

**FACULTY AND STUDENT OUT-OF-CLASSROOM INTERACTION: STUDENT
PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF INTERACTION**

A Dissertation

by

ROSALIND VERONICA ALDERMAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2008

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Yvonna Lincoln
Committee Members,	Vicente Lechuga
	Christine Stanley
	Radhika Viruru
Head of Department,	Jim Scheurich

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ABSTRACT

Faculty and Student Out-of-Classroom Interaction: Student Perceptions of Quality of
Interaction. (May 2008)

Rosalind Verónica Alderman, B.G.S., West Texas A&M University; M.A., Bowling Green State
University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Yvonna Lincoln

The purpose of this study was to identify ways in which students interact with faculty members outside of the classroom and learn what students believe makes for high quality interaction. Additionally, this study sought to identify successful out-of-classroom faculty-student interaction strategies from the student perspective. This knowledge can aid colleges and universities in promoting more formal and informal faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, thereby increasing the overall quality of the undergraduate student experience.

The study employed a naturalistic inquiry paradigm of research. The author interviewed 25 students at a Hispanic Serving institution (HSI) in San Antonio, Texas.

All students interviewed had interacted with faculty outside of the classroom. Six themes emerged in terms of types of interaction: course-related activities; traveling for conferences or study abroad; casual interactions around campus; career and graduate school focused interaction; visiting faculty in their offices (most common); and participating together in campus clubs or athletic activities.

High quality out-of-classroom interactions had four characteristics: faculty members were approachable and personable; faculty members had enthusiasm and passion for their work; faculty members cared about students personally; and faculty members served as role models and mentors. The most powerful element of high-quality faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction is that of relationship.

The most pronounced differences between underclassmen and upperclassmen were in the areas of going to faculty offices and speaking with faculty about career and graduate school plans. Juniors and seniors proportionately had more interaction with faculty on these themes.

Students offered suggestions on how the University could encourage more faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Students' ideas revolved around three themes: promoting social events and interaction; stressing the importance of office hours; and suggestions directed at faculty members. Students can also serve as ambassadors to other students by encouraging them to engage in faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

To continue improving the undergraduate collegiate experience, colleges and universities should strengthen and refine institutional commitment to practices that foster the undergraduate experience, including that of faculty-student interaction. Finally, institutions must remember to keep students at the center of their purpose and find ways to regularly solicit qualitative feedback from students of all segments of the campus environment.

TO:

My two boys: Gene and Evan

To our life together!

TO:

All the wonderful women in my life:

You made me believe anything is possible!

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From the moment I committed to completing my Ph.D. in Educational Administration, I knew it would never be possible without the commitment of those around me. I am truly blessed with a wonderful husband, Gene, and a beautiful son, Evan. Without them, and many other family members, this journey would not be complete.

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My work colleagues at St. Mary’s University have been immeasurably supportive. Special thanks to my dear friend and editor, Margaret Luévano. To my peer debriefer and friend, Graciela Lopez. To my boss and mentor Kathy Sisoian for the support “from above.” To Karen Johnson for agreeing to this craziness in the first place, and to my better halves at work, Patricia Garcia-Villarreal, Laura Pantano and Karlos Ramirez for their understanding and

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education have become increasingly focused on issues related to student retention, which affect both fiscal and student outcome dimensions on college campuses. Increased retention of students can lead to more budgetary resources. Additionally, colleges and universities understand the importance of a holistic, high quality education for all students. Student engagement defines the ideal type of a high quality educational student experience. Engaged students gain more from their collegiate experience and graduate at higher rates than those students who are not as engaged. Kuh (2003) defines student engagement as “the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take a part in these activities” (p. 25). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) highlights what are seen as educationally purposeful activities that make a difference in student engagement (Kuh, 2001). The survey instrument concentrates on five areas believed to be critical to student engagement: level of academic challenge; active and collaborative learning; enriching educational experiences; supportive campus environment; and, faculty-student interaction. Faculty-student interaction has been shown to have positive effects on student retention and success in a variety of ways. The interaction outside of the classroom has been noted to be of particular importance.

Studies at institutions of higher education have documented this importance of faculty-student interaction outside the classroom (e.g., Astin, 1993; Berger & Millem, 1999; Kuh, 2001; Lamport, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Passi, 1995). Interaction outside the classroom

This dissertation follows the style of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

has been defined as informal talks with students, discussing class ideas and readings with faculty, collaborating on research projects, invitations to faculty homes, and other general out of the classroom encounters. Researchers acknowledge, however, that current answers to these questions have mostly described the type and frequency of faculty-student interaction, but not necessarily the quality of such interaction (Kuh, 2003). More research, specifically qualitative, must be conducted to learn about the quality of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction (Powell, 1994).

Faculty-Student Interaction Research

For several decades researchers have addressed issues related to faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom. Most research has been quantitative in nature and has found that faculty-student interaction positively affects student outcomes, including academic achievement, collegiate satisfaction, and student retention.

The National Study of Student Engagement has documented the importance of time on task and asks five questions in particular that address faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The questions address time students spend outside of class discussing grades, assignments, class content or readings with faculty members. Survey questions also address career-related discussions students have with faculty. Additionally, students are asked about receiving prompt oral and written feedback from faculty members and how often they have worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework, such as committees, orientation, or student life activities. Finally, students are asked if they have or plan to work with a faculty member on research not required by class or program. The 2001 NSSE report found that although faculty-student interaction is known to add to the quality of the collegiate experience, the amount of interaction shown by survey participants seemed to be less than optimal. First-year students, for example, responded that they had occasional contact (once or

twice a month) with their faculty members (Kuh, 2001). Further inquiry has revealed that the frequency of faculty-student interaction may not be as important as the nature of such interaction. Faculty-student interaction matters most when the nature of the interaction “encourages students to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college” (Kuh, 2003, p. 29). In their *Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP)* study of 20 schools, Kuh et al. (2005) affirmed that “meaningful interactions between students and their teachers are essential to high-quality learning experiences” (p. 207). The National Survey of Student Engagement was not the first, however, to present that faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction has a positive impact on student outcomes such as academic achievement, retention, and satisfaction with the collegiate environment.

In Pascarella and Terenzini’s analysis of 20 years of research, *How College Affects Students* (1991), the researchers found considerable evidence to suggest that when faculty-student interaction extends beyond the classroom, the impact of faculty members as role models for students is increased. In addition, they found that increased interaction between faculty and students serves to strengthen the bonds students have with their institution, thereby increasing the likelihood of social integration and persistence.

Astin observed in *What Matters in College: Four Years Revisited* (1993), that the higher the student orientation of the faculty, the more positive effect it had on student retention. In addition, of all environmental variables studied, student-oriented faculty was one of only two variables that showed positive effects on students’ overall academic development. The student orientation of the faculty also produced positive effects on student satisfaction with faculty and the quality of instruction, degree attainment, and preparation for graduate school, among other factors. In summarizing the impact of faculty, Astin (1993) observed that “having a strongly

student-oriented faculty pays rich dividends in the affective and cognitive development of the undergraduate” (p. 342).

In a 1995 study, Astin and Chang explored characteristics of faculty who had been able to successfully balance the goals of teaching and research. Many of the qualities exemplified by these faculty members related to faculty and student out-of-classroom interaction. Qualities included frequent interaction with students, a strong support for student services, and involving students in faculty research.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) wrote a classic article related to faculty-student interaction. In this article, they highlighted results of their investigation on the effects of faculty-student interaction on the outcomes of students’ first year in college. Researchers found that the impact of faculty-student interaction was significant even after controlling for 14 pre-college characteristics. This research also highlighted that some types of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction have more of a positive impact on student academic achievement than others, as defined by GPA, at the end of their freshman year. Faculty-student interaction that focuses on intellectual or course-related issues had the highest impact on academic achievement and self-perceived intellectual development.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) identified the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education which are important in college student success. One of these principles is faculty-student interaction. The authors believed this interaction, encouraging contact between students and faculty, is a key factor in student motivation and involvement. They were able to identify seven principles by analyzing research related to educational practices that promote high levels of learning and personal development. All of these principles can at some level relate to the important relationship between faculty members and their students. Other principles that address the areas of improving undergraduate education include: developing

reciprocity and cooperation among students, encouraging active learning, providing prompt and appropriate feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

Other researchers confirmed multiple student outcomes from faculty-student interaction. Romanski (1987) found in her dissertation research, which included a survey and study of over 7,000 students, that faculty-student interaction does increase student academic performance, satisfaction with the collegiate experience, retention and students' overall degree aspirations. Pascarella (1980) concluded that informal contact between faculty and students does aid in the holistic education of students because it helps students improve interpersonal skills, clarify personal values, and promote critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Some studies found positive relationships between faculty-student interaction and overall satisfaction and GPA. Lamport's (1993) literature review on faculty-student informal interaction revealed that student satisfaction with their collegiate experience is positively influenced by increased faculty-student interaction, in addition to positively influencing students' academic achievement. Kuh and Hu (2001) reported that the overall frequency of faculty-student contact had a significant positive influence on the amount of time students spent on other educationally purposeful activities. The results also affirmed that the more faculty-student interaction is related to academics, the more positive influence it has on student satisfaction and outcomes. Their study also found that the more faculty-student interaction occurred, the higher the level of satisfaction students had with their college or university.

Bradley and Graham (2000) found that an institution's educational ethos, which includes the amount of faculty-student interaction, demonstrated meaningful effects on student collegiate outcomes. These outcomes included intellectual growth, career development and scientific

reasoning. The institutional environment, they believe, can have a positive impact on student success.

From a retention standpoint, Dallimore-Nordquist's (1994) master's thesis found evidence of the importance of faculty-student interaction on student persistence. Students stated that several faculty behaviors made them feel less isolated and helped them to succeed. Such behaviors included: stopping to talk to students outside of class; asking about students' lives; and, providing a classroom atmosphere that helped students get to know each other. Another correlation to retention was found in Johnson's (1997) study of commuter students. Faculty/staff to student interaction was the most important characteristic distinguishing students who persisted versus those who dropped out. The researcher found that the more quantity and quality of interaction students had with faculty and staff members, the more likely they were to be retained.

Some studies highlighted specific outcomes related to GPA. Anaya and Cole (2001) found that faculty-student informal interactions were positively related to student academic achievement. This study also found that the higher a students' reported level of academic achievement, the more students perceived professors as accessible and supportive. Milem and Berger (1997) concluded that student involvement with faculty in and outside of the classroom does positively impact cognitive and affective collegiate outcomes.

Overall, the NSSE and other research has found that one thing is clear: "Student-faculty interaction matters most to learning when it encourages students to devote greater effort to other purposeful activities during college" (Kuh, 2003, p .29).

Problem Statement, Purpose and Significance of the Study

Engagement is an important quality of the collegiate experience and critical in student retention. One proven important component of student engagement is faculty-student interaction, particularly out of the classroom interaction. Many studies cover this topic, but most

are quantitative in nature. These studies examine the frequency and type of interaction but do not necessarily address the quality or qualities of such interactions. What makes for a more meaningful faculty-student relationship? Listening to students can expand upon this type of student experience and yield rich data to be used for institutional improvement. One of the key recommendations made by advocates of quality in higher education is that “all institutions should establish routine ways to hear students’ voices, consult with them, explore their opinions, and document the nature and quality of their experience as learners.” (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and American College Personnel Association, 2004, p. 28). According to Lohr (2004), literature on the subject of faculty-student interaction “does not provide a full and current understanding of the nature and extent of student-faculty informal contact and its value toward improving the quality of the undergraduate experience” (p. 4). One of the reasons is due to the “preponderance of quantitative studies related to the topic which are limited in the ability to capture the subtleties and complexities of student-faculty contact” (p. 3). Additionally, Sax et al. (2005) concluded that “the literature suggests that the quantity of students’ involvement with faculty must be understood in the context of the quality that defines such interactions” (p. 644).

St. Mary’s University has participated in the NSSE research project and has learned much about the type and frequency of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The University also understands that with the NSSE data more differences exist within our own institution than across institutions (Kuh, 2003). In other words, there are fewer differences between St. Mary’s and other institutions than there are within the students’ experiences at our institution. The University would benefit from better understanding the types of faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom, as well as the perceived quality of such interactions, from the perspective of the students. Additionally, the University would benefit from understanding

whether the differences within the institution can be attributed to any particular student characteristics and how students perceive the quality of interaction with faculty. The purpose of this study is to help illuminate, from the student perspective, successful out-of-classroom faculty-student interaction strategies, so as to promote more of such interactions formally and informally, thereby increasing the quality of the undergraduate student experience.

Research Questions

In order to explore this problem more deeply, and provide the data which do illuminate the subtleties and complexities of faculty-student interaction, the following research questions are proposed.

- In what ways do students interact with faculty outside of the classroom?
- What do students believe makes for high quality interactions?
- How do student perceptions of the quality of their interactions with faculty change over their time at the University?
- How can St. Mary's promote high quality faculty-student interaction?

Operational Definitions

Out-of-classroom faculty-student interaction. Time faculty and students spend during non-classroom time. Includes, but is not limited to, asking questions about class assignments, readings or grades, seeking career advice, academic advising, participating on committees together, or interacting in student activities and/or organizations. Additionally, such interaction can be more personal, including eating meals together, visiting a faculty member's home, or attending a play together.

St. Mary's University. A private, Catholic institution in San Antonio, Texas.

Undergraduate enrollment of 2,400, with close to 70% of students identified as Hispanic.

Student engagement. The time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take a part in these activities (Kuh, 2003).

Student success. Broadly defined as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, educational attainment and post-college performance (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, followed by references and appendices. Chapter I describes the impetus for and significance of the study, the problem, the research questions and operational definitions. Chapter II outlines the literature review of research available in the area of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Specifically, the chapter outlines such research in the following categories: effects of faculty-student interaction on student outcomes; frequency of faculty-student interaction; and, encouraging faculty-student interaction. Chapter III will discuss the methodology used for the research project. Chapter IV will provide an in-depth analysis of the research findings. Chapter V will outline conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice as well as future research directions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews relevant literature concerning faculty and student out-of-classroom interaction. The chapter is organized into five sections: overview; effects of faculty-student interaction on student outcomes; frequency of faculty-student interaction; encouraging faculty-student interaction; and a summary of findings.

Overview

For several decades researchers have explored the impact of faculty-student interaction. Most findings point to positive student outcomes benefits for such interaction, particularly informal out-of-classroom interaction. Benefits identified include; higher persistence rates, clarification of career and learning goals, academic achievement, collegiate satisfaction, increased academic effort and overall personal development. Research has taken place in a variety of ways, and has addressed issues of quantity, quality, and type of faculty-student informal interaction. Astin (1985) remarked, “a large body of research suggests that the best way to involve students in learning and in college life is to maximize the amount of personal contact between faculty members and students” (p. 162). The overarching benefit of faculty-student informal interaction may be that it encourages more students to become involved in all types of educationally purposeful activities, which in turn leads to student success (Kuh & Hu, 2001).

As the convincing evidence of student success correlates grew, scholars began to synthesize the findings into a practical schema for successful practices in higher education. In 1987, Chickering and Gamson created a summary of principles that contribute to good practice in higher education. Their summary has become a standard used by most scholars in the field.

The *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* outlined a variety of activities that engage students in educationally purposeful practices. First, good practice encourages contact between students and faculty, believing that frequent contact in and outside of the classroom is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Second, good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students, which in turn increases involvement in learning. Next, good practice encourages active learning, an important component for engaging students in their entire educational experience. Furthermore, good practice relies on providing prompt and appropriate feedback which enhances students' understanding of their own talents and limitations, as well as areas of current focus. Next, good practice emphasizes time on task, understanding that simply being a part of something does not guarantee engagement; rather, one must exert the appropriate amount of energy in addition to time with a task. Communicating high expectations is another principle of good practice, which emphasizes the expectation for high quality work and level of engagement. Finally, good practice in undergraduate education respects diverse talents and ways of learning. All of these principles can, at some level, relate to the important relationship between faculty members and their students. These principles have become a standard for excellence in higher education.

With the increased demands for assessment of outcomes in higher education, survey instruments began to address issues of student success and practices leading to such success. Many researchers have used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) which outlines questions related to faculty-student interaction. Because of the work of the CSEQ and other independent research, another survey began to shape the way we learn about faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The need for better understanding institutional quality and institutional effect on student outcomes led researchers at the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to create an instrument to help change the fora for discussing student

success. Many of the guiding principles for this research paradigm are based on the *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. George Kuh (2005) is one of the principal researchers involved with the NSSE, and he notes: “Those institutions that more fully engage their students in the variety of activities that contribute to valued outcomes of college can claim to be of higher quality compared with other colleges and universities where students are less engaged” (p. 1).

Much current quantitative research has centered on the CSEQ and NSSE data. Studies using the CSEQ, NSSE and other data sources, both quantitative and qualitative, will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

Effects of Faculty-Student Interaction on Student Outcomes

Much of the literature has found positive outcomes of faculty and student interaction (Tinto, 1987; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, et al., 2005). The following section will highlight findings in the areas of academic achievement; collegiate satisfaction; persistence and degree attainment; career and educational aspirations; personal and intellectual development; as well as studies on specific subpopulations.

Academic Achievement

Increased gains in academic achievement are a positive outcome of faculty-student interaction (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Astin, 1993; Chang, 2005; Maestas, 2000; Sizemore, 2000). In contemporary higher education, Ernest Pascarella was one of the first to study the relationship between faculty-student interaction and student success. In 1980, Pascarella reviewed existing research on student-faculty informal out-of-class interaction. He concluded that even when pre-enrollment student characteristics were controlled, a significant positive association existed between the extent and quality of student-faculty informal contact and the following outcomes: academic achievement; educational aspirations; attitudes toward college; intellectual and

personal development; and, persistence from the first to second year of college. Pascarella also concluded that not all types of contacts were equally positive. Through research he found that the most influential out-of-classroom interaction extends what happens in the classroom to a student's life outside of the classroom. The qualitative aspects of such contact seem also to have an impact on future contacts. Pascarella noted "Indeed, it may well be that the quality and personal satisfaction derived from initial informal contacts determine, to a considerable extent, the subsequent amount of informal contact a student will seek with faculty" (p. 565).

Pascarella concluded that more information was needed on the quality of student-faculty informal interaction to better interpret student outcomes. Additionally, he highlighted the need to better understand why students happen to engage with faculty outside of the classroom. Finally, he did point to issues related to the causal direction of findings. Even while controlling for pre-entering characteristics, frequent faculty-student contact may help a student become more interested in career exploration, which in turn lead the student to initiate more out-of-class contact with faculty. Similar concerns have been raised by other researchers as well (Iverson, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1984; Pascarella, 1980; Romanski, 1987; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999). Even with these concerns, Pascarella states: "The evidence suggests that what transpires between students and faculty outside of class may have a measurable, and possibly unique, positive impact on various facets of individual development during college" (p. 571).

