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**THE IMPACT OF A VALUES CLARIFICATION PROCESS ON THE  
FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH RETENTION OF HISTORICALLY  
UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY**

by  
Jose A. Aviles

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
May 2, 2008

Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.

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Jose A. Aviles

## **Dedications**

*To my loving wife Diana,  
beautiful children Siann and Isaiah,  
thank you for all your love and support.  
You keep me moving forward each and every day.*

## **Acknowledgments**

I appreciate the support of my doctoral committee chair, Dr. James Coaxum and members Dr. MaryBeth Walpole and Dr. Patrick Spearman. I truly appreciate all of your time, advice, and support through my journey.

## **Abstract**

Jose A. Aviles

THE IMPACT OF A VALUES CLARIFICATION PROCESS ON THE  
FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH RETENTION OF HISTORICALLY  
UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

2007-2008

James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

The literature examining the retention of students of color is very much like a puzzle. Many scholars have contributed to the puzzle attempting to make a complete body of knowledge regarding student departure. However, a void in the literature seems to be the role of students' values in the retention puzzle, specifically, whether the process of clarifying personal values would affect the retention of students of color in higher education.

A transitional summer bridge program was modified using a conceptual framework anchored in the examination of espoused values versus values in use. The model was developed using Argyris and Schon's (1974) single-loop/double-loop learning. Participants engaged in a four-step values clarification process aimed at developing an awareness of personal values that guide action patterns, attitudes, and beliefs.

This action research project encompassed nine cycles. The study reports how students engaged in a values clarification process through a transitional summer bridge program. The findings suggest that clarity in personal values can be useful in impacting factors associated with retention. Additional studies should be considered to deepen an understanding of this framework in student retention.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The 2000 United States census statistics established that, at that time, Latinos constituted the largest minority group in America. Between 1990-2000, the Latino population grew by 53% (Guzman, 2001). The number of African Americans also grew, increasing by 16% during the same period. Both minority groups grew at a faster rate than the overall American population, which grew at a rate of 10.7% during the 1990-2000 period (Civil Rights, 2006). At this rate, it is safe to project that by 2050, half of the United States' population will be minorities.

Further analysis of the 2000 census data suggests that minority groups are younger than the majority of White Americans. The median age for Whites is 37 compared to age 26.6 for Latinos and 30.4 for African Americans (Civil Rights, 2006). Such growth rates suggest that minorities are becoming a critical population in the American economy. For instance, in 2006, Latino workers filled 40% of all new jobs (National Council of La Raza, 2006). The economy will need the contributions of the minority population to remain strong. It is imperative, then, that minorities continue to make strides in employment and educational attainment.

In 1978, the United States Supreme Court found that diversity in higher education was a compelling state interest (Coleman, Palmer, & Peabody, 2004). Additionally, the court pointed out numerous benefits of diversity in colleges and universities such as, impacting classroom discussions, breaking racial stereotypes, and preparing students for success in an increasingly global marketplace (Coleman et al., 2004).

Colleges and universities continue to look for students of color who are qualified for admissions. Yet, while African American and Latinos, together, make up 25% of America's population, they only constitute 18% of students enrolled in four year colleges and universities (National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2003). These small percentages require colleges and universities to form innovative retention programs to maintain minority students on their college campuses.

The Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) indicates that retention rates for the 1989 -1996 entering freshman cohorts at 232 colleges and universities were lower for underrepresented groups. These data included African American and Latino students. First-year African American student retention rates were 74%, while Latino first-year student retention rates were 71%, compared to 79% for White students. A closer analysis of the CSRDE shows that African American and Latino students, together, also lagged behind their White counterparts in six-year graduation rates by 18% (Smith, 1999).

The majority of retention initiatives include imbedded institutional factors, as well as external factors, that affect the retention of students of color. In the early 1960s and 1970s, researchers focused on issues such as financial aid and affordability, considering both as a main hurdle in the retention efforts of minority students (St. John, 1991). Yet other researchers have, primarily, considered the academic and social experiences of students of color (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengler, 1992; Hurtado, 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Although the issues of affordability, as well as the academic and social

experiences of minority students, have emerged as important, it is equally as important to address students' intention and purpose as they enter college.

The increasingly diverse and changing demographics of students in higher education presents a significant challenge to the academy. For example, NASPA/ACPA released a timely contribution urging institutions to reconsider learning that shifts from a model of information transfer to a transformational education model (Keeling, 2004). Through transformational education, we broaden our understanding of learning and, thus, are better able to place students at the center, considering what they know, who they are, and bringing clarity to their values and behaviors patterns. This, I believe, will be remarkably instrumental in the retention of students of color within the academy.

Although scholars have looked at the socio-cultural and psycho-social development of students, no studies have specifically researched the role of students' core values in the retention puzzle. As an important piece of the retention puzzle, Bean and Eaton (2000) found that students who believed they fit or who committed to an institution would be more likely to integrate academically. Kouzes and Posner (2002) also observed that clarity of students' personal values led to their greater commitment to organizations and institutions. Therefore, I postulate that a values clarification process for incoming first-year students of color may aid in the connection or commitment to their institution, ultimately boosting their retention rates.

In this study, I closely consider students' core values that inform their decisions, behaviors, and actions. This study examines how a values clarification process may impact the retention of students of color at a regional public institution.

## **Purpose of the Study**

At Rowan University, the Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF) generates the largest percentage of students of color for the college community. Each summer, EOF hosts a Pre-College Summer Institute (PCI). It is mandatory that all EOF students attend in order to fully matriculate into Rowan University. PCI is an intensive, residential, summer bridge program for special admit<sup>1</sup> students coming from academically and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Throughout the PCI experience, staff consistently espouses the values and expectations of the Rowan community. Historically, however, little is done to guide students through a personal values clarification process.

The retention rates for students of color indicate a clear need for improvement at Rowan University. From 1994 through 2003, Rowan University retained 80% of its students of color after their first year. However, after the second year, the retention of students of color dropped to 66.9% (Rowan University, 2007). Comparatively, White students were retained by a rate of 85% after their first year, with 76.8% retention after their second year at Rowan University (Rowan University, 2007).

As an innovative and experimental effort, in order to increase retention, the EOF staff focused Pre-College Summer Institute experiences on a values clarification process. The clearer students are about their personal values, the more committed they will be to the institution (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Aiding their efforts, EOF staff implemented Arygris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop learning model as a conceptual framework. The single-loop/double-loop learning model is an organizational change framework that

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<sup>1</sup> The term "special admit" shortened here from "special admittance" refers, as noted, to those students whose enrollment (admission) to the University was agreed to under the terms of the EOF Program.



requires the clarity of espoused values (Arygris, 1990). Single-loop/double-loop learning, then, served as the predominate structure assisting students as they worked toward clarifying their personal values.

For the purposes of this study, retention is examined through the factors identified in scholarly literature. Those factors are student engagement, academic integration, involvement, and the development of student relationships with faculty (Astin, 1984, 1993; Kuh 2003; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1993).

### **Leading With the Heart**

Upon reflecting on my personal and professional history, it has become clear to me that each experience I encountered in my life has shaped who I am today. My educational experiences, consequently, have been instrumental in informing who I am as a student affairs professional. For example, as a first generation Latino student, my entry into the undergraduate experience was nothing short of an intimidating challenge. In spite of the hardships and obstacles I faced, and because of the strength I discovered in my successes, I became determined to one day help those students who are now very much like I was during my early years in college. By having been where they are now, I am better equipped to make contributions and improvements in the capacity of a higher education professional.

Today, at every level, the American educational system has room for improvement. Such improvement can be implemented by first considering the educational needs of administrators, staff, and faculty. For instance, professionals can contribute greatly to their institution by learning about the immediate influence they have

on students: We take our first steps toward improvement by simply being more inclusive of and caring about our minority students. We do this by considering their needs.

For the past eight years I have worked in higher education on a variety of levels. I have been employed at LaSalle University, a private, Catholic institution. I also served at Mercer County Community College, a large community college, and I worked at Swarthmore College, a highly selective, private, liberal arts college. Finally, I am currently employed at Rowan University, a public, selective, regional institution. All have been very different in mission, size, culture, and community. However, as an administrator, I view each institution's challenges as being very similar. Higher education is a very complex, traditional, resistant to change, and highly political environment. While overarching goals and mission statements represent institutions with morally correct aims that could have far-reaching societal impacts, such aims are rarely fulfilled. Moreover, some mission statements fail to guide the everyday aims of university departments and personnel. As an educational leader, and as a minority student and higher educational professional, my frustration is greatest in issues relating to social justice and diversity.

I grew up in a Latino family that has traditional values. We were poor, and probably as a result of that, there was very little emphasis on education. These three factors were building blocks in the foundation of my formative years. My father constantly traveled from state to state in search of a better life, opportunity, and money. Yet the better life, opportunity, and money never came. In fact, as time moved along, life became even more difficult. My parents, my siblings, and I were so poor that we created meals by eating scraps from the trash. Yet because of strong family bonds, we never

struggled from a broken family spirit. My father worked hard for low pay, but in spite of everything he preached that, above all, we must always maintain our family bond.

Because of the experiences I underwent in the early years, I learned that I had an inner strength that would allow me to endure even in the worst of times.

During my teenage years, my family lived in Delsea Gardens, a low-income housing apartment complex, otherwise referred to as the “projects,” in Millville, New Jersey. Although Millville is not an urban center, the projects very much seemed like an inner city. Our community was infused with the negative influences of drugs and violence. Although they set an undertone for our environment, we were not bad people. Yet in school, it always seemed like students, parents, and teachers knew and treated us as if we were from the “bad part of town.”

I recall listening to the rather defeatist conversations of some of my older friends. As I listened to their despair and hopelessness, I realized that, likely, I was also doomed. My peers and I felt the pressures of the recurring cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity that foreshadowed our individual and collective lives. We were often told by teachers, counselors, and even our parents that we would not amount to much. In many cases, this was not directly stated, but, sometimes, what is not said is equally as important as what is.

Throughout my high school years, I cannot remember even one teacher who talked to me about college. In retrospect, I do not think anyone believed that I was college material. I did not blame them for this, for I was a very average to below average student. No teachers or administrators came forward as allies in my early life when their influences could have changed my future. In hindsight it seems that it was as if everyone

knew the end story of my life. In comparison to my experience, a number of my friends, who lived beyond the stigma attached to being a resident of Delsea Gardens, actually received time and attention from teachers and counselors. It was at this point, that I began to see the disparity between who I was and who they were. I was a poor, Latino child growing up in the worst part of town, and they were white, middle class children growing up on the “right” side of town. For me, it was a case of the classic haves and have nots.

During high school, although I talked a lot about going to college, by February of my senior year I had not applied to a single school. In my mind and heart I was fearful of being rejected. Too, I had no idea of how I would pay for college even if I were to be accepted. Certainly, I had never even met with a counselor, nor had any counselor taken the initiative to seek me out and inquire about what I was going to do with my future. Not only did I believe the counselors held no promise for me, but I knew of no one I could talk to beyond the uncaring high school guidance counselor in my school. In my world, there was no one who had gone to college who could help me. And there was no help to be found at home, for I would have been the first in my family to even consider such a thought. But then, in a twist of fate as sometimes happens in life, I found myself in the exact right place at the exact right time.

On an otherwise ordinary February afternoon, I sat in and listened to a presentation by a college admissions officer who would change my life forever. The person who offered that presentation gave me the hope to believe that I, Jose Aviles, could go to college after all. I decided, right then and there, to take a chance in doing something that no one else in my family had done: I was going to apply to college.

Growing up in evident poverty and hopelessness is still very much a part of who I am today. I decided to work in higher education expressly so that I could work directly with students. Also, I wanted to work specifically in admissions, because this is the gateway to the academy. I believed that admissions would afford me the opportunity to fill a void: I could work with students who are as I once was, neglected and in need of direction. I recognized, too, that once in admissions I could influence policies and procedures, and not only at the institution in which I worked, but maybe even others as well.

### **Developing My Passion by Connecting With My Past**

At my core, my passion to work with the issues of inequalities and injustices is directly tied to social justice leadership theory. I strongly believe that every child in this country should have a chance at a better life regardless of race or class. As I look back at my experience, I realize that the promise of the American dream came to me through the opportunity of education. And believe me, I made the most of that opportunity.

According to Rawls (1971),

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. (p. 3)

This provides the foundation for modern social justice theory. I firmly believe that not all children are given a fair and equal opportunity for education. Whether it is children attending disadvantaged school districts, having to take examinations that are culturally biased, or simply not having the means to finance a postsecondary education, it places clear separation between our children. Larson and Murtadha (2002) assert that the

objective in leading within higher education is to provide access for greater freedom for all citizens to pursue the benefits of a democratic society through higher education inclusive to all cultural backgrounds. This, in turn, results in a caring and just society.

Kozol (2005) highlights the paradoxes and contradictions that persist between public education and democratic values and principles we uphold as a nation. He found, in over 40 years of work looking at inequalities within school systems in the U.S., that we have reverted to a level of segregation that has not been evident since the civil rights movements. This segregation has led to severe inequalities in funding, resources, and opportunities. Kozol points out that the disparity starts as early as preschool, where affluent children have access to early childhood education while poorer children do not. As children enter kindergarten, affluent students have as many as four years of educational experiences compared to poor children who are experiencing their first academic year. According to Kozol, in third grade all students are subjected to a standardized test in which they are comparatively measured despite the disparity in educational exposure. With such discrepancies in mind, I now recognize that by virtue of education I have become part of the “haves,” which gives me a source of power and voice, where the “have nots” are left with little or no voice (Rawls, 1971).

In many ways, my early years, having been spent living in deep despair, could have led me into many different directions. Memories of my father and mother struggling still prompt feelings of anger and even confusion in me. This could have easily been the root for my civil disobedience alone. It could have led me to overcome and then become, myself, an oppressor. Instead, I have decided to make a difference to lead. In leading, I am especially sensitive to others who share backgrounds, experiences, and struggles

similar to my own. In a positive way, I decided to work for change in a system of education that is not equitable or fair. I aspired not to become an oppressor. Instead, I aspired to bring balance to a place where all can access a good life through education (Freire, 1989). Historically, social justice change has not happened by accident, instead it has evolved through the dedication of its leaders (Larson & Murtadha, 2002).

### **Working to Change the Academy**

Many of the inequalities in the early years of education are funneled into the college years and become issues that intersect race and college admission. The latest census data show that both Latino and African American populations are growing at a faster rate than the overall American population. Yet in recent years, proportionately, the participation gap between minorities and Caucasians in higher education continues to widen. Currently, Latino and African American students together make up only 17% of the national four-year undergraduate collegiate population (Coleman et al., 2003).

Considering the wide spectrum of colleges and universities in this country, the elite institutions seem to have made the conscious decision to aggressively and proactively consider this issue. Cronin (2002) reports that highly selective institutions, such as Ivy League universities and the small liberal arts colleges, annually recruit and admit as many as 40% racial minorities including Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. This statistic accurately reflects my personal experience at Swarthmore where, each year, 55% of their admitted freshmen applications are composed of racial minorities, and overall 38% of the student body is comprised of students of color. With over 70% of colleges and universities showing a commitment to diversity in their mission statements, the challenge is to have more institutions take on this issue.

According to Larson and Murtadha (2002), all educators need to continually work to bring greater opportunity and justice for students. I learned early on that diversity always seems to be the last item on the institutional agenda. As an admissions counselor, I have worked for offices that have passively accepted the status quo when it comes to this issue. Even more disconcerting has been the status quo dialogue in national conferences regarding college admissions and race. This is understandable in that education systems are a product of human construction, and they reflect the values, perspectives, and interpretations of the people who create them (Greenfield, 1975). However, regardless of my appointed position at each institution, I have made the commitment to initiate change. I have done so by attempting to provide a different perspective and, specifically, by creating new programs to assist in minority recruitment and retention. Recognizing that diversity concerns are not a top priority at most institutions, I do not mind being the first in line to work toward greater equity and opportunity. I work to create accessibility and support for students of color regardless of my title or position. I seek to serve the underrepresented populations without seeking compensation or recognition. This is a reflection of my servant leadership.

### **Leading as a Servant**

Greenleaf (1991) considered Leo, the servant in Herman Hesse's book, *Journey to the East*, as a classic example of the servant leader. Leo was to merely accompany the band of men on their journey and care for them and do minor chores. However, he is eventually viewed as the leader. In my reality, students are the band of men, and I am Leo, the servant on their journey. I feel very comfortable being Leo.



According to Greenleaf (1991), being a servant starts with the natural process of wanting to serve first. This is in sharp contrast to someone who wants to lead first. As a professional, I am interested in serving. I do not need to be in a position of power, nor am I interested or comfortable with being the center of attention. It is the success of the student that is my goal and, ultimately, my reward.

Greenleaf (1991) poses three questions that in some ways motivate what I aim to do on a daily basis as an educator:

1. Are those served growing as people?
2. Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?
3. What is the effect on the least privileged in society and will they benefit, or, at the very least, not be further deprived?

Senge et al. (1999) note that leaders must know their core values because that is what guides their leadership. My core values start with a commitment to education, equal opportunity to all, and a right to a quality and healthy life. My devotion as an educator is to meet the needs of students. In many ways, I see this as a mutually beneficial arrangement for the student and the institution. When I serve students in their desire of getting into college, I can also serve the needs of the institution, and possibly change the institutionalized mindset of colleges and universities in relation to diversity.

According to Hasselbach (1998), servant leadership is developed through covenant relationships. Covenant relationships are emotional or spiritual ties founded on shared principles. I form covenant relationships with my students by sharing my experiences and by establishing the fact that I have walked in their shoes. I have learned

that before a student opens up to me, I must first be open and willing to share many of my own life experiences—experiences that have led in the formation of who I am. Through covenant relationships with my students, I am better situated in filling their needs and in generating meaning in our relationships.

Greenleaf (1991) explains that servant leadership has a clear direction leading to positive outcomes. Related motivation for service has to come from an urging within the heart that the leader identifies. Through this motivation a leader seeks to serve first, leading his or her community to a desired outcome. In my life, the influence of servant leadership came to me through an extraordinary mentor. During the summer of 1991, I entered Rowan University through the Educational Opportunity Program (EOF). By its very nature, EOF is a social justice initiative that seeks to assist students who are financially and educationally disadvantaged in attending college. Soon after my enrollment, I was introduced to my first-year counselor, Mr. William H. Myers, a man who would become, without question, the single most influential educator of my life.

Mr. Myers was a gentle man who believed that his calling was to work with the educational aspirations of students. He cared very deeply for all his students, relentlessly putting them ahead of his needs and wants. While he was the genius behind many of the standing programs that exist at Rowan University today, he stood in the background, never wanting credit for his creations. His reward was in the benefits that the students received through his work, programs, and initiatives. Mr. Myers sought to help students who came with the bleakest of hardship cases. When I was a young professional, Mr. Myers shared insight with me by explaining, “Anyone can help a student who is supposed to finish his or her education and graduate, but it requires hard work to help

those who are not supposed to finish.” That was his passion, to work without credit, serving those who were the least privileged.

When I became Mr. Myers’ mentee, I quickly learned that there was not a single educator who worked harder than he. Under his mentorship, I became a better student, embraced my educational journey, and looked for ways to develop myself both academically and personally. I still believe that I owe my life, as I know it, to Mr. Myers and his leadership.

As a professional in student affairs, I often wondered why Mr. Myers never really presented at conferences, nor published his ideas in scholarly journals. In my opinion, Mr. Myers was the greatest student affairs professional I have ever known. During a dinner conversation, Mr. Myers shared his simple philosophy with me, “My interest is working with the student, not for the glory or recognition that I helped somebody.” He always sought to serve first. Both my personal and professional life has been influenced by this great educator. My leadership squarely reflects Mr. Myers’ philosophies and teachings. He inspired me to lead. In fact, I always wanted to be Mr. Myers. Today, I recognize that students connect with me as I did with my former mentor, and at the same time, I also understand that it is now my turn to serve students in their educational journey.

Spears (1997) identifies 10 characteristics of a servant leader: Calling, listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, and building community. Just as Mr. Myers felt, I believe that my servant leadership is a genuine calling. It is one I feel indebted and committed to. Educators who are servant leaders have a common ground reflecting their calling (Greenleaf, 1991).

Additionally, I understand that in building a community, I must reach back and serve the very community from which I came. As an educator, I expect, as Mr. Myers expected of me, that my students will continue to reach back and help the next generation of students who will ultimately strengthen our community.

The interest in and awareness of changing individuals and building communities, indicates strands of transformational leadership in my platform. Follett (1942) points out that through the right kind of relationships, or reciprocal influences, processes will come together, creating unity. As our communities continue to progress, the relationships that are fostered between an educator like Mr. Myers and myself, or between myself and my students, will serve to build our communities. The cumulative result is a synergy, in which the sum becomes greater than the parts (Kreisberg, 1992). If we can continue to reach back and infuse our communities with hope, vision, motivation, and opportunity, maybe we can make a difference in disadvantaged communities and change the plight of students residing in struggling communities. Importantly, such relationships begin with trust.

Jane Addams cited by Meigs (1970) indicates that in order to help the disadvantaged, or the poor, one must first know them. Furthermore, in order for them to become recipients of help, they must also first know the person who is offering it. I believe that my foundation in working with students is the commonality of our shared backgrounds. My students immediately recognize that I can relate to them, and they accept me as an educator, primarily because they trust that I know what they are going through. I believe this mutual shared experience is critical in helping my students.

According to Bolman and Deal (2003), since the beginning of time, humans have looked to symbols for sources of meaning and direction. Having come from a background similar to my students' creates a symbol that my life is today. DuBois (1903) asked the question,

How then shall the leaders of a struggling people be trained and the hands of the risen few strengthened? There can be but one answer: The best and most capable of their youth must be schooled in the colleges and universities of the land. (p. 79)

The transformational process is almost a natural process in working with disadvantaged students. The journey from Delsea Gardens to a doctoral program has generated a transformational process in every aspect of my life. Mr. Myers worked with me and his other mentees on our speech patterns, leaving behind our slang, moving us to a more professional dialect. He also preached proper grooming and presentation. He taught us how to tie a knot on a tie, shine our shoes, and pick out professional suits. All this stimulated our ambition to learn more and more each day. I now recognize this learning process is necessary for students who come from backgrounds similar to what mine was. It is a change we are often reluctant to embrace. However, it is an important change, one that cannot be short lived. Such a change in orientation cannot just be a change in characteristics; instead, it must be a change that stems from the student's own paradigm to a new way of looking at the world (Covey, 2001). Throughout this process, I believe that the student is capable of and interested in his or her own change. As was my case, the majority of students of color come to an institution of higher learning virtually devoid of information about this environment or the search for identity on which they embark. However, Maslow (1943) establishes that we all aim for self actualization. I am forever

grateful that my transformational process was guided by an educator who was skilled, highly caring, and who was, because of the depth of his feeling deeply cared for in return.

According to Wren (1995), transformational leaders are individuals who assist people in moving from one stage of development to a higher stage of development. Through that process, they address and fulfill a higher human need. In working with my students, I endeavor to reach students in a manner that extends their consciousness, builds meanings, and inspires their human intent (Bennis, 1959; Dillard, 1996). I do this because I care deeply about every student who walks through my open office door.

An ethic of care can be contagious. My long days in the office and my do whatever needs to be done attitude come from my relationship with Mr. Myers. Mr. Myers cared deeply for me, and, now, I share that same spirit of caring for my students. Noddings (1992) and Beck (1994) point out that as administrators, we must seek to create relationships with individuals instead of focusing on the roles we play within bureaucratic systems. This recognition pledges an ethic of care that requires us to attend to the needs of individuals and to be concerned with the daily decisions that ultimately influence students.

The events of my childhood, including those in the primary grades, high school, and college have left indelible images and memories that will forever be seared into my soul. Were I given the opportunity to erase those experiences, replacing them with other experiences, I would refuse to do so, for those events shaped who I am today. In fact, I believe it is the case that because I have come so far from where I was as a child that each time I reflect on my journey, I am fueled with passion. In my work as an educator, my attempt to change the traditional environment of higher education has not been an easy

task. Yet I know that as I evolve as a professional, each day I embrace that notion that my past only enhances my work. Today, I understand that my professional and personal leadership has the underpinnings of social justice, servant, and transformational leadership theory with overtones of an ethic of care. I now feel empowered and more competent in owning a theoretical understanding as a foundation to inform my practice.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

The retention of students has been studied since the early 1900s. Before specifically considering the retention of African American and Latino students, we must first understand the foundational research on overall student retention. The literature shows that student involvement and interaction are key components in the retention or attrition of students (Astin, 1984; Pacarella & Terenzini, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975).

#### **Seminal Research on Student Retention**

Astin (1970), Spady (1971), and Tinto (1975) laid the foundational work on student retention. Astin used an input-process-output model of student involvement that led to future studies and his later student involvement theory. Spady concluded that a student's personal attributes interact with the environment the student enters. Tinto sought to build on Spady's work and produced seminal research that investigated student persistence. Tinto's work has become the paradigm of student retention and has been the most cited and contested work in student retention (Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997). Tinto revisited and revised his model in 1987 and 1993.

**Tinto's Interactionalist Theory.** According to Tinto (1975), the interaction of the individual and his respective environment will lead to the decision to stay or leave college. The Tinto interactionalist model assumed that prior to college entry, individuals have goals that are formed by family background, ability, and skills (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). These goals then interact with the academic environment that the individual enters



and, over time, will lead to the student's decision to either stay or leave (Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Tinto's (1975) interactionist theory considers student retention through the academic and social integration of a student. Tinto calculates that the pre-college characteristics of a student directly affect the student's initial commitment to their institution. Academically, the student begins to integrate and grades are an indicator of the student's commitment and interest in the environment of a college or university (Tinto, 1975). Socially, Tinto characterizes the integration through informal peer associations, extracurricular activities, and relationships with faculty and administrators.

Tinto (1975) postulates that academic and social integration directly relate to institutional commitment. The student enters with pre-college characteristics that affect commitment, then the greater the academic and social integration, the greater the institutional commitment grows over time (Tinto, 1975). Tinto created 13 propositions that are testable.

Tinto (1987, 1993) revised his interactionist theory as he responded to criticism, and he offered more structure. Tinto found that in order for students to integrate into their academic environments students must go through three stages successfully: separation, transition, and incorporation. According to Tinto, separation is the students' ability to leave behind norms and customs from their home communities, families, and friends. The transition stage then is the process in which students begin to adopt the norms of their new environment (Tinto, 1993). Lastly, students enter the incorporation stage where they fully adopt the norms of their new communities (Tinto, 1993).

