

The Impacts of Personal Counseling on Stress, Academic Success, and Retention in Community  
College Students

by

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## Abstract

This research focused on the impacts of personal counseling on stress, academic success, and retention in a community college setting. This mixed methods study utilized a pre-experimental design, using pre- and post-tests to measure the level of stress of students, academic success, and retention at the beginning of receiving on-campus personal counseling services, and again after six to eight sessions. The study also used the phenomenology research design to explore the research questions, “How does receiving personal counseling services impact the level of stress, and students’ academic success, in a community college?” and, “What are the stressors in students’ lives that impact academic success and retention in the community college setting?” The investigator used convenience sampling by having counselors recruit participants to obtain a sample size of 10 participants for quantitative, and five for qualitative. The investigator used a demographic questionnaire, the Cohen Perceived Stress Scale, and face-to-face tape-recorded interviews conducted in private rooms on campus to collect data. The findings indicated that there was a significant decrease in participants’ perceived stress after attending six to eight sessions of personal counseling. This study found that overall participants felt that stress had a significant negative impact on academic success. Also, participants felt that personal counseling reduced stress, and had a significant positive impact on academic success. The implications for social work are that this study provided evidence that stress is a significant obstacle for students wishing to further their education through community college, and that personal counseling can be effective in reducing stress and improving academic success.

## Introduction

The college student population often is subject to high levels of stress (Murff, 2005). Some causes of these high levels of stress include the difficulty and pressure of class assignments, strain on personal relationships, adjusting to different housing arrangements, and financial stress. Studies have shown that these stressors can impact academic success in higher education institutions (Murff). There is also research to suggest that high stress levels in students can affect retention rates in these institutions (Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005).

The community college culture is a unique system within the higher education system (Carlsen, 2003). There is currently little research on how the high levels of stress college students experience affects academic success and retention specific to the community college setting. This research was conducted in a community college setting in order to examine this specific population.

West Valley College is a community college in Saratoga, Santa Clara County, California (West Valley, 2008). The personal counseling program in the Health Services department on campus offers six to eight therapeutic sessions with supervised Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) and Masters of Social Work (MSW) interns in the hopes of reducing stress and fostering academic success and retention. This research examined the impact of six to eight sessions of personal counseling on three outcomes: stress level of students, academic success, and retention in a community college setting.

### *Relevance to Social Work and Community College Institutions*

This study was relevant to the Social Work profession, as well as community college institutions, because it provided evidence that stress is a significant obstacle for students wishing to further their education through community college. It also provided more of an understanding

of the stressors specific to the community college culture. Because a great number of nontraditional students, that comprise a marginalized population, attend community colleges, this research could increase the cultural competency of personal counseling services (Bundy & Smith, 2004). Also, this could encourage clinical social workers serving community college students to educate themselves on what support services are available to assist their clients in succeeding.

The relevance to the community college institution is that low retention rates in community colleges are of major concern to the institution (Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005). It would be useful to understand what possible causes there are for low retention rates. Perhaps this knowledge could allow for re-allocating funds into support services, such as personal, academic, and financial support services, to increase student wellbeing, academic success, and retention rates. Also, knowing the effectiveness of the personal counseling program on success and retention could allow for program re-structuring, and improvements to better the community.

## Literature Review

### *Background of Community College Students*

The California Community Colleges System Office (2008) states that in the 2007-2008 academic year there were 2,739,921 students enrolled in community colleges in the state. The United States Census Bureau (2007) states that the estimated population of California is 36,457,549, making enrolled students approximately 7.5% of the state population. The data shows that California community college enrollment is diverse in terms of ethnicity and age (California Community, 2008). The largest age group of students is 20 to 24 years old, while the smallest is 35 to 39.

The West Valley College Factbook (2008) reported that for the spring 2008 semester, there were 10,041 students enrolled. Of these students, 58.4% reported as female, and 41.6% as male. The college age data for the spring 2008 semester was: < 21 years old, 35.1%; 21-25 years old, 23.7%; 26-30 years old, 9.2%; 31-40 years old, 10.9%; 41-50 years old, 11.1%; 51-60 years old, 6.6%; > 60 years old, 3.5% (West Valley, 2008). The reported ethnicity breakdown of the students for the spring 2008 semester was: African American, 3.0%; American Indian, 0.9%; Asian/Pacific Islander, 19.5%; Hispanic, 15.9%; Other Non-White, 2.3%; White, 58.4% (West Valley, 2008). This data from West Valley College is similar to that of the statewide data in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity (California Community, 2008).

The American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment West Valley College Executive Summary (2007) used survey data to examine issues facing the students at West Valley College. In the spring 2007 semester, 32.2% of West Valley students reported that stress affected their individual academic performance, making stress the highest ranking variable in terms of academic impact in the survey. Other high-ranking variables included sleep difficulties (26.1%), concern for a troubled friend or family member (21.3%), and relationship difficulty (14.1%). The survey defined academic impact as if a student “received an incomplete, dropped a course, received a lower grade in a class, on an exam, or on an important project” (American College, 2007, p. 20). This data shows the effects of stress and emotional problems on academic success in a community college setting, and suggest the need for personal counseling on campus.

### *Humanistic Perspective and Personal Counseling*

The humanistic perspective provides a basis for understanding the personal counseling program, and how it could benefit community college students. This perspective is a way of

explaining human behavior “from the vantage point of the phenomenal self – from the internal frame of reference of the individual” (Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2003, p. 81). Although many criticize the humanistic perspective because of its abstract and intangible concepts, there is strong empirical evidence in support of the “core conditions of the therapeutic process: empathy, warmth, and genuineness” when used in clinical settings (p. 82).

This framework could help explain the impact of personal counseling on community college students dealing with high stress levels. The personal counseling program has a foundation of these core conditions, as well as the concept of “beginning where the client is,” which is strongly rooted in the humanistic perspective (Hutchison & Charlesworth, 2003, p. 82). This theory also provides a strength-based framework in therapy, as opposed to focusing on pathology.

