

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A TARGETED COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN
TO IMPROVE STUDENT PERSISTENCE**

Nancy M. Gimbel

Lilly M. Massa-McKinley

Capstone Project

Submitted to the Faculty of

Peabody College of Vanderbilt University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Higher Education Leadership and Policy

May 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
Project Questions	10
Hypotheses	11
Conceptual Framework	12
<i>Figure 1: Student Persistence in Residential Colleges</i>	12
Methodology for Project Question One and Two: A Randomized Field Study	16
<i>Figure 2: Email Intervention Strategy</i>	18
Data Collection for Project Questions One and Two	20
Data Analysis Design for Project Questions One and Two	22
Findings to Address Project Questions One and Two	25
<i>Figure 3: T-Test Comparisons for Greek/Athletes and Non-Greek/Non-Athletes on Survey One Measures</i>	27
<i>Figure 4: T-Test Comparisons between Treatment Group and Control Group</i>	28
<i>Figure 5: T-Test Comparisons for Treatment versus Greek/Athletes</i>	29
<i>Figure 6: Percentage of Students Who Plan to Return for Sophomore Year</i>	30
Addressing Project Question Three	31
Limitations	33
Project Conclusions	35
Discussion	36
Recommendations	41
Concluding Thoughts	46
References	48

Tables and Appendices	50
Table 1: Established Scales for Surveys Measuring Social Integration and the Antecedents of Social Integration	50
Table 2: T-test Comparing Greek/Athlete Group versus Non-Greek/non-athlete Group	53
Table 3: T-Tests Comparing Treatment Group versus Greek/Athlete Group	54
Table 4: T-Tests Comparing Treatment Group versus Control Group	55
Table 5: Equivalency of Non-Greek, Non-Athlete Students	56
Table 6: Survey 1 – Goodness of Fit	57
Table 7: Survey 2 – Goodness of Fit	58
Table 8: Survey 3 – Goodness of Fit	59
Table 9: Thematic Responses to Qualitative Interviews	60
Appendix A: Survey 1	61
Appendix B: Survey 2	63
Appendix C: Survey 3	66
Appendix D: Qualitative Interview Protocol	68
Appendix E: Intervention Timeline	70
Appendix F: Targeted Email to Parents: Subject – Parents Who Attended Family Weekend	71
Appendix G: Targeted Email to Parents: Subject – Parents Who Did Not Attend Family Weekend	72
Appendix H: Email to All Students: Subject – Student Involvement	73
Appendix I: Email to All Students: Subject – Resident Life	74
Appendix J: Targeted Email to Resident Advisors: Subject – Check in with High Risk Students	75
Appendix K: Targeted Email: Subject – Multicultural Affairs	76
Appendix L: Targeted Email: Subject – Student Government	77
Appendix M: Targeted Email: Subject – Music	78
Appendix N: Targeted Email: Subject – Community Service	79
Appendix O: Targeted Email: Subject – Religious Life	81
Appendix P: Targeted Email: Subject – Performing Arts	82
Appendix Q: Targeted Email: Subject – Publications/Media	83
Appendix R: Targeted Email: Subject – Study Abroad	84
Appendix S: Targeted Email: Subject – Leadership Development	85
Appendix T: Targeted Email: Subject – Recreational Services	86
Appendix U: Email to All Students: Subject – Your Future at Meeds	87
Appendix V: Targeted Email to Students < 2.99 GPA: Subject – You Can Do It!	88
Appendix W: Targeted Email to Students > 3.0 GPA: Subject – Great Job!	89
Appendix X: Targeted Email: Subject – Student Involvement with Interests	90
Appendix Y: Targeted Email: Subject – Student Involvement Email for Students Who Did Not Submit List of Interests	92
Appendix Z: Strategies for Effective Email Communication	93

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last several years, Meeds College, located in the southeastern United States, has become increasingly concerned about the graduation rates of students who are not in Greek organizations. Compared to Greeks, non-Greeks have much lower graduation rates. In 2008 a Vanderbilt Capstone Project Team (Wiley, Gideon, & Hayse, 2009) reviewed graduation data for the first-year cohorts that started at Meeds between 1999 and 2004. They found that approximately 90% of students who joined fraternities or sororities graduated from the institution, whereas approximately 63% of the non-Greeks graduated from Meeds.

In fall 2011 Meeds College invited two Vanderbilt doctoral students to design and implement an intervention to attempt to increase persistence of first-year non-Greek/non-Athlete students. Non-athletes were included in the intervention because athletes are considered members of high-commitment groups, requiring a time commitment similar to Greek organizations. The intense psychosocial engagement athletes experience at Meeds increases their commitment to the institution and their persistence rates. Due to this, non-Greek students who are also non-athlete were included in the group of students targeted with the intervention.

To determine if the intervention was successful, an experimental design was used and first-year non-Greek/non-athlete students were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. This study specifically focused on understanding the effects of the intervention on the treatment group compared to the control group. The first two project questions focused on exploring the antecedents to social integration, social integration, and subsequent institutional commitment. These variables were devised from Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) revised theory of student departure at residential colleges. The third project question focused on understanding student perceptions of effective email communication strategies.

The guiding questions Meeds sought to answer through this capstone project included:

1. To what extent does the intervention influence social integration and four antecedents of social integration of a treatment group comprised of non-Greek, non-athlete students compared to a control group of non-Greek, non-athlete students? This question was explored through five sub-questions, including:
 - a. To what extent does the intervention influence social integration?
 - b. To what extent does the intervention influence proactive social adjustment?
 - c. To what extent does the intervention influence psychosocial engagement?
 - d. To what extent does the intervention influence perceived commitment of the institution to the welfare of students?
 - e. To what extent does the intervention influence perceived institutional integrity?
2. To what extent does the intervention influence subsequent commitment to the institution, as indicated by a student's reported intent to re-enroll at Meeds College in the fall of 2012?
3. What are student perceptions of effective email communication strategies?

The intervention focused on delivering a targeted email campaign to the treatment group through the campus' Customer Relationship Management database. Students in the treatment group received between six and 17 emails from Meeds faculty, staff and students, depending on their interests. The goal of the email campaign was to positively impact the variables listed above. All

first-year students received one pre-intervention survey to gauge baseline information, one survey during the intervention, and one survey at the end of the intervention to measure differences in the variables between treatment and control.

After the data were analyzed, several interesting findings emerged. First, the intervention had minimal impact on the treatment group. There is no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups relating to social integration as measured by peer group interactions, psychosocial engagement, perceived commitment of the institution to student welfare, or perceived institutional integrity. On surveys two and three there is no statistically significant difference between treatment and control in their subsequent commitment to the institution (whether they plan to re-enroll in sophomore year). There is only one area in which there is a statistically significant finding. This is in the area of proactive social adjustment; the treatment group has higher levels than the control group.

During interviews, 12 treatment students shared their perceptions of effective email communication strategies. This resulted in the formulation of a list of strategies for effective email communication to undergraduate Meeds students. A list of these strategies is included in the Appendix.

Upon acknowledgement that the intervention executed in this project had little effect on the treatment group, two important considerations rise to the surface. First, treatment and control students have generally positive responses to all of the variables investigated in this project so even though there are statistically significant findings, some of them might not have practical significance. Beginning with high ratings on several antecedents to social integration allows for the possibility of ceiling effects and increased difficulty in influencing variables in any statistically or practically significant way.

When analysis moves beyond just treatment and control groups to include the analysis of all survey data, from both Greek/athlete and non-Greeks/non-athletes, it is revealed that non-

Greek/non-Athletes enter Meeds with lower levels of initial institutional commitment and lower levels of their perception of communal potential, although these are still overall positive perceptions. Additionally, both Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes similarly strongly agreed during their first week on campus that it was likely that they would re-enroll at Meeds for sophomore year. By the end of the intervention, treatment students are less likely than Greek/athletes to report that they will re-enroll in sophomore year. This finding is statistically significant.

As a result of these findings, we make several recommendations:

1. Create a strategy for the more extensive use of the Customer Relationship Management software and more robust collection of data within the CRM.
2. Develop a pre-first-year communication and outreach strategy to all new students to appropriately socialize them to campus expectations and opportunities.
3. Continue to administer surveys during the first and second semesters to assess students' social integration, the antecedents of their social integration and their intent to persist to identify worrisome trends or at-risk students.
4. Increase academic department involvement in the first-year experience.
5. Train student leaders, faculty and staff on the types of email format students prefer.
6. Create a persistence officer position with authority to mandate participation of critical offices in persistence initiatives.
7. Increase the number of high-commitment organizations and programs available to first-year students and ensure support for these opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

About Meeds College

Meeds College is a small, private, residential not-for-profit liberal arts college located in the southeastern United States. The institution enrolls approximately 1800 undergraduate students and 10 graduate students.

Undergraduate students are predominantly traditional-age students and drawn from a national market with 73% of undergraduates from outside the state. Admission is selective; only 50% of applicants are admitted and 21% enroll (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). Tuition, fees, room, board, books, transportation and other expenses total approximately \$49,000 per year (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). Approximately 57% of the 2011 first-year class had financial need.

The institution crafted financial aid packages for every student with financial need and met 94% of the need of those students (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). For all students with financial need, the average financial award was \$34,464 (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). Meeds also has a generous merit-based scholarship program. Approximately 38% of first-year students without financial need received non-need-based scholarships and grants, with the average award being \$15,300 (Meeds College Information Services, 2011).

The Meeds College recruiting and financial aid strategy resulted in a 2011 first-year class of 554 academically strong students with an average high school GPA of 3.83 (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). Seventy-three percent of the first-year class scored above 600 on both the math and critical reading sections of the SAT and half of the students were in the top 10% of their high school class (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). The gender and ethnic composition of the first-year class is almost identical to the full student body at 60% female, 75% white, 7% Asian, 6% African-American, 2% Hispanic, 3% of two or more

racess, 2% international students and 4% not reporting ethnicity.

Students at Meeds can choose among 35 majors with the most popular being biology, business, economics, English, history, political science and psychology (Meeds College, 2011a). Small classes and high levels of faculty-student engagement make Meeds a challenging academic experience for students with many leveraging this rigorous experience to gain admission to graduate school immediately after graduation.

Meeds College is an overwhelmingly residential campus with 97% of first-year students living on campus and 69% of all students living in residential facilities owned by Meeds College (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). There are more than 100 student academic, social, athletic, governance, religious, media, performance, cultural, political and honor organizations on campus (Meeds College, 2011b).

The campus has an active and visible Greek community as 41% of men and 54% of women join Greek organizations. Greek recruitment occurs during the first week of class during the fall semester, and approximately 60% of first-year women and 30% of first-year men immediately divide across the 10 Interfraternity Council and Panhellenic Greek organizations (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). National Pan-Hellenic Council, which encompasses the African-American sororities and fraternities, holds new member recruitment in the spring, but as of fall 2011, fewer than 15 students are involved in those organizations. Both Greek and non-Greek students have access to all other student organizations, residence hall programming, intramural sports, and campus-wide activities.

Meeds College tracks their persistence rates carefully as it is one area of concern for the institution. The president and provost would like to see an increase in the six-year graduation rate,

which has fluctuated between 73% and 82% since the 2000 cohort, with the most recent cohort (2005) reporting a 76% six-year graduation rate (Meeds College Information Services, 2011). While there are many strategies to increase persistence, Meeds is particularly interested in focusing on increasing the persistence rate of its population of students who are non-Greek and non-athlete. More than 90% of students who join a fraternity or sorority graduate from the institution, whereas approximately 60% of non-Greek students graduate from Meeds (Wiley, Gideon and Hayse, 2009). This statistic is the primary driver of Meeds' request for a third Vanderbilt Ed.D. Capstone project, which will gauge the effectiveness of an intervention designed to increase persistence of non-Greek, non-athlete first-year students.

About Previous Vanderbilt Capstone Projects at Meeds College

In both 2008 and 2009 Meeds College invited teams of Vanderbilt Peabody College Ed.D. students to conduct research about student life on the Meeds campus. The findings and recommendations of both of those projects served as the impetus for the project described in this paper.

The First Vanderbilt Capstone Project

The first project, conducted by Wiley, Gideon, and Hayse (2009), spanned the 2008-2009 academic year at Meeds College. It focused on understanding student, staff, and faculty perceptions of fraternity and sorority life on campus, student engagement behaviors, and college outcomes of Greek students. While the study produced several interesting findings, the most concerning was the significant difference in graduation rates of Greeks and non-Greeks. For the 2004 first-year cohort (the group that graduated in 2008), 93% of students who joined Greek organizations graduated, while just 56% of non-Greek students graduated even though non-Greeks were more academically prepared when they entered Meeds. Additionally, this was not a one-time phenomenon; it was one that had

existed for at least five years, the timeframe the researchers studied. Wiley, Gideon, and Hayse (2009) offered several recommendations to Meeds College to explore this issue further, including a qualitative investigation of Greek life on campus and exploration into social integration opportunities for non-Greek students.

The Second Vanderbilt Capstone Project

The Wiley, Gideon and Hayes (2009) recommendations spurred Meeds College to invite a second team of Ed.D. students to campus for the 2009-2010 academic year. This team, Adams, Ashford, and Taylor (2010), conducted a qualitative study to explore students in high-commitment groups, which they defined as Greeks and student-athletes due to the significant effort and time required to serve as an active member in these organizations. They labeled this group "joiners" and students outside these two groups as "non-joiners." They also explored the experiences of a third group, "aspiring non-joiners," a small group of students who sought membership in one of the high-commitment organizations but were not offered membership. The researchers' intent was to understand how the experiences of these groups differed depending on their status as joiners, non-joiners and aspiring non-joiners and explore their levels of social integration.

Social integration is defined by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) as "primarily a function of the quality of peer-group interactions and the quality of student interactions with faculty" (p. 62). They note that student interactions with faculty also influence the academic integration of students. According to Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004), once a student arrives on campus, there are five influencers of a student's social integration. A student's social integration can be influenced by 1) the institution's commitment to the welfare of its students, 2) the institution's integrity in dealing with student issues and concerns, 3) the student's level of psychosocial engagement is the social life on campus, 4) the student's proactive social adjustment behaviors, and 5) the student's perception of the potential to find a community

of students like him or her on campus (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). These five constructs will be defined more fully in a subsequent section.

The Adams, Ashford, and Taylor (2010) study revealed that aspiring non-joiners were less socially integrated than joiners and non-joiners but that there were only subtle differences in the levels of social integration of joiners and non-joiners. The study also revealed that Greek life was an influential part of campus, permeating all facets of student life. While non-Greeks could find an active social life outside the Greek system, students perceived that “Greek life culture dominated the social scene, and those who were unaffiliated were at a social disadvantage” (Adams, Ashford, & Taylor, 2010, p. 49). The researchers recommended a variety of strategies to increase the social integration of non-Greeks and decrease the perception that Greek life dominated the campus. They also suggested that Meeds College carefully track and seek ways to engage aspiring non-joiners into campus life.

About this Study: The Third Vanderbilt Capstone Project

The results of the second capstone project encouraged Meeds College to seek a third team of Ed.D. students. Concerned with the different graduation rates of Greeks and non-Greeks and understanding that non-joiners and aspiring non-joiners might be slightly less socially integrated into campus life than Greeks and student-athletes, Meeds asked us (the third team of Ed.D. students) to create and implement an intervention aimed at increasing non-Greek/non-athletes’ persistence. Meeds College asked us to design the intervention, administer it to a randomly assigned treatment group comprised of non-Greek/non-athletes, and determine if the treatment group demonstrated differences in variables that influence persistence compared to a control group of non-Greek/non-athlete students. We needed to use a proxy for persistence since the project ended before fall 2012, when actual persistence results could be determined. All variables will be described in a

following section. The findings pertaining to the effectiveness of the intervention are the focus of this paper.

Exploratory Visit to Meeds College

We visited Meeds College in July 2011 for informal meetings with students, faculty, and staff to understand more about the culture and history of Meeds, Greek life at the institution, athletic teams at the institution and students’ perceptions of involvement opportunities on campus. Students, faculty and staff shared their perceptions that Greek students are heavily involved in student organizations and leadership positions across campus and are encouraged by their fraternities and sororities to get involved in other high-visibility, high-commitment organizations.

It was their perception that Greeks are overrepresented in student government, the peer advisor program, the Diplomat tour guide program, resident advisor positions, intramurals, student organization leadership, the Scholars program, and many other organizations. Additionally, a perception exists that opportunities for non-Greek students to be involved and assume leadership roles is limited due to the overrepresentation of Greek students. Lastly, there was a perception that Greek organizations have created a better communication system than is available to non-Greeks, and that due to this communication system (mainly email, word-of-mouth and weekly chapter meetings) Greeks have a better understanding of the organizations and leadership opportunities available on campus.

Faculty, students and staff also reported that student-athletes are part of a tight-knit community due to their affiliation with their team and coach. The intense psychosocial engagement athletes experience at Meeds increases their commitment to the institution and their persistence rates. Being a member of an athletic team requires a time commitment similar to Greek organizations and helps student-athletes develop strong friendships and commitment to the institution. Since student-athletes are

considered members of high-commitment groups, non-Greek students who are also non-athlete were included in the group of students targeted with the intervention.

During the first exploratory visit, Meeds College administrators expressed their concerns about the possible lack of a robust communication system that could funnel campus involvement and leadership opportunities to non-Greek and non-athlete students. Administrators shared that they believed increasing student involvement in campus life was one effective strategy for increasing persistence and asked us to design an intervention that would incorporate this theory and other persistence theory from the literature. They also asked us to use the College's newly acquired Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to deliver the intervention. A CRM system is software that can be used to send strategically timed and tailored email or text messages to a specific population of students. Meeds wanted to determine if sending personalized communication to non-Greek/non-athlete students could affect the variables that influenced persistence and ultimately lead to improved graduation rates, the College's ultimate goal. Meeds administrators understood that our project would end before actual persistence and graduation rates are known, but wanted us to design and deliver the intervention and determine if any differences in treatment and control groups emerged after just a few months of the intervention.

It was clear from our conversations with Meeds administrators that they understood that addressing their persistence issues was a long-term and complex undertaking. This understanding is supported by Braxton and Mundy (2001-2002) who wrote that college student departure is an "ill-structured problem," due to the difficulty in identifying the exact reasons why students depart and the numerous strategies that may be needed to increase persistence. There are numerous economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological reasons for student departure (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). There are also many strategies proposed to increase persistence. It is

not surprising that Meeds wanted to focus on increasing student involvement in campus life as a way to increase persistence among non-Greek/non-athlete students. According to Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) *Understanding and Reducing College Student Departure*, increasing students' engagement with peers and with student organizations (also called psychosocial engagement) can influence a student's social integration, which can lead to their increased institutional commitment and persistence. However, as will be described in this paper, increasing psychosocial engagement would be just one focus of the intervention. A student's successful social integration into a residential college also stems from the student's proactive social adjustment and the student's positive perception of the institution's integrity, communal potential, and commitment of the institution to the welfare of students (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) revised theory of student departure at residential colleges served as the conceptual framework upon which the intervention for this project was built. This conceptual framework will be described more fully in a following section.

The Importance of this Project to Meeds College

Meeds is interested in the outcome of this project for several reasons. First, departure is a troublesome issue for Meeds. It affects student welfare and satisfaction, Meeds' reputation with their peers and with prospective students, their rankings and their revenue. Addressing the departure issue is a priority at the highest levels, including the President's office and Provost's office. As a result of this project, we will provide data and findings related to the effectiveness of an intervention so the institution can determine if they would like to continue or repeat the intervention.

Second, like many institutions, Meeds has a small staff and faculty with no one person assigned exclusively to lead persistence efforts. Meeds theorizes that the use of a CRM system can expand the reach of the small staff by

allowing them to create more personalized communication to students that will help the students see Meeds as a more welcoming, supportive and caring environment. Meeds anticipates that effectively reaching out to students at-risk for departure will increase students' understanding of involvement opportunities and support services available at Meeds and increase their persistence. If the intervention is successful it will validate the increased use of technology in persistence efforts.

Third, Meeds is eager for us to share recommendations about strategies for expanding their persistence efforts and enhancing their communication that is focused on increasing student persistence. It has become clear that Greek students and student-athletes have created highly effective communication channels within and among their organizations, and they use these channels to ensure all their members understand social and leadership opportunities available on campus. Meeds would like to determine if a similar, staff-driven communication system could be effective with non-Greek/non-athlete students. Throughout the project we will meet with faculty, staff, and students to learn more about their perception of the effectiveness of emails to increase student involvement on campus. At the end of the project, we will provide Meeds with a document that includes a summary of the email communication best practices that emerged from these conversations.

Project Questions

The three central questions of this capstone project focused on understanding the effects of the intervention on the treatment group compared to the control group. The first two project questions focused on exploring the antecedents to social integration, social integration, and subsequent institutional commitment. These variables were devised from Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) revised theory of student departure at residential colleges. The third project question focused on understanding student perceptions of effective

email communication strategies.