Most of the literature focusing on student retention has either tested Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) interactionist theory or has used his theory as a foundation for a different approach. Although Tinto's theory is widely contested, his work has continued to provide a vehicle for discussion and a foundation for understanding student retention theory.

**Additional contributions to student retention literature.** Bean (1980) considered the work of Astin (1970), Spady (1971), and Tinto (1975) and developed a study that investigated the consistent persistence rates of students, as established by Summerhill's 1962 report, which analyzed a 50-year span of attrition studies. Bean's research was rooted in organizational behavior; it focused on factors that influence non-persisters. The study looked at students' departure behavior in the same way an employee would leave his job. This suggested that the reasons for both were cross applicable.

Bean (1981) conducted a second study implementing a new causal model using attitudinal variables. Bean used academic variables, student intent, goals, expectations, and both internal and external environmental variables to build on the work of Tinto (1975), Spady (1971), and Astin (1970). Bean found that student attrition was affected by student background variables: interaction by students within the institution; the influence of environment such as finances, family, and teachers; the presence of attitudinal variables, and student intention, such as degree attainment.

Pacarella and Terenzini (1980) also tested Tinto's (1975) model in a longitudinal study conducted at Syracuse University. The researchers used a random sample of 1,905 incoming freshmen to whom they mailed a questionnaire and received a response rate of 76.5%. A second questionnaire mailed to the sample during the spring semester of their

freshmen year resulted in a response rate of 53.1%. The questionnaire used was created in a Likert format and was based on Tinto's model of academic and social integration.

The purpose of Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) study was as follows:

(1) to develop a multidimensional instrument that assesses the major dimensions of the Tinto Model; and (2) to determine the validity of the instrument, and thereby the model, in accurately identifying freshmen who subsequently persist or drop out voluntarily. (p. 71)

The study supported Tinto's (1975) original findings. Also, Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) found that there was a strong contribution of student-faculty relationships to the retention of students.

Astin (1984), building on his first work, looked beyond integration and found that student involvement is critical to student departure behavior. Astin defines student involvement as the physical and psychological energy students give toward their academic experiences. Astin developed his theory of involvement suggesting five basic assumptions: Involvement means physical and psychological energy that students expend towards something; involvement occurs on a continuum; involvement is both quantitative and qualitative; student learning is directly proportional to the nature of student involvement in an educational program, and, finally, educational policy is only as effective as the capacity to increase student involvement.

Astin (1984) used the three educational theories, content theory, resource theory, and individualized theory to build his student involvement theory. Astin asserted that his theory of involvement could be placed into each one of these theories. For example, content theory is a passive method of giving information to students. Astin believed that

educators can structure a more active learning process through cultivating and supporting student involvement. Next, resource theory is centered on the idea that colleges and universities aim to increase resources such as monies and rankings (Astin, 1984). Astin re-centers this theory by establishing the most important resource of a university is student time. Astin concluded that persistence is closely tied to the level of student involvement while departure is a result of student non-involvement.

In considering both Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) and Astin (1984), Milem and Berger (1997) created a modified model of college student persistence. Milem and Berger also cite Pacarella and Terenzini (1991) saying that Tinto's interactionist model is very similar to Astin's theory of involvement. Milem and Berger used Astin's theory of involvement to measure the interaction between student and environment which create perceptions and lead to the behavior of students. This allowed the researchers to carefully look at how students go through the stages of incorporation. Milem and Berger found that social integration had a more a significant role than academic integration in affecting student persistence. While this finding is interesting, Milem and Berger conducted their research in a highly selective university where the majority of the students entered with high academic records (Milem & Berger, 1997). Also, Milem and Berger found that student involvement clearly affected the perceptions of institutional and peer support, which influenced students' commitment to their institution. This study supported using an integrated model in which students' behaviors and perceptions interrelated and influenced progress towards academic and social integration.

Although Astin (1984) initially considered the narrow notion of student involvement, researchers have further developed his study by considering student

engagement (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Pasacarella & Terenzini, 1991). Student engagement can be defined as the amount of time students dedicate to purposeful educational activities leading to desired outcomes. Furthermore, time spent is classified as time dedicated to developing relationships with faculty, studying outside the classroom, and use of institutional resources (Astin, 1993; Pasacarella & Terenzini, 1991).

**Criticism of Tinto's Interactionist Theory.** While Tinto's (1975) interactionist model is seminal research, it has been tested and challenged by other scholars specifically as it relates to race. Tinto's model is founded on Durkheim's (1953) theory of suicide and Van Gennep's (1960) theory of rites of passage. Durkheim explains that the greater an individual's ability to integrate into the community's fabric, the less likely the individual would be to experience anomie. Building on the sociological paradigm of Durkheim, Van Gennep establishes that rites of passages are an important marking of completion as a person moves from one stage in life to another.

In considering both Durkheim (1953) and Van Gennep (1960), Tinto (1975) suggests that college environments operate within these principles. Tinto's basic argument is that the more deeply a student integrates into the social and academic fabric of his or her college community, the less likely he or she is to leave the institution, in essence experiencing anomie. Also, the functionality of the transition of entering higher education operates very much like a rite of passage into society that Van Gennep establishes in his research.

There has been much debate over Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) work. The debate begins at the foundation of Tinto's framework using assimilation or acculturation as a

lens in this theory (Hurtado, 1997; Tierney, 1992). That Tinto's model assumes that minority students must separate from their cultural backgrounds and fully incorporate into a White, dominant, problematic social construct, is at the heart of the criticisms of Tinto's work (Rendon et al., 2000). Also, while Tinto's model has been repeatedly tested, some researchers have decided to make changes and adaptations to the interactionalist model.

Tierney (1992) offers a clear counter argument to Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), stating that Tinto has misused the theories of Durkeim (1953) and Van Gennep (1960). Tierney (1992) shows that Tinto's notion of integration makes the assumption that a student must integrate into a culture through a ritualistic process. According to Tierney, the process of integration reflects the values of a culture of the dominant society, a White dominant society. Tierney argues that Tinto's theory uses an anthropological term, ritual, but removes it from cultural underpinnings. Tierney points out that Van Gennep never thought that his theoretical framework would be used to explain the initiation of one person into another's culture.

In addition to Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) misuse of Durkeim's (1953) and Van Gennep's (1960) theories, Tierney (1992) also believes that Tinto's model used information about traditional aged students and not individualized results from institutional specific data. According to Tierney, Tinto's broad use of social integration is not applicable to all students, specifically non-traditional students such as Native Americans. Tierney indicates that Native American students experience a "disruptive cultural experience not because college is a rite of passage, but because the institution is culturally distinct" (p. 608).

In examining the basic premise of Tinto's interactionist model, researchers have concluded that it is important to understand biculturalism and dual socialization along with concepts of social membership instead of integration (Hurtado, 1997; Rendon et al., 2000). According to Rendon et al. (2000), the concept of biculturalism is a state in which a student can see and interact in two different cultures separately. This concept, as it relates to student integration, is directly opposed to Tinto's notion of separation. Also, achieving a culture of dual socialization means that higher education should be fully supportive of the dominant White culture, as well as underrepresented cultures (Rendon et al., 2000).

In responding to the criticism of his work, Tinto (1993) acknowledges the limitation of using the concept of integration and instead introduces the concept of membership. Hurtado and Carter (1997) recommend that future research develop the concept of membership by identifying campus activities that foster a greater sense of affinity to campus life. For example, Hurtado and Carter found that students who discussed class work and worked in groups increased their sense of belonging especially in the third year. Also, the research showed that Latino students in the study did not support Tinto's (1987, 1993) separation assumption as a necessity for incorporation. The students in Hurtado and Carter's study were heavily involved in social and community organizations as well religious organizations. The researchers assumed the involvement in these types of organizations confirmed the importance that students placed on the relationships with their home communities. In fact, Hurtado and Carter found that Latino students were interdependent with their families back home and their involvement in their campus communities.

Hurtado and Carter's (1997) findings of the interdependence of Latino students speaks directly to the concept of dual socialization. Rendon et al. (2000) assert that Americans with an ethnic identity maintain and develop membership in new and old cultures. Rendon et al. establish that students of color maintain multiple associations with their cultures and their college campuses. However, the idea of membership is not a real option because many minorities experience hostile and unwelcoming campuses (Rendon et al., 2000). Rendon et al. explain that the major problem with Tinto's interactionist theory is that it places the burden of integration on the individual as opposed to having the institution assume some responsibility.

Braxton et al. (1997) also conducted an assessment of Tinto's (1975) theory. Braxton et al. found that the empirical evidence was weak in supporting Tinto's 13 propositions in academic and social integration. In fact, in their research, Braxton et al. found that in single institution studies, only one of Tinto's propositions was relevant, and through their multiple institution study, the researchers found that no proposition supported the academic and social integration of students.

Braxton and Berger (1998) also sought to revise Tinto's model by looking at the effects of organizational attributes on student integration. The researchers suggest that leadership on college campuses should find ways to communicate rules and expectations, enforce rules fairly, and encourage student participation in decision making to aid in first year student retention (Braxton & Berger, 1998). They found that racial identity certainly had an effect on the social integration of students. Their research demonstrated that minority students feel that they have less of a voice in decisions on their campuses and this impacts their interest in social integration (Braxton & Berger, 1998). Braxton and



Berger conducted their research in a highly selective, research university. The researchers recognized this as a limitation, but offered that further research in other types of institutions should be conducted.

### **Retention Literature on Underrepresented Minorities**

As the retention literature evolved, some empirical work has focused specifically on ethnicity. Studies looking at the retention of underrepresented students very much stem from the overall retention studies, but show the need for a paradigm shift. For example, Zambrana (1988) acknowledged that membership is a critical piece found in retention literature however, he found that membership is not a real option for students of color mainly because of a lack of acceptance. The lack of acceptance is because of cultural deficit models which highlight the deficiencies of the communities in which some cultural groups exist. These cultural deficit models lead to assumptions about minorities that imply minorities have a lack of ability to achieve academically (Rendon et al., 2000).

Kuh and Love (2000) proposed culture as the framework for analyzing and understanding student departure. Kuh and Whitt (1988) offered this definition of culture within the higher education framework:

the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide behavior of individuals and groups...and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus (Kuh & Whitt 1988, pp. 12-13 as cited by Kuh & Love, 2000).

According to Kuh and Love (2000), considering student departure through a cultural lens, takes into account the behavior of students as they interact through cultural properties.

Kuh and Love's research is in line with other works that consider the departure behavior of minority students, as culture affects the interaction of student involvement, effort, and sense of belonging as well as moves the focus to a socio-cultural experience rather than a psychological one (Hurtado, 1997; Tierney, 1992).

Kuh and Love (2000) established eight propositions constructed through a cultural lens that take into consideration the interaction of students and their college environments.

1. The college experience, including a decision to leave, is mediated through a student's cultural meaning making system.
2. One's cultures of origin (or cultural backgrounds) mediate the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.
3. Knowledge of a student's cultures of origin and the cultures of immersion is needed to understand a student's ability to successfully negotiate the institution's milieu.
4. The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin and cultures of immersion.
5. Students who traverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.
6. The amount of time a student spends in his cultures of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.
7. The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's socio-cultural connections to the academic program and affinity groups.

8. Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence. (Kuh & Love, 2000 p. 201)

The first proposition establishes that the students' interpretation of the environment, which is informed by their cultural origins, is what leads to student departure behavior. The second and third propositions recognize the diversity in students and acknowledge that colleges and universities are created by multiple cultures. Proposition four, five, and six establish the concept of cultural distance and the difficulty students have in closing the gap between their cultural underpinnings and their environments. Also, it is not the ultimate integration into that new culture, but the ability to connect in some way to the new environment. Lastly, proposition seven and eight directly relate to the process of cultural connections that become critical to success in college (Kuh & Love, 2000).

Hurtado (1997) observed that most of the retention literature has focused on integration or acculturation. Hurtado stated that this body of work was potentially harmful because it assumed that the only way to succeed in higher education was to assimilate into the dominant culture. Hurtado tied this to the assimilation research that stemmed from the 1960s that looked at Mexican Americans and their incorporation into mainstream America. Hurtado found that the retention literature is all one way thinking, that minorities change to reflect the dominant culture. However, Hurtado posited that underrepresented minorities within a college environment can induce a change both in themselves and the community in general. This point assumed that a student is engaged and involved in his college communities.

Rendon et al. (2000) forward the idea that there is an institutional commitment that needs to partner with the individual commitment in retention. The assumption by most of the literature is that the individual must take the initiative to change and integrate (Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 2000). Rendon et al. state that the traditional retention research, social integrationist works, considers everyone the same without looking at the differences among students in regards to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. This is problematic because it causes institutions to simply accept the degree to which values and interpretations are shared (Kuh & Love, 2000). Also, over time, institutions develop a culture that establishes acceptable conduct and interactions and shape the way individuals think and behave (Kuh & Love, 2000).

Rendon et al. (2000) examined Astin's (1984) involvement theory as a method of retention among underrepresented minorities. Rendon et al. claimed that while involvement is an important element in college life, for nontraditional students, typically underrepresented minorities, involvement does not come so easily. Rendon (1994) suggested that instead of involvement, validation had more of an impact with nontraditional students. Rendon found that nontraditional students who were validated by an individual either inside or outside the classroom were more likely to persist and became powerful learners. Individuals in the role of validating agents provided encouragement, academic and interpersonal assistance, and supported them through their academic and social adjustments.

Tierney (2000) also advocated that institutions assume some responsibility in retention. Currently, in retention efforts, students are solely responsible for assimilating to the campus culture. Tierney suggested a new framework be developed in which a

student's culture is affirmed, honored, and incorporated into an organization's culture.

The model has five main components:

1. Collaborative relations of power.
2. Connections across home, community, and schooling.
3. Local definitions of identity.
4. Challenge over remediation.
5. Academic support. (Tierney, 2000 p. 219)

First, Tierney (2000) grounded this theoretical framework in working collaboratively through systems of power, assuming that people generate power through the cultures in which they operate. Secondly, Tierney offered that instead of the ritualistic process of transitions and incorporation, institutions build processes and activities that affirm identity, homes, and communities. Thirdly, he believed that the empowerment of students is through cultural understanding of their local definitions and the integration of that into the fabric of the campus. Next, Tierney, suggested that academics choose to challenge students and accept nothing less than academic excellence instead of lowering the standards for any student. Lastly, Tierney stated that in supporting students who are traditionally labeled "at risk," educators must treat students with respect, honoring and not dismissing their cultural backgrounds and identity.

**External factors.** In addition to academic integration, social membership, and organizational responsibility, the retention literature for underrepresented minorities shows that external factors such as family, finances, and academic preparedness are also significant. Sturtz (1995) examined why students at the community college level leave and reenter college. In his research, Sturtz looked at psychological, institutional, and

situational factors that directly affect a student's departure decision. He found that the two reasons why students decided to leave are time and money (Sturtz, 1995).

Looking specifically at Hispanic students, Nora (1990) contributed to the literature by conducting a study on student persistence and retention of Hispanic students at two year colleges. Nora's study highlights the clear need for financial aid to be included as a factor for student persistence in future studies. Nora found that programs such as work study, institutional grants and loans, and federal grants were a factor in student retention in his study.

The study conducted by Cabrera et al. (1992) focused on Hispanic student persistence. Critical of Bean (1980) and Tinto (1975, 1987), Cabrera et al. (1992) created and tested an integrated model for student retention. Cabrera et al. claimed the shortcomings in the Bean and Tinto models were that they did not include external factors such as parental involvement, finances, support from friends, and teachers as influencers in college persistence. Cabrera et al. constructed a model that used both Bean's academic integration model and Tinto's student persistence model. The researchers found that a convergence of the leading factors of both models can better explain student departure. Their findings suggest that there needs to be a greater consideration for the relationship between institutional, personal, and external factors (Cabrera et al., 1992).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) also found that family and community ties played a major role in the life of the Latino students in their study. In fact, Hurtado and Carter found that students joined social-community organizations and religious organizations. The researchers believed that the Latino students who joined these organizations have a

stronger sense of belonging to their campus because they keep connections to their external communities that they were familiar with prior to entering college.

The ties to communities that Hurtado and Carter (1997) posited can also be a negative element in the transition into college. Rendon et al. (2000) established that students who had friends that were not in college could become fetters and complicate the transition into college. In fact, these external networks maintain old patterns of behaviors that do not allow students to explore and develop new patterns or behaviors and relationships.

Schwartz and Washington (1999) concluded similar findings regarding external factors and the student decision to persist. Schwartz and Washington found that African American women had more obstacles in their academic journeys stemming from low levels of parental support, limited monies in paying for college, low self-esteem, and low social expectations to complete their college degree. Also, the researchers established that many African American students are first generation and came from single parent backgrounds. The economic situations of African American students coming from lower income groups had a direct correlation with the ability to pay and stay in college (Schwartz & Washington, 1999).

In another research study, Walker and Schultz (2001) conducted a study on the recruitment and retention of Mexican-American students at Iowa State University. Walker and Shultz found that the factors that contribute to departure range from pre-college skill sets to issues of finances. Similarly, Torres and Solberg (2001) found that Hispanic students' social integration did not predict persistence in their study. Instead, the

results indicated that self-efficacy and family support had more impact on educational outcomes (Torres and Solberg, 2001).

**Void in the literature.** The literature looking at the retention of students of color is very much like a puzzle. Many scholars have contributed to the puzzle attempting to make a complete body of knowledge regarding student departure. However, a void in the literature seems to be the role of students' values in the retention puzzle, specifically, whether the process of clarifying personal values would affect the retention of students of color in higher education. The remainder of this literature review will present a framework on how values can assist in building purposeful actions and intended outcomes for students.

### **Literature on Values**

Covey (2001) claimed that values directly control our lives. Covey founded his perspective on the works of previous scholars. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) stated that values are a social product that become internalized and are used as a criterion of an individual's worth. According to Mosconi and Emmett (2003), values can orient people to desired outcomes, create standards for behaviors, and provide a foundation for all decision making. Covey suggests that as a society we have spent too much time focusing on secondary traits such as personality growth, communication skill training, positive thinking, and leadership. Instead, he contends that we should focus on the foundation of the individual: principles or values.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) agree with Covey (2001), pointing out that values serve to empower individuals. Also, they contend that values serve as guides for decisions throughout life. Values provide a motivating force that empowers the individual



and reduces the need for someone in authority to give the extrinsic motivation through a power over dynamic (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Rokeach, 1979).

Kouzes and Posner (2002) looked at values in the context of leadership and organizations. They found that the clarity of personal values is critical to the connection of the individuals to an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). In fact, the highest level of commitment people have to their organization is when there is the greatest clarity of values about both the individual and the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Interestingly, Kouzes and Posner found the lowest level of commitment to an organization came about when there was a high clarity of organizational values but low clarity to personal values. However, the second highest level of commitment to an organization was found when there was a high clarity about personal values but low level of the organizational values (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Kouzes and Posner's (2002) findings consider the individual's commitment to an organization. A parallel can be drawn from looking at commitment to an organization to looking closely at the commitment to an institution of higher education. In fact, institutional fit leads to a student's decision to leave or stay (Bean and Eaton, 2000; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Students who feel they fit into an institution are more likely to be committed and therefore more likely to integrate academically (Bean & Eaton, 2000). However, a person can only feel committed to an institution or organization if he is clear on his own personal values (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Kouzes and Posner (2002) emphasize that clarity of personal values, more so than clarity of organizational values, lead to greater commitment to organizations and institutions.

Although little literature exists on considering the connection between values clarification and student retention, Mosconi and Emmett (2003) conducted a study that analyzed the effects of a values clarification curriculum on high school students. According to Tyson and Carroll (1970), teachers and educators are very much value builders. Mosconi and Emmett found that the students who participated in the values clarification curriculum expanded their definitions of success regarding career choices and life goals. Also, the study showed that students who participated in the curriculum were more likely to create their own definition of success overall. Mosconi and Emmett (2003) suggest that a values clarification process can lead to a high level of self-awareness about personal values. A lack of clarity in values leads to a lack of motivation, poor decisions, and dissatisfaction in individuals as well as a low commitment to organizations (Brown & Crace, 1996).

Brown and Crace (1996) established that a values clarification process puts individuals in positions of contemplation and conflict in considering their values. In this state of contemplation and conflict, clarity in values can come about. Additionally, adaptations and value change can occur through a value clarification process. According to Rokeach (1979), value changes or changes in attitudes can happen through changes in definitions of self or overall self awareness of contradictions between espoused values and related attitude and beliefs.

### **Conceptual Framework for Change**

Argyris (1990) created a framework to help gain clarity between espoused values and the values in use daily. Argyris' framework helped move organizations from what he termed single-loop learning to double-loop learning. According to Argyris, individuals

have two distinct sets of values. The first set of values are the ideal, typically they are what an individual claims to value. Argyris calls this set of values, espoused theory. The second is the actual values that are implemented to run everyday life. Argyris terms this, theory-in-use.

Argyris (1990) claims that learning involves the identification and correction of problems. Problems arise when actions lead to outcomes that are unintended. He found that, typically, individuals within organizations operate in a single-loop learning pattern. In single-loop learning, an individual uses his governing values to guide his actions, and ultimately lead to his outcomes. When an individual does not achieve the desired outcome, the immediate analysis considers the actions or behaviors and seeks to rectify the actions. This is single-loop learning (see Figure 1).

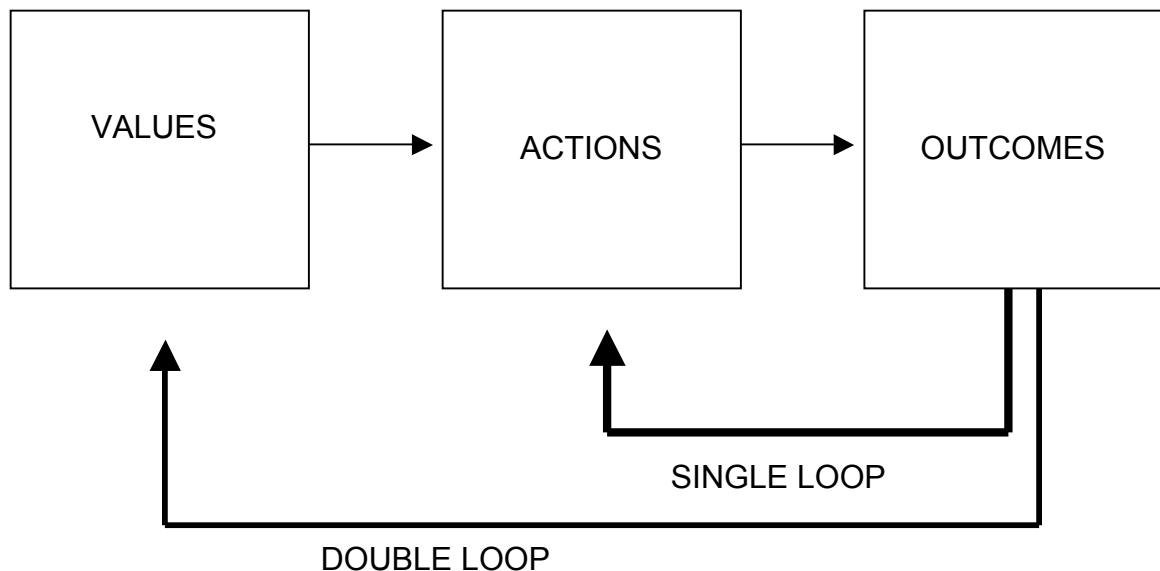


Figure 1. Argyris' Single-loop/Double-loop Learning Model

Argyris (1990) suggests that instead of looking at the actions or strategies that lead to the unintended outcomes, people should consider the governing values. After an unintended outcome is detected, an individual should revert back to the value that led to the set of actions that ultimately produced the outcome. Argyris terms this as double-loop learning.

Single-loop / double-loop learning is the conceptual framework for this study. This framework can be the core of a values clarification curriculum created to assist students of color at Rowan University gain clarity of their personal goals. My hypothesis is that when students of color are clearer about their personal values, they are more likely to engage and connect with the institution, and ultimately be retained at Rowan University.

### **Context of the Study**

**Overview of organization.** The Educational Opportunity Fund Office (EOF) serves to admit and support academically and economically disadvantaged students at Rowan University. The EOF office has existed on Rowan's campus since 1968 and was created after the state of New Jersey drafted legislation to fund new opportunities in the higher education infrastructure of the state. Since then the EOF office has served over 10,000 students, many of who have gone on to very successful careers and productive citizenry.

**EOF student profile.** EOF students are typically first generation, come from a low socioeconomic status (SES), and are extremely diverse both ethnically and geographically statewide. Our students enter Rowan through a special admissions program that EOF provides. An average admitted EOF student enters Rowan with a 2.5

grade point average, minimum SAT of 700, and is in the top half of the graduating class. Until recently, the goal was to bring in 10% of the total freshmen class through EOF.

All students who are admitted to Rowan through EOF are conditionally admitted based on the completion of the Pre-College Institute (PCI). PCI is a residential, intensive, summer bridge program that runs for five weeks from July through August. In PCI, students are given two college credited courses as well as additional academic supportive services to aid in their transition. Students are also given a number of different personal development workshops and learning opportunities to better equip them for their college experience.

Once students complete the PCI, they return full-time at the beginning of the fall academic semester, assuming a full-time course load. As part of their requirements, students are expected to meet with their assigned counselors at least once a month. The monthly meetings are opportunities for academic advisement, personal counseling, financial aid assistance, and the cultivation of a mentoring relationship. Also, students are given an EOF grant that, at the maximum, totals \$1400. This grant is used to assist in the payment of tuition, residential cost, books, fees, or other expenditures associated with college attendance.

One of the major challenges of EOF is the successful retention of our students. In the 2005 entering cohort, only 50% of our freshman class completed the fall semester with a grade point average of 2.3. The other half of our students fell below a 2.3 grade point average (Rowan's graduation standard for most programs is 2.5). Of the 50% who fell under a 2.3 grade point average (GPA), 25 students ended the fall semester with a GPA below 1.75.

To compound these dim results, over the last few years, the rising cost of tuition has increased the amount of student and parent loan debt required to attend Rowan University. This is in stark contrast to the situation just 10 years ago, when the majority of the cost to attend Rowan was covered by federal and state grants or loans in the student's name, not repayable until after graduation. This is important because in today's construct, families who are typically under poverty level are taking out a parent loan in which the monthly payments start immediately. With students' performance being so dismal, most students will be placed on academic probation and eventually depart from the institution with no degree and a substantial loan debt.