#### *Personal Counseling in the Community College Setting*

There is little current research on personal counseling specific to the community college setting. Bundy and Benshoff (2000) surveyed community college students to study the interest and need for personal counseling on campus. The study found that 70% of community college students surveyed felt that having a personal counseling center on campus would be helpful (Bundy & Benshoff, 2000). Their findings suggest that with availability of services and good marketing on campus, community college students are expected to utilize personal counseling centers on campus.

Another study examines the increase of mental health concerns in community college students seeking counseling on campus (Durodoye, Harris & Bolden, 2000). The article argues that due to the increase in cases of depression, stress and anxiety, and substance abuse problems

among community college students, personal counseling programs are needed, as well as trained, professional counselors who can manage and assist in this increasing caseload.

A limitation of these studies is that they were both written in 2000, putting them out of date. However, they demonstrate an increase over time in the need for and interest in personal counseling services on community college campuses. Another limitation is that neither study tested the effectiveness of personal counseling services in community colleges.

### *Stress in the Community College Setting*

There are several peer-reviewed articles discussing the impacts of stress in the college setting. One article discusses stress in terms of academic success and retention. Stress is defined as “a state of psychological arousal that results when external demands tax or exceed a person’s adaptive abilities” (Lazarus, 1966, as cited in Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005, p. 679). The study surveyed 107 nontraditional, mostly minority, freshmen at a commuter college. It was found that self-efficacy had a significant relationship to academic success, but that stress had a significant relationship only to retention (Zajacova et al.). This relationship was that an increase in stress was correlated with lower retention rates.

However, Murff (2005) argues that stress in a college setting has a direct impact on academic success. The article discusses stressors that affect college students, as well as stressors specific to non-traditional college students. These stressors include financial responsibilities, changes in family dynamics, and maintaining one or more jobs while in school. The article discusses a study conducted in 2004, in which college students were sent to stress reduction seminars, and as a result, showed strong improvements in their personal stress coping skills (Dziegielewski et al., 2004, as cited in Murff, 2005). Murff argues that these improved stress

coping skills will lead to greater academic success. It seems that more research must be done before making such a conclusion.

Robotham and Julian (2006) have studied the literature on stress and its effects in higher education, as the interest in retention and academic success has increased over the years. One of their biggest critiques of current literature in stress and students is that very little qualitative research has been used to delve deeper into the results of the quantitative data collected. Another critique is that there is not significant research in stress management strategies on campus (Robotham & Julian). They argue that students sometimes need professional help and support to develop and utilize stress coping skills.

After examining the research on stress in the college setting, it is clear that there is a lack of information specific to community colleges, as well as stress management strategies such as personal counseling. Also, as Robotham and Julian (2006) argue, it is important to examine stress in college students through qualitative methodology, as the research is lacking in that area.

#### *Academic Success in the Community College Setting*

There is a vast amount of research on academic success in terms of higher education, though in the community college setting, it is somewhat limited. Much of the research on academic success in colleges is in relation to stress, as discussed in the previous section. Zajacova et al (2005) measured academic success in terms of first-year cumulative grades, number of credits, and retention in the second year. However, the study did not find a significant relationship between stress and academic success.

Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) point out, due to the higher number of minority and non-traditional students in community colleges, it is hard to pin down a common definition of academic success among this diverse population. This study found that participants, all

community college students of diverse backgrounds, noted that achieving academic success was the hardest challenge of attending college, second to balancing academic and personal life. The authors argue that community college staff and faculty must be aware of these challenges, and provide more support services on campus to increase academic success of their students (Miller et al.).

### *Retention in the Community College Setting*

Research on retention in community college in terms of support services is limited. However, Fike and Fike (2008) studied predictors of retention in community college, including a variety of factors. The article provides a discussion on the differences between community college students and university students, which leads to the differences in retention. The study concluded that the top factors for predicting retention for a second year were utilizing student support services, receiving financial aid, taking Internet courses, and number of credit hours (Fike & Fike, 2008). Although only a small number of participants used student support services, of those who did, they felt more encouraged to continue on in their education.

Another study conducted on retention was conducted in the United Kingdom in different universities (Thomas, 2002). The author discussed the fairly new concept of institutional habitus, which is a term used to describe an institutions ability to be culturally competent and respectful of minority subgroups in its population. Thomas studied how different factors, including institutional habitus, affected the retention rates of non-traditional students, who are often immigrant, minority, or low-income students. This qualitative research found that students felt more encouraged to continue with their education when they felt that they fit in, or were understood by the faculty and staff (Thomas).

This literature on retention in higher education, along with the humanistic perspective, supports the idea that therapeutic personal counseling as a student support service could impact retention rates in a community college setting. In addition, Thomas's research on the impacts of cultural competency and respect suggests that the intervention, as well as the surveys and interviews should be culturally competent and respectful to encourage participation and retention in students.

### *Hypothesis and Research Questions*

Due to the limited number of studies that examine the effects and need for personal counseling on community college campuses, this research is important and timely. For the quantitative component of this research, it was hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between receiving six to eight sessions of personal counseling and decreased levels of stress, increased academic success, and higher retention of community college students. The qualitative component complemented the hypothesis by asking, "How does receiving personal counseling services impact the level of stress, and students' academic success, in a community college?" It also asked, "What are the common stressors in students' lives that impact academic success and retention in the community college setting?"

### Method

#### *Research Design*

This was a mixed methods study. The quantitative research design was pre-experimental design, using pre- and post-tests to measure the level of stress of students at the beginning of receiving on-campus personal counseling services, and again after six weeks of treatment. The pre- and post-tests also asked a series of questions to determine the level of academic success, and how many units the student took to measure retention.

The qualitative component of this study used a phenomenology research design, using semi-structured interviews and observations to collect data. This component was used to compliment the quantitative survey data by exploring if and how effective the personal counseling program was in alleviating stress, and increasing academic success and retention.

