survey results showed that most students found LCC's admissions clear, though some needed more help with applications and deadlines.

The second question explored how interactions with LCC impacted students' matriculation decisions. Support from high school counselors and LCC staff was vital, especially for first-generation students. Students preferred text messages over emails, finding them timelier and engaging, especially when linked to deadlines.

The third question assessed the effect of a yearlong communication plan on matriculation. A series of text messages offering reminders and support was effective in fostering a sense of belonging, prompting actions on incomplete tasks, and encouraging follow-ups. These messages helped students feel more prepared for enrollment.

The findings underscore the importance of personalized, interactive communication in increasing matriculation. Ongoing support improved students' preparedness and retention, emphasizing the need for proactive communication in the admissions process to address obstacles and support smooth transitions.

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DEDICATION

To my family, whose unwavering support and boundless love have been the foundation of this journey. To my husband, Mike, whose sacrifices and patience have been my guiding light. To my boys and their wives, Justin & Jenn and Trevor & Stacey, whose encouragement and understanding have provided me with the strength to persevere.

To my beautiful, amazing granddaughters, Ava, Emma, and Isla, I wish for you nothing but success and happiness in your lives. Follow your dreams and don't let anyone discourage you. If Nana can do it, so can you! AEI ♥ U.

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Finally, to anyone who has faced their own struggles and triumphs, this dissertation is a testament to the belief that with determination and support, we can achieve our goals.

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”

C S Lewis

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Transitioning from high school to college is a significant milestone in a young person's life, marked by both excitement and apprehension (Anderson et al., 2011). The senior year of high school is a crucial period for students as they navigate the college application process. Meeting application deadlines can be particularly challenging, as students juggle their academic coursework, extracurricular activities, and the application process simultaneously. Additionally, financial considerations play a significant role, as students and their families explore scholarship opportunities, fill out financial aid forms, and assess the affordability of different colleges. Students must navigate these steps during their senior year, adding to the pressure and excitement of this pivotal time in their educational journey.

“Senior Thaw,” based on the concept of summer melt (Arnold et al., 2015), refers to a situation where high school seniors who have been accepted to college experience a period of uncertainty, doubt, or a lack of motivation in the transition from high school to college. It is a complex emotional and psychological state that can affect many students during the final months of their high school journey. It is the unexpected and unfortunate trend where the enthusiasm they once felt about going to college begins to thaw and they fail to matriculate in the fall. High school seniors need to recognize that senior thaw is a common and normal experience, and it can be managed with proper support and planning. By addressing their fears and uncertainties, students can better prepare themselves for the exciting journey that awaits them in college and begin to embrace the opportunities for personal growth and learning that come with this significant life transition (Anderson et al., 2011).

Senior thaw can occur regardless of the student's identified pathway to post-secondary education. The concept can occur among high school seniors with intentions to attend both two-

year and four-year institutions. Community colleges serve as essential gateways to higher education for millions of students across the United States. As these institutions continue to play a pivotal role in expanding access to education and workforce development, it becomes increasingly crucial to analyze and enhance the admissions process within these institutions. The admissions process is a comprehensive set of services and procedures that guide students from initial inquiry through enrollment and into their academic journey. It holds the potential to shape students' educational experiences and their ultimate success (Harvey-Smith, 2022).

On average, a little more than half of high school seniors who apply to Lenoir Community College matriculate by enrolling in fall classes and remaining in the classes through the census date (10% of class time) of the semester (see Figure 1). Many prospective Lenoir Community College students who do plan to enroll often wait until after high school graduation, and even as late as the week college begins, to finish the admissions process. Students who wait may be unable to complete enrollment tasks, such as residency determination, financial aid application, transcript submission, placement tests, and registration, in time. Due to their late action, they may have to postpone enrollment until the following semester. Delaying enrollment to the spring semester may increase the likelihood of not enrolling at all. In addition, class selection is limited, and scholarships have often been disbursed in the fall semester.

The dramatic drop in the college-age population beginning in 2025 is referred to as the enrollment cliff. Less children were born during the Great Recession of 2008. Looking ahead 17-18 years from 2008, there will be as much as a 15% decline in high school seniors (Drozowski, 2023; Inside Higher Ed, 2023; North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2022). With the anticipation of declining enrollments, it is important to support applicants through the admissions process.

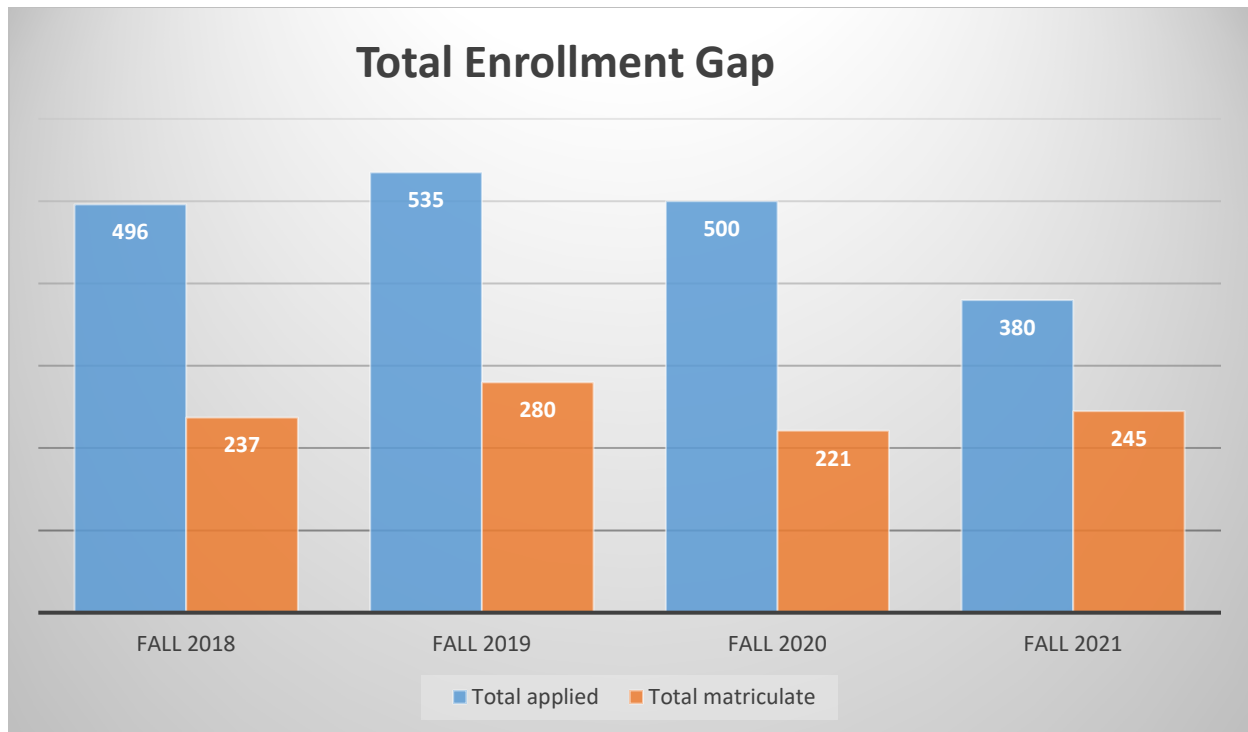


Figure 1. LCC application to matriculation 2018-2021.

Roughly 30% of undergraduate students in the United States are currently enrolled in community colleges, which comes with advantages such as open enrollment policies and adaptable class schedules (National Student Clearinghouse, 2023). According to *US News and World Report* (Warner, 2022), one of the most frequently mentioned advantages of attending a community college is its low cost of attendance, with tuition being only a fraction of what four-year institutions charge. In addition, these colleges predominantly serve students from their local areas, creating a feeling of familiarity and easy accessibility (Warner, 2022). The open-enrollment policy of community colleges provides an opportunity for many students who might not be inclined or able to attend a university to pursue higher education. With flexible scheduling, community colleges enable students to attend classes while juggling work or family responsibilities (Warner, 2022).

Another advantage of attending a community college is the North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA). The CAA is a statewide agreement governing the transfer of credits between North Carolina (NC) community colleges and NC public universities (North Carolina Community College System, 2023). These agreements allow students who fulfill specific requirements, a smooth transition into one of the many University of North Carolina (UNC) system universities. As a result, transfer students can acquire a bachelor's degree with only two additional years of higher education tuition costs.

Unlike four-year universities, community colleges are known for offering a variety of vocational and technical education programs (Warner, 2022). They present a wide selection of specialized courses that often are not found in traditional universities. Opting for community college can serve as an economical means to initially explore higher education before transitioning to a four-year program. However, these colleges also provide a comprehensive

range of programs that provide students with an alternative path, bypassing the traditional university experience altogether (Warner, 2022).

In fall 2021, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States was 15.4 million students, 3% lower than the previous year. This includes both two-year and four-year institutions. Between fall 2010 and fall 2021, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 15%, from 18.1 million to 15.4 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Of the 3.1 million high school completers who graduated in the first 9 months of 2020, 63% were enrolled in college in October 2020. This is 5% lower than the 2010 numbers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic that struck the United States in the early months of 2020 also impacted enrollment trends. Two-year colleges saw the most significant decline, witnessing an 18.9% decrease in first-year enrollment when compared to the fall of 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Community colleges typically act as a pathway to upward mobility for disadvantaged students such as those from low-income backgrounds, first-generation students, nontraditional learners, and students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. This trend suggests that a substantial number of underserved students are opting out of pursuing their college education (Kovacs, 2022). In 2020, about 43% of high school completers immediately enrolled in four-year institutions and 20% immediately enrolled in two-year institutions. The rate for two-year institutions decreased between 2010 and 2020 by 7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Based on the impact of decreased enrollment at Lenoir Community College, the purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study is to help close the gap between college-

intending high school seniors who apply to Lenoir Community College and those who matriculate. The study seeks to improve matriculation by developing and implementing a communication plan that adequately addresses the needs and barriers these applicants face following their application and continuing through the first day of class.

This chapter examines the background and context of the present study as it relates to Lenoir Community College's enrollment data and the current application and enrollment management plan. It introduces the focus of practice and the research questions that guide the study. This chapter provides an overview of the inquiry, including key inquiry partners and both the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. Also included are key terms, assumptions, the scope, and anticipated limitations.

Background of the Study

The senior year of high school is full of exciting and equally stressful new events. This is a time in a young person's life when they must start thinking about their future. For some, this is a time to seek their first job or explore serving in the military. For many, this is a time to consider the possibility of continuing their education by attending a community college or university. Most often, these decisions begin to form much earlier in high school, but the plan typically begins to take shape during the senior year (College Foundation of North Carolina, 2023).

The College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) hosts College Application Week each fall, and many universities and private colleges waive application fees during this week (College Foundation of North Carolina, 2023). The journey toward higher education begins when a high school senior submits an application to a college or university. The next step is to be accepted by an institution, and acceptance and rejection letters, as well as financial aid award letters, begin

arriving during January and February (College Foundation of North Carolina, 2023). For some applicants, the local community college is not their first choice, but if they are not accepted at their preferred four-year institution, they often choose to start at the local community college. For many, the local community college is thought of as an extension of high school rather than college. The urgency to take care of admissions requirements is diminished because the community college is local (Castleman & Page, 2014b). Although the community college admissions process may be perceived by some as less complicated than the four-year schools, there are still some areas that need attention before high school graduation. Some students may be unfamiliar with terms such as accepted, admitted, registered, enrolled, and residency (Rall, 2016). For many individuals, gaining admission to college does not necessarily translate to attending college (Arnold et al., 2009). Over the course of the senior year, students may lose focus. It is important to keep seniors engaged throughout their final months of high school, so they are prepared for the first day of college.

Summer Melt

In the area of education, the phrase "Summer Melt" carries two clear meanings. The initial interpretation, employed by college admissions departments, pertains to graduates of high school who alter their initial college choice and opt for a different institution (Arnold et al., 2009). The second definition, which is more commonly adopted by educational researchers, pertains to students who have received acceptance to a college, and express an intention to enroll, but do not start their studies in the fall semester following their high school graduation (Arnold et al., 2015). This study will use the second definition to describe summer melt.

Concerning summer melt, Castleman and Page (2014a) reported that as many as one in five high school graduates who have been accepted to college in the fall, and have indicated their

intention to go, fail to matriculate at any college due to unforeseen issues they encounter over the summer. These include issues with the college application, residency determination, financial aid application, scholarships, tuition bills, and payment plans. These barriers to enrollment are partly responsible for the continual disparities in college entrance and success. Racially minoritized students are more likely to be first-generation college students and Pell recipients (Schuyler et al., 2021). They may not have access to resources and individuals such as family members who can help them remove the barriers they are facing. The challenges students face are common barriers that lead to continuous inequalities in college entry and success (Castleman & Page, 2014a).

During the summer months, some students have little to no direct contact with their high school or the college they plan to attend. Often families, as well as high school counselors, help students select and apply for college. Once the student selects their college, high school counselors assist them with the next steps through the academic year which ends in May. The college or university is prepared to assist the student through the challenges of the first year once they arrive on campus in August. There is a gap between supports for these students during the summer. This is when summer melt occurs (Castleman & Page, 2014a, 2014b). Although summer melt can affect any high school senior, economically disadvantaged, racially minoritized, and first-generation college-bound high school graduates are among the highest group of students who do not make it because they do not know where to turn for help during this time (Arnold et al., 2009; Castleman & Page, 2014a, 2014b; Schuyler et al., 2021).

Four-year universities and colleges often have competitive admissions. If a student wants to attend a certain school, they must apply by the deadline, submit all required documentation such as essays, test scores, lists of awards and extracurricular activities, unofficial transcripts,

and often pay an application fee. This is usually in the late fall of their senior year of high school. The university or college will then select the students who meet the qualifications for admission. The college also looks at GPA and standardized test scores (Claybourn, 2023). All these materials play a part in the decision to offer the student admission. Once the student is notified of their acceptance, they have a deadline to accept the offer. This often includes a required deposit to show commitment. Attention to these activities supports student intentions for fall enrollment because of the time and financial investments (Burke, 2022; Castleman & Page, 2014a; SCORE, 2021). There is also an abundance of tasks to complete, such as housing selection, meal plans, parking, financial aid/scholarship applications, orientation, medical exams, and open house events, along with submission deadlines tied to these tasks. Missing important deadlines such as housing or financial aid over the summer can be frustrating and students may “melt away” in the four-year sector as a result (Burke, 2022; Castleman & Page, 2014a; Claybourn, 2023; SCORE, 2021).

For the community college, it is a different scenario. Many seniors will apply during college application week in the fall, but there is no set deadline for applications. At most community colleges, students can apply on the second day of class, be accepted, and enroll in classes. The application through CFNC is not designed to be complicated and can be completed quickly without assistance. There are no essays, unofficial transcripts, or test scores required for acceptance (College Foundation of North Carolina, 2023). The residency application is embedded within the community college general application. Although the residency determination application can be complicated, once the student enters enough information, they receive a residency number. The number is all that is needed to enter on the college application to allow submission. An open-door policy means anyone who applies can attend a North

Carolina community college (North Carolina Community College System, 2023; Oliveri & Wendler, 2020).

This study takes place between college application week in October and the first day of class the following August. In a community college with an open-door policy, it is vital to consider the entire application and admission timeline, rather than just the summer months. Although the admissions application is simple, there are additional steps that need to be completed prior to the first day of class.

Requirements for Community College Registration

High school transcripts can be requested through CFNC and are sent to the community college as soon as final grades are posted in June. There are no standardized tests to take. Students are placed in a math and English class based on their high school GPA. Once the application is submitted, the student is accepted and there is nothing else they are required to complete until registration. Many community colleges do require or recommend students go to an orientation session prior to registration.

In July, LCC offers and recommends that new students attend an orientation/registration event on campus. If they do not attend, this does not stop them from enrolling. They just need to contact their academic advisor for registration. At LCC, there is very little the student is required to do from October to August, and subsequently few reasons for the institution to remain in contact with the student.

When a student applies in October and then does not complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), correct residency, or apply for scholarships until late summer, they are more likely to miss registration. This study asserts that the lack of communication during the senior year is resulting in lower matriculation. Communicating monthly with high

school seniors and reminding them of steps they can complete prior to high school graduation may increase the likelihood that they will be prepared for orientation and registration in July. Individualized communication may increase matriculation and close the gap.

Context of the Study

Lenoir Community College (LCC) is a small, rural, two-year public college located in Eastern North Carolina. The main campus is located in Kinston, Lenoir County, but LCC also serves Jones and Greene Counties with campuses located in both Trenton and Snow Hill, NC. One of 58 community colleges in the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), LCC offers several transfer associate's degrees as well as terminal associate in applied science degrees in areas such as business, industry, aviation, public safety, and health sciences programs. The majority of LCC students come from the immediate service area or the surrounding counties (Lenoir Community College, 2023).

According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2022), Lenoir Community College is a two-year public college with a student population of 2,361 (Fall 2020). The college's Carnegie classification lists LCC as basic in the category of Associate's Colleges: Mixed Transfer/Career and technical-high Nontraditional. It is exclusively an undergraduate two-year college.

Lenoir County, whose county seat is Kinston, had an estimated population of 54,633 in 2022. The population was 54.8% White, 41.3% Black, 8.8% Hispanic, and 4.9% other races. Greene County, whose county seat is Snow Hill, had an estimated population of 20,211 in 2022. The population was 57.9 % White, 37.0 % Black, 16.7% Hispanic, and 11.6% other races. Jones County, whose county seat is Trenton, had an estimated population of 9,233 in 2022. The population was 67.3 % White, 28.4% Black, 6.2% Hispanic, and 1.9% other races (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2023; see Table 1). Looking at numbers from 2016-2020, the percentage of high school graduates in these counties was 81.1% for Lenoir, 82.3% for Jones, and 76.3% for Greene (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Of those residents, only 15.5% in Lenoir, 14.2% in Jones, and 10.4% in Greene had earned a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023; see Table 2). The "High School Graduate or higher" category includes people whose highest degree or level of school completed was a high school diploma or its equivalent, people who attended college but did not receive a degree, and people who received an associate's, bachelor's, master's, or professional or doctorate degree. Persons with a "Bachelor's Degree or Higher" are those who have received a bachelor's degree from a college or university, or a master's, professional, or doctorate degree. There are many prospective students located in the LCC service area. Through targeted recruiting, LCC could enroll these potential students. Once they make the decision to apply, the college must assist them through the steps to enrollment. This study aims to close the gap between application and matriculation.

Lenoir Community College receives an average of 500 applications each fall from college-intending high school seniors (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023). Recent high school graduates are applying to LCC but not enrolling in classes during the fall semester following high school graduation. This seems to indicate that the initial outreach to prospective students is successful, and they consider attending; however, the significant difference between those who initially apply and those who attend needs further examination. There is a significant population of both racial minority students and low socioeconomic students among this group based on LCC Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and FAFSA reporting for the last several years. There is a 20% difference in the likelihood that a Black or Hispanic

Table 1

Population by Race/Ethnicity in LCC's Three-County Service Area – 2023

Race/Ethnicity	Lenoir County	Greene County	Jones County
Total	34,633	20,211	9,233
White	54.8%	57.9%	67.3%
Black	41.3%	37.0%	28.4%
Hispanic	8.8%	16.7%	6.2%
Other	4.9%	11.6%	1.9%

Note. U.S. Census Bureau Data.

Table 2

Population by Education-level in LCC's Three-County Service Area - 2023

County	High School Graduate or Higher	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Lenoir	81.1%	15.5%
Greene	76.3%	10.4%
Jones	82.3%	14.2%

Note. U.S. Census Bureau Data.

student will complete the enrollment process and matriculate compared to White students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023).

In fall 2021, 380 graduating high school seniors applied to Lenoir Community College. The total number of students who enrolled was 245. That is an enrollment rate of 64%. Examining those numbers by race, 73% of White applicants, 53% of Black applicants, and 63% of Hispanic applicants enrolled. While improvements would be beneficial to the institution and students alike, it appears that there is an equity gap that may also be addressed through this study.

Trends in community college enrollment nationally, statewide, and regionally indicate that fewer students are attending community colleges (EducationNC, 2023; myFutureNC, 2023). This is an issue that can be addressed at all levels. The president of Lenoir Community College has made improving enrollment, retention, and completion numbers overall, with special emphasis on underrepresented students, a priority for the college (Lenoir Community College Strategic Plan, 2023). From a student services and admissions standpoint, assisting students through the application process and remaining in contact with them throughout their senior year in high school and the summer before college may result in increased student enrollment. The first step to increasing retention and completion is to get students enrolled.

If this issue is not addressed, it is projected that enrollment will continue to decline. Although major counties in NC, such as Wake and Mecklenburg, are increasing in population at a rapid pace, rural counties including those in Eastern North Carolina are seeing a decrease in population (Tippett, 2021). The decline in the number of college-age individuals starting in 2025, often labeled as the enrollment cliff, can be attributed to a reduced birthrate during the 2008 Great Recession (myFutureNC, 2023). Anticipating the future 17-18 years from 2008, it is

projected that high school senior populations could see a potential 15% decrease, as indicated by various sources (Drozdzowski, 2023; Inside Higher Ed, 2023; North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2022). There is already a shortage of trained workers in the community. The anticipated enrollment cliff will also contribute to the shortage. Millions of jobs could go unfilled because there are not enough skilled workers to fill them (UNC School of Government, 2020). Community colleges offer the degrees and certificates that train students for the job force (North Carolina Community College System, 2023). Community colleges may increase both transfer numbers to four year institutions and the local workforce by assisting potential students through those early stages of the admissions process.

It is expected that by identifying the issues that seem to deter students from matriculating, colleges can increase enrollment numbers. Nationwide, about half of all college students are considered first-generation (Hamilton, 2023). North Carolina ranks 32 out of the 50 states in first-generation college students for the combined 2- and 4-year colleges. (Hamilton, 2023). In North Carolina, 36.30% of college students are the first in their family to go to college (Hamilton, 2023). Nationally, this is particularly true among racially and ethnically marginalized student populations, and first-generation students are more likely to identify as nonwhite (Hamilton, 2023). As stated by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2023), 46% of first-generation students identify as White, compared to 61% of continuing-generation students. First-generation college students disproportionately come from lower-income backgrounds, as educational attainment correlates strongly with earning potential in the United States (Hamilton, 2023).

With limited college knowledge and resources among family and friends, first-generation college students are often unaware of how to navigate the application process (Rall, 2016). By

assisting these students through each step of the application process, it is possible they can successfully complete required tasks, meet deadlines, and enroll in classes. The pool of applicants is decreasing as the population continues to decline. By assisting these students through the application process, it may increase the local job force for those positions that require post-secondary degrees as well as increase the number of qualified transfer students.

Statement of Focus of Practice

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study is to close the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to LCC and those who matriculate. The study seeks to improve matriculation by developing and implementing a communication plan that adequately addresses the needs and barriers these applicants experience between acceptance and attendance.

As previously stated, LCC receives an average of 500 applications per year from college-intending high school seniors, both within the service area and outside. Of those who apply, about 50% matriculate. Breaking down these numbers by race, the trend shows about 60% of White students matriculate compared to only 40% of both Blacks and Hispanics. There is a 20% difference in the likelihood that a Black or Hispanic applicant will complete the enrollment process and matriculate according to IPEDS data from 2018 to 2022.

A review of the literature on summer melt gives a foundation to the problem (Arnold, 2009; Castleman & Page, 2014a, 2014b; SCORE, 2021). Summer melt pertains to the period between high school completion and college matriculation, during which students become detached from their high school advisors but have yet to form connections with their chosen colleges (Arnold et al., 2009; Arnold et al., 2015; Castleman & Page, 2014a, 2014b). Research on the consequences of summer melt has been explored for more than a decade (Castleman &

Page, 2014a, 2014b; Hoxby & Turner, 2015; Naranjo et al., 2016). In contrast, the effects of the interval spanning from the fall semester of the senior year of high school to the first day of college classes in August are the focus of this study, particularly for high school seniors entering Lenoir Community College the semester following high school graduation. Rather than commencing research at the point of high school graduation, this study will initiate at the time of application. This period of time will be termed "senior thaw," as it encompasses the majority of the senior year in high school, in contrast to the limited scope of the summer melt phenomenon, which only encompasses the summer period. The purpose of this study is to address the identified gap through early intervention throughout the senior year of high school by focusing on regular communications with the high school seniors who have indicated that they will attend LCC.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

The questions guiding this Focus of Practice inquiry are as follows:

1. What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation?
2. What type of interaction with LCC convinces prospective students to matriculate?
3. How does the implementation of a yearlong communication plan impact matriculation?

Overview of Inquiry

To answer these guiding questions, I used a mixed methods sequential explanatory design. This type of educational research involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data about a current educational issue, analyzing the information, developing a plan to improve it, collecting data after the intervention is implemented, and developing conclusions on the success of the intervention (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). With the ongoing interest in enrollment

at LCC, much of the data described had already been or was being collected for evaluation. In my role as Dean of Student Services, I work with other college administrators on enrollment management issues and the information identified in this study will be utilized to update current plans.

This study was conducted in five phases. In Phase I, baseline quantitative enrollment data from 2018-2021 were collected to identify the number of college-intending high school seniors who applied to LCC. Data were also collected to identify how many of these students matriculated to LCC the fall semester following high school graduation. In Phase II, quantitative enrollment data on 2022 college-intending seniors were collected from IPEDS, National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), and FAFSA. An analysis of the IPEDS application versus enrollment data were compared to data collected from the NSC. The comparison showed whether the applicants who did not attend LCC, attended another college or did not attend any college. In addition, first-generation and Pell-eligible status was retrieved from FAFSA for the cohort.

In Phase III, quantitative enrollment data from college-intending 2023 high school seniors who applied to LCC were collected to identify the number of college-intending high school seniors who applied to LCC. Data were also collected to identify how many of these students matriculated to LCC the fall semester following high school graduation. An electronic survey was created and distributed to all high school seniors who applied to LCC in 2023 to identify areas of the admissions process that students found challenging. This survey was sent to all college-intending high school seniors who applied, regardless of whether they attended LCC in the fall or not. The survey included questions to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

After data collection and analysis, Phase IV began. An intervention was created utilizing analysis from the survey data and input from the inquiry partners to increase matriculation at

LCC. Changes were implemented through the college communication plan to address these barriers and increase overall enrollment. In Phase V, the original survey sent to the 2023 cohort was sent to all college-intending 2024 high school seniors who applied and received the intervention. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, enrollment data for the 2024 cohort was collected and compared to previous years.

Inquiry Partners

Inquiry partners include individuals impacted by changes within an organization. When enacting revisions within an organization, it is important to involve all pertinent parties. The absence of sufficient engagement with inquiry partners is likely to negatively impact the effectiveness of the implemented changes (Hodges, 2018). No study can be completed in a vacuum. Although most of this study was within the realm of my role as Dean of Student Services, there are other areas of the college that can contribute to the discussion, process, and intervention.

Inquiry partners for this study included the Vice President of Student Services and Workforce Development. He provided guidance and support for the study and approved the concept of this intervention. He kept the President's leadership team informed of the study's progress. The department of Institutional Effectiveness played an important role by providing LCC data to support the study and assisted with identifying the impact the intervention had on enrollment. They also assisted with the survey distribution and ensured student confidentiality. Student Services directors, including but not limited to the Director of Admissions, the Registrar, the Director of Financial Aid, the Lancer Connections Coordinator, and the Student Success and Accessibility Advisor, assisted in the design of the intervention. Local high school counselors provided data on high school senior class intentions and assisted with the identification of

potential study participants. The collaboration and support received from the inquiry partners was essential to the success of this study.

Conceptual Framework

The enrollment funnel is a conceptual model often used in higher education to describe the various stages that prospective students go through on their journey from initial awareness of a university to ultimately enrolling in that institution. This model helps enrollment planners and admissions teams understand the steps and decision-making processes that students typically follow. The stages in the enrollment funnel can vary slightly depending on the specific context and goals of the institution, but they generally include the following stages: Prospects, Inquiry, Applicant, Admitted, Enrolled, and Matriculated (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023).

The enrollment funnel provides a framework for colleges to assess their recruitment strategies at each stage, allocate resources effectively, and make data-driven decisions to improve their enrollment efforts. By understanding where potential students drop out of the funnel or face challenges, institutions can tailor their outreach and support to increase the likelihood of students successfully enrolling (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023). Understanding the enrollment process through the lens of an admissions funnel is important for developing effective strategies to convert prospective students into enrolled ones. Community colleges may be able to enhance enrollment rates by recognizing and implementing tailored outreach approaches based on a prospect's position in the admissions funnel.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is Schlossberg's transition theory which explains transitions in a practical way. Using this theoretical framework, this study will add

support and strategies to the applicant's resources in an attempt to help the student transition successfully through the admissions process.

Schlossberg defined a transition as any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. An event can be defined as a transition only if it is perceived that way by the individual experiencing the event (Anderson et al., 2011).

Transitions have three phases; "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" (Anderson et al., 2011, p. 183). An individual moving into a situation must identify the rules and expectations of the new situation. Once there, the individual has to learn to merge these new changes into their current life activities as they move through the transition. Moving out occurs as one can see the transition completed and feels comfortable in what will come (Anderson et al., 2011).

Additionally, Schlossberg described four major factors, known as the Four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies as the resources that help an individual deal with the transition. An individual's strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas contribute to how well they can handle the transition (Anderson et al., 2011). Applying Schlossberg's transition theory to college admissions allows institutions to understand and address the diverse needs of students at different stages of the application process, ultimately contributing to a more supportive and successful pre-enrollment experience.

The conceptual framework of a funnel where students progress through stages towards matriculation aligns well with Schlossberg's theory of transition where students require the proper amount of support during each stage of the transition. These frameworks will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms will provide a better understanding of the North Carolina community college admissions process and ensure clarity of this research study.

Accepted students - Individuals who submit an application to Lenoir Community College are accepted as soon as the application is processed (Lenoir Community College, 2023).

Admitted students - Students who complete the LCC application and submit all required paperwork are admitted to their chosen program of study (Lenoir Community College, 2023).

College-intending seniors - High school seniors who have indicated by submitting an application to LCC that they plan to attend in the fall following high school graduation (Castleman & Page, 2014a).

College knowledge - An understanding of the options that exist beyond high school, requirements for applying to and financing postsecondary education, campus expectations and norms, supports postsecondary institutions offer, and many other aspects of going to college or pursuing additional credentials (Conley, 2005; Perna, 2006a).

Enrolled students - Admitted students who have started classes and completed the enrollment assignments before the census date (Lenoir Community College, 2023).

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) - To apply for federal student aid, such as federal grants, work-study, and loans, the student will complete the FAFSA. Completing and submitting the FAFSA is free. (FAFSA, 2023). In North Carolina colleges use FAFSA information to determine eligibility for state and school aid, and LCC uses FAFSA information to determine whether the student qualifies for foundation scholarships (Lenoir Community College, Financial Aid, 2023).

Matriculate - Has been accepted for admission to the college, has registered for classes, and remains in the classes until the census date (10% of the class completed; Fulton-Montgomery Community College, 2023).

Registered students - Admitted students who speak with their academic advisor, select their courses for the upcoming semester and are added to the roster (Lenoir Community College, 2023).

Residency Determination Service (RDS) - RDS was established in coordination with the UNC system, the NCCCS, the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA), and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU) as the centralized service for determining residency for students (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023).

Summer melt - The time between high school graduation and the first day of college, when many students do not show up (Castleman & Page, 2014a).

Underrepresented students - This group includes underserved students (African American/Black, Asian, Hispanic, American Indian, and multiracial) plus first-generation students and low-income students (Babineau, 2018).

Assumptions

Assumptions are the things that can be taken for granted as true (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). In the present study, it was assumed that all participants were honest and truthful in their responses. This assumption cannot guarantee that those who responded were completely honest. For example, a student may report that they did not attend college as planned because they chose to go to work full-time. However, the reason could have been that they could not complete the admissions process on time and decided to go to work instead of seeking help. Participants were

not required to answer all questions on the electronic survey, so some information may not have been obtained.

It was assumed that the survey results would assist in identifying some of the barriers and challenges that impact matriculation for incoming students. Also, it was assumed that the information from the survey data would allow for the creation of a successful updated communication plan and that the implementation of the intervention would show a positive impact on matriculation. Student services including recruiting, admissions, and new student orientation will continue to operate as they have in recent years. The updated communication plan is the only intervention in place for the 2024 cohort.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations in research refer to the boundaries or limitations that researchers establish within their study. These boundaries help define the scope of the research and specify what is included and excluded from the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). This study only included college-intending high school seniors who applied to attend LCC the fall semester following high school graduation. They may have taken college classes through the Career and College Promise (CCP) Program, but they were considered freshmen entering in the fall. Although the CCP students have had college experience by completing classes while in high school, they will be completing the CFNC application, the RDS application and the FAFSA for the first time. The requirements for admission for CCP students are not the same experience as admissions after high school graduation. This does not represent the entire profile of LCC students. This specific group of prospective students is easy to identify and track based on the high school graduation date and the start term they selected on the college application. They are similar in age, social development, and life experiences. These are students between 17 and 19 years old, typically

planning to attend their first semester in college after high school graduation. The majority have not had full-time employment due to high school schedules. The commonalities of this cohort will make it clear what barriers they may face and how they can be addressed. I chose not to include all incoming students because it might include veterans, non-traditional students, part-time students, and returning students, often described as adult learners. Family obligations, jobs, daycare, transportation, and funding are common among adult learners. The problems this larger group may face during the admissions process are too varied. The concept of summer melt and the extension of senior thaw would not be relevant to the larger group. This inquiry focuses on identifying and overcoming the barriers in the application process for traditional LCC-intending high school seniors.