The guiding questions Meeds sought to answer through this capstone project included:

1. To what extent does the intervention influence social integration and four antecedents of social integration of a treatment group comprised of non-Greek, non-athlete students compared to a control group of non-Greek, non-athlete students? This question was explored through five sub-questions, based on Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) research on social integration including:
 - a. To what extent does the intervention influence social integration?
 - b. To what extent does the intervention influence proactive social adjustment?
 - c. To what extent does the intervention influence psychosocial engagement?
 - d. To what extent does the intervention influence perceived commitment of the institution to the welfare of students?
 - e. To what extent does the intervention influence perceived institutional integrity?
2. To what extent does the intervention influence subsequent commitment to the institution, as indicated by a student's reported intent to re-enroll at Meeds College in the fall of 2012?
3. What are student perceptions of effective email communication strategies?

It was noted previously in this paper that there are five antecedents to social integration, but this project only measured how four of them are influenced by the intervention. Treatment and control students' perceptions of communal potential, the fifth antecedent of social integration, was measured in a baseline survey

conducted before the intervention and not measured again during or after the intervention. The reason for this will be described in a following section.

Hypotheses

The answers to these project questions will help Meeds determine if technology can serve as one of the tools in their persistence efforts. To test the effectiveness of the intervention, we will compare the findings to the null hypotheses and alternative hypotheses for each project question. The null hypothesis predicts that the intervention will have no effect on the treatment group and the alternative hypothesis predicts that the intervention will have a directional effect on the treatment group. Outlined below are the null and alternative hypotheses for the first two project questions. The third project question was addressed through embedded qualitative interviews that cannot be analyzed through statistical tests; therefore, it can solely inform practice and a hypothesis is not appropriate.

Hypotheses Related to Project Question One

Null hypothesis (H0): The intervention will have

no effect on the extent of treatment students' social integration as well as their levels of proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, perceived institutional integrity, and perceived commitment of the institution to the welfare of students.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): The intervention will increase the extent of treatment students' social integration and increase their levels of proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, perceived institutional integrity, and perceived commitment of the institution to the welfare of students when compared to the control group.

Hypotheses Related to Project Question Two

Null hypothesis (H0): The intervention will have no effect on the treatment students' subsequent institutional commitment compared to the control group.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): The intervention will increase the treatment students' subsequent institutional commitment compared to the control group.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING PROJECT QUESTIONS ONE AND TWO

Conceptual Framework for Question One

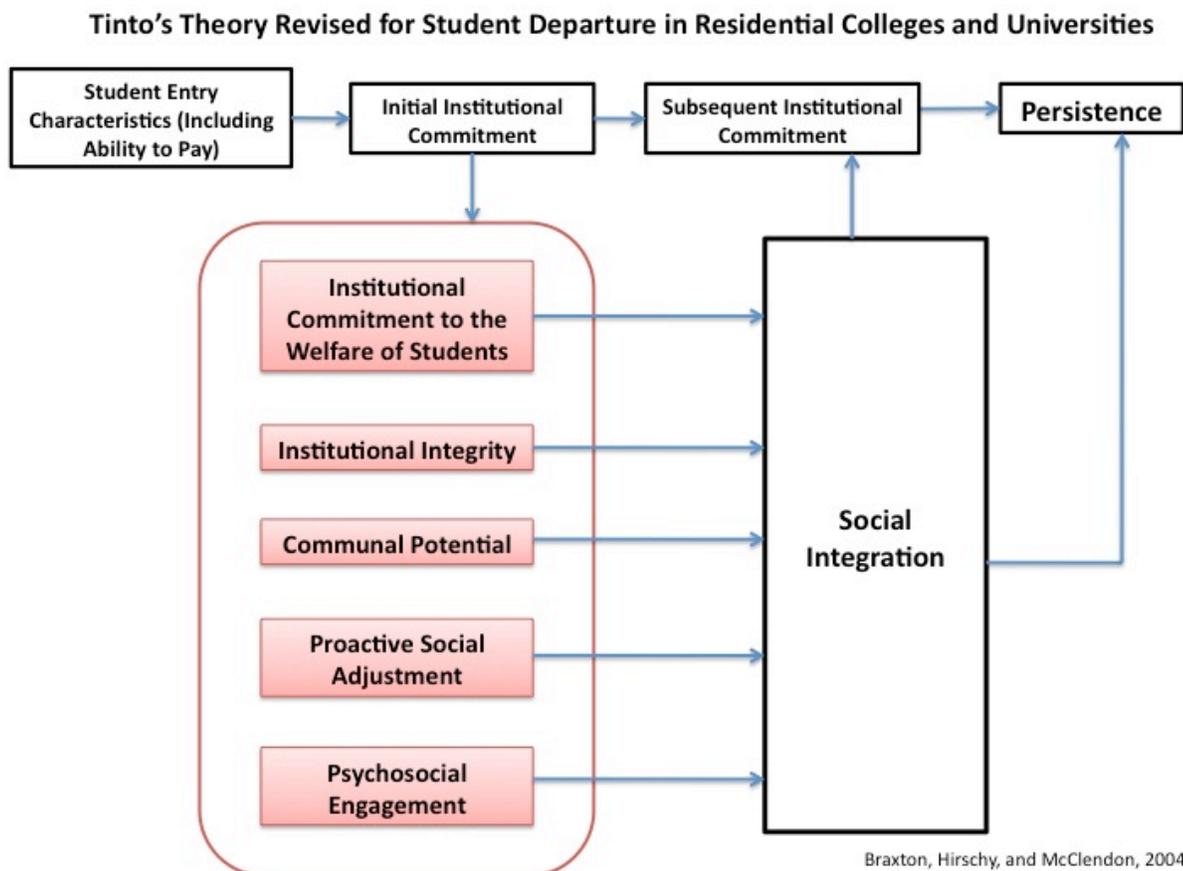
The conceptual framework used for investigating the first project question (To what extent does the intervention influence social integration and four antecedents to social integration of non-Greek, non-athlete students?) relies on Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon’s (2004) revision of Tinto’s (1975) Interactionalist Theory of student departure. In their revision, Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) reassessed the generalizability of student persistence theories in applying to both residential campuses and commuter campuses and posit fundamental differences between the two institutional types.

They revised the theory, creating two models of persistence, one that applies to residential institutions and one that applies to commuter institutions. For the purposes of this project, the

model relating to residential colleges was used, which “recognized the centrality of social integration” in student persistence (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004, p.16). Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) posit that persistence at residential institutions is influenced by many factors including the student’s ability to pay, their initial commitment to the institution, their subsequent commitment to the institution and their social integration, which has five antecedents, including commitment of the institution to student welfare, institutional integrity, communal potential, proactive social adjustment, and psychosocial engagement.

Figure 1 outlines the relationships involved in student persistence at residential colleges.

Figure 1:



Before describing how the project questions draw logically from this model, it is important to define the variables in the model.

Key Variables Defined

The Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) model posits that residential students enter college with a certain level of **ability to pay** for college expenses, which include tuition, fees, books, supplies, room, board, transportation and all other expenses related to college attendance. A student's perception of his or her ability to pay affects the decision to attend college and the student's **initial institutional commitment**, which is the belief the student holds at the time of initial enrollment at the institution about the likelihood of his or her continued enrollment at the institution. A low initial commitment to the institution could lead to early departure.

Once a student arrives at a residential college, ensuring that student experiences high levels of social integration is critical to subsequent institutional commitment and persistence. As noted previously, Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) define **social integration** as "primarily a function of the quality of peer-group interactions" (p. 62). As can be seen in the model, there are five antecedents to social integration. An **institution's commitment to the welfare of students** is measured by assessing students' perceptions of the extent to which the institution cares about the growth and development of its students, highly values students and treats them equitably and with respect as individuals (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). The variable of **institutional integrity** is the student's perception of the institution's commitment to act in accordance with its values and mission (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004).

The variable of **communal potential** is a student's perception that he or she will find a community of similar students to which he or she will feel connected (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). "The more a student perceives the potential of community on campus,

the greater the level of social integration" (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004, p. 23). The variable of **proactive social adjustment** is defined as the extent to which the student is successfully transitioning into the campus community, adopting norms and behaviors needed for continued enrollment and developing positive coping mechanism to adjust to the "demands and pressures of social interaction in the college or university" (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004, p. 24).

The variable of **psychosocial engagement** is the level or extent to which a student is engaging in activities or social behaviors that connect them with peers, student organizations and other campus activities. According to Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004), "the greater the level of psychological energy a student invests in various social interactions at his or her college or university, the greater the student's degree of social integration" (p. 26). These five antecedents lead to higher levels of social integration, which can lead to subsequent institutional commitment. **Subsequent institutional commitment** is defined as a student's continued commitment to maintain enrollment at the institution. Subsequent institutional commitment can match the initial institutional commitment or it can change over time in response to students' experiences with peers, administrators, and faculty at the institution. Subsequent institutional commitment can lead to **persistence**, which is defined as completion of the degree.

Project question one specifically focused on measuring the intervention's influence on the peer group interaction, which is a primary indicator of social integration, and the intervention's influence on four of the five antecedents of social integration, including proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, institutional commitment to the welfare of students, and institutional integrity.

The impact of the intervention on the variables of ability to pay, initial institutional commitment,

and communal potential were not included in this project design for several reasons.

First, the variable of ability to pay is placed in the model preceding student enrollment and we felt it was important to focus on variables in the model that are placed after the student's enrollment since that is when the intervention would be conducted. Additionally, the construct of ability to pay was already thoroughly explored in the Adams, Ashford, and Taylor (2010) capstone project in which the authors found that differences in average gross family need of Greeks and non-Greeks was minimal and, due to this, any differences in social integration of these two groups was most likely due to something other than their ability to pay.

Second, initial institutional commitment was best measured before the intervention started since this gave us an understanding of their initial perceptions of their future enrollment prior to that perception being influenced by the intervention, enrollment in classes, numerous campus and peer experiences, or participation in Greek recruitment.

Third, when considering when to measure the variable of communal potential we reasoned that having an early understanding of students' expectations regarding the potential to make friends and build community would be helpful to understanding the perceptions of incoming students before the intervention and would be insightful information to share with our Meeds client.

Ultimately, we administered three surveys over the course of the project. Ability to pay was not included in any survey. The first survey included measures of initial institutional commitment and communal potential and was disseminated before the intervention was administered to the treatment students. The four antecedents to social integration (proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, perceived institutional commitment to welfare of students, and perceived institutional integrity) and the measure of social integration (peer group interaction) were included in surveys two and three. With

these data we were able to clearly see the impact of the intervention on treatment students for each of these variables in comparison to the control group.

Conceptual Framework for Project Question Two

The conceptual framework used for investigating the second project question (To what extent does the intervention influence subsequent commitment to the institution, as indicated by a student's reported intent to re-enroll at Meeds fall 2012?) also relies on Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) revised theory of student departure at residential colleges. As noted previously, subsequent institutional commitment is defined as a student's continued commitment to maintain enrollment at the institution (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Subsequent institutional commitment is different than initial institutional commitment, which is the belief the student holds *at the time of initial enrollment* at the institution about the likelihood of his or her continued enrollment at the institution. This subsequent commitment can be different from the initial level of commitment if the student's actual campus experiences are different than the expectations they held for their college experience when they first arrived on campus.

Since the intervention and data collection process ended in early February 2012, it was not possible to measure the intervention's impact on student persistence to the second year or the intervention's long-term affect on subsequent institutional commitment. Due to this, we created a proxy for subsequent institutional commitment. In survey 2 and 3 we included a question that asked students about their intent to re-enroll in sophomore year. Their answer to this question was used as a proxy for their subsequent institutional commitment.

We reasoned this was an appropriate measurement due to Bean and Easton's (2000) research showing that student reported intentions can often predict their future behaviors. Bean and Eaton (2000) described a retention model

that places significant value upon the intentions of students, explaining that student “behavior is the result of the intention to perform that behavior” (p. 50). Bean and Eaton (2000) also explained that, “beliefs lead to attitudes, which lead to intentions, which lead to behaviors” (p. 50). Their model supports our assertion that if a student is asked about his or her intention to re-enroll in sophomore year and intentions lead to behaviors, then the student’s answer to the intent to re-enroll question can be used as the proxy for their actual subsequent institutional commitment and persistence to the second year.

Since initial institutional commitment was measured on the first survey and subsequent institutional commitment was measured on the second and third surveys, we can provide Meeds with a snapshot of the evolution of treatment and control students’ institutional commitment before, during, and after the intervention.

METHODOLOGY FOR PROJECT QUESTION ONE AND TWO: A RANDOMIZED FIELD STUDY

Experimental Approach with Random Assignment

One of the most important features of this project design is the experimental approach used to test the effectiveness of the intervention on increasing the magnitude of the four previously stated antecedents to social integration, social integration measured as peer group interaction, and subsequent institutional commitment of non-Greeks/non-athletes in the treatment group. In this randomized field study, non-Greek, non-athlete first-year students were randomly assigned to a treatment group or a control group. Several steps were taken to select the sample of students and randomly assign students to treatment and control groups before implementing the intervention. The process for and benefits of random assignment will be described in the next sections.

Random Assignment of First-Year Non-Greek/Non-Athlete Students

The first-year class consists of 554 first-time college students. This project focused on the experiences of non-Greek, non-athlete students, who were identified by the second week of the fall semester after Greek recruitment ended. With the help of the Office of Greek Life and the Athletic Department, we compiled the list of non-Greek, non-athlete first-year students in preparation for randomly assigning them to either the treatment group or control group.

Of the entire first-year class, 230 students were non-Greek, non-athlete, which is approximately 41%. Although it would have been ideal to randomly assign all 230 students to treatment or control groups, we were asked by the Meeds administration to remove any students from the project who were being advised by a first-time faculty advisor. Meeds administrators made this request because our initial intervention plan heavily involved faculty advisors and the administration thought participation in this

project would overburden faculty members who were advising students for the first time. Elimination of students advised by first-time faculty advisors reduced the eligible non-Greek/non-athlete pool from 230 to 192 students.

Because Meeds asked us to sort students by faculty advisor in order to remove the students advised by first-time faculty advisors, we subsequently conducted our random assignment process at the faculty advisor level as opposed to the student level. Faculty advisors were randomly assigned to treatment and control using a random number generator. This meant that when a faculty advisor was randomly assigned to either treatment or control group, their advisees were assigned to that same group. It is important to note that the faculty advisor was not actually included in the treatment or control group; it was just a method for randomly assigning their advisees to these groups. Since not all faculty advisors are assigned the same number of advisees, the method for random assignment of students resulted in slightly unbalanced numbers between the treatment group (n=105) and a control group (n=87); however, we did establish equivalency between the treatment and control groups. There were no Greek or athlete students assigned to the treatment or control groups.

Strengths of Random Assignment

Most social science research, particularly in the field of education, is not conducive to the controlling technique of random assignment (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Random assignment means that all students in the population have an equal chance to be assigned to the treatment or control group. According to researchers, “the most valid way to establish the effects of an intervention is a randomized field experiment, often called the ‘gold standard’ research design for assessing causal effects” (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 237). Randomization is most effective at controlling for threats to internal validity as influences that

confound the intervention are equally experienced by both treatment and control groups (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). In this project, random assignment of the treatment and control groups will allow us to accurately identify the effects of the intervention communication plan related to variables of social integration measured as peer group interaction, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, perceived commitment of the institution to student welfare, perceived institutional integrity, and subsequent institutional commitment.

The Intervention Communication Campaign

Intervention Strategy

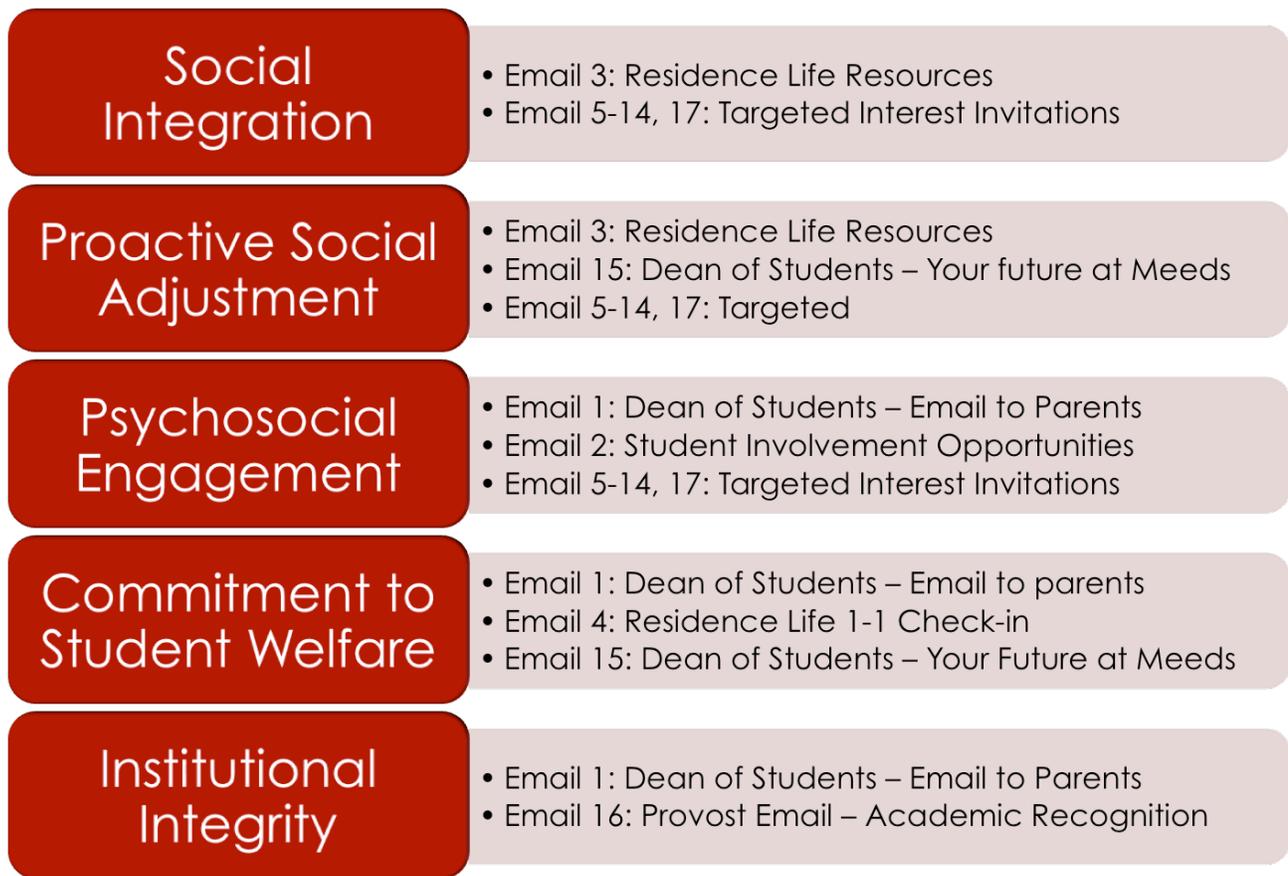
The outcomes of our intervention will hopefully yield higher levels of the student's social integration measured as peer group interactions, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, student perceptions of the institutional commitment to the welfare of students, and student perceptions of institutional integrity, and ultimately lead to higher levels of subsequent institutional commitment.

Because the purpose of this project was to test the effectiveness of targeted emails, we limited the number of emails sent to all treatment

students and, when possible, we customized the all-student emails to address that student individually (e.g.: Dear Jennifer). As a result of this strategy, students in the treatment group did not receive the same number of email interventions. The number of emails each student received ranged from six to 17. The intervention plan included 17 email communications; however, only six of the 17 emails were sent to all students. The remaining 11 emails focused on specific campus opportunities, activities and resources.

The first survey, administered in August, included an interest inventory asking students to identify all extracurricular opportunities in which they were interested. In survey 2, we included an involvement inventory to gauge student involvement and an interest inventory to identify opportunities in which students were interested, but not yet involved. Students were selected to receive one or more of the 11 activity-specific emails only if they indicated interest in that specific opportunity, activity or resources on one or both of the first two surveys. The 11 emails focused on topics such as how to get involved in theater, religious organizations and study abroad. See Figure 2 for an outline of the intervention strategy.

Figure 2: Email Intervention Plan to Target Each Variable



Developing Intervention Content

In order to write emails with accurate content and appropriate tone, we communicated with each office on campus that would be involved in sending the email interventions to students and responding to student questions as a result of the interventions. Although we wrote all the email interventions, the Meeds staff members who would ultimately send the email interventions were invited to review the emails for accuracy and provide their suggestions for adjusting the tone to make it more authentic. Each staff member approved the final email before it was sent to the treatment students and also cross-checked the roster of students to be included in the email communication in order to remove any students from the list who were already involved in the activity.

Each email was written to sound like a personal invitation from the leader or coordinator of that

activity to get involved in an upcoming activity organized by his or her organization. As just one example, any treatment student who indicated an interest in student government on the first survey received a personalized invitation from the president of student government to join the organization. All treatment emails were personalized with the student’s first name and included text indicating that the student was receiving the email as a result of his or her indicating their interest on one of the surveys.

Business as Usual

While only students in the treatment group received the intervention emails, all first-year students received the “business as usual” emails from Meeds administration, faculty, and students regarding involvement opportunities. While this confounding variable poses a threat to the internal validity, we were told by Meeds staff that no new persistence initiatives or

communications were being launched during the intervention. Additionally, all treatment and control students were exposed to the regular Meeds communication that was ongoing throughout the year so we are assuming their equal exposure cancels out the possibility that effects on the treatment group are a result of something other than the intervention. A timeline including all email interventions is included in Appendix E and the text of each email is included in Appendices F – Y.