### *Sample*

The sampling method for the quantitative component of this study was convenience sampling. The Health Services front desk staff asked all students if they wished to participate in this research prior to the first session of personal counseling of the spring semester. This component used a sampling frame of all enrolled community college students over the age of eighteen participating in the on-campus personal counseling program for six to eight sessions at West Valley College. It was anticipated that the sampling frame would be 40-60 students. However, because of a change in the time frame of the study, and the light caseload of the semester, only 18 pre-test surveys were completed. Of those 18 participants, 10 returned for six or more sessions and agreed to complete the post-test.

For the qualitative component, this investigator used convenience sampling as well. Each of the other three personal counselors submitted a list of the names of students participating in the personal counseling program who had completed six to eight sessions in the program (after obtaining verbal permission from the students). Out of a sampling frame of eight students whom were asked for permission to be contacted, five participated in the qualitative interviews.

### *Study Site*

The study was based on the West Valley College campus, in Saratoga, Santa Clara County, California. The surveys and interviews were conducted in the Health Services building,

in private rooms. Surveys, audiotapes, and interview notes have been kept in a locked file cabinet in the Health Services building.

### *Variables and Measurement*

The independent variable in this study was the intervention, which was the attendance of six to eight personal counseling sessions. One dependent variable was the level of stress, which was operationalized by the score of the Cohen Perceived Stress Scale 10 Item (PSS-10). Another dependent variable was academic success, which was operationalized by each participant's response to the demographic questions about cumulative grade point average, and expected grade point average at the semester's end. The third dependent variable was retention, which was operationalized by the participant's response to questions about number of credit hours currently enrolled in, and planning to enroll in. The dependent variables were continuous variables and were measured pre-intervention and then post-intervention, and the degree of change in these variables were tested with dependent *t*-tests.

This study included two self-administered measurements to collect data. The demographics questionnaire was used to collect each participant's number of credit hours currently enrolled in, number of credit hours planning to enroll in the next semester, cumulative grade point average to date, and expected cumulative grade point average after the current semester. It also collected participant's age, gender, ethnicity, and which student support services the participant used (see Appendix A).

The Cohen Perceived Stress Scale 10 Item (PSS-10) was utilized to determine each participant's perceived level of stress before and after the personal counseling intervention (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). The measurement is scored as a Likert Scale and consists of 10 items that are measured on a five-point scale ranging from never, almost never, sometimes, fairly

often, and very often. PSS-10 scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items, e.g., 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, etc. and then adding across all 10 items. The higher the score is, the higher the perceived level of stress of the student (see Appendix B).

#### *Qualitative Themes and Measurement*

The qualitative component addressed the following themes as they relate to the personal counseling program: (1) stress reduction; (2) academic success; and (3) retention. This investigator allowed for other themes to develop. Stress reduction is defined in this study as a self-reported decrease in the feelings of stress and anxiety in every day activities since beginning personal counseling sessions. Academic success is defined here as an increase in test scores, grades, cumulative grade point average, and self-reported confidence in academic abilities since beginning personal counseling sessions. Retention refers to the participant's self-reported desire to stay in courses for the entirety of the semester, and to register for courses or transfer to a four-year institution the following term.

This investigator administered semi-structured interviews, and read a formal script prior asking interview questions (see Appendix C). The interview questions explored if personal counseling had been helpful in reducing the level of stress of the participant and why, as well as what stressors the participant felt were most harmful to their academic success and continuing education. The investigator prepared follow-up questions ahead of time in case participants had trouble elaborating from the broader questions.

#### *Reliability and Validity of Quantitative Data*

The PSS-10 is a pre-existing data collection measurement that has been used in a variety of settings, which increases the reliability of this measurement. The demographic questionnaire is a self-created measurement, and was tested for reliability and face validity. The investigator

pilot tested both the PPS-10 and demographic questionnaire with two social work graduate students, and found it to be reliable and to have good face validity. Also, complementing this component with qualitative interview checks the reliability and validity, as it could shed light on how effective these tools were in measuring what they were supposed to measure.

#### *Credibility and Verification of Qualitative Data*

To verify the qualitative data collected in this study, the researcher used peer review. A fellow researcher who does not work at West Valley College examined the interview recordings and field notes and checked it against the findings to verify the data. Also, prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher created a list of the interview questions and had the fellow researcher examine them to ensure that they were truly open-ended questions, reasonably free from bias. These methods were chosen because they are excellent techniques for establishing credibility (Creswell, 2007).

#### *Human Subjects Considerations*

Before beginning the study, each participant was asked to sign a consent form outlining the subject of the study, explaining the participant's right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality (see Appendix D). Persons who refused to sign the consent form were not allowed to participate in this study. The counselors, when asking students if they wished to participate in the qualitative interviews, obtained verbal consent before giving their names and phone numbers to the investigator.

There was a separate consent form for interview participants, that asked each participant if he/she was willing to be tape recorded during the interview, and the investigator explained this before asking for a signature (see Appendix E). West Valley College, and San José State University Institutional Review Board approved this proposal of methods for obtaining consent

(see Appendices F and G).

### *Procedures and Data Collection Methods*

This investigator began data collection procedures directly following IRB approval in mid-December 2008. Qualitative interviews were conducted from January to March 2009. The pre-test quantitative surveys were administered starting the first week of the spring semester in February, until mid-March 2009. Post-test surveys were administered until late April 2009.

This investigator explained how to present the study and recruit participants, as well as how to administer the surveys to the other three personal counselors during group supervision, and to front desk staff in a meeting. The front desk staff administered the surveys directly before each participant's first counseling appointment of the spring semester. The front desk staff or one of the counselors briefly explained to the participants the purpose of the study, and that they were asked to complete two brief questionnaires that included the demographics questionnaire and the Cohen Perceived Stress Scale. This investigator provided all forms and pens, as well as a brief written introduction of the study to all participants. This written introduction included instructions on how to complete the consent form and the surveys, explained the purpose of the study, and informed students that it would take approximately 5-10 minutes. The participants first filled out the demographics questionnaire, followed by the PSS-10.

