Background and Non-cognitive Factors Influencing Academic Persistence Decisions in College Freshmen

by

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ABSTRACT

As the retention rate of college freshmen increases, Tinto's (1993) model of academic persistence conceptualizes several dimensions of students' voluntary dropout. This study examined both personal and parental factors that may impact the academic persistence decisions of freshmen college students: 1) parental educational attainment; 2) parental valuing of education; 3) high school grade point average (GPA); 4) residential status (on- versus off-campus); 5) educational self-efficacy; 6) self-esteem; 7) personal valuing of education; 8) perceived academic preparation; and 9) academic expectations.

The study sample consisted of 378 freshmen college students at a large southwestern university who were recruited from 23 sections of a 100-level class intended to promote academic success. The participants in this cross-sectional study were restricted to freshman level students and 18 and 19 years old in accordance with Erikson's (1968) Identity stage of psychosocial development.

A hierarchical regression analysis revealed that academic persistence decisions were predicted by residential status and self-beliefs, which consisted of: educational self-efficacy, self-esteem, personal valuing of education, perceived academic preparation, and academic expectations. Parental valuing of education was a significant predictor of academic persistence decisions until self-beliefs were added to construct the full model. Although self-beliefs were collectively the most powerful predictors of persistence decisions, accounting for 22.8% of the variance, examination of the beta weights revealed that self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and personal valuing of education were the most powerful predictors, while academic expectations approached significance.

Residential status was also a significant predictor and accounted for a small but significant variance (1.6%) in academic persistence decisions. A significant multivariate difference was found between students living on campus and those living off campus. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed differences in mother's education and in parental valuing of education. These findings suggest that researchers, counselors, and college policy-makers consider on-campus living variables as well as students' self-beliefs when considering academic persistence decisions in college freshmen.

To my family
for their support and encouragement.

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Chapter 1

The Problem in Perspective

The pursuit of a bachelor's degree has become a rite of passage for many adolescents following graduation from high school. The National Center for Education Studies (NCES; 2011) asserts that approximately 57 percent of students who enroll in a 4-year institution full-time complete a bachelor's degree within six years. This illustrates that over one-third of individuals who enroll in postsecondary institutions may leave before attaining a degree, and most of these students are freshmen (NCES, 2011). Examining the factors that may promote academic persistence, especially for college freshmen, is important to establish what contributes to students' commitment to degree attainment.

In the United States (U.S.), the growing benefits of obtaining a degree and the increased opportunities to attend college have spurred more young adults to enroll in institutions of higher education. In 1974, 13 percent of adults 25 years of age and older had attended a four year college, whereas in 2004, 28 percent had (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2006). Between 1999 and 2009, enrollment in postsecondary institutions increased 38 percent, from 14.8 million to 20.4 million (NCES, 2011). Although the undergraduate attendance rate is steadily on the rise, especially among young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 (NCES, 2011), the increase in dropout rates of college students prompts researchers to question what factors contribute to this attrition.

Data collected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2010) demonstrates that dropout rates for college students in the U.S. are at an

all time high, with the U.S. placing last with a 46 percent graduation rate when compared to 18 other "Industrialized" countries. A Harvard University study entitled *Pathways to Prosperity* by Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson (2011) examined the status of the U.S. educational system over a two-year period. The authors of this study asserted that although 70 percent of individuals pursue a postsecondary education, only four in 10 students earn either an associate's or bachelor's degree by their mid-twenties. It is evident that continued research is needed to understand factors that influence students' decisions to complete their postsecondary education.

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theoretical model, which explores factors impacting academic persistence decisions among undergraduates, provides a framework for understanding the dropout process. An important component of Tinto's model is the background factors in a student's life. These background variables include parental educational attainment, parental valuing of education, and the student's high school academic performance. In addition, individual non-cognitive factors related to self-belief concepts, specifically self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, personal valuing of education, and personal perceptions of preparation and expectations of college performance, should not be ignored when trying to understand a student's decision to stay or dropout of college (e.g., Gloria, 1997; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) emphasis of student integration into the college environment may also stress the importance of students' living situations during college in terms of on-campus versus off-campus accommodations, which should

also be considered when examining student dropout behavior. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested that positive persistence decisions for degree attainment are more likely in students who succeed academically in their first year of college. Therefore, examining students during their freshman year of college is important to understand what factors facilitate academic persistence decisions in postsecondary institutions. The current study will examine the impact background and non-cognitive factors and residential status have on academic persistence decisions among college freshmen.

Academic Persistence and Tinto's Theoretical Model

Tinto (1975, 1993) created a theoretical model explaining the factors that contribute to and predict the longitudinal process of voluntary college dropout. Based on previous research, this model considers the interactions between the student and the institution that promote persistence behaviors and examines the different forms these behaviors take. Tinto asserted that a student's inability to integrate into the collegial social system promotes diminished commitment to that system. This, in turn, encourages students to leave college to pursue different ventures. Additionally, students must navigate the academic systems of college as any negative experiences in this domain may also influence dropout decisions. While either the academic or social domain can be a primary contributor to student attrition, Tinto (1975) suggested that these two spheres inform each other. Therefore, students' integration into the academic and social systems of the institution promotes commitment to academic and social goals, which inform dropout or persistence decisions.

Tinto (1975, 1993) also suggested that individuals enter college with a range of personal attributes, such as sex, race/ethnicity, pre-college experiences, including academic accomplishments, and family backgrounds, including values and expectations. These factors collectively serve as predictors and reflections of academic persistence or dropout behaviors, which influence the student's academic and social experiences while attending college. In addition, individuals begin college with background characteristics and commitments to academic goals that influence how they perform academically and interact and integrate into the college environment. Therefore, the characteristics an individual has at the start of school impact his or her experiences in the school environment both academically and socially.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) described Tinto's model as depicting the degree of fit between the student and the college environment and interpreted commitment to graduation as dependent on social and academic integration. An important individual characteristic in this model is a student's intention to finish college, which can be reflected by his or her educational and occupational goals. This can also be viewed as a student's personal valuing of education as well as his or her perception of being academically prepared to reach this goal. While many researchers agree that what happens after beginning college has more influence on persistence than what happens before college (Tinto, 1993), it is still important to investigate these initial contributions in order to construct a fuller picture of factors related to initial intentions to persist.

The focus of the current study was on the pre-college factors that influence or contribute to students' academic persistence or voluntary dropout behaviors. In Tinto's

(1975) theoretical model, this corresponds to the pre-entry set of variables, which incorporates the factors of Precollege Schooling, Family Background, and Individual Attributes (Figure 1.). This study also incorporates students' residential status during college, which relates to Tinto's (1975, 1993) conceptualization of students' ability to integrate into the college system. Tinto (1975) asserted that an individual's perceptions of college correspond to the expectations the individual brings to college. Tinto also hypothesized that an individual's commitment to a college education, which can be defined as his or her personal valuing of education, may be linked to more positive self-beliefs that promote academic persistence. This illustrates the importance of pre-college factors, such as parental factors, high school GPA, and self-beliefs, and students' residential status when trying to understand academic persistence.

Precollege Schooling and Family Background Factors

The literature has shown that the background variables students have before entering college play a significant role in academic persistence decisions during college. For instance, Gloria and her colleagues found that demographic variables, including high school grade point average (GPA), have been consistently related to academic persistence decisions in college students (Gloria, 1997; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria et al., 1999). Further exploring the relationships among Precollege Schooling and Family Background variables and academic persistence is important because what college students experience and learn before starting their postsecondary education influences their performance and attitudes during college. This study examined the pre-college factors of parental influence, including parental

educational attainment and parental valuing of education, as well as the students' high school performance measured in terms of high school grade point average (GPA).

According to Cutrona and her colleagues, parents strive to cultivate personal characteristics in their children that allow them to function effectively and autonomously once they leave home (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994). Therefore, parental influence may play a significant role in the differences between individuals who are successful in the college environment and those who are not. The NCES (2006) found that only 40 percent of individuals with parents who have less than a high school education enrolled in college, while 86 percent of students with parents who earned a bachelor's degree enrolled. These statistics imply that parental educational attainment may have significant implications for an individual's decision to enroll in college and perhaps his or her academic goals.