Blind Participation

It is important to note that Meeds did not notify any students that this project was being conducted. Treatment group students were not informed that they were involved in this persistence research project and would be receiving intervention emails. We successfully petitioned the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of both Vanderbilt University and Meeds College for an exemption from the informed consent requirement, which would have

mandated us to inform students they were part of a research study.

The two IRBs supported our logic that requiring informed consent would undermine the project because it was unlikely that any student considering leaving Meeds would consent to being involved in an intervention aimed at increasing their persistence. The students who would sign up for such a study would probably be students who were already becoming socially integrated into campus and were least in need of an intervention to increase their social integration. It was also determined that informed consent could be waived because there was very minimal risk to participants, no more risk than other email advertising they received about upcoming events. This was an important feature of the project because by waiving the informed consent requirement, every first-year student was automatically part of the project in some way, including the students most in need of an intervention, the students who were not becoming socially integrated at the institution and at higher risk of departure.

DATA COLLECTION FOR PROJECT QUESTIONS ONE AND TWO

Survey Administration

To collect data for this project we administered three surveys. Each time we administered a survey, it was sent to the full first-year class, not just the treatment and control students in the first-year class. This was the easiest way for Meeds to conduct the surveys and also provided Meeds with data on their full first-year class so they could continue to conduct their own analysis of their first-year students.

We administered survey one (the pre-intervention survey) prior to the intervention in order to understand if there were differences between Greeks/athletes and non-Greeks/non-athletes before the intervention as well as to identify student interests in order to effectively execute the targeted email intervention. Survey one measured initial institutional commitment and students' perceptions of communal potential. Survey two measured social integration using peer group interaction as an indicator of social integration, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, and subsequent institutional commitment. Survey three measured perceived commitment of the institution to student welfare, perceived institutional integrity, and subsequent institutional commitment. Descriptive overviews of each of the three surveys are included in subsequent sections.

Pre-Intervention Survey 1: Measuring Initial Institutional Commitment and Communal Potential

Survey one was administered to all first-year students in August 2011 at the end of welcome week before students participated in Greek recruitment and joined a Greek organization. The results of this survey provide a snapshot of students' perceptions about initial institutional commitment and communal potential when they first arrive on campus, before they are members of Greek organizations, before non-Greek/non-athletes are assigned to treatment and control and before the intervention begins. This survey utilized tested items from Cabrera, Nora, and

Castaneda (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) to assess students' initial commitment to the institution. It also included items we created to measure perceived communal potential based on Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2004) definition and examples of communal potential.

All item responses provided ordinal data on a scale from one to five (five being the most positive response). Scales were created for each variable to facilitate data analysis (see Table 1 for Cronbach Alpha scores for all scales). The scale for institutional commitment included 12 items and had a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.73. The scale for communal potential also included 12 items and had a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.84. An interest inventory was also included in survey one. We also included a question to gauge a student's intent to re-enroll at Meeds College in the fall 2012 as a proxy measure for persistence to sophomore year and subsequent institutional commitment. (For a complete review of survey items for survey one, see Appendix A). The response rate for survey one was 90% (n=500).

Survey 2: Measuring Proactive Social Adjustment, Psychosocial Engagement, Social Integration, and Subsequent Institutional Commitment

Survey two was administered to all first-year students in mid-November 2011 after midterms and before Thanksgiving break. For this survey, we developed new questions to assess the variables of proactive social adjustment and psychosocial engagement and combined several questions to create a scale to measure the variables. The proactive social adjustment scale included 10 items and obtained a Cronbach Alpha of 0.69. The psychosocial engagement scale included 11 items and received a Cronbach Alpha of 0.63. Although the traditional threshold for highly correlated scales is $\alpha=0.70$, we decided to run our analysis including the established scales due to the statistical threats associated with running multiple t-tests, which would result from individual item analysis.

Tested items and scales do exist for these constructs and we recommend using the tested scales in future research. (See Braxton's Collegiate Experience Survey for question items (Braxton, 2006). We included items from Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) relating to peer group interaction to measure social integration and created a scale for this variable as well, which included seven items and obtained a Cronbach Alpha of 0.82. A question asking the student's intent to re-enroll at Meeds in fall 2012 was also included to measure subsequent commitment to the institution. In addition to these three variables, we included an involvement inventory to gauge students' current involvement and interests. See Appendix B for a complete list of questions for survey two. Survey two received a 60% response rate (n=333).

Survey 3: Measuring Perceived Institutional Commitment to the Welfare of Students, Perceived Institutional Integrity, and Subsequent Institutional Commitment

The third survey was administered to all first-year students at the end of January 2012 and included established questions from the Collegiate Experience Survey (Braxton, 2006). The third survey covered variables of perceived institutional commitment to the welfare of students, perceived institutional integrity, and subsequent institutional commitment. Scales were created to measure the variables of institutional commitment to the welfare of

students and institutional integrity. The scale for institutional commitment to the welfare of students included 11 items and obtained a Cronbach Alpha of 0.86. The scale for institutional integrity included five items and received a Cronbach Alpha of 0.86. We repeated the question, "do you intend to re-enroll at Meeds in fall 2012" to measure subsequent institutional commitment after the conclusion of the intervention. See Appendix C for a complete list of questions for survey three. Survey three garnered a 55% response rate (n=288). Each survey was open for approximately 10 days and two to three reminder emails were sent to students.

DATA ANALYSIS DESIGN FOR PROJECT QUESTIONS ONE AND TWO

Data Analyzed

The data analyzed in this project include demographic data of the first-year class provided by Meeds administrators, the results of three surveys disseminated to the entire first-year class, and two outcome variables provided to us in January 2012 including Fall 2011 GPA and persistence to Spring 2012. The analysis of the survey results is organized around the student persistence framework outlined by Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004). Three major sets of independent samples, two-tailed t-tests were conducted using the above-mentioned data including: 1) analysis of survey one responses comparing Greek/athlete students with non-Greek, non-athlete students, 2) analysis of survey two and three responses comparing treatment and control group responses, and 3) analysis of survey two and three responses comparing treatment students and Greek/athlete students.

Establishing Equivalency Among Non-Greek/Non-Athlete Students

Before we began analyzing the data, we wanted to establish equivalency among groups within the overall population. As described in the Study Design portion of this paper, upon the request of Meeds administration we removed the non-Greek/non-athlete first-year students from the sample if they were advised by a first-time faculty advisor; we will refer to this group as “ineligible” students. This decision was made by the Meeds faculty committee on academic advising in an attempt to reduce the workload of first-time faculty advisors as it was assumed by Meeds that they already had enough responsibility learning how to advise. Although it was assumed that all incoming students were equally likely to be assigned to a first-time faculty advisor, we performed a Kolmogorov-Smirnov Goodness of Fit test comparing demographic characteristics of the “ineligible” students to their non-Greek/non-athlete peers who were randomly assigned to the treatment or control groups. The purpose of this analysis was

to establish equivalency of groups and increase generalizability of findings to all non-Greek/non-athlete students. We also ran the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Goodness of Fit test for respondents and non-respondents of surveys one, two, and three in order to confirm the generalizability of the survey findings to the larger population.

Results of a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test produce a “D” statistic that indicates the likelihood that the two groups in question are from the same distribution or if they are likely from different distributions. A “D” value greater than 0.05 indicates that the two groups are from the same distribution. Because the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test can only be performed on continuous variables, we also conducted a Pearson Chi-Square to analyze the equivalence of discrete variables that have three or more values, such as the variable “race/ethnicity.” We also conducted a t-test to analyze gender proportions among the groups to establish equivalency. Conventional significance levels are applied to the Chi-Square and t-test. If the p-value is higher than 0.05, we can infer that the two groups are not different in a statistically significant way.

T-Test Analysis with Conventional Alpha $p=0.05$

The seven scales in the surveys include: initial institutional commitment (survey 1), communal potential (survey 1), proactive social adjustment (survey 2), psychosocial engagement (survey 2), peer group interaction (to measure social integration) (survey 2), institutional commitment to the welfare of students (survey 3), and institutional integrity (survey 3). The Cronbach alpha rating for each scale is presented in Table 1 of the Appendix. We conflated the multiple survey items into scales intentionally and chose not to pursue individual item analysis to reduce the threat of Type 1 error when conducting multiple t-tests. We present the alpha level for all tests and make note of all findings where $p \leq 0.05$. In total, we conducted 19 t-tests throughout our analysis and do not believe we are at significant

risk of committing Type 1 error in our analysis. We will maintain the conventional threshold for significance at $p=0.05$.

Because of the targeted nature of the intervention, students in the treatment group received different numbers of intervention emails over the course of the fall 2011 semester and early in spring 2012 semester. Originally we considered running analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics to break down the effects by number of interventions received. However, of the 288 students who took survey three, only 60 were in the treatment group. When this number was further broken down among six to 17 interventions, the power of each group was heavily diffused. For this reason, we chose to apply the t-test statistic in place of the ANOVA and keep the treatment group as one group regardless of the number of interventions received. Ultimately, the interventions were not equal dosages of the message as if we were increasing the dosage of medication to a patient. The six all-treatment intervention emails sufficiently reached out to our target population and we have no way to analyze the impact of interventions separately or cumulatively taking different combinations of interventions into effect. The t-test is the best way to analyze the impact of the overall intervention on treatment students.

Entering Differences in the First-Year Class: Greeks/Athletes Compared to Non-Greeks/Non-Athletes

Survey one was administered to all first-year students during the first week students were on-campus and garnered a 90% response rate. The survey measured initial commitment to the institution and communal potential. After the second week of classes we knew which first-year students had decided to join Greek organizations. We analyzed the data from survey one comparing two groups, those who decided to join a Greek organization or athletic team and those who did not. Because the survey was administered within the first week of the semester (prior to classes beginning and prior to Greek affiliation), we can assume that the

majority of student responses are informed by expectations of their college experience as opposed to actual experiences. We conducted independent samples, two-tailed t-tests on these two scales to better understand differences that may already exist between these two groups of students right from the beginning of their time at Meeds. This survey provided baseline information about the first-year class as well as a list of the extracurricular interests of all students in the first-year class, which would be used to design the intervention.

Understanding the Outcome of the Intervention: Treatment Group Compared to Control Group

To directly analyze project questions one and two, we conducted independent samples, two-tailed t-tests comparing treatment and control students on the scales of proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, social integration measured using peer group interaction, perceived commitment of the institution to student welfare, and perceived institutional integrity. Additionally, we analyzed subsequent institutional commitment via the survey question “do you intend to re-enroll at Meeds in fall 2012” from surveys two and three. This analysis was conducted to answer project questions one and two and identify the extent to which the intervention influenced the variables.

Putting the Results of the Intervention in Context: Treatment Group Compared to Greeks/Athletes

Since we had access to all the survey results from both Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes, it allowed us to compare treatment group survey results with the Greek/athlete survey results. Although not a part of this capstone project, Meeds’ overall goals include increasing social integration and persistence of non-Greek/non-athletes to the level of Greek/athletes. Having access to Greek/athlete survey results allowed us to put the results of the intervention in context and tell Meeds how treatment student results compare with Greek/athletes. In this analysis we conducted a

series of independent samples, two-tailed t-tests identifying Greek/athlete students and treatment students as the independent variables and their mean response to each of the five scales, plus each response to the question “do you plan to re-enroll at Meeds in the Fall 2012,” which was asked in surveys two and three, as the dependent variables.

Although we do not have a pre-test for Greek/athlete students measuring these variables prior to their participation in Greek or athletic organizations, we can reasonably assume that Greek/athlete students present higher levels of social integration and the antecedents to social integration as evidenced by their higher rates of persistence at Meeds. Based on this assumption, we are comparing the treatment group with the Greek/athletes to provide support for significant findings between the treatment and control groups. For example, if the intervention were effective, we would expect to see a statistically significant difference between treatment and control groups on a specific variable while simultaneously finding no statistically significant difference between treatment students and Greek/athletes on the same variable. Greek students have historically set the benchmark for persistence, so evidence that Greek students and treatment students are similar along the variables will add validation to any statistically significant findings that emerge when comparing treatment and control group students. However, these comparisons are simply corroborating support.

FINDINGS TO ADDRESS PROJECT QUESTIONS ONE AND TWO

Findings

In this section, we report the findings of statistical analyses run to establish equivalency of non-Greek, non-athlete students, equivalency of survey respondents and non-respondents, and the three batches of t-test comparisons.

Equivalency of Non-Greek/Non-Athlete Students

Since non-Greek, non-athlete students advised by first-time faculty advisors (“ineligibles”) were removed from the random assignment pool, it was important to determine the student make-up of the “ineligible” group of students in comparison to their non-Greek, non-athlete peers to reduce threats to internal validity. We conducted the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on variables including: average distance to Meeds in miles from hometown, ACT composite, SAT composite, high school GPA, parent adjusted gross income, and unmet financial need. The D statistic for each of these variables was higher than 0.05, indicating that the ineligible students are likely to be from the same distribution as the non-Greek, non-athlete students (see Table 5).

We conducted a Pearson Chi-Square test to see the “goodness of fit” between ineligible students and the pooled treatment and control students on the variable “race/ethnicity.” The p-value for Chi-Square is $p=0.13$, indicating that the ineligible group of students and the treatment and control students are not statistically different in the distribution of racial and ethnic groups (see Table 5). Lastly, we conducted an independent samples, two-tailed t-test to compare the gender distribution among the two groups and we found no statistically significant difference in gender between ineligible students and the treatment and control students where $p=0.29$ (see Table 5). All of these findings combine to affirm that the ineligible students enter Meeds with the same demographic characteristics as those assigned to the treatment and control groups. The only known difference

between the ineligible students and other non-Greek, non-athlete students is that they were assigned to a first-time faculty advisor.

Equivalency of Survey Respondents and Non-Respondents

In order to reduce threats to external validity, we conducted goodness of fit tests to compare students who responded to each of the three surveys with students who self-selected not to take each of the surveys. By establishing that the two groups are not statistically significantly different, we will have greater confidence in generalizing the findings from each survey to the larger population, including those who did not take the survey. Survey one had a 90% response rate with 500 students taking the survey and 54 students not taking the survey. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test analyzed several continuous variables including: distance to Meeds College in miles from home town, ACT composite, SAT composite, high school GPA, parent adjusted gross income, and unmet financial need. None of these variables were statistically significantly different across groups, implying equivalency among respondents and non-respondents for survey one.

The Chi-Square test revealed that survey one respondents are equivalent in terms of racial/ethnic distribution and the t-test revealed that women were more likely to take survey one than men ($p=0.02$) (see Table 6). However, a 90% response rate is very strong and threats to external validity are minimal. We feel confident in our ability to generalize findings from survey one to the entire first-year student population.

We conducted the same analyses comparing respondents and non-respondents of survey two, which garnered a 60% response rate where $n=333$ (see Table 7). We found that the groups are equivalent on all measures with the exception of gender. Again, women were more likely to take the survey than men ($p=0.007$). While this is important to take into consideration, we are

confident in our ability to generalize the results from survey two to the entire first-year student population.

Survey three results are very similar. Survey three received a 55% response rate where $n=288$. The findings revealed that all indicators tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were equivalent across groups with the exception of parent adjusted gross income where $D=0.04$ (see Table 8). Students with lower parental adjusted gross income were more likely to complete survey three than their more affluent peers. Additionally, race/ethnicity was not found to be statistically significantly different among the students who took the survey and those who did not. However, women were again more likely to take survey three than their male peers ($p=0.0003$). Although this is a recurring theme and care should be taken when generalizing the results of these surveys to males, we do not find it a significant hindrance to generalization.

Entering Differences in the First-Year Class: Greeks/Athletes Compared to Non-Greeks/Non-Athletes

Several interesting findings emerged after comparing Greek/athletes to non-Greek/non-athletes on the measures of initial institutional commitment and communal potential, which were measured in survey one. We found a statistically significant difference between Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes on

the scales of initial institutional commitment ($p=0.008$) and communal potential ($p=0.0001$) (see Table 2). On both of these scales, Greek/athletes have higher mean scores rating institutional commitment at 4.37 versus 4.27 for non-Greek/non-athletes. Greek/athletes have a mean rating of communal potential at 4.43 versus 4.15 for non-Greek/non-athletes. However, despite these two differences between the groups, there are no statistically significant differences in students' answer about their intent to re-enroll at Meeds in the fall 2012; analysis revealed mean scores of 4.55 for non-Greek/non-athletes and 4.59 for Greek/athletes. Both Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes enter Meeds College with high intentions to persist. However, while there are several statistically significant findings from this first survey, none of the average scores were below a 4.0 out of 5.0. These high mean scores raise important questions about the practical significance of the findings.

Figure 3: T-Test Comparisons for Greek/athletes and Non-Greek/non-athletes on Survey One Measures

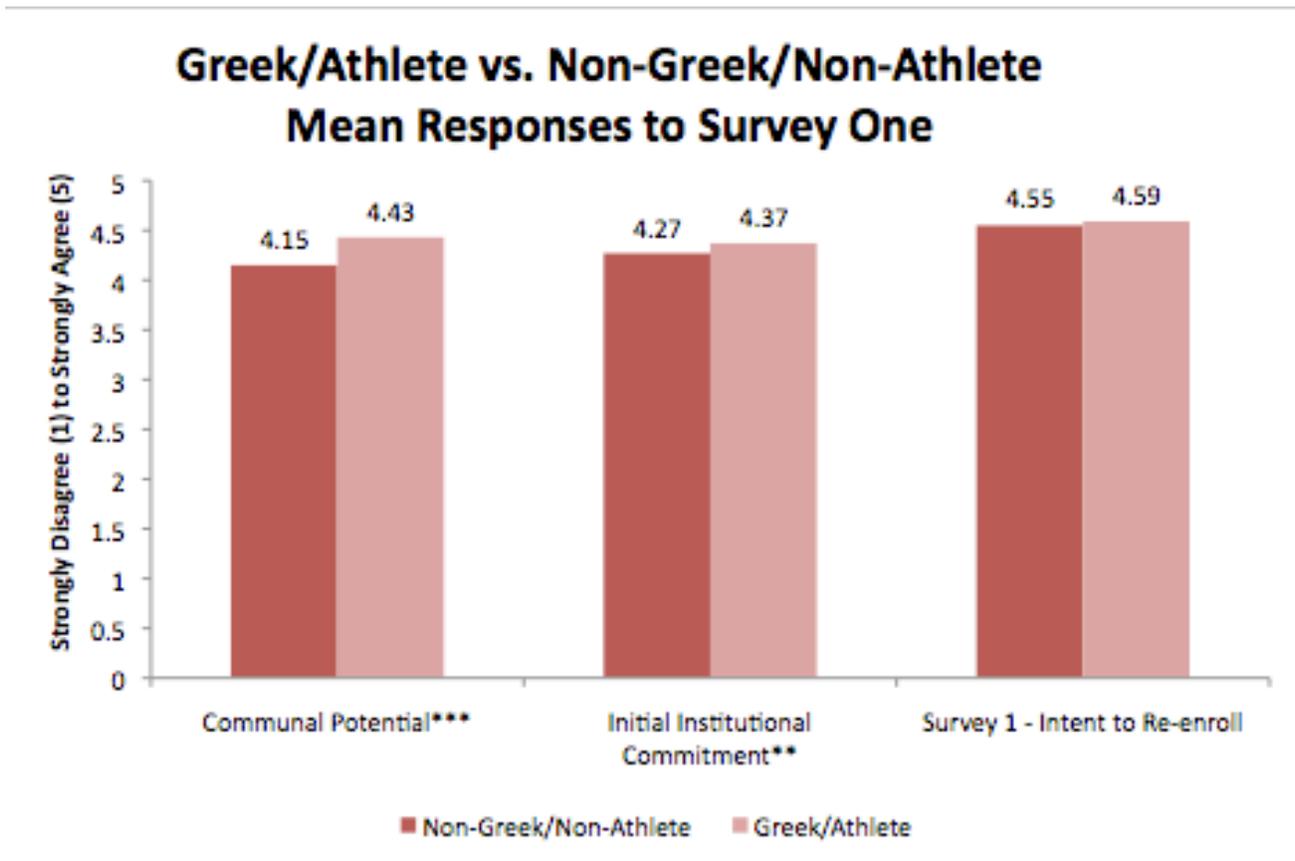


Figure 3 includes t-test results for key variables from survey one. Students rated all questions on a five point scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Significance levels are indicated by ** where $p < 0.01$ and *** where $p < 0.001$.

Understanding the Outcome of the Intervention: Treatment Group Compared to Control Group

To gauge the impact of the intervention on the treatment students, comparisons between treatment and control groups for each of the four antecedents to social integration plus social integration measured using the peer group interaction scale and the “intent to re-enroll” question (the proxy for subsequent institutional commitment) were conducted. If the intervention was successful, we would expect to see statistically significant differences in treatment student average scores on the measurements of the six variables compared to the control group. After conducting the independent samples, two-

tailed t-tests we found that only one of the five scales is statistically significant between the treatment and control group students at $p < 0.05$. Treatment students report higher levels of proactive social adjustment at $p = 0.001$ when compared to control group students. The average response for treatment students is 3.67 on a scale from one to five and the average response for control students is 3.37 (see Table 4).