Mark Lamport's (1993) literature review found that student interaction with faculty impacts academic achievement and that increased interaction is also related to increased satisfaction with a student's college or university. In his review, he looked at close to 60 studies spanning four decades. In addition to faculty serving as socializing agents, Lamport found that faculty-student interaction can positively affect student academic achievement, persistence in college, and career and educational aspirations. In terms of research that has been conducted,

Lamport noted that “questions on student-faculty informal interaction are moving from what happens to how and why, and from the amount of interaction to the quality of student-faculty relationships” (p. 971).

In her dissertation research, Romanski (1987) assessed the impact of faculty-student interaction on student academic performance and persistence. She found that the amount of faculty-student interaction was dependent upon certain background characteristics, college experiences, and institutional type. In addition, she found that the benefits of faculty-student interaction on some student outcomes can take longer to surface than others. Overall, faculty-student interaction positively impacted academic performance, satisfaction with overall collegiate experience, degree aspirations and retention of students. Romanski stated “interacting with faculty is one of the best college activities a student can engage in to help achieve higher GPA’s. Such activities appear to increase other motivation for academic achievement in students” (p. 130). Additionally, faculty interaction was the second best predictor of retention at the student’s institution. The strongest predictor was satisfaction with the institution.

In 2001, Thompson reported on the effects of informal faculty-student interaction on educational gains for science and math students in a community college environment. Students’ science and mathematics educational gains were significantly impacted positively by informal faculty-student interaction. The study also found that the higher the level of faculty-student interaction, the more effort students exerted in their science courses. Another highlight was related to students’ working. The higher the amount of time students reported working, the less informal interaction they had with their faculty. Thompson suggests that “faculty members should be attempting to develop better relationships with students, especially when this reaction results in a better learning environment” (p. 44).

Most studies about faculty-student interaction do affirm the positive influence of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction on student success. One of the most important dimensions of this success is academic achievement, and the studies outlined above show such a significant impact.

Collegiate Satisfaction

Beyond academic achievement, satisfaction with a student's overall collegiate experience is also positively influenced by faculty-student informal interaction. Many studies clearly point to the positive influence of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction on collegiate satisfaction (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lamport, 1993; Maestas, 2000; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella, 1980; Romanski, 1987; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Additionally, support was found for the positive relationship between faculty-student interaction and a student's perception of institutional support (Milem & Berger, 1997).

Endo and Harpel's (1982) longitudinal study to assess the effects of faculty-student interaction on students' educational outcomes identified four aspects of faculty-student interaction: frequency of formal interaction; frequency of informal interaction; quality of faculty advising; and, helpfulness of faculty. Results of their study highlighted faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction's positive impact on collegiate satisfaction. They gathered data from the 1975 Freshman Questionnaire and the 1979 Graduating Students Survey administered at the University of Colorado. Their analysis controlled for student background characteristics, including gender, academic ability, degree aspirations and openness to change. Even after controlling for background characteristics, faculty-student interaction generally did positively affect student outcomes. In all, they noted that frequency of informal versus formal faculty-student interaction affected more of the outcomes (nine versus two of the 14). The frequency of

informal faculty-student interaction also positively impacted overall satisfaction with the college experience.

More specifically, the frequency of informal interaction was found to affect two of the five personal/social outcomes, six out of seven intellectual outcomes, and satisfaction with education. Neither frequency of informal student-faculty interaction nor frequency of formal student-faculty interaction was found to influence academic achievement, although the latter came close. (p. 127)

Additionally, socioeconomic status was found to have no impact on the 14 outcomes studied. Overall, the authors felt passionately about the amount of information that has been found to correlate positively between faculty and student interaction and student outcomes. Furthermore, they advocated for institutions to use faculty reward systems to recognize such interactions in a tangible way.

In 1985, Hearn looked at the faculty-student interaction variables and their relationship to student overall evaluations of and satisfaction with their academic programs. The areas of satisfaction included: faculty members' knowledge of their field; their teaching ability; availability of faculty to students outside of class; challenge and stimulation of course offerings; faculty members' commitment to their field; and, interaction opportunities with other students in their same major. In general, he found that stimulating coursework and good teaching were more important than faculty-student interaction or perceived faculty knowledge on overall departmental satisfaction. Hearn did find, as well, that stimulating course work and faculty-student interaction was more important for women in the sample than for men. Teaching style criteria, rather than social support criteria, was a stronger predictor of overall satisfaction.

Einarson and Matier (2005) analyzed differences of senior college students according to race. They noted that "satisfaction with the overall quality of instruction and social involvement were the strongest predictors of overall satisfaction for all seniors" (p. 641). Additionally, satisfaction with faculty availability outside of the classroom was a moderately important,

significant predictor of overall satisfaction for white and Asian students only. Faculty's availability outside of the classroom was positively related to satisfaction for white and Asian American seniors. It was not, however, as strong a correlate as the authors expected, given previous research.

Collegiate satisfaction is not only a desirable outcome for students as individuals. Students who are satisfied with their collegiate experience are more likely to stay at the institution and graduate. Faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction has proven to positively affect students' collegiate satisfaction, and is therefore a key outcome of increased interaction.

Persistence and Degree Attainment

The interaction between faculty and students has long been assumed to positively affect student persistence and degree attainment. A broad spectrum of research does support this theory (Astin, 1993; Lamport, 1993; Pascarella, 1980; Romanski, 1987; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005).

In *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) synthesized studies from decades of research related to faculty-student interaction. In their review, they concluded that student and faculty contact outside of the classroom, even after controlling for other factors, does positively affect student persistence, degree completion, career choice and educational aspirations. They also concluded that in many ways the frequency of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction may not be as important as the type of interaction. In terms of cognitive and intellectual growth, faculty and student interaction does make a difference, especially the types of interaction that reinforce the intellectual pursuit of knowledge outside of the classroom.

Romanski's study (1987) also found that faculty-student interaction positively affects student persistence. She states, "interaction with faculty during the last two years in college

serves as the best predictor of persistence.....Faculty serve as the most crucial variable in influencing students to persist and complete their educational goals” (p. 131). The author concluded this influence is seen because increased faculty-student interaction leads to increased collegiate satisfaction and in turn increased persistence.

Wang and Grimes (2000) conducted a study at Missouri Western State College. In the fall of 1996 the college began an institutional mission enhancement program called Access Plus. The program encompassed several areas including: a student success/freshman year experience office; an intrusive freshman advising program; a freshman seminar course; and, the Center for Academic Support, among others. A web survey was designed to better understand freshmen students’ integration into and interaction with the college community. The program had already seen an increase of 10 percent in the freshman to sophomore retention rate, and 21 percent in the retention of at-risk students in particular, over the first few years of the program. The web survey highlighted that over 50% of students had discussed personal concerns with faculty either frequently or occasionally, and over 92% had approached faculty outside of class to ask course-related questions. Part of this program had focused on providing professional development to faculty and involving them in helping students succeed.

Milem and Berger (1997) found a strong positive relationship between faculty-student interaction and perceived institutional support. They also noted that early faculty-student involvement aided in student persistence. Furthermore, they found that early involvement with faculty helped to predict later faculty-student involvement. They stated that “early involvement with faculty also predicted involvement in Spring-semester organized activities, with faculty and in traditional social activities” (p. 396). In a 1999 study, Milem and Berger also corroborated that involvement with faculty has positive effects for first year students in particular. They noted:

Involvement with faculty in the fall has statistically significant positive and negative direct and indirect effects. The pattern of positive direct effects suggests that early involvement with faculty increases the likelihood that students will have positive perceptions of institutional support and subsequent institutional commitment. However, fall faculty involvement has a negative direct effect on perceptions of peer support. This may indicate that students who are not fitting in socially are turning to faculty for a source of support and that early involvement with faculty may help some students who are struggling to find a niche on campus. (p. 658)

This study was particularly insightful on issues of student persistence since it showed how positive faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction can lead to more positive interaction.

Johnson (1997) explored issues related to commuter students, by comparing attitudes of retained v. non-retained students in a single-institution longitudinal study. Retained students believed more strongly in the following statements: I got to know faculty; the institution has well-educated faculty; and, I had adequate opportunities to interact with faculty. The author stated that academic climate is an important variable to focus on when trying to increase student retention. He noted that an area in which to concentrate would be staff-to-student and faculty-to-student interaction, with special emphasis on female students. Overall, findings for commuter students in this study were similar to conclusions in studies focusing on traditional, campus-based students.

Persistence and degree attainment is a critical issue for colleges and universities for it affects institutional budgets and perceived quality. Most studies have shown a positive relationship between faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction and increased retention and graduation of students.

Career and Educational Aspirations

Another positive effect of faculty-student interaction is that of helping students to clarify career and educational goals, and with increasing students' educational aspirations. Several national studies confirm the importance of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction in helping students clarify their career and educational aspirations. (Iverson, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1984; Lampert, 1993; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005 ; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005).

What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited (Astin, 1993) looked at a myriad of potential college outcomes, including career and educational goals and aspirations. Astin's synthesis of existing research found that retention in college is affected by a variety of factors, including student involvement with peers and faculty. Astin noted that "the student orientation of the faculty produces more substantial direct effects on student outcomes than almost any other environmental variable" (p. 342). Faculty concern for students (student orientation) was measured by seven factors: faculty are interested in student's academic problems; faculty are interested in students personal problems; faculty are committed to the welfare of the institution; faculty are sensitive to the issues of minorities; faculty are easy to see outside of office hours; students are treated like numbers in a book; and, there are many opportunities for student-faculty interaction.

Astin defined out-of-class student-faculty interaction as: being a guest in a professor's home; working with a professor's research project; assisting faculty in teaching a class; and, hours per week spent talking with faculty outside of class. He found that student-faculty interaction has substantial positive correlations with various outcomes and factors such as: enrollment in graduate or professional school; overall college experience; college grade point average; degree attainment; every self-reported area of intellectual and personal growth; and

even on students' tutoring other students. Astin concludes that "these findings highlight the critical importance to student development of frequent interaction between faculty and students" (p. 384).

The study explored two environmental measures; student-oriented faculty and socioeconomic status (SES). Astin concluded that "self-reported gains in most areas of cognitive functioning are positively affected by two environmental measures: student-oriented faculty and peer SES" (p. 242). These were also the only two environmental variables that showed positive effects on overall academic development. Students' peer groups have been found to have the strongest influence on students, followed by student-oriented faculty measures. Astin further looked at the strength of peer SES influence on other measures. He attributes some of these findings on what happens at the institutional level where many high SES students are enrolled. Astin states: "First, it should be realized that there is a lot of consistency in the kinds of student bodies enrolling at particular institutions, even over long periods of time (Astin, 1985). In other words, we can assume that most institutions that currently enroll high SES students have been enrolling students for years" (p. 409). Astin goes on to point out that this pattern can translate into additional ability for the institutions to raise dollars, which in turn can have higher faculty salaries (another faculty measure). High SES students and their parents may also have higher expectations of institutions, thereby creating different environments. Although this may not always hold true with state institutions, the pattern of peer SES influence is consistent, and may not be easily attributed to surface conclusions. High SES students are scored highly on other measures that highly correlate with satisfaction and growth in cognitive development, such as living on campus and having a strong emphasis on the social sciences. These issues help to show that the relationship between high SES and other outcomes may not be defined easily, but rather is tied with the complexities of overall student college outcomes.

Hearn (1987) also looked more closely at the impact of undergraduate experiences on aspirations and plans for graduate and professional school at two institutions. In his study, the College Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ) was given to freshmen in 1973, with a follow-up in 1976. Background characteristics, such as gender, grade point average and highest degree intended, were controlled in the analysis. He concluded that faculty-student contact “played a positive role in aspirations formation, and thus indirectly influenced graduate school plans” (p. 132). These effects held true beyond the freshman year. Faculty-student interaction was seen as slightly more influential for men than for women. Some of the data also pointed, however, to the challenge of relationship versus causality. “Faculty-student interaction was affected positively by freshman-year grades, suggesting that academically talented students may have sought out or been sought out for higher levels of contact with faculty members” (p.129). It seems that much of the research shows that any causal relationships are much harder to quantify in dealing with measures so overarching as collegiate outcomes.

Steven Lohr (2004) conducted his qualitative dissertation study on student-faculty interaction. He noted that student-faculty out-of-classroom interaction assisted students with a variety of college outcomes, including clarifying career and educational goals. Such interactions, he believed, began with classroom-related activities. Students spoke of several benefits to student-faculty out-of-classroom interaction. Those benefits included: assistance in designing career and educational objectives; increased job opportunities; assistance with coursework; and, personal development. Lohr also concluded that not enough studies had addressed this topic in a qualitative way and suggested more studies do so to learn more about the quality of faculty-student interactions.

Cruce et al., used the *Principles of Good Practices in Undergraduate Education* as a basis for their 2006 study and confirmed that good practice principles, which include faculty-

student interaction, have a significant positive impact on student outcomes. This influence was particularly seen on graduate degree plans, cognitive development, and most strongly on learning orientations in first-year students. The authors also noted that good practices have a compensatory effect for students entering college below the average on a particular measure of cognitive ability or orientation to learning. They noted that because of such findings, universities should focus more on implementing such practices within remedial programs to potentially increase the effectiveness of such programs in helping students' academic adjustment.

Personal and Intellectual Development

Gains in personal and intellectual development are also positively affected by faculty-student interaction (Astin, 1993; Cruce, et al., 2006; Lohr, 2004; Pascarella, 1980; Passi, 1995).

Terenzini and Pascarella along with Blimling (1999) continued their exploration into the faculty-student interaction topic with a literature review on students' out-of-classroom experiences and their effect on learning and cognitive development. They reported that most research has found out-of-class contact between faculty and students to have a positive impact on student outcomes. The causal direction of some of the findings can be problematic, but they conclude:

Are students who gain more in their cognitive capacities more likely to seek contact with faculty members, or does the contact promote the development? In terms of policy or practice, whether the learning gains are the catalyst or a consequence of student-faculty interaction is a less interesting or urgent question than how to promote it. Student-faculty contact and student learning are positively related, and it would seem that finding ways to promote such contact is in the best educational interests of both students and institutions (p. 616).

In 2001, Pascarella and Terenzini explored student-faculty informal relationships and in particular their effect on three freshman year educational outcomes: personal development; intellectual development; and, academic performance. In this quantitative study, researchers

controlled for 14 pre-entering characteristics, including: gender; area of study; high school rank; mother and father's level of education; combined SAT score; and, ethnic origin. The frequency of informal interactions focusing on intellectual or course-related matters had the strongest positive association with increased intellectual development and academic performance. Interactions to discuss career-related issues had the highest association with self-perceived growth. Of interest is the authors' assertion that students' early experiences in college in attempting to interact with faculty outside of the classroom can influence their desire to continue such contact. A student who may have a negative early encounter with a faculty member outside of class, may be less likely to approach that or other faculty members in the future.

Weaver and Qi (2005) looked at the issue of faculty-student informal interaction from the standpoint of classroom organization. They concluded that faculty-student out-of-class interaction could diminish obstacles to communication, and in turn, encourage overall participation inside of the classroom. In this study, students perceived faculty-student interaction as influencing their participation rate both directly and indirectly through increasing students' confidence and rates of "para-participation," and through reducing their fear of professor's criticisms and fear of peer disapproval. The authors concluded that faculty-student interaction is one of the most powerful sources of influence on student learning and persistence. The authors note:

...that our findings support the argument that faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom helps students learn professionalism, view criticism in a constructive way, and enhance students' confidence in the classroom. Faculty-student interaction is thus critical for explaining class participation. (p. 587)

Actively participating in the learning process can aid in a student's personal and academic development.

Subpopulations

Iverson partnered with Pascarella and Terenzini in 1984 to conduct a study of commuter college freshmen. This study looked specifically at the impact of faculty-student interaction on the educational aspiration level of commuter college freshmen. The study controlled for pre-existing student characteristics such as: educational aspirations; high school achievement; academic aptitude; father's educational level; planned academic major; ethnicity; and, gender. The authors of the study divided faculty-student contact into three categories; academic, social, and total contact. The frequency of informal faculty-student contact focused on academic concerns positively correlated with the post-freshman year educational aspirations of white students. This influence was not replicated with non-white students. In this study, non-white students reported less contact with faculty than did white students. In general, the researchers found that students interact with faculty to discuss intellectual or course-related matters over three times more frequently than they interact socially with faculty.

Guthman (1992) studied how college grade point average and attrition was affected by several variables, including faculty-student interaction and institutional integration. The study compared African-American and white students attending predominantly white institutions and African-American students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's). The frequency of informal interaction was not significantly related to attrition for black and white students. He found that interaction in general was low for both minority and majority students.

Cole (1999) studied both African-American and white students at predominantly white institutions. The data was gained from the administration of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). The three areas of faculty-student interaction explored were: speaking with a faculty member; requesting advice from a faculty member; and, establishing a personal

relationship with a faculty member. Cole concluded that African-American students had higher rates of interaction with faculty than did their white counterparts. African-Americans, however, tended to see their faculty as less friendly, supportive and approachable. Both African-American and white students had increased faculty-student contact as they progressed through their college years.

In 2000, Ricardo Maestas studied how five specific areas of faculty and student out-of-class interaction affected six educational outcomes of Hispanic students. The areas of interaction included: climate for faculty-student interactions; mentoring; minority/women faculty influence; faculty discrimination toward students; and, faculty interest in students. The six educational outcomes assessed were: grades; three satisfaction measures; intellectual development; and, sense of belonging. Interaction did have a positive effect on the following educational outcomes: grade performance; satisfaction with certain aspects of college; and, an increased sense of belonging. The level of impact depended in part on the type of interaction. The effect of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction was similar for Hispanic and majority students, but the impact seemed to be less for Hispanic students. For Hispanic students in the sample, out-of-class interaction with faculty was positively associated with satisfaction and a sense of belonging, but only moderately associated with intellectual development.

Anaya and Cole (2001) studied Latino students in particular. They utilized data from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) administered at thirty research and doctoral granting institutions. They defined three types of interaction: general; academically related; and, primary-personal contact. Frequent interaction positively impacted academic achievement. In addition, the better students performed academically, the more positively they viewed faculty. The data suggest that “few of the student-faculty interaction variables had a unique effect on achievement for Latino/a students” (p. 10). Only three variables were statistically significant for

Latino/a students: quality of relationships with faculty; talked with faculty; and, visited informally with faculty after class. Overall, their study did note that the frequency of faculty and student out-of-class interaction was quite low.

Several studies looked at faculty-student interaction in the community college environment. Sizemore (2000) found that students who communicated with instructors outside of the classroom exhibited significantly higher achievement gain scores than non-communicators. There was a low correlation, however, between the number of outside of classroom contacts and achievement gain scores. More non-traditionally-aged students interacted more frequently with faculty outside of the classroom. In addition, women were more likely than men to interact outside of class with faculty. Hagerdon, et al. (2000), also looked at peer and faculty-student relations at community colleges. They found that faculty-student relationships differed among female and male students, but overall found no statistically significant gender differences. Overall, a pattern of generally low rates of contact with faculty outside of the classroom was observed.

