Final Reflection

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MLGCE Capstone Project

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REFLECT: ***Recall, ponder, and articulate***

At the beginning of this project, I wanted to address several different topics where I could provide information for many departments to support them in their role with student retention. I had a big dream. I planned to interview current students, alumni, staff, and faculty. I originally wanted to discover why students did not return and finish their degrees. As I progressed through this project, I realized I could only handle a little sliver of what I intended. My research direction changed during the EL 650 Digital Leadership in Education course. I was developing something outside of our SIS to help simplify and streamline preregistration for students. I eventually realized that this would create extra work for the Registrar's Office that would be difficult to maintain. It would be wiser to work within our system, and it would be better to spend my time teaching faculty and students how to use Populi.

I decided to focus on preregistration, working within the system, and how program directors could use it to build relationships. The three student retention models I looked at all saw the importance of students integrating into the college's academic and social systems (Aljohani, 2016; Bean, 1981; Cabrera et al., 1993; Manyanga et al., 2017). I combined academic and social integration with the developmental model of academic advising (Karp et al., 2020; Pardy, 2016; Zarges et al., 2018). I could streamline and simplify preregistration while helping program advisors build relationships with their students.

I did not fully understand the literature and research when I first started my literature review. The literature gave me ideas of things to try, but I did not necessarily see the themes emerge. Only when I went through Cycles 1 and 2 and returned to the literature review did I understand better what I was trying to do. I understood the literature better once I worked

through the two cycles. I feel like I did things backwards; I did my cycles, and then I understood the literature, but maybe that is what I needed to do to learn.

INQUIRE: ***Seek information and provide ideas through questioning***

What could academic advising look like in my setting if the advisors had more training? What are the areas where they feel they need training? What areas do they feel strong and could help other advisors? How could we develop a more robust system of advising? What other departments on campus could contribute something to the advisors to make the advising role easier?

SUGGEST: *Introduce ideas for improvement in the current project*

The qualitative method of research is time-consuming. I had to wait a year between cycles since preregistration only happens once yearly. If I could do this project again, I would use my time between the cycles to better prepare for the second cycle. If I had known then what I know now, I would have been better prepared for Cycle 1! Getting students to participate in Cycle 1 was difficult. I knew I had to do something different in Cycle 2 to get students to participate, so I offered a little gift to them if they participated. The gift worked since I went from eight participants in Cycle 1 to 21 participants in Cycle 2. If I had more time, I would have met with students personally to get their feedback. I did not always understand the answers they gave on their survey, and I could not clarify their responses since the surveys were anonymous.

Also, if I could do this project again, I would better prepare for the debriefing meeting after the preregistration workshop. I talked too much in the debriefing meeting, trying to explain things, and I should have done more listening. I compensated for my lack of preparation by having the program directors complete a survey. This survey allowed me to gather more information, and I was able to include those who were not at the debriefing meeting.

ELEVATE: ***Raise to a higher degree or purpose in future iterations/opportunities***

If I were to do another action research project, I feel I would be much better prepared for it. I understand how to use the literature better, and I am more cognizant of how to run a debriefing meeting and write survey questions. In addition, I would incorporate personal interviews with participants.

I could research other topics where the Registrar's Office could be involved. In the future, I see myself tackling topics like course withdrawals, high-impact practices, and student success. This capstone project has given me the tools to understand how to approach these other areas. I may not do a formal action research project again, but my current tools will equip me to proceed informally with a similar project.

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