### **Significance of Study**

In the current climate at Rowan University, it is critical that we find a way to better assist students to persist toward graduation. Over the years, EOF has provided tremendous amounts of supportive services to students, such as a rigorous summer bridge program, specific freshmen seminar classes, communal structured study, availability of academic and personal counseling, and financial resources. However, a large percentage of the students do not make use of the services. I believe providing students with a framework to help clarify their personal values will assist them in connecting with the EOF Office and the university community as a whole. Additionally, if the discussions we have with students move from strictly creating new action plans to examining the core values that eventually led to their outcomes, perhaps we might affect a greater influence on students' decisions and attitudes about engagement in the services provided.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This action research study sought to contribute another piece to the student departure puzzle. While the research on student departure is vast, there seems to be a void in the literature examining the role of personal values and the impact they can have on retention. This study examined that construct.

This study used a mixed methods research design to ascertain answers to a set of research questions (Creswell, 2003). First, what values do freshmen of color at Rowan University espouse? Second, how does the clarification of student values affect selected factors of retention of students of color? Finally, how does my leadership theory contribute to the creation of a value centered retention model at Rowan University's

#### **Educational Opportunity Program**

The heart of this research was anchored in a case study methodology. In this case study, I primarily employed a participatory action research design that informed both my theories and practices (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). According to Lewin (1946), action research moves through a number of cycles: planning, executing, reconnaissance, and evaluation. Glesne (2006) notes that action research is aimed at improving practice. Also, action research is aimed at bringing about change to improve the lives of those involved in the change (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). My aim in this study was to challenge myself as a practitioner to better serve my students. In this study, I hoped to improve the way educators assist students of color to persist in a college environment. An additional

benefit of the study allowed that, as a result of the data I gleaned, I greatly enhanced my understanding while informing my leadership.

As a practitioner, action research was a perfect method to bring research into practice. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) refer to this as practitioner research, in which data can be immediately translated into practical changes. McTaggart (1997) describes action research as a spiral in which each step may include planning, action, observation, and analysis. Throughout this study, the spiral provided a structure that allowed time for the conceptualization of each action, observation of events, an understanding of data, and another opportunity to react. Also, action research allowed me to reflect and plan based on the data of each event, thus adapting to the living environment I studied.

In addition to the study of student retention, action research was an ideal catalyst for the study of my leadership. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe practitioner research as an opportunity for the practitioner to improve his or her practice. In this study, I viewed my practice through the lens of an educational leader. In an earlier chapter of this study, I crafted a leadership platform that encompasses my espoused theories as a leader. Through the reflective nature of action research, I have been able to carefully consider my leadership and ultimately examine my leadership theories-in use.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection for this study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research focuses on the lived experience and is a good methodology to understand cultural and social phenomena (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Throughout this research I moved along a virtual continuum from observer as participant to participant as observer and finally full participant (Glesne, 2006). My role on that continuum was dependent on my level of



interaction. As an observer participant, I primarily observed while still having some interaction with participants (Glesne, 2006). However, as a participant-observer, my level of interaction and involvement increased as I began participating in various activities. Finally, as a full participant, my first role was as participant in the cases where I led discussions or seminars (Glesne, 2006). As Glesne (2006) asserts, doing so allows the researcher to fully immerse and engage in the research setting, providing a better understanding of the participants along with their behaviors from various perspectives.

The data for this study were derived, primarily, from participant observations, careful examination of field notes, informal conversations and interviews, and document analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Conducting this project as a qualitative research study and primarily using participant observation allowed me to understand the study participants in all of their complexities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Also, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), taking extensive field notes is a very natural aspect of qualitative research. The field notes I recorded were critical in uncovering rich data that provided evidence and emerging themes to this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

In addition to observation and field notes, I conducted informal interviews. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), in participant observation studies, interviews are more like a conversation between friends. Bogdan and Biklen state that in participant observation studies, interviews do not separate from other research activities; in fact they often do not have a formal opening or ending. In the context of this study, I served as one of the counselors. I had a deep rapport with my participants, and most of our conversations served as informal interviews that were noted throughout my journal.

The last method of data collection was document analysis. Document analysis can provide another form of data that can support participant observation, field notes, and interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), documents can include: personal letters, memos, policy documents, codes of ethics, statements of philosophy, and students' case records. For this study, the students submitted many pieces of documents that were analyzed to further support the emergent themes. All participants in this study signed a consent form. Also, an application to the Institutional Review Board was completed and approved.

These data collection strategies gave me the opportunity to gain rich, detailed descriptions of the events and outcomes and ultimately deepen this study. Also, using multiple data collection procedures naturally provided a system of triangulation (Creswell, 2003). Lastly, in effort to ensure the validity of the study, I shared field notes, interview transcripts, and a copy of the final study to the participants as method of member checking to ensure participants were represented accurately (Creswell, 2003).

### **Cycle 1 – Initial Action: Context of Organization Creation of PCI 2006**

Cycle 1 of this study was implemented from December 2005 to May 2006. During this time I began to think about how the single-loop/double-loop model could be used as a student retention piece. In this cycle the model for PCI 2006 was conceived and designed.

The design of PCI 2006 required a programmatic shift in the structure of the program. The programmatic shift required that I analyze and reflect on the two courses I previously experienced: *Organizations as Cultures* and *Changing Organizations*. Both of these courses introduced and elaborated on the concepts of single-loop/double-loop

learning. The necessity in changing the design of the program became apparent looking at the success rates of our freshmen students. This information prompted me to meet with the director of EOF/MAP as well as the counseling staff of the office to discuss a new direction. After many discussions, reflecting, and designing, the new model emerged and PCI 2006 was implemented.

The data from this cycle came mainly in the analysis of field notes, journal entries, and document analysis. This cycle centered on a personal journey that required tremendous amounts of reflection and carefully thought out decisions. The programmatic shift in philosophy also required leadership. I carefully examined my field notes and journal entries to tell the story of the development of the new philosophy.

### **Cycle 2 – PCI 2006**

Cycle 2 of this study was implemented from July 8, 2006 to August 11, 2006. At the heart of PCI 2006 was a new component, the leadership component, and the summer book, Covey's (2001) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

The leadership component was implemented to help students explore their personal leadership experiences and develop their potential leadership capabilities. The leadership component was anchored in a reflective practice that allowed students to be very introspective. During the leadership component, students were introduced to Argyris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop learning as a model for understanding their governing values. The goal of this discussion was to help students be more purposeful through their academic journey and truly understand how values directly impact actions and lead to intended outcomes. Additionally, using the work of Stephen Covey (2001) in

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, PCI assisted students to develop a more principle centered leadership style.

During this cycle, I was a full participant (Glesne, 2006). I took careful field notes during the sessions and transcribed them after each session. I also made substantial entries in my journal to record my mental models, assumptions, and beliefs as the summer progressed (Senge, 1990).

### **Cycle 3 – Fall 2006 Evaluation**

After the implementation of PCI 2006, I wanted to first observe and listen to what students experienced as participants in the new model. To accomplish this I conducted 10 hours of observation and six follow up interviews in the fall semester of the 2006-2007 academic year. I observed the freshmen seminar class held on Mondays and Tuesdays at 8:00 a.m. This freshmen seminar class is a mandatory class for all first year EOF students. I was hoping to see evidence of how students were using the information that was presented to them during the PCI.

I engaged in freshmen seminar as a participant observer (Glesne, 2006). I asked the interim director, as well as the freshmen counselor (who served as the seminar teacher) of the EOF Program, for permission to observe. Both were very accommodating in allowing me to conduct my observations.

The participants were first year EOF students who had completed the Pre-College Summer Institute (PCI). For each seminar class there was a range of attendance from 45 students to as few as 15 students. I arrived for each seminar just before 8:00 a.m. and settled in a seat in the rear of the large classroom. I collected careful field notes of the classroom environment and then transcribed them.

Additionally, in an effort to increase validity, I interviewed six students from the freshmen seminar. This provided a form of triangulation and assisted to support the conclusions of the observation (Glesne, 2006). The participants interviewed were selected from the observed group through a convenient sampling method (Glesne, 2006). Because the emerging themes during the observation were different from what I expected, I wanted to get information from students that I believed were examples of those who actually had their values-in-use versus students who simply espoused values (Argyris, 1990). Student interviews took approximately 20 minutes. Nine questions were created in conjunction with my professor. These questions were also pre-tested on two students (Appendix A). The questions were designed to be open ended to allow for deeper conversation (McMillian, 2000). A letter of consent was signed by each interviewee. Immediately after the interviews, I transcribed the interviews and later allowed the interviewees to review their responses as a method of member checking (Glesne, 2006).

After gathering all the information through observations and interviews, I coded the data. I first examined the interviews to see which espoused values students discussed during the interviews. I coded the espoused values as such. I then looked at my observations and coded the actions-in-use throughout the seminar. Looking at both the observations and interviews informed the study with richer data, while additionally validating the findings (Glesne, 2006). Ultimately, the goal was to determine whether the six interviewees' espoused values were in use during the seminar, thereby signaling a shift in beliefs, attitudes, and engagement in education.

#### **Cycle 4 – Redesign for PCI 2007**

After my evaluation of PCI 2006, the data pointed to needing a more intense approach focused on values clarification. According to Kouzes and Posner (2002) the clearer an individual is regarding his or her personal values, the more likely he or she will connect with the organization. Therefore, I created a four-step values clarification curriculum that focused on clarifying the incoming freshmen's personal values.

The values clarification curriculum I developed was a patchwork of exercises from a number of different sources. In the first step, I used a values clarification exercise created by the assessment consulting team at Rowan University to help departments discuss their individual and shared values (Appendix B). During the second step, I used Kouzes and Posner's (2002) values prioritization exercise (Appendix C). In the third step, I introduced, during a large group discussion, Argyris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop learning framework. Lastly, in the fourth step, I compared a list of the common values of the incoming freshmen with the values of successful upperclassmen students of color at Rowan University in a large group discussion. After developing the curriculum, I asked the staff to review it and make suggestions. We placed this new curriculum in the center of the PCI leadership component.

#### **Cycle 5 – Training of Peer Staff**

Cycle 5 occurred in the spring semester of 2007. The redesign of PCI started with having both professional and peer staff all trained in values clarification. Therefore, initially, we began by introducing and training peer staff in the newly designed curriculum. As part of the peer staff training, I required the staff to undergo the values

clarification curriculum. This also gave me the data I needed to present to the incoming freshmen as values that successful upperclassmen students at Rowan University espouse.

A total of 21 peer staff members attended the training sessions. There were nine male and 12 female upper class students of color at Rowan University. The selection criteria to be hired as a peer staff member required exhibited leadership skills, involvement in student clubs and organizations, and a solid academic record. The average cumulative grade point average of the peer staff for PCI 2007 was 3.10. There were also nine returning students who served in previous PCI peer staffs.

The director of EOF and I conducted the training sessions. We met a total of three times, April 12, 19, and 26, 2007. At each session, I took careful field notes, immediately transcribing them afterward. Also, I collected the worksheets and large chart paper used during the sessions, again, transcribing that information as well.

### **Cycle 6 – PCI 2007**

Cycle 6 spanned from July 5, 2007 to August 11, 2007. I repeated the implementation of the values clarification curriculum with the pre-freshmen students over the five-week summer bridge program. A total of 97 pre-freshmen students arrived on July 5, 2007. Of the 97 students, 80 students were African American and Latino. The average high school grade point average of the freshmen class was 2.50. The average combined critical reading and math SAT score for the admitted class was 833. All participants were asked to read and sign a consent form.

The first part of the values clarification curriculum was implemented on July 8, 2007, four days after their arrival. I purposely intended to do it soon after their arrival hoping that students still maintained the core values from their homes, schools, or

communities, not yet influenced by our program. The second part of the curriculum was presented on July 15, 2007 during the Sunday evening Leadership Forum. The third part was July 22, 2007 and the final part was August 5, 2007.

During each of these discussions, I was a full participant (Glesne, 2006). I took careful field notes during the sessions and transcribed them after each session. Also, I collected all the work that students completed during each or the session. Lastly, the freshmen were asked to post entries on an online journal system throughout the program. I mined the journal entries for rich data that helped triangulate my field notes.

### **Cycle 7 – Fall 2007**

During the fall semester, my responsibility shifted from an upperclassmen student counselor to the freshmen counselor. Therefore, Cycle 7 focused on the observations, informal interviews, and journal entries of the freshmen students who participated in PCI 2007.

As the freshmen counselor, I was required to teach the freshmen seminar class, which all freshmen are required to complete. As part of this cycle, I observed the freshmen students a total of 26 hours. I served as a lead facilitator for the freshmen seminar, therefore as a researcher I was a full participant during this cycle (Glesne, 2006). I took many notes and transcribed them immediately after the class sessions. For each seminar class there was a range of attendance from 74 students to as few as 31 students. The seminars took place Mondays and Tuesdays from 8:00 a.m. until 9:15 a.m.

During the last two seminars sessions students were asked to do two exercises: (1) another values clarification exercise (Appendix D) and (2) a 3-5 page reflection of their experience (Appendix E). These exercises were conducted December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Unlike



the values clarification process of the summer, this time students were not given a list of values to choose from. Instead, the freshmen were asked to create their own list of values that best reflects who they are. Then students were paired up and asked to eliminate their values one by one based on order of importance. For their reflection exercise, students were asked to reflect on their experience starting with their arrival on July 5, 2007. Students were asked to think about who they were when they arrived and who they have become after their first semester experiences. Also, students were asked to carefully think about the core values they espoused when they arrived, versus the values they espoused at the end of the first semester.

In addition to seminar, as EOF students, the freshmen were required to meet with me (as their counselor) at least once a month. I used some of these counseling sessions as informal interviews. In addition, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note that even some of the conversations in passing within the office or even across campus proved to be rich with data. I transcribed both the counseling sessions and side conversations to include as data. As a method of member checking (Glesne, 2006), I asked students to read the transcribed field notes to ensure accuracy.

Lastly, during this semester I especially took time to journal. Mills (2000) establishes the importance of self-reflection in the analysis of a study. This cycle in particular required continual reflection and rethinking as I was guiding the freshmen class through their most difficult transition. I used the journal entries to discuss some of the findings that emerged through conversations with other departments, faculty, and community members regarding the impressions of our freshmen class. Also, I used the

journal to reflect some of my thoughts, expectations, hopes, and concerns of this freshmen class.

### **Cycle 8 – Spring Semester**

Cycle 8 of this study examined how helping students of color clarify their personal values impacted the likelihood of their retention. In attempting to measure likelihood of retention I used key factors that are identified in the literature that lead to retention. The factors I selected included student engagement, academic integration, involvement, and the development of student relationships with faculty (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 1991; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1993).

I used various data collection strategies to examine the factors of retention. First, I conducted a document analysis, using the students' files to find nuggets of data. Secondly, I looked at mid-term evaluations and carefully analyzed the professor comments about our students. Then, I collected and examined the students' cumulative grade point averages after their first semester in college as well as the credit attempted versus credits earned. Lastly, I reported conversations with students and faculty throughout the fall semester that I recorded in my journal regarding the progress of the students.

### **Cycle 9 – Study of My Leadership**

The final cycle of this study provided me with the opportunity to look carefully at my leadership. While my goals as a practitioner and researcher are to assist students to persist towards graduation, another goal is to study my leadership through this change initiative.

This action research project allowed me the opportunity to be innovative and challenge myself to try something new to assist my students. Attempting to change the way we operated as an office required a tremendous amount of change and leadership (Senge, 1990). As the study evolved, the leadership question required considering the espoused leadership platform presented at the beginning of this study with the leadership theories-in-use throughout this project.

To test the espoused leadership platform I used reflective practice (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Mills, 2000; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) talk about leaders “getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony” (p. 51). In other words, leaders should take time to reflect and analyze the evolution of a project. Also, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest self-reflection as a method for accurate record keeping in any good study. Since I was immersed in this project, I took time to journal often and carefully. My journal assisted in effectively using reflective practice to analyze my personal thoughts, reactions, behaviors, and critical incidents. Critical incidents are important to developing a deeper understanding of leadership and practice. I also used my journal to help inform my decisions throughout the project as I looked for commonalities in situations.

According to Osterman and Kottkamp (2004), using reflective practice stresses the importance of thought patterns. Osterman and Kottkamp ascertain that thoughts influence actions. Additionally, as action research is the intersection of scholarship and practice, reflective practice served as a method of professional development for me (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) state it is important take a step back after taking action to assess the plan. Through reflective practice, I was able to

determine what leadership theories were merely espoused and which theories were in-use.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Cycle 1 – Initial Action: Context of Organization Development of PCI 2006**

According to Mills (2000), action research is aimed at improving the lives of those participants who are involved in the research. This study allowed me to focus on the experiences of students in the EOF program. It further allowed me to aid them in becoming more successful in college. However, in attempting to make my students' lives better, I had to work with my colleagues to gain the courage to do things a little differently in order to produce different results.

According to the interim director of the EOF program at Rowan University PCI had remained virtually the same since 1991 (J.T. Mills, personal communication, March 5, 2005). At that time, Mr. Myers, an assistant director of the EOF program, led the effort to conceptualize a program that could more effectively assist students in the transition from high school to college. As a graduate of the EOF program, and a participant of PCI experience in 1991, I can attest to the positive results that the summer bridge program had on me and seemed to have on others who have engaged in it. More concretely, EOF has produced over 1,500 graduates who have successfully come through the channel of PCI.

Although the program has been successful, the rates have remained relatively consistent for the last 10 years. From 1994 through 2003, Rowan University retained 80% of the EOF class after their first year (Rowan University, 2007). However, the overall retention rates can be a little deceiving. For example, prior to 2006, the academic probation standards noted that students with 24 credits were required to maintain a 1.2

grade point average (GPA). Similarly, students with 58 credits were required to maintain at least a 1.5 GPA, while students at 90 credits were required to maintain above a 1.8 GPA (Rowan University, 2008a). Yet, all but two programs during this time required at least a 2.5 grade point average for graduation. Therefore many students could come back for a second year with a grade point substantially under a 2.5, yet higher than the 1.2 grade point average, and be retained.

A closer analysis of the performance of EOF students shows a more accurate picture. For example, in the 2005 entering cohort, only 50% of our freshman class completed the fall semester with a GPA of 2.3 or above. Fifty percent of our students fell below a 2.3 GPA. Of that 50% who fell below a 2.3 GPA, 25 students ended the fall semester with a GPA below 1.75. According to the interim director of EOF, these results are typical and are in line with the past 10 years. These results pointed to an urgent need to make changes to produce better results.

**EOF Department overview.** In an effort to better understand the challenges that existed in creating a change project in EOF, it is critical to fully understand the EOF Department at Rowan University. The EOF Department has a clear mission, which hangs in the front of the office. The mission of the EOF office is as follows:

To offer access, academic support, leadership opportunities, and general exposure to a diverse student body that demonstrates the potential for academic success. To provide academic, financial, personal, and career counseling services through a centralized comprehensive approach. And consistent with the University Mission, to foster the academic, intellectual, and personal development of students, which

enables them to live as essential, contributing members of a multicultural and technological world. (Rowan University, 2008b)

This mission statement represents the espoused values that set the spirit and intent of the office.

Following is an overview of the EOF staff in place when I began working there. It should be noted, too, that upon discussing the staff members, I created pseudonyms in order to conceal the identity of those directly involved (Glesne, 2003). At the time this study began in 2005, the EOF office was staffed by four counselors: Max, Kim, Kelvin, and Jose, with Brian serving as interim director. The office had two secretaries, Gretchen and Eva. In Cycle 7 of the study, which occurred in 2007, EOF announced a new director, and Eva retired from her position. Max also resigned from Rowan University in February 2007.

During that period, the general professional experience of counselors was varied and their direct experience working with EOF wide-ranging. For example, I was hired in July of 2005, and quickly became the junior member of the staff. In this new position, I served as a counselor for upperclassmen. In my position, I directly coordinated the leadership opportunities available for EOF students. Max joined the staff two years prior and came to Rowan from a peer institution where he worked directly with minority scholars. During his time, Max was responsible for the entering freshmen cohorts and coordinating the residential component of PCI. Kim moved into the position of counselor at Rowan's main campus, having served 23 years as an EOF counselor at Rowan's Camden campus, a commuter based satellite location. Kim was directly responsible for coordinating academic offerings and supportive services during PCI. Finally, Kelvin was

the senior staff member. Kelvin was hired in 2000 after serving as an EOF counselor at a large community college for 15 years. Kelvin coordinated the interpersonal skills component of PCI, which provided counseling support to students in their transition to Rowan University.

In addition to the counselors, Eva and Gretchen brought a wealth of experience to the EOF office. Eva had been a secretary with the department for 10 years, and Gretchen had also served as the executive secretary to the program director for 10 years.

Brian was appointed to the position of acting director of EOF in May 2005. By the fall academic semester of that same year, he was officially named as the interim director. Brian had previously served as the coordinator for multicultural affairs at Rowan University. Prior to serving in that position, Brian had been the freshmen counselor for EOF for seven years. Notably, Brian had also entered as an undergraduate transfer student to Rowan University through EOF in the fall of 1989.

**Organizational context.** In attempting to clearly demonstrate the dynamics at play among the EOF staff, I provide a recounted discussion of a particular staff meeting that took place in early April 2006: Upon initializing the meeting, Brian asked the staff to answer two questions, “What is it that we do?” and “Why do we do what we do?” Interestingly, after reflecting on a possible answer, Kelvin responded, “Well let’s not waste any time sitting here wondering, who has the mission statement that will tell us?” Kelvin then articulated the EOF office mission statement. Max then stated that in everything we do, we provide a service to students. He further noted that this service encompasses academic and personal support. In order to further determine the validity of



our commitment to the mission statement I asked, “How much of the mission statement is espoused, and how much of the mission do we really enact?”

Our discussion moved to a more defensive routine at that point. For example, Max responded, “It is up to the students to take up the services we offer.” Kelvin concurred with Max by asserting that he would be willing to work with students, if they showed up to counseling sessions. Kelvin also noted that he could not, and, therefore, would not be like previous predecessors of the EOF counseling staff who had devoted their entire life to working with students.

The conversation then moved to a discussion of the freshman class. The overall sentiment of the staff maintained that we were consistent with the trend of the previous 10 years. There was no need to discuss freshmen as an issue, because we had remained steady. However, Brian asked what else might be done to better support the students, thus increasing the overall success rates of forthcoming freshmen classes. Upon reviewing the success rates of the freshmen over the last 5 to 10 years, I asserted, “In looking back, I feel we have let those students down. We could have done more. We need to challenge ourselves and determine what we could have done to help students succeed here.” Max instantly rebutted, “There was nothing more we could have done. We had study halls, freshmen seminars, and workshops, but at some point it is simply up to the student.” Kim agreed with Max and added, “Jose, if you continue to put that much pressure on yourself, you are setting yourself up for a tremendous emotional let down.” By the end of the meeting, Max summed up the discussion by adding, “Even when Mr. Myers [the single most influential counselor and EOF staff member in the history of the department]

worked with students, he was unable to help each student reach their goal of graduation. Even Mr. Myers failed with some students.”

It was clear that the EOF office had some defensive mechanisms in play. This was, in part, because new information was being brought into the system, disrupting the status quo. Wheatley (1994) asserts that the basic organizing force for every organization is information. The constant flow of the same information produces the same or similar results. However, when people who are new to one another work together, new relationships are formed, and, therefore, new information is generated. Information is the source for change and it can provide the catalyst for growth.

During this time, both Brian and I were enrolled in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program and, therefore, we began to inject new information into our department. The new information that the doctoral program provided us with generated a new lens through which we were able to understand the dynamics of the organization, the ability to connect research with our practice, and the importance of developing a system of shared values. Brian set the tone in the office with thought provoking questions that often seemed to be uncomfortable for the staff. It was uncomfortable because the staff was interested in simply looking at the successes we had and not our failures (Argyris, 1990).

The dominant voices in the organization were Brian, Kelvin, and myself. There seemed to be a jockeying for power (Bolman & Deal, 2003) as Kelvin, the senior counselor, was trying to maintain the status quo. However, Brian, as the director, maintained the positional power and therefore, held the most dominant voice within the organization. Also, due to our enrollment in the doctoral program, my relationship with

Brian solidified as we began sharing information. This seemed to threaten those EOF staff members who were not in the doctoral program. For example, the new awareness that Brian and I gained prompted us to seek out the latest literature that would support us as we sought best practices for serving students.

It is interesting that most of the staff members believed office morale to be up. Kelvin, having been part of a completely different staff, often stated that with this new staff there were no “dramas.” Kelvin often recalled accounts of previous counseling staff who were frequently confrontational because of their discontent. However, with the new office environment, he believed that the morale was much better, there were fewer confrontations, and work seemed to flow more effectively. As Argyris (1990) indicates, using guideposts such as morale, satisfaction, and loyalty yield a false-positive. While these guideposts may be high within an organization, individuals in the system can, in reality, not care at all about organizational excellence. Argyris suggests focusing on organizational learning, competence, and justice, which can be much better guideposts in achieving organizational excellence.

Additionally, most of the EOF staff members operated using first and second order error (Argyris, 1990). An example of this could be noted in the dismissive attitude toward the lack of success of the freshmen class. Most of the staff shrugged their shoulders, believed the problem was more with the students, and accepted the state of achievement. This attitude allowed for a cover-up. The staff members seemed to prefer having no information on what our students were doing, nor did they seem willing to work at cultivating relationships with students on a deep level. As a result, the staff members moved to cover-up their lack of inaction, explaining, instead, that we simply did

not know enough information and therefore could not intervene to better assist our students. Instead, it was easier to sit back, waiting for that information when the grades came out and the outcomes were final.

The staff's first and second order error led to skilled incompetence that was particularly in use with Kelvin. Kelvin had the lowest number of counseling sessions of the entire staff, followed closely by Kim. Some students even migrated from the caseload of Kelvin and Kim onto my caseload and even the director's "makeshift" caseload. The director had taken on a "makeshift" caseload because of the numbers of students who refused to meet with Kelvin and Kim. Students commented that they felt Kelvin and Kim simply did not care enough about them.