Sax, Bryant and Harper (2005) found differences among men and women in faculty-student interaction. Utilizing data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and data from the College Student Survey (CSS) follow-up, the authors found that women had more frequent interaction with faculty than did men. In addition, they noted that women tended to have more positive out-of-classroom interactions with faculty than did men. Women and men had similar outcomes related to faculty-student interaction, such as increases in scholarly self-confidence, higher degree aspirations and retention. For men, faculty-student interactions gave greater gains in the areas of political engagement, liberalism, cultural awareness and commitment to promoting racial understanding. Women, more so than men, saw positive gains in the areas of physical, emotional and academic well-being. It is important to note that the

authors found that the quantity of interaction alone was not sufficient to make positive gains.

Additionally, they suggested that:

Research ought to study more closely gender differences in faculty-student interactions in a variety of settings and via multiple forms of data collection (both qualitative and quantitative). For example, surveys could focus more specifically on the various aspects of student-faculty interaction (in class, out of class, in office hours, in research labs, etc.) and how students' perceive the quality of these relationships with faculty in each of those situations. (p. 655)

Similarly in issues of race, Laird et al., 2007, found that African-American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) reported higher levels of engagement than their counterparts at Primarily White Institutions (PWI's). Their involvement in educationally purposeful activities allowed them to gain more from their collegiate experience.

He notes:

The relatively large differences for active and collaborative learning and student-faculty interaction suggest that the students and faculty at HBCU's in this study are working together to a greater degree than African-American seniors and their faculty members at PWI's to get students involved in the practices and relationships that lead to desirable educational outcomes. (p. 50)

In contrast to African-American students, the average Hispanic senior at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) "looked quite similar to the average Hispanic senior at a PWI in terms of engagement, satisfaction with college, and gains in overall development" (p. 49). They even found that Hispanic seniors at PWI's were slightly more inclined to discuss grades, readings, and career plans with faculty. In the same direction, these students had slightly higher levels of self-reported gains in overall development.

Frequency of Faculty-Student Interaction

A significant amount of the literature has confirmed that faculty-student interaction happens infrequently (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Chang, 2005; Garrett & Zabieskie, 2003; Guthman, 1992; Hagerdon, et al., 2000; and NSSE).

Kuh and Hu (2001) conducted a comprehensive study on the effects of faculty-student interaction, spanning the decade of the 1990's. The authors used data gathered from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Questions used in the survey addressed behaviors of students that have been shown to contribute to student learning and development. They noted four conclusions from the literature: there is very little contact between students and faculty outside of the classroom; the most frequent type of faculty-student interaction is general; there are no gender differences in faculty-student contact; and, there were some differences among racial background. In relation to the frequency of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, the authors noted that interaction increased as students moved through their collegiate years. Although interaction seems to be infrequent generally, students with stronger pre-entering academic preparation are more likely to have out-of-class contact with faculty. The more students interact with faculty, the better they also perceived university relations. Asian students showed less faculty-student interaction than did white students, while African-American students showed more interaction with faculty than did white students. Latinos' involvement with faculty outside of the classroom was related to more positive gains in writing improvement. Kuh and Hu state, "however, the results of this study show positive net effects of student-faculty interaction on the amount of effort students devoted to other educationally purposeful activities and positive gross effects on all types of gain measures" (p. 326). The authors also concluded that institutional type and selectivity have a limited influence on the manner in which faculty-student contact affects student satisfaction and gains.

Koljatic and Kuh (2001) studied the longitudinal effects of the *Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. They found that the frequency of student engagement in the principles of good educational practice had not changed much between the years of 1983 and 1997. They concluded that institutions need to better support faculty who embrace these

principles, including the principle of faculty and student interaction, given that such practices have been found to enhance student success.

In 1984, Molly Everett conducted a study with faculty across universities in the State University System of Florida. Her study found that there was relatively little contact between faculty and students outside of the classroom. Of the contact that did occur, however, she found there was a positive correlation between faculty having positive attitudes and perceptions toward faculty-student out-of-class interaction and the actual number of interactions. Everett also found differences among institutional type and the discipline of the faculty members involved in the interaction. Her study found that faculty at larger, research-based institutions interacted less frequently with students outside of the classroom than did faculty at small institutions. Her study corroborated what several studies have found about the amount of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction:

The results of the survey indicate that considering the number of opportunities which faculty have for interaction with students in the identified role capacities, and the actual amount of interaction, relatively little informal interaction occurs between faculty and students. Even in the roles which are traditionally associated with faculty status, i.e., educational advisor and instructor, there was little contact. (p. 131)

This study also found that the faculty who reported having more out-of-classroom interaction with students tended to have lower degree levels and rank than their less-interacting counterparts. Some departments saw a correlation between high levels of informal interaction and retention rates of students. The author found interactions were more likely to occur when students initiated the interaction. Additionally, when institutions and departments seem to value faculty-student informal interaction, more of the interaction tends to happen, regardless of the kind of institution and department size and type.

In 1995, Passi looked at the frequency and quality of faculty-student informal interaction outside of the classroom and its effect on five freshman outcomes: academic/intellectual

development; attitudes toward faculty; educational aspirations; career certainty; and, satisfaction with education. The study not only controlled for pre-entering characteristics, but also for place of residence for students in the study. Residential students reported higher frequency and quality in their interactions with faculty, although they did not exhibit higher rates of first-year college outcomes. Students who interacted more frequently with faculty “tend to experience higher academic and intellectual development and better attitudes about faculty” (p. 143). This study did not show, however, a positive relationship between increased faculty-student interaction and first-year grade point average or future educational aspirations.

Cotten and Wilson (2006) conducted a qualitative study to look at faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Overall, they found that students had little contact with faculty outside of the classroom. Interestingly, they noted that students did not truly understand the role of faculty, and sometimes even felt belittled and degraded by faculty. This overall perception may also hinder continued interaction. The authors found that students who reported a significant amount of out-of-classroom interaction were involved in structured programs, such as mentoring. The authors were also able to see when out-of-classroom interaction seemed positive, students were motivated to work harder to try to please their faculty. Because of this, some students may see out-of-classroom interaction as additional effort and work. They noted that academic types of interactions may have a greater impact on student outcomes than purely social ones. The authors suggest, however, that faculty should not discount informal, social interactions, as they help to lay the foundation of trust that should occur to foster high quality, relevant out-of-classroom interaction.

Chang (2005) also confirmed that overall faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction is low. In her community college study she observed the highest levels of faculty-student interaction among African-American students. Overall, faculty-student interaction positively

influenced academic achievement and development of students of color. “Having positive perceptions of the college environment and interacting with other members of the institution, from students to academic counselors, show the strongest positive association with faculty contact among all racial subgroups of students” (p. 769).

Overall, the positive influence of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction on student outcomes holds constant even in studies of campus sub-populations. Some studies showed differences in the extent of the influence of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction on particular groups of students, but overall such interaction was seen as positive.

Encouraging Faculty-Student Interaction

Much of the literature has not only addressed the importance of faculty-student interaction, but made recommendations for encouraging such interaction. In addition to some of the studies already mentioned above, others address this issue.

Astin and his research partner Mitchell Chang (1995) concluded that institutions that best support student success are those that have been able to find a balance between research and teaching. What they found interesting about such institutions was that faculty at those institutions, more so than others, practiced positive educational outcomes, including frequent interaction with students and student involvement in faculty research.

Kuh and Hu (2001) suggested that faculty could enhance the collegiate experience by interacting with students outside of the classroom and as much as possible steering such conversations toward matters that help students see their in-class learning impacting their day-to-day, out-of-class life.

Dallimore-Nordquist (1994) found that in general faculty-student interaction was important in student success. She interviewed students to gain a better perspective on the quality of such interactions. The quality measures that emerged included: being accessible; being

willing to help; being approachable; creating a safe and comfortable class environment; being a friend; being flexible; being a good instructor; providing feedback; and, showing interest in student success. In-class and out-of-class interaction with faculty was perceived similarly by students. Encouraging more of the quality measures listed above can have a positive effect on student success.

Some studies drew connections between in-class activities and out-of-class interaction. Powell's (1994) qualitative study noted that student perceptions of outstanding faculty and faculty-student rapport out-of-the-classroom were at least as important in student success as the instructor's classroom competence. Factors that either encouraged or inhibited out-of-classroom interaction were identified and clustered into four areas: student needs/characteristics; teachers' in-class behavior; teachers' outside of class behavior; and, school policies/institutional characteristics. In students' needs, a major reason that was found for students' initiating out-of-classroom contact with faculty was to seek assistance with course assignments or other academic concerns. Students identified that a faculty member's willingness to share personal experiences and seem sensitive to students' needs made it more likely for students to seek out-of-classroom interaction. Additionally, faculty members who invited student participation in the classroom and were viewed as personable were seen as more likely to have out-of-classroom interaction. Students did believe that faculty have the primary responsibility for cultivating faculty-student interaction outside of class. Institutions should encourage and reward these behaviors in order to help in overall student success outcomes.

Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) looked at the broad impact of faculty-student interaction on student success by using data gathered with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Students on campuses where faculty frequently interacted with students out-of-the-classroom reported higher levels of engagement and learning. Faculty and student

out-of-classroom interactions were also enhanced by faculty members engaging in active and collaborative learning activities. For seniors in the study, course related faculty-student interactions had a positive impact on the three measures of environmental support: supportive interpersonally; supportive for learning; and, satisfied with the environment. Overall, however, out-of-class interactions appeared not to have as strong of an effect as in-class interactions. Additionally, the authors did note that faculty can make a difference by how much emphasis they place on co-curricular activities that enhance student learning. Level of importance given to co-curricular involvements had positive outcomes related to academic challenge, student-faculty interaction and active and collaborative learning. In relation to out-of-class interactions, smaller institutions had more interaction, and faculty at rural institutions engaged students more frequently in such interaction.

The 2003 NSSE Annual Report points to the inter-school differences being more pronounced than intra-school differences in all areas under study. With respect to faculty-student interaction, they remark that the key is substantive contact; casual contact has little to no effect on student outcomes. Additionally, the report highlights the importance of both the nature and frequency of faculty-student interaction. The four survey items related to faculty-student interaction were: discussing grades or assignments with an instructor; talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor; discussing ideas from readings or classes with a faculty member outside of class; and, receiving prompt feedback from faculty on academic performance. Institutions should remember that within-institution differences are the most pronounced, and should therefore look at successful strategies on their campuses to find ways of engaging faculty with students and promoting more of the interactions listed above.

Kuh, et al. (2005) examined 20 institutions that had higher than predicted scores on the NSSE. The project of learning more about these institutions was called Documenting Effective

Educational Practice (DEEP), and their findings were documented in the book *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* (2005). They stated: “Students learn firsthand how to think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty inside and outside of classrooms. As a result, teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for lifelong learning” (p. 207). The NSSE established that faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction is important. The DEEP study looked at successful ways of achieving such interaction. Some highlights include arranging physical space to promote faculty-student interaction, encouraging faculty members to be highly visible outside of the classroom, and promoting student-faculty engagement in campus committees. Such involvement was found to have several educational benefits, including academic achievement and student engagement in educationally purposeful activities. Participation in undergraduate research was also seen as a good practice; one which students considered a highlight to their collegiate experience.

Kuh, Laird and Umbach (2004) analyzed the faculty-student interaction variable within the NSSE. They found that students who reported participating in integrative learning activities gained more from their collegiate experiences. These integrative learning activities include discussing with faculty outside of the classroom ideas from readings or classes. In general, they noted that faculty at liberal arts colleges were more likely than their counterparts elsewhere to employ effective educational practices. The authors also reaffirmed that differences in faculty-student interaction within individual institutions were far greater than differences among institutions.

Garrett and Zabieskie (2003) studied faculty-student interaction as it related to students in living/learning communities. They found that students participating in living/learning communities were more likely to interact with faculty formally and informally than students not in a living/learning community. They also noted, however, that the overall frequency of faculty-

student out-of-classroom interaction was quite low. Institutions wanting to increase faculty-student in and out-of-classroom interaction could look at successful learning communities strategies to gain such engagement.

Through the study of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, researchers have identified various successful strategies, policies and practices to enhance such interaction. Since such interaction is seen a positively affecting student outcomes, colleges and universities should consider effective practices in improving faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction on their individual campuses.

Summary of Findings

Faculty and student interaction, in and out of the classroom, has been shown to make a difference in a number of student outcomes. More specifically, researchers have found that faculty-student out-of-class interactions make a difference on the following student collegiate outcomes: student retention; clarification of career and future educational goals; academic achievement; collegiate satisfaction; and, overall personal and intellectual development. These findings have held constant over decades and across student backgrounds. Some differences have been found, however, in the types of out-of-classroom interaction. Out-of-classroom interactions that focus on academic and career issues, as well as interactions that encourage involvement in other educationally purposeful activities, are most effective in aiding student success.

Some studies have brought forth concerns on causality versus relationship between faculty-student interaction and student outcomes. Most researchers, however, stated that the potential concerns with causality are superseded by the knowledge that faculty and student interaction is important to student engagement and success. So many factors come into play when addressing student collegiate outcomes, that attributing one outcome to a single variable is virtually

impossible. The positive and consistent correlations of variables related to faculty-student interaction, however, should provide a strong case for furthering the promotion of such interaction. As Kuh and Hu (2001) stated “The most important finding from this study is that student-faculty interaction encourages students to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college” (p. 329).

What researchers have learned thus far of faculty-student out-of-class interaction has certainly highlighted the importance of such interaction. Several findings and conclusions also support a case for conducting the research this study. Many authors have called for more research relating to the quality of faculty-student interaction (Lohr, 2004; Pascarella, 1980; Sax, Bryant, & Harpers, 2005). Of the current research, much has concentrated on quantitative measures. Using a naturalistic approach in researching the issues can shed more light on the quality of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Additionally, little research has focused on Hispanic students and on a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in particular.

This study addresses the issue of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction from a qualitative, student-centered perspective. This study contributes to the current literature by adding more information about the quality of faculty-student interaction and the specific experiences of students of all backgrounds at a Hispanic Serving Institution.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used to conduct this study. Areas to be covered include the purpose of the study, paradigm and method, the research design, population selected, procedures and elements of trustworthiness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was multifaceted. First, I wanted to identify ways in which students interact with faculty members outside of the classroom and learn what students believe makes for high quality interactions. Additionally, this study sought to identify successful out-of-classroom faculty-student interaction strategies from the student perspective. By highlighting best practices and practical ideas, I expect to positively affect student engagement and retention, since studies have found faculty-student interaction positively affects student success (Astin, 1993; Berger & Millem, 1999; Kuh, 2001; Lampton, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Passi, 1995).

Paradigm and Method

My primary reason for choosing a naturalistic research paradigm and a qualitative design was to give voice to students' thoughts and feelings on their out-of-classroom interactions with faculty. In line with naturalistic inquiry, understanding rather than predicting was the guiding principle in making each methodological decision (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, most of the studies that have researched the issue of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction have done so from the standpoint of quantitative questions. These studies traditionally examined the frequency of certain types of interaction between faculty and students, such as talking outside of

class, discussing class readings, serving on committees together and conducting research together.

Much data has been gathered that suggest faculty and student out-of-classroom interaction positively affects student success. I do not propose to replace the quantitative data that has been gathered, but rather wish to augment the knowledge already obtained by adding the student voice. In order to gain knowledge about student perceptions and experiences, a naturalistic approach best for the inquiry process.

Research Design

Several characteristics are inherent in the way we conduct naturalistic inquiry. These include: natural setting; using of a human instrument; utilization of tacit knowledge; qualitative methods; purposive sampling; inductive data analysis; grounded theory; emergent design; negotiated outcomes; case study reporting mode; idiographic interpretation; tentative application; focus-determined boundaries; and, special criteria for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Naturalistic inquiry allows the researcher to understand the topic better, rather than to predict and make generalizations about findings. This paradigm also allows us to understand that realities are multiple and socially constructed and that inquiry is value-bound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Where appropriate, this chapter will further address how I conducted the inquiry into student and faculty out-of-classroom interaction.

I had an interest in student retention and factors that helped students succeed in degree completion. Upon the administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement on the campus of St. Mary's University in 2004, I became more intrigued about the survey questions related to faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The survey included specific questions about faculty-student interactions: time students spent outside the classroom in discussing

grades, assignments, class content or readings with their instructors; career-related discussions students had with faculty; how often students received prompt oral and written feedback from their faculty; how often students had worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework, such as committees, orientation, or student life activities; and students' plans to work with a faculty member on research not required by a class or program.

I chose to interview students in a semi-structured fashion. Each student participated in one individual interview. The interview protocol was developed by the researcher and approved by the dissertation committee. Questions focused on determining if and how students interacted with faculty outside of the classroom and how they perceived the quality of such interactions. Data were analyzed using a constant comparative method as described in the book *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Population

All student participants were drawn from the undergraduate student population at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. The University has approximately 2,400 undergraduate students, with a Hispanic population of close to 70%. There are three undergraduate schools at the University: School of Humanities and Social Sciences; School of Engineering, Science and Technology; and the Bill Greehey School of Business. All students were enrolled at the University during the fall 2006 semester.

Purposive sampling was employed. This method of choosing participants attempts to bring together a sample that is representative of the population being studied. I attempted to interview a group of students that was representative of the undergraduate student population by school of study and ethnic background. In purposive sampling "the object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor. A second purpose is to generate the information

upon which the emergent design and grounded theory can be based” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). In line with the serial selection of sample units, I interviewed an initial group of students (10) and continued to seek students who would complement the sample in terms of undergraduate major school and ethnic background. Finally, I stopped interviews when they reached a point of redundancy. Because the purpose of this naturalistic inquiry was to maximize information, “then sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202).

In the spring of 2006, I met with the dean of each undergraduate school. To begin, I sought twelve to fifteen names of students from each school that came from a variety of majors and classifications within the school. As interviews progressed, I also tried to have a cross-section of gender and ethnicity reflective of the institution’s demographics.

Of the initial lists of potential student participants, each dean used his or her preferred method in constructing his or her list. One dean took a sample of students from those who had recently applied for departmental scholarships within the school. Another dean asked department chairs to provide names of potential candidates within their departments. The third dean provided me with the names of the students who made up the recently formed advisory council for the school and who were representative of the school’s departments. A total of 25 interviews were conducted, with eight students each from the schools of Humanities and Social Science and Bill Greehey School of Business, and nine from the School of Engineering, Science and Technology. Of the 25 interviews, one was determined not to be usable due to researcher error. All interviews were audio taped and I took field notes. The tape of interview number five, however, was inadvertently destroyed, by taping over the original interview. I did not learn of this error until late in the interviewing process. Upon discovery of this error, I was unable to

reach the student again to re-interview, and the field notes were not rich enough to well represent the entire interview.

Of the final 24 students interviewed, their fall 2006 classifications were as follows; one freshman, seven sophomores, seven juniors, and nine seniors. Of the 24, 15 students were of Hispanic origin, one was African-American, three were of Asian origin and the remaining five were Caucasian. Two of the students were international, F-1 visa students. Each undergraduate school was represented by eight students.

Procedures

I utilized a naturalistic inquiry method where the human being served as the primary instrument. Naturalistic inquiry employs four elements; “purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data obtained from the sample, development of grounded theory based on the inductive analysis, and projection of next steps in a constantly emergent design” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 187).