Limitations

Limitations are the area of the study in which there is little control but can have an effect on the results. All studies have limitations (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). A limitation of this study was that those who received the survey were not guaranteed to respond. Students who were currently enrolled in classes at LCC will be more likely to complete the survey. When trying to obtain information that may have hindered the completion of the application process, it is helpful to hear from those who did not complete the process. There was a concern that the potential students whose responses would be most informative may be the least likely group to be willing to respond to the survey. The fact that they did not complete the application/enrollment process indicates they may not be willing to complete a survey or interview.

I surveyed prospective students who applied to LCC during the 2023 fall semester following their high school graduation. Those students who enrolled in classes might have been more likely to participate in a survey than those who did not attend LCC in the fall 2023. It might

have been difficult for students to describe the barriers that stopped them from attending. Some students might not have been receptive to an unexpected survey. The number of participants was low, particularly among those who did not matriculate at LCC. I sent the survey more than once to increase participation.

The communication plan this group of students received was minimal in its content. As a result, most of these students did not have an opportunity to make a personal connection with anyone in admissions or student services. The survey they received in September 2023 was not expected and could easily be ignored. Due to the anticipated low number of participants, the survey was written to collect as much information as possible without relying on a follow-up semi-structured interview. Many questions that would have been asked in a semi-structured interview were made into open-ended questions on the survey itself. Though details may not be reflected in the open-ended questions, it was more likely to get an answer to an open-ended question than a commitment to an interview from students who were not currently enrolled at LCC.

LCC provides the opportunity to connect with applicants and students via text message based on the cell phone number provided by the applicant or student. With the text messaging system at LCC, the first text includes an option to decline future texts from LCC. If students select this option, all additional correspondence will be converted into an email that is sent to their LCC account. Students not receiving texts may be less likely to get the message promptly, as they will be required to access the message via their school email. The 2024 survey was sent to the 2024 cohort. The 2024 cohort included those who attended LCC in the fall of 2024 and those who did not attend. The same limitations applied to the second survey as well.

Significance of Inquiry

Community colleges located in rural areas struggle with enrollment numbers. There is a smaller number of students to recruit due to population decline as previously mentioned. The college must identify reasons that college-intending high school seniors are applying but not attending. This study sought to address any barriers that may be hindering prospective high school seniors from matriculating.

An increase in college enrollment brings in more funds. This may provide an opportunity for LCC to bring in more high-tech, competitive programs. The impact on the community may include a better trained workforce and increased salaries for trained workers may help the local economy grow. Closing the gap between application and matriculation may be the first step in improving the students' lives, the lives of their families, and future generations.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

LCC enrollment data show that males, racial minorities, and first-generation students are more likely to stop out before completing the application process. By addressing barriers related to admissions that are hindering potential students from attending, overall enrollment may increase and the gap between application and matriculation may decrease. All potential students should have an opportunity to attend college. A lack of college knowledge should not be a factor in matriculation (Conley, 2005; Perna, 2006a). Connecting early with applicants allows the college to assist students individually based on their specific needs. The goal of the North Carolina Community College System (2023) is to meet students where they are and take them as far as they can go.

Advances in Practice

This study addresses issues among high school seniors navigating the application process at a small community college. If a more personalized, targeted communication plan can result in higher enrollment numbers among all students then this can be replicated at other small community colleges. Identifying barriers and assisting applicants through the admissions process through more personalized year-long communication may increase enrollment at Lenoir Community College. Communication plans that rely on one-size-fits-all letters, emails, and texts may not be reaching the students who need the most help. Targeted communication may be more productive.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of senior thaw based on the phenomenon of summer melt. An examination of Lenoir Community College and the past enrollment trends led to the guiding questions of the study. The inquiry partners were identified, and key terms were defined. A brief explanation of the conceptual and theoretical theories that frame the overall study also were introduced and will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to close the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to LCC and those who matriculate. The mixed methods study sought to improve matriculation by developing and implementing a communication plan that adequately addresses the needs and barriers these applicants face specifically after they apply and before they attend that may prevent them from attending in the fall.

Chapter 2 will expand on the conceptual and theoretical framework related to the study, as well as topics related to the admissions enrollment funnel and enrollment management

practices. In addition, summer melt will be explored in more detail as well as common barriers facing college applicants. Chapter 3 includes the information related to the methodology of the study. This will be based on a mixed-methods approach including data collection, a survey, and an intervention. Through literature review and data collection, it is expected that specific barriers facing LCC students can be identified, and the proper supports are made available to match the individual needs of each student who applies to attend LCC following high school graduation. Following implementation of the intervention, collected data is analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4, along with the results of the study and the guiding questions. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a summary and interpretations of the findings, a discussion of the results with regard to the conceptual and theoretical framework, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to close the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to Lenoir Community College and those who matriculate. The study sought to improve matriculation by developing and implementing a communication plan that adequately addresses the needs and barriers these applicants face after application and prior to attending LCC.

This chapter includes a review of the literature as it relates to the concept of an enrollment funnel in higher education and Schlossberg's transition theory, the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. It also includes a review of the literature concerning enrollment management and the phenomenon of summer melt. There are three types of barriers students face in the application process; financial barriers, informational barriers, and systemic barriers (Castleman & Page, 2014b). These are examined as well as strategies and interventions that have been used to combat the barriers and summer melt.

An exploration of existing literature concerning summer melt establishes a foundational understanding of the issue. Summer melt is the time between the end of high school and the start of college when students are disconnected from their high school counselors and have not made connections with their intended college (Castleman & Page, 2014b). While the effects of summer melt, in general, have been researched, the effects of the time between college application week in October and the first day of class the following August is unknown for high school seniors entering LCC the following fall. This study focused on the time of application, as most other studies focus on the time of high school graduation. This time is referred to as *senior thaw*, as it involves the majority of the senior year in high school, rather than only the summer prior to college as is indicated in cases of summer melt.

This study aims to bridge this recognized gap through early intervention, specifically involving consistent, personalized communication with seniors who have expressed their intention to enroll at LCC throughout their senior year of high school. Based on the concept of an admissions funnel and the framework of Schlossberg's transition theory, informational, financial, and systemic barriers facing students applying to college are explored. The concept of summer melt is explored for successful interventions to be applied to support community college applicants as they move through the application process at LCC.

Conceptual Framework

The decision to attend college is not a simple decision and requires prospective students to consider, investigate, and ultimately commit to enrollment. The funnel has historically functioned as a useful model for admission departments seeking to develop the best recruitment strategies for each stage of the admissions process. Institutions may employ several different enrollment funnel models, but regardless of the specific model, they typically involve several distinct stages of progression, including prospects, inquiries, applicants, admitted students, and ultimately, those who matriculate (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023).

By understanding the different stages of the admissions funnel, LCC can implement targeted strategies to increase enrollment. Providing transparent admission criteria, personalized feedback, and timely responses can contribute to a positive experience for applicants. Additionally, offering financial aid and scholarship information can influence enrollment decisions.

At the top of the funnel are those students considering college (see Figure 2). Prospects are students who have not yet engaged with an institution but are in the institution's funnel. These include high school seniors in the service area. Through strategic recruiting, students



MATRICULATION

Figure 2. Enrollment funnel model.

begin to engage with the institution by taking campus tours, completing inquiry forms, or requesting more information (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023). The goal with any inquiry is to convert them into an applicant. Students who have submitted an application for admission are referred to as applicants. Once all pre-admission requirements are fulfilled, students are admitted to the college or accepted (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023).

The next step in the funnel is advising and enrollment. These are students who have completed new student orientation and registered for classes. Enrolled students represent the smallest portion of the admissions funnel. These are the students who have progressed through the entire funnel and matriculated as a result (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023). The funnel is a visual illustration of the journey prospective students take as they progress through the college admissions process with each stage becoming progressively smaller (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023). It is also a good visual representation of the number of individuals in each stage of the admission process or funnel. The largest number are found in the leads/prospects stage at the beginning of the process/top of the funnel, with the smallest number of individuals in the enrolled or matriculated stage as the initial pool is narrowed throughout the admission process.

By strategically addressing each stage of the admissions funnel, colleges can enhance the overall enrollment experience for prospective students. This involves not only attracting a diverse pool of applicants but also guiding them through the decision-making process with the necessary information and support. Tailoring strategies to meet the needs of students at different stages of the funnel contributes to a more efficient and effective enrollment process, ultimately increasing overall enrollment numbers.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's transition theory is a framework that explains transitions in a practical way. Originally developed to help adults transition through life changes, Schlossberg's theory is also relevant to traditionally-aged college students, 18-24 years old (Anderson et al., 2011). Schlossberg's transition theory has recently been introduced into higher education literature as a framework for working with a variety of student populations, including student veterans (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014); student athletes (Flowers et al., 2014); high school students with learning disabilities transitioning to college (Bonanni, 2015; Coccarelli, 2010); welfare recipients in higher education (Pendleton, 2007); and community college transfer students (Rodriguez-Kiino, 2013). Minimal work has incorporated Schlossberg's transition theory into studies of a rural community college student's transition from high school to college; thus, this study was developed to help fill that gap of understanding the transition through that lens.

Schlossberg (2007) defined a transition as any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. An event can be defined as a transition only if it is perceived that way by the individual experiencing the event (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001; Schlossberg, 2007). Schlossberg's theory describes three different types of transitions - anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. Anticipated transitions happen expectedly and include such events as graduating from high school. Unanticipated transitions happen unexpectedly and are not scheduled. An example would be a sudden death or illness. Non-events are transitions that are expected but do not occur, such as not being accepted into your college of choice (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 2007).

Within Schlossberg's theory, context is the relationship and setting between the event and the individual experiencing the transition; whereas impact explains the degree to which the event

is affecting the individual's daily life. A transition may or may not be linked to one identifiable event but could be a process that extends over a period of time. Transitions may have a positive or negative result on the individual's ability to cope (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 2007).

According to Schlossberg (2007), transitions have three phases; "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" (Anderson et al., 2011, p. 183). All three phases can be utilized when considering the experiences of a high school student who is evaluating opportunities and making decisions regarding their post-secondary plans, which in this particular study involve attending a community college. An individual moving into a situation must identify the rules and expectations of the new situation. Once there, the individual has to learn to merge these new changes into their current life activities as they move through the transition. Moving out occurs as one can see the transition completed and feels comfortable with what will come next (Anderson et al., 2011; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001).

In addition to the three phases used to describe the process of the transition, there are four major sets of factors that impact an individual's ability to cope with a transition. They are known as the 4 S's: situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2011; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001; Schlossberg et al., 1989). These are the resources that can help with the transition. An individual's strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas contribute to how well they can handle the transition. The first major factor, a person's situation, is based on what triggered or caused the transition (Anderson et al., 2011; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001; Schlossberg et al., 1989). In addition, the timing of the transition, the duration of the transition, the amount of control the individual has over the situation, other events occurring at the same time, and previous experience play into the situation (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Graduating from high school and entering college is a natural transition for many

students, but others may face conflicts. Students may have some pressure to enter the workforce or obligations to take care of younger siblings. Sharing resources, such as vehicles, internet, and computers, with other family members can be a challenge. One cannot assume the situation is simple for all students.

The second major factor is self, which includes personal and demographic characteristics as well as psychological resources. An individual's personal and demographic characteristics include socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity/culture, age, stage of life, and stage of health. Psychological resources include ego development, outlook, personal values, spirituality, and resiliency (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Not all college-intending students have the same sense of self. These barriers lead many students to give up when they run into the first roadblock. They may procrastinate in completing difficult tasks and wait until the last minute to get things completed.

The third major factor is the support that an individual receives from family, friends, intimate relationships, institutions, and/or communities (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989). First-generation college students may not have the family support needed to assist them through the admissions process. Staff at both high schools and colleges have to be available to support the senior who needs assistance (Castleman & Page, 2014a).

The final major factor is strategies or coping responses, which include those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing stress (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Transitioning from high school to college can be a stressful event for many young people. If a student does not have the coping strategies to progress, community college staff can assist.

This study is intended to understand high school students' transition experience through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The transition from high school to college is often aligned with the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is an important time in a young person's life. Although this transition is normally considered a predictable event, it still can be challenging. Schlossberg's transition theory can apply to the eight or nine months when a high school senior begins to work through the changes that will come with leaving high school and beginning their post-secondary education. High school seniors are reaching adulthood, but they are each at a unique developmental stage and cannot be treated the same (Evans et al., 2010). Using Schlossberg's transition theory allows community college counselors and admissions staff to evaluate each student individually and to assist a student through the admissions process.

In Schlossberg's theory, the entire transition process of moving in, moving through, and moving out can be used as a guide in helping students learn, develop, and grow from their own experiences no matter where they are in terms of their development. This study focused on the "moving in" phase. As the student is finishing the high school experience and preparing to enter the college experience, there are steps that must be completed for a successful transition, while keeping in mind the student's location in the admissions funnel and how that may impact their transition.

Enrollment Management

The origins of contemporary notions about enrollment management can be traced back to the late 19th century. In 1889, Harvard University established the Board of Freshman Advisors, which had the objective of introducing orientation, offering guidance and support, and organizing social activities for incoming freshmen (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). This event seems

to mark the inception of student services in higher education institutions. Following World War II, the realm of student services has greatly expanded to encompass a variety of components, including enrollment management, financial aid, new student orientation, academic advising, campus engagement, career exploration, developmental math and English placement, learning support initiatives, institutional research, faculty professional development, strategic planning, marketing, and student retention (Hossler & Bean, 1990; Penn, 1999).

Enrollment management is a comprehensive approach aimed at controlling the number and composition of students who join an educational institution. It is guided by strategic planning and backed by institutional research, focusing on various aspects, such as how students select a college, how they transition into higher education, what factors lead to their retention or dropout, and what influences their academic performance during their enrollment (Hossler & Bean, 1990; Penn, 1999). It encompasses activities related to student recruitment, financial aid, student support services, curriculum development, and other academic facets, all of which play a role in determining who enrolls and their subsequent academic success (Hossler & Bean, 1990; Penn, 1999).

This approach involves utilizing research to position the institution effectively in the student marketplace, analyzing the factors that impact student persistence, developing suitable marketing, pricing, and financial aid strategies, aligning student demand with curricular offerings that align with the institutional mission, and considering academic, social, and institutional factors that can influence student achievement and graduation (Hossler & Bean, 1990; Penn, 1999). Enrollment managers aim to wield an influence over prospective students from their initial contact with the institution until they complete their degree (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015).

A successful Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) framework has been described as one that offers a roadmap for efficiently allocating resources to enhance the retention of a diverse student body, all while optimizing the advantages of enrollment (Harvey-Smith, 2022). A well-designed SEM structure will leverage data-driven objectives to bolster important success factors, incorporating student services, quality, comprehensiveness, and retention tactics. The approach should be student-focused, tailoring activities that match their needs. A well thought out SEM plan will integrate market research and student input to guide the decision-making process (Harvey-Smith, 2022). Decisions should be based on both qualitative and quantitative data to reach the desired outcome (Harvey-Smith, 2022).

Understanding the historical context that influences the current size of the college is crucial. Examining annual enrollment data offers a concise overview of enrollment patterns each year. Equally important are indicators like admission application numbers and the admit rate, which measure demand for the college (Knepfle, 2019). Additionally, it could be useful to examine the number of high school graduates in the college's service area. One key attribute of nearly every successful enrollment manager is a solid grasp of the competitive landscape. Successful enrollment managers can readily identify schools that compete for applicants, admissions, and enrolled students with their institution (Knepfle, 2019). This knowledge not only provides insight into how competitors counteract enrollment challenges but also offers glimpses into future trends. The ideal enrollment plan should be a dynamic document that evolves and adjusts as the institution develops and matures (Knepfle, 2019).

Enrollment management encompasses numerous aspects within the college environment, including recruitment, admissions, registration, financial aid, career planning, academic support, orientation, institutional research, the business office, alumni services, and marketing (Penn,

1999). At one time, four-year universities focused their enrollment management plans primarily on emphasizing the "quality" of recruited college students, a pivotal factor in their potential success (Clagett & Kerr, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Conversely, community colleges, often designated as open-door institutions, grapple with the challenge of balancing the pursuit of educational quality and services with enrollment management. Over time, this has changed as community colleges have substantially improved academic standards over the last 15 to 20 years. For example, community colleges now require most professors to have a master's or doctoral degree in their discipline (Loveless, 2023). Additionally, community colleges face mounting demands from government agencies and accrediting bodies to enhance retention and graduation rates, postgraduate outcomes, and accountability, all while maintaining their commitment to open-door admissions (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Loveless, 2023).

Enrollment management initiatives, once primarily the domain of four-year colleges, are increasingly being embraced by community colleges. These institutions are investing efforts in comprehending why students choose them and what encourages them to stay until graduation. Crafting an enrollment management plan is a comprehensive endeavor that demands institutional dedication and collaboration across various departments (Bucher, 2010).

To manage enrollments effectively, substantial data—both internal and external—is required. The enrollment management office should have a high priority level and the authority to access data from the department of Institutional Effectiveness. This data encompasses market segments, admissions information, labor trends, birth rates, financial aid awards, yield ratios, recruitment activities, and student outcomes. Additionally, data collected from students regarding satisfaction, characteristics, opinions, and campus activities are crucial for understanding student enrollment and retention (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015). Institutional

researchers play a vital role in this process, not only collecting data but also interpreting enrollment trends (Hossler & Bean, 1990). Successful implementation of an enrollment management plan hinges on institutional commitment and leadership (Dennis, 1998). It requires the entire college to be involved and invested in the effort (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015).

As community colleges continue to serve diverse populations, their mission, goals, and vision must evolve. This necessitates a flexible planning process, regularly evaluated. The enrollment plan functions as the roadmap for achieving specific institutional goals related to student body size, enrollment mix, revenue, and indicators of the learning environment's effectiveness (Ward, 2005).

Summer Melt

As previously stated, Castleman and Page (2014a) reported that as many as one in five high school graduates who have been accepted to college in the fall and have indicated their intention to go, fail to matriculate at any college due to unforeseen issues they encounter over the summer. Castleman and Page (2014b) coined the phrase “summer melt” to describe the phenomenon in which students who have been accepted into a college or university for the upcoming fall semester fail to enroll or attend. As mentioned, it typically occurs during the summer months between high school graduation and the start of the college semester. Despite having the intention to attend the chosen institution, various factors such as financial difficulties, lack of guidance, unforeseen personal circumstances, or a complex enrollment process can contribute to students changing their plans and ultimately not showing up for classes in the fall (Castleman & Page, 2014b).

Summer melt can be particularly prevalent among first-generation college students and those from lower-income backgrounds who may face additional challenges and lack the support

systems needed to navigate the transition from high school to college (Castleman & Page, 2014a). Educational institutions often employ strategies to mitigate summer melt, such as providing ongoing support and communication to enrolled students throughout the summer, assisting with financial aid processes, and offering resources to address potential barriers that might arise (Castleman & Page, 2014a).

Although summer melt exists, Castleman and Page (2014b) concluded it is not a lack of motivation, determination or even money that causes this phenomenon. It is a lack of experience and confidence, such as being afraid to ask for help or not knowing what questions to ask. Applicants also may struggle with imposter syndrome: self-doubt of intellect, skills, or accomplishments among high-achieving individuals (Weir, 2013). If the student does not know how to self-advocate or has no adult support, they may fall out of the admissions funnel (Gast, 2022).

Barriers

There are three types of barriers students face in the application process; financial barriers, informational barriers, and systemic barriers (Castleman & Page, 2014b). Financial barriers include FAFSA issues, including but not limited to difficulty understanding the tax retrieval tool or submitting additional forms required. Informational barriers include a lack of college knowledge, residency issues, and career selection. The third is systemic barriers such as those faced by racially minoritized, first-generation, and low socio-economic applicants (Castleman & Page, 2014b).

Financial Barriers

Financial barriers include FAFSA application issues such as missing information, not submitting early, and not submitting additional required documents. The issues are not always a

result of intentional neglect; the student may not have known how to complete the forms and never asked for help. Although they had not received any financial package, they were not aware there were any issues. They thought everything would be in place by the time school started (Castleman & Page 2014b; Federal Student Aid, 2023; McDowell, 2023). This is a similar problem throughout the country (Federal Student Aid, 2023).

In the United States, the FAFSA is required for most financial assistance to post-secondary education. Not only do students apply for federal assistance, but the application is often used to determine state aid and in-house college scholarships. For most students, college is not possible without this assistance; therefore, its completion is an essential part of the application process (Castleman & Page, 2014b; Federal Student Aid, 2023). Many common reasons arise as to why a student does not complete the application. They include not thinking they would qualify, missing the deadline to file, having other means to pay without assistance, and being apprehensive about giving out the private information of their parents or legal guardians (Federal Student Aid, 2023).

The high school class of 2021 lost an estimated \$3.75 billion in Pell Grants by not completing the FAFSA, according to a new National College Attainment Network (2023) analysis. Nationally, 46% did not complete the FAFSA, although 47% were eligible (National College Attainment Network, 2023). In North Carolina specifically, \$126,259,224 was not claimed and 49% of the high school graduating class did not complete a FAFSA. Nationally, the class of 2022 high school graduates lost almost \$3.6 billion in Pell Grants by not completing the FAFSA. Among the class of 2022, 44% of high school graduates did not complete the FAFSA per a January analysis by the National College Attainment Network (Haverstock, 2023).

Timing is another important factor in the financial aid process. Late applications often mean that there are fewer funds available. A student who files early is more likely to persist over a late-filing student with equal need but a smaller award (LaManque, 2009). Some grants, such as the childcare grant or student work study, have a limited amount of funds available. Those late to apply may find these funds have already been distributed (Federal Student Aid, 2023).

McKinney and Novak (2014) conducted a study to determine how the timing of the FASFA filing impacts the student award and what causes students to file late or not at all. The study modified Perna's (2006a, 2006b) multi-layered conceptual model of student choice to better identify the extensive factors that can impact a student's decision to file a FAFSA. This conceptual model suggests that a comprehensive approach to understanding individuals' decisions regarding college integrates economic theories related to human capital, sociological concepts of social and cultural capital, and acknowledges that various contextual factors play a role in shaping an individual's decision-making process about higher education (Perna, 2006b).

Expanding on Perna (2006a, 2006b), McKinney and Novak (2014) propose that each student's knowledge of, and experiences with, the FASFA occur within a situated context. The students' experiences with the financial aid application process are affected directly and indirectly by their family context, the characteristics of the high schools and postsecondary institutions they attend, and the larger social, economic, and public policy context. The foundational layer of Perna's conceptual model presumes that an individual's demographic and familial characteristics, as well as their access to social and cultural capital, have an influence on college-related decisions (Perna, 2006a).

McKinney and Novak (2014) determined what represented 'early' and 'late' submission of the FAFSA. They considered the differences between the selection and application process for

university and community college students. University applicants normally begin the process of applying to college and filing a FAFSA during their senior year of high school. The open-door policy of most community colleges allows many incoming students to start the application process and apply for financial aid as late as the first week of the semester (LaManque, 2009). The study found that community colleges enrolled the majority of minority students (35%) compared to public four-year (26%) and private colleges (24%). Compared to the four-year colleges, 39% of students were part-time at the community college and were more likely to delay enrollment after high school at a rate of 28% (McKinney & Novak, 2014).

Trends in FAFSA filing showed that filing behaviors indicated 44% of first-year community college students did not file a FAFSA compared to the public four-year (26%) and private four-year college students (18%). Community college students were also much more likely to file their FAFSA late. Among students that did file a FAFSA, approximately 24% of public four-year and 17% of private four-year students filed their FAFSA late, while 54% of community college students filed their FAFSA late. Community college students were more at risk of not filing a FAFSA or filing late (McKinney & Novak, 2014).

Hossler (2000) connects the importance of financial aid to enrollment management. Enrollment at its basic level is attracting and retaining students. This includes diversity in the student body, high-achievers, and those with special talents in athletics or the arts. Financial aid is also a major component of enrollment management. Receiving a financial aid award increases the likelihood that a student will attend college.

In summary, all students should apply for financial aid. As indicated, available money is being left behind. The timing of when students file their FAFSA can influence the amount of the award. Checking on the progress of the FAFSA application and submitting any missing or

additional information should be handled as soon as possible to maximize the possible award. The timing of when students become aware of their financial aid package can influence the planning for going to college, even at very early stages of the process (Kreindel, 2021).

Informational Barriers

The lack of college knowledge is an informational barrier (Castleman & Page, 2014b). College-intending seniors may not be familiar with the tasks that must be completed before the first day of class. These include application for admission, FAFSA submission, a possible payment plan, scholarship applications, career and program exploration, and residency determination. College knowledge is defined as the possession of discrete pieces of college information to make college choices (Conley, 2005; Perna, 2006a). Gast (2022) argues that this definition is limited because it is not a fixed set of information that can be shared or read at a single point in time. It is more of an evolving collection of knowledge or a tool kit. Culture theorists propose individuals activate available collections of knowledge, ideas, and rituals when navigating unclear, complex, or changing institutional expectations (Calarco, 2014; Swidler, 1986). The knowledge in the tool kit determines the success of the student in navigating the admission process.

Low-income, first-generation students must complete admission applications, residency applications, FAFSA applications, and scholarship applications with limited resources related to college knowledge (Hoxby & Avery, 2013). Even among those who are academically prepared, low-income students are less likely to matriculate than their more prosperous classmates. It is at the application stage, where low-income high achievers differ from their higher-income peers (Hoxby & Avery, 2013). White upper and middle-class families have more social and cultural capital in their skillset, which lifts many of the barriers faced by others (Hoxby & Avery, 2013).

Institutions must consider the racial and class inequality that gives an advantage to privileged students with more college knowledge. Gast (2022) analyzed how the level of college knowledge among Black students in a medium to large California high school with a diverse student population correlated to their ability to self-advocate in college-counseling meetings. The findings indicated that the high school promoted college with posters, information nights, and email announcements, but the high counselor-student and teacher-student ratio tended to place the responsibility on the students and their families to research colleges and review their requirements (Gast, 2022). This proactive approach was expected for all students, but they normalized the middle-class White student's college preparedness knowing that most had college educated parents, and most Black students did not (based on school data). The expectation was that students should do their research about colleges before seeking school guidance on how to prepare (Gast, 2022).

Financial aid forms could be difficult for students if they had a parent incarcerated, if the parents were separated, were unemployed, or working several jobs. Students often attempted to navigate these forms on their own due to a lack of high school assistance and impending deadlines. These types of issues heightened their feelings of disempowerment (Gast, 2022). In contrast, White students who had more experience with forms and deadlines, such as SAT/ACT testing or writing college essays were more likely to approach a counselor with a specific question about the college process. This in turn heightened their sense of empowerment (Gast, 2022).

The findings from Gast's study recommend early guidance for college preparations and targeted assistance before application deadlines approach. The responsibility should not be put

solely on the students and their families to obtain the necessary college knowledge. This is also an institution's responsibility to provide the necessary knowledge (Gast, 2022).

Hoxby and Turner (2015) tested their theory that even academically successful, low-income students struggle with the application process using an intervention they designed called the Expanding College Opportunities (ECO) project. This was a large randomized controlled trial. Those targeted for the trial scored in the top 10% on the ACT or SAT and had an income in the bottom third of income distribution for families with a high school senior. Areas that were examined included net cost, instructional rigor and resources, student bodies, and curricula. Students in the control group lacked this information. Those who received the ECO intervention had improved knowledge and made better decisions about college attendance and choice (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). It is important that all students either have college knowledge or can connect with someone who does, who can guide the student through the steps of admission.

Residency Determination Service (RDS)

A student's residency status, in-state vs. out-of-state, can play a role in whether or not the student will register and attend. The state of North Carolina requires students to submit evidence of residency status when completing a college application. This establishes whether a student can receive the in-state tuition rate or if they must pay the out-of-state tuition rate (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023). North Carolina (NC) is the first state to require all applicants to submit their residency information to a third party service to determine their residency status. NC Residency Determination Service (RDS) is a centralized system that takes the responsibility away from the individual college to make the residency determination of in- or out-of-state (N.C. S.L. 2015-241). All North Carolina colleges require a determination from RDS (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023).

The community college system requires that residency is established at the time of application submission. The RDS application is embedded within the CFNC college application. Therefore, if a student begins an application to a community college and does not complete the residency application and receive a Residency Certification Number (RCN), their college application will remain in progress with CFNC, and the student cannot submit the application to the community college (College Foundation of North Carolina, 2023).

Unlike the CFNC application to a community college which can easily be completed during College Application Week held at the high school, the residency determination process is more complex. RDS requires a variety of information that the student may be unable to supply. It requires social security numbers and driver's license numbers of not only the student but also of the parents or legal guardians. It also requires tax information. Additionally, an application that begins at the high school campus is often completed at home (Johnson, 2019). This requires adequate internet service away from school. Internet access is already a barrier for many applicants and their families but the RDS requirement in conjunction with the need for internet access can prevent the student from ever submitting an application to a NC community college (Johnson, 2019; Worsham, 2021).

If the student completes enough of the RDS application, they will receive a Residency Certification Number (RCN; North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023). The CFNC application can be submitted as long as there is an RCN. The residency application requires parental information to make a proper decision, but it can be submitted without having the information. If the student does not supply the missing information within 25 days, RDS will declare them out-of-state residents (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023). This results in a tuition rate of approximately three times the in-state rate for community colleges

in North Carolina. For example, at LCC, the in-state tuition for 15 hours is \$1,212.65, and it is \$4,092.65 for out-of-state tuition (Lenoir Community College, 2023). Neglecting to supply the missing information does not stop the application process; however, receiving notification of the increased tuition amount could prevent someone from inquiring further and ultimately attending.

If an out-of-state determination is received and the student disagrees with the decision, they must file a reconsideration with RDS (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023). Unfortunately, for many LCC applicants, the out-of-state status is not corrected until the time of registration. The delay may result in a student having to postpone their college start semester until the following term or pay a significantly higher tuition fee. The Pell Grant only covers the cost of in-state tuition at LCC.

The students who most often request a reconsideration or appeal for an out-of-state determination are those who have parents who are undocumented and students who do not have a traditional family situation (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023). State law presumes that the home of a student's living parent or legal guardian is their residence unless proven otherwise. RDS uses parental information to establish residency. Students with undocumented parents or those who are not able to acquire their parent's information will be automatically classified as out-of-state. Children born in the United States who graduate from a North Carolina high school are entitled to in-state tuition rates (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023; Worsham, 2021).

Career Choices

The future goals of college-intending students should be clear to the student (Lent et al., 1994). Program selection is an important factor in the application process. This lack of clarity can also lead to summer melt. Lent et al. (1994) established social cognitive career theory

(SCCT) that explains how a person develops educational and career interests, decisions, and achievements. This is achieved through self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals (Lent et al., 1994).

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to complete actions necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Lent et al., 1994). People differ in their self-efficacy regarding the behaviors required in different occupational fields. For example, someone might be very comfortable working with mathematics but not comfortable with public speaking. People tend to select careers in which they have strong self-efficacy beliefs (Lent et al., 1994). Outcome expectations include beliefs about the costs or results of performing particular behaviors. People make choices about what they will engage in and whether they will persist based on the expected outcome and their self-efficacy beliefs. They typically will look for a positive outcome (Lent et al., 1994).

In SCCT, personal goals are one's objectives to engage in an activity such as picking a specific academic major or attaining a personal level of success. These two types of goals are choice goals and performance goals. Setting these types of goals helps an individual organize and influence their behavior. People set their goals to be in line with their views of their capabilities and of the outcomes they expect to reach from pursuing a particular course of action. Success or failure can alter or confirm self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994).

Making these academic major and future career choices early in the college application process are indicators of progression and retention. Those without a support system and sufficient college knowledge will not be prepared for these important decisions and therefore do not have as much motivation to move through the admission funnel to matriculation.

Systemic Barriers

When looking at the admissions process to post-secondary education as a funnel (see Figure 2), there are certain disadvantages for first-generation and low-income college-intending students at each stage of the process. Aronson (2008) believes that pursuing higher education is a class-based process. Those from poor or working class backgrounds are disproportionately less likely to progress as far as individuals from other more privileged classes.

Class differences begin early in life due to childhood opportunities, worldviews, access, and parental interaction and continue into adulthood. The move from high school to work or college is part of the transition to adulthood. As they approach adulthood, working-class youth tend to start working often before they complete high school. College delays adulthood therefore working class students tend to transition to adulthood sooner than middle-class students. Lower-class and working class students tend to delay college by at least one year and then are often part-time as they continue to work simultaneously (Aronson, 2008).