Treatment and control students do not differ on psychosocial engagement, perceived commitment of the institution to student welfare, perceived institutional integrity, or subsequent institutional commitment. In response to the survey three question about subsequent institutional commitment, “Do you plan to re-

enroll at Meeds next fall,” both treatment and control students average 4.41 and 4.51 respectively. This indicates a very high intent to re-enroll in the fall on behalf of all non-Greek/non-athletes (see Table 4). Of the four scales measured in this analysis, both treatment and control students average above 4.0 on responses to perceived commitment of the

institution to student welfare and perceived institutional integrity. For both the social integration scale and the proactive social adjustment scale, treatment and control students average between 3.37 and 3.8 for all responses. These more neutral responses indicate areas for improvement.

Figure 4: T-test Comparisons between Treatment Group and Control Group

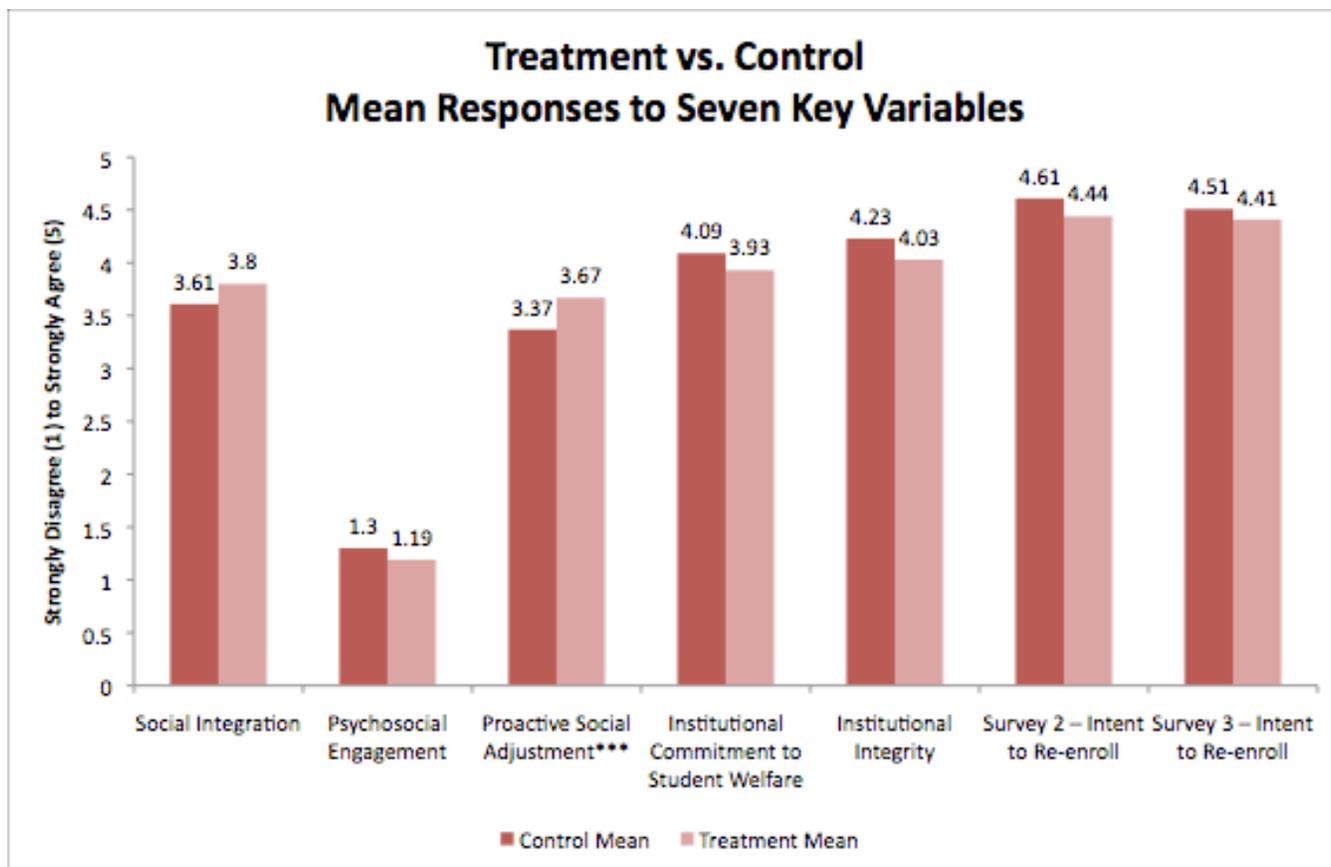


Figure 4 includes t-test results for key variables. Students rated all questions on a five point scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree with the exception of Psychosocial Engagement. This scale measured frequency of involvement where 1 = 0-5 times and 2 = 6-10 times. Significance levels are indicated by *** where $p < 0.001$.

Putting the Results of the Intervention in Context: Treatment Group Compared to Greeks/Athletes

As noted previously, one of Meeds’ overall goals is to increase social integration and persistence of non-Greek/non-athletes to the level of Greek/athletes. Due to this, we know it is important to Meeds that we share how treatment students’ survey results compare to Greek/athletes’ survey results. Since we had access to all the survey results from both Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes, we could easily compare treatment group survey results with the Greek/athlete survey results.

The t-test analysis comparing treatment students with Greek/athletes revealed that there are no

statistically significant differences in treatment and Greek/athlete mean average scores on two of the six variables tested, including proactive social adjustment and institutional integrity, where p values were both greater than 0.05. On all other scales (psychosocial engagement, social integration and perceived commitment of the institution to student welfare) and subsequent institutional commitment taken from survey three, the p-value is statistically significant at conventional levels ($p < 0.05$) (see Table 3). By analyzing the data on all other variables it was determined that Greek/athletes have higher levels of psychosocial engagement, social integration measured as peer group interaction, and perceived commitment of the institution to the welfare of students.

Figure 5: T-Test Comparisons for Treatment versus Greek/Athlete

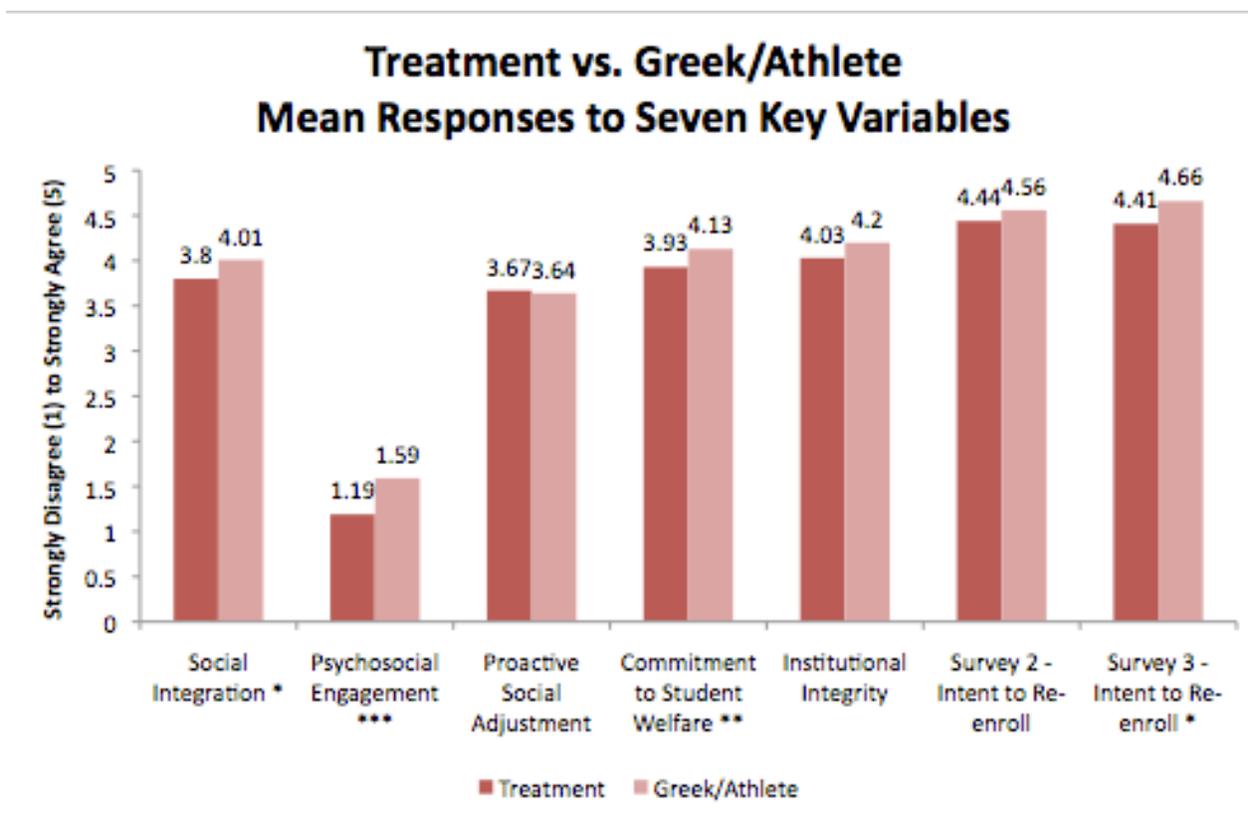


Figure 5 includes t-test results for key variables. Students rated all questions on a five point scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree with the exception of Psychosocial Engagement. This scale measured frequency of involvement where 1 = 0-5 times and 2 = 6-10 times. Significance levels are indicated by * where $p < 0.05$, ** where $p < 0.01$ and *** where $p < 0.001$.

Greek/athletes are more also likely to “intend to re-enroll” in the fall 2012 as indicated on survey three, a change from the lack of statistical significance found on this question in survey two. However, a deeper look reveals that of the 274 students who responded to survey three, only seven students indicate a clear intention to depart Meeds, which is approximately 2.5% of the first-year cohort. An additional 15 students are neutral regarding their intent to re-enroll at Meeds, which could signal a group of students

for whom an intervention may be effective. The overwhelming response, however, is positive as 68% of students “strongly agree” that they will re-enroll at Meeds and another 25% “agree” with the question. The statistical significance found when comparing the treatment group to Greek/athletes on this measure is important to review, but the practical significance is low based on the strong positive response to this question (see Table 9).

Figure 6: Percentage of Students Who Plan to Return for Sophomore Year

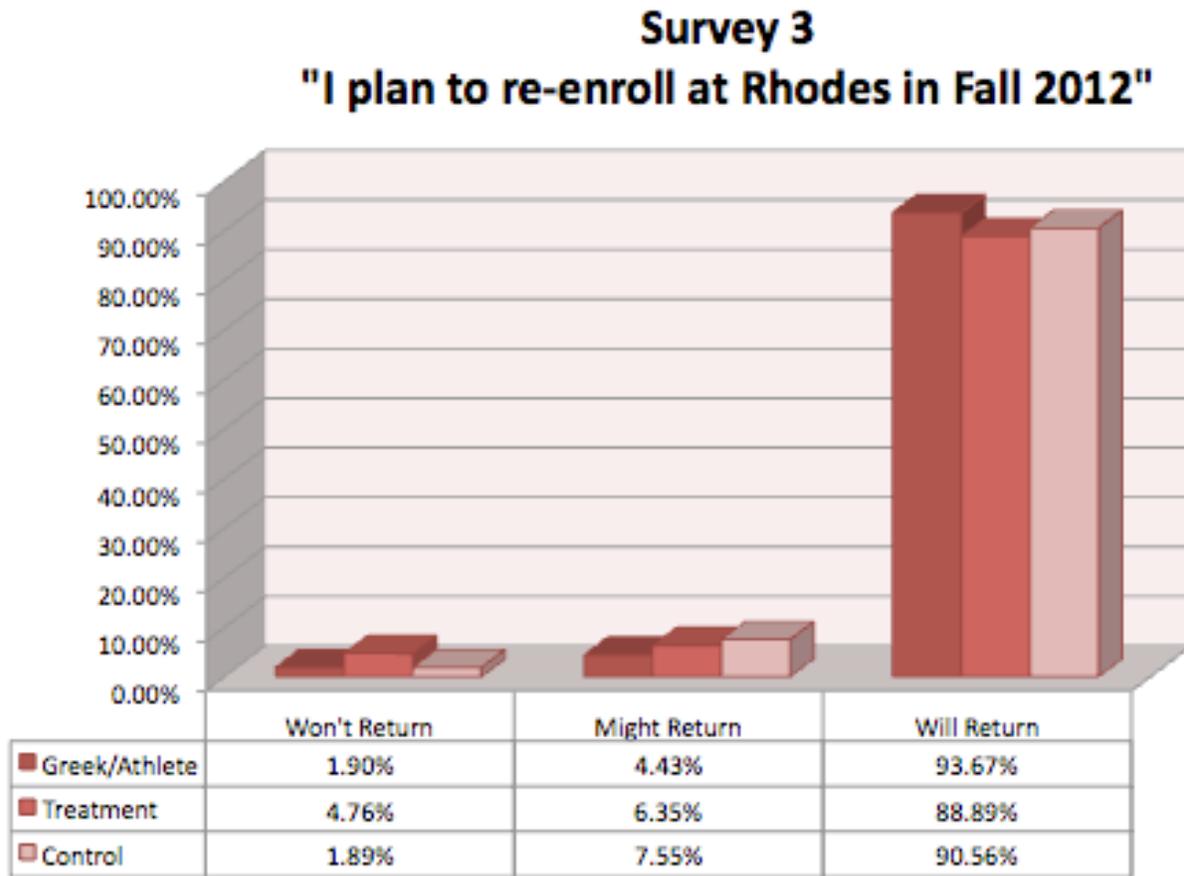


Figure 6 presents the percentages of students who intend to re-enroll at Meeds in Fall 2012 as of February 2012. Although responses were provided on a lickert scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), we conflated the responses into three categories for visual purposes. “Will Return” includes students who responded with a 4 or 5. “Might Return” includes students who responded with a 3. And “Won’t Return” includes students who responded with a 2 or 1.

ADDRESSING PROJECT QUESTION THREE

Project Question Three

Throughout the execution of this project several Meeds staff and faculty raised important questions regarding the benefits and drawbacks of using email as a way to connect with students in a personal way. They voiced specific concerns about email fatigue from over-use of email, backlash from inauthentic “targeted” emails, and the threat to established personal relationships that could result from a “mass-targeted” email sent from an individual the student already knows well. These issues gave rise to the third project question: What are student perceptions of effective email communication strategies?

In an attempt to provide insight to Meeds staff and faculty regarding these concerns, we designed an embedded qualitative component to the research project solely for the purpose of asking students about their opinions of the intervention emails, the frequency of emails received from Meeds, the meaningfulness of the content of Meeds emails, and the impact of targeted messages on their decision to read and/or take action due to an email announcement.

Methodology

Interviews were held during the first week of class of the spring 2012 term. Selection of interviewees was based on two criteria: that the student was a part of the treatment group and that the student had completed surveys one and two during the fall semester. We decided to include only those students who had completed the first two surveys because we wanted to be able to analyze their level of social integration at Meeds and commitment to the institution after hearing their perception of the treatment and email communication from Meeds. In total, 60 treatment students were invited to participate in a 30-minute interview. Of those invited, 12 volunteered to participate and were interviewed. The final interview protocol is included in Appendix D.

Qualitative Interview Analysis

Upon completion of the 12 interviews that took place on Meeds’ campus, we partially transcribed the interviews into the interview protocol outline for each student. We then reviewed all 12 transcriptions and created a matrix to identify the number of times themes emerged across the interviews. Each unique theme was added to the matrix and when a theme was repeated another point was added to a column. Upon completion of the matrix, the columns were tallied and nine themes emerged with concurrence from at least 10 of the 12 interviewees. Other themes also received several mentions, but we will provide the most analysis for the top nine themes.

All 60 students in the treatment group who completed surveys 1 and 2 were invited to participate, but self-selection of volunteers does not allow us to generalize these findings beyond the students who participated in the interviews. The purpose of the interviews was solely understand the effectiveness of email communication strategies from the students’ perspective. The information and opinions gathered through the interview process will be used to inform our recommendations for improvement of the intervention.

Qualitative Interview Findings

Interviews with 12 students in the treatment group revealed nine themes that were repeated by 10 or more of the interviewed students (see Table 9). When asked how students learn about organizations or opportunities to get involved on campus at Meeds, students unanimously mention that the SACK (Student Activities Kickoff) Fair was the primary way to learn about campus organizations. Students also mention that peers are highly influential in the decision about which activities to join (n=11) and they confirmed that email was the most influential method for learning about opportunities for involvement (n=10).

Regarding peer influence, one student mentioned,

“For the most part, how I hear about things is through other students. Maybe I’ll have a vague idea of something I’ll want to do...or I’ll hear something...and then I’ll just ask around until I find something. And it’s a small enough school that normally I can do that.”

When asked what are the top two ways to get students’ attention on campus, one interviewee said,

“I would stick to email mostly because nowadays everyone checks email at least once a day.”

To that same question another student said,

“Email is the obvious medium that I think works very well.”

Other important findings include that students like emails tailored to their interests and they recalled specific emails that were included in our intervention. Receiving tailored emails that include the student’s name in the greeting was connected to a sense that..

“Meeds cares about my success.”

One student recalled an intervention email sent from the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Dr. Drompp, recognizing treatment students for a job well done at the end of the fall semester. The interviewee said,

“Yes [Meeds cares about my success]. Because I didn’t do terrific my first semester here, but I did relatively well, and over winter break I think I got an email from the Dean of Students here saying ‘congratulations on your achievements here, you worked hard’ and it was directed towards me. I think they do that for most people and if you do badly I assume they send a corresponding email. So I think they do care about you for the most part.”

This student was not alone in feeling that Meeds cares about student success; 11 of the 12 students

interviewed agree that Meeds cares about their success.

Other recurring themes included that professors at Meeds are accessible and supportive, email frequency is “just right,” and regarding involvement opportunities, one does not have to be Greek to have an active social life on campus. These are all important findings that had high reliability among the interviewees.

Several other themes emerged as well, though some with mixed opinion. Those directly relevant to the delivery system of the intervention include: eight of 12 students stated that they read all emails sent from official Meeds email addresses, particularly if they know the sender. Two students mentioned learning this valuable lesson the hard way after missing an important university announcement. Additionally, eight students mentioned that personalized emails with their name in the salutation encourage them to read the email and five of those students said that seeing their name encourages them to get involved. Conversely, four of the 12 students report that personalized emails do not make a difference in their decision to read the email or get involved. One student even mentioned that he assumes emails with his name in the greeting were auto-populated if he did not know the sender. Finally, students mentioned that the subject line of an email is very important for catching their attention as well as a short, pithy, entertaining email targeted to their interests. See Appendix Z for a full list of strategies for effective email communication to undergraduate Meeds students. The recommendations emerged from student comments during interviews.

LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations in this project, and these limitations temper the conclusions and recommendations advanced in the next sections. First, Meeds College selected the delivery method of the intervention because the institution wanted to practice using their new Customer Relationship Management system as a way to send students personalized and targeted emails that intended to affect their social integration, the antecedents of their social integration and their subsequent institutional commitment. In the end, none of the emails were sent using the CRM because it was quickly discovered that Meeds was not familiar enough with the technology to be able to effectively use the CRM for this project. More specifically, it was difficult to create the specific distribution lists needed to communicate with the treatment group. Additionally, CRM access and training had not yet been provided to all the offices involved in the intervention, so it was not possible for every office to use CRM.

Fortunately, this did not affect the treatment student experience at all because the emails the students received looked the same regardless of whether they came from the CRM or from a staff member's personal email account. However, the CRM has many benefits that an individual email account does not. For instance, a CRM allows you to see the number of students who actually opened the email (read rate) so you can more easily understand if students are engaging in some way with the information sent. A CRM also lets you track, on one screen, all the emails a student received from different email accounts so it is easy to see the whole intervention the student received. It is impossible to do this when sending from separate faculty and staff email accounts. Use of the CRM would have allowed for more robust data analysis since we could have analyzed not just by who received the emails but who actually read the emails.

Second, there was originally a significant faculty advisor component to the intervention because Meeds shared with us that students reported that

their faculty advisors were a significant influencer of their decisions and their overall perceptions of the institution. Due to this, the original treatment plan called for students to receive targeted emails from their faculty advisors. We designed a series of emails that would be sent from faculty advisors that focused on college success skills, an invitation for a check-in meeting to see how the student was transitioning to Meeds, an invitation to discuss the spring 2012 course selection process, an email to students who failed to register for spring 2012 courses, and a welcome back email to be sent in January 2012 with an invitation to meet and suggestions about how to select a major and how to get involved in fellowships, researching with faculty, and study abroad.

The faculty committee overseeing academic advising decided they did not want to be involved in the intervention, stating that many of their faculty advisors already send these types of emails and that since many faculty advisors already had close relationships with their students, sending emails that students might perceive as "mass" emails may actually alienate the students. The faculty committee said they would allow each faculty member to decide if he or she wanted to be involved in the intervention. Since this would result in inconsistent participation of faculty advisors, we decided to remove the faculty advisor component of the intervention since we had little control over its fidelity.