The literature examining the influence of parental educational attainment was first introduced by Blau and Duncan (1967) who examined the impact of the father's education on the son's, showing that the higher the father's educational attainment, the higher the son's. This literature has since been extended to include maternal influences on educational attainment and has shown that parents who attain higher levels of education tend to show more support and encouragement for their children to pursue postsecondary education (Lin, 1990). In her study of Latino/a undergraduates, Gloria (1993) found that parental education was important in academic persistence decisions as this variable and students' academic preparation before college were related to more positive persistence decisions. In their study examining undergraduate college women

and factors influencing academic persistence decisions in their first year of college, Dixon Rayle, Robinson Kurpius, and Arredondo (2006) found a positive relation between mother's education and daughter's academic persistence decisions. While many studies have preliminarily examined the influence of parental educational attainment on children's academic decisions, it is important to discern the extent to which this factor influences persistence decisions of college students. The educational level attained by parents seems to have significance as individuals take cues from their parents and may receive different support or encouragement academically because of their parents' own educational histories.

While parental education may influence how students perceive college, the importance parents place on education in terms of its value may also impact these perceptions. In their study, Dixon Rayle, Arredondo, and Robinson Kurpius (2005) investigated self-esteem, school related stress, educational self-efficacy, and personal and family valuing of education among female undergraduates. The authors found that mother's and father's education contributed to academic persistence and that personal and parental valuing of education were positively related. These results emphasize the influence parents may have on their children's academic goals as the level of educational valuing by parents and by students tended to correspond with each other.

When studying the factors of parental and personal valuing of education and self-esteem on academic stress among two samples of college students in Thailand, Sarma, Payakkakom, and Robinson Kurpius (2012) found that self-esteem influenced the strength of the relationship between parental and personal valuing of education in their

first sample. For instance, students who reported high self-esteem seemed to value education the most and perceived their parents as highly valuing their education. Parental valuing of education, however, played a more significant role in the personal valuing of education for students who reported low self-esteem. These findings suggest that a student's perceptions of his or her parents' regard for education may impact how the student identifies the value of degree attainment. Therefore, examining how parental influences impact individuals and their academic persistence decisions is important as students likely take their parents' behaviors and expectations into account when formulating their own values and goals.

While the parental factors previously discussed address some of the Family Background variables in Tinto's (1975, 1987) theoretical model, this study also explored the domain of Precollege Schooling by utilizing high school GPA. The literature consistently links high school GPA to academic achievement and persistence decisions in college students across cultures (Brown & Robinson Kurpius, 1997; Elias & Loomis, 2000; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Students with higher GPAs in high school have been shown to earn higher GPAs in college (Vasquera & Maestas, 2009). For example, Burgette and Magun-Jackson (2008-2009) found that high school GPA was a significant variable in long-term academic persistence, with high school GPA significantly relating to college GPA. Additionally, Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Robinson Kurpius, and Rund (2011) found that high school GPA and persistence decisions were positively related to college GPA in Latino/a freshmen as students who demonstrated persistence in attaining their postsecondary degrees and had higher GPAs in high school

also had higher GPAs in college. These results suggest that having learned the skills necessary to be academically successful in high school, measured in terms of GPA, allows students to be more academically successful in college, which could well improve their educational self-efficacy and facilitate remaining in school.

Residential Status

When considering a student's residential status during his or her freshman year of college, it becomes evident that there are fundamental differences between residential students and commuter students. Residential students can be defined as students who are living in institutionally owned housing on campus, while commuter students are individuals living off campus in non-institutionally owned accommodations (Jacoby & Girrell, 1981; Jacoby, 1989 as cited in Gianoutsos, 2011). These different living situations in many ways dictate how much exposure students have to on-campus resources and activities, which may influence their desire and ability to attain a degree.

Chickering's (1974) study examining freshmen college students in both private and public institutions is considered influential in the discussion of how students' living accommodations (on- versus off-campus) impact their personal characteristics and academic outcomes. Chickering found significant differences between students who lived on campus and those who commuted in several different areas, including college-entry characteristics, the student's overall experience, and his or her educational performance. For instance, commuter students seemed to have parents with less educational experience and lower income than residential students as well as lower high school GPA's (Chickering, 1974). However, when Chickering controlled for the type of

institution, focusing solely on four-year institutions, these differences disappeared. Chickering also found that commuter students were less likely to return as full-time students following their freshman year than were residential students, which may be attributed to a number of factors, including the challenges and stigma associated with commuting as well as a decrease in overall college satisfaction.

In another study, Astin (1975) examined the data of students across 358 two- and four-year institutions collected by Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) from 1968 to 1972. When comparing commuter and residential students, Astin suggested that freshmen who live on-campus have a roughly 10 percent decrease in possibility of dropping out across different institution type. This suggests that individuals who live on campus may make more positive persistence decisions in part due to their residential status when compared to those who live off campus. In his follow-up study examining CIRP data from 1961 to 1974, Astin (1977) found that living on campus promoted academic persistence about 12 percent when holding students' entering characteristics and other environmental factors constant. Based on this data, Astin concluded that living in a residence hall is one of the best predictors of college persistence decisions.

While past research seems to illustrate the importance of students living on campus during their freshman year, more recent studies have continued to examine this relationship. In his dissertation assessing college persistence and social support networks among residential and commuter students at an urban technical arts college, Skahill (2000) found that the commuter students reported significant changes in their social support and also had a higher attrition rate when compared to residential students. These

findings correspond with past studies in emphasizing the importance of community and connectedness in on-campus living when compared to off-campus accommodations. However, in his dissertation examining student profile characteristics in an urban commuter university, Gianoutsos (2011) found no significant differences between commuter and residential students in terms of academic success. This may suggest that as commuting to campus becomes more the norm due to the current economic climate, with more than 85 percent of the college students living off-campus (Horn & Nevill, 2006 as cited in Gianoutsos, 2011), the differences between commuter and residential students may be diminishing or disappearing.

While the literature seems to suggest that students living on campus appear to have an advantage over those living off campus because of an increased accessibility to academic and institutional integration due to their proximity to campus resources (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Tinto, 1975, 1993), current research suggests this relationship merits further scrutiny (Gianoutsos, 2011). The inherent differences advocated by previous research correspond to the current study when utilizing Tinto's (1975, 1993) theoretical framework as individuals who are more integrated into the college environment both socially and academically tend to make more positive persistence decisions. Therefore, examining students' residential status, whether they live on or off campus, may shed additional light into the persistence decisions of these students and how their pre-college factors and living situations influence their college experience.

Educational Self-Beliefs

While parental factors and cognitive factors play an important role in academic persistence decisions in an individual's pursuit of postsecondary education, the literature also shows that an individual's educational self-beliefs impact his or her decision to remain in school (Gloria, 1993; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria et al., 1999; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Dixon Rayle et al., 2005; Dixon Rayle et al., 2006). The current study focused on the educational self-beliefs of self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and personal valuing of education, and beliefs about preparation for and expectations of postsecondary education. According to Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), an individual begins his or her postsecondary education with these foundations already in place. The experiences this individual has in the college setting impact how these personal attributes and values manifest and influence persistence or dropout decisions. Therefore, examining what educational self-beliefs promote academic persistence decisions is important to determine which pre-college attributes play a significant role in college attrition.

Self-Esteem. According to Crandall (1973), self-esteem involves liking and respecting oneself. This varies by degree, such as high self-esteem, where an individual seems to highly respect himself, versus low self-esteem, where an individual may not deem himself likable. Rosenberg (1965) suggested that an individual's different self-perceptions of his or her self-esteem inform his or her behavior. When examining this construct in terms of academic persistence or dropout decisions in college, self-esteem

pertains to an individual's general feelings of self-worth and how these feelings may impact his or her academic performance and, in turn, educational persistence decisions.

Previous research suggests that self-esteem plays an important role in the persistence or dropout process. For example, in a series of studies examining the relationship between academic persistence and self-beliefs, social support, and comfort in the university setting for undergraduate students, Gloria and her colleagues illustrated not only self-esteem's importance in college students' commitment to attaining a degree but also its widespread influence across ethnicities and races (Gloria, 1993; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria et al., 1999; Gloria & Ho, 2003). Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (2001), who concentrated on American Indian students, found that the more self-worth the American Indian students experienced, the more likely they were to remain in college. In another study, Gloria and her colleagues (1999) examined the persistence decisions of African American undergraduates who attended a predominantly White university. The authors found that self-esteem had a significant impact on persistence in higher education with more positive self-esteem being associated with more positive persistence decisions of the African American undergraduates. Gloria and Ho (2003) illustrated the importance of self-esteem for persistence decisions in Asian American undergraduate students as more positive self-concepts were associated with more positive decisions to remain in school.