According to Argyris (1990) Kelvin and Kim's actions were indicative of fancy footwork. Argyris notes, too, that fancy footwork allows individuals to deny that inconsistencies are present. It further allows them to place blame on others. Fancy footwork requires an individual to use everything he or she possibly can to create distance and blindness and, thus, allows him or her to avoid responsibility. Kelvin worked hard to move away from the responsibility of having students attend counseling sessions. Remember, it was Kelvin who stated, "If students do not come into the office, we cannot provide the services." Perhaps, instead of remaining committed to blaming students, Kelvin could have asked a better, more caring question, "How can we get students to come into the office for their counseling sessions?" However, this would then move the conversation into a position where Kelvin could not have an excuse in not serving students. Among the staff in general, this set the tone for Model I behavior.

The strategies used in Model I are typically to control tasks and to completely protect self (Argyris, 1990). Model I is played out through face saving tactics and methods that eliminate embarrassment. Model I behaviors usually lead to distortions and reinforce skill incompetence and skilled unawareness. Based on the example of this previous discussion, this was very evident. Most of the EOF counselors were primarily concerned about themselves. Max's response, that it was the students' responsibility to take up the services, completely removed him and the other counselors from responsibility. This led to a distortion in the organization. The EOF office espoused a beautiful mission statement, yet, in the everyday practice of the office, it was not in use. Instead, we were more concerned about work load and processes rather than building relationships, formal or informal, that assisted in the retention of students. Additionally, and even more concerning, were the low success rates of the freshmen class which the staff, with a very carefree attitude, dismissing that data as "keeping with the trend."

One of the major obstacles the EOF office experienced was its state of malaise (Argyris, 1990). This malaise was generated by two issues: there were clear undiscussables and the office routinely operated in single-loop learning. Neither dynamic allowed the staff to move into increased organizational learning and effectiveness.

The undiscussables were a staple within the EOF office as well as within the division of student affairs. Kelvin had very skillfully used fancy footwork to position himself in a place, professionally, where his lack of effort and interest were accepted. Organizationally, however, it limited the effectiveness that the EOF office could have in working with students. However, the undiscussable was, clearly, that no one wanted to bring to the discussion the fact that students did not come for counseling appointments

with Kelvin, mainly because of his perceived uncaring approach. Within the department, this led to sidebar conversations, or what Argyris (1990) refers to as underground dynamics, both in the department as well as within the division. One professional staff member who works outside the EOF office, but within the division, asked, “Why are Kelvin’s inefficiencies acceptable?”

Another undiscussable was the low level of achievement of our students. After the April 2006 meeting, which drew sharp reactions from the staff, this topic was also, clearly, marked as an undiscussable topic. However, again, this discussion became an underground dynamic in which sidebar conversations occurred regarding the lack of achievement of our students.

In fact, the many undiscussables set a tone within the organization that led to many sidebar conversations. This dynamic did not allow any of us to deal with numerous problems. Instead, members of the organization dealt with their problems among each other, instead of the more effective choice for such discussions, which were at staff meetings. Most of the discussions took place in the campus gym, in parking lots, or in the dining hall, but, as noted, they never occurred during staff meetings.

These undiscussable conversations forced the EOF office into a routine of single-loop learning. Each year, as we began planning our summer program (PCI), we immediately analyzed the actions that led to the outcomes. According to Argyris (1990), in single-loop learning, an individual uses his governing values to guide his actions, ultimately leading to the outcomes. When something goes wrong, the immediate analysis considers the actions or behaviors, seeking to rectify the actions.

A learning organization would aim to use a double-loop learning model. Argyris (1990) suggests that instead of looking at the actions or strategies that lead to the outcomes, consider the governing variable. After a mismatch or an unintended consequence is detected, an organization should revert back to the governing variable that led to the action, which then led to the consequence. Argyris refers to this as double-loop learning.

In not discussing failures, and referring to them as undiscussable, organizations create their own cover-up, or designed error (Argyris, 1990). An organizational defensive pattern begins to emerge, leading to organizational ineffectiveness. This becomes a breeding ground for skilled incompetence. Skilled incompetence by design leads to a cover-up. In turn, this cover-up leads to fancy footwork. An example of this occurred when Max argued that the EOF office did not provide the services because students had not done their part. This removed the responsibility from the staff and placed it squarely on students. According to Argyris, fancy footwork allows individuals to deny that inconsistencies are present and thus places blame on others. Fancy footwork requires an individual to use everything possible to create distance and blindness and avoid taking responsibility.

In the months leading up to PCI 2006, the staff continued to work through its organizational dynamics. The office malaise, fancy footwork, Model I behavior, and undiscussables were all challenges that confronted the shift in philosophy needed to enhance the PCI summer bridge model. In many ways, these obstacles were larger than simple issues in the office, for they created the actual culture of the EOF Department at Rowan University.

**Development of PCI 2006.** While the EOF department had many pressing issues organizationally, it was once again time for PCI. The development of PCI 2006 is a story of synchronicity. For example, I began my doctoral studies in the Fall of 2005, and Brian, the interim director of EOF, had recently completed his coursework of the doctoral studies. Thus, the time for change was ripe. The new information we brought to the organization would become a catalyst for that change.

*Overview of PCI.* As mentioned previously, PCI is a residential, intensive, summer bridge program that runs five weeks from July through August. In PCI, students were given two college credited courses, as well as additional academic supportive services, to aid in their college transition. Also, the students were to be enrolled in a number of different personal development workshops and learning opportunities, all intended to better equip them for their college experience.

Historically, PCI has had three components: The academic component, the interpersonal component, and the residential component. Kim had been responsible for the academic component, Kelvin for the interpersonal component, and Max for the residential component. At the beginning of PCI 2006, Brian charged me with the creation of the Leadership Component.

The EOF professional staff hired a total of 25 undergraduate students to work in various capacities during PCI. Students were hired to be tutors, peer counselors, or residential assistants. Also, EOF hired five supervisors to provide leadership and to coordinate each of the areas. The supervisors had, primarily, been previous EOF students who had graduated and moved into professional work.



The make-up of PCI was characterized by intensity, discipline, and structure, all qualities that made up the EOF program. The intensity of the program came by virtue of the long days that ran from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Students went home during the weekends. Discipline and structure went hand in hand. Students were required to be on time, sit up straight, listen during lectures, and do work during structured study. Among other things, these PCI/EOF characteristics instilled discipline, providing structure in students' lives.

Historically, the culture of PCI was very much like a boot camp. The program was very structural in many ways such as rewards and punishments for actions, strict adherence to policies and procedures, and well defined chain of command (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The structural approach also made the program feel very transactional for the incoming freshmen participating in the program. Typically, the staff felt there were five weeks to get the incoming freshmen up to speed before their real college experience. Therefore, the staff acted as the information givers and the students were the information gatherers. In essence, the five weeks was full of information transfer, where the incoming students were provided useful information that they were required to absorb.

***Reframing PCI.*** In the Fall of 2005, I was introduced to the work of Argyris (1990) in the course, *Organizations as Cultures*. Argyris' change framework, single-loop/double-loop learning, triggered a thought that caused me to reflect about my past. In response to that initial reflection I wrote the following question in my journal, "During the discussion of single-loop/double-loop learning [in class] I wondered, Why did I graduate from college when so many of my friends had failed?" That seemingly simple reflection led me to what would become the very heart of this study.

As I grew to understand the nuances of single-loop/double-loop learning, my thoughts and questions began to form. In a journal entry on December 6, 2005 I wrote, “If values inform actions, and if actions lead to outcomes, can students be more successful if we introduce single-loop/double-loop learning to them during PCI?” During the experience of learning about single-loop/double-loop learning, I constantly reflected on ways I could implement this tool, helping students to become more purposeful.

Two weeks later, after that journal entry, I met with Brian to discuss the development of the leadership component of PCI. During that meeting I shared new information that I had learned in class regarding single-loop/double-loop learning. What emerged were more questions: How could we introduce singleloop/double-loop learning so that incoming freshmen could understand the material? How would the introduction of single-loop/double-loop learning influence our students?

Brian found the concept intriguing. Later, he engaged me in a discussion about Stephen Covey’s (2001) book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. He suggested that we incorporate it as a required reading for PCI. Covey’s book was a good connection between single-loop/double learning because Covey centers his discussion in the book on making principle centered decisions. According to Covey, alignment of principles and actions can lead to having more predictable results regardless of the environmental conditions. Similarly, Argyris (1990) claims that governing values inform one’s actions. Therefore, the clearer the values are to the individual, the more likely the individual is to achieve intended outcomes. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* allowed us to bring this discussion forward through a more “popular” summer read instead of a traditional

theoretical book. The hope was to have students thinking differently through the introduction of this new information.

The goal of the leadership component was to assist students with understanding concepts of leadership through reflective practice. The planning document for the leadership component stated:

[The leadership component seeks to] establish the expectations of student leadership from the perspective of the institution, the EOF Program, and the various student organizations. Also, the component will help to define leadership, and explore pertinent theories on leadership. Students will understand power and the practice of leadership and followership as well as diversity and ethics.

Students will begin to develop concepts of personal leadership and an understanding of personal values. The leadership component will assist students in clarifying values and understanding their strengths and growth areas as emerging leaders and change agents.

In total, the leadership component would be four hour and a half discussions held every Sunday evening during PCI. We decided to use one of the sessions exclusively for a discussion on single-loop/double-loop learning.

As it was my responsibility, I sat and conceptualized the leadership component, and forwarded a draft copy to Brian. Brian decided he would introduce it to the entire staff to solicit feedback and reactions. On February 9, 2006 Brian called a staff meeting to introduce the newly created leadership component, and the thought of Covey's (2001) book as a required reading for all students in PCI. Brian introduced the idea of using Covey and the leadership component to assist students in becoming more purposeful in

their actions as students. He stated that Covey would allow students to gain personal mastery and become more effective students. Additionally, Brian elaborated, “The leadership forums on Sunday evenings will help students reflect on their experiences, and think about the leaders they can become.”

While I noted in my journal, “There was not a lot of interest in the leadership component...” there was a bit of a distress at the thought of a required summer read. Kelvin’s initial reaction was that the book was too “deep” for incoming freshmen. Additionally, Kim believed that we already asked students to do “too much” work during the summer. Max, who had previously read the book, thought the book was a good idea. I agreed with Max and stated, “We need to challenge students and expect more from them, students will rise to our expectations.”

With so much anxiety over the required summer reading, Brian asked, “If we could have someone come and guide students through a discussion once a week about the book, could that work?” The staff agreed that having someone lead a weekly discussion could make the required reading easier for students to understand. The weekly discussion would be part of the interpersonal skills component coordinated by Kelvin. We eventually secured Dr. James Coaxum as a facilitator for the weekly discussions on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

The discussion proved to be healthy and in the end securing Dr. Coaxum was a tremendous suggestion. I noted in my journal, “The staff seemed tentative moving forward about the changes in PCI, but at least they did not flatly reject the leadership component.” Brian urged the staff to move forward into PCI with an open mind and a critical eye.

## **Cycle 2 – PCI 2006, July 8, 2006 – August 11, 2006.**

The EOF staff entered PCI 2006 united but with a wait and see attitude. In this second spiral of my action research study, I set in motion a change initiative, the leadership component. In retrospect, this cycle was the pilot run for what ended up being the heart of this study, the values clarification process. However, this first attempt proved to be too broad in its effort. Yet it provided focus for a more meaningful innovative attempt to help retain students.

**Leadership component.** Upon developing the leadership component, I generated four seminars that were to be delivered over the course of PCI. The leadership component met for one and a half hours every Sunday evening during PCI, for a total of four meetings. The seminars were titled, The Leadership Forum. Each forum consisted of large group discussions focusing on leadership development. The group discussions and assignments were anchored in reflective practice, placing students at the center of the learning process. The goal of the Leadership Forum was to engage students in the learning process, helping them to make meaning of the information presented as it related to their lives.

The first seminar introduced leadership as theory. It was designed to promote discussion among the students. During that seminar, I gave students the assignment of writing a reflective essay on their life prior to arriving to college. I also asked them to focus on roles in which they operated as leaders. In the second seminar, I introduced three broad leadership theories: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and servant leadership. In the third seminar, we further discussed the three leadership styles introduced in the previous seminar, and we watched three different clips of videos that

best exemplified those leadership theories. In the third seminar, I also assigned students to write an essay connecting some of the elements of the leadership theories to their personal reflection essay, which had been originally submitted in week one. Finally, in the fourth seminar, I introduced the discussion on single-loop/double-loop learning.

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* Prior to the PCI, Dr. James Coaxum, a professor in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, developed a seminar titled, the 7 Habits Seminar. This seminar, for EOF students was founded on the PCI required reading, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Dr. Coaxum taught one class period per week during the summer. Each class ran each Tuesday afternoon between 1:30 p.m. and 2:45 p.m. As was the case with the Leadership Forum, the 7 Habits Seminar involved a large group discussion.

During week one of the 7 Habits Seminar, Dr. Coaxum introduced the book, covering habits one and two. During week two, the seminar focused on habit three. During the third week, Dr. Coaxum reviewed habits four and five. During week four, he introduced the group to habits six and seven. Finally, in the last week, Dr. Coaxum conducted a review of the entire book, listening to the students give their feedback on the required reading.

While the 7 Habits seminar is not the thrust of this study, it is important to note that the observations of the group further provided rich data to this project. The discussions on the 7 Habits dealt with some of the core elements of leadership discussed in the Leadership Forum. The Leadership Forum and the 7 Habits Seminar engaged students in a new and stimulating way that we had not previously experienced.

**Reflection.** On July 8, 2006 students moved into residence for their PCI experience. A total of 97 students entered PCI. Eighty-one were African American and Latino students combined, 11 were White, and five were Asian. The work in each of these forums was very different from the approach we had used in previous PCI programs. The approach for these two new initiatives was grounded in reflective practice, requiring students to think about and reflect on past experiences. According to Osterman and Kottcamp (2004), reflection is a powerful tool to examine actions or events in an effort to learn. In previous PCI programs, the staff provided information and ‘told’ students what they should know (Mills, personal communication, 2006). Such an approach was transactional. In contrast, this new initiative was transformational.

**Emergent themes from PCI 2006.**

**Engagement.** Following is my journal entry for July 12, 2006:

The students really seemed engaged in both the Leadership forum and the 7 Habits Seminar. They asked many questions and also answered many questions indicating that they had read at least the beginning parts of the book. I asked a [Latino male] student what he thought of the book and he said, ‘it’s different but I’m interested in it.’

Increased student engagement was remarkable beginning with the first Leadership Forum, which was held on July 9, 2006, one day after students’ arrival on the Rowan University campus. The forums were held in a multipurpose room on the ground level of the student center. The room was drab, cold, and isolated from other, more vital parts of the student center. During this first session, I introduced, in detail, the entire plan for the

summer. I also introduced leadership as theory. Too, I carefully expressed my expectation that each student would engage in the discussions.

Most of the students sat quietly. They listened carefully as I spoke. I noted in my journal that I was quite pleased with their attentiveness and their level of interaction, yet I wondered if this may have been a result of their insecurity at having found themselves in unfamiliar territory. Nonetheless, the level of interaction was high and clearly evident.

The students posed numerous questions that indicated their desire to investigate the concept of leadership. For example, one African American male student asked, “Can you learn how to be a leader?” Another Latina female student asked, “Have people who have become CEOs or Presidents studied leadership?” In both questions, I generated discussion among the students, allowing them to find their voices. As I searched around the room to encourage the discussion, an African American male answered, “I think that CEOs study how to become leaders because knowledge is not something you’re born with.” I finally agreed with the young man. I wrote in my journal, “The questions the students asked made me think they were processing the information I presented.”

Again, during the 7 Habits Seminar, the level of engagement was noticeable, and, it was refreshing to witness. On July 11, 2006, Dr. James Coaxum presented the first large group discussion on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The session was held in the auditorium of Bozorth Hall. The location was spacious and well lit. Dr. Coaxum started by asking the students, “How many of you have begun to read the book?” About one third of the students raised their hands. Dr. Coaxum asked, “Can anyone tell me what a habit is?” One male student answered, “It’s something you do over and over again.” Another male student contributed, “It is a routine.” Dr. Coaxum continued with his



delivery by asking, “Can anyone tell me what a paradigm is?” Many hands were raised. One female student stood up and answered, “It’s your beliefs.” A few more answers were added to the mix until a male student was called upon to respond. He said, very clearly, “It’s the way in which you see the world.” I entered in my journal, “The energy in this seminar was exciting and the students are all so interested.”

As I wrote in my journal, I again noted that the large group discussion was vibrant, and students seemed engaged. In a conversation with Dr. Coaxum after the first 7 Habits Seminar, we were both pleased with the students’ level of engagement. It seemed that the students had been reading the book even though it was only their fourth day in PCI. On July 12, we had a staff meeting where Kelvin expressed his surprise at how well the session had unfolded. Additionally, Brian was extremely pleased with the engagement of the students in both the Leadership component and the large group seminar.

Throughout the summer, I frequently visited structured study periods and noted that students were carefully reading the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Additionally, many of the tutors reported that the students were tremendously engaged in the leadership assignments. One tutor said, “[In reference to assignment one] the students are really into telling their story in their essays.” In addition, as I walked around the resident hall, many students stopped me, asking for a reaction or direction in the writing of their essays. One African American female student said, “This is like, tell you my life story! I never had to think about my life and all I have been through.”

Throughout the summer, both the Leadership Forum and the 7 Habits seminar proved highly successful. The students poured over their new information, and they

reported that it was different from anything they had experienced prior to engaging in PCI. I noted in my journal, “Having students think, instead of just telling them what they need to know, has been a huge shift from what we normally do.”

***Transformative learning.*** During the five weeks, students continued in both the Leadership Forum and the 7 Habits large group discussions. According to Fried and Associates (1995), learning has been, traditionally, simply transferring information from teacher to student, and it has been the responsibility of the students to passively absorb the information. This lackluster dynamic was the model used in previous PCI programs. However, the new model employed in PCI 2006 brought a new paradigm where we used reflective practice, placing the student at the center of the learning process. Instead of staff members simply giving information, the students were expected to make meaning of their life, relating it to the theoretical constructs presented through the Leadership Forum and the 7 Habits Seminar.

This experience proved to be a powerful learning model. Each year, at the end of PCI, we have asked students to create a personal brochure that has a biography, including in their biography significant elements that they will take with them from the PCI experience. Upon examining the brochures, all but 10 students included information about the Leadership Forum or the 7 Habits Seminar. For instance, one Latino male wrote, “I will never be the same...I understand that leadership has to be understood, and I can develop into a better leader each and everyday.” In another example, a Latina female student wrote, “I understand, now, the difference between reaction and being proactive. I will be proactive and always put first things first.” These examples are evidence that as

PCI was ending, students were significantly influenced, in a positive manner, by the information presented to them.

Of course, it was not simply that the information was presented to the students. Instead, it was their engagement with the information that made it more powerful. They moved from previously passive beings into highly engaged students. In a reflective essay, an African American female wrote, “No one ever made me think about all that I have been through in my life and then made me look at it in the sense of being a leader. I felt so powerful...” Through the Leadership Forum and the 7 Habits Seminar, the pre-freshmen were constructing new realities, and they were doing so through a new lens through which they could better to view the world, and their places in it.

*Who am I?* In hindsight, it was the process of reflection and self-discovery that emerged as the most important aspect of PCI 2006. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) observe that reflection is key in moving forward. Many of the students engaged in PCI 2006 reported that they had never before been asked to complete assignments anchored in reflective practice. The question for students that became the mantra during the summer was, “Who am I?”

That emerging mantra led us to the final forum, August 6, 2006, where I introduced the single-loop/double learning framework. I started this discussion by asking the group, “What is a value?” One student answered, “Values are your morals.” A female student responded, “Values are like morals and spirituality.” More answers surfaced until one of the quieter males spoke up in a soft voice, “It’s what is most important to you, that’s how you know you value something.”

With that definition, we proceeded with the discussion. Using a PowerPoint presentation, I provided students with a graphic of the single-loop/double-loop learning model. As I explained the model, I noted that some students looked confused, puzzled, while other students seemed to experience the epiphany I was hoping the entire group would realize.

After presenting the generic single-loop/double-loop model, I asked the group to help me construct a model that would start with a value in education. I asked students to tell me the actions that one would take if one valued education. A female student started by saying, “If you value education, then you would make sure you go to every class.” Another female student said, “You would read your [text] books.” A male student contributed, “You would ask for help from your professors.” Then I asked, “If you took those actions, what would your outcomes be?” A male student said, “You could graduate with honors.” Another male, sitting immediately next to him added, “And get accepted into the graduate school you want.” Finally, a female student said, “You could get the job you want.”

That evening, I later wrote an entry in my journal:

Today’s discussion on single-loop/double-loop was incredible. I think the students understood the concept and fit it right in to the discussion of who they are. I think I need to spend more time on this instead of the other pieces of leadership.

My reflection brought together a few observations that I had made along the way. First, in reviewing the literature, Covey (2001) pointed out that society has spent too much time focusing on secondary traits such as personality growth, communication skill training, positive thinking, and leadership. Instead, he contends that we focus on the

foundation of the individual, principles or values. For the PCI programs previous to PCI 2006, we had mainly focused on developing key skills in students, such as study skills, leadership skills, time management, communication, and interpersonal skills. Covey would consider these skills secondary traits. On the other hand, we did little to focus on the foundation of the individual, specifically the clarifying of personal values.

With this in mind, the initial attempt to get students to understand the importance of their personal values was limited. Spending only one session on single-loop/double-loop learning made it difficult to get students to think about their personal values. However, Wheatley (1994) asserts that new information changes systems. In this case, it is students who are the system. Following the single-loop/double-loop discussion, during dinner that evening, one African American student said, “I never thought about what I value; in my high school we were never forced to think about that kinda stuff.” In another conversation, a Latina female shared, “It’s scary to really think about your values, ‘cause what if you find out that your values are leading you the wrong way?” In reflecting on this single session, I wrote in my journal, “I think clarifying personal values can be of tremendous importance to our population.”

**Cycle 2 conclusion.** PCI 2006 was an initial attempt at changing our PCI model to assist students in their college experiences. In reflecting on the experience, perhaps the initial attempt at constructing a leadership component was too broad. I noted in my journal, “I learned this summer that five weeks is not enough time to do it all. However, the discussion of personal values can be powerful. I will look more deeply into this for next summer.” I further noted, “I learned that if you give students new information, and give them space to think and make sense of it, students will soar to new heights.” I was

energized at the prospect of taking the information that I had learned, having gained even more information from the students, knowing that I was fully armed to create an even better leadership component for the future.

### **Cycle 3 – Evaluation of PCI 2006, Fall 2006**

Cycle 3 was an evaluation of the PCI 2006 experience at Rowan University. The purpose of this cycle was to observe how first-year students interacted in a freshmen seminar after their PCI experience. More specifically, I wanted to see if the process of understanding governing values assisted students in engaging in seminar differently.

This cycle was based on 10 hours of observation and six follow-up interviews conducted during the fall semester of the 2006-2007 academic year. I observed the freshmen seminar class, held Monday and Tuesday mornings between 8:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m. The freshmen seminar class was a mandatory class for all first year EOF students, and I was hoping to see evidence of how students were using the information on single-loop/double learning that was presented to them during the last leadership forum in their PCI experience.

The participants were first-year EOF students who completed the Pre-College Summer Institute (PCI). For each seminar class there was a range of attendance from 15 students to as many as 45 students. I arrived for each seminar just before 8 o'clock, selecting a seat in the rear of the large classroom. As the seminar unfolded, I carefully collected field notes of the classroom environment, later transcribing them.

The students interviewed were gathered through a convenient sampling method. Student one was a freshmen Latina female at Rowan University. She was a student who always sat in the front of the classroom, participating in discussions. She maintained

regular contact with the EOF office and was viewed as an outstanding student. Student two was a Latino freshman male at Rowan University. He was usually unnoticed in seminar and sat toward the middle of the classroom. He sometimes talked with friends, but the majority of the time listened to the instructor. Student three was a Latino freshman male student at Rowan. He was very involved in seminar and sat toward the front of the classroom, was never late, and contributed to the discussions. He also maintained regular contact with the EOF office and was involved in many campus activities. Next, student four was a freshman Haitian female student at Rowan. She was quiet, shy, but pleasant. She sat near the rear of the classroom and never contributed to the discussions. However, she talked among her friends from time to time. Student five was an African American male who largely stayed under the radar and was not characterized as either an outstanding nor sub-par student. Lastly, student six was an African American female who was a bit loud at times, but who also maintained regular contact with the EOF office and kept her monthly appointments as required by EOF.

After gathering all the information through observations and interviews, I coded the data. I first looked to the interviews to see what espoused values students offered during the interviews. I coded the espoused values as such. Then I reviewed my observations and coded the actions-in-use throughout the seminar. The observations and interviews presented the study with richer data, making the findings more believable (Glesne, 2006). Ultimately, the goal was to determine if the six interviewees' espoused values were also their in-use values during the seminar.

In attempting to tell the story of this innovative attempt to retain students, I first want to demonstrate the values that the EOF office espouses to students. Then I want to

explain how students responded in their interviews, indicating what the students' espoused as their values. Next, I will connect their espoused values with their values-in-use by examining the observed behaviors in their freshmen seminar setting. Lastly, in keeping with Argyris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop model, I will illuminate what the students believed their outcomes would be at the end of their first semester.

**EOF values.** The EOF office had a high standard of expectations for all their students. At the end of PCI, the students are asked to sign a freshmen student contract clearly articulating the expectations students must meet as part of the EOF program's standard of expectations. In some ways, the expectations on the contract may be considered to be the core values that the EOF office espouses to students.

The freshmen contract conveys, in many different ways, that students are responsible for their behaviors and the manner in which they carry themselves. For example, in the first part of the contract titled, "The rules EOF freshmen must follow," students recognize that they are expected to "abide by the university code of student conduct." Additionally, under, "Conditions of Probations," the contract clearly explains, "Students whose behavior negatively reflects upon the program... will be put on nonacademic probation." These statements emphasize the importance of student conduct. Furthermore, placing students on non-academic probation for behavioral reasons sends a strong signal that good behavior and a positive image is not only valued by the EOF staff, but is valuable to students as well.