While a large number of faculty may already send these types of emails to students, several faculty, staff and students shared that not all faculty advisors invest significant effort in communicating with their assigned advisees. Due to this, Meeds may want to consider sending several pre-written email templates to faculty advisors for optional use. If a faculty advisor did not plan to send personal emails to their students previously, the templates might encourage them to do so and possibly increase the connection between the faculty and students. The inclusion

of this faculty advisor component could have resulted in a much richer intervention that utilized a resource (faculty advisors) that students report is influential to their decision-making.

Third, any email communication plan runs the risk of appearing inauthentic to students if they receive a mass email from a person they know well, confusing them as to why they are receiving it. This can happen if the CRM is not robust and lacks information about the organizations and activities in which students are already involved. For instance, it is possible that a student who was already involved in student government would receive an invitation to become involved in it because it is hard to determine what activities new students have joined. A robust CRM would be updated constantly to reflect student involvement so they do not receive invitations to join organizations they have already joined. It is difficult to determine how many times this occurred during the intervention. However, we became aware of this problem early in the intervention and started to review email lists with offices before we sent the intervention emails in an attempt to remove students from the lists if they were already involved in that activity.

Lastly, while there is a retention committee on campus that brings many offices together to discuss persistence, there is no one person assigned to persistence efforts with the authority to mandate participation in retention initiatives. Due to this, we had to rely on “soft power” of the Office of Information Services to secure participation in the intervention. At times we found ourselves trying to convince offices why they should be involved. There were several offices that decided not to participate in the intervention even though we thought their participation could have a positive influence on students considering leaving Meeds. This led to our recommendation that Meeds should have a staff person or faculty member specifically assigned to oversee all persistence efforts with the authority to require participation of certain offices that are critical to students’ persistence decisions.

PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

The three central questions of this capstone project focused on understanding the effects of the intervention on the treatment group compared to the control group. The questions focused on exploring the antecedents to social integration, social integration as measured by peer group integrations, subsequent institutional commitment (intent to persist) and student perceptions of effective email communication strategies. This section summarizes the findings for each question.

Question 1a: To what extent does the intervention influence social integration?

There is no statistically significant difference in levels of social integration between treatment and control group after the intervention.

Question 1b: To what extent does the intervention influence proactive social adjustment?

There is a statistically significant difference in the level of proactive social adjustment between treatment and control groups after the intervention. Treatment students show higher levels of proactive social adjustment when compared to control group students.

Question 1c: To what extent does the intervention influence psychosocial engagement?

There is no statistically significant difference in the level of psychosocial engagement between treatment and control group after the intervention.

Question 1d: To what extent does the intervention influence perceived commitment of the institution to the welfare of students?

There is no statistically significant difference in the level of perceived commitment of the

institution to the welfare of students between treatment and control group after the intervention.

Question 1e: To what extent does the intervention influence perceived institutional integrity?

There is no statistically significant difference in the level of perceived institutional integrity between treatment and control group after the intervention.

Question 2: To what extent does the intervention influence subsequent commitment to the institution, as indicated by a student's reported intent to re-enroll at Meeds in the fall of 2012?

There is no statistically significant difference in level of subsequent institutional commitment between treatment and control group after the intervention.

Question 3: What are student perceptions of effective email communication strategies?

Interviews with 12 students in the treatment group revealed nine themes that were repeated by 10 or more of the interviewed students (see Table 9). Interview themes and student responses led to the creation of a list of strategies for effective email communication, included in Appendix Z.

DISCUSSION

There are several interesting findings; some that reinforce what was discovered in past capstone projects, some that are calls to action, and some that open new avenues for research.

First-Year Student Perceptions Before the Intervention Began

To more fully understand first-year students' institutional commitment and perceptions of communal potential before the intervention started and to secure a list of their extracurricular interests for use in writing the targeted emails to be sent to them, a pre-intervention survey was administered during the first week of fall term. It was sent to all students since at that point it was not clear which students would be Greek/athletes and which students would be non-Greek/non-athletes. When Greek recruitment week was over and the intervention could begin, having survey results from all students allowed us to see if Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes differed when they first arrived on campus.

The pre-intervention survey revealed that non-Greek/non-athletes enter Meeds with lower levels of initial commitment to the institution and lower levels of their perception of communal potential. These findings are statistically significant. This means non-Greek/non-athlete students have less positive perceptions of their likelihood to find a community of people like them on campus. It means that the institution starts at a disadvantage with non-Greek/non-athletes because they are already slightly different when they arrive on campus. In practical terms, both groups average above a 4.0 on these scales, meaning that almost all students have positive perceptions of their communal potential and initial institutional commitment even if it is slightly lower for non-Greek/non-athlete students. This phenomenon is known as establishing a "ceiling effect" because students who begin with generally positive ratings have less room for growth and improvement (Shaddish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

While non-Greek/non-athlete students arrive to campus with slightly different perceptions from their Greek/athlete peers, survey one also revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in Greek/athlete and non-Greek/non-athlete responses about whether they plan to re-enroll at Meeds for sophomore year. This means that while non-Greek/non-athletes are different on measures of communal potential and initial institutional commitment when they enter, they plan to attend Meeds sophomore year at rates similar to Greek/athlete students. They do not arrive on campus intending to depart Meeds. This finding has significant implications for Meeds staff and faculty because it means that Meeds has a chance to impact these students and increase their persistence at their institution. The recommendation section lists several ways Meeds can address non-Greek/non-athletes' different initial institutional commitment and perceptions of communal potential.

Intervention Outcome: Treatment Group and Control Group Comparisons

The intervention described in this paper, aimed at non-Greek/non-athletes, has a minimal effect. There is no difference between the treatment and control groups on measures of social integration as measured by peer group interactions, psychosocial engagement, perceived commitment of the institution to student welfare, or perceived institutional integrity.

On surveys two and three we found no statistically significant difference between treatment and control in their answers about whether they plan to re-enroll, meaning the intervention did not have an impact on subsequent institutional commitment for treatment students. While we certainly hoped to influence the treatment students' social integration, antecedents to social integration, and intentions to persist at Meeds, ceiling effects may have again come into play. Treatment and control students averaged 4.41 and 4.51 respectively in response to the question that

measured subsequent institutional commitment, “Do you plan to re-enroll at Meeds next fall?” This indicates a very high intent to re-enroll in the fall on behalf of treatment and control students, leaving little room for improvement.

There is only one area in which there is a statistically significant finding. This is in the area of proactive social adjustment, just one of the influencers of social integration which can lead to higher rates of persistence. As noted previously, proactive social adjustment is the extent to which the student is successfully transitioning into the campus community, adopting norms and behaviors needed for continued enrollment, and developing positive coping mechanism to adjust to the “demands and pressures of social interaction in the college or university” (Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon, 2004, p. 24). Questions in this scale focused on assessing if students are developing behaviors and habits that would help them handle the stress of college, like attending class regularly, studying often, talking to their professors if they need help and seeking out peers on campus to speak with if they had a personal problem. A list of questions in the proactive social adjustment scale can be found in Appendix A.

Several of the email communications focused on encouraging proactive social adjustment. Students received messages about the importance of balancing co-curricular commitments and reaching out for help when needed, messages that might encourage behaviors that increase proactive social adjustment. These proactive social adjustment skills alone would probably not impact a student’s decision to persist since those same skills would help the student succeed at another institution if the student perceived Meeds did not meet their expectations on other areas of social integration.

What this finding reveals is that Meeds has the ability to influence one antecedent of social integration through a targeted email intervention. If it can influence one, it may be able to influence others. This should serve as a call to action to research and develop other interventions that indirectly influence positive

social integration by directly influencing antecedents of social integration. When considering which variables have the most potential for improvement, it is important to look for the practical significance in the findings, specifically where students average below 4.0 in their responses. Average ratings for Social Integration as measured by peer group interactions are 3.61 (control) and 3.81 (treatment). Moreover, while the intervention influenced the proactive social adjustment of treatment students, both treatment and control students still average 3.67 and 3.37 respectively. Both social integration and proactive social adjustment might be targets for future interventions.

Putting the Results of the Intervention in Context: Treatment Group Compared to Greeks/Athletes

Each time we administered a survey as part of this project, it was sent to the full first-year class, not just the treatment and control students in the first-year class. This was the easiest way for Meeds to conduct the survey and also provided Meeds with data on their full first-year class so they could continue to conduct their own extensive analysis of the differences between Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes. Since we had access to all the survey results from both Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes, it allowed us to compare treatment group survey results with the Greek/athlete survey results. Although not a part of this project, Meeds’ overall goals include increasing persistence of non-Greek/non-athletes to the level of Greek/athletes. Having access to Greek/athlete survey results allowed us to provide Meeds with a comparison between the treatment and Greek/athletes to see if they could provide any support for what we found in the comparison between treatment and control.

As noted previously, by the end of the intervention, there is a statistically significant difference in the levels of proactive social adjustment of the treatment and control groups, with treatment students reporting higher levels. Interestingly, when we compare treatment group

proactive social adjustment levels to Greek/athlete proactive social adjustment levels, there is NO statistically significant difference. This finding helps support the finding that the intervention has a positive affect on treatment student's proactive social adjustment. Their proactive social adjustment levels are more closely aligned with that of Greek/athletes. While proactive social adjustment is just one antecedent to social integration and may not by itself increase persistence, it is encouraging to see a difference and that Meeds may have some control in influencing it.

The survey findings also revealed that by the end of the intervention there are statistically significant differences in psychosocial engagement and student perceptions of the institution's commitment to the welfare of students between the treatment group and Greek/athletes. That treatment students are less psychosocially engaged than Greek/athletes is not surprising. Greek and athletic organizations require intensive time and energy that is difficult to match with other organizations available to first-year students. It would be interesting to see if this finding persists over the years as students gain increased access to leadership positions that require more time commitment.

The differences between treatment and Greek/athletes' perceptions of the institution's commitment to the welfare of students is more challenging to interpret. First, it is important to note that both groups reported positive perceptions, although the differences were statistically significant. Treatment students averaged a 3.93 and Greek/athletes averaged 4.13 on the scale. It could be that treatment students (as members of the non-Greek/non-athlete group on campus) do not feel as valued as indicated by their less favorable perceptions of the commitment of the institution to student welfare. As a consequence, they attribute that to the institution caring more about the Greek or athlete populations.

Greeks/Athletes Changing Beliefs about their Subsequent Institutional Commitment

As noted in the previous section, both Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes similarly strongly agreed on Survey one that it is likely that they will re-enroll at Meeds the following year. By the time of the second survey in November, there is still no statistically significant difference in treatment versus control or treatment versus Greek/athlete plans to re-enroll at Meeds for sophomore year. However, it appears that something happens between November and January, the time the third survey is administered, that starts to increase Greek/athlete subsequent commitment to the institution, while non-Greek/non-athlete subsequent commitment to the institution remains relatively flat.

From our analysis we can see that treatment and control students share similar levels of subsequent institutional commitment in January when survey three was administered, but when we compare treatment students' and Greek/athletes' subsequent institutional commitment, treatment students are less likely to report that they will re-enroll in the fall as compared to Greek/athletes ($p < 0.02$). Even with this finding it is important to note that by the end of the intervention it still does not appear that Meeds has a pending departure problem. All groups (treatment, control and Greek/athletes) have high levels of subsequent institutional commitment, with intent to re-enroll averages above 4.41. However, since a difference in subsequent institutional commitment started to appear by January, Meeds may want to consider tracking this trend into the sophomore year to see if time reveals that this question is a valid indicator of their true persistence plans for sophomore year. If it is, Meeds should explore what occurs in the first-year student experience between November and late January that could encourage non-Greek/non-athletes to consider leaving Meeds and possibly creating another intervention targeted at students with low scores on subsequent institutional commitment.

Upon acknowledgement that the intervention executed in this project had little effect on the treatment group, two important considerations rise to the surface.

First, treatment and control students have generally positive responses to all of the variables investigated in this project. Beginning with high ratings on several antecedents to social integration allows for the possibility of ceiling effects and increased difficulty in influencing variables in any statistically or practically significant way.

Second, although this specific intervention did not affect non-Greek/non-athletes' subsequent institutional commitment and some antecedents of social integration, at least during the time of this intervention, it is possible that a differently designed intervention could have a larger effect, especially on the variables of social integration as measured by peer group interaction and proactive social adjustment because mean ratings on each of these variables are below 4.0. What this research reveals is that a challenge that existed in 2008 still exists today; non-Greek/non-athletes are slightly less likely to be socially integrated than Greeks/athletes. This could be leading to their higher rates of departure over time.

Student Perceptions of the Intervention and Email Communication from Meeds

As noted in the findings section, several interesting themes emerged from the 12 interviews with students. First, by questioning students about the types of email communication they preferred, we developed a list of strategies Meeds can use in crafting email messages that motivate students to take action on the request made in the emails. It is no surprise that students prefer emails that are personalized with their name and tailored to their interests. Additional suggestions are listed in Appendix Z.

Almost all interviewees reported that the most influential communications come from peers, including Resident Assistants, Peer Assistants and peer emails and announcements in class.

Communication from peers is often seen as more personal than communication from Meeds administrators. Due to this, Meeds should leverage peers for connecting with students who they feel are at-risk for departure. The Student Activities (SACK) Fair is the most influential peer communication event, per the interviewees. At the event peers encourage other peers to get involved in student organizations, which are represented at the fair at tables with literature and sign-up sheets. All interviewees recommended continuing this event since it was where they first learned about several of the organizations they ultimately joined.

Interestingly, 10 of 12 students remembered emails they received as part of the intervention, although they did not know that they were part of the treatment group. Since students receive hundreds of emails, their remembrance of intervention emails hopefully speaks to the quality and personalization of the messages. Most students specifically remembered and appreciated the email that was sent from the director of student activities. The email was personalized with the student's name and listed ways for that specific student to get involved in types of organizations the student reported as interest areas on the surveys. This email was constructed and sent using the MS Word/MS Excel mail merge feature to generate unique emails for each student depending on their specific involvement interests. When discussing this email, the interviewees mentioned feeling like Meeds was paying attention to what they reported and cared enough to customize messages to their interests.

Almost all interviewees report that they felt like Meeds cares about their success and that professors are supportive and accessible. These perceptions are a critical part of social integration, which leads to persistence. If students feel like the institution cares about their welfare, they are more likely to persist (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Most interviewees also report that it is their perception that students do not need to be Greek to be involved on campus. Most of the interviewees are very involved in all types of organizations on

campus. This is a very positive response since Meeds expressed concerns that students may not feel there are enough involvement opportunities for non-Greek/non-athletes. It is important to note, however, that there may be self-selection bias affecting the findings of the interviews. While 60 treatment students were invited to participate, only 12 volunteered. Students who volunteer for optional projects may also be more likely to be involved on campus, skewing the results. However, this could be a topic for future study.

The findings of this study have helped us create a list of recommendations for Meeds College. These will be described in the next section.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As Adrianna Keizer wrote in the forward to *Understanding and Reducing College Student Departure* (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004), “retention is about developing a climate that is conducive to students as well as helping students make appropriate choices that make them successful” (p. xii). It is clear from our conversations with Meeds staff that the institution is eager to create a climate that increases the persistence of non-Greek/non-athletes. It also appears that the intervention had an influence on treatment students’ increased proactive social adjustment. Still, there were other antecedents to social integration that were not affected by the treatment.

Due to this we would like to make several recommendations for ways Meeds can create a campus culture, including support and opportunities, that ensures non-Greek/non-athletes experience high levels of social integration, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, perceived communal potential, perceived institutional commitment to the welfare of students, perceived institutional integrity and subsequent institutional commitment that can lead to increased levels of persistence. These recommendations are listed below. Some of the recommendations stem directly from the findings while others stem from best practices in the persistence literature.

Recommendations that Stem from the Findings

1. Create a strategy for the more extensive use of the Customer Relationship Management software and more robust collection of data within the CRM.

While persistence challenges cannot be solved only with technology, it could serve as a vital tool if used correctly. During interviews students indicated they remembered and appreciated the email from Student Activities that was tailored to their interests and listed ways to get involved in the organizations in which they had

demonstrated interest. They also shared their perceptions of email communication from Meeds and strategies for making emails more effective. These are listed in Appendix Z.

Meeds should continue the use of CRM to collect even more detailed interest inventories, current involvement information and academic performance data. The institution should use the best practices in Appendix Z and the data within CRM to target students with social and academic engagement opportunities and academic support resources. Since approximately 90% of students reported interest in volunteer opportunities on survey one, the CRM could be leveraged to send announcements tailored to that student’s specific volunteer interests, like working with children, healthcare, or the environment. Since a CRM allows the tracking of read rates and response rates, it can help administrators determine which emails have an impact so they can continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of communication with students. When students only receive email relevant to their needs and interests it helps decrease email fatigue and the annoyance that results from spamming.

In order to effectively leverage the CRM system, Meeds must ensure that all faculty, staff, and student staff on campus have access to the CRM system and are trained on its functionality. A CRM is only as good as the quantity and accuracy of the data within it. A robust CRM will ensure that students do not receive multiple invitations to join organizations in which they are already members and ensure that they do not receive impersonal-sounding invitations from people they know well. The CRM should also be leveraged for sending personal emails to students, not just mass emails. Using the CRM for personal emails to students allows administrators to easily see, on one screen, all emails sent to a student, which makes it easier to identify students at risk for academic difficulty or departure.

2. Develop a pre-first-year communication and outreach strategy to all new students to appropriately socialize them to campus expectations and opportunities.

Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) wrote about “anticipatory socialization” and the importance of helping students understand college expectations before they arrive on campus. In the discussion section it was revealed that in comparison to Greek/athletes, non-Greek/non-athletes arrive at Meeds with lower levels of institutional commitment and less positive perceptions of communal potential. It is possible that this is due to Meeds’ reputation for having a large and pervasive Greek population and students who do not plan to join a Greek organization are concerned about their ability to find community. Since finding a community of people is so important to a student’s social integration, non-Greek/non-athletes may then also be less sure about their commitment to the institution.

As soon as students are accepted, Meeds staff, faculty and student staff should start sending messages to accepted students about the many ways they will find community on campus, and tailor these communications to the student’s particular interests, like music, theater or volunteerism. Several staff members also reported that “dirty rush,” the process in which Greek students start recruiting new members outside of the designated recruitment time period, happens often during summer Open Meeds and Welcome Week orientation programs. The school should try to stop this practice or advise other student organizations to be equally assertive in recruiting students before they arrive at Meeds. If only one type of student organization (Greek) is actively recruiting new members at summer orientation events, then students not interested in Greek organizations could feel left out and concerned about their ability to find their community on campus. More important, though, is the consistent message that newly accepted students receive from faculty, staff and current students about the likelihood they will find community on campus.

3. Continue to administer surveys during the first and second semesters to assess students’ social integration, the antecedents of their social integration and their intent to persist to identify worrisome trends or at-risk students.

Through the three surveys administered during this project, students were asked approximately 70 questions about their social integration, the antecedents to their social integration and their intent to persist. Although it might not be important for Meeds to include all the questions on the three surveys, Meeds staff should review the surveys to determine which questions or scales may be most appropriate for future surveys.

Conducting surveys can help identify students considering departing and subgroups that might be struggling with social integration. However, since students struggling with academics or their decision to remain at Meeds may be less motivated to take a survey that would help administrators identify them as at-risk, Meeds should find ways to embed the survey into regular mandatory academic processes to ensure participation. For instance, more than 90% of students completed the first survey because it was attached to Welcome Week activities. Response rates dropped significantly in the second and third survey although were still very high. It could be that students who did not complete the second and third surveys are more likely to depart. Embedding the survey into a mandatory process, like spring class registration, registration for housing or viewing grades could help Meeds increase their response rates, enhance their understanding of their students, and identify at-risk students.

4. Increase academic department involvement in the first-year experience.

Interviews with students revealed that they want more interaction with their academic department in the first year, including receiving more information about activities, opportunities and career paths related to their major. All twelve of the students we interviewed knew which major they planned to declare. For a student who is less

socially integrated, a close connection with their academic unit, and specifically a faculty member within it, might help them persist. Students also shared that they would like to be affiliated with peer groups or peer advisors within their major to help with course selection and general success tips within the major. Peer groups are powerful in persistence efforts (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); if a student is less socially integrated into campus, but starts to find a strong peer group within his or her major, it may increase persistence.

5. Train student leaders, faculty and staff on the types of email format students prefer.

During interviews students spoke extensively about the types of emails and announcements they preferred and the wording of emails that would encourage them to take the action encouraged by the email, whether it is joining a club or meeting with their advisor. See Appendix Z for a list of Meeds students' suggestions for writing and formatting emails that inspire a student to take the action requested in the email. Meeds should consider sharing these suggestions with all Meeds staff, faculty and student leaders who frequently send emails to students.

Recommendations that Stem from the Literature

1. Create a persistence officer position with authority to mandate participation of critical offices in persistence initiatives.

The officer should be situated within the Provost's Office and have consistent communication with student affairs officers and academic units. This type of action shows the institution's commitment to the welfare of students (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Increasing persistence should be the officer's primary job responsibility. This is suggested since coordinated persistence efforts require a significant amount of time, probably too much for a person who is also managing a teaching load or other student affairs responsibilities. The officer should be given the necessary financial and human resources to

coordinate persistence initiatives (Abele, 2012) and should have the authority to require appropriate staff and students to participate in activities or programs that have been shown in the literature to increase persistence.