Other studies have duplicated the findings of Gloria and her colleagues, further emphasizing the significance of self-esteem in educational persistence. When examining the role of self-esteem in stress among college students in Thailand, Sarma and her

colleagues (2012) found that self-esteem was the best predictor of academic stress. Additionally, self-esteem was found to play an important role in students' personal valuing of education and their perceptions of parental valuing of education. These findings may have implications for persistence and self-esteem as individuals who view school as more stressful and who may not place as much value in degree attainment may demonstrate more nonpersistence behaviors. In another study, Robinson Kurpius, Payakkakom, Dixon Rayle, Chee, and Arredondo (2008) investigated the suitability of three psychometric measurements for the self-beliefs of self-esteem, valuing education, and educational self-efficacy for European American, Latina/o, and Native American college freshmen. Self-esteem was shown to be an important component in persistence decisions for European American and Latino/a freshmen. However, self-beliefs were not shown to play a significant role in academic persistence decisions of Native American students, contradicting the findings of Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (2001) previously discussed. In their study examining the relationship between four types of career goals and persistence decisions in first semester college freshmen, Hull-Blanks, Robinson Kurpius, Befort, Sollenberger, Nicpon, and Huser (2005) found a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and academic persistence. These studies illustrate the significant relationship of an individual's self-esteem and his or her desire to attain a degree and emphasize its universality across different races and ethnicities.

The relationship between self-esteem and academic persistence decisions has also been examined in relation to gender and has been shown to play an important role in remaining in school for female students (Dixon Rayle et al., 2005; Dixon Rayle et al.,

2006). In their study examining academic persistence decisions in female freshmen, Dixon Rayle et al. (2005) found that self-esteem played an influential role in persistence decisions as self-esteem was positively related to personal valuing of education and negatively related to academic stress. In a similar study, Dixon Rayle et al. (2006) found that academic persistence decisions were positively related to self-esteem in female freshmen, as females with higher self-esteem ratings also demonstrated more positive persistence decisions. Overall, these studies illustrate the importance of self-esteem in students remaining in college both across gender and across different ethnicities and races. Therefore, self-esteem needs to be taken into consideration when examining persistence decisions.

Educational Self-Efficacy. According to Bandura (1982), self-efficacy consists of an individual's belief in his or her ability to perform a specific task or behavior. These self-efficacy beliefs can impact whether an individual actively engages in certain behaviors or chooses to avoid them. Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs affect the individual's degree of persistence while performing the behavior. This concept is important to educational persistence decisions among college students as Boulter (2002) suggested that a student's self-perception of his or her intellectual ability assists in college adjustment, encouraging the student to set higher educational goals and to thrive academically. In other words, college students who have positive perceptions of their educational self-efficacy may make more positive persistence decisions in their postsecondary education.

The literature on educational self-efficacy beliefs and academic persistence decisions appears extensive and suggests that positive educational self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in students remaining in college. For instance, studies completed by Gloria and her colleagues examining the relationship between academic persistence and self-beliefs, social support, and comfort in the university setting for Asian American (Gloria & Ho, 2003), American Indian (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001), African American (Gloria et al., 1999), and Latino/a (Gloria et al., 2005) undergraduate students indicate the importance of this specific self-belief. The impact of educational self-efficacy on females' academic persistence decisions has also been demonstrated in studies by Dixon Rayle and her colleagues (2005, 2006). For instance, data showed academic stress, self-esteem, and personal and family valuing of education were all related to educational self-efficacy (Dixon Rayle et al., 2005). The authors explained that female students with higher educational self-efficacy may have become more autonomous since starting college, have made a personal commitment to their education, and see themselves in a more positive light. In her dissertation with women in an honors program, Gagliardi (2005) explored the influence on academic persistence decisions of non-intellective factors, including family background, goal commitment, faculty and staff interaction, peer interaction, and educational self-efficacy. The data illustrated that educational self-efficacy beliefs predicted academic persistence decisions. These studies demonstrate the value of self-belief concepts, especially educational self-efficacy, in persistence decisions of undergraduate students across race/ethnicity and gender.

In a series of studies, authors Lent, Brown, and Larkin (1984, 1986, 1987) examined self-efficacy beliefs specifically in the persistence decisions of science and engineering college majors. In each of their studies, educational self-efficacy beliefs were shown to play a significant and important part in academic persistence. For instance, Lent, Brown, and Larkin (1984) found that the level and strength of students' self-efficacy beliefs for their educational requirements related to academic persistence as higher ratings of ability corresponded with students persisting longer in science majors than did those with lower ratings. Additionally, Lent, Brown, and Larkin (1987) suggested that self-efficacy was the most useful predictor of retention in their study of science and engineering majors over the one-year period. In another study, Brown, Lent, and Larkin (1989) found that self-efficacy beliefs generally played a role in academic persistence decisions of the science and engineering majors, but its significance was impacted by how the term was operationalized. For instance, the authors measured educational self-efficacy both in terms of educational requirements (completing a variety of technical or science majors) and academic milestones (achieving specific academic goals related to technical or science majors). While self-efficacy beliefs regarding academic milestones were significantly related to persistence decisions in these students, self-efficacy concerning educational requirements was not related to academic persistence. Although these studies were specifically related to the technology and science domains, they emphasized the role of educational self-efficacy beliefs in students remaining in college.

Meta-analyses have incorporated many studies to illustrate the pervasive influence of educational self-efficacy beliefs on postsecondary retention (Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). In their meta-analysis of 109 studies, Robbins and his colleagues (2004) examined the relationship between psychosocial and study skill factors, which were divided into 9 categories (e.g., educational self-efficacy, general self-concept, and academic-related skills), and college outcomes, which entailed performance (GPA) and persistence (retention). The authors found that educational self-efficacy, academic goals, and academic-related skills were positively related to college retention and cited as the strongest predictors of the college retention criterion. Additionally, educational self-efficacy was determined to be the best predictor for both college outcomes (performance and persistence). In another meta-analysis, Multon and her colleagues (1991) selected 39 studies to examine the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance and persistence. The authors found that self-efficacy beliefs accounted for about 14% of variance in the students' academic performance and about 12% in academic persistence, illustrating that self-efficacy beliefs play a significant role in college performance and retention. Additionally, the authors found variance in the effect sizes of the persistence meta-analysis, which they attributed to the different conceptualizations of the term *persistence*, prompting research to provide conceptual definitions of this concept and to explore its connections with different predictor variables.

Much like the importance of self-esteem beliefs in remaining in college, educational self-efficacy seems to play an equally significant role in individuals attaining a degree. In their study examining first generation college students, Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz (2010) found that the students' persistence rates were a function of their self-efficacy in both first generation students and non-first generation students. This shows that regardless of their family's experience with postsecondary education, educational self-efficacy beliefs influenced the dropout or persistence rates of these students. Additionally, Bordes-Edgar et al. (2011) found that more positive persistence decisions were related to higher levels of educational self-efficacy beliefs in Latina/o college freshmen. These studies illustrate the importance of educational self-efficacy beliefs in college students attaining their degree as individuals who rate themselves as having higher levels of educational self-efficacy tend to also demonstrate more positive persistence decisions in their postsecondary education.

Personal Valuing of Education. In Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theoretical model exploring the factors informing academic persistence decisions of undergraduate students, Tinto suggested that the more personal commitment an individual assigns to achieving a degree, the more positive persistence decisions the individual will have. Therefore, this construct is important in examining the relationship between self-beliefs and academic persistence as it refers to how committed an individual is to attaining a degree and what value he or she assigns to that accomplishment. Research has found that personal valuing of education is important in making positive persistence decisions, especially in Latino/a (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Robinson Kurpius et al., 2008),

European American (Robinson Kurpius et al., 2008), and female undergraduate students (Dixon Rayle et al., 2005; Dixon Rayle et al., 2006; Gagliardi, 2005).

The importance of this variable was highlighted in a dissertation exploring the relation between successful college transition for first semester freshmen and the variables of parental attachment, perceptions of university environment, and college self-efficacy (Kirton, 2000). The author found that students who appeared to value their education more highly were more likely to adjust to college and, in turn, more likely to have positive persistence decisions. Kirton (2000) portrayed personal valuing of education as somewhat of a protective factor as individuals who place value in attaining their degree are more likely to succeed in the college environment. These studies illustrate the impact of personal commitment to education in persistence decision for undergraduate students as individuals who feel more committed to attaining a degree may be more apt to complete their education.

Perceived Academic Preparation. This variable entails how prepared an individual feels to be academically successful upon entering college. While studies typically measure academic preparation in terms of SAT scores or high school GPA, the current study examined this concept in terms of the student's *perceived* preparation. This mainly refers to how much students believe their high school curriculum prepared them for success in their undergraduate career. In their study examining factors influencing academic persistence decisions in American Indian students, Brown and Robinson Kurpius (1997) found that academic persistence decisions were significantly influenced by how academically prepared the American Indian students felt for college based on

their high school education. In other words, students who felt more academically prepared for the undergraduate curriculum also tended to have more positive persistence decisions. This link between perceived academic preparation and persistence decisions was also found in a study examining persistence decisions in female freshmen as these females' perception of their high school preparation was positively related to their desire to remain in school (Dixon Rayle et al., 2006). The literature suggests that students who view themselves as being prepared to complete a particular task will have more confidence and will persist at the task longer. However, since the definition of academic preparation is typically viewed in terms of achievement scores instead of self-perceptions of preparedness, further exploration of this variable is necessary to discern the extent to which this self-belief impacts students' decisions to remain in college.