At the end of the procedure the participant was thanked for participating in the study, and the counselor collected and placed questionnaires in a sealed envelope to be given to the investigator. Then, the counselor began the personal counseling session. The same procedures were used for the post-test measures during the sixth, seventh, or eighth session, depending on the duration of each participant's treatment.

For the qualitative component, there were additional procedures. When the investigator initially explained all data collection procedures to the three other counselors in the personal counseling department, the investigator asked them to keep in mind students who seemed willing to participate in the qualitative interview component. Candidates for the qualitative components were students who had signed the consent form acknowledging they could be contacted for a possible follow-up interview, who had a strong grasp of the English language, and who had completed eight or more sessions of personal counseling.

This investigator asked for a list of names and phone numbers from each of the three other counselors of possible interview candidates, who had given verbal or written consent, depending on participation in the quantitative component. This investigator did not have the students' case files, but only the information necessary to contact these students to ask for their participation in semi-structured interviews. Once two to six students agreed to schedule an interview with the investigator, the remaining list of names and phone numbers were kept in a locked file cabinet in the Health Services Building. After five interviews were conducted, this list was shredded for the protection of the participants.

When participants arrived for the scheduled interview, they were offered snacks and a drink, regardless of the level of their participation. The investigator read the interview script, and reminded participants that they did not have to answer any questions, and could leave whenever they chose without penalty. The investigator answered questions and clarified upon request of the participant. The investigator read all structured interview questions and listened carefully and respectfully to the answers. All interviews were audio taped if permission was given. Interviews were expected to last no longer than one hour, and most were between fifteen and thirty minutes long. The investigator took notes on observations, as well as answers to

questions during the interviews. At the end of the procedure the investigator thanked the participant, and offered them a copy of the consent form.

### *Analysis*

At the univariate level, the investigator tested most of the variables on the questionnaire (see Appendix H). For categorical questions such as gender and ethnicity, these variables were described by the percentage and frequency. For the continuous variables within the questionnaire such as age, the investigator used the mean and standard deviation, with use of the range as well. At the bivariate level, the investigator tested the independent variable of number of personal counseling sessions with all three dependent variables in separate dependent *t*-tests.

In addition to the univariate and bivariate statistics, the qualitative data collected from the interviews was analyzed and coded according to the phenomenological approach. The investigator read the personal experiences of the phenomena of participating in the personal counseling program, and then developed a list of significant statements (Creswell, 2007). Then, the investigator clustered these by themes, and allowed for other themes and sub-themes to emerge during this process.

## Quantitative Results

### *Sample Characteristics*

A convenience sample of 18 students participating in six or more personal counseling sessions at West Valley College, in Saratoga, California was gathered to participate in this study. Of these 18 students' questionnaires, only 10 were used due to 8 not returning for the post-test. Of the 10 participants, 2 (20%) were female and 8 (80%) were male. Participants' ages ranged from 20 years to 52 years. Two (20%) participants were 18-24, 4 (40%) were 25-39, 2 (20%) were 40-49, and 2 (20%) were 50 years or older. The sample consisted of 1 (10%) Asian, 4

(40%) Caucasian, 2 (20%) Iranian, 2 (20%) Hispanic/Latino, and 1 (10%) Native American participants. Six (60%) of the participants were born in the United States, and 4 (40%) were born outside of the United States. Of the 10 participants, 4 (40%) do not currently work, 3 (30%) work 10-19 hours per week, and 3 (30%) work 20-39 hours per week. In terms of household annual income, 8 (80%) reported an income of \$0,000-\$25,000, 1 (10%) reported \$50,001-\$75,000, and 1 (10%) reported \$100,001 or above. When asked what student support services participant's utilized, 3 (30%) reported using none, 1 (10%) utilized Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), 2 (20%) utilized Disability and Educational Support Program (DESP), and 4 (40%) utilized more than one student support service (See Table 1).

#### *Stress and Personal Counseling*

In regards to the hypothesis that personal counseling impacts the level of stress a community college student experiences, dependent *t*-testing was employed to analyze the difference in means between the participants' pre and post-test scores. The results of the dependent *t*-test revealed a statistically significant difference between pre and post-test scores on the PSS-10 Questionnaire ( $t(9) = 2.648, p = .027$ ). The mean score for participants on the pre-test was 24.90 ( $SD = 6.37$ ) and post-test score was 21.30 ( $SD = 5.14$ ) (See Table 2).

#### *Cumulative Grade Point Average and Personal Counseling*

To address the hypothesis that personal counseling affects academic success, dependent *t*-tests were used to analyze participant's current grade point average (GPA) and expected grade point average before and after six sessions of personal counseling. The results of the dependent *t*-test indicated that there was no significant difference between pre and post-test current GPA ( $t(9) = .760, p = .476$ ). The mean GPA for participants on the pre-test was 3.52 ( $SD = .318$ ) and post-test was 3.46 ( $SD = .373$ ). The results of the dependent *t*-test for expected GPA showed that

there was also no significant difference in pre and post-test ( $t(9) = -.337, p = .750$ ). The mean expected GPA for participants on the pre-test was 3.53 ( $SD = .388$ ) and post-test was 3.57 ( $SD = .356$ ) (See Table 2).

### *Retention and Personal Counseling*

To test the hypothesis that personal counseling influences students' retention rates, dependent  $t$ -tests were utilized to analyze participants' current credit level and expected credit level before and after six sessions of personal counseling. The results of the dependent  $t$ -test indicated that there was no significant difference between pre and post-test current credit level ( $t(9) = 1.626, p = .138$ ). The mean credit level for participants on the pre-test was 9.95 ( $SD = 4.374$ ) and post-test was 8.60 ( $SD = 4.993$ ). The results of the dependent  $t$ -test for expected credit level showed that there was also no significant difference between pre and post-test ( $t(9) = -1.468, p = .180$ ). The mean expected credit level for participants on the pre-test was 10.17 ( $SD = 4.757$ ) and post-test was 11.06 ( $SD = 4.759$ ) (See Table 2).