Along with the verbiage in the freshmen contract, and throughout my observations, I witnessed the teacher holding students accountable to the way they carry themselves. For instance, during the second day of observations, the teacher made a stern



comment regarding student attendance. He warned students to make sure they made every effort to get to class and to tell the other students to attend class as well. Also, throughout my observations, the teacher consistently asked male students to remove their hats or head coverings when inside the building. In another instance, when a female student's cell phone rang, the teacher turned and sarcastically said, "What a nice ring tone," while sternly staring at the student. The sarcasm, perhaps, was related to the fact that EOF students are not allowed to have cell phones during PCI because of the distractions they present in the classroom.

These observed interactions are high profile indications that the teacher is concerned with more than just academics. In fact, it seemed that the teacher took extra effort to take note of negative actions and moved to correct them as they occurred. Additionally, in moving to correct actions, the teacher was setting a standard reflective of the values of EOF.

**Espoused student values.** At this point, although the summer PCI experience seemed long ago, I wanted to gauge how much the students remembered from their discussion of values over the summer. I wanted to see if the information influenced their lives in such a way that they would easily recall the information. Therefore, the interview sessions began by asking students if they remembered the discussion over the summer that introduced to them the Argyris (1990) single-loop/double-loop model. Only one of the students indicated that he did not recall that discussion. However, as the interview continued, the student said he recalled the discussion. The remaining students immediately remembered the discussion during PCI.

For some students the idea of discovering their personal values may have seemed a foreign concept, and, at first, a concept that had not initially seemed worthwhile.

However, one interviewee offered more insight to the usefulness of the exercise saying,

I got scared when I first saw that. It was true with certain things and after the program when I talked to you it was similar when you asked me if I remembered it, because I was telling you maybe I wasn't into school right now. You were telling me that maybe I wasn't valuing school like I should be and that was getting to me. I was valuing my boyfriend more than school."

It seems that the information, at first, was a bit scary. The interesting aspect is, however, that the student was processing the information through her own context. After reflecting on her situation she used the information to conclude that she was valuing her loved one more than her education.

In yet another interview, a student also indicated that he had reflected on the values information presented over the summer. He said, "That was very much useful in that it made a lot of people including myself sit back and look at what we really want to do with our lives." These students thought about the discussion over the summer. I can conclude that even if the students are not showing a dramatic change in behaviors, they are processing the information.

As the interviews progressed, students were asked to identify their top three values. Interestingly, five of the six interviewees said they value education as one of their top three values. In the seminar setting, it was evident that a core group of the students were engaged in each of the activities presented and perhaps this was a reflection of that core value in education. The first seminar class I observed occurred the Monday

following a leadership retreat that most of the students had attended. The teacher opened the discussion by having students share their experiences from the leadership retreat. One of the female students who always sat in the first row and was very attentive answered, “I was inspired to lead.” In the second session that I observed, the teacher announced that the session would be more of a working session rather than a talking, sharing session. The students who typically sat in the front of the room did extremely well throughout this session. The “working” assignment took about 20 minutes, and the students in front of the room seemed to be in deeply engaged as they worked through the exercise. This core group of students comprised about one third of the total group.

**Student actions.** All of the EOF students entering college were entering a new environment in which the culture was extremely different from their home communities. Over the years, the EOF staff has focused on giving students new strategies for success and action plans to help them transition as more successful students. For example, one of the handouts given to the students during seminar was entitled, “Keys To College Success.” This handout provides students with techniques for taking notes, dealing with professors, time management measures, study habits, and goal settings. Although these are actionable strategies, they had little to do with the examination of values.

During the interviews, I wanted to have students logically connect how their actions reflected their espoused value in education. Interestingly, students made the connection that at times their actions did not reflect their espoused value in education. For instance, interviewee five responded, “Sometimes I slack off, and those times you could say, I really don’t value education.” Interviewee three offered, “Like sometimes I may slack on some things ...I may say I am going to study... but I may just put that off

and do whatever.” Students were aware that although they espoused to value education their actions were disconnected, or not reflective, of that. These actions suggest that the students are not necessarily aligning themselves with their values or principles.

While the majority of the students interviewed espoused education as one of their top three values, my observations gleaned action patterns inconsistent with a value in education within the entire group. Throughout the seminar, I observed students consistently arriving late and also absent. My first observation was about four weeks into the semester and attendance was pretty good. The seminar was broken down into two classes each with 60 students. By observation four, 17 students were in attendance, by observation five, 25 students were in attendance, and by observation six 32 students were in attendance. Additionally, a reoccurring theme seemed to be student lateness. In the first observation, 15 students were late arriving at the session.

Another observation that was inconsistent with the espoused value in education was negative body language. I created the following classifications for negative body language through my observation: Sleeping in class, constant slouching, and playing around while the presentation was in progress. In the first observation, a male student in the rear of the room laid his head on the desk and appeared to fall asleep for ten minutes. Throughout my observations, students could be seen slouching or putting their heads down. In my journal, I wondered if they had slept enough the night before. Too, I considered that perhaps this action demonstrated disinterest in the lectures. In one blatant instance, a male student responded to a question the teacher had asked by saying, “I am too tired to remember.” He made no additional effort to answer the question. I concluded

that the students were not interested enough to engage in the class discussion and activities.

In addition to sleeping or slouching, students frequently, if not constantly, played and talked while the teacher presented. In one session, a student sitting in the rear playfully threw a pencil at a friend and chuckled about the incident. Also, near the end of each class, before the professor had finished completing his lecture, students began to ruffle papers, talking at clearly audible levels, eagerly preparing to leave the room. These actions showed a lack of seriousness with which students approached the class. These observed actions indicated that students believed they were wasting time and were not interested in being in the class.

The same was evident with negative comments throughout my observation. Students seemed comfortable enough to either speak their negative comments aloud or within their circle of friends. In one instance, the teacher was introducing an exercise to the class and a student commented, in a side bar conversation with his friend, "This is the same thing we went over during the summer program." In another incident the teacher was unable to make the seminar class. The teacher called into the EOF office and asked the secretary to go to the classroom and announce that he would be unable to make it to class. The students waited in the classroom unaware that the teacher would not be coming in. However, when the secretary arrived and announced that the teacher would not be present the students were annoyed. One student commented, "I don't believe I woke up for this [expletive]."

On the contrary, some students believed that their espoused values do, in fact, match up with their actions. For example, interviewee one indicated that she was always

in the University library or in class. Interviewee three added that “they [his actions] do correspond with my value in education I am doing well in classes... [when] I am having problems with [classes], I did look for help, tutors...” Both of these students showed actions that are reflective of a core value in education.

**Students outcomes.** Most of the students believed that they would be fine at the end of the semester. Again, interestingly, while some students were cognizant that their actions were not reflective of their espoused values, other students still believed they would experience their desired outcome. For instance, interviewee two, who admittedly answered that at times he is slacking off and that may not be reflective of a value in education, responded of his eventual outcome, “I think they [grades] will be pretty good... A’s B’s and C’s.” Also, interviewee four, who also described her actions as “slacking” noted that her outcomes will be “very good.” Neither student expects that his or her actions will lead to an unintended outcome. However, both students allowed that their actions did not reflect their values.

Conversely, interviewee one was the only interviewee who indicated that she was not completely satisfied with her grades, although she would be at a “B” level. Additionally, she was the only interviewee who also responded to that question by considering more than just grades. Interviewee one responded, “...in all my classes I have a “B” average which is ok. My outcomes will be to get into the engineering school. That’s what I want to do...” This student’s statement indicates that she has really internalized her values and answers with a sense of confidence. Perhaps it was because her values served to inform her actions that it was more predictable to project her outcomes.

Covey (2001) says that we are not in control of our lives; instead values are in direct control of our lives. Yet, Argyris (1990) says, typically, that the response given, when asked what your values are, is simply your espoused values, and not really the values that are in-use. This cycle was conducted to see how students were using the information on values presented to them in PCI during the regular academic year. It was a difficult task to identify whether values were espoused or indeed in-use. Yet the observations proved to be a useful tool in deciphering the two. The data led me to believe, even more convincingly, of the importance related to the development of a model centered on values clarification. According to Covey (2001), the more aligned with principles one is, the more predictable and effective choices he or she can make regardless of the environment.

**Cycle 3 conclusions.** From this cycle, I learned that most of the students who were observed, demonstrated only espoused values in education. A small number, I estimated one-third of the entire freshmen cohort, exhibited actions consistent with a value in education. Argyris (1990) suggests that it is not the actions that need to be redirected (single-loop learning). Instead, students needed to examine their espoused values, resulting in double-loop learning.

One of the fascinating findings in this cycle was that students understood and were aware of times when their actions did not reflect their espoused value in education. The students responding in interviews began to make excuses when explaining their actions. Also, the students who were sure that their actions reflected their value in education were equally confident in their analysis. It seems that students used the

information presented to them during PCI. At the very least, students were aware of single-loop/double-loop learning and they were thinking about it through their own lives.

On the contrary, on a broad scale, the observation showed that students still needed more work to ensure that they recognized education as a core value. The consistent lateness, absenteeism, disruptive behavior during class, negative comments, and negative body language indicated that students did not value education. This also indicated that students were disengaged academically, and very few were involved in the educational process. According to Astin (1984), learning is directly proportional to the nature of student involvement in educational programs. However, involvement is an action; to be involved, students must value education and learning.

The majority of EOF students come into college life wanting to do well. Yet, through the twist and turns of the college experiences, some EOF students find themselves in difficult academic positions, such as probation or dismissal. Argyris (1990) refers to this as an unintended outcome. In connecting students to their values, they can become more intentional about their actions and can lead to a greater level of success, and, ultimately they are more likely to achieve their desired results. This cycle can be the starting point of developing a comprehensive model for values clarification, which can lead to greater levels of student retention.

#### **Cycle 4 – Redesign for PCI 2007, Fall 2006**

Cycle 4 occurred in the Fall semester of 2006. This cycle embodied a series of reflections and redesign (Mills, 2000). Upon reviewing findings from the evaluation of PCI, it was clear to me that students needed a concentrated process through which they could clarify their personal values. During this time, I developed a keener understanding,



too, of my hypothesis. As it became clearer to me, I also realized that it would be critical to also assist students in gaining clarity about their own values, which I believed would then lead them to become more intentional about their actions and outcomes. I wrote in my journal, "...I think that students coming from low SES, minority backgrounds have values that are different from successful students at Rowan." This reflection led me to take another look at the literature on values.

In considering some of the identity literature, research suggests that African American youth often attempt a reputation that is tough or cool rather than scholarly or academic (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). According to Ogbu (1987), male ethnic minorities and male students from low SES backgrounds sometimes adopt a contrary identity that leads to contempt for doing well in school. Interestingly, Graham, Taylor, and Hudley (1998) found that African American and Latino boys most admired and respected their low achieving peers. Graham et al. suggested, in their findings, that ethnic minority boys value academic achievement less than their counterparts. In a similar study, Taylor and Graham (2007) found that this dynamic of turning away from a value in academic achievement begins, for ethnic minority boys, around the seventh grade.

The literature explains various reasons why students of color develop contrary values to academic achievement and scholarship. For example, Mickelson (1990) pointed to perceived barriers in society that lead students of color toward devaluing education. Therefore, they stop really trying to earn good grades. According to Noguera (2003), the media paints ethnic minorities as unintelligent and hostile. This affects the support that students of color receive from educators such as teachers, further cementing their disconnect from education. In their early years, African American youth are more prone

to aspire to be cool or tough rather than aspiring to academic achievement (Juvonen et al., 2003). Clearly, the literature demonstrates that the development of values favoring academic achievement and engagement for minorities is problematic.

As I reflected on the experience of PCI 2006, I noted in my journal that the students in the session who discussed single-loop/double-loop learning seemed as if the information was new and different. I noted that some students had seemed even physically disturbed by it. For instance, their paralinguistic gestures indicated this when students rolled their eyes or sucked their teeth as if they were rejecting the information or bothered by the presentation. Moreover, in the interviews in Cycle 3, one of the interviewees indicated that the information presented on values was “scary.” Notes that I have written in my journal record that this was the first time the students were put in a position to think about their personal values. Yet, in the evaluation, it was clear that students still merely maintained an espoused value in education, which was not clearly observed as a value that was in-use based on my observations of freshmen seminar.

In redesigning the PCI experience, I was convinced that we needed to focus on ways of teaching our students how to better clarify their personal values. Following is a journal entry that reflects my thought process:

Perhaps the reason our students don't come out to structured study or freshmen seminar is because they don't have a clear value in education or doing well in school. Before we discuss student engagement, involvement on campus, development of relationship with professors, and success in the classrooms, students need to have a desire to do it. In the end, students have to begin with a clear set of values that guides their decisions in these areas.

According to Argyris (1990), rather than focusing on the actions of individuals that lead to the outcomes produced, instead consider the values that informed the actions.

Consistently, within EOF, counselors, like many educators, focus their time and emphasis on the actions of students. For example, when an EOF student falls into academic probation, the Student Contract stipulates that they will be required to meet two times a month with their counselor, instead of only one time. When students fall into academic probation, upon meeting with their counselor, both devise an action plan to help the students make better use of their time, organize their study, use tutorial services, and other means of increasing academic work. According to Argyris (1990), perhaps the focus should, instead, be on the governing set of values of the student that produced the outcome of being on probation.

In aiding students in ways that they might clarify their personal values, I created a four-part values clarification curriculum. My intention was to implement this at PCI during the leadership component. The curriculum was grounded in the literature of values clarification. The first part was adapted from an exercise used by the Assessment Consulting Team (ACT) at Rowan University to help departments across campus clarify their values. I used this exercise because it required an immense amount of reflective practice. Reflective practice stresses the importance of thought patterns and looks at the thoughts that influence actions (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Additionally, the exercise motivates students to think about their main objective, why it is important, who it affects, and how to go about accomplishing it.

The second part of the values clarification curriculum was adapted from the Kouzes and Posner's (2002) values prioritization exercise. In order to achieve a high

level of values clarity, it is important to be in a position that requires decisions about the importance of an espoused value (Brown & Crace, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Also, Kouzes and Posner note that, many times, values may be in conflict with one another. Therefore, it is critical to develop a sense of priority in the values. To accomplish this, I adapted an exercise that Kouzes and Posner created.

For this adapted exercise, I handed out a worksheet comprised of three parts. In the first part, I created a list of values that students could select from. I also included blank lines so students could add values if they felt the list did not reflect values they espoused. Students were instructed to circle as many values on the list that they believed reflected their values. On the second part, students were instructed to select, from the values they circled, the top seven values most important to them. Finally, in the third part, I asked students to pair up with one peer per student and, choosing from their list of the top seven values, I indicated that they should eliminate one value at a time in alternating turns.

Parts three and four of the values clarification curriculum was more of a lecture and discussion format. In part three, the single-loop/double-loop learning model was presented. The objective was to have students clearly understand how values are in direct control of their lives (Covey, 2001). My goal was for students to really begin thinking about their personal values in the context of the single-loop/double-loop model.

In part four, I presented a list of the common values that freshmen arrived with compared to the values of successful upperclassmen students of color at Rowan University. The aim in part four was to have a process that puts individuals in positions of contemplation and conflict in considering their values and, ultimately, aids them in

gaining the greatest level of clarity (Brown & Crace, 1996). In part four, I hoped that students would be uncomfortable as they gained awareness of the values of upperclassmen students at Rowan. My hope was that this uncomfortable state might help students gain a heightened awareness as they contemplated their own espoused values.

**Continuing the change initiative organizationally.** Upon reviewing the literature and constructing the curriculum for the redesigned PCI experience, I realized that the next step would necessitate discussing it with staff. I noted in my journal, that I was unsure of how the staff would react, but I was hopeful that they would be on board. After the PCI 2006 experience, all staff had been pleased with the outcomes of the program. In fact, during the September 2006 meeting, where we evaluated and talked about our reflection regarding PCI, Kelvin stated, “This was one of the best PCI programs we have had.” Brian also noted, “Based on the progress of the students, especially academically, we all felt pretty good about PCI 2006 and the changes we made” (personal communication, 2006).

While the staff seemed agreeable to the changes and outcomes of PCI, I remained aware that we needed more work as we continued with this change initiative. Senge et al. (1999) point out that resistance and challenges to change emerge when pilot programs carry out work in ways that differ from what the organization is accustomed to. However, it was encouraging that, as a united staff on these points, we felt good about the success of PCI 2006.

During a March 2007 staff meeting, we discussed some of the preliminary findings that I had gathered from my evaluation of PCI 2006. I discussed some of the students’ reactions regarding single-loop/double-loop learning, and I highlighted some of

the student interview responses regarding their personal values. I specifically discussed my observations about how students were able to discuss single-loop/double-loop learning, thus applying it in their lives. Senge et al. (1999) suggest that as new practices lead to better results, people within the organization can increase their level of commitment to the new initiatives.

Senge (1990) observed, too, that team learning is critical in engaging the organization's energies toward achieving common goals. Therefore, in an effort to ensure that staff clearly understood the conceptual framework of single-loop/double-loop learning, Brian drew a model of it on a whiteboard during the March 2007 meeting. Afterwards, Kelvin and Kim seemed a little more receptive to the discussion than they had in the beginning. Perhaps, too, this was because of the success of PCI 2006.

A week later, we met with the staff to unveil the new leadership component. I created a chart (Appendix F) that clearly defined weekly themes and integrated the values clarification curriculum with the weekly discussions of summer read, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. At the top of the chart, I delineated the objective and established the purpose. It read:

The highest level of connection between individuals and organizations happens when there is clarity of both organizational and personal values (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). The goal of the leadership forum will be to provide students with an inductive process to assist in the clarification of personal values. Through this process students will gain a high level of self-awareness about their own values and paradigms. Value changes and changes in attitudes and behaviors can come about through (1) changes in self conceptions or definitions of self, (2) increases

in self awareness about incongruities or contradictions between espouse values and related attitudes and beliefs. (Rokeach, 1979)

The staff and director were excited about the possibilities of this new direction. The plan was to hire peer staff, consisting of upper classmen students at Rowan. In doing so, we began implementation of steps one through three of the values clarification curriculum. We not only asserted that peer staff would understand what the incoming freshmen might be experiencing, but we realized that as successful upper classmen, who were students of color, our peer staff could further generate a list of common values that we could share with incoming freshmen

#### **Cycle 5 – Training of Peer Staff, Spring 2007**

Cycle 5 occurred in the spring semester of 2007. The purpose of this cycle was to introduce and train peer staff in the newly designed curriculum. As part of peer staff training, I required staff to undergo the values clarification curriculum. This would also give me data I needed to present to incoming freshmen as values that successful upper classmen students at Rowan University espouse.

**Overview of training.** A total of 21 peer staff members attended the training sessions. There were nine male and 12 female upper class students of color at Rowan University. The selection criteria to be hired as a peer staff member required exhibited leadership skills, involvement in student clubs and organizations, and a solid academic record. The average cumulative GPA of the peer staff for PCI 2007 was 3.10. There were also nine returning students who served in previous PCI peer staffs.

The director of EOF and I conducted the training sessions. We met a total of three times, April 12, 19, and 26, 2007. For each session I took careful field notes and

immediately transcribed them afterward. Also, I collected the worksheets and large chart paper that were used during the sessions, transcribing that information as well.

As mentioned in the previous cycle, the values clarification process was developed through a patchwork of exercises from a number of different sources. On April 12, 2007, I used the values clarification exercise created by the assessment consulting team at Rowan University to help the peer staff discuss their individual and shared values. On April 19, we implemented step two of the values clarification curriculum using the adapted Kouzes and Posner's (2002) values prioritization exercise. Finally, on April 26, I introduced in a discussion, Argyris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop learning framework. However, I did not need to implement the fourth step for the peer staff because, at the fourth step, the common values of incoming first-year students was to be used as comparison to the values of successful upper classmen students of color at Rowan University.

**Emergent themes of peer staff training.** In previous years prior to PCI, we typically had not conducted training sessions as early as April. However, I wanted students to experience the values clarification curriculum that would provide an understanding of what incoming freshmen would be experiencing during PCI. I also wanted to develop the list of values that successful upper classmen students of color at Rowan University espoused.

The experience of the first implementation of the values clarification curriculum was interesting. In my journal I noted that prior to this training, I had believed students would largely select money or career as a top value. However, the top value selected by the upper classmen students of color at Rowan was learning/education/growth. One



student stated, “[The main objective at Rowan is] to be away from the environment one was used to and be able grow as a person.” Another student said, “My ultimate objective ... is to grow mentally, emotionally, physically, and even spiritually. To grow as an individual through all the knowledge that can be attained and the different experiences that can take place.”

The notion that upperclassmen would list their top value as learning/education/growth was not surprising. The upper classmen who were selected as peer staff members were all successful college students. As mentioned, the median GPA of the group was 3.10. Additionally, all the upper classmen students were members of at least two student organizations, and all but four students had, at one point, held a leadership position on campus. According to Astin (1984), student involvement is the physical and psychological energy that students contribute to their academic experiences. The PCI peer staff espoused learning/education/growth as their top value. Therefore, students were highly involved on campus, devoting energy toward their academic experience, as was evidenced by their GPA.

The second highest chosen value by the peer staff was family. This emerged in number of different ways. For example, some students referred to their peers as family, while others directly pointed to actual relatives. One student commented, “...It’s about family...this is not just about me, I feel that when one reaches greatness, we all reach greatness. When one fails, we fail.” That student regarded the interconnectedness of the community of peers on campus. Yet, directly speaking about relatives, one student stated, “My family is what I value most. They believed in me when no one else did. My mom

and dad have stuck with me no matter how hard this has been.” In one last example, a Latina female stated:

My mother will benefit. I should be doing this for myself essentially but [my] true drive is for Mami. She may not benefit from it directly but seeing the smile on her face and the precious tears rolling down her cheeks on graduation day will reinforce the importance of this objective for me.

Especially for students of color, the literature yields vital information that family plays a major role in their collegiate life. This notion is one of my main criticisms against Tinto’s (1987, 1993) interactionalist model. Tinto proposed that students must separate from their home, and integrate into their college community. However, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that Latino students, specifically, are interdependent with their families back home, as well as involved in their campus communities. Upon reflecting on student responses, it is clear that family has significant importance. In fact, students rated family as their second highest value. The peer staff espousing family, as a core value, supports the findings of current, seminal literature.

The last major theme emerging as a core value for the peer staff was service to others. One student said, “The most important thing is what we do for others. If we take what we have learned and spread it among one another, the outcome outweighs the time spent here at Rowan University.” Another student said, “...Applying what was taught in the classroom to service-learning projects...is to help strengthen the community around me.” Finally, a student contributed, “My ultimate objective at Rowan is to become a terrific critical thinker and to challenge and improve the world around me.”

Students selected service to others as a value because they were a highly engaged group within their collegiate community. All peer staff members were involved in student groups and organizations, including many that are anchored in community service. When we hired peer staff members, we carefully selected students who were engaged in collegiate life. That allowed us to present to incoming freshmen a group of upper classmen students who were involved and engaged as role models in their campus community. According to the literature, student engagement can be defined as the amount of time students dedicate to purposeful educational activities leading to desired outcomes (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Pasacarella & Terenzini, 1991). We viewed peer staff as highly engaged students who value community service, also indicative of this finding.

Overall, training sessions that focused on values clarification presented a new set of information to students that had never been discussed in PCI. In my journal, I have noted my observation that students were exceptionally inquisitive as they engaged in discussions throughout the trainings. A veteran peer staff member noted: “These discussions will be much deeper compared to the type of discussions we would typically have with the incoming freshmen. I think EOF has always preached about what you have to do to make it here. This is getting the incoming freshmen to realize not just *what* to do, but *why* you have to do these things.”

**The sneaker incident.** One of the more interesting events took place after the discussion on single-loop/double-loop learning, is what I have referred to in my journal as, “The sneaker incident.” The sneaker incident was a discussion that took place after the third training session concluded. In Savitz Hall, situated just outside the room where we conducted the training session, is a large atrium. Following training sessions, most of the

students spilled into the atrium. A senior, African American male, and a sophomore, Latino male were discussing the concepts of values that were presented in the session. The Latino male said: “So, based on how you live your life and all the decisions you make, you can really tell what you really value.” The African American male agreed but said, “You can’t just say that without some exceptions. Like I do value being a student here, but I also value being an athlete. I can’t say one is more important than the other, but I would like to think that education is what I value most.” The Latino student pressed a little more and asked him what actions showed that he valued his education. The conversation continued back and forth, becoming increasingly heated. It moved to a very personal level where both young men began accusing each other of not valuing their opportunity to be in college. The final blow came from the Latino male when he said, “If you do value education more, than you wouldn’t be buying expensive sneakers when you don’t have money for your college books!” After that comment, I intervened to calm the conversation as both young men were more than a little annoyed with one another.

The sneaker incident is evidence that peer staff was not merely listening to the information, but were, instead, engaging in it and applying it to their lives. The young men showed enthusiasm in toying with this new idea, applying the concept of single-loop/double-loop learning to their lives. Later that fall, after this incident, another Latino male from the peer staff, who had witnessed the sneaker incident, said to me in a counseling session, “You know Mr. Aviles, the summer time really changed my life. I don’t think I am the same person after learning about my values and how that stuff guides my life. The experience in peer staff has changed my direction and changed who I am.”

In the final analysis, the introduction of a values clarification process in our peer staff training proved to be a success.

### **Cycle 6 – PCI 2007, July 5, 2007 to August 11, 2007**

I entered PCI 2007 with great enthusiasm as well as with great optimism for the possibilities that could result from helping incoming students through the implementation of the newly redesigned program. I noted in my journal how exciting it was to see my upper classmen students reacting to the values clarification process. I was unsure, yet hopeful, that the incoming students would have a similar reaction. Wheatley (1994) states that new information can change systems; my hope was that the incoming freshmen would be changed by this new information.

**The plan.** As explained in Cycle 2, the leadership component met for an hour and a half every Sunday evening during PCI, for a total of four meetings entitled, The Leadership Forum. Unlike PCI 2006, the Leadership Forum for PCI 2007 would consist of the values clarification curriculum. On July 8, 2007, I implemented Part One: The values clarification exercise created by the assessment consulting team at Rowan University. On July 15, I began Part Two: The adapted Kouzes and Posner (2002) values prioritization exercise. On July 22, I introduced Argyris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop learning framework. Finally on August 5, I unveiled a comparison of the values of the group (the pre-freshmen) with the values of successful upper classmen students at Rowan University.

**Implementation: The initial discussion.** The first leadership forum occurred four days after the pre-freshmen's arrival on Sunday, July 8, 2007. This first session occurred in Bozorth Auditorium, a well-lit room, setup with comfortable seating in a theatre style.

