



THE IMPACT OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS CUSTOMER SERVICE QUALITY LEVELS ON STUDENT MOTIVATION AND PERSISTENCE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of college students' perceptions of campus customer service quality levels and to ascertain whether college students' motivation and persistence were impacted by their perceptions of campus customer service quality levels. Motivation was defined as self-reported feelings of enthusiasm, drive, ambition, and enjoyment during and after campus customer service experiences. Persistence was defined as students' willingness to remain at the institution until graduation. The conceptual framework for this study was The Gap Model of Service Quality detailing five major satisfaction gaps: Knowledge Gap, Policy Gap, Delivery Gap, Communication Gap, and Customer Gap. The population of this study were college students from two selected institutions of higher learning. Using a qualitative design, the results from the study showed that perceptions regarding the quality of customer service negatively affected student motivation levels but did not impact their persistence to graduation. Although students were not satisfied with the quality of customer service on campus, they chose to "tough it out" rather than risk losing credits by transferring to another institution. The study recommended the implementation of mandatory quality improvement measures such as quarterly customer service training for employees as well as increased attention to orientating students to the policies, procedures and protocols of their campus during new student orientation sessions.

Keywords

Perception, Motivation, Persistence, Customer Service

INTRODUCTION

Customer experiences prior, throughout, and after a transaction have a big influence on customers returning (Ward, 2019). Many customers perceive customer service based on interactions with the company employees. Businesses and employers must consider the many different personalities of customers (Ward, 2019). For any business, including higher education, exceptional customer service is essential. A client persisting with a business even when a more affordable, practical, or superior alternative is available elsewhere represents customer loyalty to that business (Nolinske 2017). Some may question the necessity of research on customer service perceptions in higher education but higher education is just another form of organization (Gardner, 2017). Customer service is provided by administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education. The customers are the students. The product is education.

The number of educational institutions has increased dramatically in recent years, boosting competition for students (Austin & Pervais, 2017). There is a growing demand for educational institutions to find new approaches to promote student loyalty (Austin & Pervais, 2017). An institution of higher learning that excels in customer service motivates students to return year after year until they complete their degree requirements. Students are also encouraged to refer others to the institution. Nolinske (2017) found that institutions of higher learning that fail to provide outstanding customer service could possibly lose students. Students who get outstanding customer service may be content and pleased with the university and submit positive feedback. These favorable scores could contribute to the institution's long-term sustainability. Almost every client will sample a product or service at least once. In many instances, customer service determines whether a firm can motivate consumers and keep them coming back with additional customers (Nolinske, 2017).

In higher education, professors are not the only individuals that engage with students. Students must be educated in a clear, polite, and timely way regarding housing issues, safety procedures, financial assistance, tuition and fee payments, and course choices. The manner in which information is delivered and consumers are treated has a direct bearing on whether or not students (customers) feel motivated to continue attending a certain institution of higher education (Austin et al., 2017). Consequently, institutions of higher education should be conscious of how they connect with students and endeavor to offer students and their families with great customer service (Austin et al., 2017). This study focused on the subjective customer service experiences of college students and the lack of scholarly attention to the possible relationship between perceived levels of customer service quality, college student motivation, and persistence at various institutions of higher education. Not many studies have been published that examined the influence of perception of customer service in higher education experience.

Offering strong customer service to students has become an expectation in higher education (Pardee et al., 2017). Until recently, people did not expect an immediate response to a request, but in the digital age immediate response is expected (Pardee et al., 2017). As the number of college students decline, higher education institutions are looking to other organizations for ideas on how to recruit and retain students in some sections of the country (Pardee et al., 2017). Although many professors and staff are reluctant to think of students as customers, it might be beneficial to address how everyone can work together to improve student satisfaction by meeting their expectations (Pardee et al., 2017).

How can faculty and staff exceed the expectations of students? Today's students have many options, so if they don't feel valued and engaged in their academic community, the chances are high that they will go to another college or university (Soisson, 2017). To quote Sam Walton, "If you don't take care of your customer, someone else will." In addition, research showed that many studies have been using students' satisfaction as a gauge of their entire experience in higher education (Douglass et al., 2015; Griffioen et al., 2018). The fact that undergraduate student satisfaction is one of the primary performance markers of educational quality in educational practice may be a contributing factor to the increased interest in this topic (Duque, 2014). It is vital to look at undergraduate students' satisfaction regarding quality since it is connected to efforts to retain and attract students in higher education settings (Douglas et al., 2006; Elliot et al., 2002).

Raisman (2017) concluded that the quality of student assistance on American colleges is inadequate to mediocre, which may lead to students dropping out. They found customer service tasks such as teaching, communication skills, and returning calls and emails are rated poorly, which was alarming considering the importance of providing adequate to excellent academic customer service to retain students and create revenue (Raisman, 2017). Further, less than desirable academic customer service accounts for up to 78 percent of students' reasons for leaving an institution. The study also found staff who are intended to provide customer service are frequently dissatisfied with their jobs and exceptional academic customer service may provide a college with a considerable competitive edge in terms of student recruitment and retention. They argued encouraging students to stay loyal to a school, providing exceptional academic customer service has additional benefits, such as the capacity to generate funds for new initiatives and professors because of increased revenue from higher retention rates. Participating college administrators indicated they had no customer service training. The researchers concluded that effective training led to good to excellent customer service as these persons are responsible for ensuring quality customer service.

Academic motivation and engagement are believed to influence college students varied outcomes (Allen et al., 2008; An et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Roksa et al., 2017; Trolan et al., 2016). Behavior manifestations such as attending class, taking notes in class, doing assignments, asking questions during lectures, connecting with instructors, studying for examinations, and avoiding absences illustrate the importance of motivation (Wu, 2019). This study examined the influence of college students' views of customer service quality on their motivation and loyalty to remain enrolled in higher education institutions. It is vital to highlight that in current studies, student involvement was also considered a significant element in relation to student persistence, alongside motivation. Motivation is an innate and unobservable psychological factor, whereas engagement is an observable and externalized construct (e.g., the Motivation and Engagement Wheel) (Martin, Ginns, & Papworth, 2017).

This study was guided by the following research questions; (1) What are college students' expectations of the customer service received on campus? (2) What are college students' perceptions of campus customer service quality? (3) What feelings did students experience after campus customer service experiences? (4) What is the impact of students' perceptions of campus customer service quality on student motivation and persistence?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK / LITERATURE REVIEW

This study utilized The Gap Model of Service Quality (aka the Customer Service Gap Model or the 5 Gap Model). This framework facilitated comprehension of the notion of customer satisfaction. The model outlines the five most significant customer satisfaction gaps that organizations must overcome to satisfy customer expectations. According to the Gap Model of Service Quality, (knowledge, policy, delivery, communication, and customer gaps) client happiness is mostly determined by perception. Customers will be happy if they perceive that the service satisfies their expectations. If not, they will be unhappy. If customers are unsatisfied, it will be due to one of the

five "gaps" in customer service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985). According to the approach, an organization should measure each of these gaps and then implement measures to manage and reduce each gap (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985). This research identified whether any of these gaps exist at the institutions under investigation. It was believed that the data would reveal if college students' evaluations of the quality of customer service on campus correlate with their motivation and persistence.