### Qualitative Results

Experiences and attitudes of community college students participating in the personal counseling program were categorized into three major themes: (1) stress reduction; (2) academic success; and (3) retention. During the interviews another theme emerged, which was the humanistic perspective in personal counseling. Out of five participants, two were male and three were female. Two identified as Latino, and three identified as Caucasian. Each of the five interview participants stated that they had attended six or more sessions of personal counseling.

### *Stress and Community College Students*

The participants were asked specific questions related to stress reduction. All but one participant (80%) stated that they felt that high levels of stress impacted their academic

performance. A male Latino student stated, “I think I experienced high stress before I went into counseling, which is what prompted me to go...the stress has caused me not to be as focused as I could be on my coursework.”

The participants were also asked to disclose specific stressors that have impacted their academic success. These stressors included loss and grief, substance abuse, problems in the home, problems with relationships, and academic stress. One participant shared, “When losing a family member I dropped all but one of my classes.” Overall, most participants felt that their stressors impacted their focus and grades on assignments more than the final grade in their courses.

When asked about personal counseling reducing stress, one participant explained, “I’ll go to my counselor and I’ll be totally upset and I’ll think everything is terrible. And when I’m leaving it’s like I have this perfect ideal life.” All but one (80%) participant stated that they agreed that utilizing personal counseling reduced stress. This complements the results of the PSS-10 questionnaire that was used in the quantitative component of this study.

#### *Academic Success and Personal Counseling*

Although the questions about stress reduction were closely tied to academic success, the participants were also asked questions about how personal counseling impacted their academic performance. Four out of five participants stated that attending personal counseling had a positive impact on their academic performance. One participant, simply stated, “not really,” and did not want to elaborate when asked follow-up questions.

One female student stated, “My counselor gave me advice about going to school...and it just made it easier to actually see the whole picture.” She continued to say, “I actually did much better this semester. I got much better grades.” Another student explained, “It helped me set

goals for each semester and if I had any situations come up, challenging emotional situations, I could always go to [Counselor].” When asked about what has changed in terms of academic success since attending personal counseling sessions, another female student shared, “I don’t get overwhelmed with all my homework like I used to. If I didn’t see a counselor, I would be overwhelmed and I wouldn’t do anything. But I’m doing better because I see someone.”

### *Retention and Personal Counseling*

The interviews included one question to explore how personal counseling could impact retention rates. All but one interview participant planned to continue their education either at West Valley or through transferring to a four-year university. The participant who did not plan to continue her education stated that it was because of a death in the family, and that she planned to come back to the college after “figuring things out.” Most students explained their plans to continue their education with excitement, and it seemed that they had thought it over prior to being asked. One student shared, “This next semester I’m hoping to be full time...and then hopefully I’ll go to a four-year college.” She also shared that she planned to improve her grades in the coming semester, and this investigator observed that she seemed confident about her ability to do so.

### *Humanistic Perspective*

The investigator allowed for other themes to arise during the interview process. When asked to describe the overall experience in personal counseling, a clear theme of the humanistic perspective in personal counseling developed. The humanistic perspective in personal counseling, as explained in the literature review, focuses on strength-based therapy utilizing “empathy, warmth and genuineness” to begin where the client is (Hutchinson & Charlesworth, 2003, p. 82). All five of the interview participants shared experiences that developed this theme.

One male, Latino student shared, “I sought out counseling because I wanted to have the ability to talk to someone who I wasn’t going to feel was judgmental. Someone safe to talk to about the issues I was dealing with.” He continued by saying, “It was just helpful knowing that I had a place to talk to someone who could provide me with resources for whatever I needed. And I could vent my frustrations in a healthy way.”

A female, Caucasian student explained, “It was a good thing to have someone that was neutral, that didn’t know anyone who I knew. It was good to have someone just to open up to, and just to have someone to listen to me. It’s sometimes hard to come by.” Another male, Latino student stated, “I wanted someone to talk to whom I could trust. I found it helpful in telling right from wrong in situations.” One female student, when asked about her experience with a personal counselor, shared “It seems like [the counselor] just listened to me. So I really felt heard...[The counselor] has been really helpful to me in that way.”

## Discussion

### *Stress and Personal Counseling*

One of the primary purposes of this study was to find out the impacts of personal counseling on stress in community college students. It was hypothesized that participation in six or more personal counseling sessions would lead to a decrease in stress level. This hypothesis that the post-test scores on the Perceived Stress Scale-10 Item (PSS-10) questionnaire would be significantly lower than the pre-test scores was supported in this study. In this quantitative study of 10 students, there was a significant difference between pre and post-test scores on the PSS-10, suggesting that personal counseling was effective in reducing stress in community college students.

This research asked, “How does receiving personal counseling services impact the level of stress in community college students?” The qualitative results of the interviews supported the quantitative results, as it showed that all students interviewed felt that attending personal counseling sessions based in the humanistic perspective was effective in reducing the level of stress of community college students. It also showed that all but one participant interviewed felt that stress was directly related to academic success. This relationship was that the higher the stress level, the lower the level of academic success, which is consistent with the research done by Murff (2005) on the impact of stress reduction techniques on students’ academic success.

#### *Academic Success and Personal Counseling*

This study also examined the affects of personal counseling on a student’s academic success. To test the hypothesis that attending personal counseling sessions impacted academic success, dependent *t*-tests were employed to compare mean GPAs and expected GPAs. This study found that there was no significant difference in the pre and post-test means of GPA and expected GPA, suggesting that there is no relationship between personal counseling and academic success.

However, the qualitative results may have proved that the definition of academic success, as cumulative grade point average, in the quantitative component was too narrow. In answering the research question, “How has personal counseling impacted academic success?” this investigator found that four out of five students interviewed believed that attending personal counseling sessions affected their academic success, suggesting that the personal counseling program was effective in increasing academic success of community college students.

