

ABSTRACT

THESIS TITLE: Examination of the KEY Careers Program's Effectiveness on Increasing One-Year Retention and Four-Year Graduation Rates at Ball State University

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In higher education, there is a demand for institutions to raise both their one-year retention and four-year graduation rates, which can be measures of student and institutional success. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education established in 2012 that the state of Indiana as a whole had a goal of increasing four-year graduation rates to 50% by the year 2018. Career interventions are programming tools that can be utilized in the university setting to potentially improve both one-year retention and four-year graduation rates. Creating opportunities for student's to explore their vocational identity, such as through Holland's (1997) Theory of Occupational Themes, is one component that increases a student's likelihood of being integrated within an institution (Tinto, 1975). With resources becoming scarce within higher education, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of programming to determine if the funding is being properly allocated. The KEY (Knowledge + Experience + You) Careers program at Ball State University (BSU) was designed as a campus-wide career intervention tool to improve one-year retention and four-year graduation rates.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of KEY Careers, a career intervention program, as measured by one-year retention and four-year graduation rates for

students who engaged with the program at BSU (a mid-sized, research, residential institution) and to determine whether initial My Vocational Situation (MVS) scores and engagement with the KEY Careers program were predictors of one-year retention and four-year graduation rates. The sample utilized in this study to understand the program's impact on one-year retention rates consisted of 14,099 Ball State matriculates from the 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 freshman fall cohorts. The sample of students for data analysis of four-year graduation rates included data from 3,781 matriculates from the 2011 fall cohort.

The average rate of retention for students who participated in KEY Careers was 86.3% compared to the non-participant retention rate, which was 77.5%. The program was found to be statistically significant in regards to increasing one-year retention rates for the entire sample of students, including both males and females as well as White and non-White students. Four-year graduation rates of KEY Careers participants were 58.4% compared to the 43.4% four-year graduation rates of non-participants. Data analysis revealed KEY Careers was statistically significant in regards to increasing four-year graduation rates for the total population of students regardless of gender or race.

High school GPA and KEY Careers involvement were identified as statistically significant predictors of one-year retention and four-year graduation. The predictive model of one-year retention had an 80.2% accuracy and the model predicting four-year graduation had a 65.5% accuracy. Recommendations for practice and future research were included in the final chapter.