How does the Gap Model relate to or explain student motivation and loyalty? According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, persistence is defined as sustained enrolment at a school (or degree completion). Student motivation relates naturally to a student's willingness to engage in the learning process (Lumsden, 1994). But it also involves the motivations or objectives underlying their participation or nonparticipation in academic activities (Lumsden, 1994). The GAP Model of Service Quality aids in identifying customer service gaps between the perceived service and the desired service that may impede student motivation or discourage perseverance. It outlines the five primary gaps in consumer satisfaction that firms must overcome to exceed customer expectations. In this study, those are the student expectations. As excellent customer experiences are antecedents to customer satisfaction, retention, and positive word-of-mouth (Klaus & Maklan, 2013), many organizations (including higher education) view the provision of exceptional experiences as a primary priority (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2009). High service quality is attributed to companies that meet or surpass customer expectations. Service Quality characterizes the company's ability to retain consumers (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2009). Retention of customers is the best indicator of service quality.

Facilitating this study of the impact of student perceptions regarding customer service quality levels on student motivation and persistence was significant. It provided an opportunity to compare the findings of other researchers such as Reeve, 2012 and Schunk & Mullen, 2012 who proposed a multifaceted involvement that emphasized motivation as the compelling factor for student persistence. Wu's 2019 research on academic motivation, connection, and accomplishment among college students addresses a critical research question:

"What are the relationships between college students' motivation and engagement and their academic outcomes?" He found motivation and engagement to be important indicators of college students' long-term and short-term success in academics and careers. Students' motivation has been associated with scholastic results in higher education, including grades, retention, persistence, choice of major, graduation, and mental wellbeing (Allen, 1999; An, 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Guiffrida et al., 2013; Roksa et al., 2017; Trolian et al., 2016).

Research has shown academic motivation influences promoting students' academic levels of achievement. Intrinsic motivation in particular, can contribute positively to achievement (Guiffrida et al., 2013). Motivation has been associated with academic accomplishment for Latino college students, notably first-generation college students (Trevino et al., 2014). Student motivation was positively correlated with persistence and academic performance throughout college. Litalien et al. (2017) used the Academic Motivation Scale to study college students and discovered that general motivation linked positively with academic achievement and vitality but was inversely related to dropout intentions and psychological wellbeing.

Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive types of engagement form an integral part of the relationship between school contexts, students' perceptions of school components, and academic motivation (Wang & Eccles 2013). Between cultural and social elements, individual traits, and academic outcomes, significance between academic motivation, enthusiasm, and individual qualities and backgrounds, as well as family backgrounds were found (Lauermaann et al., 2017; Pike et al., 2012). Wu (2019) in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE) found high motivated students committed more time and energy to education (i.e., attended classes, did their homework, performed arduous undertakings, and interacted with peers and instructors), and received higher grades, stayed in college, graduated on time, and enjoyed numerous psychosocial benefits. Although finding only partial evidence for the impact of academic engagement on college students' academic accomplishment, the study supported the relevance of student motivation as a part of the college experience.

The importance of customer service in educational settings is comparable to customer service in other areas. Service and shopping experience are becoming increasingly important in the service industry (Roozen et al., 2019). Roozen and Katidis investigated the impact of customer-employee interaction and relationships as well as client contentment, allegiance, and recommendation plans, and analyzed the service experiences. In recent years, researchers, business practitioners, and policy makers have come to recognize that customer service is a dominant factor in the economy today (Angelova et al., 2011) and that customers are an important contributor to a positive business and shopping experience (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Tynan et al., 2009). Because client contact is increasingly replacing excellence as the fundamental vying asset in business, many organizations are focusing on characterizing and enhancing customer experiences (Klaus et al., 2013).

Companies are now attempting to identify elements which contribute to customer retention and happiness, and how they factor into business performance and spending (Anic et al., 2006). Customers' experiences should be diversified, according to researchers, which has a host of advantages, including retaining customers (Spake et al., 2003) and increasing client happiness and continuing benefits (Gaur & Xu, 2009; Carpenter & Fairhurst, 2005). Customer happiness, retention, and word-of-mouth referrals are all preceded by positive customer experiences (Klaus & Maklan, 2013). Creating exceptional experiences is seen as a top priority for many companies in today's

marketplace (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2009). Understanding how consumers form and assess relationships with firms and subsequent outcomes in terms of customer pleasure, retention and referrals, have become a fundamental concern for stakeholders in a range of sectors (Cottet et al., 2006). Nearly 23 percent of students will quit a college or transfer to another because of a negative service experience (Raisman, 2012). Poor quality of student services is a leading cause of attrition.

Providing good customer service to students has become a higher priority. On the other hand, customer service in higher education, is still a relatively new notion, and many people are unsure what it means for students, teachers, and staff (Seigle, 2017). Students and their parents are accustomed to receiving this level of service daily, and they now expect the same level of service in higher education (Richardson, 2017). Higher education services are being compared to those provided by merchants such as Amazon.com, Land's End, Disney, Princess Cruises and many other businesses that have learned that providing excellent customer service is the path to customer loyalty and positive referrals (Richardson, 2017).

Schools and colleges are looking for strategies to attract and retain "customers" as the number of students in various parts of the United States diminishes (Pardee, 2017). Many higher education professionals dislike thinking of students as clients (Pardee, 2017). In higher education, however, it might be useful to demonstrate how everyone can work together to improve student happiness by satisfying student expectations (Pardee, 2017). What are the expectations of students, and how should teachers and staff try to meet or surpass them? Students today have a plethora of options, and if they are not engaged and appreciated in their current academic community, they will transfer to another (Soisson, 2017). To paraphrase Sam Walton, "If you don't take care of your customer, someone else will," (p. 173).

Traditional colleges and universities have steadily become more customer-focused, though not always expressly so. According to Gates, Hefferman, and Sudore (2015), initiatives to address students' needs and support persistence are expanding beyond the classroom, particularly in the field of auxiliary services. For example, they point to High Point University, a tiny North Carolina university that provides additional amenities like an ice cream truck, valet parking, and a concierge desk. Auxiliary services may serve to keep more money on campus and make college and university campuses more customer-friendly, both of which are positive outcomes. If these services aren't offered at a student's desired institution or university, Gates, Hefferman, and Sudore (2015) state that they may opt to spend their tuition and entertainment money somewhere else. Janardhana & Rajasekhar (2012) assert that students in higher education are the customers. They receive the services that are provided by their institution. Because of this, their satisfaction should be recognized as a key factor in the determination of customer satisfaction (Janardhana & Rajasekhar, 2012).

Gallagher & Mishra, 2013 suggest that in higher education, customer satisfaction is linked to service quality. Higher education institutions must continually assess the student's (customer's) needs to stay competitive. It begins with listening to the student's (customer's) expressions (Gallagher & Mishra, 2013). Masserini, Bini, and Pratesi (2019) investigated whether the quality of educational services has an impact on students' satisfaction levels with their university experience, as well as what these relationships may mean for students' loyalty, as part of their research on quality of services and their impact on students' satisfaction and loyalty in higher education. Particularly, they state that such concepts have been found to be strategic concerns in both public and private universities in today's increasingly competitive higher education environment.

