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How State-Level Performance-Based Funding Policies Affect Student Services Departments

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HOW STATE-LEVEL PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING POLICIES AFFECT STUDENT
SERVICES DEPARTMENTS

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Abstract

For public, state institutions that are subject to state-wide, performance-based funding models, being held accountable to meet metrics set by the state affects the work of student services professionals. The state's goals for an institution can misalign with the goals of the institution and the goals that those who work there have for themselves and their students. The purpose of this project is to explore how the effects of being measured changes the work of student services professionals. Through this qualitative study including 15 interviews with student services professionals who engage with students at a four-year public institution that is subject to performance-based funding, the story of those professionals and their experiences under the transition to the funding model, and continuing adjustment, is told. Findings illuminate how student services professionals understand and respond to performance-based metrics, as well as what this experience is like for them as professionals. Major findings are divided into four themes: Pressures Resulting in Distrust, Advising in Ways Counter to Beliefs (Goal Misalignment), "Cooking the Books" (Gaming and Ambiguity), and Overreliance on Quantitative Data.

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Introduction

Problem Statement

For state legislators who are faced with tight budget decisions and pressures to hold institutions accountable, the most common solution at the present is performance-based funding (Hillman, 2016). Performance-based funding (PBF) is a model of funding in which states directly tie at least one portion of an institution's funding allocations to outcomes (Kelchen, 2018b). As Kelchen phrased it, "The inherent assumption present is that colleges are operating inefficiently and that placing colleges under additional accountability pressures will induce them to improve their outcomes" (Kelchen, 2018b, p. 84). Unfortunately, as these models expand and become more robust, concerns are being raised over the effects these measures have in practice at the institutional, academic, and student levels (Fain, 2014). Currently, research at the policy and state level is fairly abundant, and though there is little research that shows any unequivocal success of performance funding on the observable intended outcomes (Hillman, 2016; Dougherty, 2013), these models are still gaining traction and being adopted by increasingly more states (Li, 2019).

One area in need of further explanation, particularly with regard to possible unintended consequences of PBF policies is in student services departments within universities subject to performance funding. Student services is a division within all higher educational institutions which includes advisors, coaches, and support staff who work directly with students. Policymakers likely intended to stimulate and improve the work of student services professionals through funding tied to outcomes. With limited data supporting that outcomes have improved, there seems to be a lack of commitment or buy-in to the state's goals, which are ultimately changing the way student services professionals do their jobs. The ways in which student services professionals are feeling unappreciated, pressured, and despondent from polices and programming that have changed their work is an important consequence of the funding model. We know that the state tasks the institutions with meeting certain outcomes, and ultimately that responsibility trickles down to those who work with students. What that looks like at the individual level remains less researched.

Also important, and the focus of this study that sets it apart from others on the topic, is that the policies this study discusses are not the state accountability policies alone, but the suite of policies that accompany the funding model. There are many examples of these trickle-down polices that will be discussed; they include those that limit students' ability to change their major or withdraw from classes, along with others that create financial consequences for students. This distinction is intentional because so much of what affects student services professionals in their daily work is related to the trickle-down policies that are implemented to meet the state-accountability goals. Policies that govern the choices that students are given regarding their credits, majors, and ability to transfer are all consequences of performance-funding metrics and student services professionals have to work within them.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain better insight into the lived experiences of student support professionals who engage with students under the state policy and policies created in response to PBF. The investigator sought to learn more about what happens within departments when institutions put policy to practice in the face of performance challenges. For this research, the participants are staff members from student support departments such as advising offices and offices of student services at a four-year institution that is subject to PBF. Through interviews with student support professionals in combination with document analysis of student-services meetings, the hope is to better understand the experienced changes of these professionals in the face of the funding model.

To better understand the layers of the PBF policies that funnel down to student services, this study aims to explore the relationships that exist between the state and its institutions and the institutional leaders and their departments and staff. In order to understand this dynamic, the principal-agent theory will be introduced and worked from as a theoretical framework for this research. Examples of his dynamic are described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Design of Study:

State's Interests
Accountability Reporting
Performance Improvements

Institution's Interests
Research
Prestige-seeking opportunities
Renowned faculty

Shared Interests
Rankings
Improvements for attracting students/ Faculty

Administration's Interests
Political relationships
Outperfom other institutions (FL)

Student Services Staff's Interests
Student preparedeness
Academic attainment
Contributing citizens

Shared Interests
Academic attainment for metrics

Theoretical Framework

Theory guided this research from inception to findings and conclusions. Principal-agent theory is often used to describe corporate supervisor-staff relationships but has been used recently to describe the dynamics when traditionally non-quantifiable work is moving to be more accountability-driven, including outcomes and reports (Lane & Kivisito, 2008, Kelchen, 2018). This is the case today in higher education, as institutions transition to PBF models.

Significance

This study has practical significance for policymakers and university administrators alike. It is important to shed light on how student services professionals understand and respond to new requirements of performance reporting while working to ensure the quality of student support. Related to this is whether they felt they were able to maintain that quality and how that aligned with the priorities of the administration. Finally, this study seeks to understand how those priorities were communicated to student services professionals. It is important to expose the tangible effects at the student services level that are not yet being explored in the research, or considered by policymakers. Examining the experience and impressions of student services professionals, and how they feel they can affect students' success under performance funding, is significant for stakeholders who are committed to PBF models. Understanding how PBF metrics affect the work of student services professionals is to better understand the implications for students, as they are student advocates.

Using theory to explain practice, the principal-agent theory was utilized to explain convergence and divergence in interests between the state and institutions on one hand, and between administrators and student services professionals on the other. Exploring how these relationships interact may explain why there is a dearth of observable, positive intended outcomes of PBF models, and more unintended consequences (Favero & Rutherford, 2019).

Subjectivity Statement

In this research, the investigator has personal experience with working in student services at an institution during the transition to a PBF model. This experience has guided the investigator's interests and the relevance of this study is greater for those who have worked in that capacity and should be a contribution to the greater research pool on PBF. It would be unusual for a researcher to understand that there is a lack of information on this issue without having the experience to know that there is an issue. Having an "insider" perspective also allowed the investigator to disarm participants and have basic knowledge of the work participants do so as not to waste time on components that are not related to the study.

The researcher has worked in a variety of student support and academic advising roles over her nine-year career in higher education. Advising students to meet their academic goals is a position that comes with its own set of challenges and rewards; working with students in this capacity when under the policies of PBF has even more specific challenges. The researcher worked at a public institution prior to and through the adoption of PBF policies. That experience informed the interest and need for more information about what other student support professionals were experiencing in this situation. Working in that environment for three years, compared to the researchers' experiences working in the same role, at institutions not subject to PBF allowed her to understand the work as an extraordinary experience of that environment and how it changed her work.

Literature Review

The Historical and Current Role of Student Services

Typically, for professionals who work in student services, pressures to meet metrics and outcome-based goals are relatively unfamiliar. The overarching mission of these departments is student success, but only under PBF systems are those goals quantifiable by metrics and points. Student services divisions are focused on supporting, improving, and guiding the academic needs of students, but also the overall experience and development of students within the university (Barbezat, 2013). Resources provided by student services include advising, tutoring, guidance for study abroad programs, and academic major exploration (Barbezat, 2013). Today, there is growing respect for the importance of the advising profession, but it has not always been that way (Dougherty et al., 2018). For student services, goals like supporting student development, which does not have a quantifiable outcome, can diverge from the institution's goals, which are aimed at metrics.

We know from research on the impact of budget cuts at institutions in times of financial crises, such as the Great Recession of 2008, that departments like student services have at times been viewed as "discretionary in institutional budgets… and as 'frills' that make no direct contribution to students' persistence in graduating from college" (Ehrenberg & Webber, 2010, p. 36). This view of student services as unimportant or unnecessary threatens the departments, particularly in the face of financial crisis and cuts that can result from low performance on metrics by state institutions. The study by Ehrenberg also indicates that the biggest impact of cutting student services programs was felt at institutions that serve students who are disadvantaged by the metrics points system, and to whom Pell Grant dollars are allocated. As

was noted previously, those institutions are also the most disadvantaged by the scoring system of PBF (Owens & Elliott, 2017).

Student services departments are typically staffed according to a student ratio and predicate on relationships with students that include one-on-one support and immediate need-driven services, such as when illness or family emergencies affect a student's academic success. As is mentioned in Ehrenberg's study on student service expenditures in the face of financial crises, these departments have often been the first to see cuts and, more recently, are seeing the reallocation of staff members for more data and analytics-driven tasks, as opposed to face-to-face support (Wagner & Longanecker, 2016).

Student Development as a Primary Goal of Student Services

The research on college student engagement dates back to the late 1970s and early 1980s with the foundational work of Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), which for the first time put the focus on those who interface with students at the institutions and the profound roles they play. More recent research harkens back to their findings, but many more layers have been added, including the characteristics of the student, the institution, and the type of education that is being provided (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). These additional layers explain the variety of elements that we now believe contribute to students' attrition and retention, which includes not just institutional, but individual reasons as well. These include: change of major, lack of resources, family demands, and poor psycho-social fit (Kuh, et al., 2007). Braxton (2006) concluded that to affect student persistence, there are eight domains of student experience that require attention: academic attainment, acquisition of general education, development of academic competence, development of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions, occupational attainment, preparation of adulthood and citizenship, personal accomplishments, and personal development (Braxton, 2006).

As goals for those who work with students, a few of these are quantifiable and related to the metrics we know institutions are responsible for under PBF models. Occupational attainment, retention, and academic attainment are all part of the metrics in the FSUS system and can be accounted for in the outcomes measurements (FSUS, 2019). However, the desire to support and nurture relationships toward the goal of developing young people who are successful in Braxton's (2006) domains could create competing and conflicting goals for student services professionals.

In order to better understand the effects of PBF on student service departments, some research has focused on how departmental changes occur when institutions adopt PBF models: the results are mixed. In the face of performance funding metrics, at least in Florida, staff experienced the restructuring of job duties and more attention to data collection efforts (Albee, 2010). Other recent research has found some small evidence of budget reallocation toward student services and instruction (Kelchen & Stredak, 2015), though the colleges included in this research are a mix of two-year and four-year colleges. Two-year colleges have rather different performance funding metrics and have been shown to have more positive outcomes (Dougherty, Jones, Lahr, Natow, Pheatt, & Reddy, 2016).

One area of concern for student services and support staff that is also important to policymakers, as evidenced by its appearance as a metric in most performance-funding formulas, is retention. Retention, for the purpose of reporting, is primarily first-to second-year retention, which is what Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) were studying decades ago, and which is still a critical transition period today (Kuh et al., 2007). Student services departments are vital in creating and implementing a variety of programs to address this important transition. Examples of these programs are First Year Experience or Seminar programs, which emphasize the relationship-building component of student integration, as well as strengthen students' knowledge of available resources at the university. These programs have been studied, and unlike PBF models, do have proven effectiveness in aiding in student retention and persistence (Pascarella, 2005). Another major change in the last two decades aimed at freshmen success is the implementation of professional advisors and strict policies for meetings between freshmen and their academic advisors, which is also a function of student services (Pascarella, 2005). Summer bridge programs are another effort made by student services programs that have a positive correlation with student persistence (Pascarella, 2005).

At campuses in Tennessee, researchers Ness, Deupree, and Gándara (2015) found that changes in advising and counseling services were among the most prominent responses to performance metrics. Increasing staff, online advising, encouraging faculty to advise, as well as early-alert systems, were all notable changes (Ness, Deupree, & Gándara, 2015). Some of these changes, however, may be attributable to other changes in policy preceding performance funding. Coinciding with the wave of PBF models is a national trend of acknowledging the importance of professional advising (Dougherty, et al., 2016). Therefore, some of the research is difficult to attribute to one trend or another. One administrator at a university in Indiana said it best, "I think there's been this realization that advising is so important to student success… but adding performance funding probably hurried the process" (Dougherty et al., 2016, p. 116). Given the relationship between increased accountability practices and the increasing acknowledgement of the importance of advising, this study examines how accountability policies affect the work of student support professionals. The next section reviews the literature on state-level performance funding policies. This study builds on both of these topics and the research behind them.

Introduction to Accountability Practices

For researchers looking at accountability for public institutions of higher education, the current concentration of study is in PBF models (Kelchen, 2018b). For states, the most common solution for holding their institutions accountable is to tie funding to the desired outcomes and achievements of these schools. To do this, generally, one of three accountability systems are utilized: performance budgeting, performance reporting, and the most popular and ever-growing model, performance funding (Kelchen, 2018b). The following literature review will delve into the basics of PBF models and how they exist in today's world of accountability. Then, the existing literature on the known outcomes of these models, intended and unintended, will be expanded upon. This review concludes with the role that student services play in students' experiences and ability to successfully complete college, and how priorities compete when being measured for accountability.

Accountability for educational outcomes is predicated on the idea that holding institutions accountable for the performance of their students will encourage efficiency and productivity (Zumeta & Li, 2016). This perspective assumes that without being held accountable, institutions are not concerned with the goals of their students. Performance funding is the most popular of accountability systems that tie dollars to outcomes and is quickly growing more popular, and controversial. The current research on performance funding tells us there is difficulty in finding positive, and attributable outcomes such as increased graduation rates, retention, and jobs secured after college (Hillman, 2016; Kelchen, 2018b, Rutherford & Rabovsky, 2014). Even with this lack of evidence of the efficacy of performance funding, more states are adopting this model of funding, and different iterations are being created all the time (Gándara, 2019; Li, 2019; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006). There have been three phases of performance-funding waves, beginning in the late 1970s when Tennessee adopted the first model (Kelchen, 2018b). The first couple of waves were semi-impactful, less than half of the states adopted the model, but this most recent trend is gaining steam and looks to be here to stay. As of 2015, reports concluded as many as 35 states are using some form of performance funding, with as many as five more states creating plans to implement the model (Li, 2019).

The transition to PBF, which measures outcomes like timely graduation and employment rates, came about largely due to the previous funding models which were based primarily on inputs (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016). Since the 1950s, states have utilized funding formulas to fund institutions. Those formulas are comprised of input and existing markers such as enrollment, mission, prior years' budgets, allocations, and mirroring similar states' allocations (Mckeown, 1993). In today's climate of increasing accountability, performance funding has become the alternative to hold universities accountable for their intended purposes (Bastedo, Altbach, & Gumport, 2016; Hearn, 2015).