This qualitative component used the definition of academic success as, “an increase in cumulative grade point average, adding courses or maintaining credit level, receiving a higher

grade in a specific class, on an exam, or on an important project.” Perhaps if the quantitative component measured academic success with a broader definition, the results would have been consistent with qualitative findings. This dilemma of having a common definition of academic success was also expressed in the research of Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005), who felt that it was hard to come to one definition that all students and faculty could agree on.

### *Retention and Personal Counseling*

One goal of this study was to examine the effectiveness of personal counseling in community college in increasing retention rates of students. It was hypothesized that participation in personal counseling would increase a student’s retention. This investigator tested the hypothesis by utilizing dependent *t*-tests to compare mean credit level and expected credit level of students. This testing revealed that there was no significant difference between pre and post-test credit levels and expected credit levels of students, suggesting that attending personal counseling sessions was not effective in increasing retention rates.

However, as with academic success, the quantitative component narrowly defined retention rates as an increase in credit levels and expected credit levels of students. The qualitative component did not attempt to answer the question of how personal counseling impacted retention rates of students, but it did ask if students planned to continue their education. Although four out of five students planned to continue their education at West Valley College or through transferring to a four-year institution, no correlation between personal counseling and retention can be drawn because of the wording of the question. Much like the literature reviewed, the impact of personal counseling on retention in community college students is still inconclusive after this study.

### *Humanistic Perspective and Personal Counseling*

During the qualitative interview process, there was a clear theme of the effectiveness of using the humanistic perspective in personal counseling. Although this was the theoretical framework of this study, it was not anticipated that it would arise as a theme in participants' experiences with the program. All five of the interview participants further developed this theme in their description of the overall experience in personal counseling. These descriptions were positive, and some participants further developed this theme when asked what specific techniques the counselors used were effective. This development suggests that the humanistic approach to therapy is effective when working with community college students, and could be effective in reducing stress in this population.

#### *Limitations and Strengths*

The primary limitation to the quantitative component of this study is the sample size of the participants. Although this study aimed at attaining a sample size of at least 40 students, sampling methods and the unpredictability of how many students will utilize personal counseling each semester made this number difficult to reach. 18 participants participated in pre-tests, and due to the nature of providing free services and the small time frame for this study, only 10 participants returned for post-tests. This low sample size could have made results appear more or less statistically significant. Future studies should use a longer time frame for pre and post-test measures, or conduct research at community colleges where students utilize personal counseling more frequently, to ensure larger samples.

Another limitation to this study is that the United States and other nations were faced with large-scale economic crises that escalated after the pre-tests had been administered. Between lay-offs, furlough days, rising mortgage rates, and companies declaring bankruptcy, many students were exposed to added stress and financial burdens. As 80% of survey

participants reported annual household incomes below \$25,000, it is a fair assumption that this financial crisis could have impacted their stress level, and their retention rates, as financial aid is harder to come by in a recession. This could result in inaccurate post-test results. However, the fact that even with this added stressor, post-test stress levels were significantly lower suggests that personal counseling is effective in times of crisis.

In terms of the qualitative component, one limitation is that the results reflect the opinions of a select group of people who wanted to share their experiences in personal counseling. Perhaps those who did not find it as beneficial would not choose to be contacted for interviews. Additionally, counselors may have had biases in which students they recommended for the sample. Future studies should aim for larger qualitative samples in order to achieve a wider range of responses. Also, future researchers should formulate more follow-up questions to ensure that qualitative interviews achieve accurate answers to the research questions.

One of the strengths of this study is that it was mixed methods, allowing the researcher to check results of quantitative against results of qualitative. Also, as the literature review suggests, there is a lack of qualitative research in this area of focus. Another strength of this study was the diverse sample achieved from convenience sampling. Given that the quantitative sample was relatively small, participants were diverse in terms of age, ethnic background, and immigration status, which helped to ensure that minorities are represented in the results. The sample is less diverse in terms of gender (80% were female), and socio-economic status (80% reported income of \$25,000 or less annually). However, as students with low socio-economic status are a marginalized group, it could be seen as a strength that this study reached this population. The qualitative sample was relatively diverse, given the small sample size. Future studies could

increase the diversity of the qualitative component to ensure that marginalized groups are represented.

### Implications for Social Work

Studies examining the effects of personal counseling specific to the community college setting are limited. This study is only a small attempt at understanding and exploring the effectiveness of personal counseling with this population. Implications of this research for social work practice include contributing to the body of research addressing the affects of personal counseling on stress, academic success, and retention in community college students.

The results revealed that high levels of stress impact academic success, and that personal counseling is effective in reducing stress and increasing academic success. In terms of policy, these implications are that social workers and community college faculty must advocate for an increase in funding for personal counseling and other student support programs. This advocacy is crucial to the success of community college students, who currently lack substantial and well-funded support services.

Additionally, this research provides evidence that the humanistic approach in therapy is effective in working with community college students. Counselors could educate themselves in this theoretical framework to better provide support to and reduce stress in community college students. Also, this humanistic approach could achieve better long-term outcomes for students in this population. This evidence could also help in formulating new research of the effectiveness of personal counseling programs in community colleges.

Community college students are a marginalized group that is not proportionally represented in research related to personal counseling. Also, non-traditional students comprise a large percentage of the community college population. This research gave these marginalized

students a voice, and allowed them to share their experiences in personal counseling. This study represented students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, differing ages and immigration status, and lower socio-economic status. In terms of cultural competency, the implications for social work are that this group is now better represented in research. However, there should be more research studies to examine the experiences of this marginalized population in terms of stress, academic success, and retention.