Masserini, Bini, and Pratesi (2019) contend that quality of service is one of the most significant aspects of excellence in a highly competitive higher education environment. They explored the correlation between perceived educational service quality and students' general happiness with their university experience, as well as the impact of these connections on student persistence. The findings of their research revealed that service quality was a major factor in student happiness. According to Elliott and Healy (2001), the experiences students have on campus play a major role in student satisfaction. They believe that higher education institutions must focus on the features that students value and demonstrate their commitment to delivering those features (Elliott & Healy, 2001).

In order to design and evaluate a conceptual model that reflects how customer (service users) and service provider relationships might lead to keeping clients, Coelho et al., (2021) examined the value, satisfaction, and retention of higher education students. Their study was carried out by administering a survey to 301 students at a higher education institution, and the results were evaluated using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Their results indicated customer satisfaction impacted customer retention. There was no consensus on exactly which constructs effectively preceded customer retention.

METHOD

A qualitative method was used to provide insight into the experiences of the students and aided in the development of notions pertaining to the area of study. This method assisted in the discovery of new ideas and individual perspectives and allowed for a variety of unstructured or semi-structured data collecting techniques, such as group discussions, individual interviews, diary, and journal activities. Using a qualitative technique also allowed for direct engagement with student participants.

In modern competitive economy, tracking and optimizing customer satisfaction are essential. Only a few studies on student experience and loyalty are available in the context of higher education, which highlights the need for more research in the area according to Shahsavari and Sudzina (2017) who found that student satisfaction has a major direct impact on student loyalty. This study was best suited for a qualitative approach since qualitative research is typically employed to comprehend perspectives and perceptions.

This study was founded on the notion that students' customer service experiences share a common essence and that this essence is shared by others who have had comparable experiences. The experiences of the participating students were evaluated through interviews to ascertain the substance of their customer service encounters. The emphasis was placed on the students' personal customer service interactions. It was assumed that a single incidence of bad customer service cannot be expected to be reflective of the entire student population. Furthermore, it was not assumed that positive impressions are typical either. The researchers acknowledge past experiences as students. To limit any prior biases, the researchers bracketed their thoughts in the resulting interviewing and analysis processes.

Site Selection

This research was conducted at two higher education institutions in the Southeast. The selection of these institutions was based on their historical relevance, accessibility, and location. The geographical locations of the universities provided for minimal travel time since neither institution was more than three hours distant by car. Access to students and the capacity to obtain permission to conduct the study were also considered while selecting the universities for this research.

Sample Selection

This study used purposeful sampling technique with participants consisting of 16 college students from two distinct higher education institutions. From each site, two sophomores, two juniors, and four seniors were chosen. A total of 16 students were chosen to participate until saturation was reached. To get access to the students, telephone calls were sent to the site gatekeepers notifying them of the intended research and requesting permission to conduct interviews with students at their institution. Once each gatekeeper confirmed readiness to offer authorization for student participation in the study, the institutions' IRB clearance was sought to conduct research. Each gatekeeper was then requested to assist with introductions to eligible and potentially interested students. Calls and emails were made to interested students to describe the purpose of the study and their involvement. Those students who accepted to participate in the study were assigned an interview appointment date and time once they had completed the relevant documentation.

A criteria was utilized to guarantee that all students selected for involvement in the study were full- or part-time students who had been enrolled at their institution for at least six months at the time of the study. During matriculation, each student must have had at least 10 encounters with administrators, instructors, or staff. These exchanges might have been in-person, telephone, or electronic communication. If a student had not been enrolled for at least six months or had not had at least ten encounters with administrators, instructors, or staff, they were unable to participate.

Data Collection

To provide data for the analytic section of the study, a sample of eight students each from two higher education institutions, for a total of sixteen participants, were purposefully selected. Identifying students who were qualified to participate in the study was the first stage in data gathering. On each campus, professional acquaintances (gatekeepers) of the researchers were urged to publicize the need for study volunteers in their seminars and activities. Students who registered their interest were contacted and asked whether they wished to join, pending eligibility. Once enough eligible participants were identified, they were provided with information about the study and a consent form to sign, indicating that they understood the purpose of the study, their right to stop participating at any time, and the researchers' promise to maintain confidentiality and not cause any harm during the study. After completing the consent form, participant interviews were planned and conducted.

Each student who was eligible and consented to participate was interviewed. This gave individuals the opportunity to share their experiences with customer service on their campus. At the beginning of the interviews, students were asked demographic questions and then given the opportunity to explore their former lives, going as far back as feasible before they were students at their university. The conversation then focused on the specifics of the students' actual interactions with customer service on their campus. Because of the study's research questions, open-ended questions were constructed. The questions were developed based on the student's perceived familiarity with the campus, knowledge of who to contact for specific student issues, ease of access to office personnel, availability of information and materials such as referrals to other departments within the college or outside community resources, confidentiality, professionalism, and response to any questions students had.

In the final round of the interview, students were encouraged to reflect on the significance of their shared experiences and to offer any further information they desired. They were asked to be accessible for follow-up

interviews in case any comments required clarification. Each interview was allocated 90 minutes. Each interview was captured on video and audio and then transcribed. Due to the ongoing worldwide epidemic, every interview was done online using the Zoom platform.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were completed, the transcripts of each interview were reviewed and searched for patterns in the participants' responses regarding their experiences with customer service on campus, their motivation levels, and their intentions regarding persistence until graduation from the respective institution. Prior to reaching conclusions, common themes in the replies were identified and coded. Reading through the data, applying color codes to extracts, completing many rounds of coding, grouping codes according to themes, and generating interpretations that led to the end study conclusions comprised the coding process.

Specifically, the data analysis and coding procedure began with the listening to and transcription of recorded interviews. The following phase consisted of reading the written transcripts to acquire a general, informal sense of what the student participants said and how the findings appeared. To start the formal data analysis, in vivo coding was employed to determine plausible codes that might arise from the actual data. Using in vivo coding, the researchers were able to identify and indicate the underlying concepts in the data. Comparing the participant data, the researchers searched for patterns and connections. The interview transcripts were examined to identify any resulting themes. The researchers meticulously and methodically highlighted interview excerpts with color codes. Similar types of information were color-coded and divided into groups (clusters) to link various concepts and topics.

Once sorted, significant themes, repeating concepts or language, and belief patterns that connected experiences, people, and places were identified. Finding and structuring ideas and concepts, developing overarching themes in the data, validating the reliability and validity of the data analysis and the findings, and identifying potential and reasonable explanations for the findings were the first steps in color-coding the data. When analyzing the numerous replies to a single topic, repeated terms or concepts were identified. Color codes and categories were utilized to arrange common words and phrases. To develop the overall themes, each color-coded answer category was examined for one or more connected themes that provided the data a deeper significance. To reach a conclusion, distinct categories were integrated into major overarching themes comprised of subthemes.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Description of the Participants

The participants for this study consisted of undergraduate college students who were all working towards the completion of their bachelor's degrees and who had been serviced by various campus employees at least 10 times during their matriculation. A sample of 16 participants were interviewed on Zoom to obtain data for analysis. Eight participants were from each of the two institutions. The pseudonyms used to identify the participants were selected by the researchers and confirmed by participants during the demographic profiles and used during the interviews. Table 1 is a demographic descriptions of the 16 participants interviewed.