Context of Performance-Based Funding (PBF)

There are a variety of models of performance-related funding, but a majority fall within three major categories: performance-based funding (PBF), performance budgeting, and performance reporting (Burke & Minassians, 2003). Chronologically, the first of these models, performance-reporting, dates back to the 1950s but gained popularity in the 1970s. The Watergate scandal of 1976 caused a national interest in open records in the public sector, higher education institutions included. Outcomes were tied to funding very loosely, if at all, but allowed policymakers to see where the money was going (Kelchen, 2018b). Performance budgeting was the second iteration of funding modalities which reached its peak in popularity in the early 2000s. In these models, states can consider a college's outcomes in determining allocations to individual institutions but are not required to tie funding to the outcomes. The final model, performance-based funding, which is gaining so much traction today, openly and consistently ties its funding directly to outcomes (Kelchen, 2018b).

Of the three models, PBF has risen to the top due to its seemingly more transparent method of funding. By linking funding to individual indicators, and ensuring that the relationship between performance and funding is pre-determined, policymakers could argue that institutions have autonomy and control over the funding they receive (Tandberg & Hillman, 2014). In the other leading alternative model, performance budgeting, much of the allocation of funds is at the

discretion of the appropriators and is not clearly linked to predetermined factors (Burke & Minassians, 2003). Some proponents of PBF argue that the amount of funding an institution receives is based on an institution's responses, actions and outputs, not the existing (historical, mission-based, etc.) inputs of an institution. This model allows institutions to decide whether or not to respond to particular initiatives and to what extent (Tandberg & Hillman, 2014).

In terms of implementation, a variety of PBF models have come and gone and, in some states, the model was adopted and then dropped entirely by legislators, an example of this being Missouri (Burke & Modarresi, 2000). Missouri is one state that eliminated the model completely in 2000 and has since implemented a new model in both two-year and four-year institutions (Li, 2019). The lack of longevity of any one funding model makes it difficult to identify what is and is not working. Still, researchers, like Burke and Modarresi (2000) purported that some states had managed a working model and that with more research, the parts that work from these models could be replicated in other states. However, in recent years, most researchers take a more critical outlook (Hillman, 2016; Tandberg & Hillman, 2014).

How Does Performance-Based Funding Work?

In a majority of states, performance funding works as a point system (Kelchen, 2018b; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006). Institutions report their outcomes on given metrics and are given a point value for that score. In some states, the points have a set dollar amount assigned to them individually, but regardless, institutions are funded based on points. For example, the Texas Community College Success Points system awards points to students who complete milestones. Points are awarded for enrollment paired with: college readiness (one point for math, a half-point for reading, etc.), successful completion of first college-level math course (one point), successful completion of first college-level reading course (a half point), successful completion of first 15 credit hours (one point), successful completion of first 30 credit hours (one point), and completed degree or certificate (two points) (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019). As is demonstrated by this model, some funding is still awarded based on enrollment, but there are substantial opportunities for institutions to also focus on outcomes that impact students positively in order to get more points awarded.

One major aspect of performance funding that has implications for student services and budgets alike is the metrics by which institutions are measured and the distribution of funds. The most common outcomes that are measured by PBF models tend to be short-term, quantifiable metrics such as the number of degrees or certificates awarded, retention rates, excess credit hours, and labor market outcomes (Kelchen, 2018b). These outcomes are reported to the state by each institution, which can be problematic as it leaves the door open for institutions to misrepresent data in a variety of ways, known as "gaming" (Fain, 2014; Kelchen, 2018b).

Gaming occurs when organizations fail to respond in the intended ways to meet performance metrics, instead of altering their behavior to meet metrics goals they alter their performance reporting on the outcomes (Kelchen, 2018b). Gaming can occur in a variety of ways, Kelchen boils them down to five. (1)"Cream skimming" is the practice of focusing efforts on individuals who have the highest likelihood of succeeding. This practice is seen mostly in admissions policies, which require higher scores and performance for acceptance to an

institution. (2)"Parking" refers to not serving those with a low probability of success. One example is an institution in Maryland which rescinds admission for those who do not perform well and also refund their tuition. (3)"Cases on the bubble" is a practice more commonly associated within corporate industries like sales, where if a person is on the fence the person or organization that would benefit can choose to report them or not report them depending on the goals. (4)"Selective reporting" is the practice of taking advantage of the parameters for reporting and putting high achieving students in the required reporting group and lower-achieving in groups that do not get reported. An example of this would be a fall or spring start; typically students who start in fall are counted and those who start in spring are not, so lower-achieving students could be deferred to spring. Finally, the last form of gaming is (5)"cheating", or reporting false information (Kelchen, 2018b). Examples of forms of gaming in institutions subject to performance funding include raising admissions standards (cream skimming), schools finding creative ways to start students at a certain time of year, or capping their enrollment at 11 credits so they will not count as full-time (parking, selective reporting).

In the State of Florida's PBF model, institutions are ranked according to their final score, and the top-scoring institutions are given the most funding, with the lowest scoring institutions at the bottom receiving no new funding (Mulhere, 2015). Florida is unique in this structure of ranking the institutions and is currently the only state that includes this component (Li, 2019). As one can imagine, this funding model raises some opposition, one is competitiveness and less cooperation between state institutions, but another more serious result is that this model highly favors flagship and other well-established institutions (Douglas-Gabriel, 2016; Hagood, 2019). Florida's ranking model is especially problematic because those schools at the bottom are the most disadvantaged and least likely to have any upward mobility without the resources to do so (SUSF, 2020).

Implications of PBF: Research on Intended Outcomes

Contrary to policymakers' optimistic intentions, in a report on Higher Education for The Century Foundation (2016), Nicholas Hillman states that "while pay-for-performance is a compelling concept, in theory, it has consistently failed to bear fruit in actual implementation, whether in the higher education context or in other public services" (Hillman, 2016, p. 2). He goes on to discuss research on financially incentivized programs in a variety of arenas outside higher education, the ultimate takeaway being the lack of measurable increase in outcomes. These findings include what is happening in higher education as well, partially due to the immeasurability of some of the intended purposes of higher education, like public service, for example (Hillman, 2016).

In addition to Hillman's report, many other studies on the effects of PBF over time have resulted in null findings. In a study by Shin (2010), data was collected from the late 1990s, when the nation saw the first wave of PBF models, to 2007. Analyzing over twenty years of data, Shin did not observe improvement in performance in the states that adopted these models (Shin, 2010). In other studies, outside influences were identified which had as much or more impact on institutions than the PBF model, including the Great Recession, which resulted in the decline of state funding, overall (Dougherty, Natow, & Vega, 2012; Kelchen & Stredak, 2015).

Authors like Rutherford & Rabovsky (2014) along with Tandberg & Hillman (2014) have sought to dive deeper into the implications of PBF more broadly at the policy level, looking at all 50 states. Though the constant change in funding models impede the consistency that would be optimal for studying the outcomes these authors looked at (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006), they were still able to use IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) to look at 500 postsecondary institutions in all 50 states over 18 years (Rutherford & Rabovsky, 2014). Their findings were much as expected, that there was a lack of improvement on the short term student success metrics altogether, but also a significant secondary finding: that some policies were shown to have a negative short-term impact on performance.

Most relevant for this proposed study, some research has also been conducted at the institutional level. Studies of changes in campus budget allocations following PBF implementation have found some positive and some negative effects on spending priorities (Kelchen & Stredak, 2015; Rabovsky, 2012). Findings from the study include little evidence on actual changes in spending priorities that would support meeting metrics or outcome goals of PBF incentives (Rabovsky, 2012). Another study found that institutions subject to PBF metrics were less likely to receive Pell Grant revenue from their students, which suggests a change in admissions criteria and recruitment behavior toward students from higher-income families. That study also indicated that colleges tended to increase their grant aid, potentially in an effort to increase their completion rates (Kelchen & Stredak, 2015).

However, when looking at long-term outcomes, what few there are to measure, some evidence indicates that some of the newer performance funding models may prove to have positive results over a long period of time (Rutherford & Rabovsky, 2014). Even so, a majority of the research on the intended outcomes of PBF models tend to support Rutherford and Rabovsky's initial, short-term finding that there is not currently any evidence that suggests significant improvements on outcomes (Hillman, 2016; Tandberg & Hillman, 2014; Shin, 2010). This finding is a concern for proponents of PBF and does seem to indicate an underlying issue at some stage in the process of implementation.

Implications of PBF: Disparity in Funding

In her research on the financial benefits and burdens of performance funding, Hagood (2019) compared nine different models of performance funding and found that states are not encouraged to spend more on higher education under these models, but how they divide the funding is impacted. High-resourced institutions, like flagships, are more likely to benefit from performance funding than low-resourced, whose funding is more likely to decline under these models (Hagood, 2019). Unfortunately, many of the low-resourced institutions that are affected by these performance models are public, Minority-Serving Institutions, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Hillman, 2017; Jones, 2017).

MSIs and other institutions that serve students with inequitable access are having their missions threatened by the requirement to focus on outputs rather than access and equity (Hillman, 2017). One of the unfortunate results we are seeing when institutions are being measured by a new set of metrics is that they are more inclined to participate in a form of gaming the metrics by "cream-skimming" (Kelchen, 2018b). These institutions are likely to raise their

admissions requirements to better control for academic preparedness and ability to be successful on metrics like timely graduation (Hillman, 2017; Kelchen, 2018b), which leaves underprepared students who would ordinarily be served by those institutions to pursue other options, or not attend college.

The institution being examined in this study is a four-year institution in Florida. This institution gained its status as a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) in recent years. The research tells us that, historically, MSIs have been underfunded as compared to their non-MSI peers (Jones, 2017). Even before this four-year institution in Florida gained official status as an MSI, it was one of the public institutions in South Florida that held the lowest admissions criteria, and due to its geographical location, so happened to serve a large minority and transfer population (NCES, 2018). The four-year institution in this study has increased its admissions criteria year-over-year since the implementation of PBF in 2014 (SUSF, 2020).

Jones' (2017) work, along with other research (Hillman & Corral, 2017), paints a concerning picture for institutions like the one in this study that serve minority populations. For MSIs and other institutions that focus on access, outcome metrics can be detrimental and do not account for the work they do and the students they serve (Jones, 2017). Though many states have augmented their metrics to be more equitable, these additional funding modalities are not substantial enough and exacerbate inequitable funding trends (Jones, 2017). Serving as "equity premiums" intended to offset demographic differences (Owens & Elliott, 2017), these funding options often have low thresholds that actually benefit all institutions in the funding system and not just those that need it most (Mulhere, 2015). On average, across the states, equity premiums have been shown to help reduce cream-skimming (Gándara & Rutherford, 2018; Kelchen, 2018a). However, these positive outcomes are dependent on the model type; Florida's model, due to its unique design, does not yield these results.

An example of this in the Florida State University System PBF model is the "access" category, wherein if an institution reaches a threshold of 30% Pell Grant recipients, they are awarded additional funding, and no additional points are awarded for exceeding this level (Mulhere, 2015). Thereby, MSIs who remain at the bottom of the rankings, and serve up to 60% Pell Grant recipients receive the same "bonus" as do the flagship institutions, which need additional funding the least (Mulhere, 2015). Notably, at least a couple of states (i.e. Texas and Washington) have avoided disadvantaging MSIs through PBF at the two-year level (Li, Gándara, & Assalone, 2018). MSIs in these two states do well on the performance metrics and receive more funding for students in developmental education courses, gateway courses in math, and transfer students; they are not disadvantaged because the models in those states reward milestones in addition to outcome-based metrics (Li, Gándara, & Assalone, 2018). The ways in which metrics impact students are often filtered through many layers, from policymakers to administrators, ending with the support staff students work with at their institution.

Florida's Performance-Based Funding Model

Many states have shifted to a performance-based model for state allocations (Li, 2019); the models themselves often vary widely from state to state, both in terms of the metrics institutions are expected to meet, and the ways in which the state then distributes funds to the

institutions (Kelchen, 2018b). PBF originated in the two-year system before moving to the four-year State University System of Florida in 2014 (State University System of Florida (SUSF), 2020). In Florida's first round of PBF, two-year colleges adopted the model and of the results recorded, staff and resource allocation were used to meet metrics (Albee, 2010). For four-year institutions in Florida, the PBF model was approved in January of 2014 and includes 10 metrics that are intended to evaluate Florida institutions on a range of issues, see Figure 2 (SUSF, 2020).

Metrics Common to all Institutions	
1. Percent of Bachelor's Graduates Employed (Earning $25,000+) or Continuing their Education	6. Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in Areas of Strategic Emphasis
2. Median Wages of Bachelor's Graduates Employed Full-time	7. University Access Rate (Percent of Undergraduates with a Pell-grant)
3. Average Cost to the Student (Net Tuition per 120 Credit Hours)	8a. Graduate Degrees Awarded in Areas of Strategic Emphasis 8b. Freshman in Top 10% of Graduating High School Class – for NCF only
4. Four Year Graduation Rate (Full-time FTIC)	9. Board of Governors Choice - Percent of Bachelor's Degrees without Excess Hours
5. Academic Progress Rate (2nd Year Retention with GPA Above 2.0)	10. Board of Trustees Choice

Figure 2. Retrieved from State University System of Florida, Performance Metrics (2020)

Institutions are evaluated on "excellence or improvement in each metric." Excellence is measured by the goals for the strategic plan created by the Board of Governors for the state of Florida; each institution is given a point-value for meeting and improving on each of the metrics (SUSF, 2020). As the model has transitioned to four-year institutions, we are seeing massive data initiatives and the use of predictive analytics for closely tracking students in Florida as well as other states (Wagner & Longanecker, 2016).

One of the unique components to the State University System of Florida's funding model is that the 11 institutions that are included in the model are ranked against one another, and those who perform the worst are at the bottom: these institutions receive no new funds for the next year (SUSF, 2020). "New funds" represent the amount of money that is earned by the individual institutions when the metrics for the previous year are added up. Aside from "new funds" there are also "base funds", which refers to the university base budget dollars comprised of general revenue and lottery funds that are given for a fiscal year. These funds are generally calculated based on what an institution would need to operate at the minimum: a portion of these funds are also subject to performance (SUSF, 2020). For all institutions, regardless of ranking and new money, the amount of base funding received over four years is much larger than the PBF pot, but each year the state allocates $0-560 million to be distributed among the 11 institutions through PBF (SUSF, 2020).

Those institutions who rank lowest receive no new funding (SUSF, 2020). Specifically, the recent iteration of the model reads: "Institutions scoring 50 points or less, or the three lowest scoring universities will not receive any State Investment" (SUSF, 2020). "State Investment" in this description refers to new money. In five years of the PBF model in Florida, there have been many changes to the scoring system, including the utilization of the "bottom three" rule. For a few years, this rule which prevents those at the bottom three in the rankings from receiving any funds at all was removed, but is currently back as a part of the model. This small change makes a

large difference for universities who find themselves in the bottom three, but without the "bottom three" rule may still have received funds. This model has shown to result in institutions, like the one in this study, to rank very differently year after year. Being at the bottom with no new funding, the top of the rankings, and then middle causes a budgetary instability that is a challenge for planning. Notably, the highest-resourced institutions are consistently on the top (SUSF, 2020).