Academic Expectations. This variable refers to how students' expectations about their college academic performance correspond to their actual performance in their freshman year. Holen and Newhouse (1976) studied junior and senior college students' self-prediction of their academic performance and found that students could accurately guess their academic performance in a course, demonstrating that students may be aware of their level of academic ability in a given setting and are able to provide an accurate assessment of how well they are performing. This suggests that students have the capacity to rate their academic abilities effectively. However, the question remains of how this ability is incorporated into their preconceived notions of their college performance and how it may subsequently influence their persistence behaviors in college.

House (1992) explored academic performance expectations, academic self-concept, and persistence decisions in a longitudinal study that followed freshmen over four consecutive academic years. While he found that the students' concept of their overall academic ability and their motivation to achieve were significantly related to positive persistence decisions, the expectation of graduating with honors was the only significant achievement expectancy found. In another study, Trippi and Stewart (1989) explored the self-appraisal of Black freshmen and its relationship to the students' college grade performance and persistence decisions. They found that the students' expectations of their academic performance were significantly related to persistence decisions as students who expected to do well in college tended to remain in college. In their meta-analysis, Robbins and his colleagues (2004) found that self-expectancy constructs played a role across different criteria and suggested that self-expectancy may be the most important predictor of college performance and persistence. These studies demonstrate that there is still much to explore concerning the influence of academic expectations on persistence decisions in college students.

Summary

Overall, it appears that parental factors, such as parental education attained and parental valuing of education, and personal factors, such as educational self-beliefs, high school academic performance, and freshman year residential status, play a significant role in academic persistence decisions of college students. In general, these academic experiences and values that students bring with them to college have implications for persistence and degree attainment. Students who rate themselves as more confident in

their self-belief concepts, who have performed well academically in high school, and who live on campus appear may make more positive persistence decisions in their postsecondary education. Therefore, for freshmen in college, positive self-beliefs, previous success in high school, living on campus, and having parents who have higher educational attainment and place value in a college education may facilitate more positive academic persistence decisions, which lead to degree attainment.

Purpose of Study

The objective of this study was to explore how the attributes freshmen bring with them to college influence their academic persistence decisions. It is believed that more positive academic persistence decisions reflect more positive pre-college factors for first semester college freshmen. Utilizing Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of academic persistence in college as a framework, the current study examined how parental educational attainment, parental valuing of education, high school GPA, residential status, and self-belief factors, including educational self-efficacy, self-esteem, personal valuing of education, perceived academic preparation, and academic expectations, influenced academic persistence decisions. This study addressed the hypotheses that:

H1: Parental educational attainment and parental valuing of education will predict positive academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen.

H2: High school GPA will enhance the prediction of academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen.

H3: Living on campus will enhance the prediction of academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen.

H4: Self-beliefs, including academic expectations, perceived academic preparation, personal valuing of education, self-esteem, and educational self-efficacy, will enhance the prediction of academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen.

Chapter 2

Method

Participants

Approval for this study was given by the university Institutional Review Board. During the fall semester, first-semester freshmen were recruited from 23 sections of a 100-level class intended to promote academic success. The study was explained to the students, and participation in the study was described as voluntary and unrelated to their grade in the class. Consent was indicated by the return of completed survey packets, and 433 students completed and returned these surveys. The participants in this study were restricted to include only college freshmen between the ages of 18 and 19 years old in accordance with Erikson's (1968) Identity stage of psychosocial development and to include only college freshmen. Of the 378 students (135 males and 243 females) who met this age range, the vast majority of the participants were Euro-American (*n* = 287, 79.4%). However, ethnic and racial status indicated that there were also a small sample of students who self-identified as Latino/a (*n* = 37, 9.9%), Asian American (*n* = 15, 4.0%), African American (*n* = 15, 4.0%), International (*n* = 5, 1.3%), Native American (*n* = 2, 0.5%), and other (*n* = 3, 0.8%). Four did not provide their ethnic and racial status. Of those who noted where they lived, 133 (34.6%) reported that they lived off campus and 251 (65.4%) lived on campus. Five students did not specify where they lived. Of those who noted their marital status, the vast majority of the participants reported that they were single (*n* = 348, 92.1%), while 25 (6.6%) stated they were in a committed relationship and one (0.3%) noted she or he was married (See Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptives: Student Demographics

Characteristics	f	%
Ethnicity		
Euro-American	297	79.4
Latino/a	37	9.9
African American	15	4.0
Asian American	15	4.0
International	5	1.3
Native American	2	0.5
Other	3	0.8
Residential Status		
Off-campus	133	34.2
On-campus	251	64.5
Not Specified	5	1.3
Marital Status		
Single	348	92.1
Married	1	0.3
Committed	25	6.6
Not Specified	4	1.1

When asked about parental educational attainment, the students reported that about one-quarter of their mothers (*n* = 104, 27.5%) and about one-quarter of their fathers (*n* = 103, 27.2%) held bachelor's degrees. These students reported that 101 (26.7%) of their mothers held high school diplomas or GED certification, 63 (16.7%) held master's degrees, and 7 (1.9%) of their mothers held doctoral degrees. Additionally, these students reported that 72 (19.0%) of their fathers held high school diplomas or GED certification, 80 (21.2%) held master's degrees, and 31 (8.2%) of their fathers held doctoral degrees (See Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptives: Parental Education Demographics

Characteristics	f	%
Mother's Education		
Grade School	11	2.9
High School/GED	101	26.7
Vocational/Technical	18	4.8
Associate's Degree	66	17.5
Bachelor's Degree	104	27.5
Master's Degree	63	16.7
Professional Degree	7	1.9
Missing	8	2.1
Father's Education		

Grade School	12	3.2
High School/GED	72	19.0
Vocational/Technical	24	6.3
Associate's Degree	36	9.5
Bachelor's Degree	103	27.2
Master's Degree	80	21.2
Professional Degree	31	8.2
Missing	20	5.3

Instrumentation

Students completed a basic demographic sheet that also asked for high school grade point average (HS GPA), where they were currently living, mother's and father's highest level of education, how academically prepared they felt for their coursework, and whether they were doing as well in their classes as they had expected. They also completed a battery of instruments, five of which are relevant to this study. To measure personal valuing of education, the Personal Valuing of Education Scale (Gloria, 1993) was given. The Parental Valuing of Education Scale (Gloria, 1993) assessed students' perceptions of their parents' valuing of education and their encouragement to attain a degree. Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale assessed personal self-esteem beliefs, while the College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI; Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kenner, & Davis, 1993) and the Educational Degree Behaviors Self-Efficacy Scale (EDBSES; Gloria et al., 1999) assessed educational self-efficacy. To measure academic persistence

decisions the Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decisions Scale (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) was given.

Residential Status. The data were coded based on these provided options: off-campus alone, off-campus with one roommate, off-campus with multiple roommates, off-campus with family, off-campus with a partner, on-campus alone, on-campus with one roommate, on-campus with multiple roommates, and on-campus in Greek housing. For the purpose of this study, the data were recoded to include off-campus ("1" = off-campus alone, off-campus with one roommate, off-campus with multiple roommates, off-campus with family, off-campus with a partner) and on-campus ("2" = on-campus alone, on-campus with one roommate, on-campus with multiple roommates, and on-campus in Greek housing), regardless whether the student lived in a dorm or Greek housing setting.

High School GPA. For this study, students' self-reported cumulative high school GPA was used as a behavioral measure of high school academic performance. Since the literature has consistently shown that high school GPA positively relates to college GPA (Brown & Robinson Kurpius, 1997; Elias & Loomis, 2000; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010), the high school GPAs of freshmen may serve as a predictor of how they may succeed academically in college, subsequently influencing their academic persistence. For the current study, the mean high school GPA was 3.46 (SD = 0.44).

Perceived Academic Preparation and Academic Expectations. The self-belief concepts of perceived academic preparation and academic expectations were assessed using two questions in the demographic section of the questionnaire packet. The perceived preparation question, "Overall, how academically prepared do you feel for

your course work?" measured how well students believed their high school prepared them academically for college. This question was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all prepared) to 5 (Very prepared). The expectations question, "Are you doing as well in your classes as you expected to do before you came to ASU?" assessed students' perceptions of how well they were currently doing academically as compared to how well they had thought they would perform. This question was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Much worse) to 5 (Much better). For the current study, the means were 3.61 (*SD* = 0.93) for perceived preparedness and 3.25 (*SD* = 0.99) for student expectations.