Pseudonym	Class	Gender	Age	Race	Major	Institution
Allison	Senior	F	22	African American	Sociology/Social Work	A
Barbara	Senior	F	21	Caucasian	Biology/Chemistry	A
Cindy	Senior	F	21	African American	English/Pre-Law	A
Donald	Senior	M	22	African American	English/Creative Writing	A
Elizabeth	Junior	F	20	Hispanic	Biology Pre-Med	A
Felicia	Junior	F	19	African American	Psychology	A
Ginger	Sophomore	F	18	African American	English	A
Hannah	Sophomore	F	20	African American	Political Science	A
Ivan	Senior	M	23	African American	Mass Communications	B
Julie	Senior	F	22	African American	Mass Communications	B
Kim	Senior	F	52	African American	Social Work	B
Lola	Senior	F	22	African American	Social Work	B
Melvin	Junior	M	20	African American	Mass Communications	B
Nadine	Junior	F	21	African American	Mathematics	B
Olivia	Sophomore	F	19	African American	Biology	B
Paul	Sophomore	M	19	African American	Business Administration	B

Table 1: Participants Demographic Information

Research Question 1: What are college students' expectations of the customer service received on campus? This research question was about the Knowledge Gap from The Gap Model of Service Quality. The Knowledge Gap focuses on the customer's service expectations and the company's delivery of that service. The purpose of this

research question was to understand what students expect in regard to the customer service they receive on campus. The themes that emerged from the analysis of responses were: Courteous Communication Expectations and Reasonable Delivery of Service.

Theme 1: Courteous Communication Expectations

After asking each participant what their expectations were of the customer service received on campus, the themes of Courteous Communication and Reasonable Delivery of Service emerged. A majority of the participants (13 of 16) stated that they expected to receive respectful service, kindness, politeness, understanding and helpfulness. They each wanted, at minimum to receive the service that they needed or requested. Barbara had low expectations because of negative preconceived ideas regarding the way historically black colleges and universities operate. Felicia's expectations were low because of information that had been shared by relatives who were former students.

Lola did not know what to expect so she approached the entire college experience with an open mind. Participants who had high expectations of the customer service received on campus repeatedly stated that when they needed to be serviced in any capacity on campus they expected the employee (whether faculty or staff) to be kind to them, to show them respect as young adults, to speak to them in a polite, warm and welcoming manner, to help them with their needs or be able to direct them to the proper source for assistance and to demonstrate empathy and understanding for the concerns at hand. Students also repeatedly stated that they expected to have their needs satisfactorily met when they reached out to an employee for service. Cindy stated:

I expect the employees on campus to be understanding and helpful. I expect people to, like always, understand their roles and responsibilities, and always be able to help students, like when anything comes up, or falls within their office duties. Or at least be able to, you know, direct me to someone that can assist. After, you know, a couple of experiences, like now, I don't always expect people to really be able to know like, to know what to do, or how to help, sometimes they can't.

When asked to share a few times that she had to reach out to an employee on campus for service, Cindy shared the following:

Um, I would say one of the experiences I had was to switch from the bookstore credit to Follett access... it was a lot of confusion with that...And I wanted to opt out. I remember emailing, I can't remember her name, and she doesn't work there anymore. But she was like the, like the bookstore manager. I remember I remember, emailed her and it kind of it took her a long time to respond. Well, actually, she never responded. And I tried calling, um, no answer. I had been talking to some of my other classmates. And they said that they had called up there and like, they got a response but every time I call, like, I don't get an answer... I'm [going to} just go up there and when I went there, she was very helpful. When I actually went to the bookstore, that's when she explained everything to me...So yeah, I wasn't getting a response, like through email or phone so I just showed up in person.

Donald responded:

Well I prefer to actually have customer service that puts the customer first, you know, just remember that the customer remembers your personality first so leave a lasting impression...I have worked in retail all my life and know what customer service is plus respect, you know, so as a student or a customer allow me to see who you actually are and be able to actually, like, engage and have an understanding that, you know, right now I'm in need of this service, and you're the only person I come to for these services, so like please help me, but at the same time be polite, leaving a door open. So I can be able to come to you at any time, I'll be able to trust you with the things I actually am in need of help with". Donald recalled his experience with the admissions process: "I had tried to contact someone in the admissions office several times on the phone...my dad and I finally decided to just come down here... upon meeting her in person she had a harsh mean attitude...I was discouraged at first, I was upset at first. But then I met Mrs. Stone...Mrs. Stone corrected everything...her personality was more of an open person. Ever since then I was like I can talk to her. I can laugh at her jokes and I can relate to her...she did enter my transcripts right and corrected everything...if it wasn't for Mrs. Stone I would have never gone to this college in the first place.

Along with the above narratives, other participants also shared that they expected to receive respectful service, kindness, politeness, understanding and helpfulness.

Olivia stated:

I expect the people helping me to talk to me that way that they want somebody to talk to them and I expect to be treated like an adult and don't talk down to me or talk to me like I am stupid or dumb or a kid, respect is earned not given.

Nadine said:

I expect whoever I go to be professional even if they are having a bad day, that's what they teach us in class, be professional, even if you are having a bad day or had a bad morning, greet people with a smile when they come in and be polite to me especially if I am polite to you, check your feelings at the door.

Theme 2: Reasonable Delivery of Service

The students explained that they were not expecting "miracles". They just expected to be able to get what they needed without being turned away, redirected several times, receiving substandard service, no service at all or having to wait extensively. Cindy shared: "When I needed help at the bookstore, all I wanted was to opt out of the program. I didn't want to have to go through all that just to get out of a program that I didn't even want to be in in the first place. I mean like really just do what you say you're going to do without having to make people go all over the place."

Paul recalled:

Other people shouldn't be having to help me get my classes straight. The person I went to sent me everywhere. I was like, you're the one everybody is this major supposed to come to and you sending people to everybody else. Then you get there and you got to go to somebody else and they asking you why you got sent there. Just do what you here to do!

Donald said:

When I got down here with my dad, we were both like, now this don't make no sense. That was some money we could [have] spent somewhere else and some time we could [have] been somewhere else, doing something else but we had to come to the school in person, walk all over, just because we couldn't get nobody on the phone. Even if it was something I had to do, which it wasn't, I'm just saying, at least answer the phone and tell me that so I ain't got to come up here.

Research Question 2 asked: What are college students' perceptions of campus customer service quality? This research question was about the Policy Gap from The Gap Model of Service Quality. The Policy Gap focuses on management's understanding of the customer needs and the translation of that understanding into service delivery policies and standards. The purpose of this research question was to explore students' observations regarding the service delivery standards and policies on campus. After analyzing responses, the themes that emerged were: Inconsistent Service Delivery Standards, Favoritism, and Lack of Timeliness.

Theme 3: Inconsistent Service Delivery Standards

After asking each participant how they would describe the overall customer service quality on their campus, the theme of Inconsistent Service Delivery Standards emerged. This conclusion was formed after 12 out of 16 participants indicated that the service delivery policies and standards varied greatly based on which office and which employee from which they were receiving the service. Barbara and Elizabeth stated that the service delivery quality on their campus was good and that each time they needed something they were always assisted with no problems or issues even if it took a day to two to get a resolution. Kim stated that the service delivery quality on campus was less than desirable but improving. Ginger stated that the customer service on campus was completely awful and shameful.