The officer should oversee a committee comprised of all the staff and faculty critical to persistence efforts, including, but not limited to, Admissions, Health Services, Career Services, Financial Aid, the Registrar, orientation programs, housing, and the counseling center (Abele, 2012). As Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) wrote, "All members of the college community need to have a stake in the policies and practices to reduce departure" (p.68). This committee should meet several times each month. It should take a proactive approach to persistence (planning initiatives that support persistence before the student is at-risk for departure) as well as reactive (targeting students who are identified as at-risk as revealed through grades, surveys, counseling services or other methods).

The persistence officer should also oversee the communication campaign described in this project, if it is continued. It is clear that use of technology for persistence efforts, like CRM, can only be effective if there is a central authority coordinating efforts, strategically timing communications and ensuring offices understand and execute their roles. This type of coordination can ensure that strategic communications and initiatives are utilized in the critical October/November time period, which is when differences start to emerge in intent to persist between Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes. During interviews, students revealed they remembered intervention emails they received from some of the higher-level administrators like the Provost. The persistence officer should continue to seek involvement from the highest levels of the institutions so students can see that a concern for the persistence and the welfare of all students originates at the highest levels (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004).

The persistence officer would conduct research on the students who depart Meeds to understand their reasons for departure. As noted previously, some departure is necessary. Some students are not yet ready for the challenges of Meeds College or any institution and should remain uninvolved until their commitment, attitudes or behaviors change. However, Meeds is most concerned about unnecessary departure of students who should have persisted due to satisfactory grades and seemingly successful transition to college. Although students may not always be fully honest in their responses, the persistence officer should oversee efforts to speak with all students who depart and their parents. Meeds should consider using highly trained peer counselors for some of these interviews since students may feel more comfortable speaking with peers like them. Meeds should consider incenting participation in some way. If themes emerge in students' reasons for departing, Meeds should use persistence best practices, supported by staff and financial resources, to develop persistence programs that focus on addressing these issues.

The persistence officer should leverage the power of peers in Meeds' persistence efforts, looking for ways that peers can engage with students at risk for departure. Peers can be a valuable resource for struggling students and can encourage them to persist through their supportive actions (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt and Associates, 2005). It is important that students play a role in initiating ideas to increase persistence and implementing the programs (Braxton & Mundy, 2001-2002). The persistence officer may want to create a special council comprised of non-Greek/non-athletes, bringing them together often to ask for their assistance in reviewing the organizational structure, programs and policies to identify and remove obstacles to non-Greek/non-athlete social integration and persistence. The council of students can also be empowered with leadership responsibilities and funding to implement their program ideas.

The persistence officer should work with the faculty, staff and council of students to conduct a thorough analysis on all support systems

affecting non-Greek/non-athletes. They should try to determine if there is a "chillier" climate for non-Greek/non-athletes on campus that leads to their decreased institutional commitment once they experience the culture on campus. If it is found that the climate and culture negatively impacts non-Greek/non-athletes, a multi-year strategy should be created to address this.

2. Increase the number of high-commitment organizations and programs available to first-year students and ensure support for these groups.

During our exploratory meetings with Meeds faculty, staff and students, a concern arose that there may not be enough diversity in the quantity and type of high-commitment groups and programs available to first-year students. High-commitment programs are student organizations or other programs (like leadership development programs or mentoring) that require high levels of psychosocial engagement and energy (Kuh, 2008). Because students spend so much time with their peers in these activities, they have higher levels of social integration and an extensive peer community that encourages their persistence.

Greek organizations and athletics are two of these high-commitment activities. Meeds should explore these concerns by first looking at their peer institutions to understand the type of high-commitment groups and programs available to first-year students on those campuses. Kuh (2008) wrote that high-impact programs in the first year are so critical to increasing persistence that institutions should make them mandatory. These can include programs like freshman orientation, a first-semester freshman transition course, and learning communities (Kuh, 2008).

Currently Meeds does not have a freshman seminar course that spans the first semester. It should consider creating one and requiring it for all students. The freshman seminar course is a perfect vehicle for building community, helping students create friendships, and sharing information about college transition and coping strategies that could increase proactive social

adjustment (Braxton & Mundy, 2001-2002). These courses are also conduits through which to share messages about stress management, time management and academic success skills.

At many campuses, the Residence Life Association is an ideal vehicle through which to engage students, build community and encourage student persistence (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) as each residence hall has a leadership structure, inclusive governance system and an active social activity calendar that bonds students together. Meeds lacks a fully developed Residence Life Association and should seize on this “low hanging fruit” to give first-year students another high-commitment activity.

The campus also has very few learning communities in the residence halls. Learning communities can play a critical role in helping students transition to college and persist (Smith, McGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004). Learning communities could include block scheduling, high levels of engagement in the classroom, and a focus on themes interwoven through all the block classes to encourage students to connect with each other through discussions of overlapping ideas and concepts. This would provide another type of academic/social high-commitment experience for first-year students.

At the time of this project, Meeds did not have a full portfolio of highly active and staff-supported media-related organizations. These types of activities, like the newspaper, student-led news websites, and campus radio and TV stations are often high-commitment groups on campus, requiring many hours of strategy, design and teamwork to ensure successful execution. Meeds should consider enhancing support for these organizations.

Lastly, students and staff expressed a concern that the high-commitment organizations and positions available to students after the first year (like Diplomats, student governance organizations, and Resident Assistant positions, as examples) are heavily dominated by Greek

students. Offices and organizations should be incented to conduct creative recruiting efforts for these high-commitment groups and positions to increase applications from non-Greek/non-athletes and be vigilant that no one group is over-represented in the organization or leadership.

Meeds should consider implementing the recommendations noted in this section since they specifically apply to the unique needs and situation at Meeds College and could affect student perceptions of the institution and persistence. One of the best steps Meeds can take to addressing persistence is to hire a full-time persistence officer who has the authority to coordinate persistence efforts across the institution. “The more a student perceives that the institution is committed to the welfare of its students, the lower the likelihood of the student’s departure” (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004, p. 38).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Meeds College is a prestigious institution that cares deeply about the success of its students. They currently have an enviable persistence rate, and it is admirable that they want to continue to improve it. While there is a distinct persistence difference between Greek/athlete students and non-Greek/non-athlete students by graduation, we ultimately found little practical significance in the survey results comparing first-year Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes. This is likely due to the fact that all first-year students – control, treatment, and Greek/athlete – rated their experience at Meeds very positively and have little room to increase their levels of social integration and the antecedents of social integration, at least at this point in their college career. We can interpret this as typical “ceiling effects” that result from working with strong students at a selective institution (Shaddish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). In fact, treatment, control, and Greek/athletes all reported their intent to re-enroll at Meeds in the range of 4.41 – 4.66 on a scale from 1 to 5. However, since we do not have the actual persistence results yet, it is very important for Meeds administrators to continue analysis on this cohort of students in fall 2012 to confirm that their reported intentions to persist do indeed predict their persistence behaviors (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

Meeds has laid a strong foundation on which to build expanded persistence efforts, if it chooses to do so. Of course, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; a coordinated persistence effort involving all student affairs offices, faculty and student organizations could have a much more drastic impact on graduation rates than each office executing its own persistence initiatives. All faculty and staff must work together to ensure that every student finds a community on campus, has opportunities to learn and develop behaviors that support their proactive social adjustment, experience challenging psychosocial engagement opportunities and perceives that the institution has integrity and is committed to the welfare of all students. Technology should

certainly play a role in persistence initiatives, but most likely cannot be the primary tool.

Fortunately, Meeds College has many advantages that play in its favor: an academically impressive first-year, traditional-age population with minimal off-campus responsibilities that could distract them from continued enrollment, top-quality faculty and staff, a culture of rigor and close faculty-student interactions, and a residential environment ripe for expanded social integration initiatives. Since both Greek/athletes and non-Greek/non-athletes report similar persistence plans during the first week of classes and during the semester, but then, overtime, Greek/athletes increase their commitment to the institution while non-Greek/non-athletes become slightly less likely to want to continue their enrollment at Meeds, something happens at Meeds to start this shift. While this finding is a concern, is it also empowering. It means Meeds may have more control over student persistence than previously imagined. Meeds should continue to explore this issue and make every effort to ensure the institution is providing the support and culture that encourages students to continue to choose Meeds. By coordinating efforts, incorporating additional best practices and leveraging technology, Meeds will be able to achieve its goals for increased persistence and graduation rates.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We sincerely thank Meeds College for providing support, data and access to students for interviews and surveys. We also thank Professor John Braxton from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University for providing guidance and feedback for our capstone project and for his helpful feedback on all our projects and research throughout the program.

REFERENCES

- Abel, L.G. (2012). Working the Multiple Issues of Retention and Graduation. Kentucky Student Success Summit. April 2-3, 2012. Louisville, KY.
- Adams, T., Ashford, D. and Taylor, A. (2010). Do Birds of a Feather Flock Together? A qualitative study of joiners, non-joiners, and aspiring non-joiners at Meeds College. Available at Vanderbilt University Library.
- Bean, J.P. and Eaton, S.B. (2000). A psychological model of college student retention. In J.M. Braxton (Ed.), *Rewording the departure puzzle* (pp.48-61). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Bean, J.P. and Vesper, N. (1990). Quantitative approached to grounding theory in data: Using LISREL to develop a local model and theory of student attrition. Annual meeting of the American educational research association, Boston, MA.
- Braxton, J. M. (2006). Grounded retention strategies: Maximizing the success of your student retention efforts. Presentation made at the Council of Independent Colleges, Institute for Chief Academic Affairs Officers, St. Petersburg Beach, FL.
- Braxton, J.M., Hirschy, A. S., and McClendon, S. A. (2004). Understanding and Reducing College Student Departure. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report. 30(3).
- Braxton, J.M. and Mundy, M.E. (2001-2002). Powerful institutional levers to reduce college student departure. *Journal of College Student Retention*. 3, 91-118.
- Cabrera, A. F, Nora, A. and Castañeda, M. B. (1993) College persistence: The testing of an integrated model. *Journal of Higher Education*, 64(2) 123-139.
- Hirschy, A.S. (2004). Antecedents to Social Integration: Organizational influences on college student persistence. Association for the student of higher education annual meeting. Kansas City, MO.
- Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., Whitt, E.J, and Associates (2005). *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*. Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G.D. (2008). High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter. Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Pascarella, E.T. and Terenzini, P.T. (1980). Predicting Freshman Persistence and Voluntary Dropout Decisions from a Theoretical Model. *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 1980), pp. 60-75.
- Pascarella, E.T. and Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Meeds College. (2011a). Majors and Minors. Available at: <http://www.Meeds.edu/academics/17470.asp>
- Meeds College. (2011b). Student Organizations. Available at: <http://www.Meeds.edu/campuslife/673.asp>
- Meeds College Information Services. (2011). Common Data Set. Available at: <http://www.Meeds.edu/ir/1328.asp>
- Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (7th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Shadish, W.R., Cook, T.D., & Campbell, D.T. (2002). *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Smith, B.L., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R.S. & Gabelnick, F. (2004). *Learning Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent

research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125.

Wiley, P.G, Gideon, A.C. and Hayse, C.B. (2009). *An Exploratory Study of Greek Life at Meeds College*. Available at Vanderbilt University Library.

TABLES AND APPENDICES

Table 1: Established Scales for Surveys Measuring Social Integration and the Antecedents of Social Integration

SCALE	CRONBACH ALPHA	SURVEY
Initial Institutional Commitment	0.73	S1
Communal Potential	0.84	S1
Social Integration – Peer Group Interactions	0.82	S2
Proactive Social Integration	0.69	S2
Psychosocial Engagement	0.63	S2
Perceived Commitment of Institution to Student Welfare	0.86	S3
Institutional Integrity	0.87	S3

Survey 1

Initial Institutional Commitment (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Bean & Vesper, 1990) $\alpha=0.73$

1. It is important for me to get a college degree
2. It is important for me to graduate from this college as opposed to some other school
3. My family approves of my attending Meeds College
4. I believe my education at Meeds College will help me secure future employment
5. My close friends rate Meeds College as a quality institution
6. I am confident I have made the right decision in choosing to attend Meeds College
7. Getting good grades is not important to me
8. My close friends approve of my attending Meeds College
9. I do not know what I want to major in
10. I am satisfied with the amount of financial support (including grants, loans, family, jobs) I have received
11. I feel I belong at Meeds College
12. It is likely that I will re-enroll at Meeds College next fall

Communal Potential $\alpha=0.84$

1. It is important for me to make friends while at Meeds College
2. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have values similar to mine
3. I am confident that I will build close friendships at Meeds College
4. I do not plan to get involved in on-campus activities
5. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have similar beliefs as me
6. It is not easy for me to make friends in a new environment
7. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have long-term goals that are similar to mine
8. I am aware of campus organizations that I want to get involved with this year
9. I feel like I will not fit in at Meeds College
10. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have interests that are similar to mine
11. I will probably go home on most weekends
12. I already feel part of the Meeds community

Subsequent Institutional Commitment (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980) you are measuring instructional commitment differently below than in above.

18. I plan to re-enroll at Meeds next fall

Survey 2

Social Integration – Peer Group Interactions (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980) $\alpha=0.82$

1. Since coming to Meeds I have developed close personal relationships with other students
2. The friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying
3. My friendships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values
4. My friendships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas
5. It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students
6. Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem
7. Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own

Proactive Social Integration (Self-Created) $\alpha=0.7$

2. Being away from home will make me a more independent person
3. When I feel stressed out I avoid my responsibilities
5. I start assignments early so I can finish them by the deadline
6. I seek academic support services when I need help on a paper or test
7. I talk to my faculty members if I need help preparing for a test or paper
9. I procrastinate with getting my homework and studying done
10. Even though tests can be stressful, I'm confident in my ability to do well
11. I skip class to avoid stress
13. When I have free time I seek out activities and events
16. I actively participated in Welcome Week orientation

Psychosocial Engagement (Self-Created) $\alpha=0.63$

2. Attended a student organization meeting
3. Attended a sporting event
4. Gone to dinner with another student (on or off campus)
5. Attended a party on or off campus
6. Joined a committee through a student organization
9. Attended a residence hall activity
10. Joined a study group outside of class
11. Visited with my Resident Assistant
12. Attended a university-sponsored program or event
13. Pulled an all-nighter studying
14. Pulled an all-nighter hanging out with friends

Subsequent Institutional Commitment (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980)

18. I plan to re-enroll at Meeds next fall

Survey 3

Perceived Commitment of Institution to Student Welfare (Hirschy, 2004) $\alpha=0.86$

1. Most faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students.
2. Most student services staff (e.g. dean of students office, student activities, housing, etc.) I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students.
3. Most other college/university staff (e.g. registrar, student accounts, financial aid, etc.) I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students.
4. Most of the campus religious leaders (e.g. chaplain, priest, rabbi, etc.) I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students?
5. I have experienced negative interactions with faculty members.
6. I have experienced negative interactions with student services staff.
7. I have experienced negative interactions with other college/university staff.
8. In general, faculty members treat students with respect.

9. In general, student services staff treat students with respect.
10. In general, other college/university staff treat students with respect.
11. In general, I know where to go if I need more information about a policy.

Institutional Integrity (Hirschy, 2004) $\alpha=0.87$

1. The actions of the administration are consistent with the stated mission of this institution.
2. My institution almost always does the right thing.
3. The values of this institutions are communicated clearly to the campus community.
4. Since I have been a student here, the rules of this institution appear in harmony with the values the institution espouses.
5. Since I have been a student here, the decisions made at this institution rarely conflict with the values it espouses.

Subsequent Institutional Commitment (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980)

18. I plan to re-enroll at Meeds next fall

Table 2: T-tests Comparing Greek/athlete versus Non-Greek/non-athlete

Item	All Non-Greek / Non-athlete Mean	Greek / athlete Mean	tValue	DF	pValue
Communal Potential - Scale	4.15	4.43	6.96	498	<.0001
Institutional Commitment - Scale	4.27	4.37	2.64	498	0.0085
Survey 1 – Subsequent Institutional Commitment in Fall 2012	4.55	4.59	0.68	498	0.4975

Table 3: T-Tests Comparing Treatment Group versus Greek/Athlete Students

Ethnicity	Treatment Mean	Greek / Athlete Mean	t Value	DF	p Value
Peer Group Interaction - Scale *	3.80	4.01	2.03	250	0.0434
Psychosocial Engagement - Scale ***	1.19	1.59	5.53	250	<.0001
Proactive Social Adjustment – Scale	3.67	3.64	-0.39	250	0.6968
Institutional Commitment to Student Welfare - Scale **	3.93	4.13	2.99	219	0.0031
Institutional Integrity – Scale	4.03	4.20	1.85	219	0.0656
Survey 2 – Subsequent Institutional Commitment in Fall 2012	4.44	4.56	0.93	250	0.3555
Survey 3 – Subsequent Institutional Commitment in Fall 2012*	4.41	4.66	2.34	219	0.0203

Table 4: T-Test Comparing Treatment Group versus Control Groups

Item	Control Mean	Treatment Mean	tValue	DF	pValue
Peer Group Interaction – Scale	3.61	3.8	-1.53	118	0.1296
Psychosocial Engagement – Scale	1.3	1.19	1.12	118	0.2638
Proactive Social Adjustment – Scale	3.37	3.67	-3.35	118	0.0011
Institutional Commitment to Student Welfare – Scale	4.09	3.93	1.85	114	0.0672
Institutional Integrity – Scale	4.23	4.03	1.87	114	0.0644
Subsequent Institutional Commitment: Survey 2 – Intent to Re-enroll	4.61	4.44	1.16	118	0.2471
Subsequent Institutional Commitment: Survey 3 – Intent to Re-enroll	4.51	4.41	0.67	114	0.5046

Table 5: Non-Greek/Non-Athlete Goodness of Fit

Ethnicity	Ethnicity Code	Frequency of Pooled Non-GA	Percent of Pooled Non-GA	Frequency of Ineligible	Percent of Ineligible
Unknown	0	6	3.16%	2	5.26%
White, non-Hispanic	1	120	63.16%	18	47.37%
Black, non-Hispanic	2	19	0.10%	8	21.05%
Hispanic	3	4	2.11%	2	5.26%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	31	16.32%	6	15.79%
Multiracial	8	10	5.26%	2	5.26%

Chi Square	8.47
DF	5
Pr > Chas	0.13

Variables	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	KSa	D	Pr > KSa
Distance to Meeds	220	0.03	0.49	0.09	0.97
ACT Composite	181	0.05	0.61	0.12	0.86
SAT Composite	119	0.09	0.97	0.24	0.30
High School GPA	226	0.04	0.62	0.11	0.84
Parent Adjusted Gross Income	187	0.06	0.77	0.16	0.60
Unmet Financial Need	224	0.03	0.51	0.09	0.96

Gender	Pooled Mean	Ineligible Mean	tValue	DF	pValue
Percent Female	57%	47%	1.06	228	0.2889

Table 6: Survey 1 – Goodness of Fit

Ethnicity	Ethnicity Code	N (Took Survey)	Percent	N (Did not take survey)	Percent
Unknown	0	17	3.41%	3	5.56%
White, non-Hispanic	1	375	75.30%	42	77.78%
Black, non-Hispanic	2	33	6.63%	2	3.70%
Hispanic	3	15	3.01%	1	1.85%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	42	8.43%	5	9.26%
Multiracial	8	16	3.21%	1	1.85%

Chi Square	2.0655
DF	5
Pr > ChiSq	0.84

Variables	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	KSa	D	Pr > KSa
Distance to Meeds	544	0.028682	0.668968	0.096722	0.7621
ACT Composite	428	0.059504	1.231020	0.202181	0.0965
SAT Composite	289	0.048656	0.827144	0.161936	0.5007
High School GPA	547	0.038956	0.911113	0.131694	0.3776
Parent Adjusted Gross Income	453	0.025803	0.549182	0.088032	0.9236
Unmet Financial Need	534	0.043794	1.012009	0.150331	0.2573

Gender	Did not Take - Mean	Did Take - Mean	tValue	DF	pValue
Percent Female	46.30%	62.80%	-2.37	552	0.018

Table 7: Survey 2 – Goodness of Fit

Ethnicity	Ethnicity Code	N (Took Survey)	Percent	N (Did not take survey)	Percent
Unknown	0	13	3.93%	7	3.17%
White, non-Hispanic	1	246	74.32%	171	77.38%
Black, non-Hispanic	2	24	7.25%	11	4.98%
Hispanic	3	10	3.02%	6	2.71%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	29	8.76%	18	8.14%
Multiracial	8	9	2.72%	8	3.62%

Chi Square	3.0006
DF	5
Pr > ChiSq	0.6999

Variables	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	KSa	D	Pr > KSa
Distance to Meeds	544	0.059696	1.392343	0.122104	0.0414
ACT Composite	428	0.068200	1.410940	0.140787	0.0373
SAT Composite	289	0.047975	0.815568	0.097479	0.5190
High School GPA	547	0.059722	1.396787	0.122078	0.0404
Parent Adjusted Gross Income	453	0.039527	0.841276	0.081830	0.4787
Unmet Financial Need	534	0.035238	0.814301	0.072263	0.5211

Gender	Did not Take - Mean	Did Take - Mean	tValue	DF	pValue
Percent Female	54.30%	65.77%	-2.73	552	0.0066

Table 8: Survey 3 – Goodness of Fit

Ethnicity	Ethnicity Code	N (Took Survey)	Percent	N (Did not take survey)	Percent
Unknown	0	11	3.82%	9	3.38%
White, non-Hispanic	1	219	76.00%	198	74.44%
Black, non-Hispanic	2	15	52.10%	20	7.52%
Hispanic	3	10	3.47%	6	2.26%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	26	9.03%	21	7.89%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	5	1	0.04%	1	0.38%
Multiracial	8	6	2.08%	11	4.14%

Chi Square	9.8618
DF	6
Pr > ChiSq	0.1306

Variables	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	KSa	D	Pr > KSa
Distance to Meeds	544	0.068910	1.607234	0.137879	0.0114
ACT Composite	428	0.062036	1.283401	0.124464	0.0742
SAT Composite	289	0.064937	1.103927	0.129912	0.1747
High School GPA	547	0.078083	1.826214	0.156282	0.0025
Parent Adjusted Gross Income	453	0.024448	0.520351	0.049043	0.9494
Unmet Financial Need	534	0.041465	0.958191	0.083099	0.3175

Gender	Did not Take - Mean	Did Take - Mean	tValue	DF	pValue
Percent Female	53.38%	68.40%	-3.66	552	0.0003

Table 9: Thematic Responses from Qualitative Interviews

n=12

	TOP RESPONSES WITH 10+ CONCURRING OPINIONS	TOTAL
1	SACK Fair influential	12
2	I feel like Meeds cares about my success	11
3	Peers influential for involvement (known peers, not unknown peers)	10
4	Email is influential	10
5	Recalled specific emails from our treatment	10
6	Like that email was tailored to interests	10
7	Frequency of emails are just right	10
8	Professors are accessible and supportive	10
9	Don't have to be Greek to get involved on campus	10

	Next Level of Emerging Themes (n=12)	Total
1	Remembers Student Involvement Emails (from student activities)	8
2	Reads almost all emails from Meeds	8
3	Agrees that personalized emails encourages him/her to read them	8
4	I get enough emails from Meeds about things that matter	7
5	Subject line is important	7
6	Meeds is doing a good job - personal responsibility of students to get involved	7
7	Posters influential	6
8	Doesn't feel that redundancy of emails is problem. Redundancies seen more as helpful reminders	6
9	Staff are supportive	6
10	Greek Life inclusive	6
11	Groups on facebook are a great way to communicate with students	5
12	Personalized emails encouraged you to get involved	5
13	PA Leaders are really helpful - upperclassman leaders	5
14	Learned about opportunities through classes/academic department/professor	4
15	Personalized email doesn't matter	4
16	Reads Thursday announcements	4
17	Thinks Thurs. announcements aren't helpful	4

Appendix A: Survey 1

Meeds College First-Year Student Questionnaire

Welcome to Meeds College! Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. This will help us to better meet your needs this coming year!

1. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1. It is important for me to make friends while at Meeds College	5	4	3	2	1
Q2. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have values similar to mine	5	4	3	2	1
Q3. I am confident that I will build close friendships at Meeds College	5	4	3	2	1
Q4. I do not plan to get involved in on-campus activities	1	2	3	4	5
Q5. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have similar beliefs as me	5	4	3	2	1
Q6. It is not easy for me to make friends in a new environment	1	2	3	4	5
Q7. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have long-term goals that are similar to mine	5	4	3	2	1
Q8. I am aware of campus organizations that I want to get involved with this year	5	4	3	2	1
Q9. I feel like I will not fit in at Meeds College	1	2	3	4	5
Q10. I believe there are students at Meeds College who have interests that are similar to mine	5	4	3	2	1
Q11. I will probably go home on most weekends	1	2	3	4	5
Q12. I already feel part of the Meeds community	5	4	3	2	1

2. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q13. It is important for me to get a college degree	5	4	3	2	1
Q14. It is important for me to graduate from this college as opposed to some other school	5	4	3	2	1
Q15. My family approves of my attending Meeds College	5	4	3	2	1
Q16. I believe my education at Meeds College will help me secure future employment	5	4	3	2	1
Q17. My close friends rate Meeds College as a quality institution	5	4	3	2	1
Q18. I am confident I have made the right decision in choosing to attend Meeds College	5	4	3	2	1
Q19. Getting good grades is not important to me	1	2	3	4	5
Q20. My close friends approve of my attending Meeds College	5	4	3	2	1
Q21. I do not know what I want to major in	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q22. I am satisfied with the amount of financial support (including grants, loans, family, jobs) I have received	5	4	3	2	1
Q23. I feel I belong at Meeds College	5	4	3	2	1
Q24. It is likely that I will re-enroll at Meeds College next fall	5	4	3	2	1

Q25. How did you rank Meeds College among the schools you considered attending?

- Meeds was my first choice - 5
- Meeds was my second choice - 4
- Meeds was my third choice - 3
- Meeds was my fourth choice - 2
- Meeds was lower than my fourth choice - 1

4. Please tell us what activities and/or student clubs you are interested in getting involved with this year (check all that apply)

- Q4A. Intercollegiate Athletics
- Q4B. Intramural Sports
- Q4C. Outdoor Recreation
- Q4D. Greek Life
- Q4E. Religious Life
- Q4F. Community Service (Volunteering in the city, Alternative Spring Break, etc.)
- Q4G. Theatre
- Q4H. Music
- Q4I. Academic Lectures
- Q4J. Research with a faculty member
- Q4K. Leadership Opportunities
- Q4L. Multicultural Organizations
- Q4M. Student Government
- Q4N. Political Organizations
- Q4O. Student Media and Publications (newspaper, radio, etc.)
- Q4P. Study Abroad
- Q4Q. Activities with my residence hall
- Q4R. Other (please specify)

Appendix B: Survey 2

Meeds College First-Year Student Experience Survey

Section 1.

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Since coming to Meeds I have developed close personal relationships with other students	5	4	3	2	1
2. The friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying	5	4	3	2	1
3. My friendships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values	5	4	3	2	1
4. My friendships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas	5	4	3	2	1
5. It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students	1	2	3	4	5
6. Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem	1	2	3	4	5
7. Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own	1	2	3	4	5

Section 2.

Please estimate the number of times you have done the following this semester:

	Zero	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
1. Joined a student organization	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
2. Attended a student organization meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>					
3. Attended a sporting event	<input type="checkbox"/>					
4. Gone to dinner with another student (on or off campus)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
5. Attended a party on or off campus	<input type="checkbox"/>					
6. Joined a committee through a student organization	<input type="checkbox"/>					
7. Taken on a leadership position within an organization (treasurer, chair, coordinator, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
8. Gone home on the weekend	<input type="checkbox"/>					
9. Attended a residence hall activity	<input type="checkbox"/>					
10. Joined a study group outside of class	<input type="checkbox"/>					
11. Visited with my Resident Assistant	<input type="checkbox"/>					
12. Attended a university-sponsored program or event	<input type="checkbox"/>					
13. Pulled an all-nighter studying	<input type="checkbox"/>					
14. Pulled an all-nighter hanging out with friends	<input type="checkbox"/>					
15. Explored the city with another Meeds student(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
16. Signed up for a listerv for a student group	<input type="checkbox"/>					
17. Invited someone to do some activity together or hang out as friends	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Section 3.

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

1. I call home regularly to talk with my parents	1	2	3	4	5
2. I believe being away from home will make me a more independent person	5	4	3	2	1
3. When I feel stressed out I avoid my responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
4. I regularly have difficulty sleeping the night before a big test	1	2	3	4	5
5. I start assignments early so I can finish them by the deadline	5	4	3	2	1
6. I seek academic support services when I need help on a paper or test	5	4	3	2	1
7. I talk to my faculty members if I need help preparing for a test or paper	5	4	3	2	1
8. I would go to a party or event by myself if I couldn't find anyone else to go with me	5	4	3	2	1
9. I procrastinate with getting my homework and studying done	1	2	3	4	5
10. Even though tests can be stressful, I'm confident in my ability to do well	5	4	3	2	1
11. I skip class to avoid stress	1	2	3	4	5
12. I have so much school work that I don't have time for fun	1	2	3	4	5
13. When I have free time I seek out activities and events	5	4	3	2	1
14. I am so involved on campus it's hard to find time to do everything required for classes	1	2	3	4	5
15. I keep my room door closed when I'm inside	1	2	3	4	5
16. I actively participated in Welcome Week orientation	5	4	3	2	1
17. I have changed a lot since coming to college	5	4	3	2	1
18. I plan to re-enroll at Meeds next fall	5	4	3	2	1

Section 4.

1. Which of the following activities or organizations have you gotten involved in or are interested in?

Activity	Currently involved in	Am interested but not yet involved	Not interested in	Haven't decided
Intercollegiate athletics				
Intramural or club sports				
Outdoor recreation				
Greek life				
Religious life				
Community service (Volunteering in the city, Alternative Spring Break, etc.)				
Theater				
Music				
Academic lectures				
Research with a faculty member				
Leadership opportunities				
Multicultural organizations				
Student government				
Political organizations				
Student Media and Publications (newspaper, radio, etc.)				
Researching study abroad options				
Activities with my residence hall				

1. Are you involved in any activities or organizations that are not listed above? If so, please list them here:
[insert open text box]

Section 5.

1. Are you working for pay on campus?
2. Are you working for pay off campus?
3. If you are working, how many hours on average are you working per week in all your jobs combined? [drop down should have options for 1-40+ hours, with 40+ being the last option]

Appendix C: Survey 3

Meeds College First-Year Student Experience Survey

Section 1.

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. Most faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students	5	4	3	2	1
9. Most student services staff (e.g. dean of students office, student activities, housing, etc.) I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students	5	4	3	2	1
10. Most other college/university staff (e.g. registrar, student accounts, financial aid, etc.) I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students	5	4	3	2	1
11. Most of the campus religious leaders (e.g. chaplain, priest, rabbi, etc.) I have had contact with are genuinely interested in students	5	4	3	2	1
12. I have experienced negative interactions with faculty members	5	4	3	2	1
13. I have experienced negative interactions with student services staff	5	4	3	2	1
14. I have experienced negative interactions with other college/university staff	5	4	3	2	1
15. Most of the faculty I've had contact with are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas	5	4	3	2	1
16. In general, faculty members treat students with respect	5	4	3	2	1
17. In general, student services staff treat students with respect	5	4	3	2	1
18. In general, other college/university staff treat students with respect	5	4	3	2	1
19. In general, I know where to go if I need more information about a policy	5	4	3	2	1

Section 2.

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The actions of the administration are consistent with the stated mission of this institution	5	4	3	2	1
2. My institution almost always does the right thing	5	4	3	2	1
3. The values of this institutions are	5	4	3	2	1

communicated clearly to the campus community					
4. Since I have been a student here, the rules of this institution appear in harmony with the values the institution espouses	5	4	3	2	1
5. Since I have been a student here, the decisions made at this institution rarely conflict with the values it espouses	5	4	3	2	1

Section 3.

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. It is important for me to graduate from this college as opposed to some other school	5	4	3	2	1
2. I am confident I have made the right decision in choosing to attend Meeds College	5	4	3	2	1
3. I plan to re-enroll at Meeds next fall	5	4	3	2	1

4. If you do not plan to continue as a student at Meeds College next fall, what do you plan to do?
- a. Attend a different college or university
 - b. Not attend a college or university

Appendix D: Qualitative Interview Protocol

30-45 minutes

1. What campus or community activities have you gotten involved in so far at Meeds?
 - a. Did you go Greek here at Meeds?
 - b. I know Greek life is a big part of campus, do you feel like there are enough involvement opportunities and organizations for non-Greek students?
 - i. If yes, great!
 - ii. If no, do you have any suggestions for what type of opportunities and activities should be offered?
2. How did you learn about the organizations you got involved in?
3. Meeds is always looking for the best way to reach students with information about how to get involved on campus. What would you say are the most effective ways to communicate with students about involvement opportunities?
4. If Meeds could only pick 1 or 2 ways to get students' attention, what do you think works best?
 - a. Email yes?
 - b. Email no?
5. We know that one thing Meeds is trying to do is send students more personalized emails about campus involvement opportunities, as opposed to mass emails that might not be relevant to them. Do you remember getting any emails from Meeds staff that were personalized and relevant to your interests?
 - a. If yes:
 - i. Do any specific emails come to mind?
 - ii. Did those emails encourage you to get involved?
 - iii. What was it about the emails that encouraged you take the next step to get involved?
 - iv. What, if any, effect did it have that they were tailored to the interests you mentioned on the first-year interest survey all students completed when they first arrived?
 - v. We know students get a lot of emails. What is your method of weeding through your inbox and determining what you're going to read?
 - vi. How thoroughly do you read emails from Meeds staff and faculty?
 - vii. Do emails personalized with your name encourage you to read them?
 - b. If no:
 - i. Double check to make sure they know what we're talking about.
 - ii. We know students get a lot of emails. What is your method of weeding through your inbox and determining what you're going to read?
 - iii. How thoroughly do you read emails from Meeds staff and faculty?
 - iv. Do emails personalized with your name encourage you to read them?
6. Tell me what you think about the frequency of emails you receive from Meeds staff and faculty? Is it too little, too much, just right?
7. Do you feel like you receive a lot of redundant emails about the same activity or opportunity?
8. If yes, can you provide us with an example of redundant emails?
9. Do you get enough emails from Meeds about the things that matter to you?
 - a. If no, what are you missing?
10. For the last two questions I'm going to shift gears a bit to ask a little more about your overall experience and opinion. First, reflecting on your overall experience at Meeds, do you feel like Meeds cares about your experience on campus and that you're successful here?
 - a. What has given you this impression?
11. Considering your experience at Meeds so far, what are one or two things you think Meeds could do to enhance the experience for first-year students?

12. Some students decide not to get involved on campus. Is there anything Meeds can do to encourage those students to get involved more?

Appendix E: Intervention Timeline

Intervention #	Date Sent	Sent	Sent From	# Sent
SURVEY 1	8/23	✓	Director of Institutional Research	554
1	9/22	✓	Dean of Students	105
2	9/22	✓	Student Involvement Coordinator	105
3	10/4	✓	Director of Residence Life	105
4	10/20	✓	Director of Residence Life	45
5	10/20	✓	Director of Multicultural Affairs	32
6	10/20	✓	Student Government President	23
7	10/21	✓	Music Department	20
8	10/25	✓	Campus Chaplain and Director of Center for Faith and Service	69
9	10/25	✓	Campus Chaplain and Director of Center for Faith and Service	20
10	10/25	✓	Performing Arts Coordinator	10
11	11/8	✓	Advisor of Publications Board	13
SURVEY 2	11/12	✓	Director of Institutional Research	554
12	11/29	✓	Director of International Programs	56
13	12/1	✓	Student Leadership Coordinator	34
14	12/2	✓	Assistant Coordinator of Recreational Services	61
15	12/22	✓	Dean of Students	105
16	1/5	✓	Vice President of Academic Affairs	102
17	1/10	✓	Student Involvement Coordinator	105
SURVEY 3	1/25	✓	Director of Institutional Research	521

Appendix F: Targeted Email to Parents: Subject – Attended Family Weekend

Dear (family member pref name or names),

I'm excited about seeing family members and guests at our annual Meeds College Parents/Family Weekend scheduled for this weekend. I'm glad to hear you plan to join us for the great program we have planned for you.

You may remember your Open Meeds welcome session this summer. The President and I both talked about "getting connected." The first few weeks at Meeds College are such an important time for new students to get involved in the campus community. Let me share some helpful information about involvement opportunities that can ease students' transition to Meeds.

You'll see there are dozens of athletic, honor, social, cultural, academic, religious, political, performance, media, service, and governance organizations available to students. We list many of our organizations at <http://www.Meeds.edu/campuslife/673.asp>. I also encourage students to read my Thursday Announcement emails in which upcoming campus and community opportunities are posted. Lastly, there are staff members available to help students connect socially. [student name] can stop by the 4th floor of Smith and ask to meet with someone about getting connected. We would be happy to help!

Although students will make their own decisions about which clubs and activities to join, your encouragement and ideas regarding campus involvement are highly valued. Thank you!

Dean of Students

Appendix G: Targeted Email to Parents: Subject – Did Not Attend Family Weekend

Dear (pref parent name),

I am thrilled that [student's name] has decided to join us at Meeds. I am really enjoying seeing all our new students get acclimated to college life.

You may remember your Open Meeds welcome session this summer. The president and I both talked about “getting connected.” The first few weeks at Meeds College are such an important time for new students to get involved in the campus community. Let me share some helpful information about involvement opportunities that can ease students' transition to Meeds.

You'll see there are dozens of athletic, honor, social, cultural, academic, religious, political, performance, media, service, and governance organizations available to students. We list many of our organizations at <http://www.Meeds.edu/campuslife/673.asp>. I also encourage students to read my Thursday Announcement emails in which upcoming campus and community opportunities are posted. Lastly, there are staff members available to help students connect socially. [student name] can stop by the 4th floor of Smith and ask to meet with someone about getting connected. We would be happy to help!

Although students will make their own decisions about which clubs and activities to join, your encouragement and ideas regarding campus involvement are highly valued. Thank you!

Dean of Students

Appendix H: Email to All Treatment Students: Subject – Student Involvement

Dear [Student]:

I hope you are enjoying your first semester at Meeds! I am the Director of Student Involvement and it's my job to help you find great opportunities to pursue your interests and get involved on campus.

Why get involved? First, it's the number one way to meet people with interests similar to your own. Second, getting involved on campus tends to lead to slightly higher grades, which I know is important to most of our first-year students. Third, club membership and leadership are impressive to graduate schools and future employers. The staff at Meeds are here to help you find activities you are excited about. Most first-year students get involved in at least one or two organizations, which can lead to leadership roles as an upperclassman.

If you haven't had a chance to get involved on campus yet, or you want to get more involved, check out the list of organizations Meeds offers (<http://www.Meeds.edu/campuslife/673.asp>) and stop by the Office of Student Involvement to learn more. There is something for everyone!

Also, make sure you read Thursday Announcements that come from the Dean of Students. They include dozens of opportunities to get involved. If you've missed any of them, review them at <http://connect.Meeds.edu/blog/category/studentannouncements/>.

Lastly, I know that more than 80% of our first-year students want to volunteer on campus or in the community. Check out ways to start volunteering soon at <http://www.Meeds.edu/17422.asp>.

I'm thrilled you chose Meeds and am happy to answer any questions about how you can get involved on campus and in the community.

Director of Student Activities

Appendix I: Email to All Treatment Students: Subject – Residence Life

Dear [student name]:

I hope you have enjoyed your first month at Meeds and are enjoying living in [residence hall]. I love hearing the stories about how students in the halls are getting together for study groups and to socialize. Also, I hope you've had a chance to get to know your RA, [RA first name] [RA last name], well and are making some good friends on your hall. If you haven't had a chance yet to interact much with [RA first name], try to make some time to do this. The RAs are really great students and are well-trained to talk about how to get involved in organizations, find academic support and cope with common concerns like homesickness and feeling a little overwhelmed with all your obligations, both of which are completely normal in the first year.

Your RA can also answer questions about how students can apply to be RAs in the future. We're always looking for talented and enthusiastic students who want to help other students in the residence halls and help first year students transition to Meeds by serving as RAs. It's an incredibly important role on campus.

I know from talking to first year students that the first few weeks can be a stressful time with getting acclimated to the rigor of classes. Make some time to really get to know students on your hall. Having great relationships with them can help if you are feeling stressed about classes or just need a study break.

I wish you the best of luck during the rest of the semester, [student first name]. If you have any questions or concerns, consider stopping by to chat with [RA first name] or reaching out to [RA first name] via email at [RA email address].

Director of Residence Life

Appendix J: Targeted Email to Resident Advisor: Subject – Check in with High Risk Students

Dear [RA first name],

I've identified a few first-year students that I think might need some extra attention and check-in. Several of these students are your residents, and I've listed their names below:

[insert resident(s) names here]

During the time period of Wednesday, October 19 to Friday, October 28 I'd like you to do at least one check-in with each student listed above. As I reviewed during training, student information is confidential. It is important that you do not reveal to the student that we've identified him or her as a student who might be struggling a bit at Meeds. It is important that these meetings occur within this time period. Please post the results of your chatter trackers on Sharepoint no later than October 28.

The check-in meetings can be scheduled or informal. I'd like you to aim for at least 15-20 minutes with each student to get a sense of what type of experience the student is having at Meeds. As you know, meetings between a resident and a RA can have a significant positive impact on the resident, encouraging the student to reach out for help if they need it or feel more connected to campus and their hall.

Here are a few things I'd like you to ask during your check-in meeting with each student:

- How is your experience at Meeds going so far? Are you enjoying your time here?
- What types of clubs/organizations have you joined?
- Do you feel like you're making some good friends here?
- Are you having the experience at Meeds you thought you would have? Is there anything you wish was different? Is there anything that's not going well?

