

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION:** Utilizing Constructivist Grounded Theory to Understand the Experiences of Students on Academic Probation

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**PAGES:** 353

Research regarding the experiences of first-year college and university students on academic probation is relatively scant (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012). And, while a great deal of academic research is dedicated to why students leave college (Janasiewicz, 1987; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1988), as well as why they choose to stay (Astin, 1975; 1984; 1993), alarmingly little research has sought to better understand the needs of first-year students on academic probation (Kelley, 1996; Trombley, 2001). This study utilized Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) with the intent of constructing a conceptual framework or theory to better explain this subpopulation at a mid-sized, four-year, research institution in the Midwest. Using purposive sampling, myself, an insider, collected data through individual, intensive interviewing with participants, and then transcribed and analyzed using three phases of data analysis: (a) open coding, (b) axial and incident-to-incident coding, and (c) theoretical coding. The findings indicated that a participant's academic integration and engagement, social inclusion, pathways to success, and barriers to success construct a unique longitudinal progression for each student. Yet, among all 19 participants, there are a myriad of shared transition points, or moments where academic advisors, practitioners in retention, faculty, and student affairs partners can intervene to

influence student academic performance. By understanding the conceptual framework for first-year students on academic probation, practitioners in higher education can be more agile in assisting students in academic difficulty before it is too late. Trustworthiness of findings was ensured by employing Lincoln and Guba's (1985) tenets of trustworthiness for qualitative research.