Each participant was asked how they would describe (overall) the service delivery quality on their campus. Participants were asked to describe the service delivery standards they had experienced. They were asked to support their responses by giving specific examples with background information of times when they needed to be serviced. Participants were asked to include the method(s) used to make contact, to tell how they were greeted or acknowledged, and to share the time frame to get a resolution to each of their situations.

Kim said:

I had a mild stroke so I have to use a walker because it affected my limbs. Other than that, I'm okay but I need handicap accessible classrooms. The school is old and if I wanted to I could sue them, but I'm not going to do that. Some of the buildings I cannot get in but, the teachers are nice to me and they let me do my work online when I can't get in the buildings so I can't complain about that, that's good customer service but, they do need to upgrade because one day they might get a student who is more handicapped than me, who is actually staying on campus and that won't be good.

Allison shared experiences in 3 separate areas on campus:

The cafeteria people are all nice, but, why is it like that everywhere you go? The people who get paid the least are always the nicest ones at the place. Regarding faculty, Allison shared, "some of

them are real nice but, we have this one man in the history department that is awful. He don't half come to class. We never know what's going on. No syllabus. We went to the Vice President. He comes when he wants to, does what he wants to and nobody says nothing. We told the department chair but that was a waste of time. It was nothing left to do but just try to put up with it and tell other people don't take this man's class". Allison also stated emphatically that "the customer service in financial aid is adjusted to the person that they're talking to at the moment. Certain students, their favorites, they cater to, but other people not so much. Referring to the person who once serviced her, Allison says, "she was all loud and mean, she had bad attitude from the beginning. She didn't even let me get my words out". What puzzled Allison is "when my roommate who is a student leader and in a bunch of clubs and organizations got her award letter, I went up there with her but I stayed in the hallway. This same lady was nice to her, like a totally different person. We were talking about it at lunch and somebody else said she's always cool with me. This person was in SGA, he's an RA and he sings in the choir". Allison concluded "everybody says the same thing, if you're active on campus, they push you straight through when you need something".

That premise resonated in other responses as well.

Theme 4: Favoritism

Oftentimes, the policies and standards in service delivery were attributed to 'who' was needing the service according to 13 of the 16 participants. In addition to Allison's experience in the Financial Aid office, Ivan shared his observations.

Ivan explained:

I know I get better service and faster service because of my position on SGA. Around here, if you are on SGA or active on campus, they treat you like you should be treated, really all the time. And, honestly I kind of feel bad for the other students because sometimes they come to me and ask me to help them get things done or to request certain things for them because they know if I ask or say something it will get handled quicker or better than if they make the request. Like sometimes even people who are having problems in certain areas will ask me to come with them so that they can get some help the right way, and you know really, that's not the way it should be, but truthfully, that's the way it is.

Kim said:

One thing that concerns me is the fact that I was treated well when it was discovered that I belonged to a prominent family, well known in the community. I wasn't valued until there was an identification there. Oh, you're so and so. But when I'm just calling there's a dry "okay" just plain Jane everything. But when they started realizing who I was it was "hold on just a minute, we'll get that for you." Then I was like, okay, I have to be somebody in order to get the treatment that I need but every person matters. Every person should be treated with dignity and respect. And if you're not getting that, then you're not getting what you should get. Elizabeth is a Hispanic student who reported similar experiences.

Elizabeth said:

It leaves me feeling a little weird actually, like I'm Hispanic, so I am a minority too, I was raised in a black community and so I really didn't expect to be treated any special kind of way when I came here but, I am one of the few people who has never ever had a problem with anybody on campus. As much as you probably heard about financial aid I never had a problem with them and my stuff wasn't even in on time freshman year!

Theme 5: Lack of Timeliness

A total of 11 participants mentioned some form of long wait in regard to various services on their campus. A third-year student, Felicia shared her experiences.

Felicia stated:

"I hate the start of the school year because I already know that no matter how I prepare for it I have to wait two hours to see somebody in the business office unless I get up at 5am and go camp outside their door in the hallway at 6am!" Ginger told about a semester long wait to have the bathroom repaired in her suite.

Ginger stated:

We told them about this when we moved in! I know that is a busy time of year but at least they could have fixed it like the next week or something. Our toilet doesn't work so we have to share the toilet with 4 other people in the next suite and whatever the problem is affects their shower so we all use the bathroom in their bathroom and we all use the shower in our bathroom. That's a total of 8 people using one toilet and one shower and half of us have 8 o'clock classes!

Kim is a senior. She is also a non-traditional student, 52 years old. The long waits to get information regarding senior obligations frustrated her.

Kim stated:

I am not like these young people on campus. I am 52 years old, I have a life, a husband, children, grandchildren and a job. When I call up to the school for information, I expect them to be able to answer me or call me back in a timely manner. Sometimes it takes them weeks to answer the simplest of questions. Plus, I am trying to graduate so if there is anything that I need to know or do, I need to know early so I can get it done. One time it took my department so long to call me back that when somebody did call me I forgot that I had called them. I do have one lady that I depend on for information and help. I hate to keep bothering her all the time but that's the only person I can get some sense out of. The rest of them, forget it. They either don't answer or take forever to answer. The policy is do this, do that so you can graduate on time but when you reach out to them, they don't hold up their end of the bargain. So they have all this stuff in writing on paper but it's no good because they not doing their part.

Research Question 3 asked: What feelings did students experience after campus customer service experiences? This research question was about the Delivery Gap from The Gap Model of Service Quality. The Delivery Gap focuses on feelings regarding the actual delivery of service in comparison to the established service delivery policies and standards. Unlike Research Question 2 which expounded on students' observations regarding service delivery policies and standards, the purpose of this research question was to find out how participants felt in regard to the service they had received on campus and whether or not it aligned with established campus policies and standards.

Participants were asked to discuss campus policies and standards in relation to the service delivery they had experienced. They were asked to elaborate on factors such as whether there were adequate resources to meet their needs, whether the employees assisting them seemed knowledgeable of campus policies and standards, along with the process that was used to handle the situations they shared. Participants were asked to share the results of their specific situations and how they felt because of the outcomes. They were asked to elaborate on whether or not the services offered provided the level of quality they expected while sharing some things that they liked and disliked about the service experiences. Lastly, participants were asked if they had taken any actions because of their experiences. After analyzing the responses, the themes that emerged were: Lack of Knowledge, Lack of Resources, Feelings of Helplessness, Feelings of Frustration, and Family Atmosphere Among Students.

Thirteen participants gave responses that centered on not really knowing actual campus policies that were in the student handbooks. They each knew what they expected to happen and what they thought was the right thing to do but, admitted that they did not actually read the student handbook thoroughly or know the exact campus policies regarding various situations on campus. Therefore, they could not actually say with surety whether or not there were deficiencies with campus policies. In regard to the service they had received on campus, students were not sure whether or not it aligned with established campus policies and standards.

However, they could say whether they felt like there were adequate resources to meet their needs and whether or not the employees assisting them appeared knowledgeable. Additionally, each participant did share how each situation they discussed in the interview was handled and their feelings about the results in each situation. Actions taken because of customer service experiences were superficial in nature. Responses consisted primarily of students responding that they thought about transferring to other colleges but, for various reasons did not. They stated that over time they learned what to expect and minimized their expectations as a result.