Most of the pre-freshmen filed into the auditorium in an orderly manner. I also noted in my observations that the students seemed timid, which is natural for being their very first weekend on a college campus. I intentionally decided to implement Step One of the values clarification curriculum during this first weekend because I believed that the pre-freshmen would not be influenced at this point by the college environment, and would still maintain many of the core values they had brought with them from home.

During this first session, we had a rich discussion that established an understanding of the importance of values. I wanted to have an operational definition of the term “values.” Therefore, I asked the group, “Can anyone tell me what the term ‘core values’ means?” The group gave me a collective look of confusion. I waited patiently for a response until one student asked, “Do you mean what morals you have?” I replied, “Not necessarily. Your morals can be values, but they don’t necessarily have to be.” We went around the room until, finally, a Latina female said, “Sounds like your core values are what you’re about like what is the most important thing to you.” With that operational definition established we moved forward.

During this first discussion, I asked the group to think about a broader question, “Who am I?” During the third week of the summer program, July 26, 2007, I noted in my journal, “The question posed to the students in the first week ‘Who am I?’ has really taken root and has been a consistent theme that comes up in small group activities, discipline actions, and even in simple fun activities. It was a way of connecting the concepts of valuing to a more common language and understanding.”

At the conclusion of the large group discussion, I handed out a worksheet that had the actual exercise of the values clarification curriculum. As mentioned in Cycle 4, the

exercise asked five questions. These were geared to generate student reflection regarding their main objective in coming to college, why it was important, who it benefited if their objectives were achieved, how they were going to accomplish their objective, and what values they would include in their journey. The students were asked to complete the assignment by Friday, July 13, 2007.

After collecting the assignment, I reviewed all the submissions and looked for any emerging themes that might support values that the pre-freshmen espoused. I used this rich data to triangulate the responses students supplied during the second exercise. In the second exercise, the students had selected their top three values.

*Week two.* During week two, I implemented the adapted values prioritization exercise from Kouze and Posner (2002). For this exercise, I handed out a worksheet that had three parts to it. On the first part, the pre-freshmen were to select from a list the values that they believed pertained to who they were. I also included blank lines so that students could write in ‘values’ if they felt the list did not reflect those values they espoused. Students were to circle all those that reflected their own values. Then on the second part, students were instructed to select from the values they had circled, the top seven values most important to them. In the third part, I asked students to pair up with a peer and, from their list of the top seven values, they would eliminate one value at a time in alternating turns. Finally, I asked each student to write their top three values on their worksheets.

This exercise helped the students identify which values were most important to them. After the exercise one student commented, “It was really hard ‘cause it felt like I was giving up something I believed in.” Another Black female student said, “I thought

that I had to choose between some things that made me who I am, like a piece of me that I didn't want to give up, but in order to complete the assignment I had to give it up." A Latino male stated, "When I first started the assignment, I just figured like yeah, this is important to me and didn't really think twice about it. But when I had to start eliminating them I got to the point where I just stopped 'cause it wouldn't be me if I said like I don't value family cause I do, so it was really hard to say that I was going to eliminate that, so I didn't."

The comments the students provided after the exercise showed that values are a deeply rooted, personal characteristic of who we are. The students identified with that as they engaged with the exercise. Before the exercise, and as I explained the assignment, I noted that the students were listening to the instructions, but some were giggling, others doodling on paper, some slouching in their seats, and, in the rear three students were sleeping. I commented in my journal that at the start of the exercise the group seemed disengaged and, perhaps, it was because they were not yet aware of their own values. However, following this exercise, I was convinced that the majority of the group had, by the end of the session, engaged in a new process: That of recognizing their personal values.

***Week three.*** During week three, I presented a PowerPoint lecture on single-loop/double-loop learning. This format also helped me lead a discussion that lasted approximately an hour and a half. By this point in the summer, the pre-freshmen were well versed on the concepts of values. Also, they were all relatively aware of their own personal values because they had completed the first two steps of the value clarification exercises. However, my goal was to help the pre-freshmen understand how their values



influenced their lives. Single-loop/double-loop learning provided the vehicle for that discussion.

***Dinner discussion.*** Each Sunday, immediately following leadership forum, we had dinner. After the discussion on single-loop/double-loop learning, I had an interesting conversation with a group of young men. I recorded this discussion in my journal:

After leadership forum today, five young men asked me if they could join me for dinner. I agreed to have dinner with them in the dining hall, and we had a very interesting conversation. All five were from Camden [NJ], and were good friends. The discussion on single-loop/double-loop learning today got them thinking. One of the young men said, “This whole experience has me thinking about my future and how serious I am about this. But today really hit me hard. Like for us, we went to a high school where no one really cared about you learning, and especially as athletes, they just pass you through. It’s good enough if you just show up to school, so it’s not like we ever were challenged to value learning, or the best students.” The students were troubled about their own set of values and the implications that would have on their experience in college. Another one of the students said, “last week when I did the worksheet, my three values were, family, religion, and money. Today, I thought about whether I should be saying school now that I am college.” I listened to the students talk. We had a great time engaging in a very intellectual discussion, but I explained to them that this was a growth process, and that their starting point is not necessarily their ending point. I was encouraged to see that the information I had initially shared with them had

prompted a response, and that because of that, they had felt the sense of urgency to meet with me.

Introducing single-loop/double-loop learning was intended to evoke thought. I was encouraged to see the young men thinking about the information I had shared with them. It was interesting, and I was encouraged that they were also become aware of their own values and the implications of those values in their lives. This third step of the values clarification curriculum was an attempt to have students understand more about themselves.

*Week four.* In the final step of the values clarification process, I presented the pre-freshmen with the list of values that successful, upper classmen, students of color at Rowan University espoused. According to Brown and Crace (1996) the process of clarifying values places students in positions of conflict and contemplation.

In an attempt to generate conflict within each pre-freshman, I posted a collective list of peer staff values that had been compiled during peer staff their training. I presented this information to the pre-freshman during a PowerPoint presentation. I then asked them to examine the top three values espoused by successful upperclassmen at Rowan University. Having done so, I awaited their reactions. The pre-freshmen carefully examined the list, immediately reacting to it. They were visibly disturbed. Some shrugged their shoulders, and sucked their teeth. One African American female asked, “They didn’t say anything about careers?”

I asked the students to reflect on and comment about the differences and similarities between the espoused values of freshmen compared to the espoused values of upperclassmen. An African American male stood up and said, “I think the lists are so

different because they have been students here longer. I mean, they know what it takes to be in college and that changes what you're about." Another African American male stood up and said, "We didn't even put education in our top three, but maybe it's 'cause we are just focused on the end result and the upperclassmen are focused on going through it." I asked students if they believed that was the case. A Latina female commented, "Everyone in my family said go to college to get a good job and don't be the rest of my family. Nobody talks about go to learn."

Engaging the students in a comparison of the two very different lists of values proved to be a very interesting exercise. I later entered the following note in my journal, "The students seemed to be disturbed by looking at both lists. They seemed conflicted as they tried to make sense of differences in what they had listed compared to what the upperclassmen had listed." According to Rokeach (1979), value changes or changes in attitudes can occur through changes in definitions of self or overall self-awareness of contradictions between espoused values and related attitudes and beliefs. I also wrote in my journal, "Perhaps this exercise can help pre-freshmen gain a richer understanding of who they are, especially when they see the differences between the values they arrived at Rowan with versus the values that successful students espouse."

**Top three values of the freshmen class.** The pre-freshmen had a wide range of responses during their prioritization exercise. As I examined their work from the exercise, I began to see emergent themes in their responses. I coded these themes based on the top three consistent values among the group. I also mined submissions from the first exercise to provide rich data that supported the espoused values and helped triangulate the data.

*The value of family.* The top value espoused consistently among the pre-freshmen was family. Family was a constant value that arose in the large groups discussion, small group discussions, and consistently reflected throughout the pre-freshmen journal entries.

From the very beginning of the Leadership Forum, the pre-freshmen articulated the importance of family as the most important thing for them. In the first week of the leadership forum, we talked in general about a shared value that the entire group could come to consensus on. The group quickly chose family as that common value. During that discussion an African American male stated, “We all can agree that no matter how many people are against you, your family will always have your back.” A Latino male agreed stating, “That’s true and regardless of how tight you might be with friends or your boys, you always have disagreements and people will doubt what you’re doing but your family will always be in your corner.” An African American female added, “While going to school is important, the most important thing is our family. If we don’t put them first, then who else can we count on?” I noted in my journal, “The students really came to consensus quickly, and it is no surprise that family was their choice, although I thought money or career would come up.”

As I culled data from Exercise One, I noted that students consistently reflected a value in family. In a powerful statement, one Black male wrote:

I am the first generation in my immediate family to attend college. I am also the oldest and an example. I would never be able to look my siblings in the eyes again if I didn’t go to college. I won’t be like our parents and let them down. I want them to see that you don’t necessarily need mom and dad, but just someone who

cares to be motivated to make it. I also don't want my grandmother to have to support them forever.

All EOF students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, some far more disadvantaged than others. This student demonstrated the importance he placed on his younger siblings, especially considering that he had absent parents. Additionally, he expressed the sense of responsibility for his siblings that he felt had been placed on his shoulders.

This sense of responsibility, of being an example for the family as a first generation student, was expressed by many students. This also illuminates another perspective in the espoused value in family. For example, one Latino male expressed it this way,

My younger brother will benefit from my accomplishments because I will set a path for him to follow if he chooses. Even if it is not the exact path he will know that he is capable of being successful despite the hardships we face and the past we came from.

In another entry, a Black female stated, "Me being in college will help my younger cousins see that anything is possible if you work your hardest." One Latino male also echoed a similar sentiment very clearly:

By achieving my goals I set an example and help the younger kids in my family understand the importance of an education. I can be the proof they need to know that graduating from college and becoming a professional is possible as long as you integrate your set of values into your academic journey.

In summing in all up, a Latina female claimed, "My parents will benefit if I graduate...I would fail them for the last time if I do not finish school."

As students reflected on their accomplishments in college, many students indicated that their family members would benefit most. One Latino male commented that the struggles his family had endured led him to think, “My mother will profit from my achievement because after I successfully graduate, I will obtain a great job and will be able to maintain her.” Another Latino male stated, “My objective goes further than just me. I plan on taking care of my family. We are in a huge slump and I plan to get us out of it.”

Most students connected with the term “family” through a more traditional sense of being biologically related or in reference to guardianship, but some also talked about family in regard to their communities. A Latino male wrote,

My family and my community will benefit from my success in college. I grew up in a community where not many people attend college because of money, got caught doing bad things, or were forced to work right after high school. If I get to graduate, I would be able to send my family members in South America money, help my current family, and my future kids in attending college.

A Black male also remarked, “...The kids in the future from my community as well as my family so I can take them away from all the troubles we ever had.”

The theme of valuing family was consistent with the literature on students of color in higher education. In fact, referencing student departure, Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2005) found that for non-traditional populations, such as minorities, factors that influence departure include family support as well as environmental pull factors such as family and work responsibilities. Like Nora et al., Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996)

also found that maintaining a strong relationship with family was critical during the transition from high school to higher education for talented Latino students.

Just as students of color place value in family, the literature also supports that family supports, in turn, can be helpful and key in retention. Thus family values, in a sense, support education. Martin (1986) found that a supportive family was a better predictor of African American students' educational aspiration than parental education or profession. Similarly Nora, Castaneda, and Cabrera (1992) found that family support increased the likelihood that students would engage socially and academically with friends as well as faculty.

***Valuing spirituality/religion.*** Throughout PCI it was clear that a significant number of pre-freshmen were concerned about their spirituality. I noted in my journal, "There seems to be a consistent theme in religion; in many of the forums students mention 'Giving thanks to God.' Perhaps they are simply yearning for a connection to their spirituality."

In Week two, a pre-freshmen student approached one of our staff members and asked if it would be possible to have Bible study as an option for their constructive opportunity time. Constructive opportunity time usually ran each morning between 9 and 11 o'clock. During constructive opportunity time, the residential staff created programming to engage the pre-freshmen in light, fun, interactive activities. These activities ranged from games such as "battle of the sexes" to simple movie nights. The request to have a Bible study was new and different. We decided to create a Bible study, which was hosted by one of our supervisory staff members who served as a minister at his home church. The Bible study was so well attended that the supervisory staff member

requested that we allow the students to have a “Sunday Church Service,” specifically for those students who were unable to attend their home church because of program constraints. We had two Sunday Church Services in the final weeks of the program, and I noted in my journal how surprised I was by the attendance of over 40 students at each service.

While my field notes and journaling showed an emerging theme in spirituality, it was also the second most espoused value during the values clarification process. During the second session, after the clear consensus that family was important, the next value that the group came to consensus on was the importance of religion or spirituality. During that session an African American female stood up and said, “I think that the most important thing in my life is my relationship with God. He is the only reason I am here in this program.” Her proclamation led to a series of comments affirming the students’ belief in God. One Latino male stated, “We all would not be here if it were not for God.”

In answering the questions in Exercise One, the pre-freshmen continuously made reference to the importance of their spirituality, religion, or belief in God. Some students made stronger statements than others, but a significant group mentioned some aspect of spirituality. For example, an African American female wrote, “A college education is not just about trying to be rich. You have to have a set of values like responsibility, religious values, creativity, integrity, honesty, leadership, and self respect are some of the importance things.” In reference to spirituality, another African American student said, “[throughout] college I will have to stay healthy physically, mentally, and especially spiritually.”



I received even stronger affirmations of students' faith and value in their spirituality as students talked to me one-to-one. In one instance, an African American female came to me to discuss how she felt she was not fitting in with her peers. As she talked about her issue, she described her close relationship with God as a reason why she would not be willing to compromise with her peers and join into their discussions and activities. As we talked, she consistently referred to her unwillingness to compromise her faith. In our conversation she also commented about her disagreement with the group of having family as the most important value in one's life. She questioned, "How is that possible that anything is more important than God?" In my journal I wrote, "[student] today spoke so emphatically about her spirituality with unwavering commitment to her faith above all, even if it meant not being able to fit in with peers and feel alienated here."

Some students showed this strong value of spirituality in their writing as well. For example, an African American male student wrote, "The main values Rowan students should integrate into their academic journey are faith, education, and success. If one has faith through a higher power (GOD), or any other type of motivation they will strive to walk the correct path." Another Latina female share the following, "The values I would suggest are religion, determination, then education. I would suggest these because without religion first there is really no support and help during hard times." Lastly, an African American male explained, "I grew up going to church and it is the most important thing to me. Spirituality and family play a major role because they set boundaries and help round you as an individual. They are your foundation."

The conversation about values evolved over the summer and the discussion about spirituality and religion provided good examples of how students struggled with

identifying their core values. After the first Sunday service that the students conducted, a Latina female stood up and talked to the group about her evolution. She stated that she had never been to church, but said that if she had to pick a religion, she would classify herself as Catholic. However, she never attended a church experience where the attendees were so committed to their faith like what she experienced listening to her peers during the Sunday service. She was moved to tears and expressed her excitement to have been a part of that experience. Interestingly, as she talked with me afterwards, she talked about now understanding why spirituality was so important, even more so than family to her. That evening, as I added an entry to my journal, I observed that this was a good example of how espoused values can change.

College students who value religion and spirituality are not new. Statistics show that most students enter college believing in God, yet fewer than half practice a religion (Bartlett, 2005). In fact, during this generation of students, attendance of formal worship services has declined. However, many have a stronger interest in spiritual matters (Christian Century, 2008). One explanation may be that students are grappling with making meaning of life and all the experiences therein.

Research demonstrates that students of color have a higher rate of spirituality and religious participation compared to the general population (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006). According to a recent survey, 95% of African Americans and 84% of Latino students report that they believe in God (Bartlett, 2005). In particular to African Americans, Constantine et al. observe that African Americans reflect religious, spiritual, and communal values in daily life.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that for Latino students, a sense of belonging is critically important. In their study, membership in religious and social community organizations were strongly related to the students' overall sense of belonging. This study suggests that Latino students see religion as an important aspect to their level of engagement in campus life. Fox (2003) posited that religion and spirituality are interwoven into the fabric of life and can potentially influence life outcomes. The pre-freshmen in the current study have indicated that religion and spirituality are an important value.

*The value of money.* The third value that emerged consistently among the pre-freshmen throughout PCI was the value of money, career, or successful futures. In a journal entry on July 3, 2007 I entered: "I believe that most [minority] students entering college are coming with their top value being the need to get a job or make money. I think that originally my motivation in coming to college was the idea that I could make money and support my mom and my family."

During the second session of the values clarification, students started to articulate their interest in seeing college as a method for making money. After discussing family and spirituality, the pre-freshmen came to the consensus that money was their next, most important value. During that discussion an African American male stood up and said, "For me it's about making money. It's either making it the fast way, or trying to do it the right way. That's why I am here." A Latino male student stated, "My family has been poor forever. This is my chance to make a different life for me and my future family by getting a good job."

Additionally, throughout their journaling students constantly came back to the idea of making money or education as a means to a good career. In response to the question “Why is your objective important?” one Latino male wrote:

Because it will help me financially. My family has always been there to help me with whatever I need and in return I need to help them with their financial issues. I will try my best and hardest in studying so I can receive my diploma and get a good job.

An African American female framed it this way, “My objective is very important because I have to achieve in order to get a job to earn money.”

During the many discussions that spanned the summer the pre-freshmen commented on the journey of higher education as the method in which to change their lives and be successful. In one of our small group counseling sessions a Latina female stated:

I really do not have many other options that’s why I came to college. I could stay home and wait to be somebody’s wife or I could come to school, get a degree and make a good living for myself. My dad wanted me to stay but my mom supported my decisions to come to college. She believed it is the only to have a good job now in days.

In another example, an African American male came into my office to discuss his struggle of engaging academically. I asked the student to tell me why he was finding it so difficult to connect academically. He stated, “I don’t really like school.” I then asked, “What is it that you do like?” He said, “I like to work on cars like to modify them, make them fast and that kinda stuff.” Continuing with my questioning I asked, “Why did you

decide to come to college?” The student responded, “I was told that no matter how good I am working on cars, I should get a college degree so I can know how to run my business. But I don’t like school. I just want to have a good life and get paid.”

While I initially thought that money, career, or successful futures would be the ultimate top value, it is no surprise that money was one of the top three values that emerged as important. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), there are three phases involved in students’ college choices. The three stages include, predisposition, search, and finally, choice. The first stage of the student selection process is predisposition. In this stage, students formulate the decision of whether or not they desire to attend college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The students’ attitudes and influences, along with their background, dictate this decision (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Researchers have identified that certain background traits influence students’ decisions to attend college. The family socioeconomic status plays a major role in the predisposition of a student to attend college (Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990). In fact, the neighborhood’s socioeconomic status also lays a foundation for a predisposition of a student entering higher education (Paulsen, 1990). The likelihood that a student will decide to attend college is directly influenced by the family socioeconomic status (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

In this study, EOF students all hail from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. It is logical to connect that EOF students coming from low SES communities and families would be concerned about improving their situation. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), experiencing high school in this condition helps inform their decision during their predisposition stage.

In analyzing this further, Kozol (2005) brings a more in depth perspective. In visiting schools across the United States with high minority concentrations, Kozol claims that schools systems have in greater numbers linked education with employment. Kozol writes:

Advocates for school to work do not, in general, describe it as a race specific project but tend instead to emphasize the worth of linking academic programs to the world of work for children of all backgrounds and insisting that suburban children too should be prepared in school for marketplace demands, that all social classes ought to have “some work experience” in high school, for example. (p. 99)

Kozol argues that suburban schools may touch on themes of school to work, but in urban districts it has become the central part of the curriculum.

According to Kozol (2005), school-to-work programs that exist in elementary, middle, and secondary schools, typically in urban districts, focus on business jargon, cultures, and structures. This creates the bridge for students to view education as being linked to employment. Kozol writes:

Learning itself- the learning of a skill, or the enjoying of a book, and even having an idea is now defined increasingly not as a process that holds satisfaction of its own but in proprietary terms. (p. 96)

Education has become a factory that produces a product in direct response to the market needs of society. Yet in creating educational systems as such, we have taught students to link education directly to work. In other words, students from low SES backgrounds are often being trained with a package of skills to directly meet the work force needs of their immediate community (Kozol, 2005).

Students who experience education that centers on work readiness are inundated with messages that help shape their values. According to Tyson and Carroll (1970) teachers, educators, and administrators are all responsible for constructing the values systems of their students. Additionally, according to Rokeach (1979), educational institutions are significant contributors in the development of values within individuals. Kozol (2005) helps explain why students, such as those in our EOF program, enter college with a strong value in money, careers, and success in work.

**Cycle 6 conclusions.** PCI 2007 was a completely different, yet rewarding, experience for both the students and the staff. As I reflect on the process, students developed a clearer sense of their core values, leading them to better inform their decisions, behaviors, and actions. The alignment of values with actions can lead to a greater consistency in intended outcomes (Argyris, 1990).

I was surprised that money/career advancement was not the top value. However, the literature supports the importance of family in the lives of students of color as they enter college. Therefore, having family as the top value was not, altogether, a complete surprise. Also, the strong conviction toward religion and spirituality that emerged throughout the course of the summer was an interesting development. What was interesting about the value in religion and spirituality was that students directly acted on this value in requesting a Bible study and, later, a Sunday Service. Lastly, the value in money/career advancement did prove to still be a core value for students in PCI. Through the literature, it is clear to see how the connection between education and money/career advancement is made.

As I reflected on PCI 2007, I was eager to determine whether the discovery students had made about their values, as well as their understanding about the importance of their values, would remain an integral part of their experiences and beliefs. I was curious to see if having clarity about their values would inform their decisions, behaviors, and attitudes throughout the fall. I moved toward Cycle 7 with great anticipation.

### **Cycle 7 – Fall 2007**

During the fall semester, my responsibility shifted from having been an upper classmen student counselor to freshmen counselor. Cycle 7 focused on the experiences of freshmen students who entered Rowan University after having completed PCI. As we began the fall semester, I had a high degree of optimism for the possibilities that existed for our freshmen.

**Fall semester overview.** Once the pre-freshmen moved from PCI, they entered their regular fall semester as freshmen students. Freshmen students are required to complete eight structured study hours per week, attend freshmen seminar, and make at least one counseling appointment per week. The structured study hours were held Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. in the EOF office. In the evenings, the study hours were held from 6:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. in the University library. The freshmen seminar took place on Monday and Tuesday mornings between 8:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

For this cycle, I carefully took notes of the activities in which the freshmen participated, later extracting emergent themes from my field notes. For the freshmen seminar, I was particularly interested in the culminating exercises that focused on values clarification. I was vigilant in my observations regarding any evidence of value change.



Overall, I was excited about the prospect of the fall semester. I made an entry in my journal that demonstrates this, “I am really excited about the freshmen. I think they really got the messages that we were trying to send during the summer. Near the end of the program, I heard many of the students using terms like ‘I value...’ or ‘My core values...’”

***Languaging.*** The evidence of languaging is important. Languaging is a rooted in every human act, and is the method by which we co-create our environments (Gill-Monroe, 2006). According to Kegan and Lahey (2001), “The forms of speaking we have available to us regulate the forms of thinking, feeling, and meaning making to which we have access, which in turn constrain how we see the world and act in it” (p. 7). During the summer, on the first day of the Leadership Forum, when I asked the group how many of them had ever discussed the concepts of their core values, not one student raised their hands. Presenting the concepts of values clarification, or understanding of personal values, helped evolve the language that the pre-freshmen had available to them.

As counselor to a new freshmen class, one of the first things I do is to begin building each student’s file. In a student’s initial file, I review his or her freshmen contract, which they sign on the final day of their PCI experience. As part of the freshmen contract, we ask students to create a personal mission statement along with a statement of expectation.

Covey (2001) refers to a personal mission statement as a method of connecting with one’s own purpose. Covey urges each of us to develop mission statements that are principle centered and that extend for the long term. In assisting the pre-freshmen in

understanding their core values, and how they influence their actions, I asked the students to craft a personal mission statement that provided a road map for their college career.

Interestingly, through the language of values, principles emerge in the writing of the students' personal mission statements as do statements of expectations. For instance, an African American male wrote:

I have learned to value education. If I am passionate about learning, things that I am supposed to do on the daily, then it won't feel like a burden. Learning is a continuous and perpetuating process, and it may not always be in an educational setting or a place that you thought that you might learn. So I just want to enjoy learning and the experiences that I have in life wherever they take me.

In another example, a Latina female writes, "I value my education, family, and friends. I must be determined to succeed on my education making my dream of being a teacher a reality. I will live each day with responsibly so that my dream will come true."

In some instances, students began connecting their cores values as the cornerstone of their life and future legacy. For example an African American female wrote:

I value my education, success, and family...I value my education because I believe you are what you know, so everyone should learn more. I also appreciate and enjoy the value of struggles by acknowledging that a perfect life does not exist; everyone struggles. I want to be known as someone who is determined, whose words were not just said, but my actions can inspire others to become greater.

A Latino male also wrote about his values and future legacy:

I value being committed to my work and being active in my classes. I will live each day with my mindset to succeed so that my children can look back and say, 'my father was a great achiever.' I will make sure nothing interferes with my path to succeed by always remembering my values. I want to be known as a loyal man that has high standards and stands on principles.

The personal mission statements and statement of expectations provided me with a sense of encouragement. I realized that students had adopted the language that was used throughout the summer. More encouraging was evidence that students coming into their monthly counseling were unknowingly using the terminology they had learned during the summer. This was evident as they discussed issues and situations they were facing on campus. An African American male stated in a counseling session:

I know that I'm struggling in my class cause I'm not living right. I say that I value learning but I stay in the rec center playing basketball for hours when I should be studying. My actions are not showing that I value my education. I have to straighten up cause I don't want to be that guy that ends up failing and don't know how that happened.

In another instance, a Latina female came to a counseling session with many frustrations. She was feeling pressure to return home during weekends to help cook, clean, and care for younger siblings. She exhibited strong emotion as she shared the following:

I am being pulled in so many directions and I don't know what to say. I know that for me the most important thing is my education, but my parents think that as a Latina, you should be home doing women duties. That's not what I value.

In a similar discussion, an African American male student talked about the complexity of his family situation. He explained that his grandmother was very ill and that his siblings were not very responsible or interested in helping her. However, having assumed that responsibility was taking a toll on his academic work. The student said, "I love my grandmother, but I can't let my academics slip either. I'm torn because my focus is my school work."