Similar to the admissions funnel that serves as the conceptual framework for this study, Dougherty (1987) describes a funnel-like structure with a three-step process whereby community college students are deterred from reaching the same level of education as four-year students. Based on this concept, Aronson (2008) applies this to all students applying to college. At the top of the funnel are those students considering college. Many are eliminated based on poor academic performance. As the funnel narrows, other requirements must be met such as taking the correct classes in high school. Students who do not meet this requirement are filtered out. Students who do not complete a college application are filtered out. These transitions are particularly impactful for marginalized students. By looking at the post-secondary process as a funnel that filters out disadvantaged students at each stage, Aronson (2008) sees class as an

analytical category rather than a variable. Although many students consider college, they may not understand the type of education required for specific careers. Often vocational education is overlooked (Aronson, 2008).

A study conducted by Castleman and Page (2014b) early in their examination of summer melt examined enrollment trends based on a Last Dollar Scholarship program in Boston. By comparing scholarship applicants to NSC data, they concluded that 85% of students attending college were headed to universities and 15% were expecting to attend community colleges. The melt rate of the university bound students equaled 1 in 5 not matriculating and the community college non-matriculation rate was 2 in 5. The disparity in melt based on socioeconomic status was two to five times higher for low-income students despite scholarship opportunities (Castleman & Page, 2014b). The gap continues to widen. “This eleventh hour loss from the college-going pipeline is therefore an important component of a broader strategy to equalize educational opportunity for the nation’s students” (Castleman & Page, 2014b, p. 31).

As previously stated, the FAFSA and Residency Determination processes can be more difficult for low-income students. For example, non-traditional families may require additional forms to be submitted. Parents may not feel comfortable sharing private information due to their unique circumstances such as an unconventional income, government assistance, and students not living with biological parents, yet an 18-year-old cannot complete the FAFSA or Residency without parental input. The process becomes slow and labor intensive which impacts the students who need assistance the most (Fofaria, 2018).

Low-income students face many unique challenges. They often have part-time jobs or have to look after younger siblings, and they have limited access to computers or the internet. Parents often discourage them from leaving home and the student feels an obligation to support

the family (Castleman & Page, 2014b). These barriers, including financial, knowledge-related, and systemic, can have a direct impact on college registration and enrollment.

Strategies and Interventions

Difficulties in understanding and following the admissions process can inadvertently delay enrollment or, in some instances, prevent enrollment. As previously discussed, many students face barriers when applying to college. Identifying common barriers that cause students to drop out of the admissions funnel is the first step towards providing the necessary support to ensure matriculation.

Castleman and Page (2014b) worked with a college outreach service to determine strategies that would provide students with timely support. They gave them simplified information and personal attention. They walked them through each task and stayed connected until everything was completed. It was important that the first meeting was face to face and not by phone to better gauge the situation. They determined that knowledgeable staff was important to keep potential students engaged. Some themes emerged from the study (Castleman & Page, 2014b). The student and family's decisions about college finances and debt were unique and personal to each student. Individual attention was significant. Secondly, it was important to guide the student through the tasks but not do it for them. This builds college knowledge and self-advocacy. Thirdly, not all students will be ready in the fall (Castleman & Page, 2014b).

In addition, data were collected that showed students need “active encouragement” because they may not seek help on their own. They also discovered the most effective form of communication was through texting, social media, and meeting the students face-to-face (Castleman & Page, 2014b). The communications sent to students removed many barriers by informing them of tasks they may not know about, reminding them of deadlines, and helping

them complete the tasks. Castleman and Page (2014b) based their texting style on a popular book entitled *Nudge* by Thaler and Sunstein (2008). They found that texts worked well because they send important information immediately and can prompt the individual to take action at the moment before they become distracted. An introductory text should be sent first, letting students know more information will be coming. Although Castleman & Page (2014b) are pioneers in the summer melt phenomenon, they recognize there is much more that can be learned in this area of research.

In a recent article, Castleman (2021) reflects on 10 years ago when text messaging was primarily used for social and personal communication. Texting was not widely used as a common means of communication by schools or colleges at the time. Those innovative text nudges of the past were successful; however, recent data show that the statewide and national text campaigns used to combat summer melt and increase enrollment have not had the same impact on college enrollment or persistence a decade later (Castleman, 2021).

These large scale campaigns were often generic and did not address the immediate needs of the student. Many high schools and colleges still find value in texting as a channel for communicating with and supporting students but from a more personal level. Castleman (2021) contends that text campaigns are more likely to be effective when they are sent by a school or even a staff member who students know and trust. In addition, giving students real-time information on their status is more effective. Also, it is important to provide content that is personalized to the student and where they are in the college application and financial aid process (Castleman, 2021).

Another study conducted by Castleman and Page (2014a) sought to determine if low-income college-intending students were more likely to change their post-secondary plans during

the summer following high school graduation. They used two data sources: a national survey and administrative data from a large metropolitan area. They used a regression analysis to measure the likelihood of summer melt. The results revealed that low-income college-intending students have a higher rate of not matriculating in the fall. Summer signifies a critical and unknown leak in the education pipeline (Castleman & Page, 2014a).

Many immigrant students face the under match phenomenon as well as summer melt. A substantial number of college-intending students do not attend college at all or attend a college that is not equal to their abilities and academic standing (Naranjo et al., 2016). The factors for this under matching include first-generation students, low socioeconomic status, language barriers, anxiety about leaving family behind, and difficulty with college forms and FAFSA. Naranjo et al. (2016) suggest strategies to help combat this situation, which includes social media outreach, text messaging, and emails. High school seniors spend a considerable amount of time on their phones. These types of communications are easily accessible by phone and can often solicit an immediate response.

Research conducted in Cincinnati in 2019 shows similar conclusions (Londberg, 2020). The issue of summer melt is more significant among first-generation low-income students. In 2018, one in four college bound Cincinnati Public School students did not matriculate. This prompted the local school system, community college system, and state universities to create new supports to help these students remain in the college bound pipeline. This included creating new counselor and peer navigator roles to assist students through the complicated processes, such as FAFSA, orientation, and submitting final paperwork. The outreach was described as aggressive and included email, repeated phone calls, and communication to parents. In 2019, the number of students not matriculating was reduced to just 19%. This closed the gap by 7%

(Londberg, 2020). These students experienced summer melt, not due to a lack of desire to attend college but because of the overwhelming and complicated process they have to navigate (Londberg, 2020).

The Tennessee Promise program offers free tuition to community and technical colleges for in-state residents. Despite this innovative program, they have faced summer melt among those qualified recipients (Kramer, 2020). Among those who complete the scholarship application and qualified for the program, only 50% enrolled in college. Through a partnership with a non-profit group, tnAchieves, they were able to implement transition supports through emails, texts, and direct contact. Based on Castleman's (2014b) research, text messaging was a highly effective and low-cost opportunity to intervene.

Kramer (2020) suggests three principles as ways to increase the probability of students reacting to this information through text messaging. First, the information received should reinforce what a student stands to lose if they do not respond. Second, by providing next-steps, the process should be simplified, and the student is more likely to react. Third, the students should be encouraged to work with their peers to gain support from others and gain a sense of belonging. Kramer (2020) partnered with tnAchieves to test his model. They tested whether the strategic framing of a text message intervention affects the likelihood of matriculation for Tennessee Promise students. Overall, the results suggested that strategic framing of the text message was no more effective than providing a text at all. Qualitative data showed that many students had issues with receiving multiple texts from parties with whom they were unfamiliar or had never met. It was determined that too many texts were undesirable. In addition, many students were not aware that text messaging was a two-way platform. They concluded that text

messaging may not be improved through strategic behavioral framing, but informational texting can be personalized for the individual student (Kramer, 2020).

The High School to College Center created in St. Louis (Zagier, 2014) shared firsthand accounts from students who used the Center in 2014 to assist with the high school to college transition. The comments made by students indicated they were unaware of summer melt although they were facing it. They did not realize they lacked the necessary college knowledge to be successful on their own. They had an unrealistic view of college enrollment, and they may not know to ask for help, so it must be offered proactively. Zagier (2014) also used data from the High School to College Center to conclude that text messaging was a helpful tactic to keep college-intending students on track. There is a complicated range of financial and procedural tasks that must be completed and of which most students are not aware.

In 2001, Texas had a summer melt rate of 44%, one of the highest figures in the nation (Sutton, 2015). These numbers are a result of two factors. Students cannot make up their minds as to where they want to go until the last minute and first-generation, low-income students neglect to fill out the necessary forms and submit all required documents, so they just do not show up (Sutton, 2015). In 2011, less than 29% of students who enrolled in a two-year college in Texas had completed the expected first year courses at the conclusion of their freshman year. By 2014, the number rose to 49%. The reduction in summer melt contributed to the increase (Sutton, 2015). Texas Completers, a group established to close the gap in summer melt in Dallas, implemented some strategies that were significant in reducing the summer melt numbers (Sutton, 2015). They marketed a campaign throughout the school district to remind students of the resources that were available to assist them. They made sure all staff were properly trained on the resources and could adequately support the student through the process. They implemented

texting to assist students through the process. They offered financial incentives for those who completed the process early. They also developed an online dashboard for each student to check their progress (Sutton, 2015).

Castleman and Page (2014b) found success in using personalized text messaging to encourage task completion. It was a small investment of time and resources for a large return. College educated parents were the greatest factor behind their child's likelihood of attending college. Parents were able to encourage attendance and assisted in the application and admissions process. In contrast, first-generation students had no support to keep them on track. Personalized assistance in some form may be the key to turning applicants into students.

Summary

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to close the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to LCC and those who matriculate. The study seeks to improve matriculation by developing and implementing a communication plan that adequately addresses the needs and barriers these applicants face throughout their senior year of high school.

The concept of a funnel can be used to describe the admissions process to post-secondary education and Schlossberg's transition theory sets the framework for this study. Leaving high school and entering college may be an expected event, but it does not come without some difficulty for many, particularly first-generation, low-income, and racial minoritized applicants. Summer melt recognizes this difficulty that often appears between high school graduation and the start of college classes. The barriers faced by many students include informational, financial, and systemic challenges. By addressing these barriers prior to high school graduation, summer

melt can be minimized. Enrollment can increase and the gap can be reduced among college-intending high school seniors.

Chapter 3 addresses the methods of inquiry and the five-phase approach to collect data concerning low enrollment at LCC. This includes enrollment data as well as survey results. Each phase is described in detail. Assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are also be explored. By analyzing the data and creating an appropriate intervention, it is predicted that the enrollment gap should decrease between application and matriculation. Chapter 4 includes additional details on data collection, along with data analysis and results. Finally, Chapter 5 contains an interpretation of the findings in reference to prior research and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. It also includes recommendations for further study, limitations of this study, and conclusionary statements.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to close the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to LCC and those who matriculate. The study sought to improve matriculation through the development and implementation of a communication plan that adequately addresses the needs and barriers these applicants face during their senior year of high school. LCC receives an average of 500 applications per year from college-intending high school seniors. Of those who apply, about 50% matriculate.

While the effects of summer melt have been researched (Castleman & Page, 2014a, 2014b), the effects of the time between College Application Week in October and the first day of class the following August is unknown for high school seniors entering Lenoir Community College the following fall. This research study was conducted in five phases and examined the admission process beginning with the initial submission of the application, rather than waiting until the student graduated from high school. The period between submission of the application to the community college and matriculation or the census date (10% of the class completed) can be referred to as senior thaw, as it does not completely fit the definition of summer melt and there is not a specific term to describe this phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to close this gap through early intervention by determining if a yearlong communication plan with LCC-intending high school students during their senior year of high school had a positive effect on the number of students from this group who matriculate. No other significant changes were in place for the 2024 cohort.

This chapter focuses on the guiding questions of the study and how they relate to the different phases of the study. Inquiry design and rationale and the context of the study are explained. Inquiry partners played an important part in the study and their roles were also

examined. Additionally, ethical considerations are outlined. The chapter includes a detailed explanation of each phase including data collection and analysis, survey collection and analysis, instrumentation used, intervention, and results. The inquiry design rigor, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions were assessed. Finally, my role as the scholarly practitioner is reviewed.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation?
2. According to students, what type of interaction with LCC convinced them to matriculate?
3. How does the implementation of a yearlong communication plan impact matriculation?

The first two guiding questions address Schlossberg's transition theory and how it applies to this study. Schlossberg's transition theory presents a practical framework for understanding transitions. The theory describes four major factors, known as the four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2011; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001; Schlossberg et al., 1989). These are the resources that help an individual deal with the transition. As previously described, an individual's strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas contribute to how well they can handle the transition (Anderson et al., 2011). The survey and any feedback related to the intervention shows what barriers students faced during the application process and how the student was able to overcome the barriers. The feedback and data give a clearer picture of what communications worked and where the college may need to give more support throughout the senior year in high school. These questions are answered in Phases III, IV, and V. Based on

strategies used in summer melt programs, the final question addresses the effect of the intervention applied to Lenoir Community College incoming students. This question is answered in Phases IV and V.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

To answer the three Focus of Practice guiding questions, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used. Data was collected about a current educational issue. In this study, the issue identified and being addressed involved low enrollment. The information was analyzed, and a plan was developed to improve the enrollment numbers. After the intervention was implemented, new data was collected. Finally, conclusions on the success of the intervention were drawn. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), the explanatory sequential mixed method design helps explain the quantitative data by connecting it to the qualitative data. This integration is a core concept of mixed methods research. This two-part design first collects and analyzes quantitative data. Then qualitative data is collected and analyzed. The qualitative data builds on the quantitative data. Once the data has been analyzed, the quantitative results are integrated with the qualitative data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

In the first quantitative phase of the study, LCC enrollment numbers for five years, 2018-2021, was retrieved from the IPEDS reports. Based on my role as the previous Director of Admissions and the current Dean of Student Services at LCC, I have experienced anecdotally this focus of practice related to senior thaw; however, the IPEDS data were collected and reviewed to verify that the issue existed and to serve as a baseline for future comparison. In Phase II, enrollment information was collected from IPEDS for the 2022 cohort. Enrollment information was also collected from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). NSC provided information on 2022 high school graduates who applied to LCC but enrolled at other institutions.

This information helped identify the participant group for this study. In addition, information was retrieved from the Office of Financial Aid. The student's Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is a measure of how much the student and his or her family can be expected to contribute to the cost of the student's education for a given award year. It impacts a student's eligibility for certain types of federal student aid. This information was used to highlight the cohort's economic status (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023).

In the third phase of the study, survey data was collected from 2023 high school seniors who applied to attend LCC in the fall of 2023. The survey included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, resulting in the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and a mixed methods study. The open-ended questions provided participants with the opportunity to elaborate on their answers and share any positive or negative experiences they may have encountered.

Approximately half of all college-intending high school students who apply to LCC complete the process and attend classes in the fall semester. By identifying barriers facing potential students, this study implemented changes to the current college communication plan to attempt to remove barriers and increase overall enrollment in Phase IV. This occurred with the 2024 cohort during their senior year of high school.

Phase V collected IPEDS and National Student Clearinghouse Data after the intervention to see if there was an increase in matriculation. The students who received the intervention were surveyed to determine whether the intervention eliminated some of the barriers previous students faced (see Table 3).

Context of the Study

LCC is one of the oldest institutions in the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). Chartered on April 3, 1958, LCC is one of 58 community colleges in the NCCCS.

Table 3

Timeline of Phase Activities

Phase	Start Date	Purpose
Phase I	July 2022	Collect baseline enrollment data on 2018-2021 LCC-intending high school seniors
Phase II	August 2023	Collect enrollment and FAFSA data on 2022 LCC-intending high school seniors
Phase III	September 2023	Collect enrollment data on 2023 LCC-intending high school seniors (2023 cohort) Distribute the electronic survey to 2023 cohort
Phase IV	November 2023	Implement intervention to all 2024 LCC-intending high school seniors (2024 cohort)
Phase V	September 2024	Collect enrollment data on 2024 LCC-intending high school seniors (2024 cohort) Distribute the electronic survey to the 2024 cohort after intervention

The Community College System was established in 1963 under an enactment of a general statute by the legislature and it serves nearly 850,000 citizens annually. LCC is a small, rural, two-year public college located in Eastern North Carolina. LCC serves three counties: Lenoir, Jones, and Greene County. The main campus is located in Kinston in Lenoir County. There are also satellite campuses in Jones County and Greene County. The college offers 43 associate's degree programs, 19 diploma programs, 66 certificate/skills certificate programs, and four Career and College Promise Pathways. Currently, LCC serves more than 3,400 curriculum students and more than 6,600 continuing education students annually. Lenoir Community College ranks among the top five largest Continuing Education programs in the state (North Carolina Community College System, 2023).

By examining trends in community college enrollment nationally, statewide, and regionally, the trends show that fewer students are attending community colleges (EducationNC, 2023; myFutureNC, 2023). The College's Strategic Plan engages with prospective students and continues through graduation and job placement. The goal is to reimagine the programs and services offered and how they are delivered (Lenoir Community College Strategic Plan, 2023). This study engaged with prospective students by reimagining the communication plan currently used as well as looking at the method of delivery. Assisting students through the application process and remaining in contact with them throughout their senior year and during the summer following graduation may result in increased student enrollment.

There is a population decline in Eastern North Carolina (Inside Higher Ed, 2023; North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2022). There is also an enrollment decline at LCC (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023). Identifying the issues that seem to deter students from enrolling may allow colleges to address the situation. This may increase

matriculation and overall enrollment. By identifying barriers and implementing a more robust communication plan, this study aims to provide applicants with the needed support to complete required tasks, meet deadlines, and enroll in classes.

Inquiry Partners

Inquiry partners encompass those who are affected by organizational changes. When making adjustments within the college, it is crucial to engage all relevant parties. Failing to involve stakeholders adequately is likely to diminish the effectiveness of the implemented changes (Hodges, 2018). While the majority of this study falls under my responsibilities as the Dean of Student Services, other college departments will also participate in the conversation, procedure, and intervention. My inquiry partners include my direct supervisor and the Vice President of Student Services and Workforce Development at Lenoir Community College. He provided guidance and support for the study. He approved the concept of this intervention which was to improve the current communication plan for college-intending high school seniors. He oversees all operations of Student Services. He also served as a member of the dissertation committee.

The Department of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) provided Lenoir Community College data to support the study and identify the impact, if any, the interventions had on enrollment. Although it was within the scope of my job, I do not have direct access to IPEDS and NSC data. I requested this data from IE to analyze the information. IE also assisted in the creation and dissemination of the survey and collected the raw data.

Student services directors, including but not limited to the Director of Admissions, the Registrar, the Director of Financial Aid, the Career Connections and Retention Specialist, and the Student Success and Accessibility Advisor (ADA/disabilities), reviewed the survey prior to

distribution. They provided feedback on the relevance of the questions posed and any ambiguity found. They helped plan and review the details of the intervention and assisted in responding to student questions about the admissions process. As part of Lenoir Community College's IE Research Approval, the President's Leadership Team also provided feedback on the study, including the questions used in the survey. The leadership team included all direct reports to the president of the college. An executive summary of the study's final product will be sent to LCC's President's Council via the Director of Innovation and Effectiveness.

Ethical Considerations

This study required approval from LCC and the East Carolina University (ECU) Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A) to conduct the research. I obtained LCC approval by submitting Lenoir Community College's IE Research Request application (see Appendix B). The proposal was submitted to Lenoir Community College's Department of Institutional Effectiveness (LCC IE) for review and to the President's Leadership Team for final approval. I received approval to conduct the research at LCC.

Phase I (collecting baseline data), Phase II (collecting 2022 enrollment data) and Phase III (distributing a survey to 2023 high school seniors who applied to LCC for the 2023 fall term) are within the scope of my position as Dean of Student Services and therefore do not require IRB approval. In Phase III, LCC IE identified the 2023 applicants who were in the participant group. An email (see Appendix C) and text (see Appendix D) were sent to the participants explaining the purpose of the survey and explaining the need for their consent prior to participation. The first question on the survey (see Appendix E) required them to give informed consent by answering yes if they agreed to the consent statement. If they answered no to this question, the survey ended.

Phase IV was the implementation stage. I implemented changes to the current communication plan to support 2024 applicants through the admissions process between October 2023 and LCC Orientation held in July 2024. This group of potential students receive communication from LCC admissions during this period of time. As a result of this study, I provided additional communication and support.

Phase V included a follow-up survey for the class of 2024 applicants who received the intervention. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness administered the survey on behalf of the study. The survey was administered to recent high school graduates who were at least 18 years old and who applied to attend LCC in the fall of 2024. The study's purpose was disclosed to all participants, and it was explained that participation was voluntary. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and could skip questions they did not want to answer. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness provided germane application and enrollment data that will remain on an LCC device or server and will only be shared or published as aggregate and anonymized data.

Inquiry Procedures

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to close the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to LCC and those who matriculate. The study sought to improve matriculation by developing and implementing a communication plan that adequately addressed the needs and barriers these applicants faced. The study took place over five phases.

In Phase I, baseline data were collected from Lenoir Community College enrollment numbers. The data were reviewed for trends and commonalities. Phase II involved similar data collection from the 2022 cohort. Enrollment data from IPEDS, NSC, and FAFSA were analyzed

for more detailed trends. In Phase III, an electronic survey based on Schlossberg's transition theory was created and sent to the 2023 cohort (see Appendix G). The survey includes both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Phase IV involved the implementation of the intervention and the communication plan. Those high school seniors who applied to Lenoir Community College to attend in the fall of 2024 semester received the intervention. The intervention sought to increase communication between the college and the applicants throughout their senior year of high school and the summer following graduation. There were no other significant changes made to the recruiting or admissions process being used at the time of the intervention. In Phase V, a survey was sent to the 2024 cohort of college-intending students to determine if the support they received was beneficial for them. This survey analyzed the students' responses to the interventions they received during their senior year of high school. Enrollment data from the 2024 cohort was compared to previous cohorts to see if college enrollment increased after implementation of the communication plan intervention.

Phase I Baseline Data Collection

Baseline data were collected through IPEDS on enrollment at Lenoir Community College for the years 2018-2021. LCC's Department of Institutional Effectiveness provided the data. I examined the number of high school college-intending students who apply to Lenoir Community College each year during their senior year of high school versus the number of college-intending students who matriculated during the fall semester following their high school graduation. I determined the percentage of overall students who did not matriculate. I looked for trends in enrollment loss. I received and analyzed this data in July 2022.

Instrumentation

IPEDS is an annual data collection distributed by the Postsecondary Branch of the

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a non-partisan center within the Institute of Education Sciences under the U.S. Department of Education. NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the United States and other nations (NCES, 2023).

Data collection was retrieved by Lenoir Community College's Institutional Effectiveness Department. Enrollment data were retrieved from the fall Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reports for each year examined (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023). There were four cohorts examined: 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. The original data listed all applicants for each fall semester along with each applicant's year of high school graduation. Data were sorted by graduation date. The cohort only included college-intending high school seniors for that specific year. This process was repeated to create each cohort.

Data Analysis

Baseline data were collected for the 2018 fall term, 2019 fall term, 2020 fall term, and 2021 fall term (see Figure 3). During the fall 2018 semester, 496 applications were submitted by high school seniors and 237 students matriculated at a rate of 47%. During the fall 2019 semester, 535 applications were submitted by high school seniors and 280 students matriculated at a rate of 52%. During the fall 2020 semester, 500 applications were submitted by high school seniors and 221 students matriculated at a rate of 44%. During the fall 2021 semester, 380 applications were submitted by high school seniors and 245 students matriculated at a rate of 64%.

Summary of Phase I

In order to design an impactful intervention, it is important to understand the extent of its influence. It is essential to assess the initial state of the problem in the data collection phase,

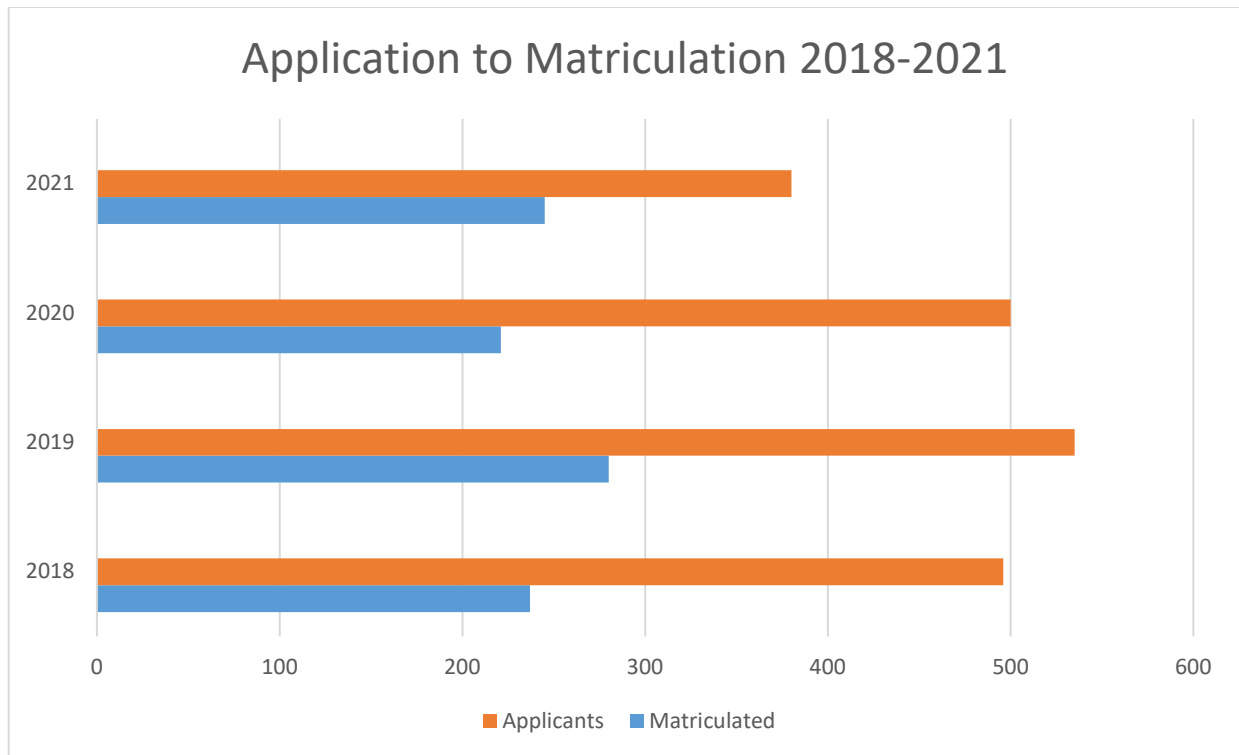


Figure 3. Application to matriculation: 2018-2021.

independent of the intervention's impact, to determine whether any meaningful difference is being made. By documenting baseline measurements and comparing them with the data collected after implementing the intervention, one can more effectively evaluate the program's efficacy. After sharing this data with the inquiry partners within student services, it was concluded that the college was losing applicants at a rate of about 50%. After collecting baseline statistical data for the years 2018-2021, I completed data collection on the 2022 cohort in Phase II.

Phase II

In Phase II, enrollment data from the 2022 cohort were collected through Lenoir Community College's Institutional Effectiveness department using the same disaggregation methods as used in Phase I. In addition, Lenoir Community College's Institutional Effectiveness department retrieved data from the National Student Clearinghouse. The National Student Clearinghouse is an educational nonprofit that provides educational reporting, verification, and research services to North American colleges and universities (National Student Clearinghouse, 2023). National Student Clearinghouse can report if college-intending high school students who applied but did not matriculate at Lenoir Community College attended another college. Data collected determined how many attended a four-year college or university, another community college, or nowhere at all. Of interest to this study is the number of students who chose another community college or who did not attend any college following high school graduation. In addition, the Office of Financial Aid will provide data based on EFC that will give information on the economic status of LCC students and what percentage may be considered economically disadvantaged. This data will cover the 2022 cohort only. An analysis of this data will support

the focus of this study as a possible barrier that needs to be addressed through specific early communication and intervention.

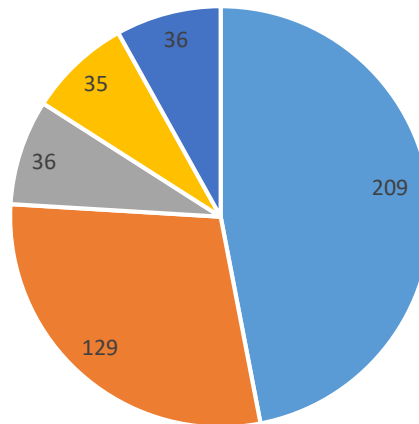
Data Collection

LCC enrollment data were retrieved from fall Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reports as was described in Phase I. College enrollment data were also collected from the National Student Clearinghouse. The applicants from the 2022 cohort who did not attend LCC in the fall of 2022 were compared to data for 2022 fall enrollment found in NSC. The results provided data reflecting if any LCC applicants attended another college during the fall 2022 semester rather than LCC. In addition, the applicants from the 2022 cohort were compared to family income data collected from the 2022-2023 FASA submissions to LCC. If an applicant completed a FAFSA and listed LCC as a receiving school, the information could be retrieved. The two lists were cross-referenced and information about Pell eligibility was retrieved. This report was also able to identify first-generation students.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from three different sources for this phase. I worked closely with IE to compare data from IPEDS and NSC to determine if LCC applicants were attending any college at the census date. There were 445 applications received for 2022 fall admission to LCC. Of those applicants, 209 attended LCC in fall 2022. There were 129 students who did not attend any college in fall 2022. There were 107 students who attended other colleges and universities. Breaking down those who attended another college, 36 were at a four-year institution and 71 were at another community college. Analyzing even further, of the 71 who attended another community college, 35 attended a college in a neighboring county that was within 30 minutes of LCC (see Figure 4).

Attendance of 2022 Cohort (445 students)



- Attended LCC
- No College
- Attended a 4 Year Institution
- Attended Community College nearby
- Attended Community College More than 30 miles away

Figure 4. Attendance of 2022 cohort (445 students).

Looking at income, of the 445 applicants who applied to LCC, 307 completed the FAFSA and 138 did not (see Figure 5). Of those who completed the FAFSA, 209 were Pell eligible and 98 were not (see Figure 6). More specifically, of the 209 applicants who enrolled at LCC in Fall 2022, 190 completed the FAFSA and 19 did not (see Figure 7). Of those 190 who completed the FAFSA, 122 were Pell eligible and 68 were not (see Figure 8). As previously discussed, completing the FAFSA is often a barrier for applicants. In addition, paying for college can be a barrier. By examining the number of FAFSA applicants and Pell eligibility, more communication can be geared toward assisting students with this phase of the admissions process.

Summary of Phase II

In Phase II, more detailed data were collected identifying what the 236 applicants who did not matriculate at LCC ended up doing. Of the 445 fall 2022 applicants, 47% attended LCC, 24% attended another college, and 28% did not attend any college (see Figure 4). The results of the initial data analysis were shared with the inquiry partners and initial discussions regarding the strategies for the next phases took place. It was theorized that a possible explanation for the loss in enrollment to a four-year institution is that LCC may have been selected as a backup plan in case applicants did not get accepted at their preferred college. It is important to provide these applicants with information about the lower cost of tuition at the community college. Those who attended other community colleges may have selected a college that had their preferred major. They may have also received more direct contact from the community college which swayed their decision. Those who did not attend any college at all may have run into barriers. It is important to collect additional data to determine why the students did not attend LCC so the intervention can be created such that it addresses possible barriers.