Donald shared:

I really had thought about transferring a while back, like sophomore year, but, I didn't want to risk losing my credits. Plus, not only that, I did not want to have to go through all that with admissions at another school like I did here. I just stayed and toughed it out. At least I know the people here now so I know who to stay away from and who to go to if I need something but, I'm about to graduate now so all I need is for them to tell me I got all my graduation stuff done so I can walk across that stage!

Ginger shared,

“It's getting to the point like I'm, I'm knowing that it's always gonna take a long time. So it's just something I've kind of settled with.” Hannah shared the sentiment and stated: “I'm a legacy. Both my parents went here and so did my aunts and uncles. They all say it's part of the college experience, so I just take it into stride and try to make sure that I have done my part so that if something does happen at least its not on me, its on them.”

Theme 6: Lack of Knowledge

When asked if they detected any deficiencies in campus policies and standards while being served by anyone in any area on campus, 13 out of 16 students (all except Barbara, Elizabeth and Melvin) stated that they could not say for sure because they really did not know the exact campus policies. In reference to campus policies and standards, Barbara had an observation.

Barbara said:

There is a section of the handbook that stated about the way we're supposed to look on campus and even like down to our hair and making sure that your hair is quote-unquote, nice, is presentable. And I was, and my question only is like, what does that mean? Because what do you describe as neat hair and being presentable? And that's something that's been in the handbook forever.

Olivia explained:

“I'm Biology Pre-Med so I missed a lot of the orientation stuff freshman year. They probably gave out the school rules then but we, all the science majors were in testing and stuff so we missed a lot.” Cindy said: “I haven't seen that thing since freshman year, oh wait, I think it's online now, but, I don't know, no, I don't really look at it so I don't know if the policies and standards are deficient or not. I just know they need to do better about a lot of stuff around here.”

Ginger shared an instance of a campus policy that she felt “might be deficient because it really doesn't take into account that some people have to work”. She shared information about trying to come back on campus late at night after working a late shift at FedEx.

Theme 7: Lack of Resources

When asked if they felt like there were adequate resources available to meet their needs, 12 participants stated that they felt like school resources were not adequate. Melvin referred to his incident with inaccurate billing although he has a full academic scholarship.

Melvin said:

Even though they got it straightened out and everything, it took me going up there three times before I could see the lady. First day she wasn't there. Second day she was at lunch. Third day is when I finally got to see her. If they had some more people working up there somebody else could've helped me the first time so that definitely wasn't high quality customer service.

Ginger referred back to her semester-long bathroom issue. She said: “They must not have enough resources, money, parts, workers, something! Ain't no reason 8 people should have been sharing a bathroom for a whole semester!”

Allison and Felicia both referred to the need for more resources (employees) in the financial aid and business office. Allison recalled several instances of using her position as a student leader to help students move ahead in the line because they had been waiting hours and sometimes days to be serviced in those areas. She shared an instance where a student in the dorm came to her room and said she was moving out because “classes had already started like a week ago and nobody still got back to her about her financial situation.” Allison said: “A bunch of times students call me and be like hey can you help me get my financial aid straightened out. These people keep saying they getting to it and I still ain't heard nothing.”

Theme 8: Feelings of Helplessness

Each participant was asked to describe the processes used to handle various situations that they chose to share along with their thoughts on the processes, the results, and their feelings. A majority of the participants (12 of 16) described less than desirable processes with delayed results and feeling like they simply had to accept that “that is just the way it is around here” even though they were dissatisfied. For example, Donald spoke of requiring special accommodations due to an injury for a period of time. Donald had a 504 Temporary Disability form that needed to be processed. After several calls and emails to three different offices on campus, Donald gave up hope of being assisted.

Donald stated:

Um, at this point I feel like the quality I expect is very bare minimum, I really do. I'm like, I would just like a response. I was like, a response from the right people, like I'm fine jumping through hoops. I'm used to it at this point, I shouldn't have to jump through all these hoops to get a simple question answered or get access to something. But, you know, like my position is I shouldn't have to do this damn much like this much work to get a single thing handled, I shouldn't have to be contacting advocacy agencies to get my 504 sorted, and it's still not fully sorted. Because you guys decide, oh, yeah, it's [going to] work on our time, not your time. And so my expectations are so bare minimum, and it still feels like that's too much because they don't want to do enough.

One thing Donald did like was the honesty from a particular department head. Donald mentioned that there were some issues with a faculty member. Donald went to the department head and shared the following comments:

Um, I like it when people are honest with me. I really do. Like the issue I was having with a professor last semester where she wasn't teaching and she wasn't helping. And I had to have like a sit-down conversation with the head of her department. Because, like, I just didn't know who else to talk to anymore. Um, it was so great when they were honest with me, and they're like, listen, I know that she is driving you up a wall. She's horrible. Like, if we had known like that this was going to happen, we would not have hired her. And like that kind of leveling with me. I appreciate it so much. Like, you don't have to be right all the time. I would just much rather someone not be peddling bullshit to me, trying to get me off their back because I'm trying to hold them accountable something.

Theme 9: Feelings of Frustration

Thinking back on everything shared about experiences with customer service on campus, 9 participants used the word 'frustration' and 6 participants mentioned the word 'annoyed' or 'annoying' to describe how they felt. Paul said: "Um, it's just overall very frustrating. Every time I like, have a problem, and I vent about it with my mom I'm just like, Oh, I'm so frustrated. And it just, it's just I'm constantly, like, aggravated slightly irritated, something's going on. And like, why can't this just be easier."

Felicia said:

Even though I feel totally defeated sometimes trying to get what I need I've had to learn that sometimes a code that we live by today, a famous rapper said it, he said, we have to get out of the mud. So that's how I'm kind of taking it here is that I'm kind of like, I [have to] get it out the mud. Like, I'm [going to] have to make do with what I have for now, in order for me to make it.

Theme 10: Family Atmosphere Among Students

Despite the frustration, 14 participants spoke of having a family atmosphere on their campus which contributed to their willingness to stay enrolled. Allison shared: "The school is like a family down here but its because of the students."

Elizabeth stated:

We always have that family mentality. And that's what the glue is. But also, like I say, you know, but the bad situations kind of slightly make me regret like, why did I choose this college? If it wasn't for those people to offset the people that gave me those bad experiences, I wouldn't have, like I said, I wouldn't have never stayed. But the good experiences, because of those good experiences, that has actually saved me from leaving the school. Okay. But, within those bad experiences, it set me up to say, put in my mindset to say that, you know what, I'm not gonna let this person ruin my day.

Cindy stated:

This school is really like a family, because we help each other and like if we know somebody is a bad professor, we tell our friends so they don't take them and we look out for each other like during COVID everybody made sure everybody was safe.

Hannah said:

This is just my second year here but you can feel the love. Even though they can be so slow doing stuff some of the people here are really nice. Like I can go to Ms. Smith and Ms. Turner's (names changed for anonymity) office and talk to them about my problems and even though they can't help me they still listen and let me get it out. And like the cleaning ladies are real nice. I like that because I am not a morning person but they always come through in the morning and be like Good

Morning or Have a nice day or something.