Also, creating respectful partnerships with community college students, and more specifically, non-traditional students, and including their input in the restructuring of the personal counseling program could increase buy-in and interest from this population. This could increase participation in personal counseling and other support services, and could possibly lead to better long-term outcomes for community college students in terms of stress reduction and increase of academic success and retention.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study examined the effects of attending six or more sessions of personal counseling on stress, academic success, and retention in a community college setting. The results of this mixed methods study revealed that personal counseling was effective in reducing stress and increasing academic success, but the impacts on retention were inconclusive. An unanticipated result of the qualitative component was the discovery that students found the humanistic framework for personal counseling effective in reducing stress and increasing academic success. This study had its limitations, but it contributed to the research base of personal counseling within the community college setting by giving a voice to these marginalized students and learning from their experiences in the personal counseling program.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Variable	n(%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Females	8(80)
Males	2(20)
<b>Age (range: 20-52)</b>	
18-24	2(20)
25-39	4(40)
40-49	2(20)
50 and older	2(20)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
African-American	0(0)
Asian	1(10)
Caucasian	4(40)
Iranian	2(20)
Hispanic/Latino	2(20)
Native American	1(10)
<b>Birth Place of Origin</b>	
In the United States	6(60)
Outside of the United States	4(40)
<b>Hours Working Per Week</b>	
None	4(40)
1-9 Hours	0(0)
10-19 Hours	3(30)
20-39 Hours	3(30)
40 Hours and over	0(0)
<b>Household Annual Income</b>	
\$0,000-\$25,000	8(80)
\$25,001-\$50,000	0(0)
\$50,001-\$75,000	1(10)
\$75,001-\$100,000	0(0)
\$100,001 and above	1(10)
<b>Student Support Services Utilizing</b>	
none	3(30)
EOPS	1(10)
Educational Transition	0(0)
DESP	2(20)
More than one	4(40)

Table 2. Paired Samples T-test results for PSS-10 score, Credit Level, and GPA

Outcome variable	Scores		<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i> value (2-tailed)
	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score		
PSS-10**	24.90(6.367)	21.30(5.143)	2.648	.027
Current GPA	3.52(.318)	3.46(.373)	.760	.476
Expected GPA	3.53(.388)	3.57(.356)	-.337	.750
Current Credit Level	9.95(4.374)	8.60(4.993)	1.626	.138
Expected Credit Level	10.17(4.757)	11.06(4.759)	-1.468	.180

*N* = 10

\*\* PSS-10 Range: 0-40: (0) low level of perceived stress, (40) high level of perceived stress

**Demographics Questionnaire****Appendix A**

Participant ID #:

Date of administration:

Thank you again for your participation in this study of the impacts of personal counseling on stress, academic success, and retention in community college students. Please fill out this questionnaire honestly, as your identity will be kept confidential. If you have any questions, please feel comfortable ask the researcher.

<i>Please answer the questions below</i>	<i>Please leave blank</i>
1. Please state your date of birth __ / __ / __	SPSS code 1.
2. Where were you born?	2.
2a. If not in the United States, how long have you lived in this country?	2a.
3. What is your ethnicity?	3.
4. Please state your gender	4.
5. Please state the number of credit hours you are currently enrolled in.	5.
6. Please state the number of credit hours you plan to enroll in the following semester.	6.
7. Are you working in addition to attending classes?	7.
7a. If yes, how many hours to you work per week?	7a.
8. Is your household annual income (please check one) \$0 - \$25,000     ___ \$25,001-\$50,000   ___	8.

<p>\$50,001-\$75,000 ___ \$75,001-\$100,000 ___ \$100,001-above ___</p>	
<p>9. What is your current cumulative grade point average (GPA)?</p>	<p>9.</p>
<p>10. What do you think your cumulative grade point average (GPA) will be at the end of this semester?</p>	<p>10.</p>
<p>11. Are you currently connected to any student support services such as EOPS, ET, DESP, or Puente?</p>	<p>11.</p>
<p>11a. If yes, please state which service(s)</p>	<p>11a.</p>
<p>12. Please state any comments you would like to express, if any, in this questionnaire.</p>	<p>12.</p>

**Perceived Stress Scale – 10**

**Appendix B**

Participant ID #:  
Date of administration:

Thank you again for your participation in this study of the impacts of personal counseling on stress, academic success, and retention in community college students. The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, please indicate with a check how often you felt or thought a certain way.

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

\_\_\_0=never \_\_\_1=almost never \_\_\_2=sometimes \_\_\_3=fairly often \_\_\_4=very often

Cohen & Williamson (1988)

Welcome and thank you for participating in this study. My name is Jenna Welsh and I am a graduate student at San José State University conducting my study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work. Thank you for expressing your interest, and this interview will take about 60 minutes and will include 10 questions regarding your experiences in the West Valley College personal counseling program. I would like your permission to tape record this interview, so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how personal counseling impacted you, and may impact other students like you. The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of how personal counseling impacts stress, academic success, and the desire to continue education in community college students.

At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the research project: Impacts of Personal Counseling on Stress, Academic Success, and Retention of Students in a Community College Setting. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How many sessions of personal counseling have you completed at West Valley College?

2. Can you describe your experience in the personal counseling program?

3. If you feel comfortable disclosing, what was the reason that you chose to seek personal counseling?

4. Have you found personal counseling to be helpful in coping with the reason you sought counseling?

Follow up if necessary:

Even though I do not know your specific reason you chose to seek counseling, it would be helpful to know if counseling was effective in coping with the problem, or effective in finding a solution to the problem, or not effective at all.

5. Did you find personal counseling helpful in coping with other issues? If so, please explain how it was helpful.

6. Do you have any suggestions for improvements to the personal counseling program?

Follow up if necessary:

Was there anything you wished your counselor would have done to help you in a different way?

Was there anything that your counselor did that you did not find helpful?

If needed:

Why do you feel this was not helpful/could have helped more?

7. Do you feel that the level of stress you have experienced in the past few months has impacted your academic performance? Please explain how and to what extent. Specific examples would be helpful, but are not necessary.

Follow up if necessary:

Academic performance can include cumulative grade point average, dropping or adding a course, receiving a different grade in a specific class, on an exam, or on an important project, etc. Do you feel that stress has affected any or all of these items?