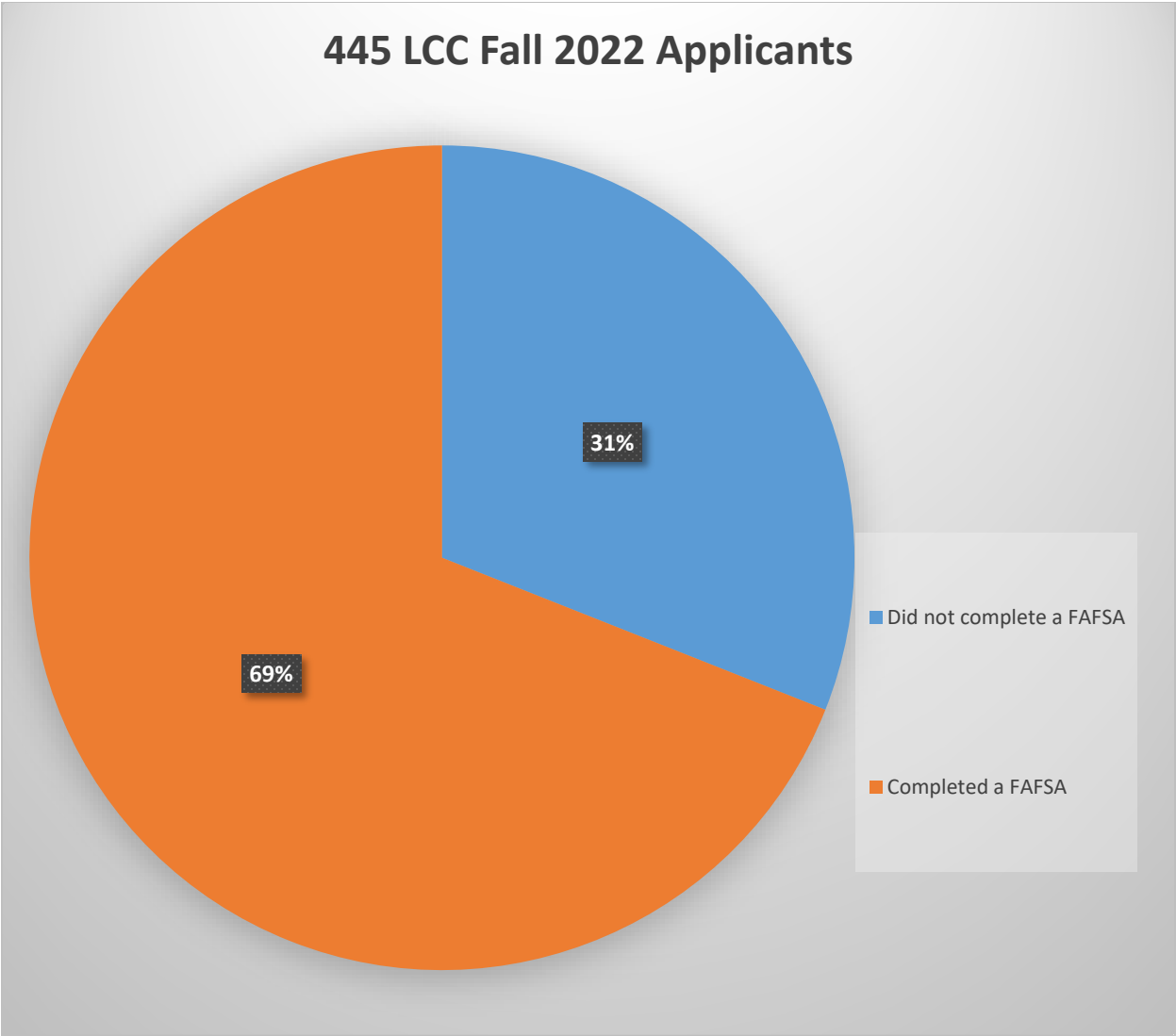


Figure 5. Fall 2022 applicants completing FAFSA.

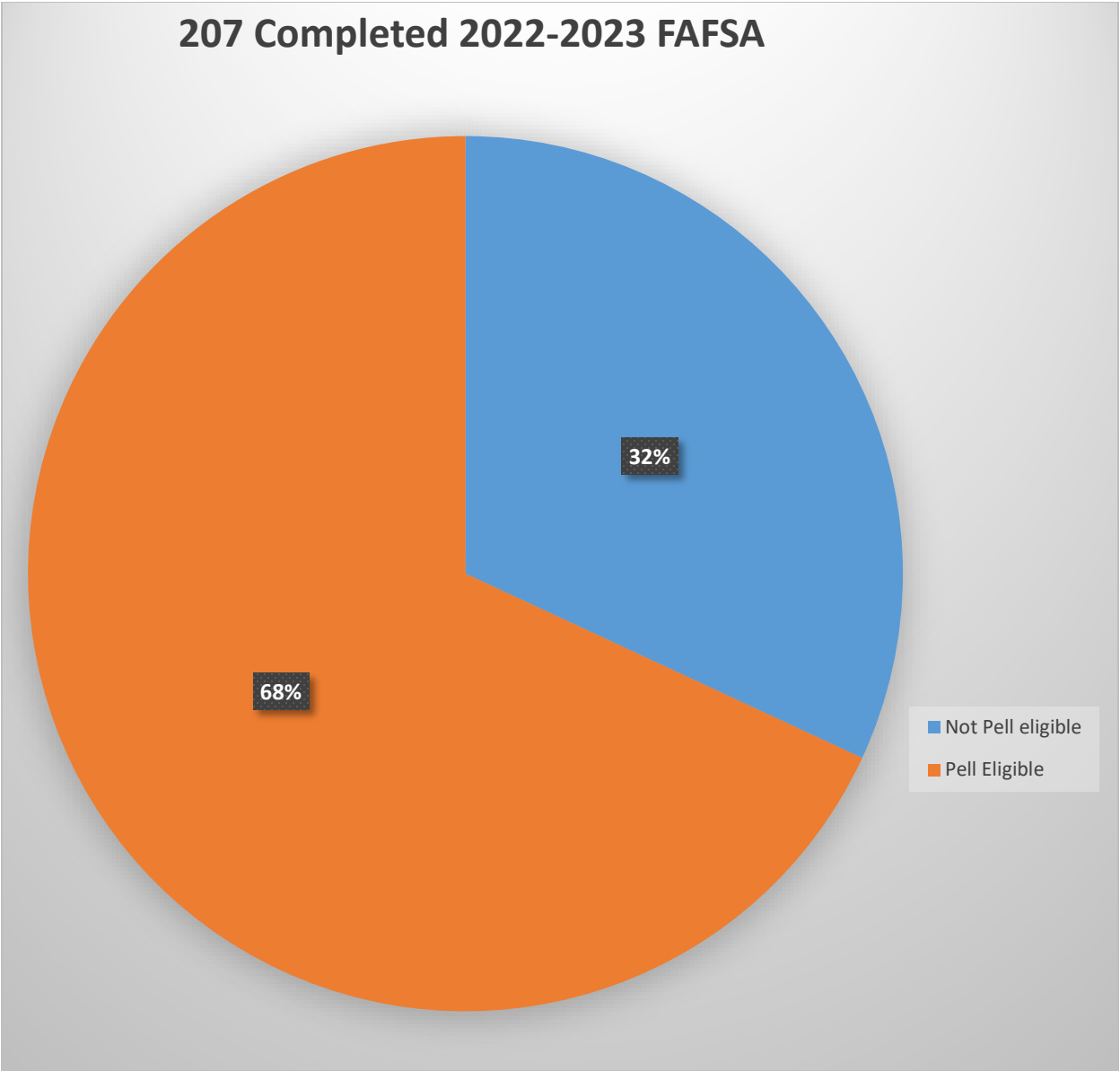


Figure 6. Fall 2022 applicants who qualified for Pell.

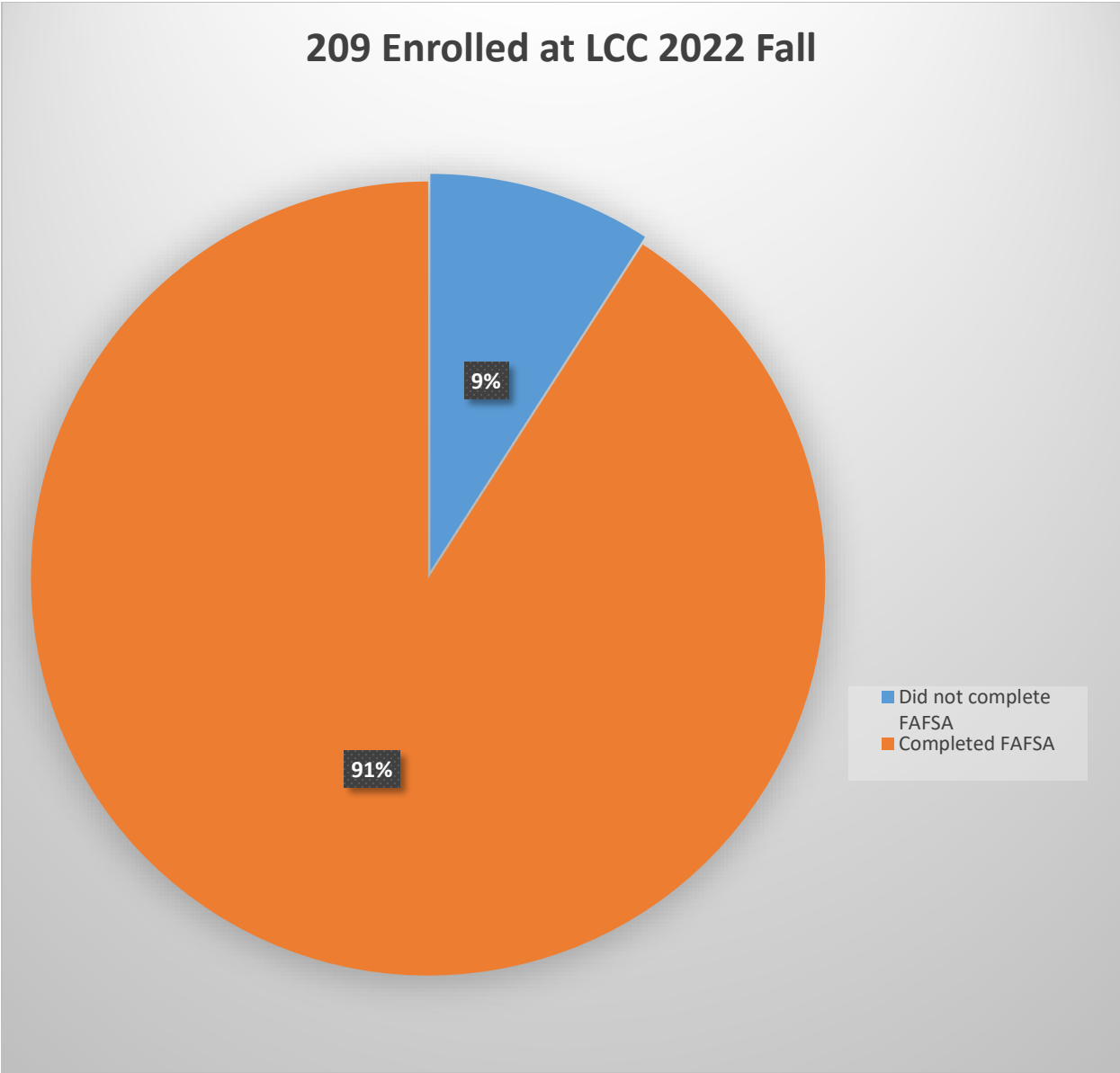


Figure 7. Fall 2022 students enrolled at LCC and completed FAFSA.

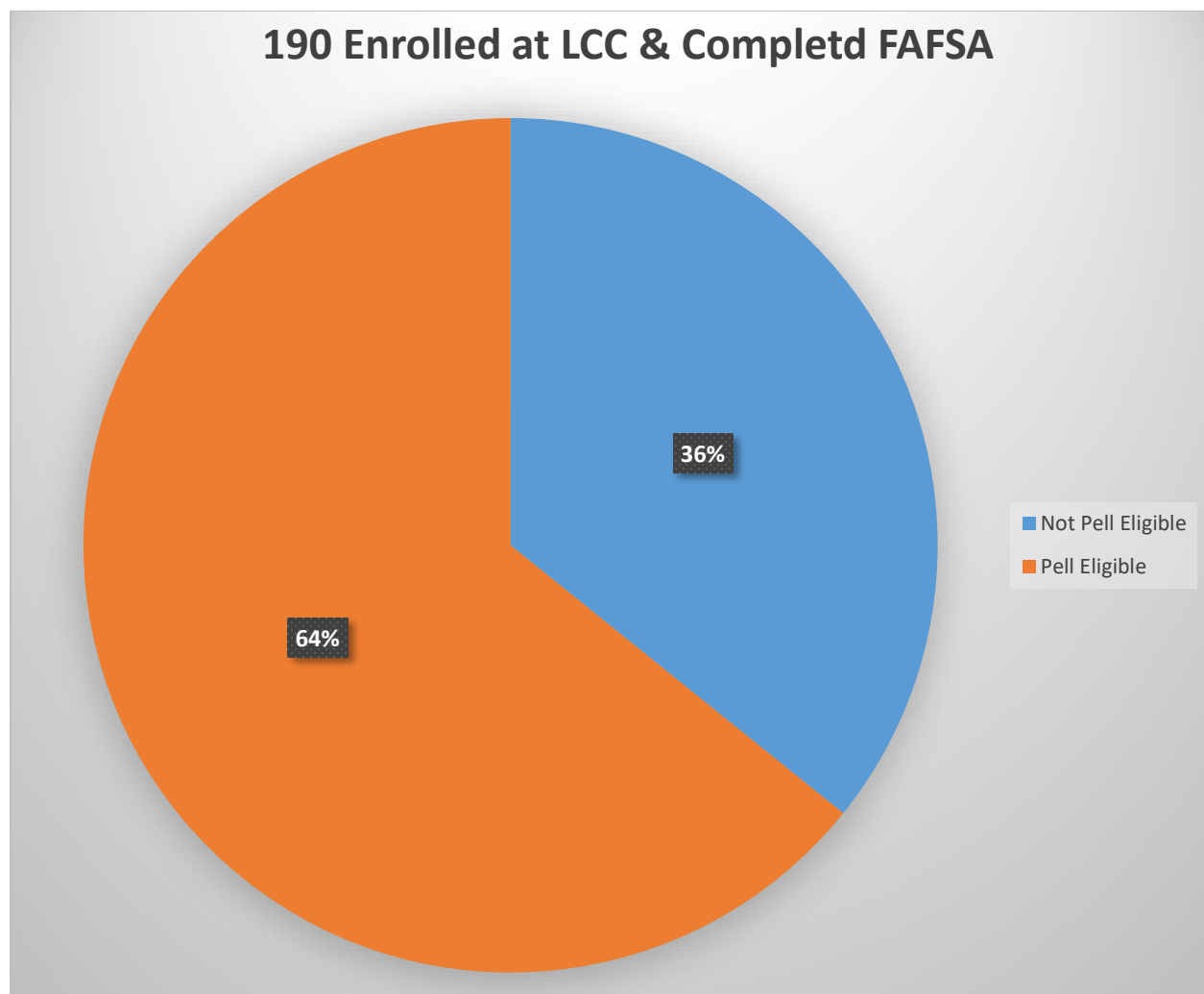


Figure 8. Fall 2022 students enrolled at LCC and Pell eligible.

Phase III

In Phase III, enrollment data was collected through IPEDS for the 2023 cohort in the same manner as was done with the previous cohorts in Phases I and II (see Figure 9). An online survey was disseminated to the 2023 cohort of incoming LCC students. Results were collected and shared with inquiry partners for analysis and determination of possible barriers to enrollment. Further discussions based on the results led to the determination of the structure of the communication plan that was implemented as the intervention in Phase IV.

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

All 2023 Lenoir Community College-intending high school students who applied for fall 2023 were asked to complete the LCC-sanctioned electronic survey. The original data included all applicants for the fall semester, as well as the applicant's year of high school graduation for verification of participant qualification. Data was sorted by graduation date. The cohort only included college-intending high school seniors for 2023. This survey went to all applicants regardless of their matriculation.

Instrumentation

Enrollment data was collected from IPEDS reports. The original data listed all applicants for the fall semester. There were 489 total applications received from college-intending high school seniors. There were 223 students enrolled in classes at the census date and 266 who did not enroll at LCC for the 2023 fall semester.

The survey (see Appendix E) was created with assistance from LCC Student Services inquiry partners. The development of survey questions was based on the Transition Guide, a counseling tool based on Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 2007) with an emphasis on the admissions process. The survey was sent to LCC IE for institutional approval and

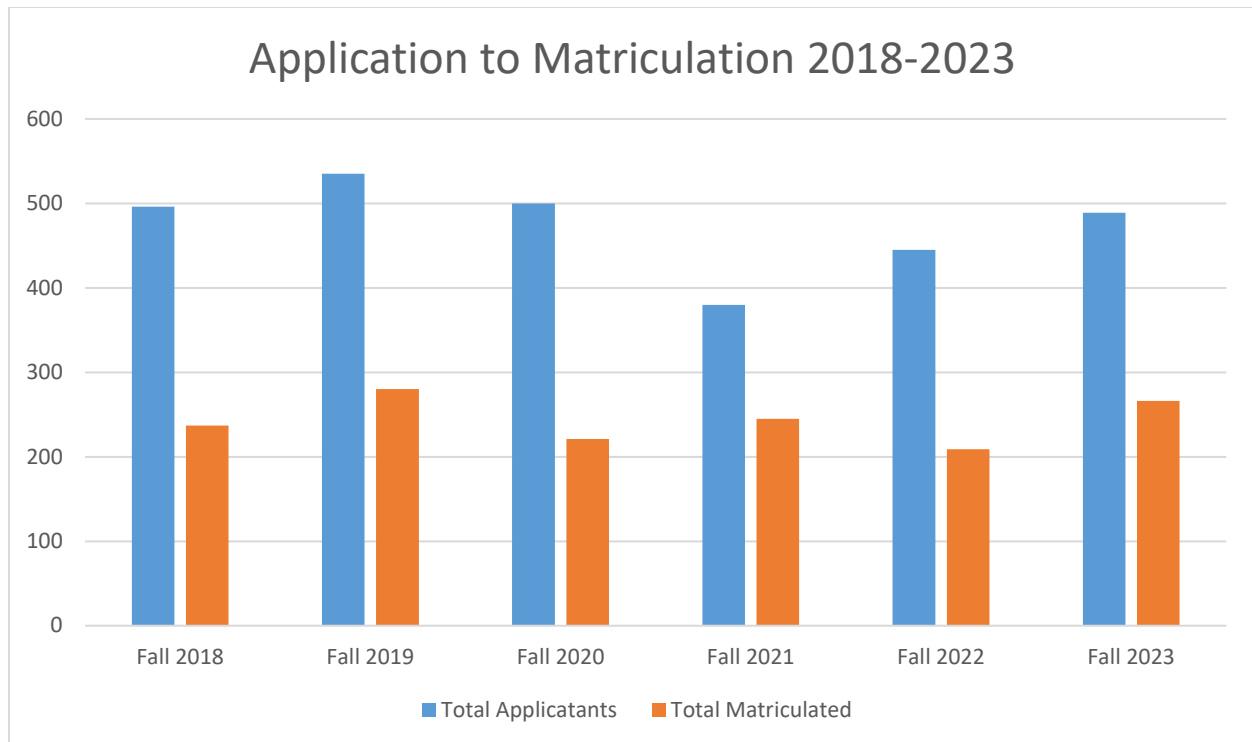


Figure 9. LCC application to matriculation 2018-2023.

presented to the President's leadership team. Their suggested changes were incorporated into the final draft. It then was sent back through LCC IE for final approval. The survey includes quantitative data-based categorical binary variable questions, multiple choice questions, and a Likert Scale delivery method. There will also be an opportunity to collect additional qualitative information through the inclusion of open-ended questions. The survey begins with general demographic data. It is followed by a series of questions related to the 4 S's in Schlossberg's transition theory, as well as questions related to possible barriers the applicant may have faced throughout the admissions process.

The survey consisted of 20 questions. The survey addressed Guiding Question 1, "What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation?" through data collected via survey questions 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. The survey also addressed Guiding Question 2, "What type of interaction with LCC convinced them to matriculate?" through data collection via survey questions 15, 16, 17, and 18 (see Table 4).

Data Collection for 2023 Survey

I reached out to possible participants requesting their participation in the early fall of 2023. LCC IE sent a bulk email (see Appendix C) to the personal email accounts of 489 potential participants. The email included a link to the survey. The email content advised that we were seeking survey responses from individuals who graduated from high school in 2023 and applied to Lenoir Community College to attend the 2023 fall semester. It explained the purpose of the study and asked them to participate in a brief electronic survey to help the college improve enrollment strategies for future applicants. If they wished to participate, there was a link to the survey created in SurveyMonkey. A text (see Appendix D) was sent to participants' cell phone numbers asking them to take the survey and to check their personal email for the link to the

Table 4

Corresponding Data Source to Guiding Question

Guiding Question	Corresponding Survey Questions
1. What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation?	Questions 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14
2. According to students, what type of interaction with LCC convinced them to matriculate?	Questions 15, 16, 17, and 18

survey. During the first two weeks, 35 surveys were started by participants. A second text (see Appendix D) was sent two weeks later. It thanked those who had already completed the survey and reminded the others to look for the survey link and complete and submit the survey. There was a total of 50 participants by the first of October, 2023 and the survey was closed.

The first question in the survey served to collect informed consent information from participants. All details regarding the survey and participation were provided and participants were not able to continue with the survey unless they answered the consent question in the affirmative. If the participant selected “no” on the first question asking about consent, the survey ended. Participants were advised that their choice to participate in the survey was voluntary. Participants were also informed that they have the right to skip any questions they do not want to answer. They were assured that their identity will be protected throughout the study. Additionally, question two asked the participant’s for their age. If they indicated that they were under the age of 18, the survey will end.

The survey was sent to 489 applicants. Fifty applicants opened the survey, which equates to greater than a 10% participation rate. One participant answered “no” to the first question related to consent, which resulted in a decrease to 49 participants. Even with the decrease, the participation rate still remained in the 10% range. The participants included 35 currently enrolled LCC students and 14 who did not enroll in the fall of 2023.

Quantitative Data Analysis - 2023 Survey

The students who chose LCC provided various reasons as to why they selected LCC. Among those answers, 52.94% liked the low cost, 58.82% attended because LCC offered the program they were interested in completing, 32.25% only wanted an associate’s degree, and 38.23% planned to transfer after acquiring necessary classes (see Appendix F).

Survey questions 8-14 (see Appendix F) provide insight regarding participants' perceptions of the application process and 39 participants provided responses to these questions. Survey question 8 asked participants how they felt while completing the application process. Fifteen felt overwhelmed or somewhat overwhelmed, 8 were neutral and 16 were confident or somewhat confident. When asked in question 9 if they felt they had the necessary skills to apply and prepare for college, 24 of the 39 who responded agreed that they did. Participants were asked if attending college was accepted or expected in their culture in question 10 and only two of the 39 answering said no. The majority of students felt they had control over their ability to successfully apply and prepare for college, as well as the emotional and physical energy to handle the admissions process. Questions 13 and 14 asked participants to reflect on their feelings about attending college and their expectations about the application process. Only five out of 39 indicated that they did not think attending college was important to them; while two of 39 felt that their expectations about applying for college were not realistic.

The majority of participants felt they received support during the admissions process from a variety of sources. Survey question 15 sought to collect data on support structures (see Appendix F). Family support was received from 74.36%, classmate and friends gave support to 62.16%, high school teachers and counselors were credited with supporting 71.79% of the students, LCC was helpful to 56.41% and 42.11% used other sources for support.

When asked how they dealt with situations they faced during the application process in survey question 16, 38 students responded (see Appendix F). Thirteen students did not ask for help but waited for someone to contact them. Other students spoke with others to resolve issues (33), made a plan and followed through (33), sought help from others (29), or managed their time better (29).

Of those students who did not attend LCC, 42.86% attended another college, 28.57% planned to attend LCC in the future and 28.57% did not complete all the steps necessary for admission. The demographics of the 489 participants were 45.83% white, 33.33% black, and 18.75% Hispanic/Latino (see Appendix F).

When asked what form of communication the participants preferred to receive from LCC in survey question 18, 39 participants responded. Most indicated they preferred traditional letters, calls, and texts. Emails to both personal and school accounts were least preferred. Question 19 asked how easy or difficult the steps to admission were and 39 applicants responded. Only six students found the application to the college moderately difficult. The RDS application was difficult/moderately difficult for five students. Requesting transcripts was difficult/moderately difficult for nine students. The FAFSA was difficult/moderately difficult for nine students. The majority of respondents felt that applying for LCC scholarships, registering for new student orientation and connecting with their academic advisor for registration was not a difficult process (see Appendix F).

Qualitative Data Analysis 2023 Survey

Question 17 on the survey was an open-ended question asking participants to provide information concerning how LCC could better support future students through the admissions process. Twenty-three students responded. Twelve indicated that LCC had done a good job and did not offer any suggestions for improvement. Suggestions that were provided included better communication (8), clearer instructions (2), and more physical and mental help (1) (see Appendix F).

The final question of the survey (question 20) was open-ended and asked if there was anything participants would like to add about their experience through the admissions process at

LCC. There were 17 responses with 12 indicating they had nothing to add. The other five participants had complementary statements such as “Thank you for giving me an outlet for higher education I can afford” and “It has been great so far. It is like one big giant family!” (see Appendix F).

Summary of Phase III

The information received from the 2023 enrollment data and 2023 survey were shared and reviewed with the inquiry partners to determine common threads and areas of concern. This information, as well as information collected through the literature review, aided in identifying barriers that were used to assist with the creation of the communication plan and guide the implementation of changes initiated in Phase IV.

Phase IV

Phase IV included the creation and implementation of the intervention. I used the information and analysis of the data collected, as well as information obtained from the literature and inquiry partners in Phase III, to design and implement the intervention.

Based on Schlossberg’s transition theory, transitioning from high school to college can be challenging for many students (Anderson et al., 2011). It is important to look at the resources the applicant had at the time they applied to LCC to predict the challenges future prospective students may face and how LCC can better support them. For the purpose of this intervention, the admissions process begins when the student submits an application to LCC. The process ends when classes began. The applicant may have stopped the process at any time in between. I worked with my inquiry partners to develop a communication plan that supported the 2024 cohort of college-intending students throughout the entire admission process based on the data

collected in Phases I-III. Guiding question 3 relates to the intervention: how does the implementation of a yearlong communication plan impact matriculation?

During the 2023-2024 school year, an updated communication plan was implemented for all high school seniors who apply to Lenoir Community College. The information communicated to the 2024 cohort is based on the results of the 2023 survey questions, research on the subject of summer melt, and input from the Student Services inquiry partners.

Participants in Phase IV were 2024 high-school seniors who applied to Lenoir Community College. The majority of applications received from this group were completed during college application week on October 16-20, 2023. The communications began in November 2023 once applications had been received, and applicants have been accepted.

Intervention

The communication plan used prior to November 2023 consisted of letters and emails. The new plan added the addition of a regular texting plan. As done in previous years, the 2023-2024 communication plan sent an email to the applicant's personal email address as soon as the application was submitted through CFNC. The email thanked the student for submitting the application and told them the application would be processed within 2-3 business days and that they should wait 24 hours before they attempted to set up their Lancer email account. As soon as the application was processed through admissions, the applicant received a "Big Blue Envelope" mailed to their home address. This included an acceptance letter that explained that their application had been accepted and that once they graduate from high school and the college received their final high school transcript, they would be admitted as a student. Also, in the letter was a save-the-date message about Experience LCC, the new student orientation in July. There was also a Lancer Survival guide which included a variety of information about the college and

the admissions process. In prior years, there was no additional communication until the following June 2024. In June, each year an email invitation to Experience LCC, new student orientation, was sent to all LCC college-intending high school graduates asking them to attend the event. Also, a reminder letter for final high school transcripts was sent. The 2024 intervention added the addition of personalized text communications which began in early November 2023 and continued through August 2024.

The new communications distributed over the next eight to nine months included information and reminders about the barriers that were identified in the survey analysis, which included residency, financial aid, career exploration, and scholarships, as well as check-ins to see how their senior year was going and build a sense of belonging and connection to LCC. The intention was for the intervention to be interactive. Students were able to respond to the texts. These responses came directly to my email, and I was able to respond at any time including evenings and weekends, if needed. Previous experience working with the Watermark texting system suggested that this one-on-one interaction would result in qualitative data. Once applicants made a connection with me, they continued to reach out as they had questions or concerns. In addition, the personal connection began to create a sense of belonging to the college. I managed the initial connections and worked with the inquiry partners in Student Services to assist students who needed individualized help from each division.

New student orientation (Experience LCC) is held each year in July. The goal was to have all students ready for registration before Experience LCC 2024. Those who were not ready or who did not attend Experience LCC received texts and phone calls in the weeks following the orientation. Every effort was made to help them complete the admissions process and register for fall classes. Applicants who did not complete an application prior to Experience LCC will not be

included in the 2024 cohort but still received as much of the intervention as time allowed. There were no additional interventions for the 2024 cohort.

Summary of Phase IV

During the 2023-2024 school term, the 2024 cohort consisted of 498 applicants. They received the intervention in the form of a more personal communication plan. Based on the literature reviewed and survey results from the 2023 cohort, the addition to the current communication plan included monthly check-ins and reminders of information that needed to be submitted or corrected to be college-ready by July for Experience LCC, the new student orientation event.

Phase V

In Phase V, the 2024 cohort of students who receive the communication plan intervention, received a post-intervention electronic survey following the start of classes in the fall of 2024. This survey was sent to all 498 applicants regardless of their matriculation status. The purpose of the post-intervention survey was to gauge the effectiveness of the intervention. The survey was college-sanctioned and distributed through SurveyMonkey. The survey collected quantitative data based on categorical binary variable questions, multiple choice questions, and a Likert Scale delivery method. There was also an opportunity to include additional information by answering open-ended questions. Each participant was given an opportunity to participate in a semi-structured interview as well. LCC IE, the President's Leadership team, and the Student Services inquiry partners reviewed and approved the wording and distribution of the survey and the semi-structured interview questions.

The 2024 cohort received texts from me at least once a month beginning the week they applied. A bond was built and therefore the responses to the survey were larger than the previous

cohort (2023). Due to this connection, students were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview at the end of the survey. More specific qualitative data could be collected in the semi-structured interview that better explains barriers they faced and how they were resolved through the intervention.

The survey began with general demographic data. Included in this data is a question regarding the academic attainment of the student's parents. This information, although for only one year, does show the percentage of students who were first-generation college students.

IE sent a bulk email to the participants' personal email accounts with a link to the survey and a text was sent to their cell phone numbers on file asking them to check their personal email for the survey link. The text was sent through Watermark Student Success and Engagement, formerly AVISO. The survey was sent after the census date of the fall 2024 semester. It was sent out a second time the following week as a reminder to those who did not complete it during the first week and a thank you to those who did. After being available for two weeks, it was closed.

Data collected from the follow-up survey was analyzed and shared with the inquiry partners. The findings were used to evaluate the effects of the intervention and determine if future adjustments can be made to increase success. Additionally, the results of the follow-up survey were triangulated and compared with the results from the original survey to confirm the existence of barriers that impact matriculation to LCC, while determining if the additional communication and outreach during senior thaw can increase matriculation.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Mixed methods research emerged as a response to the identified shortcomings of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, offering a more intricate and multifaceted approach. It holds the potential to enhance the quality of research by providing deeper insights

into the subject under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Combining both quantitative and qualitative elements enables the capture of information that might otherwise be overlooked when relying solely on one research approach. This approach contributes to the expansion of knowledge and generates new avenues of inquiry for future studies, accommodating a broader spectrum of research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This evolution in research methodology, often referred to as the "third methodological movement," has gained increasing acceptance among researchers since its establishment around 2000 (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Quantitative researchers have frequently criticized qualitative research for its challenges in generalization, interpretation, and replication. Conversely, qualitative researchers have argued that quantitative research often employs irrelevant hypotheses and superficial descriptions. A fundamental distinction between these two methodologies lies in their objectives: quantitative research aims to propose hypotheses for acceptance or rejection, whereas qualitative research seeks to generate hypotheses (Cronholm & Hjalmarsson, 2011). Integrating these two approaches can complement each other, offering richer insights and raising further research questions. The goal of mixing quantitative and qualitative research designs is to leverage the strengths of both while mitigating their respective weaknesses.

Ethical considerations that apply to both quantitative and qualitative research methods also pertain to mixed methods research since it combines aspects of both. These ethical concerns encompass obtaining permission, safeguarding anonymity, avoiding disruption, and accurately communicating the study's purpose. Additionally, they involve avoiding deceptive practices, respecting the study population, addressing potential power imbalances, and ensuring confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This study was approved by LCC before the survey was sent to applicants. The email containing the link to the survey clearly explained the purpose

of the study and the process of informed consent and confidentiality. LCC IE provided the survey results without any identifying information.

An explanatory sequential design involves initially collecting quantitative data and subsequently gathering qualitative data to elaborate on the quantitative findings. This approach is rooted in the rationale that quantitative data provides a broad overview of the research problem, necessitating further analysis through qualitative data collection to refine, extend, or explain the initial findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The initial data collected in this study was quantitative in nature. The majority of the survey was quantitative as well. There were some open-ended questions on the survey that collected qualitative data. During the intervention phase, there was an opportunity to unofficially collect additional qualitative information via interactions with applicants through email, text, and face-to-face contact.

In quantitative research, rigor is achieved through the measurement of validity and reliability. Validity is defined as the extent to which a concept is accurately measured. Reliability is the accuracy of an instrument. The research instrument should produce the same results if it is used in the same situation on repeated occasions (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). There are three major types of validity. Content validity is the extent to which a research instrument accurately measures all aspects of a construct. Construct validity is the extent to which a research instrument measures the intended construct. Criterion validity is the extent to which a research instrument is related to other instruments that measure the same variables (Heale & Twycross, 2015). There are three attributes of reliability. Homogeneity is the extent to which all the items on a scale measure one concept. Stability is the consistency of results using an instrument with

repeated testing. Equivalence is consistency among responses of multiple users of an instrument, or alternate forms of an instrument (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

Data collection for this study was retrieved from IPEDS, NSC, and FAFSA, all reputable sources whose data are respected in higher education. The data for each phase were collected in the same manner. Qualitative research provides a foundation for summarizing quality standards and best practices. Qualitative research involves gathering diverse empirical materials such as personal experiences, cultural texts, and interviews to describe the everyday and challenging moments in individuals' lives. Qualitative researchers employ a range of interpretative practices to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, recognizing that each practice offers a unique perspective. As a result, researchers often use multiple interpretative practices in a single study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Rigor, in qualitative terms, is a way to establish trust or confidence in the findings of a research study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) summarize four criteria for creating the trustworthiness of qualitative research results. They are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credible research shows evidence that the results accurately represent what was studied. To establish credibility, I used Schlossberg's transition theory (2007, 2011) as a framework for the research. I reviewed the individual surveys looking for similarities within and across all participants. My inquiry partners, who are experts in their various fields, vetted the questions and helped interpret/analyze the results of the study.