Research Question 4 asked: What is the impact of students' perceptions of campus customer service quality on student motivation and persistence? This research question was about The Communication Gap and The Customer Gap from The Gap Model of Service Quality. The Communication Gap focuses on the gap between what gets promised to customers through advertising and what gets delivered. The Customer Gap focuses on the difference between customer expectations and customer perceptions. The purpose of this research question was to explore whether students felt like they got what was promised to them through word of mouth, advertisements, or other forms of communication prior to their enrollment at the institution. Additionally, this research question sought to discover whether there was any difference between what students expected and what they perceived they had gotten in terms of customer service quality on campus. This is important to student motivation and persistence because according to The Gap Model of Service Quality, communication gaps result in dissatisfied customers. That could cause them to seek out a different provider (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985). In the worst-case situation, it might cause an institution to lose a significant number of students at once.

Students were asked to think back to what they had shared about their experiences with customer service on campus and to explain what those experiences meant to them. Specifically, they were asked to tell how (or if) the campus customer service affected their motivation (enthusiasm, drive, and determination) and their willingness or desire to persist (remain enrolled at the institution until they graduated). Students were asked what their experiences with customer service meant to them in the context of where they could have gone to college versus where they were enrolled. Students were asked to share their feelings about the services they received as compared to what they may have been promised through advertising, and how their total campus customer experience mattered to them.

Saturation was quickly reached with this research question. 14 of the 16 participants stated that they felt misled in some way and that the college they attended was different from what they had been led to believe it would be like. However, in spite of the differences mentioned and the frustration with some of their experiences, including thoughts of transferring, none of the students actually made a decision to leave. The camaraderie with other students and certain employees created a family environment that encouraged them to remain at the institution. Each student shared that the adverse experiences they encountered temporarily lessened their motivation and enthusiasm. However, the impact was not significant enough to cause them to leave. The students learned what to expect, how to navigate the system, and they were optimistic that change was possible on their campus. As a result, three themes emerged: Persistence, Motivation, and Optimism.

Allison began:

I feel like it was very misleading. Even though I am a student ambassador on campus, I feel like I was told that it was going to be a way that it wasn't. If I wasn't a student ambassador I would have really gone through worse trying to get certain things done. Before I came I was told that they were going to be helpful, they're going to be here for me. It definitely is not what I imagined at all. It definitely has been a shock. I'm just glad I was a student ambassador so I didn't go through a lot of what other people did so staying motivated wasn't too hard for me. Plus being a student leader and being in other clubs, I had connections on campus and that made me want to come back every year.

Donald said:

I understood the game and the game was get them here by any means necessary. They talked a good game, but they didn't follow through and there were several times I wanted to leave because it was nothing at all like I was told it would be but there were a couple of professors that I really got attached to and they really helped me in my department, like keeping me up on what's going on and telling me about different opportunities, so that kept me upbeat about being here.

Theme 11: Persistence

Regarding persisting, students consistently shared that in spite of how they felt about the services they had received, they would remain at their chosen institution until they graduated. Students stated that they would remain enrolled because it was too much trouble to transfer. Students stated that they did not want to lose credits or be forced to adapt to a new environment where problems could also exist. About persisting,

Allison said:

I would say I've like definitely wanted to leave. And I've expressed that to my advisor. And like how frustrated I was...she told me because I'm so far ahead and I'm on the right pathway to keep going. She's really the only reason why, if I'm being honest, that I stayed, just because she like has my best interest at heart. And she, she's helped me so much... she's mapped it out. Like we had a

zoom meeting before the semester started. She emailed me the course catalog, the graduation, like requirement chart and we sat there for like an hour on Zoom going through everything and just mapping out what classes I needed to take. And so she's really one of the main reasons that I continued school here just because she's helped me and I'm on the right track. But if I did not have her and I wasn't a student ambassador I would have, I definitely would have left after Freshman year for sure...definitely, she's played a humongous role into why I stayed here to finish my studies.

Kim said: "I never thought about leaving although at times it was hard to stay motivated."

Donald said:

I just dealt with it and stayed because of my scholarship and because of the opportunities that I received. Sometimes I wonder if I went somewhere else, like, will people be more responsive? Or like, be more helpful or wouldn't be, it wouldn't take so long to get things done. But, Um, people have problems everywhere. They just be good at hiding it. Even though the thought of leaving has crossed my mind I don't. I mean, it might be problems here, but other schools do have problems too so might as well stay here.

Theme 12: Motivation

Even though students shared numerous experiences that they felt were less than favorable, they stated that overall, those experiences did not reflect the campus service. Students shared that they were motivated by the fact that most employees seemed to be doing the best they could considering the circumstances surrounding the situations where students needed to be served. Students stated that they realized other schools had problems also and that they learned how to navigate the systems on their campuses.

Barbara shared:

Coming to this school I had preconceived notions about what it would be like even though I have been to mixed schools all my life and I live in a mixed neighborhood. But, yes, I have to be honest and say that I was clearly treated better than other students a lot of the time but still sometimes my motivation just wasn't there. Sometimes my enthusiasm just wasn't there. Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like if I went somewhere else because of the things this school doesn't have. But then I talk to some of my friends who go to other, bigger schools and they complain about some of the same things students here do. So, if I went to a PWI I would have probably had issues like everybody else. That part right there usually cheers me up and makes me glad I came here. Plus, even though you have a few rotten apples, overall the people here are nice and most of them do try to help you even if they can't get exactly what you need so I like that.

Cindy said:

Before I came, they told me that the professors and everybody was gone be there to help anytime you have a question or something even if it's two in the morning. That's partially true. Some of them will help you and some of them just say you should already know that. That kind of takes my motivation away because I'm a student. You supposed to be teaching me and you don't want to answer no questions. Some of these kids are smarter than me. I just started asking around. I'm like, okay, how are you getting that? And I just started being with people who were trying to study. So that's how I learned and started keeping my motivation up.

Theme 13: Optimism

Students reported feeling optimistic that even though they saw and experienced areas where change was needed, implementation of training or changes in operations could improve the service delivery on their campuses. In closing her interview,

Allison said:

I feel like there's definitely room for improvement. I do feel like they aren't where they should be. I don't want it to be like I was bashing the entire time. But there are a lot of holes, in this institution. When it comes to customer service there's room for improvement. I just feel like if they set up a workshop just kind of like teaching them how to like filter out emails, or like to flag an email when it's important or just like to set up a reminder in their email to like, get back to the student when they didn't get back to the student. Like if they set up something so simple like that a lot of things would be different. And like the way that things are handled would be different as well. Like, I feel like there are ways to like move forward and to better what's going on. If they

were to set up such things. So I feel like if this gets put into the final paper, I'd love to say start getting a workshop or just doing something over the summer before classes start, like how to work on communication and customer service. That could definitely like better the school for the upcoming school years.

Ivan replied:

I have definitely seen better in my school but I love spreading school spirit and school pride across campus. It's okay, it's cool. So every time I get mad or upset, it will always be about just one thing. I just tell myself like, okay, just calm down. It's okay. It's [going to] keep happening. Just keep going and just keep pushing. And if I think its going to ruin my whole day, I will go in my room. I will talk to nobody else like leave me alone. Freshman year some of the workers here really upset me. But now I'm just like, I just brush it off. I learned to walk off just like the conversation, or the situation never happened.

Lola said:

Now that I am graduating, I can say that you have to take the good with the bad. Even when we get on jobs everything is not going to be like we expect so I just always tell the freshmen don't expect stuff to be perfect, just make the best of it and be nice to everyone in the offices and all the professors. I'm a senior and I have a lot of friends at other schools, and everybody complains about the financial aid office so just do what you should, keep like three or four copies of everything, because they will lose your stuff and keep a positive attitude because at the end of the day you just trying to get your degree and get out of here.