During these meetings, if you perceive that the student hasn't yet found a group of friends or several organizations they like, please try to find out what his or her interests are and suggest some organizations. These can be academic clubs, social or service orgs, athletics or other types of activities. When students get involved on campus and feel they have a good group of friends, they're more likely to succeed academically. Feel free to share that with the students, especially if you sense they're not getting involved socially because they're spending so much time on coursework. Also, if they're struggling academically, discuss some of the academic support resources we covered at training.

As always, when you're posting the results of your chatter trackers please indicate any concerns you have and if you think the student needs additional staff follow-up or a referral. I'm very interested to see how these students are doing. Thanks so much for all you do for our students. I look forward to hearing from you.

Director of Residence Life

Appendix K: Targeted Email: Subject – Multicultural Affairs

Hello [students first name]!

I hope you're having a great time at Meeds! During Welcome Week you completed a survey indicating you are interested in getting involved in multicultural organizations. As Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs, I wanted to personally invite you to check out some of our activities and student organizations. I would love if you were involved with the wonderful things we are doing.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs houses 5 student organizations:

- * All Students Interested in Asia (ASIA)
- * The Black Student Association (BSA)
- * The Hispanic Organization for Language and Arts (HOLA)
- * The Gay Straight Alliance (GSA)
- * The Meeds Indian Culture Exchange (RICE)

We also sponsor 3 support groups: African American Women Speaking Our Minds on Empowerment (AWSOME), Brothers With a Purpose (BWP) and Queer Street. If you are interested in being involved in any of these organizations or support groups feel free to contact Chimaka Ugorji, the RSA for the office, and she can get you added to the appropriate list serve.

I also welcome you to check out our office. We're located in Smith Hall on the 4th floor. It's a great space for students to study, lounge and enjoy multicultural movies and educational and leisure reading of cultural books and magazines.

The OMA has three amazing student workers: Anthony, Allison and Chimaka. Their office hours are posted in the OMA. If you need assistance with anything, feel free to contact any of us. We are happy to help!

Also, I invite you to:

Like us on facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/MeedsOMA>

Follow us on Twitter: Meedsoma

Visit us on the Meeds website: www.Meeds.edu/oma

Some students interested in multicultural affairs also like to pursue majors or minors in Latin American Studies, African American Studies, Asian Studies, Chinese Studies, and Gender & Sexuality Studies. To learn more about these academic programs check out <http://www.Meeds.edu/academics/17470.asp> and speak with your academic advisor.

Get connected! Hope to see you in the office and at our events soon!

Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs | Meeds College

Appendix L: Targeted Email: Subject – Student Government

SUBJECT: Student Governance...Looking for next year's leaders

Hi [Student],

I hope you had a fantastic fall break! Now that we're back on campus, I'm following up with you because you indicated an interest in student government in the Welcome Week survey.

Have you thought about running for a leadership position next year? Even if you aren't currently involved in one of the student governance groups, it's definitely not too late to run for a spot for your sophomore year. In fact, I didn't run for student government until the end of my first-year and have been involved ever since.

This spring we'll have elections for 2012-13 positions for

- Student Government
- Honor Council
- Social Regulation Council (SRC)
- Allocations Board
- Meeds Activities Board (RAB) and
- Class Council

I'll email you when the process officially starts this spring, but contact me if you'd like to talk more about getting into student gov't opportunities. We also have a Meeds staff member, the Director of Student Leadership, who works with student leaders and can answer a lot of questions. Please contact her if you have any questions about getting involved with any of Meeds' student groups!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the Spring Elections. I'd love to sit down and chat.

Thanks,

Student Government President

Appendix M: Targeted Email: Subject – Music

SUBJECT: Calling all Musicians!

Dear [Student],

The music department at Meeds prides itself on welcoming all students with an interest in music to our community regardless of major. It is never too late to join an ensemble, take lessons, attend a concert, or consider a minor or major in the Music Department.

You're still in your first semester here at Meeds, so there is a lot of time and opportunity ahead of you to pursue your musical interests at whatever level of commitment works for your schedule.

In the spring semester consider registering for a music course or taking lessons. We often have spring auditions for ensembles if there are enough students interested in joining a group. There are also regular concerts featuring Meeds faculty and well-known musicians across genres. You can find more information about courses, lessons, ensembles, and the concert schedule at <http://www.Meeds.edu/music/>.

I'm also here to assist you in connecting to the Music Department. Please don't hesitate to call, email, or stop into Harrell Hall.

I look forward to working with you this coming semester.

Sincerely,

Administrative Assistant
Meeds College Dept of Music

Appendix N: Targeted Email: Subject – Community Service

SUBJECT: Still Looking for Volunteer Opportunities?

Dear [Student],

I know you have a lot of activities, assignments, and friends competing for your time, but I wanted to personally invite you to participate in some upcoming service projects through our Center.

As you may know, the Center for Faith and Service works with many student groups dedicated to service in the city and around the country. In this email, check out opportunities to work with the homeless, neighborhood clean-up, bicycle advocacy, art therapy, and a soup kitchen.

You are welcome to join us for one day of service or become a regular volunteer. One thing is for sure, volunteering with other Meeds students is a great way to make friends and make a difference in our community. Email the contact listed to join us for a day of service.

Advocates for the Homeless

- Day drop-in center for homeless people in Midtown
- Share a meal, conversation or board game
- Mondays 4-6. Depart from Central campus Statue, 3:45 PM.
- Contact:

White House Interfaith Service Challenge, MIFA Artistic Board-Up Project in the city

- Neighborhood stabilization and clean-up of abandoned properties
- Clear debris, trim overgrown lots, paint homes with artistic scenes
- Saturday, Oct. 29, 10-2. Depart from Central campus, 9:45 AM.
- Contact:

Revolutions Community Bike Shop

- Bicycle advocacy, repair and community-building
- Learn to build and repair bikes with neighborhood residents
- Sundays 2-5, First Congregational Church
- Contact:

More Than Art

- Art therapy and community building with low-income and homeless people in Midtown
- Learn to create art (pottery, stained glass, painting and more) and friendships. Optional: stay afterward for More than a Meal.
- Thursdays 3:30-5. First Presbyterian Church. Depart Central campus Statue 3:15.
- Contact:

Souper Contact

- Meal program for homeless and low-income people in Midtown.
- Prepare healthy and tasteful dishes, set tables, have conversation, promote hospitality, clean up.
- Tuesdays 3:30-5:30. First Methodist Church. Depart Central campus Statue 3:15.
- Contact:

If you are interested in other service opportunities, don't hesitate to email me or just stop by the office.

Hope to see you soon,

Chaplain
Center for Faith and Service

Appendix O: Targeted Email: Subject – Religious Life

SUBJECT: Join us for fellowship

Greetings [Student],

How is your first semester at Meeds going so far? I hope you've found some fun student groups to get involved with, met some great people, and are enjoying your classes.

I am the Chaplain at the Center for Faith and Service, and I just wanted to invite you to join us for fellowship and to check out the student-led organizations on campus. The faith community at Meeds is very active and students from all faith backgrounds connect with one another through worship services, religious student organizations, and/or inter-faith service projects.

Reach out to the contact listed below for specific information on meeting times and upcoming fellowship events:

- Catholic Student Association | List contact here:
- Charis (PCUSA) | List contact here:
- Community of Meeds Episcopalians | List contact here:
- Baptist Collegiate Ministries | Megan List contact here:
- Jewish Student Organization- Hillel | List contact here:
- Meditation Group | List contact here:
- Muslim Student Association | List contact here:
- Reformed University Fellowship | List contact here:
- Meeds Christian Fellowship | List contact here:
- Tuesday Fellowship | List contact here:
- Ride Board: Attend worship in the city with other Meeds students. Check with the Center for rides, locations and times.

There's also a lot of information in the attached brochure about student groups and worship opportunities. Please take a look and don't hesitate to contact me or come see me in my office if you'd like to talk about anything.

I hope to hear from you soon,

Chaplain
Center for Faith and Service

Appendix P: Targeted Email: Subject – Performing Arts

SUBJECT: Get Involved in the Performing Arts!

Greetings [Student],

My name is Jon, and I'm writing to you as an associate producer for our current season at the Smith Theatre. Your name was given to me as a prospective actor or crew member who might be interested in some of the upcoming opportunities through my office.

Our opening musical is the Tony award-winning Urinetown, with six performances in November (11 & 12, 17-20). We expect sell-out houses. Cast and crew members come from the classes of 2012-2015 and from a wide range of majors - from theatre to history to neuroscience - so regardless of your field of study, we welcome your involvement. Our winter production in February is titled Treefall. We are currently recruiting crew - it's never too late to join up.

Auditions for our casting of Antigone, will be held Oct. 27 and 28 (right around the corner). Please contact me if you'd like more information.

Also, as you think about your course schedules for the spring semester, take a look at some great classes like Voice and Diction for Public Speakers (INTD240), Acting I (THEA120), and Introduction to Performance (THEA105). These classes are open to everyone regardless of major.

Information on all of the upcoming shows at the Smith Theatre can be found at: <http://Meeds.edu/theatre/22743.asp>. Please don't hesitate to email me if you have any questions about theatre opportunities. If you want to be involved in theatre, the door is always open.

Have a great day!

Jon, Performing Arts Coordinator

Appendix Q: Targeted Email: Subject – Publications/Media

SUBJECT: WANTED: Writers for the Sou'wester!

Hello [Student],

Were you a part of your high school newspaper, yearbook, or another publication? Are you interested in journalism as a career or hobby? Well, as Editor-In-Chief of the newspaper, I'm reaching out to selected first-year students to become a part of the writing team early, which can lead to leadership opportunities and great experiences down the road.

I wrote for the paper the fall of my freshman year, became a section editor that spring, and am now Editor-In-Chief as a junior. This year, we have many first-year students writing for both the bi-monthly publication and the website, and several have also taken on leadership roles.

The best ways to get involved include:

1. Submit articles for the website, which are accepted and posted on a rolling basis
2. Come to one of the open editor's meetings where we brainstorm issues and article topics for the next edition – the next meeting is Tuesday, November 15th
3. Check out some courses that discuss the media in the English, International Studies, or Political Science departments – ENG 155 (Daily Themes) is a personal favorite of mine!

There are other great media related opportunities on campus too, including:

- The Annual Review
- The College Review

I hope you'll consider working with us! Check out our website to learn more:

Please send me an email if you would like more information on any of the above topics.

Have a great day.

Jenny

Meeds College Class of 2013
Editor-In-Chief of the student newspaper

Appendix R: Targeted Email: Subject – Study Abroad

SUBJECT: Fine Tune Your Study Abroad Plans!

Hi [Student],

I hope you received our email before fall break regarding opportunities to come in and talk about study abroad programs in which you may be interested. We are now following up with students who indicated a special interest in studying abroad during the Welcome Week survey this fall, and we have a short survey that will assist you in thinking through your many overseas options.

SURVEY LINK: Insert here

It is important to start preparing for your study abroad plans during your first year in order to complete necessary pre-reqs and find the program that best fits your needs and interests. After you complete this short survey, our staff will reach out to you to set up a 1-1 meeting to discuss program opportunities and help set you on the path to fulfill your interests in study abroad.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Director of International Programs
Meeds College

Appendix S: Targeted Email: Subject – Leadership Development

SUBJECT: [New Leadership Program – Personal Invitation]

Hi [Student],

I'm Jennifer, the Student Leader Coordinator here at Meeds. This spring we will be rolling out a brand new leadership program, and I wanted to extend a personal invitation for you to join. Your Welcome Week survey indicated that you were interested in leadership opportunities, and this series offers workshops to learn about leadership styles, skills, strengths, and more.

Participating in this series as a first-year student is ideal because it will prepare you for leading student organizations, applying for summer internships, working on group projects for class, and it will set a great foundation for the many experiences ahead of you at Meeds.

The program is open enrollment and you can attend as many of the workshops as you like. The Leadership Series Calendar and Workshop Descriptions for the spring semester can be found at: <https://in.Meeds.edu/admin/studentactivities/Pages/default.aspx>. We have a publicity blitz planned for the end of this semester and early in January, but I wanted to give you a heads up because we'd love to have you in the program.

I'm free to talk with you more, if you have any questions.

I look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Jennifer

Student Leader Coordinator

Appendix T: Targeted Email: Subject – Recreational Services

Dear [Student First Name],

As we're wrapping up intramurals and outdoor recreation programs for the fall, I encourage you to start thinking about which intramural, club sport or recreational activities you want to get involved in next semester.

The Meeds Outdoor Organization (MOO), a club sport, will plan outdoor activities open to all students. In the past MOO has coordinated out-of-town camping trips and local climbing outings. It's a great way to meet people and have fun.

We also have basketball, volleyball and soccer intramurals starting in spring term. Students of all levels are welcome and encouraged to form teams to play against each other.

Start talking to friends and students in your classes, student organizations, and residence halls now about pulling together intramural teams to register and compete in spring term. It's a lot of fun!

Lastly, consider checking out one of our other club sports, including Crew, Dance Team, Women's Lacrosse, Rugby, Ultimate Frisbee, Fencing, Cheerleading, and Cricket.

All these activities are coordinated by Meeds Recreational Services. They're a great way to have fun, de-stress, meet people and get a good workout.

For more information about these opportunities, check out our website: <http://www.Meedslynx.com/> and click on "Recreation." You'll also see flyers around campus in spring term.

Hope to see you soon at some of our activities!

Joe
Coordinator of Recreational Services

Appendix U: Email to All Students: Subject – Your Future at Meeds

Dear [Student],

It has been a busy fall semester at Meeds. I'm sure you're ready for a bit of down-time, "sleeping in," and home-cooked meals!

Around this time of year, I often hear one of two stories from our first-year students – either "I love Meeds and want to get more involved," or "I've experienced difficulties and I'm not sure if Meeds is the right place for me." Either way, we want to help! If you feel like Meeds is a good fit for you, I encourage you to continue exploring and expanding your interests and involvement on campus. The spring SACK Fair will be January 19th. Look for advertisements when you return in January.

If you are unsure about Meeds, let me know personally. I'll connect you with people or opportunities to help you resolve concerns.

Enjoy the time away from academics, and we'll see you soon.

Dean of Students

P.S. If you haven't already, consider registering for the 2012 Career Seminar! This program, designed specifically for first-year students, will provide you with the opportunity to explore majors and careers through self-assessment tools, major panels, and a career networking luncheon.

Appendix V: Targeted Email to Students <2.99 GPA: Subject – You Can Do It!

Dear [Student first Name],

Congratulations on finishing your first semester at Meeds! I know that the transition to college can be difficult; students are presented with a challenging academic experience while living away from home and getting acclimated to campus life.

If you have questions or concerns about your academic experience at Meeds, I encourage you to meet with your advisor after the winter break. Your advisor is a great resource for academic support and campus information. I also hope that you will take advantage of the possibilities for close academic relationships with your professors, who are eager to assist you to do your best in their courses. As you think about your academic program at Meeds, it might also be helpful to consult with the staff in the College's office of Career Services: [insert link](#).

While many factors are considered for graduate school as well as scholarship and internship selection, academic performance plays a significant role. I trust you will continue to invest effort in your Meeds education and hope you will seek new ways to enrich your academic experience through various opportunities such as research with a faculty member or study abroad.

I'm delighted that you are part of our Meeds family, and wish you the very best during the spring term!

Yours,

Dean of the Faculty and Vice-President for Academic Affairs

Appendix W: Targeted Email to Students >3.0 GPA: Subject – Great Job!

Dear [Student first Name],

Congratulations on finishing your first semester at Meeds with strong grades! The first semester of college is often a difficult transition for students. I'm glad to see that your hard work has paid off. You will start your second semester with a foundation of academic achievement that will open many doors for you during your time at Meeds. Great work!

While many factors are considered for graduate school as well as scholarship and internship selection, academic performance plays a significant role. Students with strong academic histories become the top candidates for many opportunities. For this reason I want to encourage you to continue to invest in your Meeds education and to look for new ways in which to enrich your academic experience, such as research with a faculty member or study abroad. I hope you will talk with your advisor about these and other opportunities.

Again, congratulations on your success! You're part of one of our most impressive first-year classes in the College's history, and I'm delighted that you are a member of our Meeds family.

Yours,

Dean of the Faculty and Vice-President for Academic Affairs

Appendix X: Targeted Email: Subject – Student Involvement with Interests

Dear [Student],

Welcome back to your second semester at Meeds! I hope you had a wonderful winter break.

This semester you'll receive many invitations to get involved on campus. Choose wisely so not to overwhelm yourself but definitely pick a few opportunities to complement your academic course load. Students who get involved in academic, cultural, religious, volunteer, political, artistic and other types of campus activities are more likely to perform well in their courses.

I encourage you to attend the Sack Fair on January 19, during which you'll learn about many student organizations. It will take place from 5-7 p.m. at the Multisports Forum. Additionally, you're always welcome to stop by the Office of Student Involvement to learn more about getting involved on campus.

At the bottom of this email I highlighted a few organizations and activities that might be interesting to you specifically based on your responses to our campus interest surveys. If you haven't had a chance to get involved in these yet, spring term would be a great time.

Hope to see you soon!

Director of Student Activities

Organizations and activities that might be interesting to you based on your fall interest survey. Check these out in spring term if you haven't yet!

- «M_1_Intercollegiate_Athletics»
- «M_2_Intramural_or_club_sports»
- «M_3_Outdoor_Recreation»
- «M_4_Greek_Life»
- «M_5_Religious_Life»
- «M_6_Community_Service_Volunteering_in_Me»
- «M_7_Theatre»
- «M_8_Music»
- «M_9_Academic_Lectures»
- «M_10_Research_with_a_faculty_member»
- «M_11_Leadership_Opportunities»
- «M_12_Multicultural_Organizations»

- «M_13_Student_Government»
- «M_14_Political_Organizations»
- «M_15_Student_Media_and_Publications_news»
- «M_16_Researching_study_abroad_options»
- «M_17_Activities_with_my_residence_hall»

Appendix Y: Targeted Email: Subject – Student Involvement email for students who did not submit list of interests

Dear [Student],

Welcome back to your second semester at Meeds! I hope you had a wonderful winter break.

This semester you'll receive many invitations to get involved on campus. Choose wisely so not to overwhelm yourself but definitely pick a few opportunities to complement your academic course load. Students who get involved in academic, cultural, religious, volunteer, political, artistic and other types of campus activities are more likely to perform well in their courses.

I encourage you to attend the Sack Fair on January 19, during which you'll learn about many student organizations and activities. It will take place from 5-7 p.m. at the Multisports Forum. Additionally, you're always welcome to stop by the Office of Student Involvement to learn more about getting involved on campus. There is something for everyone!

Director of Student Activities

Appendix Z: Strategies for Effective Email Communication to Undergraduate Meeds Students

1. **Have the email come from peers they know.** Students reported that their peers are most influential in getting them involved in organizations and activities on campus. They are particularly influenced by peers they know. When trying to increase student involvement, especially among students who are not yet involved or who may be shy, try to get people they know to invite them to be more involved. Resident Assistants and Peer Assistants might be particularly influential.
2. **The subject line matters:** Students made it clear that the subject line must be specific, concise and attention-grabbing. It is valuable real estate, often determining if a student will open the email at all. If it is a forwarded email, remove the “Fwd:” part of the subject line. Use abbreviations of words (ie: Oct. vs. October) to take advantage of the space. If an action is needed by a certain date, put the deadline: “Ambassador apps due Jan. 15.”
3. **Emails must be shorter:** Students complained of long emails where the point and action needed are not clear. Students suggested limited email to 10 lines if possible.
4. **Personalized emails with student’s name encourage students to read them:** Many students realize that their name in the greeting line is auto-generated (ie: Dear Marie), but they are still more likely to read it a personalized email and assume that it relates to their personal interests, which increases the likelihood they will read the full email and take the action requested in the email. Some students reported that they believe that a personalized email means that Meeds cares about them.
5. **Students appreciate emails tailored to their interests:** Students reported that they prefer emails that are customized to their interests so they are not spammed with irrelevant emails. Use of a CRM system would allow the tracking of student interests to ensure students receive emails related to their interests.
6. **If you need a response, be clear about that and when it’s due:** Students voiced frustration with emails that did not include clear deadlines. They suggested including deadlines at the beginning of the email to catch students’ attention.
7. **Bold key words:** This helps students see key points, deadlines, features of a program. This is particularly helpful as students try to manage hundreds of emails per week.
8. **If embedding a survey, tell them how long it takes to finish it:** Students reported that they are more likely to complete an online survey if the email invitation to complete the survey indicates that the survey will only take a few minutes. Students suggested being clear about the time commitment needed; if it only takes two minutes, then say that so students know if they can finish it in one sitting. They also advised to keep surveys as short as possible.
9. **In the email, indicated exactly why the student is receiving the email:** This will increase the level of attention students dedicated to the email. If the student is receiving the email because they signed up at an information session, indicate that. It is likely the student has forgotten and this reminder might make them realize that they were actually interested in receiving this information. Additionally, if not every student is receiving the email, write that in the email. I can make a student feel special or chosen by receiving the email.

10. **If the email is trying to encourage some action, indicate exact steps for taking that action:** Be clear and concise about the steps. Number the steps. Include links that work. Consider a checklist.
11. **Reminders are welcomed:** Students were asked if they were annoyed by email reminders about upcoming events. They indicated that one or two reminders for big events and event relevant to their interests were welcomed since their lives are so busy and it is often difficult to remember everything.