While there are no easy answers for the complex lives of EOF students, it is evident that the students were thinking about their decisions based on their governing values. In essence, students were more aware about their decisions, behaviors, and actions as they evolved. Also, students were checking to ensure that their decisions reflected what they espoused to be their core values.

***Freshmen seminar.*** In an effort to build on their PCI experience, students were required to take a freshmen seminar course. During the Fall 2007 semester, as the freshmen counselor, I taught the freshmen seminar course. By virtue of teaching the course, I was able to observe the freshmen for a total of 26 hours. However, for this cycle I wanted to focus on the culminating exercises that were anchored in values clarification and reflection.

Throughout the freshmen seminar many discussions centered on the concepts of core values and the daily decision making that students were encountering. In one discussion, a Latina female expressed the following sentiment,

At the time [during PCI] I was angry at the thought that upperclassmen said education or learning was their number 1 value. I thought for sure family was supposed to be number one. But after being here for two months, I see how education has to be number one. I cannot continue to go home every weekend or I will never make it here.

In a similar discussion a Black male explained his inconsistencies. He stated, “I think that education now the most important thing to me, but I just can’t get away from the drama at home. I always get sucked back into stuff going on back home.” I asked him to talk a little more about this dilemma. He continued:

It’s that everything at home is always a mess and I am the only one my grandmom calls. So I want to believe that I think education is the most important, but when I look at what I do, it is my family that always matters first. It takes away from my time here.

What is interesting about these two examples was that students were looking at their actions to understand what values were in use. In the first example, the Latina student recognized that although she believed that her family was her top value, her actions revealed to her that she really valued education more at this time in her life. Conversely, in the second example, the African American male espoused a value in education, but his actions showed that a value in family was in use.

**Top three values at the end of fall semester.** On December 3 and 4, 2007, I once again asked the freshmen to do a values clarification exercise. Unlike the summer exercises, I did not give students a list of values to choose from. Instead, in this exercise, I asked students to create a list of all the values important to them. Then, I asked them to

narrow that list to the 10 most important values. Finally, similar to the first exercise during the summer, I asked them to partner with a peer, eliminating one value at a time, until they had identified their top three values.

In sharp contrast to the summer, the top value that freshmen now espoused was a value in education. During this process in the summer, education was listed as the fifth most espoused value, not even making it to the top three values. This time, however, the freshmen had experienced a complete semester of college, and in this exercise, espoused a value in education.

I asked for someone in the group to elaborate on his or her espoused value in education. A Latino male raised his hand and said, “Before, I would just state I value this or I value that without knowing what it really meant. Now I know how much of significance it has to say, ‘I value education.’” I pushed a little further and asked him to explain to me why he values education. The student answered:

Now I really believe in valuing education, but I also have an understanding and why. Education is the key to success in the future. Without education you are considered a nobody. Because I value education, I will do the things that will help me get the results I need to be successful here.

This comment shows how the students have been able develop a working understanding of single-loop/double-loop learning. This Latino student explained that by virtue of valuing education, he expects that his actions will be influenced ultimately leading to his intended results.

The second value espoused by the freshmen during this exercise was family. Similar to the first time I conducted this exercise, the students expressed themselves very

passionately in regards to their value in family. During the exercise, it was interesting to observe students as they struggled to make decisions about which value was most important to them. In most cases, when students arrived at the value as family, it was difficult for them to eliminate it for any other value. During the discussion, one African American female contributed the following insight:

My family has been there for me through everything. Growing up in a predominately female household, we hold a strong bond from the oldest to the youngest and it can never be broken. I plan to help my family and love ones in any way possible.

In another passionate example, a Latino male said, “Nothing will ever be more important to me than family.” Finally, an African American female stated, “The one thing I value the most out of life is my family. My family is my backbone and the reason why I am here today.”

The last value espoused in this value clarification exercise was a value in money or career advancement. Consistent with the first exercise, money or career advancement emerged important and, once again, the students placed it as third in order of importance.

As an example of the espoused value of money, one Latino male stated, “We haven’t had any money in my house. I came to college so I can make money in the future.” In another instance, an African American female said, “Black women don’t always make it to the top. I value career because I want to prove to everyone that as a Black woman I can make it to the top in my career.” Lastly, an African American male expressed it this way, “Growing up poor, you know that money is important. I want to be

able to give my family everything we didn't have and never worry about money ever again."

**The student reflection of the process.** In addition to engaging students in a final values clarification process, I also requested that students write a three to five page personal reflection on their experience since entering PCI until the end of the freshmen semester. According to Osterman and Kottcamp (2004), reflection provides an opportunity to understand your thought patterns and actions.

Upon analyzing the personal reflection of my students, again, I began to see language and terminology emerge in conjunction with values. Consistently, students stated that clarifying their personal values was an important part of their experience. For example, a Latino male said, "Going through PCI helped me understand what is important for me. I have realized that education is an important value and understanding that makes life a whole lot clearer for me." An African American female stated:

If you want to see a change in your life, it all begins with you... The most important part of the journey I am talking about is finding out who I am as a person, who I desire to become, and what my true core values are.

In another example a Latina student wrote:

The most valuable piece of information that I learned from the summer was that education should be a value if you are going to succeed in college. I didn't forget about my family or my religion I just focus more on education a lot more than ever before.

In an example of perhaps one of the most improved students since the beginning of PCI, an African American male wrote:



My first few days in PCI I felt very uncomfortable. The journey in PCI was all about you [me]. I got to learn about myself. My values when I first arrived were family, religion, money, and then education. I didn't know my values would change by end of the program. The reason money was over education was because I believe if I graduated college I would be able to provide for my family financially.

In their reflections, the students also took it a step further by connecting their espoused values with their action patterns. An African American female stated, "When I started PCI my core values were not very different than what they are today. What has changed is my method of incorporating these values into my daily life." In another example, a Latino male student wrote:

After PCI, I realized that everything about changed. We were asked, 'Who are you?' I started to understand my values and actions more clearer. But when I returned to school for the Fall semester, I realized that I was returning to the same person that I use to be. Trying to be a superman for everyone else and forgetting about myself and my priorities were really not straight. I then knew that I needed to pick up my game and be who I say I am.

**Value change.** In analyzing students' espoused values from the summer and comparing them to the espoused values in December, it was clear that there had been a shift in the values that students consider important. While students espoused a value in both family and money/career in both instances, the priorities they place on their values has clearly changed.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) stated that clarifying personal values begins by gaining self-awareness. Furthermore, Kouzes and Posner note, too, that it is important for someone to “provide the mirror” (p. 84). For our students, this journey in discovering who they are as individuals required that they answer questions that most of them reported they had never been asked. The participants in this study were guided through a process that put them in touch with their guiding principles, helping them understand how those assumptions lead to their decisions and behaviors.

In the course of helping students clarify their personal values, the process also helped the participants see what the organization valued. This was accomplished by demonstrating what upper classmen espoused as their core values. I wrote an entry in my journal that stated:

While having students write and talk about their innermost core values provided a mirror, showing the pre-freshmen what upper classmen espoused as their core values provide a window that looked out to the community they were entering.

According to Rokeach (1979) value change can occur through a change in self-definition or by understanding contradictions in attitudes and beliefs. As they did this, participants in this study evolved during the course of six months. They consistently expressed changes in their values, assumptions and beliefs. For instance, an African American male said:

On July fifth, 2007 I walked up to Evergreen Hall, barely aware what I was in store for. I thought education was important to me, but I quickly found out that it was not as important as I thought it was. School was something that I did because I knew it was right and I had fairly good success in school. I was aware that

getting an education was the surest way to ensure a good life financially. My core values walking through the doors that day were basically money, family/friends, and just plain old leisure or having fun. My core values have now changed a bit and education is my number one core value. The main reason I now value education is because, How could you [I] go to school and do the work wholeheartedly, if you [I] do not value the fact that you [I am] are getting an education?

In a similar realization, a Latina female expressed:

“[Now] My first and huge value is education, [then] religion, and of course family. Family originally was my top core value, after seeing how easily it is for a family to fall apart and how much it affects my progress in life I began to see my family as emotionally draining. Education and faith in people is the only thing that has saved me from giving up. I know that receiving an education will help me lead my own life away from all the drama of home.

In essence, the students changed their self-definitions and grew through this experience.

An African American male explained, “I am not the same person that entered PCI in July.” A Latino male stated, “I think I know who I am now. I have changed the way I see the world and what is important to me.”

**Cycle 7 conclusions.** The fall semester was a very interesting time for my students. I began to see their evolution in ways that I did not expect. I wrote, in my journal, at the end of the summer program in August, “I think the students will come back and be aware of what was offered to them in the summer, but it will not mean much.” I

hypothesized that this would be the case because we offer a lot of information in PCI. Interestingly, however, the students held onto the information regarding their core values.

Throughout the various activities it was evident that the students had developed a self-awareness of their core values. Through their languaging, their reflective statements, and even at the end of their values clarification exercise, the students reverted back to discuss their core values. The progression of the students was exhilarating, and I was eager to see how their performance, if any, was influenced by having a clearer sense of their personal values.

### **Cycle 8 – Spring Semester**

Cycle 8 examined how helping students of color clarify their personal values affected the factors that I identified from the retention literature. With a consensus among the freshmen class espousing a core value in education, I was eager to learn whether students' decisions, attitudes, and interest in academic endeavors followed suit.

According to Argyris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop learning, outcomes can result in a desired outcome based on the governing value. Therefore, I elected to examine the following factors: student engagement, academic integration, involvement, and the development of student relationships with faculty (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 1991; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1993).

**Student engagement.** Student engagement can be defined as the amount of time students dedicate to purposeful educational activities leading to desired outcomes.

Furthermore, time spent is classified as time dedicated to developing relationships with faculty, studying outside the classroom, and using institutional resources (Astin, 1993; Pasacarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The level of engagement from this class was noticeably different. This was evident when I simply looked at the class broadly. During Cycle 7, the EOF office hired a new director, Margarita, for the department. I created an entry in my journal on October 16, 2007, reflecting a conversation with the new director:

Margarita stated that she was surprised, but pleased, at the level of engagement from the freshmen class. She asked me if it was normal for the freshmen to be so connected to the office and the activities available to them. I responded that this class seemed much more connected and engaged than any previous class I remembered. She noted that she hadn't seen a group, in her career, that connected as well as did this group had.

More concretely, the level of engagement could be seen in the participation of the freshmen seminar. The freshmen seminar course was scheduled on Monday and Tuesday mornings from 8:00 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. The entire PCI cohort split in half, with each half scheduled for one of the freshmen seminar days. The room was spacious and well lit. It was the same room where freshmen seminar has always been scheduled.

Compared to the previous year, attendance was significantly improved. During the freshmen seminar course for 2006, attendance ranged from as few as 15 students to as many as 45. The average attendance for the 2006 freshmen seminar was 29 students. During the freshmen seminar course in 2007, attendance ranged as few as 24 students to as many as 70 students. The average attendance for the 2007 freshmen seminar class was 38 students. This increase in attendance demonstrated a higher level of engagement from the students as well as an increased desire to fulfill their responsibility. When I asked a

Latino student why he came to every seminar class at 8:00 a.m. on a Monday morning he responded, “I realized that I was getting something every time I came.”

The theme of engagement also emerged from the informal conversations that I had with colleagues around campus. For example, an administrator who coordinated many of the leadership opportunities for our students commented that there was higher than normal interest in leadership opportunities from this group. From this interest arose a critical incident, the need to develop a process for providing sponsorship to our students. This year, we had record numbers of students soliciting funding toward participation in some of the numerous leadership opportunities. In previous years, we received a manageable number of requests. Therefore, it did not affect the departmental budget dramatically. However, with this class, the number of students requesting funding in order to attend conferences, seminars, etc., were so high that the department had to structure the process to request funding. The director created a sponsorship form to better track the number of students that we would sponsor.

In addition to the administrator who coordinates leadership opportunities, faculty commented on their favorable impression regarding the level of engagement by the freshmen class. A prominent faculty member remarked, in an informal conversation, “This year’s class just seems more connected and interested than freshmen in prior years.” In a progress report submitted at the midterm, a professor writes, “[Student] is very engaged in class discussions and comes to class prepared each and every time.”

**Academic integration.** Scholars have postulated that academic integration directly relates to students’ decision to either stay or depart (Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1987) notes that even more so than

academic difficulties, the integration of both social and academic aspects of college life influence retention.

Evidence of the freshmen class' academic integration started to emerge early. For example, this year the freshmen class participated in their structured study in higher percentages than the previous year. Overall 75% of the freshmen class completed the required eight hours of structured study weekly. Conversely, in the previous year, less than 50% of the freshmen class completed their structured study weekly (Mills, personal communication, 2008).

In another example of academic integration, for the first time, seven freshmen applied to be part of the Honors program. EOF students historically do not participate in the honors program at Rowan. When I asked one of the students why she had applied for the Honors program she replied, "I'm looking for more of a challenge than just the regular classes."

In addition to interest in the Honors program, we also had a tremendously high number of students interested in study abroad, again, showing an interest in academic exploration and integration. In previous years, I would average about 10 students on my caseload who were interested in study abroad. In examining my counseling notes, I found 46 students who have an interest in study abroad. Additionally, for each of those students I assisted them in academic plans, helping them to create a vision of how study abroad can fit into their academic journey.

Also, faculty comments on progress reports reflect the academic integration of the freshmen class. One professor comments about a Latina student, "[Student] is a participating student and contributed to the class well. She has an excellent attitude and

has met all expectations up to this date academically.” Another professor writes about an African American female, “[Student] attends class and participates. She often has great responses to add to class conversations.”

Even in cases where students were struggling, professors commented on the students’ willingness to work hard and go above and beyond. For example, a professor said about a Latino male in a programming class:

[Student] is a good student. He tries very hard and comes to my office for extra help. Unfortunately, programming is not an easy subject for him and he is struggling a bit. However, if he continues working as hard as he has been then he should pass.

In another class, a psychology professor commented about an African American female who was struggling:

[Student] is currently performing at a ‘D’ letter grade. However her performance on her second examination has significantly improved. No doubt her performance on the third exam will show continued improvement. Her out of class project has earned her full credit. She is sincere in her effort to do well in class. This is demonstrated by her willingness to work on extra credit reports....

Finally, the overall performance at the end of the fall semester indicated improvement. At the end of the fall semester, any freshmen who fell under a 2.3 grade point average is required to attend a probationary program called “supper club.” Supper club was created to provide a positive, proactive environment where students can study in community to encourage one another. For the past three years, I have coordinated the supper club initiative. Over the last three years, we averaged 53 students that were



required to attend supper club weekly as they had a fall grade point average under a 2.35. This year's freshmen class consisted of only 37 students.

**Student involvement.** According to Astin (1984), student involvement means physical and psychological energy that students expend toward something. During PCI, we hired peer staff members who were on campus to serve as role models for our students regarding campus involvement; during PCI we had stressed the importance of campus engagement.

In a recent study Walpole et al. (2008) found that first semester summer bridge program freshmen at a public university showed a low level involvement in student organizations during the fall of 2003. The study revealed that, in particular, that cohort of students did participate in residence hall programs, recreational activities, employment, or students clubs and organizations. Additionally, EOF freshmen at Rowan historically did not choose to participate in student government (Mills, personal communication, 2008).

In sharp contrast to that earlier study, the 2007 EOF freshmen showed a significantly increased level of involvement. More than half the EOF freshmen class reported in their counseling sessions that they had attended a student club or organization's meeting. When asked why they had become so involved, an African American male said, "I heard you say in the summer that being involved outside of the classroom was important."

Additionally, in a show of the highest level of involvement, four EOF freshmen decided to run for elected office in the student government freshmen elections. As part of the freshmen elections process, freshmen are required to commit themselves to the first

year leadership program. The first year leadership program requires students to actively participate in leadership development initiatives, community service projects, and attend regularly scheduled student government meetings throughout the fall semester. Upon completing the first year leadership program, freshmen are eligible to run for office. In a surprising twist, an EOF freshman student won every position in the student government freshmen elections.

**Faculty/Student relationships.** Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) found that there was a strong contribution of student-faculty relationships to the retention of students. Again, during PCI we stress the importance of student-faculty relationship. However, in my experience, this has been a hurdle that is difficult to overcome. I believe it is the students' feelings of intimidation that prevent them from reaching toward developing relationships with faculty.

Students' initiative of developing a relationship with their professors was evident early on in the fall semester. During PCI we spoke extensively about the need to develop meaningful relationships with faculty. I realized, as I spoke with students in counseling sessions that the message had come across. I entered in my journal, "It seems that the freshmen are really working to make time to meet with professors and take initiative in forming relationships." A Latina student in a counseling session said, "I've been going to my sociology professor's office hours to talk about the class notes. It has helped me understand things better."

Student-faculty relationships also emerged as I read through the comments by professors in their progress reports. Professors consistently mentioned that students were frequent visitors during office hours, often staying after class to talk. A composition

professor wrote about an African American female, “[student] continuously comes to my office for help and seems to be in a good place to do well...” Another professor commented about a Latino male, “[student] is struggling but he comes in during office hours and brings many questions. He is a pleasant young man that is a pleasure to have as a student.” Lastly, a professor says about an African American female, “She always stays after class and is willing to talk about the material. It’s a joy to have a student that shows her curiosity.”

**Cycle 8 conclusions.** In reflecting on the fall and spring semester, I was excited to see the growth in my students. In this cycle, I clearly noted that the freshmen were highly engaged, involved on campus, integrated academically, and formed relationships with faculty. These activities could lead to a greater chance of retention and, overall, a richer college experience.

This year, our success was largely based on the different approach in PCI. Unlike previous years, we did not just tell students to do what we say. Instead, we helped students gain clarity regarding personal values that informed their actions. By the end of the fall semester, their top espoused value was education. Therefore, it is logical to assume that students were engaged in activities that enhanced their academic experiences because they valued education.

In the end, the students’ actions, attitudes, and beliefs were a reflection of their values, which could lead to their desired outcomes. As staff, we worked to retain and graduate our students. This study has shown that when students of color clarify their personal values, they can help inform their attitudes and decisions toward engagement in

college. In the final analysis, the engagement on campus led to the retention and graduation of students.

## Chapter 5

### Cycle 9 – Leadership Reflection and Conclusion

This study began with a simple question: How can I help my students be more successful at Rowan University? My professional journey is a reflection of my personal experiences as a first-generation, Latino student. The many struggles I experienced as a student remain close to my heart and firmly in my mind. In this way, they now serve me in the form of passion, compassion, and empathy within my daily practice.

As I reflect on my college experience, a constant question is with me: Why was I successful, while so many of friends never attempted to enter college, and when so many failed along our journey?

As I entered my career in higher education, I wanted to be a student of higher education. I wanted to genuinely understand the complexities of the plight of students who look like me. My doctoral experience has challenged me to understand the literature on student retention in an authentic manner, so that the seminal body of research on minority student retention could frame my practice. What I did not expect was that, ultimately, the doctoral experience at Rowan University would have challenged me to also know myself.

As a practitioner in higher education, I consider myself an educator, not simply a student affairs practitioner. As my study unfolded, and as my knowledge of the concepts related to retention grew, I began to incorporate some of these dynamics in my work with students of color. Because of my new knowledge, I began infusing my work in ways that I previously would not have considered. As I began to address change by trying new and

innovative things, I soon realized that doing so would prove to be far more challenging than I had earlier anticipated.

### **Reflection on Organizational Context**

In part, many of my challenges existed because of my position, but also because of the point in life in which I entered the EOF department as the junior member. Of all the staff members at the time, I the youngest staff member, and I had the least experience in higher education. Additionally, I entered the department and immediately started my doctoral studies. I would, every now and again, hear comments that were intended to poke fun or with mock me, “Jose what theory applies to this problem...” or “What books will you pull from this time...” During one staff meeting, one of our staff members even said, “I am tired of folks who are trying to get their degrees experimenting with our populations...” These types of comments reveal the degree to which the discipline of student affairs has distanced itself from connecting scholarly research to practice.

This layer of resistance, which existed in the EOF office, serves as the backdrop for my study. As my awareness has increased, I have observed that this attitude is more pervasive in student affairs even beyond my department, even beyond my institution. In my experience, having worked at various institutions and having attended many professional association conferences, student affairs professionals operate by creating programs they believe can work, yet they rarely look to research to inform their practice.

Originally, it had not been my intention to engage in doctoral studies so early in my life. I had just completed my masters’ program in August 2005, and I wanted room to breathe. However, as soon as I was hired in EOF, my new supervisor strongly advocated the doctoral program, stressing how much he had gained from the experience. I soon

found myself entering the program as a non-matriculated student—one with a ‘wait and see’ attitude. In fact, even as I was still deciding to enter the program I also attempted to get motivation from colleagues who are also my friends, asking them to join me. One friend commented, “I am not at a point in life where I am interested in doing a doctoral program.” I urged him to think about what we could gain beyond the degree. He retorted, “Beyond the degree? I wouldn’t do it for anything else beyond getting the credential.” Sadly, even beyond the walls of my institution, I believe the credential has been the main motivation.

Bringing research into our practice was a challenge. Yet, the department was also plagued with symptoms that were characteristic of the larger Rowan culture. Rowan, a public institution, has a culture that seems more staff centered, than it is student centered. Rowan has evolved into an organization where low levels of trust are evident within departments and especially among upper administration (Senge, 1990). One of my first encounters with this dynamic occurred during my first year at the institution. Upon attempting to create a Latino professional association at the institution, I invited many of the Latino professionals to a meeting. In fact, I extended invitations to everyone I could think of who had an interest in Latino affairs, including a number of management level persons. We got together for our first meeting, but, afterwards, I received a phone call from one of the “in-unit” staff members. Although she was a friend and colleague, she sternly educated me to the fact that many of the individuals at the meeting believed that I had put them in a compromising position by having invited “managers” to the meeting. My intention was not to put anyone in a compromising position. Instead, I had simply involved everyone I could think of who might have had an interest in Latino affairs.

While it is difficult to operate in an environment that is lacking in trust, it is important to recognize that a lack of trust is a very real sensibility at Rowan. In part, this lack of trust arises because administration does not operate with enough transparency. As staff members, we are constantly reminded that we operate in shared governance, not shared decision making, a term that signifies input from the community is solicited, but decisions are made behind closed doors. While that seems to make sense, in other institutions where I have worked, the process did not seem to distance and thus alienate staff and faculty from the decision making process. Instead, my perception was that as a community, together, we were responsible for our decisions, and the decisions emerged as the community wrestled with problems in open forums and dialogue. At Rowan, the lack of trust and closed-door decision making leads to an environment where staff members are never fully invested in the community. Instead, they tend to simply comply (Senge, 1990).

The lack of trust leads to an environment where everyone, from upper-level management to in-unit staff members, is jockeying for position (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The Rowan professional environment is, perhaps, the most politically charged environment in which I have ever operated. The focus of its members has moved, predominately, from being student-centered to being staff-centered. The staff focuses on the end result of their activities, but they do not focus on the process it takes to produce those results (Senge, 1990). This, perhaps, leads the staff to focus on the end result, and, thus, their focus becomes “just getting it done.”

In Cycle 1, I provide an account of one of our more intensive discussions, centered on identifying purpose in all we do. However, as I reflected on that discussion, I



recognized elements symptomatic of the larger Rowan culture. From that discussion, I also observed a clear struggle to obtain a dominant voice in the organization. This is a direct reflection of the broader culture, where everyone is jockeying for position.

Additionally, Max argued that as an office we have provided services such as structured study halls and freshmen seminar, but that, at some point, it is the student's responsibility to show up for counseling. In doing so, his viewpoint clearly demonstrated that our staff had focused on simply providing administrative service rather than services that actually support students. Throughout the study, I was challenged with moving our focus from simply offering a service or event, to instead requiring the staff to consider all the ways in which we could attract students to take advantage of our services and also engage in our events. My motivation for doing so was grounded in my desire to help students. From my own experience, and from my newfound knowledge in the doctoral program, I recognized that it is not enough to provide mere services, rather those services must be available to students as a means of nurturing support. If we create a program or service and students do not participate, then whom have we helped?

It is difficult for me to operate in this environment. It is also difficult for me to attempt to accept it for what it appears to be. Kouzes and Posner (2002) urge leaders to challenge the process. During my entire career, I have made a point of challenging the process relating, specifically, to issues of diversity. In my journal, I reflected on a conversation with a colleague in which I explained, "It is impossible to understand the needs of EOF students, and expect that you can extend the same or similar effort as other staff members in other student affairs departments." My point is this: There is a great level of need that EOF students enter Rowan with, and, therefore, there is an

extraordinary amount of effort required to meet those needs. My desire to meet those needs comes from the myriad leadership theoretical constructs that strongly influence my practice and perspective as I work, on a daily basis, with my students.

### **Leadership Reflection**

Throughout this study, I have been highly cognizant of my leadership. As I leave the doctoral program, this critical examination of my leadership affords me an objective view, so that, finally, I view my leadership with clarity: It makes sense to me.

Indeed, I maintain that my leadership is imbued with the elements of social justice, servant, transformational, and caring styles. However, at the end of the program, I was surprised by the emerging elements of transactional leadership, in specific situations, throughout my study. Another interesting discovery I made centered on how my leadership operates. I have learned that my desire to implement and maintain social justice highly motivates me, that servant leadership is how I lead, that transforming students' lives is what happens, and that underneath all that I do, there exists an ethic of care.

Social justice leadership serves as the motivation behind my work. I still recall talking with Mr. Myers during the final weeks of my undergraduate experience, telling him, "I want to work at a college to help students who look like me, students with whom I can relate." Prior to making that statement, I was stuck in a state of confusion, very unsure of where I was heading after graduating with my Bachelor of Arts. However, just as I articulated that statement to Mr. Myers, I had a clear epiphany. My life seemed to almost instantly have direction and meaning.

Since that epiphany, my life's work has been creating greater equity in education. Through all the positions I have held at various institutions of higher education, this has been my objective. According to Larson and Murtadha (2002), sadly, many educators have accepted that the injustice in society is unalterable. As I reflect on the challenges within this study, I wonder, even in programs like EOF, if the resistance to change comes from the defeatist belief that we likely cannot overcome the many deficits our students present to us. However, my approach has been, and continues to be the firm conviction that my duty is to work to create more equitable systems of education by which I can facilitate greater access and support in higher education to all students.