Gaps and Areas to Explore Further

When looking at the literature on PBF on the whole, there is a clear disconnect between the intended outcomes of these funding models and what researchers have shown to be the realities of observable outcomes. More to the point of this research, the discrepancy between the intentions and realities of those who are implementing these metrics at the student services level. In the investigator's experience as a student services professional in an institution undergoing the transition to a PBF model, the unintended consequences are more of a concern than the lack of outcomes, and little is known about those, specifically. As Kelchen (2018b) described, PBF models can result in gaming behaviors like cream-skimming, parking, and selective reporting. What we know little about from the literature is if gaming has been prevalent in metrics reporting, or how these practices, if utilized, impact the work of student services professionals.

Similarly, efforts to focus attention on students who have a higher likelihood to succeed have changed the landscape of typical job duties for student services professionals. The pressure to meet metric goals has spawned a need for institutions to use data tools to separate students into subgroups (Wagner & Longanecker, 2016). These data tools are costly themselves and have to be navigated by a data analyst; therefore, staff allocations are reassigned in some institutions, or financial resources are diverted toward the hiring and training of individuals to work with data for metrics reporting. This may also require that professionals focus on certain groups over others in their efforts to increase success.

There is a good deal of research around the different types and outcomes of performance funding models over time. Much of the current research on institution-level effects addresses the outputs as indications of how performance models are working, primarily in terms of degrees and certificates awarded, and graduation and retention rates (Burke & Modarressi, 2000; Hagood, 2019; Hillman, 2016; Tandberg & Hillman, 2014). There is less research on the effects at the point of implementation and the processes and changes at the student support level. The relationship of the institution to the state is one part of the dynamic of performance funding; the other is the relationship between the institution and the students it is measuring. A gap in the literature exists around the process of implementing changes in response to performance funding metrics. Does this implementation change the behavior or mission of student services-related offices, and if so, how? The research on this topic will focus on the perceptions of the processes and changes for student services staff to meet the goals under the metric criteria. The research questions are: how do student services professionals in a four-year university understand and address the PBF metrics they are tasked with responding to? More specifically, what are student services professionals' perceptions of performance funding metrics and how they change the way they approach their work? Additionally, how are metrics, data, and accountability changing the daily work of student services professionals?

Theoretical Framework

Principal-agent theory is utilized because it can explain the degree of unintended consequences and the minimal observable, intended outcomes of PBF models in four-year institutions. Principal-agent theory was initially applied in the field of economics as a way of understanding "new" behaviors in organizations (Moe, 1984). More recent research has used this theory to describe how governance impacts actions at institutions of higher education (Lane & Kivisito, 2008), as the role of relationships, information flows, and incentives have been increasingly more scrutinized. The core tenet of principal-agent theory centers on a contractual relationship between a principal actor or organization who contracts with an agent to fulfill certain functions (Lane & Kivisto, 2008). In this theory, two dynamics are most important: one, that the agent is beholden to the principal for some kind of reward or sanction (monetary or otherwise) and two, that the principal is reliant on the agent for some kind of expertise, information, or skills (Kelchen, 2018). This dynamic is known as information asymmetry, meaning the agent has more and better information than the principal and is the foundation for how the relationship works (Lane & Kivisto, 2008). There is also an underlying assumption of some diverging interests; this misalignment creates tension that is ideally outweighed by the reward (Kelchen, 2018).

As it relates to higher education and the dynamic of PBF models, the agents have the tools related to meeting the performance outcome metrics, and the principals have funding to reward them for doing so. As is noted by Kelchen (2018) this means the agents are in an advantaged position of having the information and therefore can report the information in ways that makes them look favorable, by utilizing different forms of gaming. With this in mind, the principal must decide what it finds to be the most important and should consider what the agent finds to be important as well. The more similar the outcomes, the less energy the principal has to expend to ensure the agent acts as intended, and would minimize gaming.

In addition to information asymmetry, interest divergence is equally a compounding factor in the principal-agent relationship in higher education. As Kelchen (2018) noted, the more similar the goals of each player in the relationship, the more likely the principal is to get to the intended outcome. We see this dynamic at play in the interests of the principal and the agents as well. Though, from a policymakers' perspective, the stated goals of the metrics are agreed upon interests for the state official and institutions (Gandara, 2019) we know there are variations in those interests.

To explore this theoretical framework for PBF, looking at the relationships between players, this research assumes that there is more than one layer of the principal-agent relationship at work in this case. This study expects to reveal that the principal-agent relationship exists at two levels, which makes this framework such an applicable fit. We would immediately expect to see this relationship between the states who are controlling the budgetary incentives, and the institutions who want those incentives but who also have their own priorities of prestige, education, and providing a public good (Tierney, 1988). This research hopes to shed light on another layer of this relationship between administrators at the institution, specifically upper-

level administrators and student-facing support staff. The goals of the institution are set and verbalized at the president, vice president, and associate vice president level, and in this case, are primarily carried out at the department level by the academic advisors and other student service professionals working with the students.

Student services professionals have expectations placed on them that metrics be met, and they have their own priorities of relationship-building and student success; these priorities can be misaligned and result in another principal-agent issue. The below diagram illustrates the assertion of multi-level principal-agent relationships (Figure 3):

Principal-Agent Concept Map

Level One:

Principal: State Policy Makers

Agent: Institutions

- Rewards/ Sanctions: PBF funding $ Reward
- Principal: $$
- Agent: Information regarding performance

Level Two:

Principal: Institutional Leaders/ Administrators

Agent: Student Services Staff

- Rewards/ Sanctions: Departmental funding and staffing
- Principal: $$
- Agent: Hands-on support with students, degree conferral, reporting

The principal-agent framework, also referred to as agency theory (Lane & Kivisto, 2008; Kivisto, 2005) has previously been used in the context of assessing the university-government relationship. This theory has been used to describe many of the choices we see in governmental decision-making and policy implementation, as well as an explanation for low performance by universities (Kivisto, 2005). In reviewing the literature, agency theory has not been used to explain resource allocation and departmental responsiveness within institutions, which will be one way that this theory is applied in this research.

Based on the existing research on the principal-agent relationship and the converging and diverging goals of the actors (Lane & Kivisto, 2008), the expectation is that there are differences in goals between the actors in this study. The diverging goals between the state and institutions include: the state's goals of accountability, reporting improvements, and high performance by its institutions, compared with the institutions' goals of pursuing research opportunities as a component of prestige and rankings, student development, tuition, and enrolment goals, and alumni relations. Shared goals for the state and institution could be shared ranking interests, some of which overlap and are partially included in performance metrics (See Appendix A).

In the second level of principal-agent relationships, there is an expectation to see differences between the administrators and student support staff's interests, which include: the administrators' goals to curry favor with the Board of Governors (specific to Florida) and to outperform other institutions in the university system, compared with the student services professionals' goals of student development, academic attainment, and overall preparation for successful adulthood and contributing citizens. Shared goals between the administration and student services include academic attainment which is measurable by state metrics. Though there are shared goals at both levels, it can be expected that in order to skirt those that diverge, some unintended consequences could arise (See Appendix B).

Principal-agent theory, coupled with previous literature, informs the hypotheses related to student services professionals' responses to PBF. First, misaligned interests at the state-to-institution level and the administration-to-support staff levels could be a result of the diverging goals created by metrics reporting. There is also expected to be goal and interest misalignment which can and will result in gaming (Kelchen, 2018). This study aims to discover the amount and kinds of gaming that student services staff witness and participate in. There is an expectation that there will be evidence of cream-skimming, parking, and selective reporting in the staff's experiences. There is also an expectation of positive results in outcomes where aligned goals exist between the principal and agent. Factors like communication, clarity, and resource allocation could lead to the genuine buy-in of the PBF outcomes and not just adherence to the guidelines of metrics reporting.

Methods

To address the research questions in this study regarding how student services professionals perceive and respond to PBF in one university in Florida, a qualitative case study was conducted. Based on the existing literature, and principal-agent theory, the primary research questions for this study are:

(1) How do student services professionals in a four-year university understand and address the performance-based funding metrics they are tasked with responding to?

(2) What are the perceptions of professional staff members regarding the metrics themselves?

(3) To what extent are metrics and performance-based funding effects a part of professional staff members' daily work?

Ultimately, the findings from this study could inform the greater literature on the shift in priorities of student services departments under performance metrics. Concerning the use of principal-agent theory to describe what is happening at the university, the information gathered from staff could also indicate the degree to which staff feel that administrators have similar or different goals than the departments that are carrying out services to students.

As mentioned previously, the gap in the literature this study fills concerns the impacts of a PBF model on the experience of staff and how they work with students. Students are a concern when it comes to the unintended effects of PBF models, but it is difficult to ask students to identify how this trend of accountability has impacted their experiences. Those who work most closely with the students impacted, and who have a more longitudinal sense of impacts and

consequences are the staff members who adhere to changes in policy. Professional student services staff members have perspective and understand the changes in policies that affect students.

Research Design/ Methodology

To better understand the staff's experiences, a case study design and qualitative research methods were utilized. This approach allowed for the collection of data based on the respondents' shared experience of transitioning to and working under a PBF model. A case study design was selected because this study is looking to investigate an occurrence, the implementation of PBF at a four-year institution in Florida, and what was experienced within a bounded system (Creswell, 2013). The shared experience of the student services staff members within this four-year institution was operationalized as a phenomenon. In this study, interviews were conducted, utilizing the hallmark of qualitative research. To complement the qualitative data, document analysis of student services staff meetings were added to reinforce findings (Creswell, 2013). Tracking the regularity and why or how information about PBF comes up at large-scale meetings shows that the issue is pervasive and salient for the participants in this study.

Case Selection

While there are many states and models of PBF at four-year institutions in the US (Li, 2019), this study is particularly focused on Florida's state university system, and one institution within that system, which is where the study physically took place. Florida uses a unique ranking system in its PBF model, which has greater implications, and has been the subject of greater scrutiny than other states' models because ranking creates competition between the institutions as they are ranked against one another. This component of how Florida utilizes PBF makes it an extreme case (Patton, 1990) meaning that it is unusual and dense with information. Specifically, to further mount the pressure, the ranking of an institution is vital to their funding, especially for those at the bottom. The bottom three institutions receive no new funds, so the system is unusually competitive and high-stakes.

The institution chosen for this study is an open-access, four-year institution which is experiencing changes to their admissions policies due to PBF. With some exceptions, at this institution, freshman and sophomore advising takes place at the main university advising office, referred to in this study as CO Advising. Though staff who work with freshmen and sophomores do not have as much impact on those outcomes that are measured by metric reporting (such as time to graduation and employment after), this office interacts more with other metrics like first to second-year retention. At this institution, this office sets the standard for advising institution-wide and reports directly to the Provost. This office has undergone many changes in the last five years since the implementation of PBF, but much of the leadership is still in office, making those who work there great participants for this research.

Interviews were conducted at two additional departments, corresponding to two academic colleges. One college is home to the most popular major at the university, and the major with the largest amount of transfer students, in this study the college is referred to as UD College. Transfer students are of particular concern under the Florida performance-funding model

because they do not currently "count" toward the metrics. This college also houses a five-year program that could be troublesome for metrics reporting because a student cannot complete the program in four years, without excess hours, another metric which the state tracks. The second college was also selected in order to include an area of academics with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) emphasis. Not all colleges are "weighted" equally within the metrics reporting, those programs that have STEM designation are programs of emphasis, this college is also referred to as UD College in this study. For anonymity purposes, the STEM designated advisors are not differentiated in the findings.

In selecting the three departments in which to conduct this research, the intention is to capture the efforts at the beginning stages of a student's journey and how that looks under PBF metrics, as well as the academic colleges where students complete their degrees, and where efforts are concentrated on other metrics.

Recruitment/ Participant Selection

This study used a partially purposeful sampling technique coupled with snowball sampling to enrich the data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The investigator gained access to advising departments that underwent many changes under the implementation of PBF metrics. Some of the individuals on staff also worked in their departments prior to the state-wide implementation, these individuals were able to contrast their experience before and after the implementation of PBF. It was believed that they could provide a thorough explanation of an experience that could be representative of many other similar departments across the state.

Participants consisted of 15 student services professionals, diverse in age, ethnicity, gender, and years working at the institution, see Table 1, Participant Chart. The chart displays the given pseudonym of the participants, the years worked at the institution, their department, and role. These characteristics are important because some of their responses were relevant to access and equity which could be reflections of their positionality within the changes they are seeing.

Depending on the department, the participants are working toward different metrics and with different types of students. The departments are identified as: central office advising (CO Advising), these participants work with freshman and sophomores and engage mostly with retention metric efforts, upper-division advisors at the academic college (UD College), these participants engage primarily with graduation and excess hours metrics, and are a in a non-STEM designated academic college. Finally, upper-division advisors who do work in academic colleges with STEM designation were interviewed; these participants engage with completion metrics, particularly those with STEM emphasis. For anonymity purposes, the STEM designated advisors are not differentiated in the findings

Table 1: Participant Chart

Name (Pseudonym)	Range of years at university	Department	Role
Tom	10+	CO Advising	Advisor with Managerial Duties
Susan	10+	CO Advising	Advisor

Bruce	5 and under	UD College	Advisor
Jessica	5-10	UD College	Advisor
Sarah	5-10	CO Advising	Advisor
Jacob	5 to 10	CO Advising	Advisor with Managerial Duties
Donna	10+	CO Advising	Advisor with Managerial Duties
Judy	5 and under	UD College	Advisor
John	5 -10	UD College	Advisor with Managerial Duties
Sandra	5 and under	UD College	Advisor
Shawna	5 and under	CO Advising	Advisor
Lauren	5 and under	CO Advising	Advisor
Sam	5 and under	CO Advising	Advisor with Managerial Duties
Susan	5-10	UD College	Advisor

All participants were employees of one of the three departments outlined above, and each served as an advisor, academic coach, or supervisor of academic advisors. The original group of participants was selected from departmental organizational charts on university websites, as well as individual relationships with the investigator. From that point, snowball sampling was used to further recruit more participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through the use of a recruitment email (see Appendix C), all participants were asked to consider participating in the study and asked to reply to the email if they would consider doing so. After receiving responses, the participants were then asked for their availability over three days and their preferences regarding where the interview would take place. All of the participants felt comfortable in their own offices and suggested meeting there.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted at the university in Florida, over three days. For qualitative research, interviews are considered to be the most effective method used to collect information, to gather detailed insights (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). This study utilized a semi-structured interview protocol, allowing for open-ended questions. For this investigation, it was necessary to allow for divergence from the script into areas that were informative based on the participants' responses. Each of the participants brought a different perspective based on their backgrounds such as their history at the institution, age, or racial/ ethnic identity, and answers varied accordingly, especially those addressing the types of students being served. Since some questions were more applicable to those who had been at the institution prior to the onset of the PBF model, a semi-structured approach lent itself to these interviews (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Examples of semi-structured interview questions for this study are as follows, the full interview protocol appears in the Appendix D.