Personal Valuing of Education Scale. This scale, which was developed by Gloria (1993), measures the extent to which an individual values a college education, their commitment to obtaining a degree, and whether this degree is worth the time, money and energy necessary. The Personal Valuing of Education Scale consists of five items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much). An example of items included in this scale is, "How much do <u>you</u> value a college education?" Responses within this scale were summed and averaged with higher scores reflecting greater perceived personal valuing of education. Dixon Rayle and her colleagues (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .82 for the Personal Valuing of Education Scale. Studies by Robinson Kurpius and colleagues (2008) and Gloria (1993) provided evidence of predictive validity, demonstrating this scale's ability to predict academic persistence decisions. For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha was .83 with a scale mean of 4.61 (*SD* = 0.54).

Parental Valuing of Education Scale. The Parental Valuing of Education Scale (Gloria, 1993) measures students' perceptions of their mother's and father's encouragement, support, and valuing of a college education. The scale consists of four items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much). An example of items included on this scale is, "To what extent does your mother [father] value your seeking a college education?" Responses within this scale were summed and averaged with higher scores reflecting greater perceived parental valuing of education. Dixon Rayle and her colleagues (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .74 for the Parental Valuing of Education Scale. For the current study, the Cronbach's alpha was .75 with a scale mean of 4.79 (*SD* = 0.51).

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale. Developed by Rosenberg (1965) to measure general feelings of self-worth, this scale contains 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree). An example of items included on this scale is, "I am able to do things as well as most other people." The response scores are summed to provide a total score reflecting general feelings of self-worth. Higher total scores signify a more positive perception of self. Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (2001) reported an internal consistency coefficient of .82, while Gloria et al. (1999) found a coefficient alpha of .84. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha is .81 with a scale mean of 31.59 (*SD* = 5.75).

This scale has convergent validity as previous research denotes a relationship between Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and self-esteem constructs, including both high (Reynolds, 1988; Savin-Williams & Jaquish, 1981) and low self-regard (Fleming &

Courtney, 1984; Demo, 1985). For instance, Lorr and Wunderlich (1986) reported correlations of .65 and .39 between SES scores and confidence and popularity, respectively. Additionally, there is evidence of discriminant validity for SES as Reynolds (1988) found no significant relationship between SES scores and several concepts, including grade point average (.10) and Scholastic Aptitude Test verbal (-.06) scores. (as cited in Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

Educational Self-Efficacy Inventories. The first scale, the College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI), was developed by Solberg et al. (1993) to assess educational self-efficacy beliefs. This measurement has three subscales, including course, social, and roommate efficacy. The CSEI consists of 28 items; however, the roommate efficacy subscale was not used in this study as at the time of the study many students did not live on campus. The remaining 14 items were responded to on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all confident) to 7 (Extremely confident). Items include, "Make new friends at college," and, "Understand your textbooks."

The second scale, the Educational Degree Behaviors Self-Efficacy Scale (EDBSES), was developed by Gloria et al. (1999) as a complement to the CSEI to assess students' confidence in their ability to complete degree-specific tasks. This scale was based on Lent, Brown, and Larkin's (1986) study exploring science and engineering students' confidence in their ability to attain their degree requirements. The 14-item scale was responded to using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all confident) to 7 (Extremely confident). Items include, "Decide on an academic major," and "Getting a B or better in introductory courses for my major." Gloria and her colleagues reported

an internal consistency of .93 for the EDBSES and a correlation of .60 between the two educational self-efficacy instruments.

Robinson Kurpius, Payakkakom, and Chee (2004) examined the two self-efficacy measures in a study of 747 college freshmen and suggested using both as one comprehensive assessment of educational self-efficacy. The authors found correlations of .65 for Native American, .73 for Latino, and .71 for Euro-American students between the two scales. When the two measurements were assessed as one instrument, the internal consistencies were .95 for Euro-American students and .96 for both Native American and Latino college freshmen. The authors reported that 16.1% of the variance in academic persistence for Native Americans, 20.7% for Latinos/as, and 19.4% for Euro-Americans was accounted for by the predictive validity of the combined measurements. The responses to the combined measurements were summed and averaged across the 28 items with educational self-efficacy scores ranging from 1 (Low educational self-efficacy) to 7 (High educational self-efficacy). Hull-Blanks et al. (2005) reported an internal consistency of .95 for the combined scales. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .95 with a scale mean of 5.37 (*SD* = 0.91).

Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decision Scale. This scale, which was developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), measures students' academic persistence decisions. The Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decision Scale contains 30 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree). These items correspond to facets of the dimensions presented in Tinto's (1975) theoretical model. For instance Tinto's "institutional and goal commitments" are assessed by the

item, “It is important for me to graduate from college.” The response scores are summed and averaged to provide a score reflecting overall academic persistence decisions. Higher scores signify more positive persistence decisions. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) reported alpha reliabilities ranging from .71 to .84. Additionally, while Gloria and Robinson Kurpius (2001) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .79 for their sample of Native American undergraduates, Bordes-Edgar and her colleagues (2011) reported Cronbach’s alphas of .75 for their initial study and .71 for their follow-up study of Latinos/as. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) found evidence of discriminant validity for the Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decision Scale as it accurately differentiated between students who remained in college and those who dropped out of school. For this study, the Cronbach’s alpha was .80 with a scale mean of 3.43 (*SD* = 0.45).

Procedures

Course instructors were contacted to request permission to administer the survey during their class time. Roughly midway through the fall semester, graduate students or counseling psychology faculty distributed survey packets in the 23 classes. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and would not impact their class grades if they selected to participate in the study. Approximately 90 percent of the students present on the day the surveys were administered completed the survey packet. The survey took about 30 to 40 minutes to complete. The few students who were unable to complete the surveys during the allotted class time were permitted to return it to their instructors during the following class period.

Projected Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses were run to examine the Cronbach's alphas, means, and standard deviations for each of the measurements utilized in this study. The four hypotheses were tested using a hierarchical multiple regression. Step one entered parental educational attainment and parental valuing of education. In step two, high school GPA was entered in the regression equation. Step three entered students' residential status at the time of the study (off-campus versus on-campus). Finally, in step four, academic expectations, perceived academic preparation, personal valuing of education, self-esteem, and educational self-efficacy were entered to test their power to predict academic persistence decisions over and above the background, residential status, and parental variables.

Chapter 3

Results

A Priori Analyses

Descriptive statistics were generated to examine the nature and characteristics of the college freshman sample in this study. These descriptive statistics can be found in Tables 1 and 2 in the Method chapter. Next, Pearson Product Moment correlations were conducted for each set of predictor variables (see Table 3). The internal consistencies were then conducted for the measures in this study. These are reported in the descriptions of the predictors and criterion measures in the Method chapter.

Analyses of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis proposed that parental educational attainment and parental valuing of education would predict academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen. Parental level of education was defined as mother's and as father's highest levels of education attained. These three measures were entered as a cluster into the regression equation to predict academic persistence. The regression analysis was not significant, $F(3, 374) = 1.81$, $p = .15$. Examination of the beta weights for these three measures indicated a significant relationship between parental valuing of education and academic persistence decisions of these college freshmen, $\beta = .12$, $t = 2.23$, $p = .026$. Mother's and father's highest levels of education attained and parental valuing of education accounted for a small variance (1.4%) in academic persistence decisions. This hypothesis was not supported by the regression data.

Table 3

Descriptive Information and Correlations for the Study's Variables

Var	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 HS_GPA	3.46	0.44	-	-.08	.03	.09	.09	-.02	-.001	-.03	.20**	.02
2 MomEd	3.98	1.59		-	.43***	.01	.01	.09	.09	-.03	-.02	-.02
3 DadEd	4.44	1.72			-	.03	-.01	.22***	-.02	-.07	-.03	-.04
4 UExp	3.25	0.99				-	.48***	.04	.25***	.14**	.38***	.31***
5 UPrep	3.61	0.03					-	.08	.21***	.07	.43***	.27***
6 ParVal	4.79	0.51						-	.21***	-.03	-.02	.12*
7 PersVal	4.61	0.54							-	.10	.21***	.34***
8 Esteem	31.59	5.75								-	.24***	.25***
9 EdEff	5.37	0.91									-	.44***
10 Persist	3.43	0.45										-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Block	Var	β	R^2	F	R^2 change	F change
Block 1	ParVal	.12*	.01	1.81	.01	1.81
	MomEd	-.03				
	DadEd	-.03				
Block 2	ParVal	.12*	.02	1.45	.001	.37
	MomEd	-.03				
	DadEd	-.03				
	HS_GPA	.03				
Block 3	Par Val	.11*	.03	2.37*	.02	5.99*
	MomEd	-.05				
	DadEd	-.03				
	HS_GPA	.02				
	Res_Stat	.13*				
Block 4	ParVal	.07	.26	12.79***	.23	22.52***
	MomEd	-.07				
	DadEd	-.001				
	HS_GPA	-.05				
	Res_Stat	.14**				
	Esteem	.12**				
	EdEff	.29***				

PerVal	.21***
UExp	.10
UPrep	.03

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

It was predicted in hypothesis two that high school GPA would enhance the prediction of academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen. This measure was entered into the regression equation and did not produce a significant relationship, $\Delta F(1, 373) = 0.37$, $p = .54$. When entered into the regression equation, students' high school GPA accounted for only 0.1% of the variance in academic persistence decisions. The beta weight for parental valuing of education remained significant, $\beta = .12$, $t = 2.25$, $p = .025$. This hypothesis was not supported by the regression data.