After I received the initial list of potential participants I sent an e-mail communication to all potential interviewees (see Appendix A for a copy of the e-mail). Some follow-up occurred with phone calls or in person in order to secure the total number of interviews.

Once students responded, they were asked to set up an interview time that best fit their schedule. All but one interview took place on the campus of St. Mary’s University between June of 2006 and February of 2007. One interview was conducted at an off-campus restaurant to best accommodate the student’s schedule. No monetary incentive was offered for participating in the interview. If the interview time fell during a meal time, however, I offered to purchase a meal for the student. While I had not previously met 13 of the students interviewed, I did have some previous interaction with the other 11 students. None, however, were under my direct supervision.

The interviews were semi-structured and guided by a question protocol (see Appendix B for protocol). I aimed to build a rapport with each student and have a non-threatening, comfortable interview environment. An initial set of questions was formulated, and during the first interview, two additional questions emerged. Other than these two additional questions, no other changes were made to the protocol questions. Prior to the actual interview, I gave a brief introduction of the research, and presented the student with an informed consent form (see Appendix C for form). Both the participant and I signed and dated the form. These are kept in a locked storage. I chose not to give participants any operational definitions related to faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, so as not to introduce bias.

I used two methods to collect data from the interviews. I took written field notes and used audio tapes to record the interviews. The audio tapes were transcribed in a word processor format. I then checked all audio tapes against the transcripts in their original state. Member checking was a two-step process. Initially, I asked students during the interview for clarification when needed and summarized general findings. Additionally, I had offered each student the opportunity to read his or her transcripts and offer any changes he or she felt were appropriate. Half the students interviewed reviewed their transcripts. The remaining students did not respond to requests to review their interview transcript. Following each interview, I sent a thank you note to each participant. I then updated all participants as to the progress of the research upon completion of all interviews, member checking transcriptions and at the conclusion of data processing.

The edited transcribed interviews were unitized and printed onto four-by-six index cards. Each card was coded and printed sequentially. I utilized a system developed by Elsa Gonzalez y Gonzalez to format and print all cards (2007). The codes included some demographic information about the student interviewed. For example, I#10FJRHB12 was interview # 10,

female, junior, Hispanic, business school major, card number 12. All cards were stored in boxes which are kept in locked storage.

I analyzed the cards using the constant comparative method presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as cited by Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 339). Once all cards were unitized and printed, I analyzed each card and compared it to each previous card. Cards that held similar pieces of information were kept together, while I created a new stack of cards as new information or data emerged that were not related to the previous categories. This process continued until all cards had been initially categorized and themes began to emerge. Once an initial set of categories emerged, I analyzed each category again and re-categorized as needed. Although some changes did occur with categorizing and subsets, the general larger themes that initially emerged remained intact.

Trustworthiness

Unlike positivist paradigm research, naturalistic inquiry does not attempt to establish internal and external validity. Instead, the researcher in a naturalistic paradigm attempts to establish trustworthiness by addressing four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

In order to establish credibility, I employed several strategies, including: prolonged engagement in the field; peer debriefing; and member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that using these criteria can help to operationalize steps for gaining credibility. First, I have been involved with the University where the research took place for almost fifteen years. An established presence on the campus allowed for establishing trust with the students interviewed rather easily. Additionally, I work with programs and initiatives that aid in student success; therefore, already I had a knowledge base of issues related to faculty and student interaction.

I also engaged in peer debriefing. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, peer debriefing “is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). I was able to debrief and interact with another professional on the campus of St. Mary’s University. This professional is knowledgeable about faculty issues, student success correlates and the campus culture. She has over seven years of experience at St. Mary’s University and is familiar with the research topic. This process involved allowing the peer debriefer to review some of the transcripts, engage in a discussion about coding categories and general hypotheses, and helping to test overall reactions to the data.

A second debriefer, a fellow graduate student, was asked to serve as an inquiry auditor. This individual reviewed and provided feedback on the methodological aspects of the research, and can verify the completeness of the audit trail. The inquiry auditor produced a letter explaining the process and findings of the audit (see Appendix D).

Additionally, I employed several steps of member checks. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “member checking is both informal and formal, and it occurs continuously” (p. 314). Initially, I was careful to ask follow-up and clarifying questions while interviewing so as to ensure the students’ intents were interpreted as clearly as possible. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I also allowed the students interviewed to have an opportunity to review the transcripts.

Transferability

Thick description is one of the best strategies employed to aid in allowing the reader to consider the transferability of the data presented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By including as much as possible in the presentation of the data, readers can best judge how the data and conclusions most impact their reality. A cross-section of students were interviewed to provide a picture of as

much of the campus as possible. Additionally, I kept a reflexive journal to chronicle researcher bias, feelings and theories as the research progressed, first impressions of students interviewed, and overall perceptions of the questions at hand.

Dependability and Confirmability

I sought assistance from an inquiry auditor in order to help satisfy concerns on dependability and confirmability. The auditor's first task was to authenticate the records of the researcher and examine the product for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Secondly, the auditor determined that the audit trail was complete. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state: "The auditor's first concern will be to ascertain whether the findings are grounded in the data, a matter easily determined if appropriate audit trail linkages have been established" (p. 323). This audit helps to ascertain that the findings are based on the data and not relying solely on the researcher's personal interpretations. A letter from the inquiry auditor is included in Appendix D.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans. (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, p. 4)

The focus of this research was faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction of students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The theoretical framework guiding this research was the work of Gamson and Chickering (1987) in authoring the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. The authors believed that encouraging contact between students and faculty is a key factor in student motivation and involvement. They were able to identify seven principles by analyzing research related to educational practices that promote high levels of learning and personal development. All of these principles can at some level relate to the important relationship between faculty members and their students. Other principles that address the areas of improving undergraduate education include: developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, encouraging active learning, providing prompt and appropriate feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

Four research questions anchored the inquiry into faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction: In what ways do students interact with faculty outside of the classroom? What do students believe makes for high quality interactions? How do student perceptions of the quality of their interactions with faculty change over their time at the University? How can St. Mary's promote high quality faculty-student interaction?

Initially, the research questions sought to learn ways in which students interacted with faculty members outside of the classroom and what students believed made for high quality interaction. Additionally, I wanted to learn how student perceptions of the quality of their interaction with faculty changed over their time at the University and how the University could promote more high quality faculty-student interaction.

The qualitative nature of the research allowed for understanding the subject in as much detail as possible. Many studies have affirmed the importance of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction (Tinto, 1987; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, et al., 2005). Most of these studies, however, were quantitative in nature and looked at the effect of faculty-student interaction on student outcomes from the perspective of quantity and types of interaction. Researchers have called for additional inquiry that examines the issue of faculty-student interaction from the student's perspective of quality (Lohr, 2004; Pascarella, 1980; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005). This research project has attempted to address those calls and to capture new insight about the subject.

The Subject Institution

Powerful Programs, Personal Attention. St. Mary's is unique in that there's that personal interest that faculty really take, I know it's splashed across telephone books and on billboards, but it really, to people who have come to St. Mary's, I think it really does make a lot of sense, it really does hit home [#10MSRHB27].

St. Mary's University was founded in 1852 by the Society of Mary. Its mission as a Catholic, Marianist University is to foster the formation of people in faith and educate leaders for the common good through community, integrated liberal arts and professional education, and academic excellence. The University is classified as a Masters L level institution by the Carnegie Foundation. In the fall of 2006, 2,400 undergraduate students were enrolled at the University in one of its three undergraduate colleges. The University also hosts students in

masters and PhD level programs as well as in the School of Law. The University is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), with an undergraduate Hispanic population of 69% for fall 2006. Women made up 60 % of the undergraduate population in the fall of 2006.

Student Participants

The participants in this study were all undergraduate students during the fall of 2006. They represented a cross section of undergraduate majors and were representative of the ethnic breakdowns of the overall undergraduate population. Table 1 outlines the demographic profile of student participants, including gender, ethnicity, classification and undergraduate college.

TABLE 1. Demographics of Participants by Type			
Type			
Gender	Female		13
	Male		11
Classification	Freshman		1
	Sophomore		7
	Junior		6
	Senior		10
Ethnicity	Hispanic		15
	Non-Hispanic		9
		Asian	3
		African American	1
		Caucasian	5
School of Major	Bill Greehey School of Business		8
	School of Humanities and Social Sciences		8
	School of Science, Engineering, and Technology		8

Organization of the Chapter

The presentation of the data is organized under each of the four research questions. Additionally, a fifth section has been added to present further information gathered from the interviews, focusing mainly on ways in which faculty behavior inside of the classroom affects outside of classroom interaction between faculty and students. The questions asked during the interviews were not equivalent to the research questions, but provided the opportunity to gain insight into faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction in multiple ways.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked: In what ways do students interact with faculty out of the classroom? All interviews began with the initial two-part question: Do you interact with faculty outside of classes? If so, how?

Initially, all but two of the respondents indicated that they interacted with faculty members outside of class. The two students who initially responded that they did not interact immediately began to realize they did interact with faculty outside of the classroom. Once students were asked to identify the ways in which they interacted with faculty outside of the classroom, their responses clustered around six themes: course-related activities; traveling for conferences or study abroad; casual interactions around campus; interaction focusing on career and graduate school plans; visiting with faculty in their offices; and, participating in student organizations/clubs and athletic activities.

Course-related Activities

Students identified course-related out-of-classroom activities as some of their most meaningful interactions with faculty members. Many of these activities were anchored around a class. It seems that the “structure” given to these interactions provided a less-threatening

environment in which to engage faculty in all different types of interaction. These types of interaction also offered the foundation for additional out-of-classroom interaction.

I have been to their house and ate dinner with them. When I went, it was for a senior class and they had a whole bunch of faculty, mainly in the [undergraduate] school, and students from the class and others, some graduating seniors [#9MSRHB4-5].

And then there's also a program, it's called "Think", and a few teachers come in there and it's like a discussion board where we talk about current issues and just what we think about everything [#7FSRAS5].

Actually, for that class, [the music professor] had symphony tickets, so me and a few other students went to the symphony together and at the time I didn't have a car so he gave us a ride, so that was pretty cool [#24FSOHH4].

[We talked about] politics, mostly, because last semester was the first time I voted and he gave the class extra credit for voting, which I thought was a really neat way to get new students involved in civic engagement [#25FFRWH7].

Well, I think, definitely the first thing that comes to mind is working with the VITA program (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance). That's a lot of fun. I think it's really helpful for the student, in terms of picking up basic work skills in tax preparation [#10MSRHB8].

Many students in the business school mentioned the VITA program in particular. This program allowed students to spend a significant amount of time with faculty members outside of the classroom and build strong relationships. The program runs for several weeks in the spring leading up to the April 15 tax filing deadline. Students and faculty members, along with additional volunteers, work on Saturdays in helping community members with their tax preparation.

Several students spoke of this program and mentioned it had become a highlight of their collegiate career. The structure of the program, training and actual work time, coupled with the close working relationship with faculty members really makes this program unique. It allows faculty and students to come together in a non-threatening, learning environment and learn more

about each other as persons. For the students who participated in it, the program was not only an extension of their course-work, but allowed them to really feel a part of the larger community and see how their work could impact those around them.

The value of course-related activities can be multi-faceted and certainly offers many opportunities for growth and development of students.

Traveling for Conferences or Study Abroad

Conference travel and study abroad experiences were other ways in which students interacted with faculty members outside of the classroom. These types of experiences inherently prompt prolonged engagement with students and faculty. They allow for a relationship and trust to be built, unlike many other interactions. Students' examples included:

There's my debate coach, [who] you go on tournaments with and interact outside of class [#4FJRHB6].

Conferences and stuff like that, so I think you see them in a different light [#14MJRHB6].

Well, the [service trip to that country], that was awesome, but not everybody gets a chance. Just to be able to go in there and to see them care about us, they're not just like mean people, just seeing that they care, so just going to ask questions and they're always there to help [#15FJRWS5].

When describing travel, one student commented how these experiences inherently lead to more out-of-classroom interaction. She was an upperclassman who had the opportunity to complete two study abroad programs. She considers her travels and interaction with faculty a highlight of her undergraduate education. Coming in to college, she was not convinced that a formal college education was for her. She had an entrepreneurial spirit and felt the world could offer a wealth of knowledge and experience for any person. In being able to meet faculty, however, and gaining respect for them, she saw her college education in a new light. Traveling with faculty

allowed her to see that these persons also had real-life experience and actually “knew what they were talking about.”

Well, there are two instances that pop out immediately; if you study abroad, that interaction with the professor is pretty personal. You spend plenty of time with the professors, traveling to the airports and outside of the classroom you all travel around the cities together. I just got back from [the study abroad location]. I was in [the professor’s home] several times. [The professor and his wife], here in town, they had some reunions for us and then over in [the study abroad location] they had a couple of reunions for us in their home [#3FSRWB2].

Travel abroad and to conferences can be an expensive venture and one not all students can afford. Students who had the experience, however, really saw it as a highlight of their educational experience at St. Mary’s.

Casual Interactions around Campus

Students also gave many examples of casual contact with faculty members around campus. Being a small campus was mentioned as helping to promote such contact. Eating venues around campus were listed prominently. These types of interaction made faculty members seem more approachable outside of the classroom.

I have some teachers that are really great. Whenever I just see them, like in between classes, they’ll stop and talk and say “Hello” [#18FSOWH3].

Occasionally, in the cafeteria, a faculty [member] would invite me to sit with them over lunch or whenever that is, [or] go for coffee every now and then [#16MSRIWS3].

I think it’s had a positive effect on my side, you know, and it can just be a simple act of saying hi to them when they’re in the cafeteria [#14MJRHB14].

Well, our campus is very small, so a lot of your faculty know you by name, by first name. You’ll see them at Java City, or they’ll sit down and have lunch with you and, I mean, pretty much during school hours, just small talk and things like that [#12FSOHH3].

I just saw my Spanish professor from last semester. On the way to work today I passed her and she wanted to know how I was doing and she was glad I was working and getting job experience, and I appreciated that [#4FJRHB12].

When I talk with faculty outside of the classroom, it's not just faculty I've had, [who] were my teachers, faculty in general, you know, I talk to professors I've never had classes with, and I've gotten to know them pretty well [#16MSRIAS13].

An upperclassman who is an international student detailed how his casual interactions outside of the classroom made him feel an intimate part of the campus community. There were many school holiday breaks when he could not get back home, and he had examples of how faculty and staff members, including Marianist brothers and priests, welcomed him with open arms. On several occasions he was invited to visit a Marianist community for a meal and conversation. These casual, sometimes impromptu, interactions really connected this student to the University. As a result he stated that he felt comfortable speaking to all faculty and staff on campus.

Interaction Focusing on Career and Graduate School Plans

Out-of-classroom interaction also encompassed activities and conversations about career choices, educational aspirations and graduate school plans. Students expressed that these were important, not only because they were meaningful interactions, but ultimately because they were a benefit of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

I ask them for advice. For example, right now with graduate school, I go to my professors and ask them about graduate school and how to apply, and tips, and stuff like that [#8MSRHH3].

I would probably say that I came in here undecided, so I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do, so I talked to [the faculty member] a lot to just kind of feel my way through all of my different interests. That was a very meaningful impact on an academics and what I want to do with my life [#24FSOHH6].

I want to go to graduate school so I am trying to get her to help me make sure that I have everything ready, [for] when I'm ready to graduate [#2MSRHS5].

A lot of the times our discussions will lead to my future, things that I want to do and their experiences that they share with me, a lot of them have already taken the path that I want to take [#20MSRHH6].

One upperclassman of Hispanic background said that faculty members and their advice had been instrumental in his internship and career decisions. Although he had not taken advantage of faculty relationships early on in his college career, he began to learn of all the networking contacts faculty members had and understood the importance of connecting with faculty in seeking opportunities related to his major and career. Initially, this student had not considered out-of-state opportunities, but when considering two prestigious internship offers, he took some time to talk to his faculty members. As a result, he took the challenge of going out-of-state for an internship and has since accepted a job offer for a desirable position with the same company. He processed through his thoughts of staying close to family versus taking a new opportunity, and found that his new opportunity also gives him the chance to give back to his family. He believes he would not have had most of his career opportunities had it not been for building relationships with his faculty members.

Other students expressed:

They have influenced me in the career path that I've chosen and the position that I've taken, and I think they've also helped me look beyond my career in public accounting, like what you could do beyond public accounting [#10MSRHB21].

I do interact with [faculty]. I've had internships and decisions as far as career-wise that I consult my advisors [about] [#9MSRHB3].

We were talking about my major and what I would want to accomplish and she was telling me "if you want to go into something like administration you should try to do the Washington Semester, and try to see the types of things you would be good at." It was good encouragement [#19MSOHH7].

Discussing career choices, life-long career-paths, and other career-oriented issues helped students get to know faculty members more personally. These conversations also helped

students to see faculty members as caring persons who had a stake in what happened to students as individuals.

Visiting with Faculty in Offices

Visiting with faculty members in their offices was the most often-mentioned form of out-of-classroom interaction. Previous research had found that most faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction began with students approaching faculty about class-related issues (Lohr, 2004). These findings seem to affirm those conclusions. This type of interaction was characterized by several different motivations.

There was one professor particularly during my freshman year, my philosophy professor, and for maybe four or five or six class periods, after class we would just sit and talk about whatever we discussed in class for a while [#4FJRHB4].

A couple of my professors had made meetings outside of class mandatory and so I've met with them outside of class to talk about progress in the class and that kind of thing [#4FJRHB5].

The only time I actually do talk to my teachers is maybe if I have a question on homework, or like something academically related [#7FSRAS3].

I usually go by and speak to [my professor] once or twice a semester....I [have] spent a lot of time speaking to her since I've been here [#9MSRHB16].

I'm the type of student where, if I'm not getting what I need, I'll come to the office [#11FJRHS9].

I use their office hours to my advantage and I will go in there and ask questions, not for all classes, mainly for my core classes, my major classes, and so I have taken advantage of them, just if I ever have any questions. I've never really called anybody on the phone, but I have [e-mailed] a lot of them [#15FJRWS3].

One time, I just went for help on an essay. I got the help on the essay, but then I starting talking, we starting talking more about the things I want to do besides the class and it's just given me more encouragement to try to do something else [#19MSOHH6].

Just after everything was turned in, all our final papers, I just went in on my own and sat down and talked to her and asked her what was going on in her life and she asked me what was going on in mine, and we talked for a while [#1FJRHH6].

Just like that little time period before class starts, if I get there early, that's usually when I get to know my teachers better [#7FSRAS7].

One student spoke much about building relationship with faculty by visiting them in their offices often. This student was an upperclassman who said he was quite comfortable with going to see his faculty in their offices. Additionally, he believed that their availability helped him gain confidence in his academic ability. For example, he felt he could casually go to an office and ask if he was headed in the right direction with a writing assignment. Even on one late night the upperclassman was working on an assignment and called the faculty member to see if he was in his office. The faculty member was in his office and invited the student to come over so they could talk about the assignment. The student believed that taking advantage of office hours and office availability certainly helped him as a student. Some of the comments include the two below:

I feel really comfortable going to a number of my advisors, or any professors in either of my departments to ask for help. I do have almost friend-like relationships with a couple of my professors who after class we can just talk about anything, which is pretty neat [#20MSRHH3].