1. How do you express your opinion on metrics/ rankings and policies related to these things?
    a. Do you think your voice is heard?
2. To what extent are you involved in decision making related to student advising or student success? For example, do you attend Academic Advising Council meetings? Are you able to express your opinion there?
    a. Do you feel like the topics discussed there are relevant to the current issues in advising at your university?

3. Is there anything else that you would like for me, or for policymakers, university administrators to know about how performance-based funding affects your job and your interactions with your students?

The interviews took place at the institution, in the participants' offices, with expressed permission from their supervisors. Doors were closed for privacy as well as for audio considerations. Each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes, depending on how succinct the answers were. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission, and the investigator took notes, as well. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the audio and transcript when created, to serve as a member check (Creswell, 2013). All files were saved on a password-protected laptop or in Box, a double-authenticated storage file that is cloud-based. Files that were saved to the cloud via Box and any of the software tools were password protected and also labeled as numerical files with no identifying information.

Another piece of data collection, which was used to triangulate the data collected through interviews, was the review and analysis of meeting notes from the Academic Advising Council (AAC) at the institution. This council has over 80 members; it is inclusive of all academic advisors in the university and meets quarterly to discuss relevant updates in university policies, procedures, and initiatives that affect or relate to the work of advisors. The minutes of these meetings are kept by the Communications Chair (a position that rotates annually) and are publicly available on the AAC website through the institution's website.

All of the participants interviewed in this study attend the AAC meetings when they can, and most referenced the council when asked how and when they heard about metrics or performance funding in their work. To analyze how prevalent and salient the PBF metrics are to advisors, institution-wide, the minutes were downloaded and the mentions of PBF or programs related to PBF were tracked using a spreadsheet. Frequencies were noted, as well as themes that arose, and trends of mentions over time. For example, fall meetings were much more highly saturated with mentions of outcomes and metrics, and programs like Early Start and Jump Start. Whereas, mentions of GPA and other enrollment criteria increasing was mentioned most often in spring.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed, all audio files were sent to be transcribed by a third-party service that is secure and private to use for research. Research data was analyzed through the method of coding. This method uses constant comparative data analysis to determine the most common, relevant, and salient ideas and themes among the 15 interviews (Creswell, 2013). The process of coding includes an initial survey of all themes, quotes, and items of interest mentioned in the data. Then, by repeatedly filtering and identifying all relevant data, correlative data began to form themes. This method is also referred to as the constant comparative method (Dye, Schatz, Rosenburg, Coleman, 2000) and is used to categorize and compare qualitative data for systematic analysis.

To analyze the data produced from this study, a software program used widely for this type of research was utilized. This program is called NVivo and was used to analyze both transcripts from the interviews, and the investigator's notes to extract themes and ideas. NVivo software helped to categorize and systematically form themes through the "node" system. Upon completion of the interviews, the investigator read through the transcripts many times and then

began assigning commonalities to nodes. Consistent themes and ideas came to light and were reinforced throughout the process of deductive coding. Inductive coding was used to identify new themes and ideas which were not expected by the investigator (Creswell, 2013). Memos were created to further identify concepts, impressions, and to categorize data (Creswell, 2013). Finally, guided by the theoretical framework for this study, principal-agent theory (Lane & Kivisto, 2008), themes and situations related to this theory were identified early and expanded upon or shaped through repetitive review of the data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a component of research that is important in order for a contribution made to the larger research body to have value (Creswell, 2013). In this case, there is a good deal of research regarding PBF models, but the contribution of the effects these models have on student services professionals' work is limited, making this study quite important. Trustworthiness also ensures that the true experiences of the participants are shared with the reader so that the reader may have insight and understanding of what student services professionals are experiencing in the face of PBF models and how it affects their work. The investigator followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) benchmarks for ensuring trustworthiness, which are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

For this study, credibility was enhanced through the use of diverse sources of data; using participants from different backgrounds, departments, and levels of involvement, as well as staff meeting agendas, allowed for information to be triangulated. Negative case analysis was used while analyzing interview data, each time revising, changing, or adding to themes as new interview data was analyzed (Creswell, 2013). Also, member checks by participants were utilized to further confirm credibility.

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the findings of qualitative research to other settings with similar social and relational patterns. This can be achieved through a "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the case is very unique in terms of the exact space this university occupies in a specific state's PBF model, but the findings of the study are very likely to be occurring at other institutions within the state, and likely other states that also rank institutions against each other.

Dependability for this study is achieved through the audit of others associated with the study, a colleague who works at the institution in the study, and through a dissertation chair who is overseeing this research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is accomplished through the use of the dissertation committee, comprised of researchers who are not involved with any of the steps of this research. The investigator consulted the chair of this committee often to review and provide feedback on findings and themes to ensure that the investigator's own perspective was not coloring the outcome of the analysis. Credibility is also confirmed through the use of triangulation of different sources of information. The investigator used myriad strategies to increase validity; triangulation through document analysis of student services meetings, member checks, and peer debrief (Creswell, 2013). One of the individuals interviewed has been working at the institution in a student support capacity for over 6 years, and although she now works with graduate students, she is in a Ph.D. program and will be critical of findings and validity, and a

great "in-group" source for member checking and peer debrief (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, relying on internal consistency should also ensure reliability (Creswell, 2013).

In the interest of honesty, many measures were taken to ensure participants would feel safe to disclose whatever they wanted to for the study. The letter of informed consent gave participants the option to refuse to answer any question that made them uncomfortable, and also the opportunity to expand upon any topic they wished. All participants were given anonymity assurance and were interviewed face to face in a location of their choosing. Participants were rarely guided to return to the topic if they had ideas or opinions to express that were not part of the interview questions. All audio was transcribed and included in the analysis. Follow-up and clarifying questions were also used to ensure the accuracy of understanding by the investigator (Creswell, 2013).

Saturation

Saturation was used to verify that all data has been collected to its full ability and is the point at which no new themes or ideas result from further data collection (Creswell, 2013). In this study, saturation was met at or around the 12th interview, but with 15 scheduled and with respect for the participants' willingness to be interviewed, all 15 interviews were completed. Each participant had a slightly different perspective on the experience of adapting to the PBF model, but the themes and takeaways that were pertinent to this study reached saturation before the end of data collection. Through negative case analysis and constant comparison, the data analysis at the end revealed a rich amount of offerings for each theme that arose. Within a couple of the themes, many quotes existed to support the finding, and not all could be utilized in this paper.

Ethical Considerations

Per the requirements of ethical research, and in compliance with the Institutional Review Boards of the institution under which this research is approved, and the institution studied, each participant signed a physical copy of the informed consent letter which ensured anonymity and the minimization of any risks of participating in the study. Each participant's departmental leadership emailed confirmation of support of the employees being interviewed, as well. Finally, at the beginning of each of the audio recordings, a statement of consent was read and each participant verbally confirmed that the researcher had permission to record them. Pseudonyms were used in the presentation of the data. Each participant was given the option to retract their interview at any time up until completion of the study.

Positionality Statement

For this research, I must disclose the investigator's positionality and the investigator's relationships with the individuals who were interviewed. As the investigator, I was very aware that the interest and passion I have for this topic are derived from the lived experiences that each of my participants is experiencing and I relate to them. I worked at an institution that was implementing performance funding, and my experience with PBF shaped my work and the way I engaged with students. This experience was extremely eye-opening for me. Seeing first-hand

how disparities were widened, students who need the most help were being neglected, and experiencing the stress of constantly pivoting and trying new initiatives and programs gives me an insight that most do not have.

Through my career in higher education, then through my academic pursuits, I began to gain perspective on how the rest of academia and policymakers view PBF models and it became clear to me that my experience is not well known, nor is it the focus of research. I went into this project interested in how this institution has adapted over six years, and with my wider perspective on PBF models, asked how is the institution settling in, or not? As Creswell (2003) stated: "Research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institution in which they live and work, and even the researchers' lives." I believe that I am appropriately positioned to be the investigator in this research and my experience helps me represent the data completely and truthfully, in the hopes of creating change, however minute. To minimize bias, as I am so close to the topic, I used standardized protocol with all participants and repeated back their language when I needed clarification.

Findings

Introduction: A University Managing Under Performance-Based Funding

To fully understand the impact of PBF at a university that has adapted to and lived with the model for six years, research was conducted in-person. Being on campus and physically interacting with the environment and the participants in the study was necessary in order to understand the context for this case and how student services professionals understand, experience, and are responding to PBF.

At the time of this study, it was a mid-fall semester and the university was bustling. This institution is changing; there are efforts to move toward a more residential campus, which are evidenced by residence hall renovations and new amenities being added onto the student union. The institution is working toward achieving a higher level of recognition through its athletic and academic programs as well. In recent years the football team has reached bowl-eligibility and their coach has garnered a good deal of recognition for his contributions to that achievement. Academically, the incoming GPA is at the highest it has been, and the programs to support students have multiplied in a short time.

In terms of the effects that PBF is having on the institution as a whole, participants reported that the institution feels as though it is finally settling in after half a decade of haphazard attempts at implementing changes very quickly. New construction projects are visible across campus, possibly indicating the plans for expanding the residential programs are being realized. Programs that were created and implemented haphazardly seem to have found a sustainable rhythm; offices have expanded and marketing materials reflect programs with longevity. Today, those at the institution give the impression that the university is finally able to relax and settle in. After being at the bottom, top, and middle of the metrics rankings, the institution has the experience to know what it is like to operate in all those positions in the rankings and have hit a comfortable stride in the rankings. The university is serving a different student now and are serving all students in very different ways. Some interview participants reported that the metrics

have made them better at their jobs, more intentional, and more accountable than before, they just wished the metrics were more tailored to their university.

What stands out from studying this institution and those working within it is that the metrics are everywhere and behind everything. As an example, looking at documents from quarterly AAC meetings, metrics, and metric-related programming are mentioned in every single meeting from 2015 on. Metrics and reporting are like an underlying current that everyone knows are constantly there, but after six years have become the norm. Many employees are new now and know no different, and the negative effects of programming and policies that serve to improve reported data are regarded apathetically, if regarded at all. To have gone through such a challenging and dramatic transition to PBF, as this institution did, it is little wonder that many are okay with the quiet calm that comes with being ranked where they currently are. The experiences of student services professionals who lived through the transition and who currently work under PBF illuminates the need for a closer look at impacts on those who work with the policy implementation first-hand.

The Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how outcomes or PBF models' effects trickle down to the student services staff who work directly with students as advisors and coaches. The research questions explored were (1) How do student services professionals in a four-year university understand and address the performance-based funding metrics they are tasked with responding to? Within this topic, (2) What are the perceptions of professional staff members regarding the metrics themselves? And (3) To what extent are metrics and performance-based funding effects a part of professional staff members' daily work?

The collective results of this study revealed themes that captured the experiences of the staff, their attitudes, and their concerns about the impacts PBF are having on the students they work with. Four themes stood out and were most salient for participant experiences due to the frequency of comments made in each category, and the saturation of shared experiences among many or all participants, these included: Pressures Resulting in Distrust, Advising in Ways Counter to Beliefs (Goal Misalignment), "Cooking the Books" (Gaming and Ambiguity), and Overreliance on Quantitative Data. Below, chapter four outlines this study's findings by collective themes, examples of each are given to provide context for understanding the experiences of student services staff. Finally, data collection via the document analysis of Academic Advising Counsel reinforced the experiences of the participants by providing evidence that the pressures of PBF metrics and outcomes are prevalent in their work.

Pressures Resulting in Distrust

Adapting to a performance-based model has affected various facets of student services professionals' work, and many reported how all-encompassing this change has been. There is little wonder that a large, public institution that historically served commuter and transfer students with fairly low admissions standards would have difficulty adjusting to a PBF model. To meet new demands, changes occurred across the board, and a shift in university goals affects all constituents, students, faculty, and staff. When asked about how they feel performance

metrics have affected their work, answers were explicit and clear, like this statement from Tom: "It has affected everything. It is certainly all-encompassing and all-consuming for, I think not only (university) but for the state of Florida for sure". And this from Susan regarding the impact of PBF measures: "Bottom line is it adds a lot of work. (Performance funding is) not necessarily a bad or good thing, but it does add a lot of work and stress, to be honest". The pressure to find solutions, answers in the data, and to not be ranked at the bottom are some of the high-level issues that administrators and directors were charged with. The pressures and stresses were reflected in the experiences of advising staff as well; Bruce stated that "(performance funding) affected the way I approached advising students, there was definitely pressure; you could feel it."

Findings from this study suggest that the pressures resulted in a sense of distrust on multiple levels. When under pressure to perform, or report performance, directors' communication with their staff changed, became less transparent and more geared toward telling them only what they need to know to do their jobs. Participants were not asked directly about how PBF affects their professional relationships, but many expressed they felt that that being measured by metrics created pressures that resulted in interactions that felt distrustful. Because much of their work is now quantified through metrics, the pressure to meet goals seems to be causing staff and their supervisors to have decreased communication. Some participants noted that secretive behaviors occurred due to a lack of trust. Jessica has worked at the university for over 13 years in different roles and is now an academic advisor. She has had the opportunity to see the effects of the university adapting to the performance funding model and identified a feeling of distrust. In regards to information about how the university or her department is performing, she stated:

> I would say there are some things that are kept from us. Over the few years, I've started to realize it's mostly because there's a fear that it will stoke fears or that it will be something that becomes something. It's very much like a parent-child relationship (Jessica).

Additionally, Sarah stated "They don't always share with us a lot of data either. They sent us a brief copy of the (report) for this year. I've been here for four years and that's the first time they've ever shared that with us." The feeling of mistrust is perceived to be coupled with a lack of respect for the advisors' level of professionalism in a few cases. Participants expressed that they were asked to just "do their jobs" and not "bother" with the data because it "didn't matter to them". Many full-time student services staff found this treatment to be insulting and affected their level of buy-in for working toward the goals of meeting the metrics.

Some of the participants in the study were associate directors, who themselves were advisors, but who also had newer advisors reporting to them. One of these participants, Jacob, confirmed the assertions and feelings that some advisors made about deceptive behaviors. Jacob said, "Now if (supervisor) says we don't need to tell them (advisors) certain things, I won't tell them. I'll say 'keep your ears open when it comes down the pipe you'll hear things'."
When asked how more transparency would impact their work, one advisor stated: "I think it would just make me feel more connected to where our mission and purpose is in the metrics".