8. If you answered yes to the following question and feel comfortable doing so, please explain what stressors or life events impacted your academic performance the most.

Follow up if necessary:

For example, relationship problems, loss of a family member, having a divorce, or financial problems can sometimes impact academic performance. Did any of these, or another stressor impact your academic performance more than other life events?

9. Do you feel that using the personal counseling program has impacted your academic performance? Please explain how and to what extent. Specific examples would be helpful, but are not necessary.

Follow up if necessary:

Academic performance can include cumulative grade point average, dropping or adding a course, receiving a different grade in a specific class, on an exam, or on an important project, etc. Do you feel that personal counseling has affected any or all of these items?

10. Please tell me if you plan to continue your education at West Valley College in the coming semester. If yes, please explain your specific plans in terms of how many credit hours you plan to take, what support services you will use, and if you have any long term education plans.

**Agreement to Participate in Research**

Survey Consent Form

**Responsible Investigator:** Jenna Welsh, SJSU Student

**Title of Protocol:** Impact of Personal Counseling on Stress, Academic Success, and Retention of

**Appendix D**

### Students in a Community College Setting.

1. You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating the impacts of personal counseling on a student's level of stress, academic success, and continuation of education in a community college setting.
2. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete two questionnaires once, prior to the start of the first personal counseling session, and again at the completion of the sixth, seventh, or eighth session. The two questionnaires are a demographics questionnaire, and a perceived stress survey. The study will occur in the private room your counseling appointment is held. The investigator will provide all forms and pencils for you to complete this study. The investigator will also read and clarify any questions upon your request.
3. If you agree to participate, you may be called and asked at a later date to come in for a one-hour follow-up interview.
4. This study will involve minimal risk, mainly the possibility of emotional discomfort from answering survey questions. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort will not be greater than you could encounter in every day life. If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the study, you have to right to withdraw from the study with little or no notice.
5. You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. Indirect benefits will include the promotion of our understanding of the impacts of personal counseling on stress, academic success, and retention in community college students.
6. The findings of this research study may be published, however, no information that can identify you or your counselor will be included.
7. There is no compensation for your participation in the two questionnaires.
8. Questions concerning this research may be addressed to Jenna Welsh, 410-382-6004. Complaints about this research may be presented to Peter Allen Lee, Ph. D., MSW Program Coordinator, 408-924-5850. Questions about research subjects' rights or research-related injury may be presented to Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at 408-924-2427.
9. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in the study.
10. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study. If you choose to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University, West Valley College, or any other participating institutions or agencies.
11. You will receive a copy of this consent form at the time that you and the researcher sign.

The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.

The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and verification that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

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Participant's Signature

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Date

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Investigator's Signature

---

Date

**Agreement to Participate in Research**

Interview Consent Form

**Responsible Investigator:** Jenna Welsh, SJSU Student

**Title of Protocol:** Impact of Personal Counseling on Stress, Academic Success, and Retention of

**Appendix E**

### Students in a Community College Setting.

1. You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating the impacts of personal counseling on a student's level of stress, academic success, and continuation of education in a community college setting.
2. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer ten questions in an interview that will not exceed one hour. The interview will occur in a private room at West Valley College. The investigator will provide all forms and pencils for you to complete this study. The investigator will also read and clarify any questions upon your request.
3. You will be asked for your permission to audiotape the interview, but if you wish not to be recorded, only notes will be taken.
4. This study will involve minimal risk, mainly the possibility of emotional discomfort from answering survey questions, and possible interview questions. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort will not be greater than you could encounter in every day life. If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the study, you have to right to withdraw from the study with little or no notice.
5. You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. Indirect benefits will include the promotion of our understanding of the impacts of personal counseling on stress, academic success, and retention in community college students.
6. The findings of this research study may be published, however, no information that can identify you or your counselor will be included.
7. You will be offered snacks during the interview regardless of your level of participation.
8. Questions concerning this research may be addressed to Jenna Welsh, 410-382-6004. Complaints about this research may be presented to Peter Allen Lee, Ph. D., MSW Program Coordinator, 408-924-5850. Questions about research subjects' rights or research-related injury may be presented to Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at 408-924-2427.
9. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in the study.
10. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study. If you choose to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University, West Valley College, or any other participating institutions or agencies.
11. You will receive a copy of this consent form at the time that you and the researcher sign.

The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.

The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and verification that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature                      Date

**Appendix F**

IRB Approval Form Attached Separately

**Appendix G**

Agency Letter of Approval Form Attached Separately

**Proposed Analysis**

**Appendix H**

<b>Univariate/Descriptive Statistics and Tests</b>
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<b>Variable and Level of Measurement</b>	<b>Statistics and Tests</b>
Age (continuous, interval/ratio)	Mean, Standard deviation
Place of Birth (categorical, nominal)	Percentage, Frequency
Hours per week working (continuous, ratio)	Mean, Standard deviation
Ethnicity (categorical, nominal)	Percentage, Frequency
Gender (categorical, nominal)	Percentage, Frequency
Number of credit hours, current (continuous, ratio)	Mean, Standard deviation
Number of credit hours, future (continuous, ratio)	Mean, Standard deviation
Working or not (categorical, nominal)	Percentage, Frequency
Household annual income (categorical, ordinal)	Percentage, Frequency
PSS-10 Score (continuous, ratio)	Mean, Standard deviation
Grade point average, current (continuous, ratio)	Mean, Standard deviation
Grade point average, future (continuous, ratio)	Mean, Standard deviation

<b>Bivariate Statistics and Tests</b>		
<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>Statistics and Tests</b>
Number of Personal Counseling Sessions	Level of Stress	Dependent t-test, Pearson's $t$ and $p$ value
Number of Personal Counseling Sessions	Academic Success	Dependent t-test, Pearson's $t$ and $p$ value
Number of Personal Counseling Sessions	Retention	Dependent t-test, Pearson's $t$ and $p$ value