It was predicted in hypothesis three that living on-campus would enhance the prediction of academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen. When entered into the regression equation, where a student lives during their freshman year (on- or off-campus), accounted for a small but significant variance (1.6%) in academic persistence decisions, $\Delta F(1, 372) = 5.99$, $p = .02$. Examination of the beta weights revealed that both parental valuing of education ($\beta = .11$, $t = 2.02$, $p = .045$) and residential status ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.45$, $p = .015$) were significant predictors of academic persistence decisions. Students who lived on-campus made more positive academic persistence decisions. This hypothesis was supported by the regression data.

It was predicted in hypothesis four that self-beliefs, including academic expectations, perceived academic preparation, personal valuing of education, self-esteem, and educational self efficacy, would enhance the prediction of academic persistence decisions among first semester college freshmen. These measures were entered as a cluster into the regression equation to predict academic persistence. When entered, students' self-beliefs accounted for 22.8% of the variance in academic persistence decisions, $\Delta F(5, 367) = 22.52$, $p < .001$. Examination of the beta weights revealed that residential status ($\beta = .14$, $t = 3.03$, $p = .003$), self esteem ($\beta = .12$, $t = 2.66$, $p = .008$), educational self-efficacy ($\beta = .29$, $t = 4.32$, $p < .001$), and personal valuing of education ($\beta = .21$, $t = 4.32$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of academic persistence decisions. Students' academic expectations approached significance, $\beta = .10$, $t = 1.90$, $p = .059$. Parental valuing of education was no longer a significant predictor ($\beta = .07$, $t = .138$, $p = .17$). These data support the hypothesis.

Post Hoc Analyses

To understand better the results, post hoc analyses were conducted. A MANOVA was conducted to examine the influence of students' living on- or off-campus for the measurements included in the study. A significant MANOVA was found, $F(10) = 1.88$, $p = .049$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$, power = .85. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed differences in mother's education, $F(1) = 7.69$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, power = .79, and in parental valuing of education, $F(1) = .82$, $p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, power = .65. Examination of the means indicated that students who lived on campus ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.61$) had mothers with higher educational attainment than did those students who lived off campus

(M = 3.58, SD = 1.61). Similarly, examination of the means indicated that students who lived on campus (M = 4.88, SD = 0.31) had parents with higher valuing of education than did those students who lived off campus (M = 4.75, SD = 0.52).

Several Chi Square tests were also conducted to examine the relation of living on- versus off-campus and selected demographics. Students' sex and their residential status were not related, $\chi^2(2, N = 345) = 2.15$, $p = .09$. The relation between ethnicity and students' residential status was significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 370) = 15.54$, $p = .016$. Groups 1 (Euro-American) and 2 (African American), 3 (Latino/a), the three largest groups represented in the sample, significantly interacted as fewer African American and Latino/a students lived on campus than was expected and more Euro-American students than expected lived on campus. Mother's education and living on- or off- campus were also significantly related, $\chi^2(6, N = 376) = 21.64$, $p = .001$. More students with mothers who obtained Bachelor's and Master's degrees lived on campus than was expected and more students whose mothers earned Associate's degrees lived off campus than expected.

Chapter 4

Discussion

A student's freshman year in college serves a pivotal role in their postsecondary education as students adjust to an advanced education and, for many, navigate their first experiences in the "adult world." Additionally, while college enrollment rates are increasing, most college attrition occurs during the freshman year (NCES, 2011). This study focused on several variables in the freshman population, specifically parental educational attainment, parental valuing of education, high school GPA, residential status, and self-beliefs, including educational self-efficacy, self-esteem, perceived academic preparation, academic expectations, and personal valuing of education, to examine what role these factors play in first semester freshmen's academic persistence decisions.

In terms of the parental variables, the results indicated that overall parental educational attainment did not play a significant role in students' decisions about remaining in school. Parental valuing of education seems to influence students' academic persistence decisions to some extent as it remained significant in the hierarchical regression model until self-beliefs were added to construct the full model. While past research suggests that parental education (Gloria, 1993; Dixon Rayle et al., 2005, 2006) and parental valuing of education (Dixon Rayle et al., 2005; Sarma et al., 2012) may positively influence students' persistence decisions in college, the current findings suggest otherwise. The results imply that the extent to which parents encourage their children to pursue postsecondary education may be more influential on students

staying in college than is what type of degree their parents attained. However, once students have adjusted to their college environment and become more independent, parental influence and encouragement for going to school may no longer play as strong a role in promoting positive persistence decisions. Students may begin to rely on themselves more as they differentiate themselves from their parents. The study results support Tinto's (1975, 1993) theoretical model of college dropout as students enter college with certain personal characteristics and family background variables that may not continue to be primary predictors of academic behavior once the student has started his or her college career.

Although the literature has established the relation between high school GPA and academic persistence decisions in college (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Brown & Robinson Kurpius, 1997; Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008-2009; Elias & Loomis, 2000; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010), this study's results did not find a significant relation between the two variables. The difference of the current results from previous research may be due to the sample included in the current study as past research has not typically limited their population to first semester freshmen. For instance, both Burgette and Magun-Jackson (2008-2009) and Bordes-Edgar and her colleagues (2011) examined academic behaviors in the freshmen population in their studies, but both studies included a longitudinal component. Bordes-Edgar et al., examined students over a four and a half year period and found a connection between high school GPA and persistence decisions, while Burgette and Magun-Jackson found that high school GPA affected *long-term* academic persistence in their sample of Black and White students over four years.

Therefore, it appears that the relation between high school GPA and academic persistence decisions may strengthen over time; however, the attrition of students with lower GPAs in high school may also account for the significant finding over time.

When conceptualizing Tinto's (1975, 1993) theoretical model as one of degree of fit between the student and his or her college environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983), where a student lives seems to become an important factor in a student's persistence decisions. For instance, college resources may be more accessible to students who live on campus, possibly facilitating their integration into the collegial system. This study's results mirror this interpretation as students who lived on campus made more positive persistence decisions than did those who lived off campus. Previous research has found similar differences between individuals who live on campus and those who do not (Chickering, 1974; Astin, 1975), even asserting that living in a residence hall is one of the best predictors of college persistence decisions (Astin, 1975). However, whether due to financial, social, or other reasons, more students appear to be living off campus (Horn & Nevill, 2006 as cited in Gianoutsos, 2011). In the context of an increasingly commuter society, the current findings emphasize the importance of the residential status variable when examining academic persistence of freshmen students. Indeed, at the university where this study was conducted, more campus dorms are being built for freshmen in order to foster their integration into the university environment, which has been linked to academic success.

When examining the influence of residential status on the measurements included in this study, two variables revealed differences between students who lived on campus

and those who lived off campus. These variables were mothers' educational attainment and parental valuing of education. Students who lived in on-campus housing reported having mothers with higher educational attainment and rated their parents as valuing education more than did those students who lived off campus. For instance, students with mothers who obtained Bachelor's and Master's degrees tended to live on campus more than was expected and more students whose mothers earned Associate's degrees lived off campus than expected. Although the current study was not able to test the relation between students' family income and their residential status, families where the mother has higher educational attainment may also have higher incomes to cover the cost of living on campus. These data correspond to the parental variable findings as parental characteristics may impact events leading up to the beginning of college, such as encouraging the student to enroll in college or to live on campus. However, parental influence may not play as critical a role once classes have started and students have begun living more independently. Therefore, perhaps how parents speak to their children about college (Sarma et al., 2012) and in what ways they show postsecondary education to be important (e.g., their own educational attainment) may emphasize their valuing of a child committing to a postsecondary education and persisting to a degree. Additionally, ethnicity and students' residential status significantly interacted as more African American and Latino/a students lived off campus than was expected and more Euro-American students lived on campus. Although students' residential status has been examined in the past, the current study illustrates the importance of this variable in the overall picture of students' positive persistence decisions and should be considered in

more detail, especially since student demographics appear to be related to students' tendency to live on campus or off campus.