One director-level participant who oversees advisors stated that he does not "want advisors to think about the metrics when they are advising students; I just want them to do their jobs and let me worry about that". The implication was that he wanted to protect advisors from feeling the pressures and not allow the outcome metrics impact their work; unfortunately, as Bruce detailed, he did feel the stress and the pressure regardless. This director's approach only served to make his advisors feel like he does not trust them or respect that they would do their jobs appropriately if given the information.

Another, unexpected example of participants experiencing mistrust was expressed by Donna, an associate director who is also involved with the First-Year Experience efforts at the university. Donna has worked at the institution for nearly twenty years and expressed that she has noticed a change in the level of collaboration, that individuals from other state institutions are more guarded when she attends state-wide conferences for First-Year Experience development. Donna stated:

> The saddest part of all of this for me is that there was a time where we couldn't talk to anybody about anything because it might give them an idea that would set them ahead in the metric. There was a level of paranoia at the state, you know, we didn't talk to them, they didn't talk to us. For me, that was sad because education is supposed to be collaborative. That we learn from each other and if we're really working at it, we can make each other better.

Donna's perceptions of this between-university distrust and paranoia were confirmed in some ways by other participants when they answered questions related to the discussion of metrics. Many participants said metrics were discussed at professional conferences, like the Florida Academic Advising Association, a branch of NACADA. Some stated that metrics were discussed frequently and then glossed over without a lot of discussions when multiple university constituents were present.

Workplace environments range in levels of interaction and trust, particularly between supervisors and staff, but it seems that as a result of PBF pressures and stressors, the level of communication and trust between these participants and their supervisors have changed noticeably. The pressure to perform and report performance changes the way participants are receiving information and relationships with their supervisors. Similarly, the pressure to outperform one another is changing the incentive to collaborate and communicate between university constituents when they engage with one another at conferences.

Advising in Ways Counter to Beliefs (Goal Misalignment)

In response to questions about how success is measured and whether the metrics address success, many participants indicated that the outcomes that are quantified do not reflect their beliefs about what makes a student successful. Participants concluded that there is a misalignment between what the advisors consider to be achievable goals for success and what the state is actually measuring. One advisor, Tom stated, "Student success can mean so many different things. Like one student transferring, that could be a success because they got into a different school that may have been their number one. So success is so different." The result of

this misalignment is that advisors are having to direct students down academic paths that sometimes conflict with their beliefs about what is best for the student. Primary examples of this occurrence often pertain to majors, the pace of study, and when students want to transfer out of the university. Major changes are often complicated, for example, when students want to change their major for whatever reason, they are asked to petition to do so, those petitions are denied if the student has more than 90 credits toward their current major. The pace of study is managed through a variety of policies, including one that allows a student no more than two withdrawals, more will result in a fee. Also, students who want to leave the university are subject to scrutiny before they can collect their academic transcripts.

Major restrictions have been implemented in response to PBF and some advisors are concerned about students missing out on some of the value of pursuing a bachelor's degree. Donna expressed these concerns in her statement:

> One, students have to commit to a major very early in their (academic) career. The student who is truly undecided, who needs or desires to experience actual courses in the major before committing to it doesn't have as much opportunity to do that.

Another advisor Judy stated: "The student who gets down the road in a major and then begins to struggle or has an epiphany of some sort that they are not well-suited... Changing is more difficult than it used to be". Another unforeseen consequence of tight major restrictions is that colleges with less difficult majors are the self-described "dumping grounds" when students cannot pass technical and STEM courses on the first try. Students are subject to an excess-credit surcharge, a fee per-credit when a student exceeds the maximum credit allowance for that major. This policy was implemented a year after the transition to PBF, as one of the metrics pertains to excess credits. Since students are faced with harsh penalties for taking too many credits, they sometimes have to change to a major they did not intend to take, and the colleges that are forced to accept these students feel taken advantage of. John stated: "Our college is the dumping ground for the harder colleges or the more technical colleges like business or engineering." An example of this seemingly common scenario was explained by Bruce:

> Because, initially they're telling me 'Hey I just want to be in criminal justice. That's what I want, that's what I want to do.' Well okay, I'm going to work with you to make sure that happens, right? That's your goal, I'm going to make sure that happens for you. We'll help you get there, I should say. So, what changed is (with PBF) now I'm thinking crap, this student is failing stats, and what if they fail research methods? So now, to make sure we hit performance metrics, we need to change the student's major.

In many cases, to get students to stay, remain full time, and finish faster, policies have been created by university administrators to prevent students from continuing in ways that could be counter to these outcomes. Nearly every participant mentioned one or more of these policies that cause them ethical dissonance in trying to enforce them because the results of the policies often have unintended financial consequences and go against what they think is best for the student. Examples of these university-wide policies include: excess hours surcharge, limit on withdrawals (going over the limit results in a surcharge), a policy preventing change of major

after 90 credit hours, and a policy requiring students to have an exit interview when they request transcripts to transfer; all were implemented in response to PBF metrics.

In analyzing meeting agendas for the Academic Advising Counsel, these policies were introduced under topics like "Push to Get Students to Graduate" and "Excess Hours Surcharge". The addition of new policies and frequencies of mentions were prevalent. All of the policies that participants mentioned which were created to limit the flexibility of students and expedite their graduation appeared on the meeting minutes as presentations to the advisors. Most of these presentations were given by the Registrar's office, to explain specifics to academic advisors who need to know exactly how and when policies affect students' records and progress. The policies present in the meeting minutes included: excess hours surcharge, holds on undecided students at 60 credits, holds on students trying to change major at 90 credits, and a policy limiting the number of classes a student can drop.

Advisors are concerned over the number of students they see who have limited options and often accept financial penalties to take excess credits (an amount calculated by degree and the "acceptable" amount of credits within which to graduate). One Advisor, Sandra stated, "We're going to charge students for not passing classes on their first or second attempt that was perhaps a good idea. But the assumption is that students understand what college costs, they don't until they graduate and have a huge bill." Advisors are also seeing students stop out due to the fees they have incurred because of these policies that are intended to encourage students to persist. They accept the fees to complete their semester, but cannot reenroll when they get their bill.

Graduation and retention rates are both emphasized in the performance metrics and are greatly impacted by students transferring out of the university, especially if they started full-time at that institution. Some state PBF models include a reward for transfer students; currently, Florida does not. In the state system of Florida, many institutions have articulation agreements that make transferring between them fairly simple for students. However, counter to these transfer policies, performance funding legislation causes universities to highly discourage transferring because it is reported as attrition for the institution the student is leaving, and the institution that the students transfer to gets the points for their completion.

To curb the number of students transferring and the ease with which they are able to do so, policies were created to alert student services staff if they indicated in any way that they would want to transfer. Again, from John:

> What we do is, within Starfish (advising software), we have an indicator where when I go in there I can place flags on students, letting everybody know that this student is looking to possibly transfer. And then, they have different departments who will receive the flag, and then they will reach out to the individual student to see if we can find out why they're transferring, or see if there's something we can do here to try and retain them.

Some participants reported that they are not very comfortable reaching out to students for an explanation of why they are transferring, indicated by the transcript request or not being enrolled in classes. Jessica is one of these advisors who is not comfortable, she stated:

But to call them and say, "Why aren't you enrolled in classes?" It was, I mean, any number of questions. I put myself in that scenario, like why are you calling me and asking me why I'm not enrolled in classes? I'm just not, what does it matter?

Advisors also tend to disagree with the negative connotation surrounding students who transfer; for some of them this is one of the areas in which student success is being improperly measured by the metrics. To this point, Shawna stated: "Working with the population like we do, success may mean leaving the institution and going someplace else, transferring, being happy, and earning a degree, just not at (this university)". For these advisors and others that addressed their views of student success as compared to what the metrics are measuring, the goals of the metrics are not in-line with what they perceive to be the goals of some of their students. Having to enforce policies they do not agree with is a professional obstacle for advisors and student services professionals to reconcile and try to overcome.

In addition to their concerns about enforcing policies they don't always agree with, many mentioned issues with mission misalignment of the university under the new funding model's expectations. None of the participants were asked about the mission or cultural changes, but many included this assessment in their answers. Susan compared the effects of the PBF model to standardized testing in K-12 education; she said, "Much like K-12 standardized testing, this whole 'one-size fits all' doesn't work. We're not all the same. We all have different student populations. We have different missions and visions". Implied in statements like this one is the difference in the type of students that attend the high-resourced flagship institutions and those who attend less selective, less-resourced institutions like the institution in this study. One comment on how this was overlooked in policymaking came from Sandra "maybe if we were Wesleyan College in 1970… which maybe the policymakers attended and that's why they think this works".

Donna further explained the issue of one-size-fits-all metrics: "The problem has been that one set of metrics was created for all state universities in Florida, and fundamentally the problem is that not all the state's schools have the same mission". For institutions of higher education, the student body is reflected in the mission. The type of students the institution serves greatly impacts their goals. The primary difference in student types that this commentary is referring to is the abundance of transfer and part-time students, who are not counted in the metrics currently, whereas first time freshmen (FTICs) are. At an institution that was created to serve transfer, non-traditional, and commuter students, this shift in emphasis is felt by the student support professionals; through their different lenses, they experience this in different ways. Some remarked on the fundamental disparities being exaggerated by the model, "the more your institution caters to a particular group of students (referring to FTICs), then it becomes a division between those who have and who have not". Regarding the students and their realities, Shawna said, "These students (might be) entrepreneurs, they are students that are involved in everything and sometimes it's extremely hard for them to balance all of that, and also take enough courses to graduate in four years. Or, we have a lot of nontraditional students with families and other obligations".

The increased emphasis on college completion has resulted in restrictions that are created to encourage students to finish by discouraging or denying students and activity that would delay

their graduation. For student services professionals, the value of going to a four-year university is partially the learning and development students gain while exploring what they want to do, at least this was the intention historically. Forcing students to expedite graduation by enforcing policies that will charge them or prevent them from taking more or different classes goes against the intention of advisors to help foster their development. Fostering success is important to the participants, and does not equate to getting through college as expediently as possible, nor does it include refusing students when they want make decisions about their education such as transferring or changing their major.

"Cooking the Books" (Gaming and Ambiguity)

The expression "cooking the books" refers to accounting tricks to represent outcomes as better than they are. One participant stated plainly, "So, the amount of book cooking that's happening across the state is just sickening. There is not student success, it's about cooking your books to make this, to play this game, to get the funding". From this statement and the echoing statements of many others, the impression is that institutions in the state of Florida are in a tight race for funding, no doubt, but also the latest and most effective tools to represent data in ways that will make them winners financially.

The participants were not asked about gaming in metrics reporting explicitly, but of the 15, 12 commented on the practice. For most participants, the genesis of the gaming at their university was imposed on them to keep up with the other bigger and better-resourced schools that were already playing the game. In Tom's example, "The gaming has happened at every school, (institution redacted) has played this game as well, but we were late to the table. Florida and Florida State were early to the table". According to another participant, the reason that the larger schools are doing so well in the rankings year over year is related to vested interests policymakers have in those schools, and they look to what those larger schools are doing in order to set the bar. He/she said, "And at the top, that's the only group that the state is looking at to determine funding".

To create better outcomes, this university has resorted to trying to improve the inputs – at least for first-time students beginning in fall, which are the students that count in metric reporting. To do this, the university adapted admissions policies, shortly after the introduction to PBF, that many of the other institutions in the system use as well. These policies "defer" students to spring or summer if they are not strong enough academically to start college in the fall. These policies take the shape of programs called "Jump Start" and "Early Start" which are managed by student services professionals, many of whom participated in this study. These programs were first introduced in Academic Advising Counsel meetings, and appear on the agenda nearly every meeting after, for two years. In analyzing documents these programs were introduced as "Update from Admissions" and "New Programming for Summer." Jump Start is a program in which students start in the summer with two courses, three credits each, in addition to a non-credit guided course with an instructor from their major college. If the student does not make a 2.5 GPA or better, they are unable to start in fall and are deferred to spring, missing out on a true first fall semester in the college experience. One participant explained how it feels to him: "Okay, you know what, we need to identify these students who cannot continue' so then Jump Start becomes a tool, less for college preparedness and more for weeding out."

Early Start is different but serves the same end; students begin college as fully admitted students in summer and also do not count toward the metrics reporting. These students generally have lower GPA and entrance exam scores. Another tactic that is used to minimize the fall-start students to only those with the most likelihood of succeeding is to keep lower GPA students under full-time, less than 12 credits, and ensure that students who are at the upper end of the GPA spectrum register as full-time students by enrolling them in more than 12 credits. Jacob commented on this practice by saying, "that bothers me, too. Right now, all FTICs who start here have to be full-time for their whole time here or else they can't come here. Maybe we've lost some good students who just couldn't be full-time because they had to work". These programs can result in major financial and social consequences for students, and freshman advisors are at the forefront, trying to advise and guide students when they know that the option given to them is not what they would want for themselves. Tom said, "So we support them to the best of our ability, give them the SLS experience. Make sure they are in classes that are going to set them up to continue, but that's it. It's kind of a burden on the family if they can't get a fall start or can't pay to be not full-time". Regarding how this increases income disparity in students, he said "I don't think anything affects all students evenly, for example, the Early Start students. That's a big chunk of money and the students who don't need the financial aid are in a better situation to pay."

Participants noted that the larger schools named were the first to decrease their fall admit students to those with higher GPA, and not only would they deny them admission, but they would also encourage them to go to other universities, like the one in this study, to take intro classes for their major and come back in later semesters. Tom stated, "Florida State and Florida would say to the students, 'We encourage you to take courses in the fall at another state school, but only take 11 hours so that we can count you as an FTIC when you come back to us". On this topic, Sam also remarked, "So they were not only cooking their books, they were cooking our books because the students would come here and matriculate in the fall, counting in our fall metric, and then leave one semester after because we were not their first choice." In response to this, the institution in this study was forced to create policies that prohibit students from enrolling in classes unless they enrolled in 12 credits or more, making them full time.

Backing up a bit, before the issues of students being admitted full time or less than, the larger, more selective institutions were the first to defer students to other terms in order to have the best numbers to report to the state. Because schools like UF and FSU are much more selective in their admissions, they were able to create this system without experiencing conflict with their mission. Tom touched on this in his statement, "So if a university could admit ten students and they all graduated in four years, they would have a perfect metric, which is ridiculous, right? First choice institutions can play that game." First choice institutions in this example refer to the more selective universities in the state system, which eligible or hopeful students would apply to first. Currently, all institutions in the state are trying to compete with this plan to present the best students by enrolling them in the fall. Tom said, "Every school decreased the number of students they admitted in the fall. They want the smallest fall class they can get."

At the institution in this study, the practice of carefully selecting those students who will be represented in the reporting of the metrics has created a new practice of "profiling" students.