I like talking to my professors....I do probably on a weekly basis, interact with professors outside of the classroom, a couple of times per week [#20MSRHH4].

Several students mentioned the advantage of visiting with faculty members just prior to the beginning of the class period. Some of the visits were related to homework questions, but others were a regular part of building a rapport with the faculty member.

Participating in Student Organizations/Clubs and Athletic Activities

Interacting in student activities was a positive way to see faculty members in a different light. Some of these interactions were with major-related clubs exemplified in the following:

I interact mostly with my accounting professors because I'm involved with a lot of things like the accounting club, so, my advisor for the accounting club is also my advisor of academics, so I interact with him a lot [#13FSRAAB2].

Additionally, one student mentioned participating with faculty members through intramural and basketball pick-up games. Interacting with faculty around campus activities was mentioned several times as a suggestion for promoting faculty-student interaction and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Interacting with faculty during such activities frames an opportunity for students to see faculty as “normal” human beings. There is enough structure in the activities to allow students to not feel too intimidated in entering into the interaction. One male student in particular spoke of playing “noon-ball” with faculty and staff members. He said that because he was able to see his faculty members in such a setting, he felt more comfortable approaching those faculty members in other settings, such as offices and around campus.

Overall, interaction appears to happen most frequently with faculty members within a student's major. One of the questions asked of students was to give the names of faculty members who have made the most impact on them. Overwhelmingly, students mentioned faculty who were in their majors. The University has a faculty-based advising system, where students have to meet with their academic adviser in order to register for classes. Unless a student changes his or her major, the student will typically meet with the same faculty member from their freshman year on, at least once per semester. Full-time, tenured professors do teach freshmen level courses; the University does not have any teaching or graduate assistants teaching classes (some do assist in labs). This phenomenon may assist in students getting to know their faculty better early on in their time at the University.

In summary, all students had some type of interaction with faculty members outside of the classroom. The types of faculty-student out-of-classroom interactions clustered around six

themes representing both social and academic types of interaction. Students were able to easily give examples of their interaction. The themes included: course-related activities; traveling for conferences or study abroad; casual interactions around campus; interaction focusing on career and graduate school plans; visiting with faculty in their offices; and, participating in student organizations/clubs and athletic activities. The most common type of interaction mentioned was visiting with faculty in their offices. One type of interaction that was seldom mentioned was interaction with faculty via the use of technology. When interviewing students, I refrained from using operational definitions so as not to introduce bias. As a result, I believe students concentrated their answers on face-to-face interaction. The culture of the St. Mary's University campus is also one that encourages personal relationships, and therefore might bias interaction as that happening face-to-face.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked what students believed made for high quality interaction. Several questions were asked to address the issue of the quality of such interaction. Initially, I asked students to describe the quality of their interaction with faculty outside of the classroom. This question seemed to stump most of the students. Most answers were simple and short.

Very good [#21MSOHS6].

They're all, I mean, pretty positive [#22MJRWS9].

I would say for the most part they are very good because [faculty members are] just really open to talking [#24FSOHH8].

I would consider them very good [#17FSOHB6].

It's all been positive so far [#18FSOWH6].

I'd say it's a really good quality, actually [#2MSRHS14].

I would say very professional [#1FJRHH1].

The quality I would say is really good and I would compare it to them as professors themselves. I think the quality of professors we have here is really high, so the experience I have outside the classroom with them is just as high and just as qualified [#20MSRHH8].

In order to gain more insight into what the students believed made for high quality interaction, I asked the students to describe their most meaningful faculty-student out-of-classroom interactions as well as how they believed faculty members had made an impact on them as students. Themes for high quality interaction centered on: 1) faculty members being approachable and personable; 2) faculty members having enthusiasm and passion for their work; 3) faculty members caring about students personally; and, 4) faculty members serving as role models and mentors. Additionally, students identified inhibitors of high quality interaction.

Most students described positive relationships by using examples of faculty approachability. Throughout the interviews, several examples were given of being intimidated at first by faculty members. All of the students interviewed had an experience that allowed them to view faculty members as approachable and personable, thereby facilitating such interaction.

It's amazing to find out how approachable all of them are. My interactions with them have not always been regarding school work, but also my personal issues, and just to learn how much they are willing to help you without crossing any limits is great [#6FSRIAB8].

They just seem very, very welcoming to, if you need to meet with them outside of class, then you're able to. They make themselves available [#14 MJRHB4].

So, I'd say that they've helped me with that a lot because I can just go talk to them. You can talk to almost anybody on this campus because faculty is so open [#2MSRHS20].

Every time you walk through the hallways, I mean, they all have open doors and they're usually ready to help [#2MSRHS15].

He made me feel real comfortable. I had left for a year and when I came back, he was trying to get me into classes...When a class was full already, because I registered kind of late, he called all the teachers and he made sure he could squeeze me in and he called me daily and was like "I haven't contacted this teacher yet, but when I do I'll let you know to make sure you get in the class," so I think he was real helpful. He made me feel real comfortable [#2MSRHS10].

One student in particular was pretty shy and overwhelmed at first by the whole college experience. She was pleasantly surprised through her years at St. Mary's to encounter faculty members who really cared about her as a person, took an interest in her talents beyond just the classroom, and thought of her for out-of-classroom opportunities. She states:

They are very relatable [#1FJRHH13].

It's nice, because for a while when I started college I [thought that] professors and students are completely separate and they are so much higher than we are, [but] being here a while....these people are teaching us so we can become their equals, not so they can continue to become higher, superior [#1FJRHH45].

A female student in the sciences had transferred in from another very competitive institution and program. She commented on how faculty learned who she was by name and how they made her feel very comfortable about her decision to transfer to St. Mary's. She came from a highly educated family with high expectations, and wondered if a smaller campus environment would combine the personal attention with academic excellence. She was pleasantly surprised to find St. Mary's was outstanding in both areas. She comments:

They were my first teachers when I transferred here, and they were very accommodating, you know, very welcoming and I think I could approach them quite easily [#7FSRAS17].

He's just a very funny guy, he's lively and he's down to earth and you can really just talk to him about anything and he's just straight with you and he'll joke around, which is fun and makes everything lighter [#7FSRAS18].

[This professor] is my first teacher that I actually got to know [who] actually knew my name [#7FSRAS19].

All of the previous examples helped students describe how faculty members made it more comfortable for students to approach them. This theme will be further explored in conclusions and recommendations.

One of the themes that emerged was around the issue of faculty members having passion and enthusiasm for their work. Students described why this quality increased the level of respect students had for them. Faculty members' passion also impacted the likelihood that students would interact with them outside of the classroom.

Well, [this professor] in particular, he was in charge of the [study abroad] program and he had so much enthusiasm for it and he taught us a class online and we read a few books and we'd travel to [the city] and we'd do tours and stuff. He was just very genuine and enthusiastic and he cared about what he had to say and he cared about the program and you could tell in his actions and everything he did [#3FSRWB15].

When a teacher has enthusiasm for a subject and it shows, they inspire me to learn about it, and I think that improves what I learn about it, too, because if I have an interest in something, I'll go the extra mile [#3FSRWB28].

Students also gave numerous examples of quality interactions with faculty who showed how much they cared about them as students. Personal attention was at the heart of the examples. St. Mary's University, in general, is very committed to building community and caring for students. The student responses emphasized these characteristics.

When I think about St. Mary's, I think about personal attention, which is what is advertised. When I came here as a freshman, I was like, wow, they weren't just using that to get us to come, they were really telling the truth [#20MSRHH24].

Teachers here really make it a priority to help their students and just make sure they do well [#7FSRAS31].

For the most part, they have a genuine concern for what you are talking about and they care about your grades. If you show an effort, they show an effort, and that is what I appreciate [#3FSRWB12].

Also, if I need help with any on-campus issues or finding anything, they would help me by directing me to the right place. For example, if I need a tutor or a counselor, they wouldn't hesitate to help me [#6FSRIAB6].

One of my other professors called me on my dorm phone because he needed a tutor for somebody else, and I thought that was really cool because it was personal [#24FSOHH13].

They really care about their students, so I think that is very good [#17FSOHB14].

They're very helpful. The students are not just a number to them, they actually know [students] by name, so I think that's very good and important [#17FSOHB5].

Well, just this year, one of my professors, I think she went to a conference, and they were just handing out free copies of [a book] and she was like "Oh, I picked you up one because I know you're a [specific] major." And I just thought that was really cool for her to think of me like that [#18FSOWH4].

I told [my professor] that I wanted to do an internship, and she actually went out and researched what I [could] do. She looked up the number and everything—I already have the number. I just need to call [#19MSOHH10].

Caring for students' personally resonated with students and helped them view faculty members as persons who really want to help students succeed at the University.

Many examples centered on a student's tackling a personal issue and the faculty member being able to empathize and help with the issue. In some instances, these interactions were described as the most meaningful interactions students had experienced with their faculty.

We sat down and had a heart-to-heart talk and he uncovered some of my past that I don't like to remember, and I got very emotional. He closed the door, and he let me cry in there. He said he went through some of the things I went through before I came here, and it just felt better to have somebody, just connect with somebody like that deeply, especially my first day coming here [#23MSOHS4].

It's their encouragement, because I know one day I was, I saw my grade on ATROX [on-line system] and I just started crying. I burst into tears. I was like "I can't do it anymore." I was going to the [school] building trying to find the professor that gave me the grade and I ran into [another] teacher, and he was like "what's wrong" and I was crying and I said "nothing's wrong" and he said "something's wrong [Susan]" and he

gave me a hug and he's like "what's wrong" and [I said] I just saw my grade and he [said] "okay, calm down, don't do anything rash, and we'll talk about it later," and he gave me a hug and that was really nice [#13FSRAAB4].

My first semester when I had my issue with my roommate, I was still able to go and talk to my advisor about it, and that's because after [our] first meeting, she told me you could talk to me about anything, even if it's not academic [#12FSOHH12].

He has always been there for me, and my junior year was very tough and because my professors were there, I can say this, I made it through [#6FSRIAB27].

For some of these students, these experiences have made a significant impact on their collegiate career. Knowing they could turn to a faculty member was key in getting through some difficult times.

When students spoke of faculty members having an impact on them, they described some high quality interactions in which they saw their faculty members as role models and mentors. These interactions were described as having made an impact on their success as students.

He's been a mentor to me, as a Hispanic leader, and we've had casual conversations in the university setting and we have a personal relationship as well outside of the classroom [#10MSRHB20].

Sometimes you might feel discouraged and they will tell you "yeah, don't worry about it" and "you can do it" because they might know your abilities more than you do sometimes, because they see you from the outside [#8MSRHH14].

I had a chance to see how, I guess, in a sense [what] their success has brought, I mean how they are today, and I go often, so I see their many awards, I see all their books, and I kind of tell myself "yeah, that's what I want," you know, I want to be able to reach that point [#1FJRHH31].

He's excellent. I would consider him my mentor this year at St. Mary's. He's an excellent advisor, excellent professor, and he promotes that student-teacher relationship. He wants us to know that if you have anything to talk about, even if it's something that is going on, you know, personal-wise, that he's there to talk to us and to be there for us [#20MSRHH12].

A freshman female in humanities elaborated on how faculty could serve as role models or mentors while at the same time instilling confidence in students' academic abilities. Her experience with one faculty member in particular made a lasting impact for her entire first semester at the University. She explains:

He had so much confidence in me. I guess I did a 180 in that class, because at first I thought "I'm never going to get this stuff, it's pointless." And then, by the end of the semester he was encouraging me to be a [subject] major. That made me feel really good, you know, that I had improved in the class that much [#25FFRWH13].

In some instances, students saw their faculty as mentors because they had taken the time to recommend students for some honor.

Well, he got me interested in politics and I would talk a lot in class and ended up getting a good grade and [the professor] called me one day and said, "Hey, there's this internship, why don't you apply for it?" After some time, he kind of pushed me, because I originally did not want to do it. I just wanted to get a job, and so he e-mailed me again and said "go ahead, call them." And I got the internship [#21MSOHS7-8].

She had nominated me for a scholarship...I ended up winning [#23MSOHS8].

First of all, she honored me by suggesting me to be that [part of a board]. I didn't feel like our connection was that strong, and then she approached me outside of the classroom and said, "Hey, I wanted to volunteer you for this, is that okay?", and I was like, "Of course!" [#3FSRWB6].

Taking the opportunity to recommend a student or help them in achieving an honor was a huge honor for these students. Such examples reiterate the idea of faculty members caring about students personally. Such interest and concern on the part of faculty also creates a sense of confidence, hope, and achievement in students, characteristics they might not have come to college feeling.

The quality of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction is affected by many factors, including the faculty-student relationship inside of the classroom. Students identified factors that would inhibit them from interacting with faculty outside of the classroom. When students

were asked how actions inside of the classroom affected outside of the classroom interaction, they were able to articulate eloquently their observations. Some of the examples were related to a lack of respect for the faculty member based on the student's classroom experience.

Sometimes if a professor isn't fully utilizing their time in the classroom or doesn't appear to be as serious as the student may have expected, I don't think there's that same interest on behalf of the student to approach that professor with other types of questions [#10MSRHB18].

He was so boring in the classroom, and he kind of talked down to us too, and I think that's another thing that professors should avoid, that if you talk down to students, if you don't give them the same respect that you expect from them, they're not going to respect you [#3FSRWB24].

I guess if I can't appreciate them as professors [teaching], it's harder for me to appreciate them as people, you know, outside of the classroom, because outside of the classroom it's more a person-to-person interaction [#4FJRHB16].

I think if there's a professor who is particularly snappy at students [in the classroom], or like, really short with them, that students will be more hesitant to have interaction with them outside of the classroom [#25FFRWH16].

You don't want to take things personally, but sometimes they may say something that they may not think is offensive but it is, and if you feel offended by someone who's teaching, you're not going to want to interact with them outside of the classroom [#20MSRHH10].

For many students, what happens inside of the classroom clearly affects what happens outside of the classroom. They see inside and outside of the classroom interaction as inherently interconnected. Students overall said they took faculty more seriously, had more respect for them, and put forth more effort in their courses when they got to know faculty personally outside of the classroom. One student mentioned how knowing faculty more personally helped him to see where the faculty was coming from and added insight into their teaching style, in turn making the faculty members seem more interesting in teaching their subject. Even when students viewed faculty members as boring in the classroom, once students got to know the

faculty better, they wanted to enjoy the class more, pay more attention, and basically gave faculty a “break” in their perception of the class.

Overall, respondents had many positive examples of their interaction with faculty members outside of the classroom. When asked to describe meaningful interactions some rich data emerged. Out-of-classroom interaction does make a meaningful impact on students’ collegiate lives, but within-classroom interaction may be equally important.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked if students’ perceptions of the quality of interactions changed over the time they were at the University. The sample of respondents included more students who were in their final two years at the institution than in their first two years. There were eight students classified as freshmen or sophomores and 16 classified as juniors and seniors in the fall of 2006, so as to collect exceptionally rich data on this particular question.

I looked at the possible differences by analyzing data and comparing freshmen and sophomore responses to those of juniors and seniors. When looking at the question “How would you describe the quality of your interactions with faculty outside of the classroom?” there were not any significant differences between the groups. In analyzing the types of out-of-classroom interaction, there were some differences in some categories. More juniors and seniors mentioned going to a professor’s home for a meal, and more of them mentioned volunteering with a faculty member for something related to a class or their major. In relation to visiting with faculty in their offices, juniors and seniors seemed more inclined and confident in doing so and proportionately mentioned more instances where they chose to do so. Table 2 below illustrates the number of students mentioning the different types of interaction.

TABLE 2. Number of Students Who Identified the Following Types of Out-of-Classroom Contact with Faculty Members						
	Travel/Study Abroad	Student Organizations/ Athletics	Course-Related Activities	Casual Campus Contact	Going to Faculty Offices	Talking about Career/ Graduate School
Freshman	0	0	1	0	1	1
Sophomore	1	3	2	5	3	3
Junior	3	2	1	4	5	1
Senior	2	6	6	2	7	6

The most pronounced differences between the two groups were in relation to types of interaction, specifically, going to faculty offices and speaking with faculty members about career or graduate school goals. Four of the eight freshmen and sophomores spoke of interacting with their faculty members related to career discussions. Those who shared examples were struggling with declaring a major, and faculty members helped them in making the decision. Their examples were not as rich or complex as those of the upperclassmen. That underclassmen did not interact as frequently with faculty about career and graduate school decisions should not be surprising, whereas juniors and seniors would view them as more immediate in nature. In addition, freshmen and sophomores had only one example of traveling or studying abroad. Again, these findings are not surprising since typically freshmen are not encouraged or eligible to study abroad. Conference attendance is usually tied either to a discipline-specific professional development opportunity or to a leadership development opportunity. These experiences are usually reserved for students who are deeply immersed in their major, usually upperclassmen, or for those students who are officers or paraprofessionals within co-curricular activities.

Most students throughout the course of the interviews identified benefits to faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. More juniors and seniors identified such benefits. Table 3 below shows some of these differences.

TABLE 3. Number of Students Who Stated the Following Benefits of Out-of-Classroom Interaction with Faculty Members

	Increased Comfort/ Confidence	Recommendation Letters/ Recommendations for Internships	Making Yourself Known	Academic Help/ Grades	Understanding Faculty Better/ Increased Respect
Freshman	1	0	0	0	0
Sophomore	2	3	1	1	0
Junior	0	1	3	2	2
Senior	8	7	6	2	1

Additionally, of the nine examples given by students as to faculty members serving as role models and mentors, eight were juniors and seniors.

When freshmen or sophomores spoke of the quality of their interaction and identified benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, they spoke about feeling more comfortable and getting help with grades.

There are some faculty that I feel very comfortable being able to talk to them about work. If I'm having a problem with something, that [interaction] will help me in the long run with my grades [#17FSOHB11].

Well, [interaction] has given me, of course, more encouragement. Like I said, last year [I thought] "Oh, I'm just a freshman, I can't do anything", but still, I'm a college student, so, that means I could do more than I think I can do [#19SOHH15].

[Interaction] gives you that level of comfort, especially for me because I am five hours from home.....it gives you that person that you can turn to if you're having an issue [#12FSOHH11].

In contrast, juniors and seniors had richer examples of short-term and long-term benefits of faculty-student, out-of-classroom interaction.

I believe that if the interaction between faculty and you is strictly in the classroom, then the only basis for them to know you will be your grades. Grades do not always define the kind of person you are. I might be doing great in one class and not in the other. That doesn't mean I am not working hard in that class. I guess in class they can observe our strengths and weaknesses in one subject, but outside [they observe] more of our character, I would say [#6FSRIAB17].

By talking to the teachers, I actually found out it helps a lot, it's a big part of college compared to high school..... I think interacting with your professors, making yourself known to them and making sure they know who you are and know that you are interested in their subject, I think a lot of it is up to the student [#2MSRHS26].