Finally, students' self-beliefs played the most significant role in academic persistence decisions in this study, accounting for the largest variance in academic persistence decisions. Consistent with the self-beliefs literature, students' self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and personal valuing of education all played a powerful role in students' desire to attain their degree (e.g., Gloria, 1997; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). In the current study, students who reported higher self-esteem, or had more positive perceptions of themselves, exhibited more positive persistence decisions. Previous research has established the positive relation between these two variables across race and ethnicity (Gloria, 1993; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria et al., 1999; Hull-Blanks et al., 2005; Robinson Kurpius et al., 2008; Sarma et al., 2012) and across gender (Dixon Rayle et al., 2005; Dixon Rayle et al., 2006). The results of these studies closely correspond with the results of the current study in that how students view themselves may impact their desire to persist in the postsecondary education environment.

When examining educational self-efficacy and academic persistence, students who had higher educational self-efficacy scores, or those who felt more confident in their academic abilities, reported more positive persistence decisions. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theoretical model proposes that academic persistence decisions rely on a student's ability to adjust to the college environment both socially and academically. Boulter

(2002) asserted that how a student views his or her intellectual ability can assist in the student's adjustment to the college environment. These two interpretations correspond to the results of the current study as students who felt more confident in their academic abilities had more positive persistence decisions in their first semester. Previous research has uncovered similar findings across race/ethnicity (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Gloria et al., 2005; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria et al., 1999), gender (Dixon Rayle et al., 2005; Dixon Rayle et al., 2006; Gagliardi, 2005), and academic major (Brown et al., 1989; Lent et al., 1984, 1987). Perhaps students are able to make more positive persistence decisions as they gain more confidence in their abilities to thrive academically and to attain goals they set for themselves in college, and trust in their capacity to attain a degree.

In the current study, students' personal valuing of education also played an important role in their academic persistence decisions as more highly valuing their college education predicted more positive persistence decisions in their first semester of college. Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) suggested that the more personal commitment an individual has to attaining a degree, the more positive persistence decisions that individual will make. This variable has also been shown to have a somewhat universal impact on academic persistence regardless of race/ethnicity (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Robinson Kurpius et al., 2008) and gender (Dixon Rayle et al., 2005; Dixon Rayle et al., 2006; Gagliardi, 2005). Again, it appears that an individual's commitment to his or her own education is a key component in promoting positive persistence decisions among college freshmen regardless of their individual demographics.

When examining students' academic expectations and preparation prior to college enrollment, the literature does not typically handle these variables as self-beliefs. For instance, academic preparation is typically measured in terms of achievement as studies tend to use SAT scores and GPA to examine how prepared a student is for postsecondary education. Instead of relying on objective methods, this study's emphasis was placed on how prepared students subjectively felt and how their college academic performance met their own perceived expectations. The current study did not find any significant contribution of perceived academic preparation on students' academic persistence decisions. However, academic expectations was just short of the .05 significance level, perhaps suggesting that students' ability to perform as well in their classes as they expected to before coming to college may impact their ability to make positive persistence decisions. Maybe meeting one's expectations instills a sense of confidence in one's academic abilities, prompting students to continue working toward their degree. These findings seem to perpetuate the pattern found in the current study as pre-college factors, such as parents' educational attainment and academic preparation, do not impact academic persistence as much as here-and-now measurements, such as current expectations for academic performance and educational self-efficacy. Therefore, although pre-college factors may allow students to feel confident in attending college and help them initiate their college career, the immediate self-beliefs and environmental factors students experience during college seem to be the most beneficial in promoting positive academic persistence decisions for college freshmen.

Limitations of This Study

Limitations of this study mostly involve the generalizability of its findings. This study, which was conducted at one large, public university in the southwestern United States, does not contain a diverse sample as the participants were primarily Caucasian and the majority (64.5%) lived on campus. Therefore, generalizations should be tentative when applying these results to college freshmen from minority groups and from other regions and types of college institutions. Due to the small sample size of freshmen of different ethnic and minority groups, any conclusions resulting from comparison among these groups must be made cautiously. Additionally, the current study did not consider students' family income as students who are supported by their parents may not validly know this information. These figures, however, may be very informative in examining and interpreting results when comparing individuals who are still supported by their parents and those who are self-sufficient, or when examining what components of income moderate certain factors, particularly students' residential status. The operational definition of academic persistence in this study is limited to students' intent to persist academically as it does not include an objective measure of their persistence behavior over time. The cross-sectional nature of the study may also limit the scope of these results as data were collected at one point in time, instead of longitudinally. Also, another limitation of the study may be the time of year the study was conducted (during the fall semester) as perhaps a longer timeframe would have demonstrated different patterns between the variables.

Conclusions and Future Research

Future research can be informed by the limitations and the significant findings of the current study. Future studies may want to utilize behavioral measures of academic persistence in conjunction with self-report measures to assess students' persistence decisions. Due to the significant finding that college freshmen who lived on campus made more positive persistence decisions than did those who lived off campus, examining a more balanced sample of on-campus versus off-campus students may help to make this relationship more concrete. Also, the type of living accommodations in on-campus housing warrants examination. Since the literature seems to have built a strong foundation for cross-sectional studies on academic persistence, a longitudinal approach may help to further examine the variables in academic persistence decisions of college students.

Overall, the hierarchical regression model revealed that four of the study variables (on-campus living, self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and personal valuing of education), and potentially a fifth variable (academic expectations), predicted academic persistence decisions of college freshmen. These findings have several implications for college campus policy for both on-campus housing during a student's freshman year and educational opportunities. Since, students who live on campus make more positive persistence decisions than those who live off campus, colleges may work to make freshman housing more accessible, perhaps taking students' finances into consideration as well as the physical space necessary to house a freshman class. By promoting the benefits of freshmen living on campus, colleges may see the student attrition rate

decrease as students may become more integrated into the collegial system both socially and academically. Additionally, providing resources where students can be assisted in their transition into the college environment both academically and socially would be beneficial for student retention. For example, ASU has incorporated a freshman curriculum that addresses several global student concerns, including self-beliefs and students' fit in the college environment. These classes teach freshmen about social integration into the college campus, problem solving, and academic integrity as a means of engaging the freshman class, facilitating their efficacy concerning their increased independence, and promoting a sense of community. By implementing programs such as these for college freshmen, universities may enhance self-beliefs that serve as protective factors against college attrition.

There are also several implications for counselors who practice with college freshmen. The self-belief variables, in particular self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and personal valuing of education, are connected with how individuals perceive themselves in their current context. By helping students challenge negative self-thoughts related to these particular areas, counselors may be able to address one dimension of academic persistence. Additionally, being aware of the beneficial impact that living on campus has on students' persistence decisions can also be valuable for counselors as they can help students explore options for living on campus that are consistent with their life circumstances. Based on Tinto's (1993) theoretical model of academic persistence of college students, students' intentions serve as a foundation for actual persistence. Therefore, promoting an environment where college freshmen can more easily access

campus resources and facilitating more positive self-beliefs may assist students in making more positive persistence decisions and eventually attain their degree.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear ASU Student,

I am a faculty member in the Division of Psychology in Education in the College of Education at Arizona State University. Five graduate students (Megan Foley, Laura Huser, Elva Blanks, Sonja Sollenberger, and Christie Befort) and I are conducting a longitudinal study to examine the factors that influence freshmen students' adjustment to college life and their choosing to remain in school. Your participation will involve 30 to 40 minutes of time to fill out a questionnaire. Code numbers will be assigned to your questionnaire to protect your confidentiality. If you choose not to consent to our having access to your school records, simply do not sign or do not return this form with your questionnaire. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and your grade in UNI 100 will not be affected. The results of this study may be published, but your name will not be used in any way.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation could be increased awareness of how you could better adjust to college life.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at (480)965-6104.

Sincerely,

Sharon E. Robinson Kurpius, Ph.D.
Professor of Counseling and Counseling Psychology

I give consent to participate in the above study by returning the completed questionnaire.
I also give consent to the researchers to access my school records: _____Yes _____No
If yes: **Please print your name**_____

_____
Signature **Date**

_____
Social Security Number

Home Address and Phone Number for follow-up:_____
_____
_____
_____

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through Karol Householder, 965-6788.