Transferable research provides detailed background information so that readers can determine whether the results apply to other situations. It is the ability to transfer research findings or methods from one group to another (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I provided a dense description of the population studied by defining the demographics and geographic boundaries of

the study. Dependable research defines the study process in adequate detail so that the work can be duplicated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I used strategies such as having the inquiry partners participate in the analysis process and providing a detailed description of the research methods.

Confirmability occurs once credibility, transferability, and dependability have been established. Confirmable research shows that the results are based on the information collected from the participants and not the interpretations or biases of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I confirmed accuracy by using the participant's exact words from the survey and texts.

Triangulation is a standard of rigor used in qualitative research. Data triangulation is used to identify the commonality of data obtained through multiple data sources and methods to diminish error or bias and enhance accuracy in data collection and analysis processes (Natow, 2020). I used an electronic survey with both closed-ended and open-ended questions and data analysis to determine if the intervention was successful.

I disclosed to all participants that the decision to participate was voluntary. I explained to all participants that they had the right to skip any questions they did not want to answer. I advised those who participated in the survey that I would protect their identity throughout the study. The survey was a college sanctioned survey. All students were approved to participate in the survey regardless of age. The participants were traditional high school students; typically, this group of participants are between 17 and 19 years old. The 2023 and 2024 cohort were high school graduates at the time they took the survey and were 18 years or older. The 2024 cohort received the intervention during their senior year, but the communication was sanctioned by the college and did not have an age requirement to disseminate.

Based on previous studies of summer melt, participants involved in the present study were all high school seniors who chose to apply to the fall semester at Lenoir Community

College following graduation. The survey in Phase III and Phase V was given to all high school seniors who applied to Lenoir Community College in the fall semester following high school graduation. Not all students who received the survey matriculated at Lenoir Community College. The intervention in Phase IV was given to all 2024 high school seniors who chose to apply to the 2024 fall semester at Lenoir Community College following graduation. The development of survey questions was based on the Transition Guide, a counseling tool based on the Transition Model developed by Schlossberg (Schlossberg, 2007). Once deficiencies were identified, the communication plan intervention was put in place to help the student through the process. After the intervention was applied to the 2024 cohort, data was collected to see if enrollment improved as a result of the interventions. This survey and intervention could easily be replicated at another community college.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The present study took place within the context of Lenoir Community College, a small rural 2-year community college. The purpose of the study sought to design an intervention that increased the number of Lenoir Community College-intending students who matriculate following their high school graduation. The study was proactive in nature as it sought to anticipate barriers and provide assistance to overcome those barriers before the student stopped the admissions process.

The results achieved in this study may not be appropriate for larger community colleges, private colleges, or public universities. A large majority of North Carolina community colleges are located in rural communities with low populations, low socioeconomic status, and diverse populations. For those schools, this may be a beneficial study. As in any study, it is important to examine situations that may have an impact on the study or results in an effort to mitigate the

effects and provide additional opportunities for success. As such, the delimitations, limitations, and assumptions related to the study must be identified and evaluated.

Delimitations

Delimitations in research refer to the boundaries or limitations that researchers establish within their study. These boundaries help define the scope of the research and specify what is included and excluded from the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). The delimitations of the study included college-intending high school seniors who applied to attend LCC following graduation. This number was traditionally 500 or less in size. The size of the participant group in this study was manageable with the current staff at LCC. In a larger community college or four-year institution, this personalized communication might not be as easy to replicate.

This group of prospective students was easy to identify and track. They were similar in age (17-19), social development (transitioning into adulthood), and life experiences (still living at home and being supported by an adult). The commonalities of this cohort made it clear what barriers they faced and how they could be addressed.

I chose not to include all incoming students because it might include veterans, non-traditional students, part-time students, and returning students. The problems this larger group may face during the admissions process were too varied. The concept of summer melt and the extension of senior thaw would not be relevant to the larger group.

Limitations

Limitations in research refer to factors or constraints that can affect the design, execution, and interpretation of a research study. These limitations can influence the study's validity, generalizability, and the extent to which its findings can be applied to a broader context (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). A small sample may not be representative of the larger population and can limit

the generalizability of the findings. The initial survey was sent to almost 500 applicants but only 35 responded. Two weeks later another 15 completed the survey resulting in a total of 50 participants. This low participation in a voluntary survey was concerning because the potential students this study would like to hear from may have been the least likely group to be willing to respond. Those students who did not enroll at LCC may not have an interest in completing a survey from LCC, however; their answers would help determine why students do not complete the admissions process and attend class.

Findings may be specific to a particular context or setting and may not be generalizable to other settings or populations. The size of the participant group in this study was manageable with the current staff at LCC. In a larger community college or four-year institution this personalized communication might not be as easy to replicate. The researcher's own biases, beliefs, or values may influence a study's design, analysis, and interpretation. I asked the inquiry partners to assist with ensuring I did not let any personal bias enter the study. In addition, there was a time restraint on this study. The intervention had to begin and end during a specific time period. Important data would be lost if the start date was delayed. There may be external factors or variables that researchers cannot control, and these variables might introduce unaccounted-for influences in the study. An example that affected this study was the ability to complete the FAFSA. Traditionally the FAFSA opens on October 1st each year. During the intervention it was going through a restructure and was not available until December. It was still not fully functional for several weeks. This gave students less time to complete the application.

Assumptions

Assumptions in research refer to the underlying beliefs or conditions that are taken for granted and serve as the foundation upon which a research study is built. These assumptions are

fundamental to the research process, guiding the research design, methodology, and interpretation of results (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). One of the more common assumptions made in survey research is the assumption of honesty and truthful responses. Response bias is a general term used to describe a number of different conditions or factors that cue respondents to provide inaccurate or false answers during surveys or interviews (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The study assumed participants would be honest in their responses because participation in the survey was voluntary.

There is an assumption that the conceptual and theoretical frameworks used in this study are sound frameworks for this type of research. There is an assumption that a mixed methods study is the most effective research method. There is also an assumption that based on the survey responses, barriers will be identified, and interventions will be appropriate to help remove those barriers.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

Positionality involves the researcher defining his or her position in relation to the study, the participants, and the setting. It is an opportunity for the researcher to address their biases that could affect the way data are interpreted. It is important to reflect on the researcher's position of power and privilege in contrast to the more marginalized participants. I am a US born, able-bodied, White, female, baby boomer. I was raised in a middle-class environment predominantly by my maternal grandmother. I had a K-12 private school education. I did not attend a community college post high school graduation but rather attended a public university. I am a first-generation college graduate completing a doctoral program. As such, my socioeconomic status and educational attainment has afforded me specific opportunities. I must keep in mind that some participants in the study will not have had the same opportunities.

I worked for more than 15 years in the public school system as a substitute teacher and a teacher's assistant. I currently work at a community college in student services, where the first nine years of my 14 year tenure were in admissions. As a staff assistant and later Director of Admissions, I have first-hand knowledge of the issues new students face as they navigate the admissions process. Our admissions model has changed over the years as we have moved from paper applications to exclusively online applications. The personal interaction is gone, and many students do not know who to ask for help. I now serve as Dean of Student Services. I have access to not just an Admissions perspective, but also Financial Aid, Career Exploration, and Scholarship opportunities.

Participants in the study were a diverse population of Black, Hispanic, and White, first-generation, Pell-qualified, Generation Z students. I have worked with this population for over 20 years. I have observed great disparities among students of color in both the K-12 and post-secondary education systems. The literature supports this view (Arnold et al., 2015; Aronson, 2008; Camardelle et al., 2022; Choy, 2001; Dougherty, 1987; Dwyer, 2017). The community college illustrates that providing equal and unrestricted entry does not necessarily lead to fairer opportunities for higher education and improved career paths. While community colleges are often perceived as inclusive gateways to higher education and instruments for attaining educational fairness, Black students experience significantly divergent results compared to their non-Black peers. Across metrics such as graduation rates and income potential, community colleges frequently fall short in providing impartial outcomes for Black students enrolled in their programs (Camardelle et al., 2022).

Prior to this research study, I had a perceived idea of the barriers that prevent applicants from matriculating based on my years of experience in the field. The literature reviewed for this

study confirms those barriers in general; however, it is still important to confirm the barriers that may impact prospective students at LCC. This study allowed me the opportunity to implement changes based on information collected from the literature that identifies barriers, as well as information collected directly from the student perspective at LCC. This study addressed ways of eliminating pre-enrollment barriers to increase enrollment at LCC. As previously stated, students face difficulty with applications, FAFSA, residency determination, and program selection (Castleman & Page, 2014b; Choy, 2001; Fofaria, 2018; LaManque, 2009).

As the Dean of Student Services, I had the authority to implement permanent changes to the current communications plan if there was a notable improvement in enrollment as a result of the updated communication plan intervention in this study.

Summary

Chapter 3 explained the methodology used in this study. Enrollment numbers collected from Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III show a clear enrollment pattern at LCC from 2018 through 2023 (see Figure 9). The survey presented in Phase III gave guidance as to reasons students do not complete the admissions process and matriculate after applying. The results of the survey and literature review from Chapter 2 helped form the intervention applied in Phase IV. Enrollment data collected at the end of Phase V showed if the intervention was successful. A percentile increase in enrollment overall is a strong indicator that the intervention was successful. Survey results from Phase V were compared to survey results in Phase III to see if participants faced fewer barriers and felt more supported as a result of the intervention.

Chapter 4 explains in more detail how the data were collected and analyzed. Mixed-method studies include both quantitative and qualitative data. It explains what the results mean and how they align with the guiding questions presented previously.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods study was to close the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to LCC and those who matriculate. The study seeks to improve matriculation by developing and implementing a communication plan that adequately addresses the needs and barriers these applicants experience between acceptance and attendance. This study was conducted in five phases. The first three phases involved collecting data from previous cohorts to form a baseline for improvement. Data results for the first three phases are detailed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, Phase IV, the intervention, is described and the data are analyzed. In Phase V, a 2024 cohort survey was conducted, and data were analyzed. The overarching results of all data collected can be used to answer the three questions guiding this study:

1. What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation?
2. What type of interaction with LCC convinces prospective students to matriculate?
3. How does the implementation of a yearlong communication plan impact matriculation?

This chapter will review the methodology of the study, information on the participants, details on data collection, and results of the analysis of the data collected. Additionally, the resulting codes and themes, along with answers to the questions listed previously will be presented. Finally, a brief synopsis of the overall findings is included.

Participant Demographics

Participants in this study consisted of college-intending high school seniors who applied to attend LCC in both fall 2023 and fall 2024 following high school graduation. This included students who attended and those who did not attend LCC during both semesters. The survey

described in Chapter 3, Phase III was sent to the fall 2023 cohort of students to gather initial baseline data. The fall 2024 cohort of students, consisting of all 2024 college-intending high school seniors who applied to attend LCC, were part of the communication plan intervention described in this study. This group included students who attended and those who did not attend LCC in the fall of 2024. Both the communication plan intervention in Phase IV and the survey in Phase V were completed with the 2024 cohort of students as participants.

On November 15, 2023, a month after college application week, LCC's institutional effectiveness department ran the first query to capture information on high school seniors who had completed an application to attend LCC in the fall of 2024. The initial query produced 243 applicants for the 2024 cohort. Each week, the query was run and the number increased as prospective students were added. By July 15, 2023, there were a total of 498 applicants in the cohort (see Table 5).

Experience LCC, the new student orientation, was held on July 18, 2024. This was also the cut-off for the data collection for the intervention. Although high school graduates continued to apply and could start in 2024, they were not included in the intervention due to the short time between their application and the first day of the semester (one month). They still received some of the intervention texts, but any responses were not included nor did they receive the survey in September 2024.

Implementation

The study was conducted in 5 phases. As previously indicated, this chapter provides details on the implementation of the communication plan intervention, which took place in Phase IV, as well as details on Phase V, which included conducting a survey with participants and analyzing the data collected throughout the study.

Table 5

Number of Applications Received By Month From 2024 Cohort

Month	Number of applications received
November 2023	250
December 2023	32
January 2024	47
February 2024	35
March 2024	19
April 2024	33
May 2024	28
June 2024	14
July 2024	40
Total included in Intervention	498

College Application Week is a week-long event that allows high school seniors to apply to colleges and universities for free and was an important aspect of this study. During this time, many colleges waive their application fees. The goal is to help students save money and give them the opportunity to apply to multiple schools. College Application Week also provides resources to help students and their families with residency determination and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). North Carolina Free College Application Week for the 2024 cohort was held October 16 to 20, 2023. Although Lenoir Community College does not charge an application fee, it is still a popular week for high school seniors to submit their applications to the college. Often counselors and college representatives are available at the high school to assist students with the process and students are encouraged to apply.

Beginning in November of 2023, all applicants in the 2024 cohort were sent a series of texts (see Appendix G). The intent of these texts was to inform applicants of upcoming events and deadlines. It also provided them with a person they could contact if they had questions about the admissions process. Texts sent to the cohort fell into two categories. Some texts were informational and were sent to applicants as they were added to the cohort. For example, these texts informed students they needed to check their residency status or set up their school email account. Other texts were date driven, based on a specific event, deadline, or holiday. For example, the scholarship deadline was approaching, it is time to register for new student orientation or wishing them a happy new year. These were only sent to students who were in the cohort at the time of the event or deadline.

The 2024 cohort consisted of 498 applicants. All 498 applicants received the Welcome text (see Appendix G, Welcome to LCC) in which I introduced myself and let them know that I would be communicating with them until classes began in the fall of 2024. All 498 applicants

received a text explaining how to set up their Lancer account, myLCC (see Appendix G, myLCC set up), and instructed them to start checking their LCC email for information from financial aid, the foundation (scholarships) and their academic advisor. In addition, their residency determination was reviewed, and they were notified if they had been verified as in-state or out-of-state for tuition purposes (see Appendix G, RDS review IN and RDS review OUT). Those who had an out-of-state determination, but graduated from a North Carolina high school, were encouraged to contact RDS and make the necessary corrections to receive the in-state tuition rate (see Appendix G, RDS review OUT #2, RDS review #3, RDS SSN issue, RDS reminder OUT #4).

All 498 applicants were reminded to complete the 2024-2025 FAFSA (see Appendix G, Financial Aid Announcement). Tuition and funding sources can serve as a barrier for many students in attending post-secondary education. In order to receive funding sources students are required to fill out and submit the application for federal aid. A goal of the intervention was to push the message of completing the FAFSA as early as possible so that awards could be shared with students during the first quarter of 2024. Normally the FAFSA opens on October 1 of each year. By notifying them early, they could examine the difference between university costs and community college costs and make a more informed decision on which is a better fit for them financially.

Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances impacted this aspect of the intervention. The FAFSA Simplification Act passed by Congress introduced major changes to the federal student aid system starting with the 2024–25 award year (Federal Student Aid, 2024). Key updates included:

- Student Aid Index (SAI) Replaces Expected Family Contribution (EFC): The new SAI will be used to determine a family's ability to pay for college, with a minimum SAI of -1500 and updated criteria for Federal Pell Grant eligibility.
- Family Definition Changes: The FAFSA form will now align family size more closely with tax return information.
- Expanded Federal Pell Grant Access: More students will be eligible for Pell Grants based on family size and poverty levels. Incarcerated students and those affected by school closures or misinformation will regain or maintain Pell Grant eligibility.
- Streamlined FAFSA Form: The form will use IRS data for calculations, removing questions about Selective Service and drug convictions, while adding questions on gender, race, and ethnicity.

The FAFSA typically launches on October 1st each year, but the 2024–2025 version was delayed until December 30, 2023. The new FAFSA process experienced significant issues, including glitches, technical errors, and low completion rates. As late as the first week of the fall 2024 semester, issues were still being resolved (Federal Student Aid, 2024). The result of these delays could have an impact on the results of this intervention. Some students did not register for classes because they were not sure about the funding they could receive.

In addition to these informational texts sent to all students, many date-driven texts were sent. For example, texts were sent acknowledging holidays and school breaks. Some were as simple as “Happy Thanksgiving” and others included a reminder such as, “We've got a Pot of Gold to help you pay for college. All you have to do is complete the 2024-2025 FAFSA and the LCC Foundation Scholarship application (deadline is March 31)” or “FAFSA is not processing yet but as long as your application is pending, you are fine for now” (see Appendix G, Happy

Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, St. Patrick's Day #1, St. Patrick's Day #2, Easter, July 4th). These were sent to all students who had completed an application at the scheduled time of the text.

Additionally, texts included event reminders, such as LCC's FAFSA day, where students and parents could come to the college to receive personal assistance with completing the FAFSA (see Appendix G, FAFSA DAY), LCC Foundation Scholarship application deadline (see Appendix G, Scholarship Deadline), and Senior Commitment Day, an event where all service area seniors who have committed to attend LCC come to campus to meet others and learn more about the college (see Appendix G, Commitment Day).

Texts were also sent about Experience LCC, the new student orientation held each July. The goal of this event is to connect students with advisors, complete missing steps in admissions, residency and FAFSA, and register for Fall classes (see Appendix G, Save the Date, EXP LCC reminder, EXP reminder #2, EXP LCC agenda, Missed EXP LCC).

In January, a text was sent welcoming them back to their final semester of high school to reengage them after the holiday break (see Appendix G, Welcome Back). In May, a text was sent to make sure the students were confident in their chosen major, and we offered additional assistance if they had questions about their choice (see Appendix G, Major and Career choice). Additionally, in May, applicants were advised that they had been admitted and assigned an advisor who could register them for classes (see Appendix G, Admitted). In June, a text was sent congratulating them on their high school graduation and reminding them to send their final high school transcript to LCC. After running a report to determine who was still missing items, additional reminders about submitting these items were sent in July prior to Experience LCC. These were targeted to those who had not submitted the following items: final high school transcript, any previous college transcripts, and confirmation of their residency status.

Despite the issues with the FAFSA process, some students did receive financial aid awards. As a result, two financial aid texts were sent; one was sent to those who had not completed a FAFSA, and the other was to those who had completed the FAFSA. For those who had completed the FAFSA, they were asked to check their LancerMAIL to see if their FAFSA had been awarded (see Appendix G, No FAFSA and Financial Aid offer).

One aspect of LCC's Quality Enhancement Plan addresses equity concerns during student onboarding; in an attempt to address this situation, every student who is admitted into a curriculum major receives a Student Onboarding Survey (SOS) from the Dean of Student Services. The purpose of the survey is to determine the unique needs of incoming students and direct tailored early interventions and supports to those students. Each student who is admitted receives a text and email. The email includes the sign in link to the survey. The communications are sent every Tuesday for up to three weeks or until the student completes the survey. After the third attempt to encourage the student to complete the survey, communications stop, and the academic advisor will encourage the student to complete the survey during their first meeting. Although this is not a part of the intervention in this study, it is an additional text the 2024 cohort received.

When students enrolled in fall 2024 classes, they received a text in late July and again in August prior to class beginning with information on how to pre-order their books. There were also tuition reminders, past due tuition notices, and first day of class reminders sent to all students prior to the first day of class. Students in the 2024 cohort who had registered for classes also received these texts as part of a campus-wide message.

The final text messages sent specifically to the 2024 cohort were in reference to the request to complete the final survey. A text was sent letting them know they would be receiving

information about the survey. Both a text and email were sent with the link to the survey that same week. Two reminders were sent and the survey closed September 18, 2024.

Data Collection

The intervention described in this study included more than 45 text messages created and sent to members of the 2024 cohort. In an effort to analyze the results of the intervention, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the study. Quantitative data was collected utilizing an electronic survey sent to all participants as a link in the final text message and via email, as well as via IPEDS data. Qualitative data was collected through analysis of the logged responses to the text messages that were sent during the intervention, as well as through the responses to open-ended questions on the online survey.

Quantitative Data Collection - Online Survey

In September 2024, an online survey was distributed to the 2024 cohort of LCC applicants, following the census date of the fall semester (see Appendix J). The survey featured a variety of question formats, including binary categorical variables, multiple-choice questions, and a Likert Scale, along with open-ended questions for qualitative insights. It began with demographic questions and proceeded to address aspects related to Schlossberg's transition theory and potential barriers faced during the admissions process.

The survey consisted of 20 questions and sought to collect data to provide answers to two of the guiding questions. It aimed to answer the first guiding question, "What aspects of the admission process influence student matriculation?" by analyzing responses to questions 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. The second guiding question, "What type of interaction with LCC encouraged them to matriculate?" was examined through questions 15, 16, 17, and 18 (see Table 6).

Table 6

Corresponding Survey Question to Research Question

Research Question	Survey Question
1. What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation?	4. What influenced your decision to attend LCC? 5. Why did you decide not to attend LCC following high school graduation? 8. As you were completing the steps of the admissions process, did you feel confident or overwhelmed? 9. Did you feel you had the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully apply and prepare for college? 10. Was the decision to attend college acceptable in your culture? 11. Did you feel confident that you had control over your ability to successfully apply for and prepare for college? 12. Did you have ample emotional and physical energy to handle the admissions process? 13. Was attending college after high school important to you? 14. Looking back, were your expectations about the college application process realistic?
2. According to students, what type of interaction with LCC convinced them to matriculate?	15. Who did you receive support from during the admissions process? 16. How did you deal with situations you had to face during the admissions process? 17. How could LCC better support future students through the admissions process? 18. Reflecting on your experience with the LCC admissions process, what form of communication would you have preferred?

This survey was nearly identical to the one sent to the 2023 cohort in fall 2023 (see Appendix G), with the exception of the wording of the final question (see Appendix G, question 20). In 2023, students were invited to share any additional thoughts about their experience with LCC. For the 2024 cohort, the last question was modified to ask if they would be open to a one-on-one interview regarding their personal experiences during the admissions process. Unfortunately, only one student expressed potential interest in a phone interview, leading me to forgo that component of the study as planned.

Within the first week, 51 surveys were initiated. A follow-up text (see Appendix G) was sent the following week to thank those who completed the survey and remind others to check their email. A final email reminder was sent the day before the survey closed (see Appendix G). By September 18, 2023, a total of 77 participants had completed the survey before its closure.

The first survey question addressed informed consent, requiring a “Yes” response to proceed. Those who declined were directed to end the survey. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and assured that they could skip any questions they did not wish to answer. Confidentiality was guaranteed throughout the study, and the survey would automatically end for any participant under 18.

Quantitative Data Collection - IPEDS Data

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is an annual data collection managed by the Postsecondary Branch of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES, a non-partisan agency within the Institute of Education Sciences under the U.S. Department of Education, serves as the primary federal entity for gathering and analyzing educational data both in the United States and globally (NCES, 2023). Enrollment data was pulled for each fall semester from LCC’s IPED report. Data collected indicated how many high

school college-intending graduates applied to LCC for a given fall semester and how many of those students actually attended classes at the census date of the semester. This method was used to collect data from 2018 to 2024.

Qualitative Data Collection – Online Survey

Qualitative data was collected via two open-ended questions on the online survey. Survey question 17 asked how LCC could enhance support for future students through the admissions process. The final open-ended question, survey question 20, asked if participants would be willing to partake in a semi-structured interview. As previously indicated, only one participant advised that they would be willing to take part in a one-on-one interview. Based on the lack of interest and availability, semi-structured interviews were not conducted to collect data for the study.

Qualitative Data Collection – Text Responses

Qualitative data was collected by logging participant responses to text messages sent during the study. Responses to the texts were collected and logged weekly. Each text sent was logged in an excel spreadsheet by applicant name (see Figure 10). In addition, each text was saved in Watermark, an early alert system that allows texting to applicants and students. In Watermark, an applicant could be searched by name and all text conversations sent during the intervention are displayed by date with any student responses.

Early applicants received the most text messages (40-45), and some late applicants received fewer text messages (4-5). Ultimately, the 2024 cohort consisted of 498 new students, all of whom received the data collection survey in September 2024 seeking their input regarding their experience with the text messaging process. An additional 44 students applied after Experience LCC in July. Texts were sent to these late applicants but due to the limited contact,

Student Identifier	Welcome 11/15/23 (when applied)	Thanksgiving 11/23/24 (once)	myLCC 12/1/23 (when applied)	RDS OUT 12/19/23 (when applied)	Christmas 12/25/24 (once)
Student 1	Thank you this is (student name) mother number I will let her know about your text message, again thank you so much right now she is in school It's fine if you do but this is her number (252)560-6337 again I don't mind at all though	"loved"	Okay thank you		
Student 2	Heeey , nice to talk to you	Happy Thanksgiving		How can I change it to say I'm in state	
Student 3	(student name) number is xxx-xxxx This is her mom	Happy thanksgiving			How do I make my lancer login account I had to get my transcript from high school I'm otw to LCC right now
Student 4	Hello Kim, I actually do have a question. I have dual enrollment with LCC through High School. How will I access my Application Status with LCC if I already have an account?	How do I access my Application Status through my account? Okay thank you			
Student 5	Hey I want to know sent out approved letters like accept people yet Ok Hey I sill didn't get no blue paper in the mail	Thank u n happy Thanksgiving to u too	Is there anyway u can send another one		

Figure 10. Screenshot of student responses to intervention texts - 2024 cohort.

they were not sent the survey or included in the final data set. The total number of students who received at least one text was 543.

Data Analysis

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in an effort to answer the specified guiding questions. Data was analyzed by reviewing participant responses in both the electronic survey and responses to the text messages, which contributed to the identification of codes and ultimately themes. Additionally, IPEDS data was compared to determine if there was a change in matriculation. The results from the data analysis were then used to answer the guiding questions.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data for this study was collected through the use of an electronic survey sent to participants to inquire about their perception of the text message intervention. As indicated, data from IPEDS was also reviewed to determine if there was any change in enrollment information between 2023 and 2024. It was important to note that any change in enrollment data could be created by a variety of reasons, hence the importance of collecting the additional survey data and text response/participation data related to the text messaging intervention.

Survey Data

After collecting the survey data, the information was reviewed and analyzed with input from student services inquiry partners. Out of 498 distributed surveys, 77 respondents completed it, resulting in a participation rate of over 15%. Among the respondents, 56 were currently enrolled at LCC, while 16 were not (see Figure 11). Quantitative data was collected via an electronic survey sent to participants, and a basic data analyzation was conducted utilizing the analytics features in Survey Monkey.

Q3 Are you currently enrolled in classes at LCC?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 5

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 73%	Average Score 1.8/2.0 (89%)	Standard Deviation 0.42	Difficulty 7/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
✓ Yes	2/2	77.78%	56
No	1/2	22.22%	16
TOTAL			72

Q5 Why did you decide not to attend Lenoir Community College following high school graduation (select all that apply)?

Answered: 16 Skipped: 61

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Attended another college	56.25%	9
Entered the military	0.00%	0
Chose full-time employment	6.25%	1
Decided not to attend college immediately after high school graduation	37.50%	6
Did not complete the necessary steps to be eligible to attend (for example: residency determination issues, financial aid issues, program selection issues, transportation issues, internet issues, personal issues)	12.50%	2
Other (please explain)	6.25%	1
Total Respondents: 16		

#	OTHER (PLEASE EXPLAIN)	DATE
1	I did attend but I didn't know how to get to my classes online and I'm currently pregnant i would rather be on campus instead of doing it at home	9/4/2024 9:35 AM

Q6 Race:

Answered: 69 Skipped: 8

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Asian	1.45%	1
Black or African American	24.64%	17
Hispanic/Latino	18.84%	13
White	47.83%	33
Two or More Races	7.25%	5
Other	0.00%	0
TOTAL		69

Figure 11. 2024 Survey - questions 3, 5, and 6.

The survey questions attempted to collect data that would provide information as to participants' experience with and perception of the text messaging intervention. Of those who did not enroll, 56.25% attended another college, 6.25% chose full-time employment, 37.50% planned to attend LCC in the future, and 12.50% did not complete all necessary admission steps (see Figure 11). The demographics of the 498 participants were 47.83% white, 24.64% black, and 18.84% Hispanic/Latino (see Figure 11).

When asked about preferred communication methods from LCC in question 18 (see Figure 12), 60 participants responded. The most favored methods were phone calls and texts, while emails—both personal and school—were least preferred. Regarding the perceived difficulty of the admission steps (see Figure 12), 60 applicants responded to question 19, with only two finding the application moderately difficult. Ten students found the RDS application difficult or moderately difficult, four struggled with requesting transcripts, and 23 found the FAFSA challenging. Most respondents felt that applying for LCC scholarships, registering for orientation, and connecting with academic advisors was not difficult or they did not complete those steps.

Participants who chose LCC provided various reasons for their selection: 50.91% cited low cost, 67.27% appreciated the proximity to home, 43.64% were attracted by specific programs, 30.91% sought only an associate degree, and 60% intended to transfer after completing necessary courses. Additionally, when asked about their feelings during the application process (see Figure 13), 61 responses were collected. Of these, 21 felt overwhelmed, 21 were neutral, and 19 felt confident. When asked if they believed they had the necessary skills to prepare for college (see Figure 13), 39 of the 61 respondents agreed they did. None of the 61 participants reported that attending college was not accepted or expected in their culture (see

Q18 Reflecting on your experience with the LCC admissions process, what form of communication would you have preferred? (Please rank from best (1) to least preferred (5))

Answered: 60 Skipped: 17

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Phone calls	30.00% 15	22.00% 11	14.00% 7	18.00% 9	16.00% 8	50	2.68
Text messages	24.53% 13	13.21% 7	5.66% 3	16.98% 9	39.62% 21	53	3.34
LCC email messages	13.95% 6	20.93% 9	16.28% 7	25.58% 11	23.26% 10	43	3.23
Personal email messages	11.36% 5	13.64% 6	43.18% 19	18.18% 8	13.64% 6	44	3.09
Regular mailed letters	20.00% 9	22.22% 10	13.33% 6	22.22% 10	22.22% 10	45	3.04

Q19 How easy or difficult were the following steps of the admissions process?

Answered: 60 Skipped: 17

	EXTREMELY DIFFICULT	MODERATELY DIFFICULT	NEITHER EASY NOR DIFFICULT	MODERATELY EASY	EXTREMELY EASY	DID NOT COMPLETE THIS STEP	TOTAL	WE AV
The application to the college	0.00% 0	3.33% 2	26.67% 16	36.67% 22	33.33% 20	0.00% 0	60	
The residency determination form	3.33% 2	13.33% 8	38.33% 23	26.67% 16	13.33% 8	5.00% 3	60	
Requesting official transcripts	0.00% 0	6.67% 4	31.67% 19	33.33% 20	26.67% 16	1.67% 1	60	
The FASFA (financial aid) Application	11.67% 7	26.67% 16	16.67% 10	26.67% 16	13.33% 8	5.00% 3	60	
The LCC scholarship application	1.69% 1	10.17% 6	23.73% 14	22.03% 13	16.95% 10	25.42% 15	59	
Registering for Experience LCC (new student orientation)	0.00% 0	3.33% 2	25.00% 15	16.67% 10	36.67% 22	18.33% 11	60	
Connecting with your academic advisor for registration	0.00% 0	6.67% 4	21.67% 13	26.67% 16	35.00% 21	10.00% 6	60	

Figure 12. 2024 Survey - questions 18 and 19.

Q8 As you were completing the steps of the admissions process, how did you feel?

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 16%	Average Score 3.1/5.0 (62%)	Standard Deviation 1.23	Difficulty 2/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Overwhelmed while completing the process	1/5	8.20%	5
Somewhat overwhelmed while completing the process	2/5	26.23%	16
Neutral	3/5	34.43%	21
Somewhat confident in your ability to the process	4/5	11.48%	7
✓ Confident in your ability to complete the process	5/5	19.67%	12
TOTAL			61

Q9 I felt I had the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully apply and prepare for college:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 51%	Average Score 2.6/3.0 (87%)	Standard Deviation 0.56	Difficulty 6/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	3.28%	2
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	32.79%	20
✓ Agree	3/3	63.93%	39
TOTAL			61

Q10 The decision to attend college was:

Answered: 60 Skipped: 17

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Not at all accepted or expected in my culture	0.00% 0
Somewhat not accepted or expected in my culture	0.00% 0
Neutral	13.33% 8
Somewhat accepted and expected in my culture	13.33% 8
Accepted and expected in my culture	73.33% 44
TOTAL	60

Figure 13. 2024 Survey – questions 8, 9, and 10.

Figure 13). Most felt they had control over their ability to apply successfully (see Figure 14) and had the energy to handle the admissions process (see Figure 14). All 61 participants deemed attending college important (see Figure 15), and only four felt their college expectations were unrealistic (see Figure 15).