When one student was asked how out-of-classroom interaction had made a difference in his success as a student, he said “in the first two years, none” [#9MSRHB18]. He went on to explain that once he got to know his faculty members better, they made more of a difference in his success. In conducting the interviews, I did not give students any operational definitions, including one for student success. When students spoke of their success, however, it seemed they were referring to grades in classes, graduating with a degree and overall career goals experience and clarification.

Juniors and seniors also spoke of the importance of recommendation letters, networking contacts, and general information about internships. No freshmen but three sophomores mentioned any of these benefits.

I think just building a strong relationship, even if it isn't something more personal, then what I am learning from them, I think it will help me in the long run just to have strong relationships, strong networks and everything, like if I need a recommendation or something, I could go to them [#7FSRAS22].

Sometimes I think we look at professors as simply being teachers, but I think they're really leaders in their fields. They participate actively as professionals outside of the classroom and they really have some good contacts outside of the university environment [#10MSRHB 25].

I couldn't have gotten the internship without their recommendations, [and] I couldn't have gotten the money I received without some of their recommendations [#9MSRHB20].

Although there was not a large number of freshmen and sophomores in the respondent pool, the data yielded some differences and offers insight into how relationships and interaction with faculty members change, strengthen, and mature over a student's collegiate career.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question sought to learn of students' ideas on how the University could promote more faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Students were directly asked: *What can the University do to promote positive faculty and student out-of-classroom interaction?* This question was particularly important for me, since I have worked at the subject institution for over 14 years. I wanted to better inform university administrators on ways in which they could promote more faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, which has been shown to have a positive effect on student success.

When asked this question, several students could not think of any ideas. One said, “can’t think of anything” [#8MSRHH15], while another said “that’s a tough one” [#3FSRWB31]. In the end, however, almost all respondents had ideas for helping to promote faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. For some, not having ideas initially was an issue of who bears the responsibility for initiating faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

I’m not sure what they could do. I don’t think the University could really do anything. It kind of depends on the professor because no matter if you made [students] go to student-faculty events or student-professor events, it’s still whether or not they want to be there, and if they want to be open, and how they fit in, so, I’m not sure if there could be a way [#13FSRAAB13].

I really think it’s pretty much up to the teachers to promote it, but I think the teachers do a pretty good job at promoting it, but I’m not sure how they could do it more [#2MSRHS23].

I’m not sure what else they could do though, because it’s really up to the student to actually make an attempt to go talk to [faculty], but as long as [faculty] make it known that they welcome the students, I think most of the students would know they are there [#2MSRHS25].

Once respondents began to outline ideas for promoting faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, their thoughts and examples were insightful as well as realistic for the campus under study.

Ideas to Promote More Interaction

Most of the ideas given to promote faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction were structured around three themes: promoting social events/interaction; stressing the importance of office hours; and suggestions directed at faculty members.

Some of the literature has stated that the type of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction does make a difference in student outcomes (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Maestas, 2000; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These studies have found that interaction that concentrates on academically-related matters seems to be most effective. In reviewing the data for this research, one thing becomes clear. Some of what might be considered more informal or casual interaction seems to play a foundational part in fostering more academic and career-related interaction. Positive out-of-classroom interaction facilitates other types of interaction. Cotton and Wilson (2006) had similar conclusions in their qualitative study. They determined that “faculty should not discount the benefit of informal, social interactions with students; such contact appears to provide an important foundation for student effort and from which students can begin to pursue more academically oriented interactions” (p. 515).

The respondents in this study gave several examples for encouraging such interaction. Some of the examples focused on social interaction.

Maybe have a ‘luncheon with faculty member day’, or maybe that a class can go with their teacher out to Java [coffee house] or somewhere, and that would give them a chance to socialize [#1FJRHH34].

I think it would be neat if there were more opportunities for us to visit professors in their houses. I don’t necessarily know how the University could help that more, maybe just providing, I know about the grants now that are available to professors who like to host students in their houses, that kind of thing, just more of that kind of thing would be neat [#4FJRHB20].

I guess one, and I think it can be done due to the small classes and such. My sister was telling me that back at her institution sometimes [they] might not have class even at the

university, they just meet at their professor's home for dinner and discuss class. I mean, not necessarily that's what our professors or faculty have to do, but I think just mixing it up a little bit, or maybe just meeting for dinner, or maybe, just small stuff, would make a difference [#14MJRHB10].

I guess just encourage both the students and the faculty to interact with each other. Perhaps have more events which are open to both faculty and students. Most of the activities are open to both faculty and students, but it's either only focusing on students or focusing on faculty, and you don't get that much interaction [#16MSRIAS17].

Maybe department-driven social events [#23MSOHS10].

We have an awesome coffee house which would be great to spark little round-table sessions. Like, have coffee with professors [and] just bring different topics maybe once a month and then you can build that kind of relationship and you'll be able to connect with those professors....just get rid of some of those barriers that we have in the classroom [#12FSOHH13].

[In the 1960's there were events] and [faculty and students] would just share feelings that perhaps they didn't feel comfortable sharing in the classroom. And they would talk, and of course it was a different time so it was a more politically active crowd here at the university. I think maybe those types of sessions or those types of venues should be looked at more closely here at the University. I think Java City has been a step in that direction, but I think just the surrounding community doesn't really have that many venues that are conducive to that kind of dialogue, but I think maybe the University could work toward suggesting more venues [#10MSRHB22].

Overall, one environmental factor was mentioned several times during the interviews.

Locations such as Java City and the cafeteria seem to play a role on facilitating faculty-student interaction. There may be some missed opportunities, however. Students were able to assess that the venues show much promise but have not reached their full potential. Finding ways to “structure” more interaction opportunities might be important in maximizing the use of these spaces. Additionally, breaking bread together in faculty members' homes holds much promise. It seems these types of venues allow for the relationships to form between faculty and students in open yet “safe” environments. Recommendations regarding this theme will be made in Chapter V.

The University should also stress the need to take advantage of faculty members' office hours and general faculty availability. Respondents expressed that students in general do not take advantage of office hours. Some students saw that other students only visited with faculty members around registration time, which is required for academic advising and course selection. The majority of students in this study had interacted with faculty in their offices.

I know sometimes people see their advisors only when they register, so then at the end of the year maybe have a required check-in and that way they could see them another time [#1FJRH35].

Students have a mentality that you go to the advisor only when you need to register for classes, not when you're actually having problems, but an advisor can be there for you whenever you need. They're not only strictly for [the] registration period. So, I guess, make [students] aware of the resources available with the faculty members and advisors [#6FSRIAB21].

Some of the student suggestions pertained to faculty members directly. One student suggested that faculty members should have sign-up sheets for study groups. The suggestion was aimed at reducing the "load" for a faculty member as to "have office hours for individual things" [#11FJRHS17] and have group times to address questions and issues typical to a larger number of students. Other suggestions included:

If from the first day [faculty] let it be known, just like they do with their syllabus, when office hours are, make it be known when they are going to be available, and also if they are available at that time, they can't just say they are available and they're not actually there [#2MSRHS24].

I don't know if this is possible, but the University [could ask] the advisors to have at least one mandatory session towards the middle of the semester to know where the students stand, if they are struggling in any particular class, and if they need help [#6FSRIAB22].

If you suggested to the professors that they should have better interaction with their students for these reasons, if, maybe from this study they'll get some results that will prove that if you interact with your students better they will respect you in class, they

might pay more attention, that sort of thing, maybe that would help....I think it's really hard to force people [#3FSRWB32].

I think people are scared to go talk to people out of class, to just go talk to professors. I guess for them to just be more readily available and stress their office hours, and I guess stress in class that they will help you if ask [#15FJRWS14].

Respondents also mentioned the idea of having faculty members involved in student organizations and clubs, "if teachers could be more active in student organizations"

[#7FSRAS24]. Seeing faculty in a variety of out-of-classroom settings allows students to see them more as persons.

I think if they attend [club] meetings or something and speak, or give an opinion, just seeing them there and with students who actually care. I think that makes a difference because if they put themselves there -- I see it all the time when I go to these programs -- [students] are all motivated, they all want to learn, they all want to make connections and network [#9MSRHB22].

Maybe rearrange some of the syllabus depending on the subject matter....maybe there could be a small percentage of it involving field assignments where [students] can actually go with the professors and do something like that outside of the classroom, and it doesn't have to be directly related to something academic, but just something different that will help develop that outside of the classroom relationship [#14MJRHB15].

Most of the ideas presented by students were similar to examples they gave of high-quality interaction with faculty members. Mostly, these ideas helped to build strong relationships between faculty members and students

Students Advocating for More Interaction

During the first interview, I added a question related to students advocating for faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. This question asked how students would convince new students that they needed to interact with faculty members outside of the classroom. From the interviews, I observed how returning students could have a strong influence on new students in helping them to initiate faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Respondents' insight into

this question provided good advice for all faculty and staff members trying to promote faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Student responses clustered around the following themes: 1) telling freshmen to not be afraid; 2) sharing examples; and, 3) explaining the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

The “do not be afraid” theme was the most prevalent in respondent advice. One student stated she would “tell them, *don’t be afraid*, that if they seem scared to talk to them, [that faculty] are here to help us, that’s their number one priority, to help students” [#17FSOHB13]. Several of the responses around this theme were insightful and directive.

[Faculty are a] little more at ease and more personable outside of the class so, I’d tell [students] first to get over their fear and their intimidation that’s brought on by the whole student-teacher thing, and to just talk to them, and above all for them to make the initiative first, because without that, how are you ever going to start a relationship? [#20MSRHH23].

I think I would just let them know not to be scared of faculty, especially here at St. Mary’s University, because [faculty] are willing to talk to you [#14MJRHB16].

Convince them. I would just tell them “don’t be scared of your professors, they are people just like you, they have lives outside of the classroom and they are here to help you” [#7FSRAS25].

Students were passionate about this concept and spoke about it quite fervently. In many ways, they felt that every new student should hear from upperclassmen and be encouraged to seek faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Their comments were inspirational.

I’d obviously tell them there’s no need to be afraid, because all of the professors, all the faculty members and even the staff [members] in the [undergraduate] school are awesome, so there shouldn’t be such a thing called hesitation when you have a certain problem, because they are there to help you in every way possible [#6FSRIAB25].

I would probably say, [faculty are] people just like you and me, I mean, they have more respect because they’ve earned it because they obviously have their position because they worked for it with their degrees, their PhD’s, so they worked hard for it, and the worst they can tell you is no, like, not right now, or maybe some other time [#23MSOHS11].

Students also spoke of using examples to help encourage freshmen to interact with faculty outside of the classroom. “Actually telling them that it will be better for you if you do it this way, from my experience” [#6FSRIAB24]. Other examples included:

One of the other individuals who went up with me [for the summer] was working up there and he was interested in another side of [the profession], and I knew a professor who did some of that, so I told him that we’ll just go talk to him, “I’ll take you right there and we’ll talk to him.” He asked “well, do you know him?” and I said “no, not at all.” And the reason I spoke to that professor was because he was roaming around, saw me, had me for a class before, probably didn’t know my name, but had an idea of who I was, and asked me about what I’d been doing [#9MSRHB26].

Well, I would tell them some of my experiences. I’ve had pretty good experiences with the faculty [#19MSOHH17].

I guess just by example. I mean, tell them your experiences. When I came my freshman year I didn’t know any teachers[but] that’s the only way you’re going to get anywhere is if you talk to the teachers [#22MJRWS15].

I think it’s pretty much up to the people who actually do talk to the teachers to let people who don’t know that it’s okay, that you can do it, you know, it’s not a bad thing, that they’re there to help you and they’re not going to blow you off [#2MSRHS28].

Students interviewed reflected on their experiences and spoke of telling younger students about the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Talking about benefits gave the respondents the opportunity to reflect on what they had gained from faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Additionally, their ideas could help younger students learn about the tangible benefits of such interaction. This insight could help new students feel more comfortable or confident in engaging in out-of-classroom interaction with faculty members.

I guess I would just stress the importance of it all, especially because those are the professors who you are going to be spending most of your time with as you advance in your college experience [#12FSOHH14].

[I had] an underclassman ask me how I managed to land a couple of the internships I’d managed to land and my first advice is well, you have to have an idea of what the layout

is, what the terrain is like. I really benefited from speaking to professors about what the terrain was like. I would say, if you really want to get out there and gain some practical experience, get your feet wet, rough up your knees, land these types of internships, then professors are one place to start, definitely a place to start [#10MSRHB23-24].

I would tell them it opens up a lot of opportunities for you to learn more, for you to be more motivated in class, and also things like job opportunities, cause you never know when you are going to need a job, a reference for a job, or a scholarship application [#4FJRHB21].

That it would enhance your learning experience if you had a better relationship with your teacher. You would understand their teaching style much better because you would have a better sense of how that person is and why they talk the way they do [#1FJRHH36-37].

The best motivation [for interaction] would be grades, because that's what you are here for [#11FJRHS18].

I would just tell them that I think it's always good to meet new people in college and especially their professors, and that means they are older, they are wiser, they can give you more insight, they can tell you about the past of the University and traditions [#25FFRWH20].

We can gain significant insight from tapping into students' ideas and knowledge of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Students serve as excellent emissaries to each other and can strongly influence others to make the most of their collegiate experience. This is especially true of upperclassmen influence on underclassmen, particularly because of the focus of the former on career planning. Additionally, information we gain from speaking directly to students can be used in helping educate faculty on ways in which faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction can add positive dimensions to the teaching-learning experience.

Additional Insight

I added two questions to the protocol during the first interview. The second question asked if what faculty members did inside the classroom affected their involvement with faculty outside of the classroom. Answers to this question were insightful in providing additional

information on how interaction inside and outside of the classroom are inter-related. One respondent summed it up best:

So, it all starts in the classroom. I think here it's easy to build relationships because the classes are so small and because you have to get to know your professors, there's no way to avoid it, and you become friends and you are able to feel more comfortable to speak to them outside of the classroom. We're talking about outward, talking about relationships outside of the classroom, because if you don't do all of that inside, in-class relationship, you're not going to have the outside of class relationship [#20MSRHH25-26].

Prior studies had also found a relationship between inside and outside the classroom interaction. One study found that outside of class interactions were important in building the right relationship inside the classroom. Weaver and Qi (2005) stated: "One of the most crucial roles professors can play in influencing students' classroom participation involves their engagement with students *outside* the classroom" (p. 586). In their study of classroom organization and student participation, the authors found "students perceive *faculty-student interaction* as influencing their participation rate both directly and indirectly through increasing students' *confidence* and rates of "*para-participation*" and through reducing their *fear of professor's criticisms* and *fear of peer disapproval*" (p. 586).

When asked about the impact of inside-classroom on out-of-classroom interaction, most students agreed that dynamics inside of the classroom affected outside interaction. "I believe so" [#11FJRHS10], "Definitely" [#25FFRWH15], and "Yes, I would say that" [#6FSRIAB13] were some of the responses. Responses to these questions addressed a variety of teaching techniques and strategies. Some responses addressed how in-the-classroom faculty members speak specifically to students about visiting during office hours.

Most of the teachers I've had always let you know when their office hours are and they're always, like, "if you need help, just come by my office." They say that almost every day, so, they're there and every time we do bad on something they're like "nobody

came by my office, nobody asked for help”. I mean, I should have just gone by there; she would have helped me with this [#2MSRHS21].

Professors in the classroom, they can either make themselves available or not, and if they stress to you that they are available, people should take advantage of it [#15FJRWS9].

Teaching style was also addressed in students’ comments. These comments echoed earlier examples of students’ not having respect for faculty members, thereby decreasing the likelihood of their visiting with faculty outside of the classroom. Students also believed that faculty members who expressed their “personality” in the classroom made it easier to approach them outside of the classroom.

I’ve had professors who kind of frustrate me when they try to explain things because they’re vague.....that kind of thing would keep me from wanting to pursue a relationship with them outside of the classroom, if I’m frustrated about what they are saying inside [#4FJRHB17].

[She] is a good professor. She’s very knowledgably in [her field]. Every class I’ve taken with her I’ve learned so much. She knows what she is talking about and she has real life experience to back it up, so that helps when you are learning [#3FSRWB19].

I think to an extent just learning about their personalities in the classroom; how they teach, if they’re very formal and very stern about their lecture and everything, just straightforward in their lecture, I think I wouldn’t approach them as easily as a teacher who was more fun and outgoing and lively. It seems like if they use their hands or just talk about personal experiences, I would think that is more approachable, and I would be more comfortable talking to them [#7FSRAS15].

When a teacher shows more of themselves inside of the classroom, it makes the students warm up to them better [#11FJRHS11].

I think it really goes back to the way the teachers act toward the students in the classroom, that’s what I think. [#18FSOWH11].

They bring personal experiences inside the classroom [#1FJRHH24].

The use of a variety of teaching techniques was also highlighted as something that enhanced students' out-of-class interaction with faculty members.

This semester I had [a professor]- I really like him a lot, he's been a lot of help. He makes everyone understand everything before we continue. He paints a good picture of everything [#22MJRWS11].

She never stuck to one way of teaching....I guess she's taught the class so long, she really knows what people are interested in watching and so she's already got something set up for us and she hands us handouts and it's different. She changes it up, and I like that. It wasn't just like "open your books, let's do this" [#1FJRHH22].

Just her sense of humor made the class a lot more interesting...she somehow tried to find a way to make everyone laugh even if they didn't do their reading. They still got to take part in the conversation in class just because they were there. I think she made it a more enjoyable class with her sense of humor [#1FJRHH30].

In summary, what faculty members do inside of the classroom does affect faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Additionally, positive out-of-classroom interaction does also enhance the in-classroom experience by making students more likely to want to excel inside of the classroom.

Findings

Research Question 1: In what ways do students interact with faculty outside of the classroom?

1. All students interviewed had interacted in some way with faculty members outside of the classroom.
2. Six themes emerged in terms of types of interaction: course-related activities; traveling for conferences or study abroad; casual interactions around campus; career and graduate school focused interaction; visiting faculty in their offices; and participating together in campus clubs or athletic activities.

3. Students described their most meaningful interactions as focusing on three of the themes: course-related activities; traveling for conferences or study abroad; and career and graduate school-focused interactions.
4. Visiting faculty members in their offices was the most common type of interaction for students and faculty outside of the classroom.
5. Most of the faculty members who the students mentioned as having a positive impact on them were faculty in the students' majors.

Research Question 2: What do students believe makes for high quality interactions?

1. When asked directly to describe the quality of their out-of-classroom interaction with faculty, students had a hard time doing so. Giving examples of the most meaningful and impactful interactions they had with faculty members helped in describing high quality faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.
2. Students described their most meaningful interactions with faculty outside of the classroom in ways that fell into one of four themes. These themes included: faculty members are approachable and personable; faculty members have enthusiasm and passion for their work; faculty members care about students personally; and faculty members serve as role models and mentors.
3. Caring for students personally and being approachable outside of the classroom were the most common descriptors for high quality interactions.

Research Question 3: How do students' perceptions of the quality of their interactions with faculty change over their time at the University?

1. Some differences existed between students in their freshmen and sophomore years and students in their junior and senior academic years.