Paul said:

The way I look at it is this: no matter what you do or where you go ain't nobody perfect, so this is really just preparing us for real life so ain't no point in running somewhere else. I just report stuff that's wrong to whoever is in charge in that spot. I usually email them so I have documentation that I did report it and how many times and hopefully they will get it straightened out. The main thing is stay calm. Some people don't get what they want because they get all loud and start cussing but just stay calm and act professional and you can usually get some help.

DISCUSSION

An analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of multiple findings related to the impact of students' perceptions regarding campus customer service quality on student motivation and persistence. Most of the significant findings that emerged from the responses to each interview question confirmed the findings of other recent studies about the impact of customer service on student motivation. However, regarding persistence, the findings of recent studies were not the same. Persistence was not affected in this study because leaving the institution was an inconvenience to the students. It was not because they wanted to persist at their institutions. These findings have a direct correlation to GAP 5 in the conceptual model used for this study. Although students chose to stay as a matter of convenience, there is no guarantee that enrollment will not be affected. Negative reviews of the institution could heavily impact future enrollment as well as the institution's bottom line.

Shahsavari and Sudzina (2017) studied student satisfaction and loyalty in Denmark. As stated in this research, they also found that in the higher education context, only a few studies are available on satisfaction and loyalty of the main customers who are the students, which signifies the need to investigate the field more thoroughly. The aim of their research was to measure the strength of determinants of students' satisfaction and the importance of precursors in students' satisfaction and loyalty in Denmark. While they found that student satisfaction is a precursor of student loyalty, they also stated that positive word of mouth to others is the result of satisfied customers who have had a good experience. In this study, students were loyal to persist at their institutions but not for the right reasons. Thus, it is the positive word of mouth that is of concern in this study. Even though students chose to stay, their word of mouth could affect future enrollment. They further asserted that the key elements to develop and manage customer relationships are customer value and customer satisfaction. In other words, "a good customer relationship creates customer satisfaction which in turn fosters loyalty," (Shahsavari and Sudzina 2017).

The increasingly competitive and dynamic educational environment brings up numerous challenges, such as the possibility of declining enrollments and competing for students with competitors. Universities are facing changes in the higher education market, and they have to be more intentional regarding their practices. Shahsavari and Sudzina (2017) state that the environment that universities operate under is getting more like private companies which means universities must become more aware of the importance of student satisfaction. Studies show that student satisfaction has a positive impact on student motivation, student retention, recruiting efforts and fundraising

which emphasizes the importance of student's satisfaction. A drop in student retention without a compensating enrollment increase affects various customers of higher education such as students, staff, faculty, alumni, donors, and others, which drives the need for managing the loyalty and retention process from the start of a student's matriculation until their graduation. It is proven that attracting a new customer cost more than retaining one. Thus, loyalty is a crucial factor for the success of every business including colleges and universities.

In his 2011 study on student satisfaction and loyalty, Budic states customer satisfaction is the best predictor of future business (Budic, 2011). He further contends that in order to achieve optimum customer satisfaction, companies must provide adequate service and support. Such is the case in this study. To provide optimal customer (student) satisfaction, institutions of higher education must provide quality service and support for students. In this study, out of state participants stated, "They don't care about us out of state students," "when they make last minute decisions, they don't consider out of state students." Feeling uncared for contributed to the adverse feelings that participants expressed. Budic (2011) further explained that quality service is not something that is just assumed but, in order to constantly improve, it must be experienced by clients; quality service must be included in all activities of the company; quality service requires commitment of all employees; quality service requires high quality partners; in short, Budic (2011) states quality service is essential in business. As this study proposes, Budic (2011) states that the customer is the one who determines quality of service.

The conceptual framework for this study was the Gap Model of Service Quality. Based on many years of using the SERVQUAL model, many other researchers have drawn conclusions regarding service quality that align with the Gap Model. Among the most important is a need to constantly listen to the customers. Participants in this study reported not feeling like they were being listened to because their questions were not answered appropriately or the information, they were given had nothing to do with what they were inquiring about. Second, in the SERVQUAL model, researchers concluded that reliability has a great impact on satisfaction. In this study participants reported discontentment because of unreliable service. One participant stated:

The sign at the mailroom says that they are open from 9-4. I went down there at 10 and nobody was there. I went at 12 and there was a lunch sign on the door. I went at 3 when I got out of class and the sign said closed for the day! How can you be closed for the day and it's not even 4? And the bad part is, it's always like that when you get a package it's a guessing game to see when somebody will be there. It's so frustrating!

That also aligns with GAP 3 in this study, The Delivery Gap - the difference between service delivery policies and standards and the actual delivery of the service.

Other conclusions that researchers using the SERVQUAL model reached which align with results of this study are: it is necessary to impress a client in that way creates an impact on satisfaction and loyalty and there is a need to be extremely honest. Budic (2011) stated that facing a downfall in enrollment along with the increased costs of functioning means that many private colleges use marketing to attract students and funds. Gap 4 in this study is The Communication Gap. The communication gap is the gap between what is gets promised through advertising of any kind and what gets delivered. Like the other gaps, there are a number of reasons why this can happen such as overpromising or insufficient communications between administrators and advertising teams.

At any rate, communication gaps lead to customer dissatisfaction. This happens because what customers receive is not what they were promised and may cause them to turn to another provider. Questions in this study related to this gap centered around whether students felt like they got what they were promised by personnel, ads, brochures and other sources of information when they enrolled at their respective institutions. Responses to these questions were all similar. The majority of the participants stated, "They told me it was a family environment" and "everybody knows everybody." That was one characteristic that the participants were pleased about. Thus, it is important to impress potential students but they also value being completely honest with them.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative research study explored the impact of students' perceptions of campus customer service quality on student motivation and persistence at two institutions of higher education in the Southeast. Interviews were conducted with 16 participants from the two institutions. Participants responded to questions regarding their perceptions of the customer service quality on their campus. The results illustrated the positively perceived customer service quality fostered student motivation but poorly perceived customer service quality resulted in decreased motivation levels in students. The results also indicated that persistence was not directly impacted by the customer service because participants felt like it was too inconvenient to transfer to another institution. Participants discussed the difficulties encountered when trying to get certain things done on campus. They also discussed the high touch quality and service provided by certain individuals and certain departments on campus. Although getting things done proved difficult and seemingly impossible at times, participants expressed frustration but remained enrolled at the institutions.

When sharing their experiences, participants often stated that the employees needed to be trained on how to deal with people especially those on whom their business depends. Specifically, more than one participant stated, “we pay them” followed by summaries of instances of perceived customer service. That premise that employees need training in customer service delivery is supported by other researchers who have concluded that as enrollment in higher education institutions continues to drop it would behoove administrators on campuses to implement comprehensive training on effective customer service.

This study was conducted in the Southeast and only included two private minority serving institutions. The study could have been strengthened if public institutions, majority institutions or institutions from other states were a part of the study. Strengths of the study include providing students the opportunity to share their experiences on campus in the hopes that more discussion will be held that centers around improving service delivery to students. The results of the study align with current research regarding the move of higher education institutions to begin operating using business models to remain competitive.

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