The majority of participants reported receiving support during the admissions process (see Figure 16), with family support at 81.97%, classmates and friends at 71.67%, high school teachers and counselors at 85.25%, LCC support at 83.33%, and 44.83% seeking help from other sources. In response to how they handled challenges during the application process (see Figure 16), 61 students reported various approaches: 19 did not seek help but waited for contact, 52 discussed issues with others, 49 made plans and followed through, 55 sought help, and 51 managed their time better.

The 2024 survey attracted 33% more participants than the 2023 survey, likely due to the established familiarity between the cohort and myself, resulting in a 5% increase in participation from the previous year (see Table 7).

The survey identified areas where applicants faced challenges in the application process. In the 2023 survey, 29% of participants who did not attend LCC failed to complete all admission steps, while this figure dropped to 12% in 2024. Most participants felt confident about the application process, though about a third found it more challenging than anticipated. Support from others was prevalent, with 83% using LCC as a resource—an increase from the previous year when only half sought help from LCC (see Table 7).

The communication strategy remained consistent between both cohorts, with the addition of personalized text message campaigns for the 2024 cohort, which the 2023 cohort did not receive. Feedback indicated a 12% increase in satisfaction regarding LCC's support during

Q11 I felt confident that I had control over my ability to successfully apply and prepare for college:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 62%	Average Score 2.7/3.0 (91%)	Standard Deviation 0.58	Difficulty 8/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	6.56%	4
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	14.75%	9
✓ Agree	3/3	78.69%	48
TOTAL			61

Q12 I had ample emotional and physical energy to handle the admissions process:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 47%	Average Score 2.5/3.0 (84%)	Standard Deviation 0.65	Difficulty 5/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	8.20%	5
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	32.79%	20
✓ Agree	3/3	59.02%	36
TOTAL			61

Figure 14. 2024 Survey - questions 11 and 12.

Q13 Attending college after high school was:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 31%	Average Score 4.0/5.0 (81%)	Standard Deviation 0.97	Difficulty 4/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Not at all important to me	1/5	0.00%	0
Somewhat important to me	2/5	8.20%	5
Neutral	3/5	19.67%	12
Important to me	4/5	32.79%	20
✓ Very important to me	5/5	39.34%	24
TOTAL			61

Q14 Looking back, my expectations about the college application process were:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 32%	Average Score 2.3/3.0 (78%)	Standard Deviation 0.60	Difficulty 3/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Not realistic	1/3	6.56%	4
Neutral	2/3	52.46%	32
✓ Realistic	3/3	40.98%	25
TOTAL			61

Figure 15. 2024 Survey – question 13 and 14.

Q15 I received support during the admissions process from:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Family	4.92% 3	13.11% 8	81.97% 50	61	2.77
Classmates/friends	8.33% 5	20.00% 12	71.67% 43	60	2.63
High school teachers/counselors	1.64% 1	13.11% 8	85.25% 52	61	2.84
LCC staff/advisors	5.00% 3	11.67% 7	83.33% 50	60	2.78
Other sources	8.62% 5	46.55% 27	44.83% 26	58	2.36

Q16 How did you deal with situations you had to face during the admissions process

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Spoke with others to resolve issues	86.67% 52	13.33% 8	60
Made a plan and following through	80.33% 49	19.67% 12	61
Sought help from others	91.67% 55	8.33% 5	60
Managed my time better	83.61% 51	16.39% 10	61
Didn't ask for help but waited for someone to contact me	32.20% 19	67.80% 40	59

Figure 16. 2024 Survey – Questions 15 and 16.

Table 7

Comparison of Survey Results from 2023 to 2024

Category	2023 Results	2024 Results
Matriculation Patterns		
Attended another college (%)	42.86%	56.25%
Planned to attend LCC in the future (%)	28.57%	37.50%
Did not complete admission steps (%)	28.57%	12.50%
Support During Admissions Process		
LCC Support (%)	56.41%	83.33%
Family Support (%)	74.36%	81.97%
High School Counselors Support (%)	71.79%	85.25%
Classmates/Friends Support (%)	62.16%	71.67%
Feelings About the Application		
Overwhelmed or Somewhat Overwhelmed (%)	39%	34%
Confident or Somewhat Confident (%)	41%	31%
Preferred Communication Method		
Phone Calls/Text Messages (%)	Most Preferred	Most Preferred
Emails (Personal/School) (%)	Least Preferred	Least Preferred
Perceived Difficulty of Application		
Found Application Moderately Difficult (%)	15%	2%
Found FAFSA Challenging (%)		23%
Communication Satisfaction		
Satisfaction with LCC Support (%)	47%	70%
Requests for More Communication (%)	52%	30%

admissions, while the request for more communication decreased by 13% year (see Table 7).

IPEDS Data

In Phase IV, enrollment data were collected through IPEDS for the 2024 cohort in the same manner as was done with the previous cohorts in Phases I, II and III (see Figure 17). There were 543 total applications received from college-intending high school seniors. There were 245 students enrolled in classes at the census date. Of the 298 who did not enroll, 64 indicated they would be attending another college. Ten students opted to take classes through one of our workforce development programs. There were 224 students who did not indicate what they chose to do after graduation.

IPEDS data was reviewed and analyzed to determine if there was any change in the number of new students related to fall 2023 vs. fall 2024. This data showed that in fall 2023, LCC received 489 applications and 223 students matriculated. Data for fall 2024 at LCC showed 543 applied and 245 were enrolled at the census date. The matriculation percentage did not change from 2023 to 2024. It remained at 45%. A review of enrollment data from 2018-2024 shows that the percentage of students who matriculated has remained consistent around the 45% mark. Fall of 2021 showed a 64% matriculation rate but this is more than likely a result of federal money that was available for students enrolled in college. This was an incentive for high school seniors to attend college in order to receive the grant funds.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This study utilized a mixed method approach as it provides strength in drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data to attempt to reduce limitations (Creswell, 2016). For the most part, quantitative data collection is outlined in previous sections, while qualitative data was

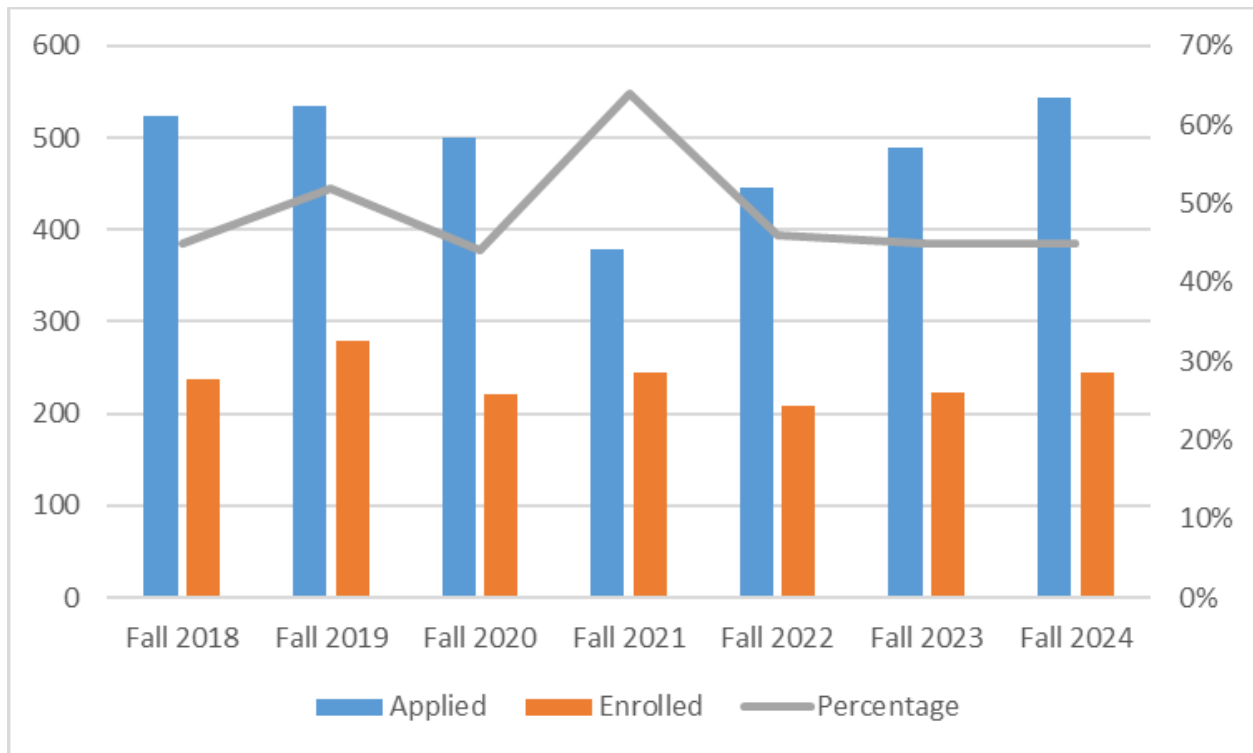


Figure 17. LCC application to matriculation 2018-2024 with percentages.

part, quantitative data collection is outlined in previous sections, while qualitative data was collected via analysis of the responses to the two open-ended questions on the electronic survey and the text messages sent during the communication plan intervention.

Online Survey

The online survey included two open-ended questions that sought to collect additional qualitative data from the participants. Survey question 17 asked how LCC could enhance support for future students through the admissions process. Forty responses were received, with 25 praising LCC's efforts and others suggesting better communication (9) and clearer instructions (3; see Table 8). The final open-ended question, survey question 20, asked if participants would be willing to partake in a semi-structured interview. Of the five responses, four declined, and one expressed interest (see Appendix L).

Text Responses

All participants received the text messages beginning with the Welcome Text, and there were 50 responses to the text. The myLCC text was also sent to all students. This text received 14 responses. The RDS in-state text was sent to 406 students. The out-of-state text was sent to the remaining members of the cohort. Among those who received the out-of-state text, 24 were in fact out-of-state students, while 69 were in-state and had residency issues that needed to be corrected. Additional residency texts were sent to these remaining 69 students throughout the year as needed, in an effort to assist with correcting the residency before registration. The Financial Aid announcement was sent to each student and 12 responses to that text were received.

Several texts were sent to coordinate with a holiday or special event. The Thanksgiving text was sent to 243 students and eight students responded. The Merry Christmas text was sent to

Table 8

Survey Question 17 Responses

Survey Question 17	Participant Responses
How could LCC better support future students through the admissions process?	• Keep doing what they are doing. The professors are great. • Get to know them better before putting a lot of work on them while they have a job and other issues and responsibilities • Having links to scholarship opportunities in the admissions process or directly after the admissions process would be helpful • None that I can think of, LCC's admissions process is very straightforward and simple • I am not sure • Doing great as is • I don't know if they have it, but maybe a class, just something hands on to get help walking through the process • I can't think of anything better • Making them feel even more welcomed and knowing that it's a bit step applying and the whole process of it • Better guidance • Making it easier for the future students to understand what they are doing • Honestly the support that LCC offers is fantastic • Faster communication

266 applicants with six responses. The Welcome Back text was sent to 266 with seven responses. FAFSA Day was announced in a text and sent to 298 students with eight responses. A Valentine's Day text was sent to 324 and five applicants responded. LCC Foundation scholarship applications were due at the end of March. A text was sent to 343 with six responses. March included two St. Patrick day texts and an Easter text. This was sent to 343 and 355 respectively with 19 responses total. Commitment Day was sent to the 2024 cohort as a reminder to sign up at their local high school if they wanted to attend. The text was sent to 377 high school seniors and received six responses. Our first Save the Date text for new student orientation was sent in April to 468 with six responses. The graduation text was sent out the morning of the high school graduations to 459 with eight responses.

Several informational texts were sent in the spring. One text that received many responses focused on the applicant's selection of their major. This text was sent to 443 applicants and received 43 responses. In addition, two additional texts were sent to students on the same day. One was to let them know they had been admitted to the college and the other was in regard to completing a FAFSA and information regarding their award was sent to their LCC email. Of the 469 students who received these texts, there were 37 responses. After identifying those who had not completed a FAFSA and based on comments received, another text was sent to 257 students notifying them that either they had not started or submitted a FAFSA for 2024-2025.

Near the date of Experience LCC, the new student orientation event, several texts were sent out from the end of June until the day before the event. The total of students receiving texts regarding Experience LCC totaled 498. The responses to this event equaled 107. Texts regarding the survey sent in Phase V were sent to 498 students. These texts informed students about the

survey and reminded them to complete the survey. There was a total of 30 responses from these texts.

A total of 217 applicants in the 2024 cohort responded at least once with 477 communication incidences where a comment was made or a conversation took place. Many were a simple acknowledgement of receiving the text such as “thank you” or a “liked” emoji. Fifteen students requested to stop receiving texts. While the students no longer received the texts, they did receive the information via email in their LCC account.

The original Welcome text ranked among the most popular texts sent to the 2024 cohort with 50 responses. The most common response was from a parent advising that the student had used the parent’s cell number on the college application. The parent would then give me the student’s cell number so they could receive the texts directly.

Although the myLCC text only received 4 responses at the time it was sent, questions concerning how to set up school accounts and emails were received throughout the intervention. They were particularly common just prior to Experience LCC. Many had difficulty setting up their account. For example, one text stated: “...it will not let me activate my account Is there any way you can help me find my student number, I was given one and I have it but I changed my class and idk if that would change it.” After my assistance they replied, “Thank you I've gotten it straightened out.”

The multiple RDS texts also received many responses. There were approximately 70 students with out-of-state residency status according to RDS but after a review of their high school transcript, it was determined that their residency status should be in-state. Eighteen students notified me that they had made the necessary corrections and were now considered in-state. I was able to check the status of the remaining students to see if they had appealed the

decision. Ultimately by the time classes began, those attending LCC had made the necessary corrections. One student responded with the following:

Hello, yes I was considered out-of-state for a while because RDS needed more information to ensure I am a NC resident. I have sent my documents to prove my residency and the RDS site says I'm a resident and eligible for in-state tuition. Should I still need to contact RDS about it? The site says I am a resident.

Unfortunately, the 2024-2025 simplified FAFSA caused many LCC students to struggle with the federal aid application. Normally the FAFSA is available annually on October 1. During this particular study, the application did not open until December 30. Although it did become available, not everyone was able to complete it immediately. The website crashed several times, and it took months before all students were able to submit the online application. The original plan for the intervention described in this study was designed to strongly encourage applicants to complete the FAFSA early and include subsequent follow-up on their progress, similar to residency. As a result of the issues impacting the release of the FAFSA application, this was not possible. Some students were still trying to get approved for financial aid on the first day of the fall semester. Since students were provided with a contact at LCC, they were able to reach out when they had questions.

An example of the questions and comments received as responses to the texts that were sent regarding the FAFSA process included:

Hey. I completed the FAFSA on Feb. 26, but I did not choose LCC as one of my schools on the form at that time. Do you know how I can change that or if it matters? The application shows it is still in review when I log onto the FAFSA site.

Another student was able to reach out regarding questions about the FAFSA process and implications of moving and changing to online classes: “Hi ms kim! I completed my FAFSA already but i'm still not sure if the school got it. and if i were to move to another city before my semester starts is there anyway i could do online?” Additionally, parents of students attending LCC were also able to utilize the communication plan to ask questions about topics, including the FAFSA and financial aid, “Hello, this is “X’s” parent & I'm trying my best to complete the Fasfa form but it keep asking me to verify myself & its not allowing me.”

The Major and Career text was another popular text message as it received 43 responses. Some individuals responded that they were confident in their choice of major or career path, as is seen in the comments from the following students: “I am in the right major, thank you!” and “I would like to continue with the dental pre reqs my goal is to be a dental hygienist.” Some students indicated that they were positive on the major they decided to pursue and did not need further information at this time:

Hello, Ms Kim, it's “X”. I'm a hundred percent sure on the major I selected, Pre-BSN in nursing. I would not like to take a career assessment or speak to a counselor about my options. At the moment I don't need more information from the program chair. Thank you.

Although many students indicated they were pleased with their current selection, others were not as sure, “I would like to switch my major, actually! I want to change it to nursing Thank you”. Some advised that they were interested in speaking with someone and possibly taking an assessment to see where their interests would lead them. One student confirmed this with the following response:

I am not 100% sure. I would like something related to human science, a field where I can learn about humans. I think that taking a career assessment wouldn't do no harm.

Radiography doesn't sound bad, for all I know I could get my associates degree in two years and still find a job just with that.

Those who had concerns were directed to the Career Connections specialist at LCC who set appointments to meet with the students on their schedule to help them determine the correct major:

Hi Kim! I was trying to choose the best option that would lead me on a good pathway to a Physical Therapy degree. I would love to talk to a counselor to make sure I am on the right path, but I don't think today is the best time.

Some students described unique reasons for wanting more information about alternate majors, including one who stated:

Hey! I'm really looking for a major that wouldn't so much take a toll on me and cause too much stress on my shoulders! i'm looking forward to a career where i can be in my own space, behind a desk getting my job done. I would really appreciate it if you could help me out :) okayy, thank you so much !

The series of texts regarding Experience LCC also received many responses. The texts included a Save the Date, an invitation to register for the event, and a few reminders to complete registration. The most common response to these texts was that the students were having difficulty setting up their myLCC account to access the link for the event registration, “how do I sign in or make a lancer account? Thanks.” Another student texted, “I am actually having trouble signing up and I will be attending on Thursday.” More responses included, “Yes, i do plan on

coming Thursday but it won't let me sign in Thank you" and "I'd like to attend but I am having trouble signing in."

One student advised that they were experiencing several issues that they needed assistance with prior to orientation in stating:

Good morning, I have been having issues with trying to find my student id , I spoke to my advisor this morning and she told me i have been registered for cosmetology but I never got an email saying I got accepted so I don't have access to my student id number to be able to sign up for this Thursday.

The week of the event, I offered to register them if they would confirm they planned to attend. As a result of the effort to assist students with this process, registration increased by 10%. Students also indicated they wanted to find out specific details about the event, "Hi ms hill! i talked with my advisor and I said i'll be picking my classes tomorrow at the EXP. What time does it start?" and "I was curious as to if the orientation was mandatory? I know the flier says we can schedule classes that day as well but I was wondering if there was any way to schedule them through email?"

Students would also reach out to advise if they were unable to attend the event, but had additional questions: "Is there going to be another chance for Experience LCC, or is the 18th the only option? I am asking because I will be out of town that day" and "I will be at camp this week! my advisor has been the absolute best and have put me in the best classes already! thank you!"

Participants in the study also responded to the text asking them to participate in the electronic survey and most indicated they would be happy to complete the survey, while others texted to advise when they completed it. Additionally, even after the planned text messages were

completed, class started, and students had met with their academic advisor, some have continued to text with questions about their major, classes, and future registration. The text messaging communication intervention has allowed me to establish a connection with many of these students and they know I will respond if they reach out. Based on the number of responses received, the intervention has been a worthwhile technique to add to admission processes. An unexpected result of the intervention was that students expressed a feeling of connection to LCC and to me early on and they were better prepared for the first day of class.

Codes & Themes

Following the collection and initial review of the data responses, coding was completed using manual techniques and deductive coding. Deductive coding allows researchers to directly address specific research questions or hypotheses (Drew, 2023). While respondents' answers and level of participation varied, there were also similarities in their answers that can be seen through the codes that were identified. The recurrent words and phrases included "won't let me log in," "can't access my account," "need help," "who do I contact," "don't know what to do next," "what happens now", "excited to join," "Thank you". Codes were identified as access and technical issues, guidance and assistance, confusion and uncertainty, interest and engagement, and desire for more communication. After identification of individual codes, a table was created to illustrate how the codes were grouped to determine overarching themes (see Table 9). Themes were based around specific areas of communication that received the most responses. These included texts about My LCC Account, RDS Issues, FAFSA Issues, major selections, scholarships, orientation and registering for classes.

Table 9

Codes and Themes Chart

Recurring Words/Phrases	Codes	Categories Affected	Theme
"won't let me log in," "can't access my account," "student ID not found," "error logging in."	Access & Technical Issues	My LCC Account, RDS Issues, FAFSA Issues, Scholarships, Orientation Registering for Classes, Career/Major	Students face barriers in accessing online college systems
"need help," "who do I contact," "how do I," "can you help." "not sure if submitted," "don't know what to do next," "what happens now."	Process Confusion & Uncertainty Guidance & Assistance	FAFSA Issues, Registering for Classes, Career/Major	Students have a strong desire for personalized guidance
"didn't know I had an email," "more communication needed," "checking in helps."	Desire for More Communication	FAFSA Issues, Registering for Classes, Career/Major	Students need better communication and clarity in processes
"want to attend," "excited to join," "looking for opportunities", "thank you", "okay", "Will do"	Interest & Engagement	All areas of the intervention texts	Students react positively to information provided to them by text

Theme #1: Students Face Barriers in Accessing Online College Systems

Theme #1 is students face barriers in accessing online college systems. This theme was identified based on recurring words/phrases including “won’t let me log in,” “can’t access my account,” and “error logging in.” Further analysis of the recurring words/phrases led to codes having to do with access and technical issues. Many students struggle with setting up their LCC accounts, FAFSA, and registration portals. Issues like login errors, ID number confusion, and FAFSA verification problems indicate a need for better onboarding support. Without easy access to these essential online systems, students may become frustrated and discouraged from continuing the enrollment process.

Technical issues, such as system errors and forgotten credentials, can prevent students from accessing critical services. Additionally, first-time college students may be unfamiliar with how to navigate online platforms, creating additional stress. LCC can improve onboarding support with step-by-step tutorials, proactive troubleshooting assistance, and a dedicated help desk for technical support.

Theme #2: A Strong Desire for Personalized Guidance

Theme #2 is students have a strong desire for personalized guidance. This theme emerged from the repetition of specific words and phrases, such as "need help," "who do I contact," "how do I," and "can you help." A deeper examination of the repeated words and phrases resulted in codes related to process confusion and the need for more guidance & assistance. Students frequently ask for advisor contacts, assistance with choosing a major, and help navigating financial aid. Many responses suggest that direct communication with a counselor or support staff is highly valued. The transition to college can be overwhelming, especially for students

unfamiliar with academic and financial aid processes. Having personalized support available can significantly impact their confidence and success.

Personalized advising allows students to feel supported and ensures they are making informed decisions about their educational journey. Many students benefit from structured academic planning, major exploration sessions, and one-on-one guidance with financial aid. Implementing scheduled advising check-ins, mentorship programs, and peer support groups can

Theme #3: Need for Improved Communication & Clarity in Processes

Theme #3 is there is a need for improved communication and clarity in the process. Recurring words and phrases, including "didn't know I had an email," "more communication needed," and "checking in helps." helped to identify this theme. Further investigation into the repeated words and phrases identified codes concerning a desire for more communication. Students express confusion about next steps after applying or registering. Some feel uncertain about financial aid, scholarships, and registration timelines. Many suggest that more frequent check-ins, clearer guidance, and proactive communication would enhance their experience. The intervention implemented regular text updates to guide students through each stage of enrollment and financial aid.

A lack of clear, structured communication can leave students feeling lost and overwhelmed. Many students do not receive timely updates on their application status, financial aid deadlines, or course registration requirements, which can lead to missed opportunities and increased frustration.

Frequent emails, text message reminders, and personalized notifications can keep students informed and engaged. Clear and concise instructions should be provided at every stage, ensuring that students understand what is expected of them and how to proceed.

Theme #4: Students React Positively to Information Provided to Them by Text

Theme #4 is students react positively to information provided to them by text. This theme was recognized through the frequent appearance of words and phrases like “thank you,” “okay,” and “Will do”. Additional analysis of the recurring language revealed codes associated with interest and engagement. Students express gratitude for the information they receive. They respond positively when they are given the personal assistance they need. They are willing to reach out to LCC when they need assistance, knowing they will receive a timely response from a real person.

Text messaging has proven to be an effective tool for keeping students informed and engaged. Because students frequently check their phones, text messages serve as a direct and efficient means of communication. Timely updates on important deadlines, reminders about upcoming events, and encouragement from LCC staff can significantly enhance student engagement and retention.

Additionally, students appreciate the ability to ask questions and receive quick responses via text. This immediate support helps them navigate complex processes with confidence. LCC has expanded their text messaging services by incorporating two-way communication, where students can respond with questions and receive real-time assistance.

Furthermore, by personalizing text messages—using the student’s name, referencing their major or specific concerns, and offering tailored support—made the communication feel more meaningful. By continuing to leverage text-based communication, LCC can maintain strong connections with students, address their concerns promptly, and enhance overall engagement. Ensuring that messages remain concise, relevant, and action-oriented will further optimize this communication strategy.

Results

This section will review the results of the study as outlined by the three focus of practice questions. The results of the cumulative data will be used to provide a list of recommendations and strategies for future implementation. This analysis highlights the need for improved technical support, stronger advising systems, and clearer communication. Addressing these areas can enhance student satisfaction and success at LCC.

Analysis of Research Question #1

Research question #1 asked the following: What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation? Several factors influence whether a student matriculates at Lenoir Community College. Financial considerations are among the most significant, with many students citing low tuition and the ability to live at home as primary reasons for choosing LCC. Affordability plays a crucial role, particularly for students who plan to transfer to a four-year university after completing their general education requirements. Additionally, the simplicity of the community college application process compared to universities makes LCC an attractive option.

While most students felt confident navigating the admissions process, some reported challenges with specific steps, particularly completing the FAFSA and verifying their residency status. These steps were identified as potential barriers that could deter students from enrolling if they were not properly supported. Another key aspect of matriculation was the level of guidance students received. Many students relied on their high school counselors, academic advisors, and family members for assistance in completing their applications and understanding enrollment requirements. The presence of a strong support system significantly impacted students' ability to complete all necessary steps and make informed decisions about their college education.

Analysis of Research Question #2

Research question #2 asked the following: According to students, what type of interaction with LCC convinced them to matriculate? The study found that personalized and frequent communication played a crucial role in convincing students to matriculate at LCC. Text messages were one of the most effective forms of communication, as they provided students with timely reminders and direct access to support. Unlike emails, which were often ignored or overlooked, text messages allowed for immediate engagement and prompted students to complete necessary steps in the admissions process. Many students responded positively to these messages, using them as opportunities to ask questions and seek guidance when they encountered difficulties.

In addition to text-based communication, direct support from advisors and staff members at LCC was highly valued by students. Many applicants were first-generation college students who lacked family guidance on navigating the admissions process. Having an accessible point of contact at LCC helped alleviate confusion and encouraged students to follow through with enrollment requirements. High school counselors also played an important role in providing support and guidance, further reinforcing the importance of personal interaction in increasing matriculation rates.

Analysis of Research Question #3

Research question #3 asked the following: How does the implementation of a yearlong communication plan impact matriculation? The implementation of a yearlong communication plan had a significant impact on student engagement and preparedness for college. By maintaining regular contact with applicants through text messages, LCC was able to provide consistent support and reminders about key deadlines, financial aid opportunities, and enrollment

steps. This proactive approach helped students feel more connected to the college and reassured them that they had access to assistance whenever needed. Many students reported that the text message intervention made them feel more prepared for their transition to college.

Despite these positive outcomes, the overall matriculation rate at LCC remained unchanged at 45%, the same as the previous year. While the communication plan successfully increased engagement and reduced confusion among students, external factors such as financial aid delays and personal circumstances likely influenced final enrollment decisions. The study suggests that while enhanced communication is valuable, additional measures—such as providing more hands-on financial aid assistance and addressing technical challenges in the enrollment process—may be necessary to further improve matriculation rates.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this explanatory mixed-methods study aimed at improving the matriculation rate of college-intending high school seniors at Lenoir Community College (LCC). The study focused on implementing a yearlong communication plan designed to support applicants through a series of targeted text messages. These messages provided reminders about important deadlines, assisted with residency verification and FAFSA completion, and connected students with advisors to help them navigate the admissions process.

The research followed five phases, with Phase IV detailing the intervention and Phase V analyzing survey results from the 2024 cohort. A total of 498 students participated in the intervention, receiving both informational and event-driven texts. The communication plan aimed to address common enrollment barriers and ensure students had the necessary resources to complete their applications successfully. Quantitative data was collected through surveys and

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reports, while qualitative data came from students' responses to text messages and survey comments.

Findings revealed that cost and proximity were the primary reasons students chose to attend LCC. The text-based communication method proved effective in engaging students, as many responded positively to the messages. However, several students encountered challenges with setting up their accounts, completing the FAFSA, and verifying their residency status. The study also highlighted the importance of personalized support, as many students sought guidance from advisors and school counselors. Despite these efforts, the overall matriculation rate remained at 45%, consistent with previous years, suggesting that while communication plays a crucial role, other external factors may influence students' final decisions.

The study identified four key themes: barriers in accessing online college systems, a strong desire for personalized guidance, the need for improved communication and clarity in processes, and positive student engagement with text messages. Overall, the intervention facilitated better communication between LCC and prospective students, making them feel more connected and supported throughout the admissions process. In Chapter 5, final conclusions and recommendations will be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This mixed methods sequential explanatory study addressed the gap between college-intending high school seniors who apply to Lenoir Community College and those who ultimately enroll. The study focused on improving matriculation by designing and implementing a communication plan that effectively addressed the challenges and needs these applicants encountered after applying and before attending LCC.

The study focused on these three guiding questions:

1. What aspects of the admission process play a role in student matriculation?
2. What type of interaction with LCC convinces prospective students to matriculate?
3. How does the implementation of a yearlong communication plan impact matriculation?

This study was carried out in five phases. The first three phases involved gathering data from previous cohorts to establish a baseline for improvement. This included enrollment data and an online survey. In Phase IV the intervention was designed and implemented, and the data results were analyzed. The intervention sought to collect information to determine answers to the following guiding question that drove the study: RQ3: How does the implementation of a yearlong communication plan affect matriculation rates?

In Phase V a survey was conducted with the 2024 cohort, and both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer the two remaining guiding questions of this study. The survey in Phase V sought to collect information to determine answers to the following guiding questions that guided the study: Question 1: What factors in the admission process influence student matriculation? and Question 2: What type of engagement with LCC encourages prospective students to enroll?

This final chapter delves into additional interpretations of the data gathered in response to the three guiding questions. Here, a comprehensive analysis of what the data reveals about the effects of a text campaign targeting college-bound high school seniors applying to Lenoir Community College is provided. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's implications, as well as recommendations for practical applications and future research directions.

Summary of the Findings

This research study involved a text messaging intervention and a survey to collect data on the students' perceptions of the intervention. The survey was administered to the 2023 cohort in the fall following their high school graduation to gather baseline data. The intervention was implemented for the 2024 cohort throughout their senior year of high school, and they also completed the survey in the fall after graduation. A total of 498 students participated in the 2024 cohort.

This study employed a mixed method design to generate comprehensive insights. Following data collection and analysis, the study identified four key themes: difficulties in navigating online college systems, a strong preference for personalized support, the need for clearer communication and streamlined processes, and positive student engagement with text messaging. A strictly quantitative analysis would suggest that the text message intervention had no impact on enrollment, as the gap between application and matriculation remained at 45%. Based on this data alone, one might conclude that the intervention was ineffective. However, qualitative findings provide compelling evidence of its positive effects.

The qualitative data revealed that the barriers discussed in Chapter Two were indeed present among college-intending high school graduates planning to enroll at LCC in the fall

(Castleman & Page, 2014b). Students faced challenges in several areas, including setting up their student accounts and email, completing the residency determination process without requiring reconsideration (North Carolina Residency Determination Service, 2023), submitting the FAFSA and any missing documentation (Federal Student Aid, 2023), selecting an appropriate major aligned with their interests (Lent et al., 1994), and registering for orientation and fall courses (Castleman & Page, 2014b).

These qualitative findings offer valuable insights for refining future procedures to better support incoming students early in the enrollment process. Adequate preparation before the first day of classes may increase students' likelihood of a successful semester. In contrast, students who enroll at the last minute are often more prone to early withdrawal. Examining fall-to-fall retention rates may indicate whether the 2024 cohort was better prepared and more confident at the start of the semester compared to the 2023 cohort.

The 2024 cohort benefited from direct access to support via text messaging, allowing them to quickly receive responses—often within an hour—from a real person when they had concerns. One could hypothesize that this increased preparedness during the first semester contributed to greater academic success and, consequently, a higher likelihood of returning for the second semester. Notably, there was a 2% increase in fall-to-fall retention between the 2023 and 2024 cohorts.

The findings indicated that cost and proximity were the primary factors influencing students' decisions to attend LCC. The text-based communication method effectively engaged students, with many responding positively. However, some students faced challenges with account setup, FAFSA completion, and residency verification. The study underscored the value of personalized support, as many students actively sought assistance from advisors and school

counselors. Despite these efforts, the overall matriculation rate remained at 45%, consistent with previous years, suggesting that while communication is essential, external factors also impact students' final enrollment decisions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this research study on addressing the gap between college application and matriculation are closely connected to the existing body of research discussed in Chapter 2. In that chapter, key concepts such as Summer Melt, the enrollment funnel, and Schlossberg's transition theory were explored, all of which provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the challenges students face during the transition from high school to college.