2. More juniors and seniors mentioned going to a professor's home for a meal, and more of them mentioned volunteering with a faculty member for something related to a class or their major. In relation to visiting with faculty in their offices, juniors and seniors seemed more inclined and confident in doing so, and proportionately mentioned more instances where they chose to do so.
3. The most pronounced differences in relation to types of interaction were connected to visiting faculty in their offices and speaking with faculty about career or graduate school plans. Juniors and seniors proportionally had more interaction with faculty on these themes.
4. Student respondents identified benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Juniors and seniors identified more of such benefits and were more able to describe these interactions as multi-faceted.

Research Question 4: How can St. Mary's promote high quality faculty-student interaction?

1. Most students interviewed had suggestions on how the University could encourage more faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.
2. Students' ideas revolved around three themes: promoting social events and interaction; stressing the importance of office hours; and suggestions directed at faculty members.
3. Students expressed their role in serving as "ambassadors" of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.
4. Respondents' advice to students was broken down into three areas: encouraging students not to be afraid or interacting with the faculty; sharing examples with younger students; and, explaining to younger students the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

5. The most prevalent type of advice was related to not being afraid to approach faculty members outside of the classroom.

In summary, students do interact with faculty members outside of the classroom and see these interactions as important to their development as students both personally and in their chosen field of study. The initial purpose of this study was to examine the original four research questions. During the initial student interview, two additional lines of inquiry emerged and were manifested in two additional interview questions. These additional questions allowed for insight into additional components of quality of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

The first question asked students if what faculty did inside of the classroom affected their out-of-classroom interaction. Overwhelmingly students believed this was true. Faculty would benefit from understanding how their openness in the classroom and reminding of students of their availability outside of class can go a long way in building positive student relationships.

Additionally, I asked students how they would convince students younger than themselves that they should interact with faculty outside of the classroom. This line of inquiry allowed students to clearly articulate benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The answers to this question allowed me to glean that students themselves can serve as excellent ambassadors to faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

Chapter V will provide a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations in relation to policy and practice. Additionally, I will address recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter provides a summary of the purpose of this study as well as the findings of the research. Based on the findings, I will present conclusions. Additionally, this chapter contains a discussion of implications for policy and practice and recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was multifaceted. First, I conducted the study to help identify ways in which students interact with faculty members outside of the classroom and learn what students believe makes for high quality interactions. Additionally, this study sought to identify successful out-of-classroom faculty-student interaction strategies from the student perspective. This knowledge can aid colleges and universities in promoting more formal and informal faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, thereby increasing the overall quality of the undergraduate student experience.

There were four research questions addressed with this study. They were: In what ways do students interact with faculty members outside of the classroom? What do students believe makes for high quality interaction? How do students' perceptions of the quality of their interaction with faculty members change over their time at St. Mary's University? How can the University better promote high quality faculty-student interaction?

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

In what ways do students interact with members outside of the classroom? All of the students interviewed gave examples of ways in which they interacted with faculty members outside of the classroom. Examples of interaction clustered into six themes.

The first two themes involved course-related activities and traveling abroad or to conferences with faculty. Students described course-related activities as having a significant impact on their collegiate experience. An example of such interaction was the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, where students and faculty members volunteer to help community members with tax return preparation. Traveling with faculty members to conferences or with study abroad programs was also seen as a meaningful type of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Students expressed that travel with faculty allowed them to get to know faculty personally and develop meaningful academic and social relationships. Both of these types of experiences allowed students to have sustained interaction with faculty members over a period of time.

Additionally, students spoke of interacting casually with faculty members around campus and visiting with faculty members in their offices. Campus eating venues such as the Diamondback Café and Java City coffee house were cited numerous times as places where students interacted informally with faculty. Visiting with faculty in their offices was the most common type of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Students were motivated to visit faculty members in offices because of questions arising from classroom discussions or assignments. Both of these types of interaction were made less threatening when faculty members took the opportunity inside of the classroom to remind students of their availability outside of the classroom.

Students also interacted with faculty in clubs and athletics, as well as visited with faculty members to discuss career and graduate school aspirations. Most of the clubs cited by students were those related to an academic discipline. Faculty members also were helpful in guiding students to graduate programs, suggesting appropriate internships, and writing letters of recommendations.

When asked about their most meaningful interactions, students most often cited out-of-classroom activities that were course-related; traveling for conferences or study abroad; and discussing plans for career and graduate school. When stating the names of faculty members who had a positive influence on them, students most often spoke of faculty members within their major.

Research Question 2

What do students believe makes for high quality interaction? Students in this study described the quality of their out-of-classroom interaction with faculty members by providing examples of the most meaningful interactions they had experienced. Students identified certain characteristics that made for high-quality faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. High quality interactions were characterized mainly by faculty descriptors used by students in explaining such interactions. High-quality, positive experiences happened when: faculty members were approachable and personable; faculty members cared about students personally; faculty members showed enthusiasm and passion for their work; and, faculty members served as role models and mentors.

In general, students perceived faculty members as more approachable when they expressed their own personal experiences and spoke of family members. Doing so helped students see faculty more as human beings. Being approachable also created the opportunity for students to discuss with faculty personal problems and concerns they were having. During such

interactions, faculty members were helpful in directing students to needed resources. Students had positive memories of meaningful interactions where faculty members took a personal concern in them. Caring for students personally and being approachable outside of the classroom were the most common descriptors for high-quality interaction. These two quality descriptors were complementary and worked together in creating an environment in which faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction could thrive.

When faculty members displayed a passion for teaching, their academic discipline and their work in general, students found their interaction with them to be of high quality. These faculty members were able to ignite passion in their students. Furthermore, they inspired students to show more effort toward their courses as well as to interact with faculty outside of the classroom. Additionally, students described high quality interaction as being related to how faculty served as role models and mentors to them. Faculty members encouraged students when they experienced tough personal times, took the time to mentor students, and were overall positive role models for students.

Research Question 3

How do students' perceptions of the quality of their interaction with faculty members change over their time at the University? Students in their freshmen and sophomore years held some different perceptions of the quality of their interaction with faculty members than did their junior and senior counterparts.

The most pronounced differences by classification were in relation to the type of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction each experienced. Traveling or studying abroad with faculty and speaking with faculty about career or graduate school plans were more prevalent among upperclassmen. Juniors and seniors proportionally had more examples of interaction

with faculty in these ways. Freshmen and sophomores gave almost no examples of such types of interaction.

Overall, juniors and seniors, who made up the majority of students interviewed, had richer and more multi-faceted examples of their interactions with faculty members and the quality thereof. Additionally, juniors and seniors were better able to articulate the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

More juniors and seniors cited going to a professor's home for a meal and volunteering with a faculty member on something related to a class or their major. In relation to visiting with faculty in their offices, juniors and seniors seemed more inclined and confident in doing so, and proportionately expressed more instances where they chose to do so.

Although some differences existed, meaningful interaction took place between faculty and students of all classifications. The types of interaction that were more frequent with juniors and seniors were in many ways more appropriate in scope for the needs and experiences of upperclassmen, and frequently related to career counseling and planning.

Research Question 4

How can St. Mary's University promote high quality faculty-student interaction? Most students interviewed had examples of ways in which the University could promote more faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

Examples respondents gave to promote such interaction were grouped into three areas: promoting social events and interaction; stressing the importance of office hours; and, suggestions directed at faculty members. Additionally, I discovered from the interviews that students themselves play an important role in promoting faculty-student out-of-class interaction.

Students gave examples of social events that could bring students and faculty members together. Breaking bread together in a variety of settings was often cited as an idea. Students

really enjoyed eating with faculty, whether at the campus cafeteria or in a faculty member's home. This type of activity aided students in seeing a more personal side of faculty members. Events defined as "mixers" were also suggested as ways to interact casually with faculty on campus. Casual interaction that helped students get to know faculty members as persons aided in future interaction around more educationally purposeful activities.

Students also spoke of the importance of visiting with faculty members during their office hours. Those students interviewed believed that oftentimes students did not take full advantage of office hours. They believed that some students would only visit with faculty members around advising and registration time. Students stressed the benefits of interaction as reasons for visiting with faculty in their offices more frequently.

Students also suggested ways in which faculty themselves could promote out-of-classroom interaction. One such way was for faculty to stress the availability of office hours. Students said that faculty who continued to mention their out-of-class availability made themselves more approachable outside of the classroom. Other suggestions included having faculty-organized review sessions on class materials and faculty members taking part in campus clubs and organizations.

Additional Findings

I found that a positive and effective way to promote faculty-student out-of-class interaction was for students themselves to advocate to other students about interacting with faculty. Because of their first-hand experiences and their strong influence on peers, students are in a unique position to advocate for faculty-student out-of-class interaction.

I asked students how they would convince younger students to interact with faculty members outside of the classroom. From this question more data emerged stating that students would give advice to younger students and articulate some of the benefits of faculty-student out-

of-classroom interaction. When asked to give advice to younger students about interacting with faculty outside of the classroom, responses focused on three themes: telling students not to be afraid of faculty; sharing examples with younger students; and, explaining to younger students the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The most common advice was for students not to fear approaching faculty outside of the classroom. Most of the respondents could think of examples that they would share with younger students in helping convince them to initiate outside of the classroom interaction with faculty. Respondents also articulated benefits of out-of-classroom interaction with faculty, which helped provide motivation for younger students initiating such interaction.

Students interviewed articulated the following benefits of out-of-classroom interaction: understanding faculty's teaching styles better; making themselves known to faculty members for when they may need help; obtaining recommendation letters and internship advice; increasing their confidence and comfort with interacting with faculty; and, overall, receiving academic assistance.

Additionally, students saw a correlation between in-class actions and out-of-class faculty-student interaction. Many students believed that positive faculty-student out-of-class interaction began with positive in-classroom practices and gave examples of what faculty did positively in the classroom that encouraged more out-of-class interaction. One such practice was for faculty to reiterate in the classroom their availability and willingness to meet with students outside of the classroom. Using a variety of teaching techniques and expressing one's personality in the classroom were also seen as practices that encouraged more faculty-student out-of-class interaction.

Overall, findings of this study confirm previous studies and add to the body of knowledge about faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. In particular, knowledge about

the elements of the quality of interaction is enhanced. The qualitative nature of this study allowed the student experience to be described in rich detail and has added the student voice to the discourse on faculty-student out-of classroom interaction.

Conclusions

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge related to faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Specifically, this study has represented the student voice in relation to what makes for high quality, faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

Research Question 1

When analyzing the ways in which students interact with faculty outside of the classroom, this study found similar descriptions of interaction to those found in the literature. Some studies found that the most frequent type of out-of-classroom interaction between students and faculty is visiting with faculty in their offices, mainly around academic issues. This study reaffirmed such findings. Whether office visits are of a casual or more serious nature, they seem to play an important role in setting the stage for meaningful faculty-student interaction. Visiting faculty members in their offices seems to imply they are approachable and make students feel comfortable in going there. Such positive interactions build student confidence in pursuing further interaction with faculty outside of the classroom. Even interactions that are more casual or short in nature help set the stage for students approaching faculty about more serious or delicate issues. Interaction, period, is important, and office hours are one way to set the institutional tone and the expectation for new students. Office hours, therefore, should be encouraged and seen as part of the institutional culture.

Additionally, researchers should, therefore, not discount the type of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction-formal or informal, casual or intricate, while traveling abroad or in the school cafeteria. What some may consider casual interactions do, indeed, help to build a trusting

relationship between faculty members and students. Negative interactions may hinder a student from interacting much, if at all, in the future. In general, it seems that a student's perception of his or her interaction with a faculty member may be the ultimate litmus test as to whether it was an important, meaningful interaction. All types of positive faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction should be encouraged among students and faculty on all campuses.

Research Question 2

In addressing the area of quality of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, this study describes many examples of powerful student experiences. The most powerful quality indicator is that of relationship. When students get to know faculty members, and they in turn feel "known," students believe they are an important part of the campus community. Caring about students and being approachable go hand-in-hand in helping students perceive their relationship with faculty as being of high quality. These two areas are central to building the relationship and setting the tone for out-of-classroom interaction.

St. Mary's University has as a marketing slogan of "Personal Attention, Powerful Programs." This catch phrase was affirmed, as students believed it was much more than a casual mention. Personal attention is a part of the university ethos and should be cultivated and affirmed in all areas of the institution.

Students were able to articulate quite eloquently what made for high quality experiences with faculty. Students' words can describe their experiences better than any number of surveys can do. When learning about the student experience, in this case faculty and student out-of-classroom interaction, a mix of methods and philosophies should guide research.

Previous studies have addressed the frequency of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The quality of the interaction may prove, however, to be more important than the frequency in which they happen. By relying on frequency, faculty and administrators may

inadvertently impose a standard on what might be the appropriate mix of type and frequency of interaction. What some may term as casual interaction -- asking a faculty member questions about a homework assignment -- may be a highly empowering experience for a student who feels that the faculty member has cared about them personally. For others, a deep conversation about career aspirations and internship exploration may lead to life-changing decisions. All interaction may have a strong impact on student success, and individual students may be the best judges of the type and frequency of out-of-classroom interaction needed. This is not to suggest that students will always know what is best for their own development. What some may consider a quality experience may be “lost” on one student due to immaturity. Overall, quality may be more about how the interaction takes place and the way the student perceives the interaction, than about the content of such interaction or exactly how often the interaction takes place.

The literature supports these conclusions. Cotten and Wilson (2006) noted that informal, social interaction outside of the classroom should not be dismissed as not having such an impact because they may very well help set the stage for other, perhaps more meaningful, interactions. Endo and Harpel (1982) actually found in their study that the frequency of informal student-faculty interaction affected more collegiate outcomes than did the frequency of formal student-faculty interaction. The NSSE data has also found that little interaction -- of the right kind -- may be enough for some students (2006). There may be no magic formula as to frequency and type of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction.

I believe that all of the students interviewed were in some way benefiting from out-of-classroom interaction with their faculty members. Their interaction with faculty had made a difference in their lives as students. They all came from a variety of backgrounds, majors and aspirations, but all had common experiences when it came to finding faculty as being helpful and interested in them as students.

One thing is clear. When students speak of high quality faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, they always anchor their descriptors by how they perceive their relationship with faculty members. Interaction is rooted in relationship, and developing a relationship with faculty members that enhances a student's academic and personal development should be at the heart of all individual and institutional efforts.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked how the quality of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction changed over a student's time at the institution. This question should be explored further given the low representation of freshmen and sophomores in the group of respondents. From the data gathered, however, I conclude that students do gain a better understanding and appreciation of the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction as they advance at the institution. This makes sense since older students have more needs for interaction around internships, recommendation letters, graduate school, etc. Students' time at the institution also gives them additional confidence in approaching their faculty – students see faculty more as humans than “unreachable” professionals. Although this perception can be seen as the natural progression that eventually all students will reach, the freshman year should not be overlooked since initial faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction sets the tone, positive or negative, for subsequent interaction. Milem and Berger (1997) found that early involvement with faculty, for example, contributed to higher levels of student persistence.

Students interviewed seemed to be able to seek the interaction they needed in order to succeed. What is not known in this study is if their perception of what they need to succeed as students actually helps them to succeed in measurable outcomes, such as GPA, retention, and graduation rates. More information is needed in this area to draw further conclusions.

Upperclass students can be powerful agents in promoting faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Through formal and structured institutional efforts to help guide first and second year students, University administrators and faculty members should encourage upperclassmen to be such agents. The peer-to-peer influence cannot be underestimated. What students can do to help each other see the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction can be far reaching and perhaps have more impact than some institutional efforts.

Research Question 4

Since most of the literature affirms the importance of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, all institutions should be concerned with learning of ways in which they can improve such interaction (Astin, 1993; Milem & Burger, 1997; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2001 & 2005). This study has demonstrated that involving students in exploring the question can lead to extensive data with practical advice on how to address most institutional issues. Many of the suggestions from research participants are within the reach of most institutions. The test lies in putting the data into action.

Interactions that offer some sort of structure, mainly around convening students and faculty members together, are powerful agents in creating good faculty-student relationships. Participating in such programs – departmental retreats, undergraduate research, and discipline-related volunteer work – can provide effective ways to foster faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. These programs are different than casual interaction, and can perhaps be more powerful. We should still not discount the importance of casual, informal interaction, but instead, use it as a means of setting the trust and relationship for other, more educationally purposeful interaction.

Breaking bread together, particularly for the type of institution which focuses on building community, proves to be a strong socializing agent. By building faculty-student

relationships and community, the University can accomplish several outcomes, and this could potentially be one of the easiest ways to begin such relationships. Setting the stage, however, may not be enough in accomplishing richer relationships. Crafting the right environment for faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction to flourish requires some careful planning.

Creating the right balance of both formal and more casual interaction involves structuring opportunities that bring faculty and students together. Doing so will provide an initial way for both groups to get to know each other, thereby beginning to nurture a trusting relationship. Offering faculty money to eat in the university dining hall may help from a logistical standpoint but will not be very effective in helping a shy faculty member get his meal and find “entry” into a crowded “student” table. Events that invite both students and faculty members may not provide enough structure to show students and faculty alike how to engage with each other either. Such interaction is sometimes difficult even for the most skilled social beings and can, at the core, seem more threatening to participants than the thought of not partaking in the experience at all. This phenomenon may well be the reason an interaction such as volunteering in a discipline-related project can prove so meaningful. From the beginning, faculty and students participating in such endeavors bring to the table some common knowledge (perhaps discipline specific), have projects at hand to accomplish, and have just enough structure to begin to get to know each other personally. Such interaction is characterized by a “low–threat” factor that puts all parties at ease. Additionally, the perceived classroom “barriers” are not present. Students and faculty can concentrate on doing something together and learning from each other while doing so. These somewhat structured forms of interaction allow for each party to predict enough of the situation to feel comfortable and welcome in the particular environment.

Institutions should seek to develop a culture that allows for faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction to happen naturally where it can and that promotes specific programs and environments which further cultivate such interaction. Institutions should also be aware that what takes place in the classroom most certainly affects faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction and should, therefore, be examined in tandem with institutional efforts related to encouraging such interaction.

Implications for Policy and Practice

At St. Mary's University, a good foundation exists for fostering faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. National research such as the National Survey of Student Engagement points to several practices that enhance student involvement in educationally purposeful activities. Many of these practices focus on the seven *Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). These principles include: encouraging contact between students and faculty; developing reciprocity and cooperation among students; encouraging active learning; providing prompt and appropriate feedback; emphasizing time on task; communicating high expectations; and, respecting diverse talents and ways of learning. Several implications and recommendations can be made to continue to enhance the students' collegiate experience and their success.

Continue to Foster the Faculty-Student Out-of-Classroom Relationship

Positive faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction already exists on the St. Mary's University campus. Like most areas of any institution, however, efforts can be made to continue to improve. One of the first recommendations is to continue requiring students to meet with their faculty academic advisors. Although advisors are only one of the many faculty members students come into contact with, this practice guarantees that the institution makes an effort to

develop the faculty-student relationship. It may also be helpful to have faculty who teach first-year students meet with these students at least once again during the course of the semester.