High school students with the test scores and GPA that are strong enough to be accepted to this university are not necessarily admitted, at least not in the fall. Sam shed some light on what this looks like, "These are all students who are eligible to come to the university based on their profile, but the strongest profile is admitted to fall, the second strongest to the summer, and the third strongest to the spring. But students all want the fall experience."

When asked whether students understand or get the impression that they are grouped by profile and semester they start, the answers were generally that the selection is communicated to the student as an opportunity to get a head start on college. Some participants suspected that students often knew why they were in a certain group but they do not feel empowered to push back. To one advisor, this practice felt manipulative, "I hate to say it, but I tell it like it is. I notice that to help our performance numbers we do things to manipulate, and I hate to use that term. For example, if a student doesn't do well in the summer, we have them come part-time in the fall."

The reality is that even though these options are not ideal, they still do not often deter students; students are applying to this institution because they can't get into better schools, at least not until they take courses to improve their GPA. By utilizing programming like Jump Start and Early Start, this institution does not see a decrease in admission numbers, they are still able to maintain their student population, but they are able to better control who the state sees as their students. This institution has also increased its admissions requirements, going from a fairly open-access institution to one with a GPA requirement that is growing year-over-year. For some of the STEM programs, and the student services professionals that work in those colleges, the admissions changes are making their jobs easier, as Jessica noted earlier, they can only guarantee completion for students who are strong enough academically to make it happen for themselves. For those in student services who enjoy working with the other populations, those who are less likely to succeed under the new model, Judy explained:

> Those are the ones we care most deeply about, the ones who are committed but are, and I don't know if this is politically correct but are average students. I think our particular university was created to work with the average students.

As mentioned previously, the state of Florida's performance funding model ranks the institutions against each other, likely intending that competition will spur the institutions to benchmark and improve faster. However, the findings of this study seem to indicate that this system encourages more gaming. As Susan put it "I love a good competition, that's kind of in my nature, but sometimes that causes people to do sketchy things". One of the contributing factors to the amount of gaming perceived by student services professionals seems to lie in the lack of structure or guidelines on how the state would like institutions to analyze or report their data. Judy talked about this experience as an advisor: "So now to hit performance metrics we think we must need to change this student's major. They initially said, 'Here are the performance metrics, improve them,' without any guidelines". Without guidelines, universities seem to have learned each other's tricks and changed policies for the students without any oversight or management of the repercussions from the state. As Bruce put it, "What it represents is the institutions have learned to, essentially, game the system. Institutions have learned to work within what few parameters the BOG (Board of Governors) lay out".

Within the institution, there are suggestions of certain departments and colleges taking part in data representation with a "spin" or "softening" to report more positive outcomes than maybe are the reality. When asked about the data they pull, analyze, or report, most of the student services professionals in this study did not report that they, themselves manipulated data in any way, but some were under the impression that their directors or the higher-level administrators were doing so. One advisor spoke about how data is represented in his department and said, "If there has to be, I will talk to my direct boss about how to spin it if we need to spin it". Regarding the practice of manipulating what the data says, Sarah said the following regarding leadership:

> I think they have to make decisions on how they will provide the information we give them. I give a very black and white representation of everything and figure that leadership can do what they need to politically to soften the data.

Within-institution frustrations are rising related to the reallocation of students for the purpose of reporting as well. As mentioned before, some colleges have increased their major restrictions and others have become the fallback choice. Most often this happens to benefit the overall scoring of the institution as there are programs that are designated as "programs of emphasis" by the performance model, typically STEM programs. Those back-up colleges feel cheated by internal gaming. John had this to say regarding the practice of changing students' majors to get them out of the STEM colleges:

> So we accept them because we feel it is our moral obligation to do so, and let them hurt our (college's) metrics. And there needs to be an acknowledgment of that, that we need to get an extra couple of percentage points, or other colleges need to go down a little bit because they are not keeping those students.

Prior to PBF, there were cases where students would leave programs due to GPA and have to find another major, this happened frequently with the business school, but the backup colleges did not see this as a loss for them and a win for the other colleges. The quantification of students is another result of the funding model.

Student services professionals are reluctant participants in the situations that have been created by their institution trying to respond to PBF demands. A once nearly open-access institution that is now restricting enrollment by increasing its admissions standards, and then further dividing students into subgroups creates ethical burdens on its staff. Though it may be administration and admissions teams that make the decisions, the staff in this study are the advisors who run the programs and work with the students and their families when they have to make difficult decisions. Being asked to counsel a student who is faced with a challenging admissions outcome, or to collect information about why a student wants to transfer is not easy or welcomed for student services staff, especially when they don't agree with these policies. Overall, the professionals that were interviewed care about their students, the mission of their workplace, and the obligation to guide students to make the best decisions for themselves. This professional drive is in direct conflict with telling a student they have to pay out of pocket

because the institution will not allow them to take enough credits to apply for financial aid, or to stay at the institution and finish when the student wants to complete their degree elsewhere.

Overreliance on Quantitative Data

Of the participants who took part in the study, about half saw their jobs change to include working with data, tracking students, and reporting as the university adapted to BPF. The half that did not see these changes all acknowledged that someone in their department, usually a peer, became the appointed "data person" for that department and spared the rest from having to take on the additional tasks. As noted by Jessica, "I think at this point I have been very fortunate to not have to do so much with data". However, during certain times of the year when reporting was due, many had to also pitch in. Sarah commented, "Me, personally, not that much time spent on data because we have someone within the office whose job is that. But right now I'm doing it because we're on a time crunch." Many advisors are reluctant to add data tracking duties to their work because they feel it takes time away from building relationships with students, and they have concerns about the data itself and how it is used. Finally, there is a lack of understanding or buy-in for how, or if, working with data improves student outcomes.

Decrease in Relationship Building

For many advisors, the opportunity to help students by getting to know them and what their goals are is the driving force behind choosing that career path. Advisors come to know and understand the student populations they are working with at an institution, and create ways of supporting those students. Adapting to PBF and the change of students who are being served or focused on is felt by the participants in this study. Bruce explained his experience in the transition to PBF:

> I started at (university) at this college, when there was not a performance metric standard, or at least it wasn't really highly publicized. And so, my whole first year I'm doing the work I was hired to do, which is academic advisor. And then, the performance metrics came in later on, and the importance of that came online. So, not having that background when I took the job definitely impacted my stress level.

Bruce and most other participants had worked in higher education as academic advisors before PBF, some within the same institution, state, and institution type. For most, the primary shift in their work pertained to who they were serving. Bruce, again:

> So, with academic advising, its student-facing; your interactions are with your stakeholders, the students. Students and parents and families, right? That's who you are primarily serving. And their interests are what you're mostly serving, as well as the university. But when you introduce the performance metrics, suddenly you're serving a different stakeholder. You're serving not just the college, or the university as a whole, you're serving the state of Florida.

Often, advisors who work so closely with students feel removed from the interests of these other stakeholders, such as the state, and see themselves as the students' advocates, first and foremost

As mentioned in the previous section, when introducing another stakeholders' interests, academic advisors find themselves on the frontlines when these interests diverge, as Bruce mentioned. John, who also was given data tracking responsibilities reported: "When I was tasked with taking over this performance tracking thing, my big thing was I should be getting paid more money for doing extra work. And I'm not." John's experience, along with others, is their advising duties did not diminish even though the addition of data collection took up a good deal of their time. Regarding this, John stated: "You want me to be an advisor and the best advisor I can be, and I thought I was a good advisor (pre- metrics reporting)". None of the advisors reported receiving any training on how to work with data to create the reports they were asked for, some reporting that training themselves was another task that took up a lot of their time, time formerly spent with students.

Most participants reported that the time they spent on advising students face to face decreased as their assignments for data reporting increased. To compensate for less advisor availability, participants stated they thought some colleges have limited the students they will see face-to-face and offer program plans or online materials to other students. When asked how the colleges are managing students with multiple competing priorities Sarah stated: "like the College of Science. They won't even see non-(FTICs), College of Science will only see FTICs." In her example Sarah is referring to First Time in College students, meaning those who are counted in the metrics, thereby leaving those who are not counted in the metrics to only be seen by an advisor once they are close to graduation.

Concerns With Data Analytics

The use of data at the university is also a concern for many of the participants. To "catch up" to where the university felt they needed to be in the world of data and analytics, the university purchased a couple of software programs to help them. Participants referred to "Starfish" often, this software allows them to manage their advising appointments, receive warning flags about their advisees (both from the grade alert system, each other, and faculty directly), and allows for data reports to be pulled without a third party. In addition to Starfish, many participants mentioned Civitas, which was described as a data tool that uses predictive analytics from student information to help inform advisors about the likelihood a student would have to be successful or unsuccessful. The Civitas information, usually represented as a score is fed into Starfish so that when an advisor pulls up a student's profile, the Civitas data would be present, represented as a number and a color. The advisors that mentioned this feature said that they do not use it at all and they do not believe it to work correctly. Lauren, an academic coach who works specifically with students at risk, a designation that is determined by GPA, probation, or suspension status, said: "So this number, it's based on the rate that we think they're going to continue to register in future semesters, I believe".

In contrast to Laura's understanding of how Civitas indicators work, her director Sam stated that the number "…is a score of how likely it is that the students are going to graduate based on their profile". So, ultimately Lauren said, "We as coaches have a problem with this number because we don't believe it is accurate" and "it doesn't help me at all, and I have to make sure it's covered up every time I have a student meeting so they don't see it… Because how can I explain if you have a 'red (code for at-risk)' to a student?" However, Sam was

confident that the program is being used in the following way: "How do you prioritize who needs a touch now vs next week, vs the week after? Civitas helps us make that decision".

As student services professionals, many of those who were asked about data and tracking students stated that they disagree with the rampant and inconsistent use of data software and constant tracking. Some felt that the data-driven initiatives are taking away from face-to-face time with students, some are concerned about the validity of the data, and others are not sure what the data is even for. Susan stated, "We try because I think if (university administrators are) always worrying about benchmarks and the funding that goes through it, students become more of a number rather than a student." Another example, referring to the data reports used to determine who is selected for certain programming came from Jan's comment, "We just run a list and whoever doesn't meet your GPA, those kids are dropped, these kids continue, and we have nothing to do with that process". The lack of involvement with the process stems from the use of data to decide the composition of certain programs instead of advisors who know the students personally. When asked how she feels the intention of PBF models could be improved, Susan responded, "Maybe be more specific on how it is still a caring industry we are in. A lot of times, too many numbers make it seem uncaring".

Lack of Buy-in

In terms of what data analysis can impact, many participants believe that there is little they can do on the individual student level to change behaviors, regardless. Jan shared her thoughts on this:

> I think that the one negative thing is that the college thinks we can somehow change the metrics. We can try to pressure students to take more classes and so forth, but it's really up to the students they admit at admissions. Whether or not the student passes the classes, whether or not the graduation rate, for instance, will change. In terms of that, I can't affect that. Whether or not my students are going to graduate, I can't change that.

Tom, who has been working with data for years, even before the adoption of PBF and had this to add:

> Though the question is whether or not their (advisor) interactions with students have been sufficiently impactful, you can't really measure in that way because there are too many external factors, you can't control for them, at least not that I am aware of. Not unless you put a student in a bubble.

With a lack of confidence in the outcomes of data and continuing emphasis on it taking up so much of advisors' time, the participants reported being burdened and even annoyed by the reporting they are tasked with. The lack of training, pay, and recognition all contributing to their negative feelings.

The use of data to guide institutional agenda is concerning for student services staff. Largely, those who go into academic advising and student support services as careers do so because they enjoy engaging with students and perceive what they do as being in a helping profession. The amount that some job duties are changed and restructured due to PBF-related

data tracking varies on a continuum of very little, or at peak times, to a complete shift to data tracking with very little face-to-face interaction. For those who are trying to incorporate the imposed data analytic systems, there is no training on how to do so effectively, and the systems themselves pose problems that either complicate their work, or they dismiss the system entirely, unbeknownst to their supervisors. Not only do advisors question the metrics themselves as a way of measuring success, but they also question the implementation of these data analytic programs because there is little evidence to support that they are doing anything. These programs are also replacing their judgment and involvement in making decisions about what is best for students.

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how student services professionals at a four-year university understand and respond to a PBF model and how they perceive the model affecting their daily work. Through this qualitative study, the investigator conducted interviews with 15 student services professionals, all advisors, some also carrying managerial and supervisory roles, all who work within an institution under the PBF model in the state of Florida. The investigator also used document analysis to support the interview data. The research questions in this study were: (1) How do student services professionals in a four-year university understand and address the performance-based funding metrics they are tasked with responding to? (2) What are the perceptions of professional staff members regarding the metrics themselves? (3) To what extent are metrics and performance-based funding effects a part of professional staff members' daily work?

Based on an in-depth qualitative exploration of a university in Florida, four themes were identified, with sub-themes in each category. Those themes are: Pressures Resulting in Distrust, Advising in Ways Counter to Beliefs (Goal Misalignment), "Cooking the Books" (Gaming and Ambiguity), and Overreliance on Quantitative Data. Each of these themes lends insight into the experiences of student services professionals related to the adaptation to and continued work under a specific PBF model. The state of Florida transitioned to its version of an outcomes-based funding model at the end of 2014 and the model has undergone many changes and iterations. One component that has not changed, and which likely impacted some participant responses and the development of themes, is that the Florida model ranks institutions against one another. This unique attribute and how the institutions have fluctuated in the rankings over the years makes this particular model unique to study from the angle of student services professionals' experiences.

Summary of Findings

Participants in this study were all engaged in working directly with students, some worked only with lower-division students, some with only upper-division students, and some also carrying supervisory roles. Many had worked at the institution before the transition of PBF, some had been hired after; all have the experience of working through the byproducts of PBF, whether that be policies, new programs, or new software intended to help them do their jobs

more efficiently. Within this context, the study revealed four key themes. This section summarizes each of these related themes.

The first theme, Pressures Resulting in Distrust captures the reports of student services professionals regarding their relationships with their supervisors and with professionals at other universities. The experiences reported indicate that, after adopting the PBF model, advisors felt their supervisors were less likely to share information with them related to metrics and outcomes for reporting. Those participants with supervisory duties also reported that they are unlikely to share data or metrics reports with their employees for fear that it would influence how they work with students. Another conclusion that could be suggested from this finding is that they don't have time to have in-depth conversations due to the amount of time spent on extra data-related duties; they prefer their employees to just do their jobs and not inquire about outcomes. Advisors perceived this lack of communication as an indicator that their supervisors do not feel they are professional or trustworthy.