The results of this study offer further insight into these concepts by examining the effectiveness of a text messaging intervention and identifying specific barriers that impact student enrollment. The following sections present a detailed interpretation of the study's findings, analyzing their connection to the three guiding questions and the relevant literature discussed in Chapter 2. By situating these findings within the broader context of prior research, this discussion aims to highlight patterns, reinforce existing theories, and suggest areas for future exploration.

Guiding Question #1

Guiding question #1 focused on how the admission process impacts matriculation. The study revealed valuable insights into the admission process and the factors that contribute to student matriculation at Lenoir Community College (LCC). The analysis of the first guiding question highlighted that aspects such as low cost, proximity to home, and program availability are significant factors in students' decisions to attend LCC. Moreover, the study found that while

most students felt confident about completing the application process, some still experienced overwhelm, suggesting a need for ongoing support throughout the transition.

Guiding Question #2

The second guiding question focused on the types of interactions that encouraged matriculation. It was evident that communication from LCC, particularly personalized support from staff and high school counselors, played a crucial role in student decisions to enroll. Additionally, the preference for text messages and phone calls over emails suggests that more direct, timely communication strategies are more effective in maintaining engagement.

Guiding Question #3

Finally, the third guiding question addressed the impact of a yearlong communication plan on matriculation. The implementation of personalized texting proved to be a highly successful intervention, fostering a sense of belonging, providing timely reminders, and creating opportunities for ongoing support. The data suggests that the addition of text messaging not only improved the students' experience but also contributed to a significant decrease in the number of students failing to complete admission steps.

Overall, these findings suggest that effective communication, timely support, and understanding students' specific needs and preferences are critical factors in supporting applicants at LCC. Future efforts should continue to focus on enhancing communication strategies, particularly through personalized and interactive platforms, to better support students throughout their transition to college.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study's findings align closely with both the conceptual framework—the enrollment funnel—and the theoretical framework—Schlossberg's transition theory—by shedding light on

how students experience and navigate the college admissions process. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of the student enrollment journey, offering insights into the factors that shape decision-making, preparedness, and overall experiences in the transition to college.

Conceptual Framework- the Enrollment Funnel

The enrollment funnel model outlines the stages from prospect to matriculated student. The study's quantitative and qualitative data capture student experiences at various stages of this funnel. The data show how prospective students are influenced by factors like cost, program offerings, and proximity to home. This correlates with the initial awareness and inquiry stages of the funnel where students consider different options (Boyles, 2022; Davie, 2022; Sanborne, 2023).

Feedback on student attitudes during the application process, such as being overwhelmed or confident, aligns with how students navigate the steps leading up to being admitted. The survey results show that most students felt they had control over their ability to apply and prepare, which suggests they felt more confident during this stage.

The final stages of the funnel, where students make the decision to enroll, are reflected in the survey results showing reasons for choosing LCC, such as low cost and specific programs. These decisions demonstrate how students move from inquiry to committed enrollment. Additionally, the responses about support received during the admissions process (e.g., family, high school counselors) reflect the resources that students rely on during the transition from high school to enrolling in the institution.

Theoretical Framework- Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's framework (Anderson et al., 2011) helps explain how students experience the transition from high school to college. The study shows that students face varying levels of difficulty during this transition, particularly in the application process. Schlossberg described four major factors, known as the Four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies as the resources that help an individual deal with the transition (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

In reference to situation, the survey results indicate that students' perceptions of the admissions process (whether they feel overwhelmed or confident) directly reflect how they perceive their situation during this transition. Students who felt confident likely had more resources or support, whereas those who felt overwhelmed might have lacked sufficient guidance or resources (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

The responses also reflect students' self-perception, such as whether they felt they had the necessary skills to navigate the admissions process. A significant portion of respondents felt they had the required skills, suggesting that self-confidence and preparedness played a role in successful transitions.

Support from family, friends, high school counselors, and LCC itself is crucial in Schlossberg's framework, and the survey results confirm that students who received support from these sources felt more confident and were more likely to complete the application process. The data suggest that family support and school counselors were particularly significant, as was LCC's own outreach.

Students who faced barriers during the application process employed different strategies, such as asking for help or managing their time better. This reflects Schlossberg's notion of using strategies to cope with and overcome challenges during a transition.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

While this study successfully collected data to analyze and address the guiding questions, certain limitations and delimitations must be acknowledged. One key limitation of this study is the response rate of participants. Receiving a survey does not guarantee a response, and students who are already enrolled at LCC were more likely to complete the survey than those who did not matriculate. This presents a challenge when attempting to understand the barriers that prevented students from completing the enrollment process. The individuals whose insights would be most valuable—those who did not complete their application or enrollment—were also the least likely to respond. This was reflected in the response rates, with only 10% of the 2023 cohort and 15% of the 2024 cohort completing the survey.

The survey focused on prospective students who applied to attend LCC in the fall semester following their high school graduation. However, those who enrolled were more likely to participate than those who ultimately did not attend LCC. For students in the 2023 cohort who did not enroll, recalling and articulating the specific barriers they faced may have been difficult, and some may have been unreceptive to an unexpected survey. To mitigate low response rates, the survey was sent multiple times, yet participation remained limited, particularly among non-matriculated students. The same challenges applied to the 2024 survey, which was distributed to both students who enrolled and those who did not.

Another limitation was the minimal communication plan received by the 2023 cohort. These students had little opportunity to establish a personal connection with admissions or student services, making the survey they received in September 2023 unexpected and easy to ignore. Given the anticipated low response rate, the survey was designed to gather as much information as possible without requiring a follow-up interview. Many questions that would have

been part of a semi-structured interview were included as open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses. While this approach increased the likelihood of obtaining responses, it did not always capture the depth of information that an interview might have provided.

Additionally, LCC's communication system relies on text messaging, with the initial message giving students the option to opt out of further texts. If students chose to opt out, all future communication was sent via email to their LCC account, which they may not have checked regularly. Among the 2024 cohort, 15 students initially opted out of text messages, and additional students later indicated they had decided to attend another institution and requested to stop receiving texts. Students who did not receive text messages may have been less likely to receive timely information, as they had to actively check their email for updates.

An unexpected yet significant limitation arose from financial aid issues related to the FAFSA Simplification Act, which introduced major changes to the federal student aid system for the 2024–25 award year. The FAFSA, which typically opens on October 1, was delayed until December 30, 2023. The rollout of the new system was fraught with technical difficulties and glitches, leading to lower-than-expected FAFSA completion rates. These issues persisted into the first week of the fall 2024 semester, causing uncertainty about financial aid availability and leading some students to delay their enrollment or class registration. This disruption may have influenced student decision-making and impacted the study's data.

A delimitation of this study was that it focused exclusively on college-intending high school seniors who applied to attend LCC in the fall semester following their high school graduation. Some of these students may have previously taken college courses through the Career and College Promise (CCP) Program, but they were still classified as first-time freshmen in the fall. While CCP students had prior experience with college coursework, they were

completing the CFNC application, the Residency Determination System (RDS) application, and the FAFSA for the first time. Their admissions process differed from that of CCP students continuing college post-high school or adult learners returning to education after a gap.

This study did not encompass all incoming LCC students, as that broader population includes veterans, non-traditional students, part-time students, and returning adult learners. These individuals face a distinct set of challenges, including family obligations, employment responsibilities, childcare needs, transportation barriers, and financial constraints. The enrollment experiences and barriers of these students are more varied, making them outside the scope of this study. Additionally, the concepts of Summer Melt and Senior Thaw—key frameworks for this research—are less relevant to non-traditional students.

By focusing on traditional high school graduates intending to enroll at LCC, this study sought to identify specific barriers in the application and matriculation process for this population. These students, typically aged 17 to 19, share similar life experiences, social development stages, and educational backgrounds. Most have not had full-time employment due to their high school schedules. These commonalities provided a clear framework for understanding the obstacles they faced and developing targeted interventions to improve the enrollment process.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

The results of the study may have practical implications in the way the admissions office at LCC communicates with new applicants. It is apparent many students are unclear of next steps and are unaware of issues that need to be resolved. By initiating ongoing conversations with applicants early in the application process, they are more likely to be prepared and to register for classes. Although the gap between application and enrollment did not close, it was evident that

the students who did matriculate at LCC were better prepared for the first day of class. The retention from fall to spring shows an increase among those who received the intervention.

When comparing enrollment numbers from 2018 through 2024, there was no increase in matriculation among high school seniors at LCC. Although more students did not enroll in 2024 than 2023, those who did were more informed than previous cohorts. This was evident by their responses to the text messages and their participation in the survey. LCC's overall enrollment for 2024 fall was approximately 10% higher than enrollment in 2023. This is based on total enrollment, not just the high school cohorts. Spring enrollment for 2025 was also 9-10% higher than 2024 spring. A review of retention for fall to spring enrollment among the 2023 cohort verses the 2024 cohort shows an increase in retention of more than 2%. There were 223 students in the 2023 cohort who attended in the fall semester and 164 returned for the spring semester. In comparison, 219 attended in 2024 fall and 166 students returned for the spring semester. The retention rate rose from 73.5% to 75.7%. This upward trend in both overall enrollment and retention suggests positive momentum for the college, with improved student persistence and a stronger start to the 2025 academic year.

Recommendations for Future Research

Reflecting on the findings of this study, several areas for improvement in the current intervention could enhance its impact on incoming students at LCC. Additionally, future research opportunities related to this study should be considered. One straightforward yet meaningful adjustment would be to refer to traditional holidays as "breaks" rather than by specific names. This small but intentional change promotes inclusivity and ensures that communications remain respectful and considerate of the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of all students.

With the resolution of the FAFSA debacle in 2024, future studies could focus more on the financial aspects of college attendance, providing valuable insights into how students navigate tuition, fees, and financial aid processes. Understanding the challenges students face in securing funding, as well as identifying gaps in financial literacy, could lead to more effective support systems. Additionally, exploring the impact of timely financial aid communication and resources on student enrollment and retention could further enhance institutional practices.

One major challenge in this study was the time-intensive process of tracking new applicants, monitoring message delivery, and addressing responses. However, as the study concluded, LCC implemented a new CRM system capable of automating text message distribution. This advancement will significantly reduce administrative workload, allowing staff to dedicate more time to assisting students with their needs.

Even with the implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, maintaining a personal connection should remain a vital component of the outreach process. While text campaigns and automated messages can effectively initiate contact and streamline communication, they should not rely solely on AI-generated responses. It is essential that staff actively monitor and engage with replies to ensure that interactions remain authentic, responsive, and reflective of the college's commitment to individualized support and meaningful engagement.

The absence of semi-structured interviews presented a significant limitation in the ability to collect rich, relevant qualitative data. These interviews could have provided deeper insight into student experiences, perceptions, and the overall impact of the intervention. It is possible that clearly communicating, early in the process, that the initiative was part of a research project might have encouraged greater student participation in post-intervention feedback. As a result of

this oversight, an important opportunity to capture valuable perspectives and inform future improvements was missed.

Inspired by this research, I plan to develop a comprehensive online orientation featuring videos and step-by-step instructions on completing the admissions process. This resource will be available at any time, ensuring students have access to essential guidance when they need it. Development is scheduled to begin later this year.

Finally, while this intervention primarily targeted high school seniors, it is likely that other applicants share similar questions about the admissions process. As a result, the text messaging initiative from this study will soon be integrated into LCC's broader communication strategy for all incoming students.

Implications on Role as Scholarly Practitioner

Having worked in admissions for over a decade, I had envisioned this intervention for quite some time. Seeing it come to life and actively participating in the process was incredibly rewarding. While I always knew that students had questions about various aspects of the admissions process, I was unsure of exactly when or where they needed assistance. This intervention provided the opportunity to offer timely support, often responding to students within minutes of receiving their texts. Every student who reached out for help received the guidance they needed.

One key takeaway from this research is the critical role of communication. Students often have questions but may not know who to ask or how to articulate their concerns. By providing timely information and proactive guidance, they can stay on track throughout the admissions process.

Through this study, I have not only enhanced my skills as a Dean of Student Services but also gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by different departments. Working across various areas has strengthened my ability to collaborate and develop more effective solutions. As a scholarly practitioner, I remain committed to identifying and removing barriers for students, ensuring that the admissions process is as seamless and accessible as possible.

Conclusions

This study highlights the challenges students face during the transition from high school to college, particularly the phenomenon of “Summer Melt.” By examining factors that influence matriculation at Lenoir Community College, the research underscores the importance of clear communication, proactive support, and accessible resources.

Findings suggest that financial considerations, ease of the admissions process, and personal interactions with counselors and staff significantly impact students’ decisions to enroll. Additionally, personalized, timely communication—especially through text messaging—proves to be an effective strategy for keeping students engaged and on track. The study demonstrates that a structured, yearlong communication plan fosters a sense of belonging and improves retention rates.

Ultimately, the research reinforces the need for colleges to adopt intentional communication strategies that address students' uncertainties and logistical challenges. Future efforts should explore financial barriers and leverage automated communication tools to enhance support while reducing administrative strain.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

Willis Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Kimberly Hill](#)

CC: [Heidi Puckett](#)

Date: 2/23/2024

Re: [UMCIRB 23-002133](#)
Senior Thaw

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 2/23/2024. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1, 2ab, 4a.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
2024 semi structured questions.docx(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Blank_Navigation_Of_Admissions_Process_January_2024.pdf(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Introduction_to_Navigating_Admissions_Process_January_2024.docx(0.01)	Consent Forms
Kimberly Hill Approved Dissertation Proposal for IRB 12.29.23.docx(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Survey email 2024.docx(0.01)	Consent Forms
Survey email 2024.docx(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: LCC IE RESEARCH REQUEST APPROVAL

Lenoir Community College's IE Research Request Approval

July 26, 2023

Dear Kimberly Hill,

Based on a review of your research proposal, the associated benefits and risks, and Lenoir Community College's policies and procedures, LCC agrees to permit the study titled Senior Thaw: Closing the Gap Between Application and Matriculation Among Students in Rural Community College Setting.

LCC authorizes

- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness to provide Kimberly with germane application and enrollment data that will remain on an LCC device or server and will only be shared or published as aggregate and anonymized data.
- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness to administer the attached survey on the behalf of Kimberly. The survey will be administered to recent high school graduates who are ≥ 18 years old and apply to attend LCC in Fall 2023. This may include students who apply to LCC but do not to attend Fall 2023. Kimberly Hill agrees to disclose the study's purpose to all participants, and to explain that participation is voluntary. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and can skip questions they do not want to answer.

As part of this approval, Kimberly Hill agrees to notify LCC's Director of Innovation and Effectiveness if there are changes to instrumentation or newly identified risks. Additionally, once

received, Kimberly Hill will provide evidence of Institutional Review Board approval from their doctoral institution. Kimberly Hill will also provide an executive summary of the study's final product to LCC's President's Council via the Director of Innovation and Effectiveness.

LCC reserves the right to withdraw from studies at any time. Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Proctor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "N." and the last name "Proctor" clearly visible.

Nikki Proctor

Director of Innovation and Effectiveness Lenoir Community College Knproctor66@lenoircc.edu

252.527.6223 ext. 319

APPENDIX C: 2023 SURVEY PARTICIPATION EMAIL & CONSENT

Hello,

My name is Kimberly Hill, and I am conducting a research study entitled “Senior Thaw: Closing the Gap between Application and Matriculation among Students in a Rural Community College Setting”, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree, Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. The study focuses on Lenoir Community College (LCC)-intending high school seniors’ transition from high school to college. I am conducting a written survey to gather data about your experience during the admissions process at LCC.

You have been asked to take part in this study because you meet the parameters of this study. You applied to attend Lenoir Community College after completion of high school in 2023. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about your transition from high school to college in a written survey. Each survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

An anticipated benefit of participating in this study is that higher education professionals who read it will have a better understanding of the barriers students face during the transition from high school to college. Such insight may lead to higher quality resources, more qualified professionals, and more efficient transitions for this student population.

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. Your name will not appear in the study. Lenoir Community College staff as well as my Dissertation Chair will see the data collected only.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or you may agree to participate but change your mind at any time. If you do not want to enter the study or

decide to stop participating, you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Kimberly Hill. You can email me at krhill01@lenoircc.edu. Here is the link to the written survey, [Admissions Survey](#)

APPENDIX D: 2023 SURVEY TEXT MESSAGES

Text message #1

Hi! This is Kim Hill, Dean of Student Services at Lenoir Community College. I am completing a doctoral program at ECU and I really need your help. This afternoon, I am sending an email to the personal email address on file at the college. There is a link to short 10 minute survey I would like for you to take. Even if you are not currently enrolled at LCC, please consider completing the survey. The information is confidential but invaluable to my dissertation. Thank you in advance.

Text message #2

Hi! This is Kim Hill, Dean of Student Services at Lenoir Community College. I am completing a doctoral program at ECU and I really need your help. For those who have not completed the survey, an email was sent to the personal email address on file at the college. There is a link to short 10-minute survey I would like for you to take. Even if you are not currently enrolled at LCC, please consider completing the survey. The information is confidential but invaluable to my dissertation. I need at least 50 more completed surveys to validate my study. For those who have already completed the survey- THANK YOU!

APPENDIX E: 2023 COHORT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Hello! My name is Kimberly Hill, Dean of Student Services at Lenoir Community College (LCC), and I am conducting a research study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree, Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. The study focuses on Lenoir Community College - intending high school seniors' transition from high school to community college.

You have been asked to take part in this study because you applied to attend Lenoir Community College after completion of high school in 2023. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about your transition from high school to college.

Your responses will be kept completely confidential. The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and anonymous unless you provide identifying information in the open-ended questions. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study.

**If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at:
krhill01@lenoircc.edu
252-527-6223 ext. 301**

Navigating the Admissions Process

* 1. By clicking on the YES button, you acknowledge:
Your participation in the study is voluntary.
You are 18 years of age.
You are aware you can terminate your participation at any time for any reason.
Your responses to the survey will be anonymous.

☐ Yes ☐ No

* 2. Did you graduate from High School in 2023?

☐ Yes ☐ No

* 3. Are you currently enrolled in classes at LCC?

☐ Yes ☐ No

* 4. What influenced your decision to attend LCC? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Low cost
- ☐ Program I am interested in was offered
- ☐ Close to home
- ☐ Only wanted an associate degree, diploma, or certificate
- ☐ Athletics
- ☐ Did not get into my first choice
- ☐ Wanted to complete some college (fewer than 60 hours) at LCC before transferring to another college or university
- ☐ To earn an associate's degree before transferring to a four-year college or university
- ☐ Other (please specify)

5. Why did you decide not to attend Lenoir Community College following high school graduation (select all that apply)?

- ☐ Attended another college
- ☐ Entered the military
- ☐ Chose full-time employment
- ☐ Decided not to attend college immediately after high school graduation
- ☐ Did not complete the necessary steps to be eligible to attend (for example: residency determination issues, financial aid issues, program selection issues, transportation issues, internet issues, personal issues)
- ☐ Other (please explain)

6. Race:

- ☐ Asian ☐ Black or African American ☐ Hispanic/Latino ☐ White ☐ Two or More Races
- ☐ Other

7. What is the highest education level achieved by your parents?

	Less than high school	High School Diploma, Adult HS Diploma, or GED	Some college	Associate Degree	Bachelor Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral	Unknown
Parent/Guardian 1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parent/Guardian 2	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Transitioning from high school to college can be challenging for many students. It is important to look at the resources you had at the time you applied to Lenoir Community College (LCC) to predict the challenges future prospective students may face and how LCC can better support them. For this survey, the admissions process begins when you submit an application to LCC. The process ends when classes begin. You may have stopped the process at any time in between.

8. As you were completing the steps of the admissions process, how did you feel?

- ☐ Overwhelmed while completing the process
- ☐ Somewhat overwhelmed while completing the process
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat confident in your ability to the process
- ☐ Confident in your ability to complete the process

9. I felt I had the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully apply and prepare for college:

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree

10. The decision to attend college was:

- ☐ Not at all accepted or expected in my culture
- ☐ Somewhat not accepted or expected in my culture
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat accepted and expected in my culture
- ☐ Accepted and expected in my culture

11. I felt confident that I had control over my ability to successfully apply and prepare for college:

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree

12. I had ample emotional and physical energy to handle the admissions process:

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree

13. Attending college after high school was:

- ☐ Not at all important to me
- ☐ Somewhat important to me
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Important to me
- ☐ Very important to me

14. Looking back, my expectations about the college application process were:

☐ Not realistic ☐ Neutral ☐ Realistic

15. I received support during the admissions process from:

	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
Family	☐	☐	☐
Classmates/friends	☐	☐	☐
High school teachers/counselors	☐	☐	☐
LCC staff/advisors	☐	☐	☐
Other sources	☐	☐	☐

16. How did you deal with situations you had to face during the admissions process

	Yes	No
Spoke with others to resolve issues	☐	☐
Made a plan and following through	☐	☐
Sought help from others	☐	☐
Managed my time better	☐	☐
Didn't ask for help but waited for someone to contact me	☐	☐

17. How could LCC better support future students through the admissions process?

18. Reflecting on your experience with the LCC admissions process, what form of communication would you have preferred? (Please rank from best (1) to least preferred (5))

	1	2	3	4	5
Phone calls	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Text messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LCC email messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Personal email messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Regular mailed letters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. How easy or difficult were the following steps of the admissions process?

	Extremely difficult	Moderately difficult	Neither easy nor difficult	Moderately easy	Extremely easy	Did not complete this step
The application to the college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The residency determination form	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requesting official transcripts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The FASFA (financial aid) Application	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The LCC scholarship application	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Registering for Experience LCC (new student orientation)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connecting with your academic advisor for registration	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

20. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience with LCC?

APPENDIX F: 2023 SURVEY RESULTS

Navigating the Admissions Process

Q1 By clicking on the YES button, you acknowledge:Your participation in the study is voluntary.You are 18 years of age.You are aware you can terminate your participation at any time for any reason.Your responses to the survey will be anonymous.

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	98.00%	49
No	2.00%	1
TOTAL		50

Q2 Did you graduate from High School in 2023?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 0%	Average Score 1.0/2.0 (50%)	Standard Deviation 0.00	Difficulty 1/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Yes	1/2	100.00%	49
✓ No	2/2	0.00%	0
TOTAL			49

Q3 Are you currently enrolled in classes at LCC?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 70%	Average Score 1.7/2.0 (86%)	Standard Deviation 0.46	Difficulty 8/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
✓ Yes	2/2	71.43%	35
No	1/2	28.57%	14
TOTAL			49

Q4 What influenced your decision to attend LCC? (select all that apply)

Answered: 34 Skipped: 16

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Low cost	52.94%	18
Program I am interested in was offered	58.82%	20
Close to home	61.76%	21
Only wanted an associate degree, diploma, or certificate	32.35%	11
Athletics	5.88%	2
Did not get into my first choice	0.00%	0
Wanted to complete some college (fewer than 60 hours) at LCC before transferring to another college or university	8.82%	3
To earn an associate's degree before transferring to a four-year college or university	29.41%	10
Other (please specify)	2.94%	1
Total Respondents: 34		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
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1

Need to meet UNC requirements

9/29/2023 12:10 AM

Q5 Why did you decide not to attend Lenoir Community College following high school graduation (select all that apply)?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 36

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Attended another college	42.86% 6
Entered the military	0.00% 0
Chose full-time employment	0.00% 0
Decided not to attend college immediately after high school graduation	14.29% 2
Did not complete the necessary steps to be eligible to attend (for example: residency determination issues, financial aid issues, program selection issues, transportation issues, internet issues, personal issues)	28.57% 4
Other (please explain)	35.71% 5
Total Respondents: 14	

#	OTHER (PLEASE EXPLAIN)	DATE
1	i was attending but they kicked me from my classes even though i didn't violate any rules.	9/28/2023 2:56 PM
2	To play sports and get a type of degree	9/28/2023 1:02 PM
3	My motivation was shattered due to a death in the family before my graduation and another death about a month. It severely affected my goal of going to college this year.	9/14/2023 6:29 PM
4	I am, just not this semester.	9/14/2023 3:15 PM
5	too far from home	9/14/2023 3:14 PM

Q6 Race:

Answered: 48 Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Asian	0.00% 0
Black or African American	33.33% 16
Hispanic/Latino	18.75% 9
White	45.83% 22
Two or More Races	2.08% 1
Other	0.00% 0
TOTAL	48

Q7 What is the highest education level achieved by your parents?

Answered: 48 Skipped: 2

	LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, ADULT HS DIPLOMA, OR GED	SOME COLLEGE	ASSOCIATE DEGREE	BACHELOR DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE	DOCTORAL	UNKNOV
Parent/Guardian 1	20.83% 10	27.08% 13	14.58% 7	10.42% 5	16.67% 8	4.17% 2	0.00% 0	6.25%
Parent/Guardian 2	19.15% 9	14.89% 7	27.66% 13	6.38% 3	14.89% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	17.02%

Q8 As you were completing the steps of the admissions process, how did you feel?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 20%	Average Score 3.2/5.0 (64%)	Standard Deviation 1.37	Difficulty 2/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Overwhelmed while completing the process	1/5	10.26%	4
Somewhat overwhelmed while completing the process	2/5	28.21%	11
Neutral	3/5	20.51%	8
Somewhat confident in your ability to the process	4/5	15.38%	6
✓ Confident in your ability to complete the process	5/5	25.64%	10
TOTAL			39

Q9 I felt I had the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully apply and prepare for college:

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 48%	Average Score 2.5/3.0 (84%)	Standard Deviation 0.68	Difficulty 5/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	10.26%	4
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	28.21%	11
✓ Agree	3/3	61.54%	24
TOTAL			39

Q10 The decision to attend college was:

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Not at all accepted or expected in my culture	2.56% 1
Somewhat not accepted or expected in my culture	2.56% 1
Neutral	33.33% 13
Somewhat accepted and expected in my culture	20.51% 8
Accepted and expected in my culture	41.03% 16
TOTAL	39

Q11 I felt confident that I had control over my ability to successfully apply and prepare for college:

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 54%	Average Score 2.6/3.0 (85%)	Standard Deviation 0.72	Difficulty 7/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	12.82%	5
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	17.95%	7
✓ Agree	3/3	69.23%	27
TOTAL			39

Q12 I had ample emotional and physical energy to handle the admissions process:

Answered: 38 Skipped: 12

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 42%	Average Score 2.5/3.0 (83%)	Standard Deviation 0.60	Difficulty 4/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	5.26%	2
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	39.47%	15
✓ Agree	3/3	55.26%	21
TOTAL			38

Q13 Attending college after high school was:

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 30%	Average Score 3.8/5.0 (77%)	Standard Deviation 1.14	Difficulty 3/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Not at all important to me	1/5	2.56%	1
Somewhat important to me	2/5	10.26%	4
Neutral	3/5	25.64%	10
Important to me	4/5	23.08%	9
✓ Very important to me	5/5	38.46%	15
TOTAL			39

Q14 Looking back, my expectations about the college application process were:

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 44%	Average Score 2.5/3.0 (84%)	Standard Deviation 0.60	Difficulty 5/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Not realistic	1/3	5.13%	2
Neutral	2/3	38.46%	15
✓ Realistic	3/3	56.41%	22
TOTAL			39

Q15 I received support during the admissions process from:

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Family	10.26% 4	15.38% 6	74.36% 29	39	2.64
Classmates/friends	13.51% 5	24.32% 9	62.16% 23	37	2.49
High school teachers/counselors	5.13% 2	23.08% 9	71.79% 28	39	2.67
LCC staff/advisors	5.13% 2	38.46% 15	56.41% 22	39	2.51
Other sources	13.16% 5	44.74% 17	42.11% 16	38	2.29

Q16 How did you deal with situations you had to face during the admissions process

Answered: 38 Skipped: 12

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Spoke with others to resolve issues	86.84% 33	13.16% 5	38
Made a plan and following through	86.84% 33	13.16% 5	38
Sought help from others	78.38% 29	21.62% 8	37
Managed my time better	78.38% 29	21.62% 8	37
Didn't ask for help but waited for someone to contact me	34.21% 13	65.79% 25	38

Q17 How could LCC better support future students through the admissions process?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 27

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I can't say.	9/29/2023 12:16 AM
2	nothing	9/28/2023 3:40 PM
3	They do a good job already	9/28/2023 3:16 PM
4	Communication	9/28/2023 3:05 PM
5	More explanation on some steps of admission	9/28/2023 1:49 PM
6	I think it's good the way it is.	9/28/2023 1:26 PM
7	N/A	9/28/2023 1:17 PM
8	I feel like lcc had good support	9/28/2023 1:09 PM
9	nothing really it was easy to me	9/28/2023 1:07 PM
10	Texts	9/28/2023 1:06 PM
11	By offering a better system for unanswered questions.	9/18/2023 6:59 PM
12	Make it less tedious	9/15/2023 12:27 PM
13	I would argue that LCC is very patient and forgiving with the admission process due to being filled with such nice staff. In my humble opinion I'd see no change to be made. I was just overwhelmed with the process of Financial Aid, but I know this process doesn't apply to just LCC.	9/14/2023 6:46 PM
14	check in on them, it's a struggle sometimes	9/14/2023 3:18 PM
15	they should do more communication on telling us what to do after applying because I didn't know they even emailed me back about going to the classes I chose until I had check the lcc email ,now I'm going to wait until the spring because I missed about a week or two of the class.	9/14/2023 3:04 PM
16	the phone calls	9/14/2023 3:02 PM
17	offering physical and mental help!	9/14/2023 2:56 PM
18	idk	9/14/2023 2:51 PM
19	My admissions process was fantastic. If I had any questions, the person I contacted would get back to me in a timely manner.	9/14/2023 2:49 PM
20	Emailing students everyday checking on them.	9/14/2023 2:42 PM
21	Quicker response times from admissions	9/14/2023 2:38 PM
22	I think the admissions process is simple as is, I just wish there was an easy to get to academic year calendar available on the website. The link to get to one now just gives an error or the event calendar.	9/14/2023 1:16 PM
23	Continuing their work with students the same	9/14/2023 1:09 PM

Q18 Reflecting on your experience with the LCC admissions process, what form of communication would you have preferred? (Please rank from best (1) to least preferred (5))

Answered: 39 Skipped: 11

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Phone calls	22.86% 8	11.43% 4	25.71% 9	2.86% 1	37.14% 13	35	3.20
Text messages	25.81% 8	12.90% 4	19.35% 6	19.35% 6	22.58% 7	31	3.00
LCC email messages	9.09% 3	18.18% 6	30.30% 10	30.30% 10	12.12% 4	33	3.18
Personal email messages	8.57% 3	28.57% 10	20.00% 7	17.14% 6	25.71% 9	35	3.23
Regular mailed letters	30.30% 10	24.24% 8	6.06% 2	27.27% 9	12.12% 4	33	2.67

Q19 How easy or difficult were the following steps of the admissions process?

	EXTREMELY DIFFICULT	MODERATELY DIFFICULT	NEITHER EASY NOR DIFFICULT	MODERATELY EASY	EXTREMELY EASY	DID NOT COMPLETE THIS STEP	TOTAL	WE AV
The application to the college	0.00% 0	15.38% 6	17.95% 7	35.90% 14	30.77% 12	0.00% 0	39	
The residency determination form	2.63% 1	10.53% 4	28.95% 11	34.21% 13	18.42% 7	5.26% 2	38	
Requesting official transcripts	7.69% 3	15.38% 6	23.08% 9	20.51% 8	30.77% 12	2.56% 1	39	
The FASFA (financial aid) Application	10.26% 4	23.08% 9	25.64% 10	15.38% 6	17.95% 7	7.69% 3	39	
The LCC scholarship application	0.00% 0	5.13% 2	30.77% 12	15.38% 6	23.08% 9	25.64% 10	39	
Registering for Experience LCC (new student orientation)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	30.77% 12	15.38% 6	28.21% 11	25.64% 10	39	
Connecting with your academic advisor for registration	2.56% 1	5.13% 2	12.82% 5	30.77% 12	43.59% 17	5.13% 2	39	

Q20 Is there anything you would like to add about your experience with LCC?