My initial interest in this study was rooted in social justice. In Cycle 1, I began to question how we can accept the dismal statistics of our students' success rates. Casually, the EOF department has continued to do its work, focusing narrowly on the successful students. My question in Cycle 1, is better reflected in a journal entry where I have written:

Why hasn't the office stopped and looked at not just the successful students, but the unsuccessful students? If, consistently over 10 years, half of our students are succeeding, then that means the other half is failing. Why are we not paying attention to the half who fail?

This study has placed me in a position of critically examining this population through a more informed lens. Prior to moving into my position within EOF, most of my career had been in admissions. In that capacity I focused, mainly, on increasing access for students of color because that is where my motivation is. However, upon working with EOF, I have had the opportunity to understand the aspect of retention and its relationship

to students of color, along with all the challenges that exist for that population. Still, my motivation comes from a social justice perspective, working from the assumption that EOF students come to Rowan University disadvantaged by broken systems of education and a community that is virtually ignored. Consequently, it is clear to see that for students, their deficits are no fault of their own.

Larson and Murtadha (2002) remind us that, historically, social justice has relied on the work of committed leaders. Additionally, they call on administrators to assume the responsibility of the work of social justice. Again in Cycle 1, my frustration in our meeting was that we, as staff, accepted the fact that students entered Rowan, and that half of them, at the least, failed. Kim's comment suggesting that I would have an emotional letdown for putting so much pressure on myself serves as evidence that she was not interested in dealing with the serious issue of student dropout.

In reflecting on my experience in the doctoral program, the gravity of the issues in K-12 education became clearer to me. Being in the classroom with principals and other K-12 educators provided a rich dialogue that began to frame my inquiry. According to Kozol (2005), the problems in our educational stem from the very early years of a child's schooling. Kozol's observations indicate differences among educational models for low SES students in urban neighborhoods compared with those for middle class children in the suburbs. The differences in the educational models are all encompassing, ranging from the quality of teachers to the curriculum that students are offered (Kozol, 2005). In his study, Kozol found that in urban school districts, learning has been substituted for rote memorization. This memorization caters to high stakes testing. Also, in comparing per pupil spending in urban schools versus suburban middle class schools, Kozol found

enormous differences. For example, in Philadelphia spending per pupil amounted to \$9,299. In Lower Merion, a suburban school district of Philadelphia, spending per pupil was \$17,261. Kozol argues that money spent on pupils makes a world of a difference in education.

The students Kozol (2005) refers to in his study, the low SES students coming largely from urban school districts, are the type of students who end up in EOF at Rowan University. I have accepted the fact that the systems of education through which our EOF students hail has failed them. They come to PCI, in large part, underprepared for the rigors of a college experience.

Furman and Shields (2005) stress that educators need to act deliberately and morally. As I look at my study, morality is at the heart of my intention as an educator. I do not accept what I see as fact. I want to challenge institutions of education to create more equitable systems of education for all children. Rothstein (2000) says that social justice leaders must work to correct inequities in education such as funding, facilities, and other resources. In each position I have held, I have worked to that end. This study is a reflection of my passion to find better, more innovative ways to help my students succeed at Rowan University.

### **Leading as a Servant**

Although social justice exemplifies my motivation, I have also discovered that my leadership practice is executed as a servant leader. Again, I refer to my great mentor, Mr. Myers, he reminded me that it was his calling to be an educator. Today, I believe that my calling is the same.

Many of my freshmen students decided to enroll in a leadership theory class in the spring semester. They often returned to my office to discuss different learning experiences throughout the semester. One day, one of my students returned after a presentation she had led on servant leadership. She said, “Mr. Aviles, I used you as an example of a servant leader.” She continued, “As I read through my research [on servant leadership], I kept saying to myself, this is Mr. Aviles.” When I asked my student to tell me why she thought I was a servant leader, she responded:

Because you walk along side with us, you tell us all the time how you relate to where we are and it feels real. But you also give so much of yourself to us and you never want recognition for what you do.

As my understanding of Greenleaf’s (1991) theory of servant leadership grew, I re-centered my leadership with his concept in mind. According to Greenleaf, a better approach in leadership is serving others as a priority. In my practice, I do not view my role as solely that of the student affairs practitioner; instead, I am an educator whose main purpose is to meet the needs of students. Having once been an EOF student, I perceive a sensation that is relatively surreal: I am a product of EOF at Rowan University. I constantly tell students that I am who they are. I am just a little further down the road. I share this with them in an attempt to convey that I am not greater than they, nor am I to be viewed as superior; instead, it is my aim to create a community where, together, we can accomplish our dreams (Spears, 1997).

During Cycle 3, I captured a critical incident in my journal that reflects on one of my students who was struggling with his confidence:

Jerry came into the office today just as I was about to leave (about 7:00 p.m.). I could see that he was noticeably bothered about something. He caught me as I was closing my door and had my briefcase in hand. I asked him what was wrong. He started talking about withdrawing from his composition class because he did not feel he was able to succeed in the class. As he talked a little more, a tear rolled down his cheek. I asked him why he was so emotional. He answered saying, "I don't belong here. I am not smart enough to be in these classrooms." His emotion and lack of confidence took me back to my freshmen year and all my feelings of inadequacies. I said to him, "Jerry I remember when I was in your shoes, and how I felt the same feelings. I was the first in my family to attend college, and I also didn't know anyone who had attended college. So it was scary. For me, I found comfort in hanging on to Mr. Myers those first few weeks as I gained more confidence in myself." Jerry seemed to be comforted a little by my ability to relate. He continued, "But Mr. Aviles, everyone back home knows that I went to college. I can't fail here, but I don't think I can do it." Then I said, "Jerry, I saw you work like crazy during the summer, I would not have allowed you to enter your fall semester if I did not think that you were capable of thriving here." Jerry visibly perked up. Jerry and I continued to talk until 10:00 p.m. As we concluded our conversation, I asked if he wanted to study with me on Monday and Tuesday evenings. He seemed even more enthusiastic about that idea. It was one of those conversations that will build a bond between Jerry and me for his time here.

As I reflect on my incident with Jerry, I did not think twice about the time that he entered my office. The only thing that was important to me was that Jerry needed help.

He was visibly disturbed and was reaching out for someone to help. At that point, I wanted to help Jerry. Also, although I did most of my work at my home office, I decided to study in the library on Mondays and Tuesdays with Jerry to help encourage him to do his work. This critical incident captures the essence of servant leadership. According to Spears (1997), among some of the characteristics servant leaders have are listening, empathy, healing. In the incident with Jerry, these characteristics emerged.

In addition to these examples, the conversation in Cycle 1 also revealed my passion and commitment to serving students. As I reflected on that conversation, my frustration grew deeper and deeper as the staff continuously shifted responsibility away from us. During that conversation, the focus on the staff was to ensure that they were doing their job as it related to each person's job description. According to Greenleaf (1991), servant leaders look to serve first. Greenleaf's questions guide my practice. His questions are:

1. Are those served growing as individuals?
2. Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?
3. And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society and will they benefit, or, at least not be further deprived?

Each of Greenleaf's questions fits narrowly in the core of my work with students. I am neither concerned about my job description, nor about the amount of hours I am in my office. Instead, I am focused on whether students are growing as individuals, and whether they are becoming likely to reach back and help the next generation. I am concerned



about the question of whether their lives will be better, less deprived by virtue of the work that I have done and continue to do with them.

I responded to Greenleaf's (1991) questions as I attempted to shift the philosophy of PCI. For example, while encouraging students to clarify their personal values I was attempting to lead them toward a more purposeful experience, one that would also enhance their retention potential. The processes I implemented in PCI clearly placed students at the center of their learning, requiring them to make meaning of their lives, values, and future endeavors. My servant leadership promoted community and allowed students to dream and imagine all that is possible in their future. It was my job to help serve students, encouraging and supporting their visions, allowing them to grow into stronger, wiser, and freer individuals during their time with me. As I did this, I prepared them in ways that would allow for growth after they were beyond my daily influence.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Through this study, I have worked hard to create a greater transformational experience for my students. As I reflect on my study, it is evident that the process of the PCI experience has been and continues to be transformational for students. As I explained in Cycle 2, PCI traditionally has been an experience that has been described as an “academic boot camp.” The program was very much a top down structure that placed staff as the providers of information, and students as the information gatherers. However, beginning with Cycle 2, I wanted to infuse many more elements of transformational leadership into our program, such as reflective practice, meaning making, and putting students at the center of the learning process.

In a similar experience regarding servant leadership, one of my students came to my office after learning about transformational leadership in his leadership theory class. He asked me, “Mr. Aviles what kind of leader are you?” I answered, “I think mainly a servant leader.” He continued:

I think you are a transformational leader, because you inspire us to think about what we can be. You’re not like [the resident coordinator for PCI] that would beat it into our heads that we better do this or better do that; instead, you paint a picture of how great we can be if we just do certain things.

In Cycle 7, I had a conversation with the new director of EOF about my approach with my students. I said, “I really do not want to be that person who forces students to do what I say. I want students to buy into what I am saying by inspiring them to want to do it.” While I recognize that this approach is difficult, I am convinced of what Senge (1999) says about individuals in organizations, which is essentially, that if there is no buy-in, then there exists only compliance. When students comply, their involvement and engagement is short lived. My goal in this study was to create a model for students to be transformed.

According to Judge and Piccolo (2004) transformational leadership offers a function that goes well beyond short term goals. On the other hand, transactional leadership is the exchange of resources that gives people what they want in exchange for something the leader wants. While transformational leadership sounds idealistic, it yields the “buy-in” I was looking for in students. For me, the “buy-in” was critical. In one of my first journal entries I wrote:

One of my big questions, is why don't students take advantage of all the services that EOF provides? We have structured study, freshmen seminar, counseling sessions and even supplementary workshop on a range of topics. But [Brian] says that in his 15 years with the program, it has been consistent that by mid October – November the freshmen stop participating.

Already aware of this dynamic, I knew it was very important to cultivate within students an awareness of the importance of becoming more purposeful about their academic journey. Early in the study, I posited that through clearer values, students would have more purpose and aligned actions. In essence, my goal is to have students grasp a deeper understand of doing what is necessary to succeed academically because they have a core value in education, not because a staff member is telling them they have to do it.

Judge and Piccolo (2004) list the four dimensions of transformational leadership as charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Through the values clarification process, and upon encouraging students in reflective practice, the PCI experience was grounded in each of these dimensions. The students experienced a truly transformative process that helped them engage in a new way, richer than ever before in EOF at Rowan.

During Cycle 7, I discussed requesting that the pre-freshmen write a mission statement, along with a statement of expectations that would be included as part of their freshmen contract. The freshmen contract historically had been the staple at the end of the PCI experience. It acted as a binding agreement between our office and the student. Over the years, however, it seemed much more of a formality: The students signed the

contract, but did not pay much attention to it. Often times, by the fall semester, the students forgot about the contract they had signed at the end of their PCI experience.

Having students create a mission statement and statement of expectations was a transformative measure. The goal was to have students create their own measure in a set of expectations that we could evaluate at a later time. As the freshmen counselor, I decided the best time to revisit their mission statements and statement of expectations was in December, prior to the semester break.

The experience was truly inspiring. During their final counseling sessions with me, I pulled out their freshmen contract and showed them what they had written in August, at the end of their PCI experience. One student wrote, as a statement of expectation, “I expect to maintain a 3.5 after my first year.” As we began discussing it, she began to be emotional, stating, “When I wrote it, I really did not think I could accomplish it. But I never forgot that I wrote it.” She ended her fall semester with a 3.7 GPA. However, prior to coming to PCI, she had graduated with a 2.3 GPA from an urban high school. She was the first person in her family to attend college. In another example, a student, seemingly shocked to see his words, mused, “I did write this didn’t I? Well, during PCI you got us to believe that if we work hard, anything is possible.” This student had completed his first semester with a 3.3 and had joined two clubs and organizations. He also was the first in his family to attend college.

Upon reflection on this experience, I confirm that I am, indeed, a firm believer in transformational leadership as a method of working with low SES, first-generation students. I learned that our students are highly capable of doing great things if we give them the time and space to be creative and to engage academically. Having PCI anchored

in a transformative methodology was different, but it proved to be key in getting students' buy-in to their experience as college students.

### **Ethic of Care**

Underneath all of the elements of leadership, I have learned that I do what I do because, more than anything, I care about my students. Throughout my study, the ethic of care consistently emerged. Perhaps the ethic of care is necessary to social justice and servant leadership.

As I reflect on my journey, I realize that I care deeply about my students because, at one time, I was in their exact position. As I entered Rowan University through EOF, I did not have confidence that I was smart enough, strong enough, nor resourceful enough to succeed in college. In part, because it was such new territory to me, I just did not know what to expect. However, along my journey, it was Mr. Myers who took time to care about me. Therefore, it is in my very fiber to care about the experiences my students are having on campus. Through his wisdom, Mr. Myers shared with me important advice as I was about to enter my professional experience in higher education: "Students do not care about what you know as much as they care about whether you care."

Beck (1994) says that caring leaders embrace the notion that all students deserve the chance to live in a supportive, nurturing environment. For me this was paramount throughout my study. In attempting to create a more transformational experience for my students, I wanted to create a space where students could be supported through their own explorations.

In reflecting on my entire journey in EOF, I realize that I entered the department hoping to make a difference, assisting students while they were in college. However,

from the very beginning, I began to see how much of a job this profession is to some and how little passion some in the field possess. From the very start of this study, I brought forward the issue of our student attrition because I care. In our discussion in Cycle 1, it was easier to accept what my colleagues were arguing than it was to fight against them. In essence, the fact is that not all students will succeed in college. Yet it is difficult for me to idly accept that notion. I believe it is unethical to accept a student into the university and then not work to meet his or her needs, giving that student the best possible opportunity to graduate. Instead, if we accept a student through EOF, regardless of previous academic history or disadvantages, it is our duty to work to support that student toward graduation. As a professional in student affairs that is my passion.

A critical incident, highlighting my ethic of care, occurred during Cycle 6 of PCI, 2007. In the third week, two young men were caught with marijuana in their dorm. The handbook for PCI clearly warned, "Any alcohol or drug usage on the college campus will be immediate termination from the program and will therefore result in an automatic denial of admission to the university." The young men were caught at 11:00 p.m. in the evening. They were taken to the main office where I met with each individually, explaining the policy. One of the young men was a student I had noticed in the large group. I had thought, early on, that he had tremendous potential. He was confident, articulate, and always well prepared for large group discussions. When I realized he was one of the offending students, I was heartbroken. I could not believe he would jeopardize his education in this way. By the time I met with him, it was 2:00 a.m. The standard procedures for drug and alcohol offenses are to call parents and immediately have the student removed. I proceeded to call his parents, explaining to his mother the offense and

the need to have the student picked up immediately. The mother begged me to reconsider the consequences and expressed that this was the only opportunity her son had to go to college. I explained that there was no gray area in the policy, and that the decision was final as per the director. After talking to the mother, the young man and I talked for another two hours before his mother arrived. During our conversation, the young man was very apologetic for his actions. He understood that he could not possibly remain in the program. I was shocked at one point when the young man said, “Mr. Aviles, I never met anyone who cares about students the way you do. I can see that you are disappointed, but this isn’t your fault. This was all on me.” Later that morning I entered the following sentiment in my journal:

The decision to send [student] home was one of the toughest decisions I have had to make. It was a heart wrenching night. I have not been able to get over the events of yesterday evening. [Student] made one of the most irresponsible decisions to have drugs in room, of all places. He knew what was at stake, but totally disregarded the program and his educational opportunities. It hurt to send him home, but I hope that it is a lesson he will never forget.

This incident is illustrative of the emotional struggles that I have involving students. In this case, the young men were completely in the wrong. However, I realized the opportunity that they were throwing away by their actions. What hurt most was that both young men had great potential. As I noted, one of the young men had been a stand out in the PCI class. My caring nature did not allow this to be a black and white issue. Although I recognized that the students were wrong, it hurt me to send them home regardless.

## **Conclusions and Implications of the Study**

This change project started with the notion that I wanted to help retain more of our African American and Latino students at Rowan University. I created three research questions that helped guide my study. The questions were:

1. What values do freshmen of color at Rowan University espouse?
2. How does the clarification of student values affect selected factors of retention of students of color?
3. How did my leadership theory contribute to the creation of a value clarification model at Rowan University's Educational Opportunity Program?

**Research question 1.** *What values do freshmen of color at Rowan University espouse?* During Cycle 6 of PCI 2007, I was able to answer what values freshmen of color at Rowan University espouse. The top three values espoused by freshmen were as follows: family, religion/spirituality, and money/career. I implemented the first part of the values clarification curriculum after only four days after students had arrived on campus. Doing so early allowed me to better ascertain their values.

As time progressed, it became evident that their values changed. By the end of the fall semester the values freshmen espoused were as follow: education, family, and money/career. The change in values was a result of being exposed to new information and a new environment. After placing students in a position of conflict and contemplation, they began to see which values were important in a college environment. Through this process, students began to re-prioritize, even adopting new values, leading them a greater level of success at Rowan.



This study was important because it provided evidence that pre-freshmen entering college through a summer bridge program had a clear set of values. According to Argyris (1990), values inform actions, which lead to outcomes. Argyris indicates that instead of looking at actions or strategies that lead to unintended outcomes, we should, instead, consider our values. The clearer you are about your values, the more aligned and intended your outcomes will be.

**Research question 2.** *How does the clarification of student values affect selected factors of retention of students of color?* Early in this study I hypothesized that if students of color were clearer about their personal values, they were more likely to engage and connect with the institution, which would ultimately contribute positively to their retention at Rowan University. During Cycle 8, I selected a set of factors from the literature regarding the retention of students because I wanted to see if the values clarification process influenced those factors.

Overall, the values clarification process in PCI 2007 produced a very different feel to the incoming class of students. Many staff and faculty commented about the sense they got from the class, and, in many cases, the comments reflected on the level of engagement. In a recent conversation, one of the coordinators of the male mentoring program at Rowan University commented that this year the male freshmen seemed to be much stronger academically. He did not believe that there were an abundance of students at the lower end of the spectrum who needed intense support as was the case in years past. Moreover, data support his observation. For example, we had fewer numbers of students requiring the probationary support of “supper club.”

In addition to increased positive performance, as reported in Cycle 8, EOF students won the entire student government freshmen elections. Brian, the immediate past director of EOF, said that he could not recall that this had ever happened. In part, this is because, historically, it is difficult to find enough students who are interested in becoming involved at a high level like student government. Indeed, it was a remarkable turn of events to have so many EOF students at the freshmen executive board of student government.

As I reported in Cycle 8, the students did well in engagement, involvement, academic integration, and in developing relationships with faculty. I attribute this positive outcome to the fact that throughout the fall semester, the number one espoused value by the freshmen students was education. According to Argyris' (1990) single-loop/double-loop model, students' values inform their actions, which, in the end, lead to the intended outcomes.

This study was an interesting attempt to find a connection between values clarification and the affect it can have on retention the of students of color. Although further work needs to be done to better understand the role of values in the retention of students, I found that the students in this study were more consistent about their decisions toward engagement activities than any other class I had worked with. Further studies could help better understand the influence of values clarification, thus continuing to contribute to the scholarly body of knowledge that exists as we learn more about our practice, students, and ourselves.

**Research question 3.** *How did my leadership theory contribute to the creation of a values clarification model at Rowan University's Educational Opportunity Program?*

Overall, this study helped me learn about amount about who I am as a leader. I am a deeply passionate educator, committed to working with students from underrepresented backgrounds. My leadership requires that I challenge the current establishment in education toward the purpose of broadening access and support to all students.

Yet I also realize that helping students from underrepresented backgrounds, many of which are first-generation, requires an inordinate amount of work. Throughout my career, because I aspired to help students from underrepresented backgrounds, I had to help them undergo a transformational process in order to help them successful in college. This study demonstrated that the transformational process begins from the inside out. In helping students clarify their personal values, we were successful in helping them engage in the college environment.

While the challenge of attempting to change a long-standing program such as PCI was enormous, I remained steadfast in my commitment that as a staff we could do better for our students. My commitment came from the fact that only half of our class had been successful. My leadership with this issue indicated that regardless of the resistance, I was going to help change PCI to give students a better opportunity to thrive in college.

My leadership, grounded in social justice, motivated me to take on this challenge. Throughout the study, as I have always done, I strove to serve my students as I assisted them toward their eventual success. Throughout the process of PCI and myriad changes implemented, we unfailingly placed students at the center of the learning process as they underwent their transformational experience.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, my study was conceived from the memories of my experiences as an undergraduate. My personal memories of hardship and struggles led me to care deeply about my students and their lived college experiences. Together, the elements of my leadership influenced this study, which led to the successes therein. Perhaps the findings of this study might serve as a platform to engage future research on the values students of color have as they enter college, and in that way, positively influence students not only at Rowan University, but also in other educational settings K-20.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

Follow-Up to observations of Freshmen Seminar  
Fall 2006

1. Tell me your name, year, gender and ethnicity.
2. This interview will look at your Pre-College Summer Institute Experience and I want to focus in particular on two main parts of that experience:
  - a. Your introduction to the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
  - b. Leadership forum and the discussion in particular about values.
3. What do you think about the summer read, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People?
4. What do you think about the discussion on student values, actions, and outcomes?
5. What are your top three values?
6. How do you value education?
7. How do your actions reflect your value of education ?
8. What do you think your outcomes will be at the end of this semester?
9. How do you think the Freshmen Seminar can build on your PCI experience?

## **Appendix B**

### **Values Clarification Exercise 1**

#### **LEADERSHIP FORUM PCI 2K7**

**Assignment:** Carefully consider each question and give answers with depth. Use Microsoft Word to type your answers.

#### Values Clarification Exercise

1. What is the ultimate objective of being a student at Rowan University?
2. Why is the objective important?
3. Who benefits if the objectives are attained?
4. How is the objective achieved?
5. What values do or should students of Rowan University integrate into their academic journey?

## Appendix C

### Values Clarification Exercise 2

#### STEP 1:

Values are principles that are tremendously important to us. Your values are the underlying principles that guide your actions, decisions and behaviors. It is absolutely essential that you be clear and mindful of the values that guide your actions. This exercise will help in clarifying your personal values.

#### **IDENTIFY YOUR VALUES**

ACCOUNTABILITY

HONESTY

ACHIEVEMENT

LEARNING

CAREER

PRODUCTIVITY

CARING

QUALITY

CAUTION

RESPECT

CHALLENGE

SUCCESS

COMPETITION

RESPONSIBILITY

COOPERATION

SERVICE TO OTHERS

CREAVITY

TASK FOCUS

CURIOSITY

WINNING

DETERMINATION

EDUCATION

DIVERSITY

FAIRNESS

RELIGION / SPIRITUALITY

FAMILY

MONEY

GROWTH

RELATIONSHIPS (WITH OTHERS)

INTEGRITY

INDIVIDUALISMS

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INVOLVEMENT

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STEP 2:

To help you understand your values more clearly, list the seven values you have selected below.

TOP 7 VALUES

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STEP 3:

Pair up with a partner and each take a turn eliminating one value at a time from the least important to the most important value on your list. Note which order the values were eliminated

Eliminated Values:

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## Appendix D

### Values Clarification Exercise 3

List the top ten Values that matter most to you:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

Prioritize your Values in order of elimination. The first one eliminated (least important) to the last (most important to you).

10. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
1. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E**

### **Homework Assignment**

#### **Freshmen Seminar Homework Assignment**

##### Personal Reflection

You have now been here since July 5, 2007. Reflect on your journey considering:

1. Who you were when you arrived to Evergreen hall on July 5<sup>th</sup> (discuss what you think your core values were then).
2. What are the most important lessons you have learned through this experience thus far?
3. Who have you become? Think about your strengths and what you believe are your core values today.
4. What are areas do you still need to work on to be a better student?

Write a 3-5 page personal reflection. Use questions 1-4 as a guide but feel free to reflect deeper and include more. Due December 11<sup>th</sup>.

# Appendix F

## Leadership Model

### PCI 2k7 Leadership Model

#### Goal

The highest level of connection between individuals and organizations happens when there is clarity of both organizational and personal values (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). The goal of the leadership forum will be to provide students with an inductive process to assist in the clarification of personal values. Through this process students will gain a high level of self-awareness about their own values and paradigms. Value changes and changes in attitudes and behaviors can come about through (1) changes in self conceptions or definitions of self (2) increases in self awareness about incongruities or contradictions between espoused values and related attitudes and beliefs (Rokeach, 1975).

#### Framework

Date	LEADERSHIP FORUM	Date	7 HABITS	Weekly Learning Outcome	Small Group	Public Speaking	DATE	Sunday Excursion
July 8	Examining Your Values – A Values Clarification Journey	July 10	Creating Successful Paradigms & Being Proactive	Begin to Develop an understanding of the students' personal paradigms and gain clarity of their personal values.			July 8	Public Safety
July 15	How Do you get to where you are going? - Understanding Values, Actions and Outcomes	July 17	Habit 2: Begin With The End In Mind Habit 3: Put First Things First	Students will understand how their espoused values will lead their actions and impact their outcomes. Students can use Habit 2 & Habit 3 to conceptualize their desired outcomes and better prioritize their values.	Discussion Re: writing of personal mission statements	Presentation of personal mission statements	July 15	<<Speaker>>
July 22	Who are you? What is Rowan? A self awareness exercise (1 <sup>st</sup> Draft of personal mission statements due)	July 24	Habit 4: Think Win-Win Habit 6: Seek First to Understand, Then To Be Understood	Students will see what current upperclass students list as core values at Rowan. This exercise will help students see the similarities or incongruities that exist		Presentation of personal mission statements	July 22	Study Abroad

				between them and the community they are entering. Habits 4 & 6 will give students the tools to better understand and accept the information presented.				
July 29	This is Who I am- Creating Your Principle Centered Leadership Model (2 <sup>nd</sup> draft of Personal Mission Statements Due & Statement of Personal Expectations)	July 31	Habit 7: Sharpen The Saw	Students will be guided through and interactive process to develop a personal leadership model. The center of this model will be the student's core values. Habit 7 will bring together the total personal mastery of prior habits. Students will understand the concepts of synergy and will assist in connecting their self awareness to their self conception.			July 29	<<Speaker>>
August 5	Writing of the Freshmen Agreement	August 7		In this exercise students will begin to write their individual Freshmen Agreement. The Freshmen agreement will consist of: Personal Mission Statement, Personal Expectations, and EOF/MAP Expectations			August 5	AESNJ