Participants also reported that, when attending state-wide conferences with other student services professionals from competing universities, they are reticent to share best practices for student success, retention, and completion. Ultimately, this finding highlights the fact that the rankings component in the state of Florida's funding model caused members of this institution to feel restricted from sharing information about how they are improving their metrics scores with competing institutions. This occurrence would hinder the progress and improvement of all of the institutions in the system.

The second theme, Advising in Ways Counter to Beliefs (Goal Misalignment) was formed from participants' reports that their work often diverges from their goals for their students. Due to the increased emphasis on college retention and completion under PBF, mechanisms have been put into place to discourage or prevent students from extending their time to graduation. These mechanisms are often policies that advisors have to implement and enforce which advisors worry can result in financial consequences or a lack of student exploration and development. Student services professionals are not convinced that these mechanisms are always in the students' best interests and they find them ethically conflicting when being asked to enforce them.

Resulting from the realization that the institution needed to make serious changes after their first year at the bottom of the metrics rankings, many policies were implemented that constrain students' ability to extend their time to graduation. These policies include an excess hours surcharge, limit on the number of withdrawals they can take without charge, and limits on when they can change to a new major. For many advisors, the understanding they have of what makes a student successful includes personal growth and development, and small successes such as completing an associate's degree to transfer to another university. Though some advisors suggested that the metrics make them more intentional about their work and that they understand how certain policies could help students, many participants do not agree that the metrics which caused the creation of these policies are actually good measures of student success, as they understand student success, which is not a one-size-fits-all model.

The third theme, Cooking the Books (Gaming and Ambiguity) refers to practices the university has adapted which are intended to improve their standing in the rankings. To those working in student services, and who are aware of data reporting, these practices look like and result in gaming of the metrics. As a result of a funding model that tracks some students and not all, participants have noticed that all universities in Florida have started admitting the strongest students, those with the highest likelihood of success, in the fall and others who are less likely are admitted in other terms. This practice was initiated at larger, more resourced institutions in the state, who are more selective and ultimately admit more students who are likely to succeed, anyway. Once the less selective institutions realized what others were doing, they felt forced to follow suit to have a chance of competing. This resulted in a series of admissions changes and new policies that affect mid and lower-performing students negatively in some cases, and advisors have to enforce these decisions and work with students to get through the situations the decisions create. Student services professionals reported a change in the students they are seeing, gaps in disparities widening, and a conflict with the mission of the university under the new policies.

Last, the study uncovered that student services professionals believe there is an Overreliance on Quantitative Data. To identify students who are subject to alternative admissions routes, programming for lower performers, and those who are at-risk of either completion or transferring out of the institution, the university has employed the use of data-tracking software. The use of these data-tracking software and predictive analytics is concerning for student services professionals, as they reported in this study. The Overreliance on Quantitative Data theme encompasses the time and attention data tracking is taking from advisors meeting with their advisees, the concerns advisors have about the validity of the data, and a lack of confidence that software programs are able to improve student outcomes. Participants report that using data to make decisions about students is usurping their expertise and causing their relationships with students to suffer.

The remainder of this chapter links research findings to existing theory and research. The chapter will also discuss the implications of this research on practice and policy, and suggestions for future research, including the limitations of this study.

Findings Connected to Theory and Prior Research

The four themes from the findings inform the research questions of this study which are: (1) How do student services professionals in a four-year university understand and address the performance-based funding metrics they are tasked with responding to? (2) What are the perceptions of professional staff members regarding the metrics themselves? (3) To what extent were metrics and performance-based funding effects a part of professional staff members' daily work? Prior research also supports the experiences of the participants in this study and supports the idea that these findings are not happening in just Florida alone. The principal-agent theory, as applied to accountability-driven performance funding models (Kelchen, 2018), predicts that due to interest divergence and information asymmetry, agents will work in favor of the principal in return for incentives, in this case, funding, This section summarizes responses to each research question and their relation to the principal-agent framework and prior research.

Research Questions

Research question one asks how student services professionals in a four-year university understand and address the PBF metrics they are tasked with responding to. According to the findings of this study, participants are keenly aware that the metrics drive everything around them, from programming to policy, to the students they serve. Findings from document analysis fortify these statements as they show that efforts geared toward the metrics and performance are mentioned at every AAC meeting. Kelchen (2018b) suggested that the emphasis on accountability is rampant and the resulting PBF models are gaining in popularity because of this, as is apparent in Florida. In terms of understanding and responding to the model, student services professionals reported that they work, now, with many new programs and policies that were created post-adoption of PBF that they were not engaging in previously. Programs like Jump Start and Early Start are very labor-intensive and include staff members from all colleges.

Another finding related to how student services professionals understand the metrics they are tasked with suggests that communication has changed in the workplace for many participants. Research on the principal-agent theory can be used to explain what is happening between advisors and their supervisors (Lane and Kivisto, 2008). PBF created a whole new set of guidelines that student services departments had to shift and adhere to; many of these changes were a source of discomfort for advisors and their supervisors alike. As is illustrated in Figure 3, the Principal-Agent Concept Map, when accountability measures are put into place, the pressure to be more accountable for outcomes is experienced at multiple levels. Suddenly, institutions are beholden to the state for performance reporting, directors of advising office are beholden to the institution, and the individual advisor is now also beholden to their supervisor for quantifiable outcomes. Interestingly, there is a disconnect between the supervisors' expectations that their staff will engage in shirking (Lane and Kivisto, 2008), or that they will not be able to perform under pressure and the staff who are willing to do the work but want to know how well they met their goals. The information asymmetry that exists between the principal and the agent in this example is that the directors have the outcomes of the collective department's reports and are not sharing them with the staff, contrary to what was expected based on the principal-agent theory (Lane and Kivisto, 2008). This and other findings suggest limitations of the principal-agent theory to completely explain or rationalize PBF reform and its effects, which is discussed more in-depth in the Limitations section.

Research question two asks about the perceptions of professional staff members regarding the metrics themselves. According to the findings, many staff members reported that they do not agree that the metrics they are measured by are an accurate assessment of a student's success. Further, many participants expressed that they do not feel like the efforts being made to meet metrics are actually improving student outcomes. The research mirrors this sentiment, in recent studies, very few to no positive, attributable outcomes have been associated with performance or outcome-based funding models (Dougherty, Jones, Lahr, Natow, & Pheatt, 2014).

Without understanding that there is a clear and attainable goal of the implemented changes, penalties, and policies, advisors struggle to have difficult conversations with advisees, particularly when they do not buy-in. Goal misalignment, referred to as interest divergence in

principal-gent theory literature, clearly supports the finding of this issue that is being described by participants (Lane and Kivisto, 2008). Professional advisors are educated and trained to guide students through the bureaucracy of higher education and advocate for them as needed. The concept that many are conflicted in their work due to PBF policy is evident, and the result of interest divergence. The institution has goals to meet, that is their primary interest, which in many cases, conflicts with what advisors feel is best for the individual. In accordance with the literature on student development and the efficacy of student services (Brabezat, 2013) many participants gave examples of policies that are in conflict with student development and exploration which affected participants negatively.

Because student services professionals are on the front lines in engaging with students, these are the staff who see the individual student and the effects that new policies are having on them. The literature around PBF and the effects on students who are already marginalized or disadvantaged (Jones, 2017) are brought to life in the examples given by the participants in this study. Many mentioned the changes in admissions and policies which exclude students that this institution historically served, effects of which are mentioned frequently in the data. The threats to equity and increased disparities among student populations created by new programming and admissions profiling are expressed repeatedly, which is also a trend that is supported by research (Hillman & Corral, 2017).

Somewhat surprisingly, another perception of the metrics and being tasked with reporting outcomes is that it is leading to gaming. As Kelchen (2018b) identified, there are many forms of gaming: cream-skimming, parking, cases on the bubble, and selective reporting, and this institution is participating in all of them, according to participants. The surprising piece of this finding was that nearly every participant reported the occurrence of gaming and called it out openly. The responses suggest that there is a general acceptance that the institution is participating in gaming and that they do so because they have to, as part of a system in which the other institutions are gaming as well.

Research question three addresses the extent to which metrics and PBF effects were a part of participants' daily work. Participants reported that metrics drive everything they do and that the existence of metrics and PBF is something that is in the background at all times. In their working relationships, pressures related to PBF have fostered distrust between staff and their supervisors and between staff at competing universities as well, which is attributable to the pressure and dynamic shifts described by the principal-agent theory (Lane and Kivisto, 2008) (Kelchen, 2018b). More directly, the increase in data-driven initiatives have changed the day-to-day work of many, if not all participants. Reliance on data mining software and predictive analytics has become prevalent in institutions that are needing data for reporting student outcomes (Wagner & Longanecker, 2016), and this practice is apparent in this study as well. Reliance on data is creating issues for student services professionals as they are no longer involved in making decisions about students on a more individual level, and the time staff spend on trying to understand and report data is taking them away from their students. Relationship building is cut down drastically when an advisor's day is spent largely on data tracking and reporting, relationships that are a key indicator for student success and retention (Kuh et al., 2007).

Finally, being asked to advise in ways counter to their beliefs is becoming a regular occurrence for student services staff. All departments in this institution are using policies like those that dictate major-change denials, limit the amount of classes students can withdraw from, and the excess hours surcharge. Research on excess hours penalty policies reveals clearly that these policies, though well-intended to incentivize, are not discussed with students early enough, resulting in a situation where students don't have a choice but to accept the fee (Kramer, Holcomb, & Kelchen, 2017). Due to the ill-conceived implementation of excess hour penalties, many students are incurring more debt without achieving higher rates of completion. Further, the accrual of debt due to charges disproportionately affects marginalized student groups and students who attend less selective institutions (Kramer, Holcomb, & Kelchen, 2017). The institution in this study would be considered to fall into the less-selective category, and even with research citing the consequences of the policy, advisors have to enforce it.

Implications for Practice

The findings in this study suggest that some of the experiences of student services professionals who are tasked with responding to PBF metrics are problematic. All of the policies and programs that were discussed in this study were implemented as a response to PBF at the institution; none are known to have existed before the implementation of this funding model. There are several implications for practice in the findings of this study, which can be grouped into two main categories: data use and a disconnection between the use of the tools and advisors' understanding of what their roles are and what they are tasked with.

In the example of predictive analytics and how they are used in advising, it was clear that the advisor and their supervisor had conflicting views on the use. Lauren, the advisor stated clearly that the predictive number that is calculated using Civitas analytics is flawed, makes her job more challenging, and she does not clearly understand it so she does not use it. Her supervisor was assured that his staff are using predictive analytics to assist them in triaging which students need attention. This example, and others, indicate that the use of data is not as comprehensive as leadership in the institution might believe and that advisors who do not have buy-in with the data systems are simply not using the data. Advisors seem to lack clarity on how predictive analytics work, as well as lack confidence that the data tools do what they are supposed to. Additionally, staff are not having discussions about their concerns with their supervisors.

Another data-related implication of this study is that advisor buy-in to the metrics as a whole is not being achieved. Without evidence that all the data tracking and reporting results in the intended outcomes, advisors view this piece of their job as tedious and unnecessary. The use of data and reporting to aid in gaming practices is well known among the participants in this study, causing the disenchantment with the funding model to be reinforced. Finally, data-driven initiatives, reporting, and emphasis on metrics scores are changing the way advisors work and their relationships with their supervisors and students. Whether this is attributable solely to interest divergence or lack of time to grow relationships is unknown, the assumption is that it is both. Supervisors are not sharing outcomes of the objectives with their staff as readily as they would like, and a general feeling of distrust and lack of confidence are prevalent among advisors.

Again, this could be the result of supervisors gaming by altering the reports, or a lack of time to discuss outcomes with staff members when all parties have extra duties due to metrics.

In terms of advisors' roles and dissatisfaction with the way metrics have altered their work, implications for practice should be considered. Many advisors are not trained in working with data to the extent that they are being asked, and the discomfort makes them reticent to engage with data. Also, advisors expressed that data is replacing their expertise in identifying students who need extra support, and replacing the parts of their job that they enjoy. This experience has been documented in Social Work professions as deprofessionalization, the idea that social workers are not autonomous to make decisions in the best interests of their clients due to state oversight (Clark, 2005). Many advisors also reported feeling conflicted in their jobs because they expected to be advocates for students and able to build relationships with students that allow them to do so; funding metrics are requiring that they enforce policies that are counter to this expectation.

Recommendations for Practice

In practice, the key issues seem to relate to communication and further break down to role definition and expectations, feedback to decision makers, and inappropriate use of staff, at times. Given the clear findings that staff do not understand their roles clearly, or their expectations in using and reporting data, the first recommendation would be to redefine job descriptions and diversify the kind of roles individuals have. Most of those interviewed have such widely different duties within their jobs, it is not appropriate to have all of them be defined as "advisors" or "coaches". Given the amount of time this university had to adapt to the new demands of PBF, it is to be expected that logistics and intentional planning were a luxury they didn't have. However, as the institutions in Florida have adapted over five years and are becoming more comfortable with the new policies, it is time to step back and see how, from an administrative level, systems can be improved. Programs have gone through many revisions in order to better capture the intended students, but the staff who carry them out have been left out of the conversation on improvement.

Another element of communication that is shown to be lacking is that between managers and their advising staff. Negligence of relationships and trust-building is likely due to a lack of time and emphasis on relationships, when the emphasis is so much on reporting and results. Recommendations to remedy would have to start with university leaders who would need to recognize that it is their place to take a performance model and make it work at a university, which a unique kind of business. Unlike a sales department, which is far more individualistic, universities rely on inter and intra-departmental collaboration in order to find the best solutions for students. Staff need to feel that their opinions are heard or matter, and they cannot be concerned about speaking with colleagues in order to get solutions.

In terms of data-reliance and use for predicting student outcomes, university administrators should insist that their staff be thoroughly trained on how to use tools like Civitas and should know how their staff is utilizing the tools by collecting feedback. This collaborative approach may increase buy-in and would also serve to improve communication. Advisors whose strengths and interests lie in data collection and analysis should be utilized in helping department

mangers meet their data requirements. For those advisors who are not comfortable with data, and who are stronger working face-to-face with students, that should be an option, too. Some departments already have this kind of design, though it is not perfect. Finally, regarding the deprofessionalization of advisors, in a study by Clark (2005), the question was whether the social workers in the study could actually be held accountable for outcomes when their expertise was not utilized in making decisions, which is applicable in this scenario. Again, if advisors or coaches and data-sourcing staff could be separated, appropriate responsibilities could be more clearly assigned and accounted for.

Implications for Policy

As PBF is a state-level policy, and the trickle-down effects of it are more policies, the results of this study have implications for policymakers to consider. The first, major implication that nearly all participants mentioned is that the metrics are creating a change in the student population that this institution serves, and that change is counter to the mission. Many participants suggested that because institutions within the same system vary widely and serve different populations, one set of metrics cannot be applied to all. Within a system having a spectrum of selectivity is healthy, allowing more students to be served. Responding to the existing PBF metrics is causing institutions to be forced to limit the amount of less-academically prepared students to attend, as are all of the institutions in the state, if they want to be competitive.