Answered: 17 Skipped: 33

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	no	9/28/2023 3:40 PM
2	no	9/28/2023 3:16 PM
3	N/a	9/28/2023 3:05 PM
4	no	9/28/2023 1:26 PM
5	No	9/28/2023 1:17 PM
6	No I think everything is good	9/28/2023 1:09 PM
7	no there is nothing	9/28/2023 1:07 PM
8	No	9/15/2023 12:27 PM
9	Though I'm not currently enrolled due to what happened in my life the past few months I will say I absolutely loved the Vibe LCC holds just by Walking in the in multiple buildings during my visit to receive my fall semester class schedule. I very much appreciate that LCC would give me a chance to join them. I just need time to boost my mental back up with giving myself time to prepare by Getting a part time job in the meantime to also boost my communication skills with unfamiliar people. That will also help me when I'm in college next year during fall semester. If you are reading this I'm glad you're taking the time out to read this lengthy reposnse.	9/14/2023 6:46 PM
10	No just waiting to see the next classes for cosmetology by next semester	9/14/2023 3:04 PM
11	no	9/14/2023 3:02 PM
12	They worked well with people to go at an easy pace	9/14/2023 2:51 PM
13	It has been great so far. It is like one big giant family!	9/14/2023 2:49 PM
14	No	9/14/2023 2:42 PM
15	No	9/14/2023 2:38 PM
16	Thank you all for giving me an outlet for higher education that I can afford.	9/14/2023 1:16 PM
17	LCC is an outstanding community college with amazing instructors	9/14/2023 1:09 PM

APPENDIX G: INTERVENTION TEXT MESSAGES - 2024 COHORT

Text name	Content	Date sent	reoccurring or date driven	type
Welcome to LCC	Welcome to Lenoir Community College. My name is Kim Hill, Dean of Student Services. Please consider accepting text messages from me, as I will be your navigator through the admissions and registration process during the next few months. Please feel free to contact me by text, phone, email, or in person if you have any questions along the way.	15-Nov-23	Sent each week from November 15, 2023 - August 15, 2024 to new applicants	informational
Thanksgiving Day	We are thankful for <u>all</u> of our new students coming next fall. Happy Thanksgiving!	23-Nov-23	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC
<u>myLCC</u> set up	As a future student at LCC, you should set up your <u>myLCC</u> account as soon as possible. If you are a CCP student, you should already have an account set up. Important information concerning financial aid, orientation, and communication from your faculty advisor will be sent to your Lancer email. Here is a link to instructions on how to set it up https://www.lenoircc.edu/lancerlogin/	1-Dec-23	Sent each week from December 1, 2023 - August 15, 2024 to new applicants	informational
RDS review IN	I have reviewed your residency <u>status</u> and you have been determined to be an in-state student for tuition purposes at LCC. This is awesome. You do not need to take any further action to receive the in-state tuition. Kim	19-Dec-23	Sent each week from December 19, 2023 - August 15, 2024 to new applicants whose residency has been verified as in-state	informational
RDS review OUT	I have reviewed your residency <u>status</u> and you have been determined to be an out-of-state student for tuition purposes at LCC. If you are a US citizen and live in NC, you should be considered in-state. If you believe this is an error, please reach out to RDS at 844-319-3640 to learn how to correct your status. Once you have it right, text me, so I can update your status on our records. Kim Hill, Dean of Student Services.	19-Dec-23	Sent each week from December 19, 2023 - August 15, 2024 to new applicants whose residency has been verified as out-of-state	informational
Christmas Day	Happy Holidays from LCC! Take this break from school to work on anything you need to complete for admissions. For example, Residency, FAFSA (available Dec 30, 2023), or Scholarship Applications	25-Dec-23	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC and informational

RDS review Text OUT #3	Your residency is still out-of-state. In-state tuition for 15 hours is about \$1200 and out-of-state is over \$4000. If you are a US citizen and live in NC, you should be considered in-state. If you believe this is an error, please reach out to RDS at 844-319-3640 to learn how to correct your status. Once you have it right, text me, so I can update your status on our records.	1- Jan- 24	Sent one time to all applicants who still had not corrected their residency	informational
Welcome back!	Welcome back to school! Hope you had a great break. Just one more semester and you will be a high school graduate bound for college! Contact me if you have any questions about LCC admissions.	4- Jan- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC
Financial Aid Announcement	The 2024-2025 Financial Aid Application (FAFSA) is now available. Please visit www.fafsa.gov to complete your application If you have not already submitted. Even if you do not think you will receive the Pell Grant, there are state funds and in-house scholarships available at LCC that you could receive just by submitting the FAFSA. KIM	16- Jan- 24	Sent each week from January 16, 2024 - August 15, 2024 to new applicants	informational
RDS review OUT #2	I have reviewed your residency status for a second time and you have been determined to be an out-of-state student for tuition purposes. Based on your LCC application, I believe you should be considered in state. Please reach out to RDS at 844-319-3640 to learn how to correct your status. Once you have it right, text me, so I can update your status on our records.	19- Jan- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who still had not corrected	informational

			their residency	
FAFSA DAY	If you need help completing your 2024-2025 FAFSA, please consider attending FAFSA DAY at LCC. 1/27/24 from 9-12 in the LCC Library (main campus). First 50 people who complete the FAFSA win a \$50 VISA card! Financial Aid staff will be available to assist you through the process. You can register to attend at https://forms.gle/RT6YrZxLSLY7tvXs9 or let me know if you plan to attend so we have enough staff available to assist.	22- Jan- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Valentine's Day	Happy Valentine's Day! We would LOVE to help you pay for college. Please visit https://nextncscholarship.org/ to learn about the Next NC Scholarship. Qualifying students attending LCC will receive at least \$3,000.	14- Feb- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC and informational

Scholarship Deadline	Hey, it's Kim from LCC. I wanted to let you know that LCC offers a variety of scholarships through our foundation including the LCC Guarantee Scholarship for high school seniors who have participated in the CCP program and meet the requirements. Please complete the simple application at https://www.lenoircc.edu/foundation/scholarships/ Don't leave money on the table!	23-Feb-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
St Patrick's Day #1	We are so lucky to have you coming to LCC in the fall. Happy St. Patrick's Day!	17-Mar-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC
St Patrick's Day #2	We've got a Pot of Gold to help you pay for college. All you have to do is complete the 2024-2025 FAFSA and the LCC Foundation Scholarship application (deadline is March 31). FAFSA is not processing yet but as long as your application is pending, you are fine for now.	17-Mar-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Easter	Happy Easter! Hope your basket is full of all your favorites!	31-Mar-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC
Commitment Day Invite	You have applied to LCC but are you committed to coming next fall? Come show your college pride at Senior Commitment Day on April 24, 2024 from 9:30a - 1:30p. Come and meet other future Lancers, your advisors and learn about what is in store for you next year. Please use the registration link to sign up: https://forms.office.com/r/V3hfksbrnZ If you can't make it, you will have another chance to visit campus at New Student Orientation on July 18, 2024.	17-Apr-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Save the Date	Save the Date! Each year LCC holds a new student orientation called Experience LCC. Mark your calendars for July 18, 2024. This is an opportunity for you and your parents to visit campus, learn about services available to you and meet with your academic advisor about fall classes. More information will be coming soon. Kim Hill	25-Apr-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
RDS SSN issue	Hey this is Kim at LCC. I have reviewed your residency <u>status</u> and it looks like the SSN you entered on your application to the college does not match the SSN you used on your residency application. Please contact Crystal at 252-527-6223, ext. 351 and she can help you correct the error.	26-Apr-24	Sent one time to all applicants who had an issue with their SSN not matching on the applications	informational

Major and Career choice	Hi, its Kim from LCC. When you applied to LCC, you had to select a major. How confident are you in your selection? Would you like to take a career assessment or speak to a counselor about your options? Would you like more information from the program chair? Let me know what you <u>need</u> and I will connect you with the right person to assist you. If you are in the right major, you do not need to do a thing!	1-May-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Admitted	You have been admitted to the major you selected and assigned an academic advisor. You should have received an email in your lancer account with that information. Your academic advisor will reach out to you in the next few weeks to assist you with registration. Let me know if you have any questions. KIM	21-May-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Financial Aid offer	LCC Financial Aid packages have been processed. If you completed a 2024-2025 FAFSA, you should have an email in your Lancer account letting you know the amount of you offer. Please check this email to make sure everything is good. KIM	21-May-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who had completed a FAFSA	informational

No FAFSA	I have reviewed the financial aid applications for 2024-2025 and I could not find one for you. It is important that you complete the application even if you do not think you will receive funds. There are additional grants and scholarships available that require you to complete the FAFSA www.fafsa.gov	23-May-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who had not completed a FAFSA (over 200 applicants)	informational
EXP LCC invite	Experience LCC (New Student Orientation) will be held on July 18, 2024, 10am-4pm. EXP LCC is an opportunity for you and your parents to visit campus, meet your academic advisor, pick up your schedule, pre-order books, obtain your LCC ID badge, and receive other important information. Register to attend this event at https://www.lenoircc.edu/experienceLCC/ KIM	3-Jun-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Graduation/ transcript needed	Congratulations on your upcoming high school graduation! Please make sure your high school counselor is aware you plan to attend LCC in the fall so a final transcript can be sent to LCC right after graduation. If you have attended a college other than LCC and have transferable credit, make sure you request an official transcript from the college to be sent to LCC.	6-Jun-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC and informational

Missing HS transcript	It is time to register for classes at LCC but we need an official copy of your HS transcript first. NC HS grads can go to cfnc.org , click on Apply to College and then Request Your Transcript and we will have it tomorrow! If you are out of state, please ask your high school to send it to LCC. We accept electronic copies from the school.	2-Jul-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who had not submitted their high school transcript	informational
Missing college transcript	Are you ready to register for your fall classes at LCC? We don't have your college transcript yet. Please have an official transcript sent to us so we can build your schedule.	2-Jul-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who had not submitted their college transcript	informational
Missing permanent residency card	It is time to register for LCC classes but first, we need a copy of your permanent residency card or other Visa identification. You can email a copy to admissions@lenoircc.edu or stop by the office and we will make a copy.	2-Jul-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who had not submitted their residency card	informational
July 4th	Happy July 4th! Remember EXP LCC is in 2 weeks. You can still sign up to attend at https://www.lenoircc.edu/experiencelcc/ . KIM	4-Jul-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	Connection to LCC and informational
EXP LCC reminder	Experience LCC is this Thursday! It is not too late to sign up. If you are having issues with the sign in, just sent me a text and let me know you plan to attend and I will take care of it for you. We want to have your folder ready when you arrive, so let me know! Also, you should have been contacted by your academic advisor to select your classes. If you haven't met with your advisor, try to do that before Thursday if possible.	15-Jul-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
EXP LCC Agenda	Good morning, just wanted to send out the agenda for EXP LCC on Thursday. lenoircc.edu/experiencelccagenda/ Breakfast can be purchased from a food truck available outside the Waller Building and several food trucks will have lunch items available for purchase at noon. Bring a picture ID so you can have your LCC ID badge made. For those attending, see you Thursday!	16-Jul-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Missed EXP LCC?	It is time to register for fall classes and meet your academic advisor. You missed Experience LCC but do not worry, we have got you covered. Please contact your advisor today and make an appointment to register for classes.	23-Jul-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who did not	informational

			attend EXP LCC	
Tuition	Classes begin in less than 2 weeks! If you have not registered, take care of that NOW! Remember, if you are paying out-of-pocket for your tuition, payment is due by August 14, 2024. You can pay through Self-Service (myLCC) or call the cashier at 252-527-6223, ext. 324.	7- Aug- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Classes begin on Monday!	Did you know fall classes begin at Lenoir CC next Monday? You haven't registered yet! Are you planning to attend? If so, can I help you connect with your academic advisor? KIM	14- Aug- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who have not registered	informational
Tuition is Due	Tuition is past due and financial aid is not covering the cost. Please pay through self-service or contact the cashier to make your payment or ask to be removed from the classes before they begin on Monday.	15- Aug- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time who have registered but not paid tuition	informational
First Day of class	Classes begin today! Look at your schedule in self-service to see when your first class meets. All online classes should be available in Moodle by 8 am this morning.	19- Aug- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	informational
Survey coming	This past year, Student Services made some changes to the communication plan to be more personal and timelier <u>in an effort</u> to help more students progress through the admissions process and start classes in August. Next week, I will be sending out a survey to see how we did. Please take the time to complete the survey even if you are not currently enrolled at LCC. Your feedback is important.	3- Sep- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	request
Survey sent	<u>Hey</u> it's Kim from LCC. The survey has been sent to your personal email. If you did not list one on your application, it was sent to your Lancer mail. If you didn't get it, let me know and I can text you the link. Please take a few minutes and complete the entire survey for me. even if you are not attending LCC.	4- Sep- 24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	request

Survey reminder #1	Hi! This is Kim Hill, Dean of Student Services at Lenoir Community College. I am completing a doctoral program at ECU and I really need your help. This afternoon, I am sending an email to the personal email address on file at the college. There is a link to A short 10-minute survey I would like for you to take. Even if you are not currently enrolled at LCC, please consider completing the survey. The information is confidential but invaluable to my dissertation. Thank you in advance.	10-Sep-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	request
Survey reminder #2	Hey it's Kim from LCC. I wanted to remind you about the survey for my dissertation. It will close tomorrow night. I would love to hear from you even if you are not taking classes at LCC. Because it is anonymous, I don't know who has completed it. If you have, THANK YOU. If you haven't, please take the time to complete it today or tomorrow. https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6MKHJMF	17-Sep-24	Sent one time to all applicants in the 2024 cohort at the time	request

APPENDIX H: 2024 SURVEY PARTICIPATION & CONSENT FORM

Hello ,

My name is Kimberly Hill, and I am conducting a research study entitled “Senior Thaw: Closing the Gap between Application and Matriculation among Students in a Rural Community College Setting”, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree, Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. The study focuses on Lenoir Community College (LCC)-intending high school seniors’ transition from high school to college. I am conducting an online survey to gather data about your experience during the admissions process at LCC.

You have been asked to take part in this study because you meet the parameters of this study. You applied to attend Lenoir Community College after completion of high school in 2024. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about your transition from high school to college in an online survey. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

An anticipated benefit of participating in this study is that higher education professionals who read it will have a better understanding of the barriers students face during the transition from high school to college. Such insight may lead to higher quality resources, more qualified professionals, and more efficient transitions for this student population.

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. Your name will not appear in the study. Lenoir Community College staff as well as my Dissertation Chair will see the data collected only.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or you may agree to participate but change your mind at any time. If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Kimberly Hill. You can email me at krhill01@lenoircc.edu.

Here is the link to the online survey, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6MKHJMF>

Thanks for helping me out!

KIM

Dean of Student Services/ Title IX Coordinator

Lenoir Community College

APPENDIX I: 2024 SURVEY TEXT MESSAGES

Text Message #1

Hey this is Kim from LCC. For those attending class, I hope your semester has been good so far. Please feel free to reach out to me if you need assistance and don't know who to call. I am completing a doctoral program at ECU and I really need your help. Tomorrow morning, I am sending an email to the personal email address on file at the college. There is a link to short 10 minute survey I would like for you to complete. Even if you are not currently enrolled at LCC, please consider completing the survey. The information is confidential but invaluable to my dissertation. Thank you in advance.

Text Message #2

Hey it's Kim from LCC. The survey has been sent to your personal email. If you did not list one on your application, it was sent to your Lancer mail. If you didn't get it, let me know and I can text you the link. Please take a few minutes and complete the entire survey for me. even if you are not attending LCC.

Text Message #3

Hi! This is Kim Hill, Dean of Student Services at Lenoir Community College. I am completing a doctoral program at ECU and I really need your help. For those who have not completed the survey, an email was sent to the personal email address on file at the college. There is a link to short 10-minute survey I would like for you to take.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6MKHJMF> Even if you are not currently enrolled at LCC, please consider completing the survey. The information is confidential but invaluable to my dissertation. I need at least 50 more completed surveys to validate my study. For those who have already completed the survey- THANK YOU!

Text Message #4

Hey it's Kim from LCC. I wanted to remind you about the survey for my dissertation. It will close tomorrow night. I would love to hear from you even if you are not taking classes at LCC. Because it is anonymous, I don't know who has completed it. If you have, THANK YOU. If you haven't please take the time to complete it today or tomorrow.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6MKHJMF>

APPENDIX J: 2024 COHORT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Hello! My name is Kimberly Hill, Dean of Student Services at Lenoir Community College (LCC), and I am conducting a research study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree, Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. The study focuses on Lenoir Community College - intending high school seniors' transition from high school to community college.

You have been asked to take part in this study because you applied to attend Lenoir Community College after completion of high school in 2024. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about your transition from high school to college.

Your responses will be kept completely confidential. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and anonymous unless you provide identifying information in the open- ended questions. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study.

At the conclusion of the survey, you will have the opportunity to participate in a one-on-one interview with me to discuss your personal experience, both positive and negative, during the application process by submitting your contact information. If received, I will reach out to you to set up a time to complete the interview. It should take about 30-45 minutes to complete. If you do not want to complete an interview, you do not need to do anything. This is a voluntary interview.

**If you have questions, please feel free to contact me
at: krhill01@lenoircc.edu
252-527-6223 ext. 301**

Navigating the Admissions Process

* 1. By clicking on the YES button, you acknowledge:
Your participation in the study is
voluntary. You are 18 years of age.
You are aware you can terminate your participation at any
time for any reason. Your responses to the survey will be
anonymous.

☐ Yes ☐ No

* 2. Did you graduate from High School in 2024?

☐ Yes ☐ No

* 3. Are you currently enrolled in classes at LCC?

☐ Yes ☐ No

* 4. What influenced your decision to attend LCC? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Low cost
- ☐ Program I am interested in was offered
- ☐ Close to home
- ☐ Only wanted an associate degree, diploma, or certificate
- ☐ Athletics
- ☐ Did not get into my first choice
- ☐ Wanted to complete some college (fewer than 60 hours) at LCC before transferring to another college or university
- ☐ To earn an associate's degree before transferring to a four-year college or university Other
- ☐ (please specify)

5. Why did you decide not to attend Lenoir Community College following high school graduation (select all that apply)?

- ☐

Attended another college
- ☐

Entered the military
- ☐

Chose full-time employment
- ☐

Decided not to attend college immediately after high school graduation
- ☐

Did not complete the necessary steps to be eligible to attend (for example: residency determination issues, financial aid issues, program selection issues, transportation issues, internet issues, personal issues)
- ☐

Other (please explain)

6. Race:

- ☐ Asian
 ☐ Black or African American
 ☐ Hispanic/Latino
 ☐ White
 ☐ Two or More
- Races
 ☐ Other

7. What is the highest education level achieved by your parents?

	Less than high school	Adult Diploma, or GED	HS Diploma, Some college	Associate Degree	Bachelor Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral	Unknown
Parent/Guardian 1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Transitioning from high school to college can be challenging for many students. It is important to look at the resources you had at the time you applied to Lenoir Community College (LCC) to predict the challenges future prospective students may face and how LCC can better support them. For this survey, the admissions process begins when you submit an application to LCC. The process ends when classes begin. You may have stopped the process at any time in between.

8. As you were completing the steps of the admissions process, how did you feel?

- ☐ Overwhelmed while completing the process
- ☐ Somewhat overwhelmed while completing the process ☐

Neutral

- ☐ Somewhat confident in your ability to the process
- ☐ Confident in your ability to complete the process

9. I felt I had the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully apply and prepare for college:

- ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Agree

10. The decision to attend college was:

- ☐ Not at all accepted or expected in my culture
- ☐ Somewhat not accepted or expected in my culture
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat accepted and expected in my culture
- ☐ Accepted and expected in my culture

11. I felt confident that I had control over my ability to successfully apply and prepare for college:

- ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Agree

12. I had ample emotional and physical energy to handle the admissions process:

☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Agree

13. Attending college after high school was:

☐ Not at all important to me ☐ Somewhat important to me ☐ Neutral ☐ Important to me
☐ Very important to me

14. Looking back, my expectations about the college application process were:

☐ Not realistic ☐ Neutral ☐ Realistic

15. I received support during the admissions process from:

	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
Family	☐	☐	☐
Classmates/friends	☐	☐	☐
High school teachers/counselors	☐	☐	☐
LCC staff/advisors	☐	☐	☐
Other sources	☐	☐	☐

16. How did you deal with situations you had to face during the admissions process

	Yes	No
Spoke with others to resolve issues	☐	☐
Made a plan and following through	☐	☐
Sought help from others	☐	☐
Managed my time better	☐	☐
Didn't ask for help but waited for someone to contact me	☐	☐

17. How could LCC better support future students through the admissions process?

18. Reflecting on your experience with the LCC admissions process, what form of communication would you have preferred? (Please rank from best (1) to least preferred (5))

	1	2	3	4	5
Phone calls	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Text messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LCC email messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Personal email messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Regular mailed letters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. How easy or difficult were the following steps of the admissions process?

	Extremely difficult	Moderately difficult	Neither easy nor difficult	Moderately easy	Extremely easy	Did not complete this step
The application to the college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The residency determination form	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requesting official transcripts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The FASFA (financial aid) Application	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The LCC scholarship application	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Registering for Experience LCC (new student orientation)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connecting with your academic advisor for registration	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

20. If you would like to participate in a one-on-one interview with me to discuss your personal experience, both positive and negative, during the application process please submit your contact information below. I will reach out to you to set up a time to complete the interview. It should take about 30 minutes to complete. This is a voluntary interview. You do not have to respond to this question.



APPENDIX K: 2024 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What influenced your decision to attend (or not) LCC following your high school graduation?
 - a. Was this the primary reason or were there other factors at play?
2. How was your personal experience during the admissions process?
 - a. Did you have any issues completing the application process?
 - a. Did you have family assistance? Why not?
 - b. Did you have assistance from your high school counselor or instructors? Why not?
 - c. Did you reach out to LCC for assistance? Why not?
 - d. Did you attend our new student orientation- Experience LCC? Why not?
3. How easy was the overall process?
 - a. How easy/difficult was the application to complete?
 - b. How easy/difficult was the Residency determination to complete?
 - c. How easy/difficult was the request for transcripts to complete?
 - d. How easy/difficult was the FAFSA to complete?
 - e. How easy/difficult was the scholarship application to complete?
 - f. How easy/difficult was the Experience LCC orientation registration to complete?
4. Do you recall receiving communication from me during your senior year?
 - a. Were the monthly check-ins from LCC staff helpful?
 - b. Were the reminders of next steps helpful?
 - c. Were reminders of upcoming deadlines helpful?
 - d. Would you have preferred calls, emails or texts?
 - e. Was the communication too frequent?

5. How could the college better support future students through the admissions process?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add about your personal experience with LCC?

APPENDIX L: 2024 SURVEY RESULTS

Q1 By clicking on the YES button, you acknowledge:Your participation in the study is voluntary.You are 18 years of age.You are aware you can terminate your participation at any time for any reason.Your responses to the survey will be anonymous.

Answered: 77 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	97.40%	75
No	2.60%	2
TOTAL		77

Q2 Did you graduate from High School in 2024?

Answered: 75 Skipped: 2

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 4%	Average Score 1.0/2.0 (52%)	Standard Deviation 0.20	Difficulty 1/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Yes	1/2	96.00%	72
✓ No	2/2	4.00%	3
TOTAL			75

Q3 Are you currently enrolled in classes at LCC?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 5

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 73%	Average Score 1.8/2.0 (89%)	Standard Deviation 0.42	Difficulty 7/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
✓ Yes	2/2	77.78%	56
No	1/2	22.22%	16
TOTAL			72

Q4 What influenced your decision to attend LCC? (select all that apply)

Answered: 55 Skipped: 22

Answered: 16 Skipped: 61

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Attended another college		56.25%	9
Entered the military		0.00%	0
Chose full-time employment		6.25%	1
Decided not to attend college immediately after high school graduation		37.50%	6
Did not complete the necessary steps to be eligible to attend (for example: residency determination issues, financial aid issues, program selection issues, transportation issues, internet issues, personal issues)		12.50%	2
Other (please explain)		6.25%	1
Total Respondents: 16			

#	OTHER (PLEASE EXPLAIN)	DATE
1	I did attend but I didn't know how to get to my classes online and I'm currently pregnant i would rather be on campus instead of doing it at home	9/4/2024 9:35 AM

Q6 Race:

Answered: 69 Skipped: 8

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Asian	1.45%	1
Black or African American	24.64%	17
Hispanic/Latino	18.84%	13
White	47.83%	33
Two or More Races	7.25%	5
Other	0.00%	0
TOTAL		69

Q7 What is the highest education level achieved by your parents?

Answered: 70 Skipped: 7

	LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, ADULT HS DIPLOMA, OR GED	SOME COLLEGE	ASSOCIATE DEGREE	BACHELOR DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE	DOCTORAL	UNKNOW
Parent/Guardian 1	7.14% 5	25.71% 18	14.29% 10	18.57% 13	20.00% 14	5.71% 4	0.00% 0	8.57
Parent/Guardian 2	17.91% 12	31.34% 21	13.43% 9	5.97% 4	8.96% 6	2.99% 2	2.99% 2	16.42

Q8 As you were completing the steps of the admissions process, how did you feel?

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 16%	Average Score 3.1/5.0 (62%)	Standard Deviation 1.23	Difficulty 2/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Overwhelmed while completing the process	1/5	8.20%	5
Somewhat overwhelmed while completing the process	2/5	26.23%	16
Neutral	3/5	34.43%	21
Somewhat confident in your ability to the process	4/5	11.48%	7
✓ Confident in your ability to complete the process	5/5	19.67%	12
TOTAL			61

Q9 I felt I had the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully apply and prepare for college:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 51%	Average Score 2.6/3.0 (87%)	Standard Deviation 0.56	Difficulty 6/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	3.28%	2
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	32.79%	20
✓ Agree	3/3	63.93%	39
TOTAL			61

Q10 The decision to attend college was:

Answered: 60 Skipped: 17

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at all accepted or expected in my culture	0.00%	0
Somewhat not accepted or expected in my culture	0.00%	0
Neutral	13.33%	8
Somewhat accepted and expected in my culture	13.33%	8
Accepted and expected in my culture	73.33%	44
TOTAL		60

Q11 I felt confident that I had control over my ability to successfully apply and prepare for college:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 62%	Average Score 2.7/3.0 (91%)	Standard Deviation 0.58	Difficulty 8/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	6.56%	4
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	14.75%	9
✓ Agree	3/3	78.69%	48
TOTAL			61

Q12 I had ample emotional and physical energy to handle the admissions process:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 47%	Average Score 2.5/3.0 (84%)	Standard Deviation 0.65	Difficulty 5/8
ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Disagree	1/3	8.20%	5
Neither agree nor disagree	2/3	32.79%	20
✓ Agree	3/3	59.02%	36
TOTAL			61

Q13 Attending college after high school was:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 31%	Average Score 4.0/5.0 (81%)	Standard Deviation 0.97	Difficulty 4/8

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Not at all important to me	1/5	0.00%	0
Somewhat important to me	2/5	8.20%	5
Neutral	3/5	19.67%	12
Important to me	4/5	32.79%	20
✓ Very important to me	5/5	39.34%	24
TOTAL			61

Q14 Looking back, my expectations about the college application process were:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

QUIZ STATISTICS			
Percent Correct 32%	Average Score 2.3/3.0 (78%)	Standard Deviation 0.60	Difficulty 3/8

ANSWER CHOICES	SCORE	RESPONSES	
Not realistic	1/3	6.56%	4
Neutral	2/3	52.46%	32
✓ Realistic	3/3	40.98%	25
TOTAL			61

Q15 I received support during the admissions process from:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Family	4.92% 3	13.11% 8	81.97% 50	61	2.77
Classmates/friends	8.33% 5	20.00% 12	71.67% 43	60	2.63
High school teachers/counselors	1.64% 1	13.11% 8	85.25% 52	61	2.84
LCC staff/advisors	5.00% 3	11.67% 7	83.33% 50	60	2.78
Other sources	8.62% 5	46.55% 27	44.83% 26	58	2.36

Q16 How did you deal with situations you had to face during the admissions process

Answered: 61 Skipped: 16

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Spoke with others to resolve issues	86.67% 52	13.33% 8	60
Made a plan and following through	80.33% 49	19.67% 12	61
Sought help from others	91.67% 55	8.33% 5	60
Managed my time better	83.61% 51	16.39% 10	61
Didn't ask for help but waited for someone to contact me	32.20% 19	67.80% 40	59

Q17 How could LCC better support future students through the admissions process?

Answered: 40 Skipped: 37

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Keep doing what they are doing the professors are great	9/17/2024 5:04 PM
2	Idk	9/17/2024 4:09 PM
3	get to know them better before putting a lot of work on them while they have a job and other issues and responsibilities	9/16/2024 6:59 PM
4	Having links to scholarship opportunities in the admissions process or directly after the admissions process would be helpful.	9/16/2024 5:49 PM
5	None that I can think of, LCC's admissions process is very straightforward and simple.	9/16/2024 4:52 PM
6	i am not sure.	9/16/2024 1:55 PM
7	Doing great as it is	9/16/2024 12:35 PM
8	I don't know if they have it, but maybe a class, just something hands on to get help walking through the process	9/16/2024 12:02 PM
9	I can't think of anything better.	9/16/2024 12:00 PM
10	N/A	9/16/2024 11:58 AM
11	I don't know	9/9/2024 2:54 PM
12	Making them feel even more welcomed and knowing that it's a big step applying and the whole process of it.	9/9/2024 2:48 PM
13	Idk	9/9/2024 1:43 PM
14	Better guidance	9/7/2024 2:44 PM
15	N/A	9/7/2024 9:58 AM
16	making it easier for the future students to understand what they are doing	9/5/2024 5:37 PM
17	Honestly the support that LCC offers is fantastic	9/5/2024 1:08 PM
18	Faster communication	9/5/2024 9:44 AM
19	N/A	9/5/2024 9:24 AM
20	not sure	9/4/2024 4:08 PM

21	N/A	9/4/2024 2:13 PM
22	Help them step by step	9/4/2024 1:22 PM
23	All did a fantastic job for me but I needed to get away from the area I know.	9/4/2024 1:02 PM
24	I think LCC does a great job but if anything, reaching out to students daily about their admissions.	9/4/2024 12:28 PM
25	N/A	9/4/2024 12:08 PM
26	not sure	9/4/2024 11:43 AM
27	I'm not sure	9/4/2024 11:04 AM
28	Going to High School outside of Lenoir County and informing students.	9/4/2024 10:32 AM
29	I think they are already doing a great job	9/4/2024 10:22 AM
30	Offering help with admission and maybe a tour to see if LCC is the place for them	9/4/2024 9:45 AM
31	They do a pretty good job	9/4/2024 9:40 AM
32	They can support them by contacting them more.	9/4/2024 9:31 AM
33	They did good	9/4/2024 9:29 AM
34	N/A	9/4/2024 9:28 AM
35	Idk	9/4/2024 9:28 AM
36	Make the process simpler and easier to navigate.	9/4/2024 9:27 AM
37	They do a great job nothing more needs to be done.	9/4/2024 9:04 AM
38	It was pretty good as is.	9/4/2024 9:00 AM
39	Be there to support students and help them feel more comfortable and motivate them through the process.	9/4/2024 8:38 AM
40	Keep them informed about the resources available to them	9/4/2024 8:30 AM

Q18 Reflecting on your experience with the LCC admissions process, what form of communication would you have preferred? (Please rank from best (1) to least preferred (5))

Answered: 60 Skipped: 17

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Phone calls	30.00% 15	22.00% 11	14.00% 7	18.00% 9	16.00% 8	50	2.68
Text messages	24.53% 13	13.21% 7	5.66% 3	16.98% 9	39.62% 21	53	3.34
LCC email messages	13.95% 6	20.93% 9	16.28% 7	25.58% 11	23.26% 10	43	3.23
Personal email messages	11.36% 5	13.64% 6	43.18% 19	18.18% 8	13.64% 6	44	3.09
Regular mailed letters	20.00% 9	22.22% 10	13.33% 6	22.22% 10	22.22% 10	45	3.04

Q19 How easy or difficult were the following steps of the admissions process?

Answered: 60 Skipped: 17

	EXTREMELY DIFFICULT	MODERATELY DIFFICULT	NEITHER EASY NOR DIFFICULT	MODERATELY EASY	EXTREMELY EASY	DID NOT COMPLETE THIS STEP	TOTAL	WE AV
The application to the college	0.00% 0	3.33% 2	26.67% 16	36.67% 22	33.33% 20	0.00% 0	60	
The residency determination form	3.33% 2	13.33% 8	38.33% 23	26.67% 16	13.33% 8	5.00% 3	60	
Requesting official transcripts	0.00% 0	6.67% 4	31.67% 19	33.33% 20	26.67% 16	1.67% 1	60	
The FASFA (financial aid) Application	11.67% 7	26.67% 16	16.67% 10	26.67% 16	13.33% 8	5.00% 3	60	
The LCC scholarship application	1.69% 1	10.17% 6	23.73% 14	22.03% 13	16.95% 10	25.42% 15	59	
Registering for Experience LCC (new student orientation)	0.00% 0	3.33% 2	25.00% 15	16.67% 10	36.67% 22	18.33% 11	60	
Connecting with your academic advisor for registration	0.00% 0	6.67% 4	21.67% 13	26.67% 16	35.00% 21	10.00% 6	60	

Q20 If you would like to participate in a one-on-one interview with me to discuss your personal experience, both positive and negative, during the application process please submit your contact information below. I will reach out to you to set up a time to complete the interview. The interview should take about 30 minutes to complete. This is a voluntary interview. You do not have to respond to this question.

Answered: 5 Skipped: 72

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	No	9/17/2024 4:09 PM
2	N/A	9/16/2024 11:58 AM
3	N/A	9/7/2024 9:58 AM
4	N/A	9/4/2024 2:13 PM
5	I might not be able to make it but a phone call will be better	9/4/2024 9:40 AM