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS SHEET

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Semester and Year in college: _____

Projected Major of Major in college: _____

Marital Status: ___Single ___Separated
___Married ___Living in committed relationship
___Divorced

Are you currently employed: ___Yes ___No
If yes, how many hours a week: ____ On-campus ___Off-campus

I am currently living:
___off campus alone ___on campus alone
___off campus with one roommate ___on campus with one roommate
___off campus with multiple roommates ___on campus with multiple roommates
___off campus with family ___other_____

If living on campus, I currently live in:
___a traditional dorm room with a shared bathroom at the end of the hall
___a suite of multiple bedrooms with shared living room and bathroom
___an on campus apartment
___other_____

What is your career goal?_____
_____

How committed are you to obtaining this career goal? Not at all Very Committed
1 2 3 4 5

How strong is your commitment to earning a bachelor's degree?
Not at all Very Strong
1 2 3 4 5

Do you plan to enroll at ASU for Spring Semester? ___Yes ___No

If not, do you plan to enroll in some other school such as community college or technical:
___Yes ___No

Getting a college degree will be worth the time required to obtain it.
Strongly disagree Strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5

Getting a college degree will be worth the money spent to obtain it.

Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Getting a college degree will be worth the work/effort required to obtain it.

Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Are you doing as well in your classes as you expected to do before you came to ASU?

Much worse				Much better
1	2	3	4	5

Overall, how academically prepared do you feel you are for your coursework?

Not prepared at all				Very prepared
1	2	3	4	5

There have been university professors/instructors/counselors who have encouraged my educational efforts.

No one One person Two or more persons

There have been university professors/instructors/counselors who have taken me "under their wing."

No one One person Two or more persons

APPENDIX C

PREDICTOR AND CRITERION MEASURES

ATTITUDES TOWARD SELF

Using the following 4-point scale circle the most accurate response:

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**

	SD	**D**	**A**	**SA**
1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.	1	2	3	4
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	1	2	3	4
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	1	2	3	4
5. I feel that I do not have much to be proud of.	1	2	3	4
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	1	2	3	4
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	1	2	3	4
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	1	2	3	4
9. I certainly feel useless at times.	1	2	3	4
10. At times I think that I am no good at all.	1	2	3	4

EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS

Assuming that you are motivated to do your best, please indicate how confident you are that you could successfully do the following tasks. Circle NA (Not applicable) if the task no longer applies to you.

How **confident** are you that you could:	**Confident** Not at all						Extremely	
1. Research a term paper.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
2. Ask a question in class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
3. Do well on your exams.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
4. Join a student Organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
5. Take good class notes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
6. Make new friends at college.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
7. Keep up to date with your schoolwork.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
8. Manage time effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
9. Talk to your professors.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
10. Write course papers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
11. Understand your textbooks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
12. Ask a professor a question.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
13. Talk to university staff.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
14. Participate in class discussions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
15. Complete the math general studies requirements with a B or better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
16. Complete the science general studies Requirements with a B or better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
17. Complete the humanities general studies requirements with a B or better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

18. Complete the social science general studies requirements with a B or better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
19. Complete the English general studies requirements with a B or better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
20. Decide on an academic major.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
21. Be accepted into your academic major.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
22. Getting B or better in introductory courses for my major.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
23. Getting B or better in advanced courses for my major.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
24. Getting a B or better in elective courses.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
25. Getting B or better in upper division courses.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
26. Complete your undergraduate degree with a G.P.A. of a B or better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
27. Obtain a job in my chosen field after graduation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
28. Be accepted into graduate school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

ACADEMIC DECISION

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5

	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interests in ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
5. It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had personal problem.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Since coming to this university I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally interested in students.	1	2	3	4	5

14. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally outstanding or superior teachers. 1 2 3 4 5

15. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students. 1 2 3 4 5

16. Most of the faculty I have had contact with are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas. 1 2 3 4 5

17. Most faculty I have had contact with are genuinely interested in teaching. 1 2 3 4 5

18. I am satisfied with the extent of my intellectual development since enrolling in the university. 1 2 3 4 5

19. My academic experience has had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interests in ideas. 1 2 3 4 5

20. I am satisfied with my academic experiences at this university. 1 2 3 4 5

21. Few of my courses this year have been intellectually stimulating. 1 2 3 4 5

22. My interest in ideas and intellectual matters has increased since coming to this university. 1 2 3 4 5

23. I am more likely to attend a cultural event (for example, a concert, lecture, or art show) now than I was before coming to this university. 1 2 3 4 5

24. I have performed academically as well as I anticipated I would. 1 2 3 4 5

25. It is important for me to graduate from college. 1 2 3 4 5

26. I am confident that I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university. 1 2 3 4 5

27. It is likely that I will register at this university next fall. 1 2 3 4 5

28. It is not important to me to graduate from this university. 1 2 3 4 5

29. I have no idea at all what I want to major in. 1 2 3 4 5

30. Getting good grades is not important to me. 1 2 3 4 5

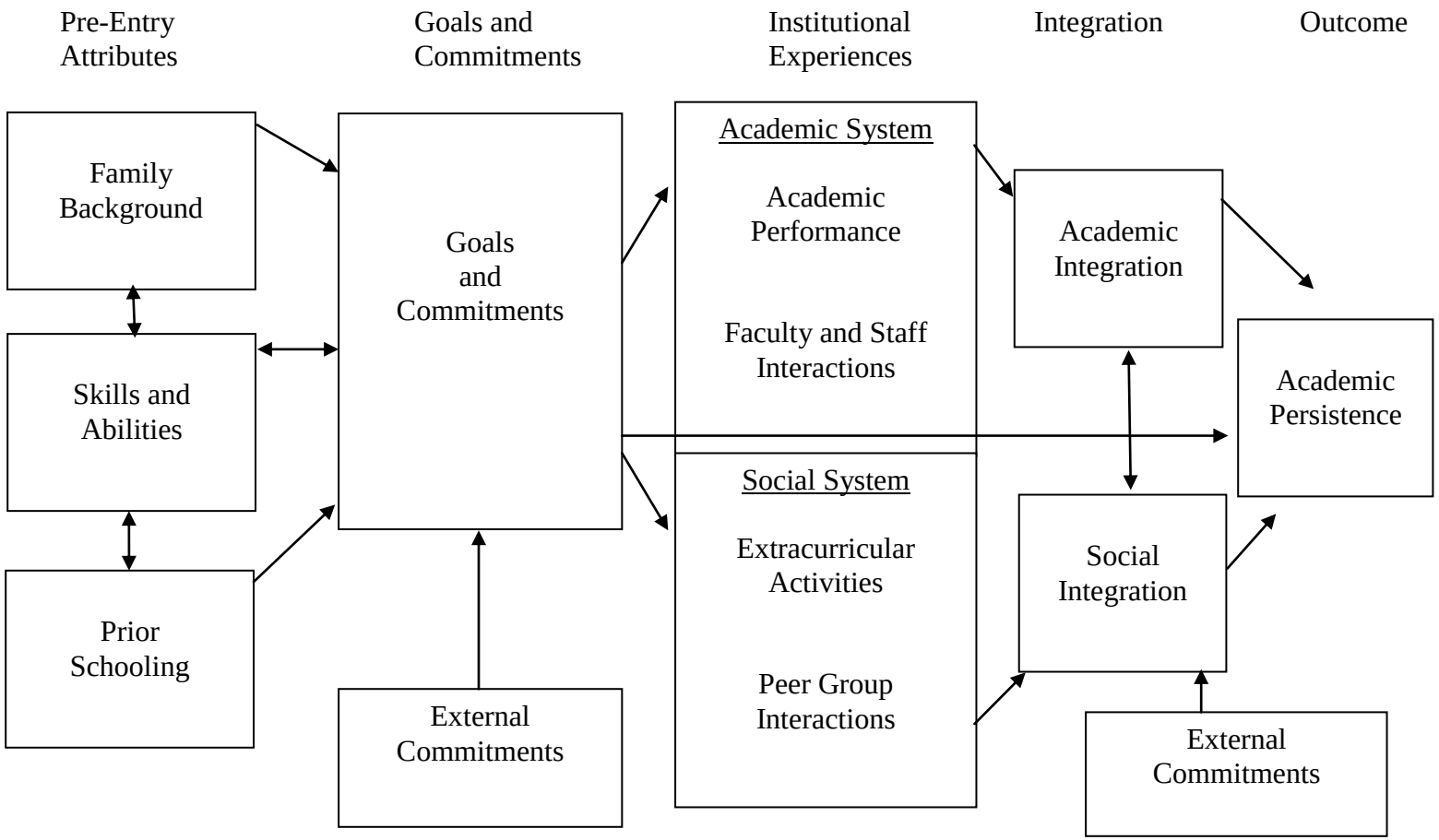

Figure 1. *Tinto's (1993) model of academic persistence*.