Gaming practices are becoming prevalent and normalized throughout the whole state system; the practices are commonly known and recognized by all participants. Being forced to participate in these gaming tactics is disadvantaging students. One example that is mentioned several times throughout this study: students who are profiled and admitted in non-fall terms are missing out on the true fall experience, and some are paying out of pocket because they are not allowed to enroll in classes full time if they wish to start in fall. Gaming is also creating unhealthy competition among institutions, resulting in a lack of collaboration and a practice of more selective institutions manipulating the transfer system to admit more competitive students.

Recommendations for Policy

Policymakers who are still unconvinced that PBF models are not working should consider the damages caused by the unintended consequences and work to improve them. Tailoring a system-wide model to work for the individual institutions in the system is a necessary start. Considering the role that each institution serves, as well as the type of students they serve, can help dictate what an individual institutions' goals should be and what metrics would reflect those goals. Addressing and highlighting differences in the institutions within a system could serve to alleviate the level of competition that is causing distrust between institutions as well.

Specifically, policymakers in the state of Florida should seriously consider research showing how other, non-competitive models work. In this study, particularly, the findings related to gaming and pressures resulting in distrust are all attributable to the unique aspect of the Florida model which ranks the institutions against each other. This also presents a limitation of the study; because they are specific to Florida's model, the transferability of some specific

findings are not as externally valid to other states. Likewise with the findings related to mission and goal-misalignment, equity premiums are not the same as equity metrics that other states use to highlight underserved populations (Rosinger, Ortagus, Kelchen, Cassell & Voorhees, 2020). Whereas equity premiums are utilized as a "bonus point" in the case of Florida's policies, they are too vague and can be taken advantage of by all of the institutions in the system. Research by Rosinger et al (2020) identified 29 states the use equity in some fashion, but half of those specifically use race as a consideration, not just Pell recipients as Florida does. This distinction is important, especially to MSIs.

Suggestions for Further Research

If institutions are going to continue to emphasize the use of data to meet metric-related goals, they are likely going to continue to expect academic advisors and student services professionals to work with the data tools and reports as part of their jobs. Without data analysis from individuals with research-related experience, how can institutional leaders expect that data be consistent or good? A study that looks at the education of student services professionals who are tasked with data analysis would be useful for research on the outcomes of the data, and policymakers and university administrators alike. To study what kind of degrees they hold, how much experience they have had with data, training, and comfort level of working with data software and reports would shed light on who is calculating outcomes for the metrics reports and how reliable that reporting actually is.

One element of this study that would be useful to further explore is the effects on advisors based on their background. In the process of interviewing participants, it was clear that the experiences of the advisors were partially based on their race/ ethnicity, gender, and collegiate experience. This background impacted how they felt the metrics were or weren't widening disparities or changing the trajectory of students, to some degree. The background might also include the type of master's degree they have, whether it be in a counseling or social work field, higher education administration, or another less-related field. This study would help inform administrators on the importance of being thoughtful when hiring for certain roles when metric goals are in place.

Finally, related to deprofessionalization, as studied by Clark (2005) in the field of social work, a study on the perceptions advisors and student support staff have about their autonomy and impact is warranted. Some participants noted that though they are following the policies that have been created, and reporting their numbers, they do not agree with the policies, nor do they feel that their reports or data collection are impacting student success. Currently, there is no indication that metrics or outcomes are part of the participants' annual review, but if policymakers or university administrators should consider drilling down to the individual staff level, this information would be informative. If the intended outcomes of PBF models are not being achieved, likely, policymakers would eventually suggest a withdrawal of the models, but equally likely is the option to double-down on the accountability measures and look at the individuals who are affecting outcomes.

Limitations

Although the current study achieved its objectives, to answer the research questions related to the experiences of student services professionals related to the implementation of PBF, there were some limitations. First, this study was conducted at just one institution within the state university system of Florida, this was intentional because the institution chosen was an open-access institution and unique case (Creswell, 2013), but expanding this study to other institutions in this system may improve transferability. Additionally, the state of Florida's PBF model is unique in many ways, which would limit the external validity of this study's findings outside the state of Florida. Another possible limitation might be time and selection bias. Time and the length of employment at the institution could be a limiting factor as the experience of working pre-and-post-PBF implementation can color the experiences of staff. Selection bias could be a limitation because the participant group is more likely to be colleagues with similar interests and points of view, and common acquaintances to get the number of participants used. It is necessary to note that those who have worked at the institution prior to 2014 may have similar thoughts and experiences related to the shared experience of adapting to PBF, which was not an easy transition for this institution. Ensuring enough diversity in the length of time that participants have been worked at the institution helps to address this limitation. Finally, researcher bias and personal knowledge of the issue could be considered a limitation. To minimize bias, a standardized protocol was used with all participants, and the use of participants' own language was used when clarification was needed.

Another limitation that is important to mention is the use of principal-agent theory to describe the findings of this study. In their work on the use of principal-agent theory to rationalize large reforms like PBF, Dougherty and Natow (2019) noted that using neoliberal theory retrospectively, like this research does, can effectively miss the role of institutional, business, and cultural effects on the reform (Dougherty & Natow, 2019). This study resulted in findings like distrust and other relational factors, as well as expectation confusion, and lack of skill or interest in data analysis which are all products of the institution and type of role the participants are in, and not related to principal-agent theory.

Conclusion

The intended and unintended outcomes and consequences of PBF models are regularly researched and reported to policymakers and those in academia who inform these models. There is less research on the effects these models have on those who work with students under the models. It is imperative that we understand this phenomenon because the trickle-down effects of PBF models are experienced in the daily work of professionals whose careers are dedicated to helping students. Reporting outcomes is not the same as reporting how an institution got to the outcome and what had to be sacrificed to do so; student services professionals can inform this area with their lived experiences.

The impact of PBF on the participants in this study should be a substantial consideration when policymakers address these models and work to improve them. The impacts on students that the participants reported should also be a consideration, as they are advocates for students who do not have the institutional knowledge and expertise to navigate through their education alone. Despite the challenges caused by being subject to performance metrics, all but one person

in this study still work at the institution and remain committed to supporting students, with the hope that they are helping students and the metrics will eventually change.
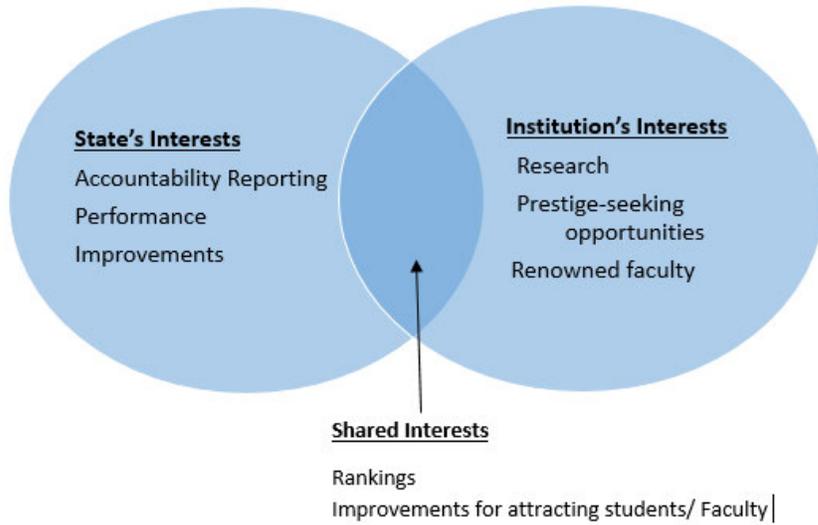
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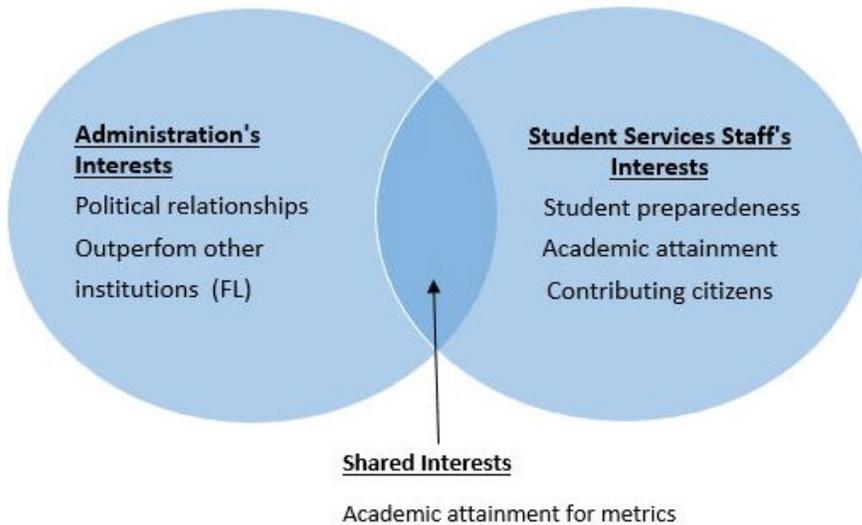
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Appendix A – Diagram of State vs. Institutional Interests

State's Interests
Accountability Reporting
Performance
Improvements

Institution's Interests
Research
Prestige-seeking
    opportunities
Renowned faculty

Shared Interests
Rankings
Improvements for attracting students/ Faculty

Appendix B- Diagram of Institutional Administrators' vs. Student Services Staff's Interests

**Administration's
Interests**
Political relationships
Outperfom other
institutions (FL)

**Student Services Staff's
Interests**
Student preparedeness
Academic attainment
Contributing citizens

Shared Interests
Academic attainment for metrics

Appendix C – Recruitment Email

Dear (Participant First and Last name),

My name is Christa Rohan. I am a doctoral student studying Higher Education Administration at Southern Methodist University conducting my dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Denisa Gandara. All interviews and recruitment will be conducted by me, without the aid or involvement of ██ administrators, I am not affiliated with ██

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a study on how state-level performance-based funding policies affect student services departments. The study will entail an in-person interview, lasting 30-45 minutes, wherein I will be coming to you wherever you are comfortable on campus. The object of this study is to gain more insight into the effects that high-level policy has on the department and individual level of student services staff, your jobs, and your work with students.

In the interview I will ask you a range of questions regarding your work, your perception of your work, your interactions with students, your involvement with data collection and reporting, and your experiences related to changes in the performance-funding model and ██'s positionality in the rankings. With your permission, I would audio-record the interview for later review, creation of transcripts, and analysis.

All interviewees will remain anonymous. I will assign transcripts pseudonyms and remove all identifying information from any reports. I will also be protecting the identity of ██ when I present my findings by leaving out specific identifiers.

This study has the potential to influence policy design by informing policy makers and institutional leaders about how those who work directly with students are being affected by performance-based funding policies.

If you are willing to participate in this research, I will follow up to schedule an interview in the coming weeks. If you have any questions or concerns about this process, please contact me or my faculty advisor by phone or email.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Christa Rohan

██████

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Denisa Gándara, Ph.D.

██████

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Appendix D – Interview Script: Staff

Introduction:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this interview concerning the effects of performance-based funding models on departments of student services. As noted in the email you received, the object of this study is to gain more insight into the effects that high-level policy has on the department and individual level of student services staff, your jobs, and your work with students.

To help us ensure that your comments are accurately reflected, I would like to audio record this interview, if that is acceptable to you. I will keep all audio files secure and will destroy them after the study is completed. Is it alright for us to record this interview? We want to provide the level of confidentiality you desire. In my publications, I will not refer to you by name, but will instead use a pseudonym. You can tell us your preferences regarding confidentiality now or you can let us know at the end of this interview. Do you have any questions or comments before we get started?

4. Grand Tour Question: Could you share your overall perception of performance funding related to your institution, and how it has or has not affected your daily work?
    a. How has your job changed over the last ( ) years?

5. How much time do you spend face to face with students in your current position?
    a. Has that amount changed over time
    b. Is that amount of time more or less than you expected when you accepted this position?
6. How are you measured in your job? What is success?
7. How much of your work week do you spend on data collection or analysis?
    a. Has that amount changed over time?
    b. Is that amount of time more or less than you expected when you accepted this position?
8. Have you noticed duties that have been added to your job that are geared toward meeting or reporting metrics for funding?
    a. What do these duties entail?
    b. How often are you asked to report numbers for students you oversee?

9. Have you noted a difference in departmental rewarding that is related to meeting metrics?
    a. Do you note any of these differences widening?
10. What are some ways that you make decisions about reports that are sent to the provost regarding your department's metrics-related data?
    a. Do others in your department (your supervisor) make more of these decisions?
11. Have you experienced any changes in hiring within your department?
    a. Have you noticed any changes in other departments?
    b. Are those departments funded differently?
12. Do you know the 10 metrics by which your institution is measured?
    a. How is that communicated to you?
    b. Do you think these metrics are a good way to measure the success of your students? Why?
13. How do you express your opinion on metrics/ rankings and policies related to these things?
    a. Do you think your voice is heard?
14. To what extent are you involved in decision making related to student advising or s   student success? For example, do you attend ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ meetings? Are   you able to express your opinion there?

     a. Do you feel like the topics discussed there are relevant to the current issues in advising at ██?

15. Is there anything else that you would like for me, or for policy makers, university administrators to know about how performance-based funding affects your job and your interactions with your students?

SMU EXEMPT LEVEL PARTICIPATION EXPLANATION AND CONSENT SCRIPT

Study Title: How State-Level Performance-Based Funding Policies Affect Student Services
Departments

We are conducting a research study to learn more about how performance-based funding policies are perceived by and affect those who work directly with students as advisors and student support staff.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw for any reason. There are no penalties if you withdraw, decline to participate, or skip any parts of the study. If you agree to participate, you will asked to participate in an interview about your experiences as a student support professional who works under a performance-based funding model in your state institution.

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Your participation should take about 30-45 minutes. Risks are minimal, there is potential that this study will find negative and unintended impacts of these policies, but all interviewer input will be confidential. Your interview will also be protected from the administration ███████████████████. ███ will also be protected in the report and identifying information will be omitted. All data collected will be protected by the interviewer, only the end report will be shared. We hope to inform policymakers about the impacts of these funding policies at the "ground level", how the policies impact your job and your interactions with your students. Would you like to participate in this research study?

If you consent to participate, please sign below:

_____
_____

Name   Date

Principal Investigator: Christa Rohan (541-908-4864)

Dissertation Chair: Denisa Gandara, Ph.D. dgandara@smu.edu (214-768-4779)

IRB Chair: Tom Mayo, JD. www.researchcompliance@smu.edu (214-768-2033)