Additionally, faculty should understand how powerful their in-classroom demeanor and actions affect out-of-classroom interaction. As another study concluded, “The impact that a faculty member can have on the student experience can be seen in and out of the classroom. We found that faculty behaviors and attitudes affect students profoundly, which suggests that faculty members may play the single most important role in student learning.” (Umbach & Wawrzynski, p. 176). Students in this study expressed the need for faculty to continue encouraging students to meet with them outside of the classroom. It is not enough to post office hours. Faculty also should stress their availability and discuss interaction opportunities throughout the duration of the semester.

At this time, the University is changing its base computer system. Due to this important change in technology, adjustments are being proposed to the current advising and registration system. The University should carefully consider the transition from faculty-based *and* assisted class registration to an advising-only system. During this transition, many students and faculty could presume that advising meetings may not be as critical since students will be able to register for classes on their own via the internet. Some may even see this as a “relieving of duties.” Special care should be taken to educate both students and faculty on the importance of out-of-classroom interaction. Although the students will most likely still need a personal identification number or permission to register, the advising system could become a “ticket” to accessing internet-registration. This transition presents the opportunity to make the advising process truly about advising and relationship building. This opportunity is critical and should be carefully crafted with the input of experts in the field as well as faculty and students.

This transition offers a great opportunity to educate students and faculty on the importance and benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. For new students, the University should capitalize on the fact that all new students and many of their parents are present at new student orientation sessions during the summer. Faculty, administrators and current students should take this time to speak with new students about the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction and present such interaction as the norm or culture of the institution. Acculturation in faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction can continue with the program of Academic Convocation, a ceremony and meal required of all faculty and new first-year students. This ceremony is, at its core, an opportunity to introduce students to the academic environment of the institution. The structure of the program and its concluding lunch should be examined to propose ways of maximizing student and faculty interaction. New faculty and staff members should also be presented with information on the philosophy of engaging students in educationally purposeful activities, including faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Understanding the impact of such interaction can help faculty make this a priority in their day-to-day work.

Student affairs professionals are important in this process as well. Student affairs professionals come in close contact with many students frequently and can be powerful agents in promoting faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The more community members who can help students understand the need and benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, the more the University can hope to have students partaking of such interaction.

Finally, in relation to fostering faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction, the institution should examine the campus environment and find ways to maximize indoor and outdoor space in creating “third spaces.” Third spaces are those that are comfortable and familiar to all community members and encourage lingering for relationship building. Ray

Oldenburg (1999) describes in his book *The Great Good Place* that a “third place” is one in which people can gather without the worries of their day-to-day lives for lively discussion, general sharing, and good company. The campus Java City coffee house, for example, was built with this concept in mind. It has, however, fallen short of reaching its full potential. I believe this is partly due to some environment challenges, such as lack of comfortable seating, smoking permitted immediately outside of the building where most of the seats are, and general awkwardness in the flow of traffic. In speaking with student participants and other students as well, all agreed that Java City could foster more interaction among students and between faculty and students with some careful restructuring of the physical environment and addition of amenities, such as music. I strongly recommend the institution work with the appropriate professionals to enhance the Java City environment. Recommendations could also be sought for the use of the Blume Academic Library, which could potentially serve as an excellent location for encouraging and nourishing student-to-student and faculty-to-student interaction.

Strengthen and Refine Institutional Commitment

It is also the case that most institutions do not align their reward systems to the goal of enhanced student retention. It is one thing to talk about the importance of increasing student retention, it is another to invest scarce resources and adopt institutional faculty and staff reward systems that promote the behaviors that would reinforce that goal. (Tinto 2006, p. 9)

Most institutions should evaluate and re-align the faculty reward and promotion system. The system should seek to reward faculty committed and engaged with promoting the principles of good practice in undergraduate education, which include faculty and student interaction. Such a review of the faculty reward system could provide for a dialogue that would increase the understating of the role of faculty members in helping students engage in educationally purposeful activities and increase student retention.

Additionally, the University should commit substantial resources to structured opportunities for faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Funds could be used, for example, to encourage faculty to have meals with students, on or off campus as appropriate, engage students in undergraduate research, and travel with students to professional development opportunities domestically and abroad. Each of these activities has the potential to impact a student's collegiate experience dramatically. Some opportunities are now growing, such as the McNair Scholars program, the Bill Greehey Scholars Program, and Entrepreneurial Scholars Program. Not all opportunities need to be long-term, however, such as summer research programs or semester-long study abroad opportunities. Spring break service-learning immersions abroad and January or May mini-mester programs could be developed to engage students with faculty around a particular issue, culture, or process.

The University currently engages in a variety of assessment efforts. These efforts, however, are led by different areas of the University and do not always include qualitative methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that qualitative research methods can be powerful assessment methods in learning about the student experience, what is important to students, and how the University can improve upon programs and services. Student learning, not just student satisfaction, should be at the heart of assessment efforts. More critical, however, is the need to unify the assessment efforts of the entire University. A University-wide task force should define the institution's assessment agenda, carry out such assessment, and evaluate all data gathered to identify patterns in student success. Adjustments could then be made to current programs, and ideas could be generated and implemented for new initiatives to aid in student success. A comprehensive assessment program, one that not only gathers data but analyzes it to identify patterns, best practices, and improvement areas, could have a powerful impact on all University outcomes, including student success and learning. *Learning Reconsidered*, the 2004 national

publication, offers a recommendation specific to student assessment. “All institutions should establish routine ways to hear students’ voices, consult with them, explore their opinions, and document the nature and quality of their experience as learners” (p. 28).

As an institution committed to helping students succeed, St. Mary’s should look to increase overall engagement in all seven of the principles outlined by Chickering and Gamson (1987). The *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* not only encourage contact between students and faculty, they encourage active learning, providing prompt feedback on performance, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning. Additionally, these principles encourage the development of reciprocity and cooperation among students, communicating high expectations, and emphasizing time on task. The authors of the principles believe that contact between students and faculty members is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. St. Mary’s should look to guiding principles that are central to what we already know makes for high quality collegiate experiences and learn how to exploit those principles in relation to our campus. The principles already complement other guiding principles of the University, such as the mission statement, Vision 2012 document and the Characteristics of Marianist Universities document.

Keep Students at the Center

It is important that we stay focused not only on the individual beneficiaries of higher education, the students, but also on how the University benefits from the student voice. Too often we think of students as the recipients of great knowledge and those who benefit from the classes and programs we offer. Students can also be powerful agents of socialization for their peers and can assist the institution in reaching its overall goals of student engagement.

Studies have documented the importance of peer-to-peer influence (Berger & Milem 1999; Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling, 1999). Returning students can have a prominent role in

helping acculturate first-year students to the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. The institution should play a strong role in helping students recognize the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. Doing so achieves two important tasks: helping students see what they can gain from interacting with faculty outside of the classroom and allowing them to teach the importance of such interaction to their younger peers. The University should identify ways in which we can use students in shaping the environment for all types of educationally purposeful activities.

Even more importantly, we need to listen to students. When we ask students about their experiences, we become vulnerable because we take on some responsibility to act upon what we hear. We need to ask students more about their experience at our University, and not let the data, quantitative or qualitative, become only part of a report. Identifying findings of research and suggesting a plan of action are the easy parts. Carrying out solid recommendations that can improve student success can sometimes be the next obstacle. Once we document the student experience, we owe it to the students to implement revised and new programs and services that we know will help them succeed. As Tinto (2006) points out “The second lesson, that of program implementation, can be broadly stated as follows: It is one thing to identify effective action; it is another to implement it in ways that significantly enhance student retention over time” (p. 8).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study, like so many others, researched only one part of faculty-student, out-of-classroom interaction. The current research was able to look at a sample of majority of Hispanic students at an Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Because this group of students is actually the majority at this institution, we cannot actually draw direct parallels to Hispanic students at predominantly white institutions. Interviewing Hispanic students at both types of institutions

could prove to be helpful. From the data gathered in this research, there were no glaring differences among Hispanics and non-Hispanics. Such potential differences could be further explored at an HSI. Along a similar line of inquiry, distinctions should be made within the Hispanic student population. Many differences exist among these students, many based on culture, but many more based on socio-economic status. Better understanding students from this viewpoint could offer some additional insight into the dynamics of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction with all students.

Faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction from the viewpoint of the faculty could also prove helpful in gaining more information about the quality of such interaction. Interviewing both faculty and students at the same institution could provide insight into the phenomenon in general and to differences within the institution. More qualitative research with faculty and students at institutions, both with high levels of interaction and with low levels of interaction, could also highlight between-institutions differences. Such research could allow us to learn about more ways to foster the good that is already happening on each campus.

From a demographic point of view, further analyzing students' background characteristics and comparing them with their qualitative perceptions could help examine whether what students believe makes for high quality interaction truly affects their success as students in measurable student success outcomes, such as GPA, retention and graduation. Gender and major discipline could also be explored more in depth.

Additionally, studies should continue to look at student motivation for seeking out-of-classroom interaction with faculty and factors that enhance the odds they will engage in such interaction. Pascarella suggested this in 1980, and although some studies like this one have shed light on the issue, more studies should be conducted to explore student motivation.

Finally, when reviewing retention data and surveying students who leave institutions, we should seek information related to their level of interaction with faculty. Data gathered from students, and then reviewed for those retained and not retained, can also provide insight into the effect of faculty-student interaction on retention.

In conclusion, faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction is an important factor contributing to student success. Students themselves speak of ways in which faculty members have had powerful influences on them and their success as students. Most students in one way or another interact with faculty members outside of the classroom, and faculty members themselves can influence such interaction by what they do outside of the classroom, and sometimes more importantly, inside of the classroom.

The University should emphasize the benefits of faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction to both students and faculty members alike. The retention of students is a prominent issue on most college campuses. Institutions should foster all educationally purposeful activities that contribute to the success of students.

Universities should take advantage of data, gathered from their own and other campuses, and utilize such data to make sound decisions in relation to institutional priorities and the commitment of resources to such priorities.

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APPENDIX A

E-MAIL REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW

Hello!

My name is Rosalind V. Alderman and I am a PhD candidate at Texas A&M University pursuing a degree in Higher Education Administration. I am also a staff member at St. Mary's University in the office of Student life.

I am writing to ask your assistance in helping me complete my dissertation research. You have been nominated by the Dean of your undergraduate school as someone I could approach to hold an informal interview on my research topic. My dissertation is titled:

Faculty and Student Out-of-Classroom Interaction: Student Perceptions of Quality of Interaction

I am looking to interview 20-30 students on their experiences related to how they interact with faculty members outside of the classroom. Each interview should take no more than one (1) hour. I am hoping to complete my interviews between now and June 15th. All interviews will take place on campus or in another public setting (restaurant, coffee shop, etc).

I am writing to see if you would be willing to be interviewed for my project. If you are not in San Antonio for this next month but are interested in participating in this study, please do let know- we may be able to work something out.

There is no compensation for this study, but your participation would make a difference in students' experiences for years to come.

I am beginning to build the interview schedule, so if you are interested and willing to be interviewed, please reply to this e-mail as soon as possible, and we can set up a time and place that is convenient for you.

Thank you for considering this request. I can be reached at the contact information below.

Rosalind

PS: This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at both Texas A&M University.

APPENDIX B
PROTOCOL

1. Do you interact with faculty outside of classes? How?
2. What are the most meaningful/positive interactions you have had?
3. Have you ever had a negative interaction with a faculty member? If so, can you describe it?
4. How would you describe the quality of your interactions with faculty outside of the classroom?
5. Do you believe that what faculty do inside of the classroom can affect your out-of-classroom involvement with them? If so, how? *
6. Who are faculty members who have made an impact on your time here as a student? How?
7. How has your out-of-classroom interaction with faculty made a difference in your success as a student?
8. What can the University do to promote positive faculty and student out-of-classroom interaction?
9. How would you convince new students/freshmen that they should interact with their faculty outside of the classroom? *

* Questions added during initial interview and used for all subsequent interviews.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I have been asked to participate in a research study about faculty-student out-of-classroom interaction. I was selected to be a possible participant because I was nominated by the Dean of my undergraduate school. A total of 30 St. Mary's University undergraduate students have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to help illuminate, from the student perspective, successful out-of-classroom faculty-student interaction strategies.

By participating in this study I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary.
- I will be asked to answer a series of questions related to my out-of-classroom interaction with faculty.
- My interview will be audio taped and later transcribed in order to help the researcher best capture all answers.
- This study will take approximately 1 hour for one interview, and up to one additional hour follow-up interview if necessary for answer clarification.
- The risks associated with this study are minimal, mainly possible discomfort with the type or length of questions asked.
- There are no positive or negative benefits for me participating in this study.
- I will not receive any monetary compensation for my participation.
- I can elect to not answer any of the interview questions or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- My participation and answers will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be used instead of my real name, and all materials (including the audio tapes) will be kept in a locked box for a minimum of three years and then destroyed. There will be no direct link from the data back to each student interviewed.
- Only the researcher and her dissertation chair will have access to the interview data.
- The data obtained from the study may be published.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board- Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelia M. Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067, araines@vpmail.tamu.edu.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions as necessary and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent document for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of the participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of the investigator: _____ Date: _____

Investigator:

Rosalind V. Alderman

24735 Crescent Run

San Antonio, TX 78258

(210) 481-3595, ralderman@stmarytx.edu

Faculty Advisor/Chair:

Dr. Yvonna Lincoln

EAHR Department, Mail stop 4226

TAMU

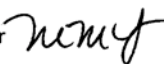
(979) 862-2701, ysl@tamu.edu

APPENDIX D

AUDITOR REVIEW LETTER

Memorandum

To: Dr. Yvonna S. Lincoln, Chair
Alderman Dissertation Committee

From: Ms. Michelle M. López, Auditor 

Date: January 31, 2008

Re: Letter of Attestation for Alderman Dissertation

On November 21, 2007, the researcher, Rosalind Alderman, and I met to discuss the audit process. During that meeting, we reviewed the researcher's methods for obtaining and analyzing the data. I was also provided copies of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 to review.

Charge

The Auditor's charge is to determine dependability, confirmability and to review credibility measures.

Theoretical Basis for the Audit

Per the chapter, *Establishing Trustworthiness*, in Lincoln and Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), this audit is based on Edward S. Halpern's auditing concept as described in Appendices A & B. (pp. 382-392).

"An inquiry audit cannot be conducted without a residue of records stemming from the inquiry, just as a fiscal audit cannot be conducted without a residue of records from the business transactions involved," (Lincoln and Guba, p. 319) This audit will review the Audit Trail and the Audit Process as outlined by Halpern's 1983 models and as described in *Naturalistic Inquiry*. (1985)

Goals of the Audit

Per the initial meeting, the goal of this audit is to establish trustworthiness of the researcher's work, determining dependability, confirmability and to review credibility measures.

Audit Procedures

Audit Trail

I found evidence that the Audit Trail Categories below were achieved successfully.

- 1) Raw Data: The researcher appeared to have all the raw data organized and labeled appropriately. While she did lose one interview due to having accidentally recorded over it with another interview, she also had incomplete field notes, and thus concluded that she would not use the interview.
- 2) Data Reduction and Analysis Products: I was able to review the unitized data, which the researcher had carefully organized. I also reviewed the transcribed data from each interview and the coding method she used for the data.
- 3) Data Reconstruction and Synthesis Products: The researcher initially began with 32 categories which she pared down to formulate her findings and conclusions as presented in chapters 4 and 5. She used a small notebook to write notes for chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation.
- 4) Process Notes: The researcher discussed with me her decision-making rules and procedures for analyzing the data. She also discussed the role of the peer debriefer she utilized earlier in the process. She had found it helpful to make use of a peer debriefer.

- 5) **Materials Relating to Intentions and Dispositions:** The researcher began using a reflexive journal, the same day she defended her proposal. This was a record of her self-evaluation and criticism along the way.
- 6) **Instrument Development Information:** Based on the naturalistic inquiry method employed, this category does not seem relevant to the audit.

Audit Process

- 1) **Preentry:** The researcher and I met to review various documents and decided to continue the relationship through to the end of the audit.
- 2) **Determination of Auditability:** After reviewing the components of the Audit Trail, I found that it was *comprehensible, useful and linked*, per the definitions provided by Lincoln and Guba. (p. 322)
- 3) **Formal Agreement:** While no formal, written agreement was created, a verbal agreement was reached.
- 4) **Determination of Trustworthiness:**
 - a. *Confirmability:* The findings seem to be based on the data, inferences are logical, the category structure is clear, there little to no inquirer bias and there are sufficient efforts to ensure confirmability.
 - b. *Dependability:* Based on the audit, there is sufficient evidence to substantiate the purposive sampling, saturation, findings and a rationale for decisions. There were sufficient efforts to ensure dependability.
 - c. *Credibility:* The researcher did ask students interviewed to conduct a member check, however, not all responded. Of those who responded, the information was changed in the transcript. A peer debriefer was also utilized and helped to validate the themes for researcher.
- 5) **Closure:** The findings of this audit are shared with the researcher in this memorandum.

Findings

Overall, the audit has found that the researcher conducted the study in accordance to the naturalistic inquiry methods, following the appropriate tasks to produce a complete audit trail as well as to ensure trustworthiness in her process.

Overall Attestation

I attest that the researcher's methods and conclusions have met the requirements of dependability, confirmability and credibility measures.

Auditor's Vita

The auditor has been employed in higher education for 15 years as a student affairs professionals, lecturer (undergraduate and graduate courses) and consultant. She holds a B.S. in Government from Texas Woman's University, a M.Ed. in Counseling and Guidance (College Student Affairs emphasis) from Texas State University-San Marcos and is a current doctoral student at Texas A&M University, studying Higher Education Administration.

She has most recently held the position of Associate Director of Student Development and Retention with the LBJ Student Center at Texas State University-San Marcos for nearly two years. Currently, she holds the position of Interim Director of Retention Management and Planning at Texas State University-San Marcos working out of the Vice President for Student Affairs office.

APPENDIX E

RESEARCH AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Questions

- In what ways do students interact with faculty outside of the classroom?
- What do students believe makes for high quality interactions?
- How do students' perceptions of the quality of their interactions with faculty change over their time at the University?
- How can St. Mary's promote high quality faculty-student interaction?

Interview Questions

1. Do you interact with faculty outside of classes? How?
2. What are the most meaningful/positive interactions you have had?
3. Have you ever had a negative interaction with a faculty member? If so, can you describe it?
4. How would you describe the quality of your interactions with faculty outside of the classroom?
5. Who are faculty members who have made an impact on your time here as a student? How?
6. How has your out-of-classroom interaction with faculty made a difference in your success as a student?
7. What can the University do to promote positive faculty and student out-of-classroom interaction?

VITA

Name: Rosalind Verónica Alderman

Address: 24735 Crescent Run
San Antonio, TX 78258

Education: B.G.S., General Studies, West Texas A&M University, 1991

M.A., College Student Personnel, Bowling Green State University, 1993

Ph.D., Educational Administration, Texas A&M University, 2008

Professional Experience:

Associate Dean for Student Life, St. Mary's University, 1997-present

Assistant Director of Residence Life, St. Mary's University, 1993-1997

Graduate Assistant – House Director, Residence Life, Bowling Green State University, 1991-1993

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