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**Post-Secondary Belongingness Scores: How Peer Wellness Coaching
Impacts the Results**

by

Jeremy D. O'Hara

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Master of Social Work

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Abstract

This study's purpose was to contribute and further the body of knowledge on improving students' sense of belonging. This study examined a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching, on St. Cloud State University's campus, to students' sense of belonging. It studied how participating in Peer Wellness Coaching may impact students' perception of how well they belong to St. Cloud State University's campus. Research has shown students with a higher sense of belonging are more likely to succeed in school and persist through to graduation. The participants for this study included students enrolled at St. Cloud State University during Fall 2019 semester. Over two-thirds of these students indicated an increase sense of belonging to campus, as a result of participating in Peer Wellness Coaching. The students indicated several variables, related to an increased sense of belonging, such as: feeling comfortable discussing their wellness goals, wanting to recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to other students, and feeling the location was appropriate for their appointment. This study leaves the potential for additional analysis of St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching program and its impact of a causal relationship between students' sense of belonging, as a means to improve retention rates. This study provided an initial framework for further study of Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on creating an inclusive environment, where all students feel a sense of connection to campus—leading to an increase in student retention rates.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

St. Cloud State University turned attention to student sense of belonging, within the past few years, aimed to enhance students' experience (Davis, Hanzsek-Brill, Petzold, & Robinson, 2019). Through these efforts, many shifts in thinking and programs have been altered or enacted, including Peer Wellness Coaching. Davis and colleagues (2019) found students' sense of academic and social belonging to be a predictor of retention rates at St. Cloud State University. Efforts to increase students' connectedness to campus are highly sought after—as a means to improve student retention at colleges and universities.

The transition to college is challenging, for many students, during this change a common worry is whether or not they belong (Stewart, 2016). When students are faced with normative difficulties, such as receiving a poor grade or struggling to make new friends, the student may conclude they do not belong to that college or university. The National Center for Education Statistics in their 2013 Digest of Education Statistics found only four in ten (39 percent) of first-year, full-time students achieved their goal of earning a bachelor's degree within four years (as cited in Coley, Coley, & Lynch-Holmes, 2016). Furthermore, only a little more than two in ten (26.5 percent) of first year students, enrolled in a two-year institution achieved degree completion or certificates within six years. Coley et al. (2016) stated as a nation, two- and four-year graduation rates have remained relatively the same over the past 30 years.

Importance of Belonging

Retention rates—leading to degree completion—is relevant to students as mentioned by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which claimed students who received a two- or four-year degree can expect to make up to 70 percent more money than those without a college degree (as cited in

Coley et al., 2016). Given the increased cost of tuition, it is more important than ever for students to see through to graduation, otherwise suffering in student loan debt, without the increased financial benefits of having a degree. Research has shown, for students to succeed, students need to be supported both academically and socially (Coley et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2019). Colleges and universities will have to exert more effort to retain students, they have historically enrolled, as well as provide novel support to new groups of students (Coley et al., 2016).

How We Know Peer Wellness Coaching is Effective

St. Cloud State University has worked to support students both social and academically through various avenues, including Peer Wellness Coaching, which is rooted in motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing uses a partnering communication style to engage students, elucidate their strengths and goals, evoke their motivations for change, and encourage autonomy of decision making (Petroliene, 2013). Motivational interviewing is a student centered approach that strives to support students to make changes in unhealthy behavior by reducing ambivalence and encouraging self-directed adjustments (Petroliene, 2013). According to Petroliene (2013) motivational interviewing is known to be one of the most effective strategies for changing unwanted behaviors, in a short period of time, precisely why motivational interviewing was selected for Peer Wellness Coaching, at St. Cloud State University. In present day society, typical counseling strategies are less effective methods for changing behavior because individuals want to see change within a short period of time (Petroliene, 2013). Similarly, wellness coaching is a novel and unique approach for encouraging academic success and mental health among students (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching program and rates of students' sense of belonging, in terms of increasing students' retention. To establish a precise context as it related to rates of students' sense of belonging, this study's literature review focused primarily on students', at two- and four-year institutions, social and academic sense of belonging. It is apparent both social and academic belonging are predictors of student retention rates (Davis et al., 2019), what is less known is what institutions can do to improve a student's sense of belonging. Analyzing a program—Peer Wellness Coaching—at St. Cloud State University, provided an opportunity to explore the relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' belonging rates.

Why Peer Wellness Coaching Will Work at St. Cloud State

In an effort to address the relationship between retention rates at St. Cloud State University and Peer Wellness Coaching, this paper explored the following issues: 1) historical perceptions of Peer Wellness Coaching; 2) current impacts of Peer Wellness Coaching on academic achievement and mental/emotional health; and, 3) theoretical framework as a basis for Peer Wellness Coaching. While the aforementioned issues were the focus of this study, the research question: Is there a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and belongingness ratings, in terms of increasing students' retention, in post-secondary education, at St. Cloud State University?, was explored, in more detail.

This study centered on survey and statistical information associated with Peer Wellness Coaching sessions, at St. Cloud State University. Statistical data from surveys completed by students who participated in Peer Wellness Coaching, at St. Cloud State University, during Fall

2019 semester (August 2019-December 2019), were analyzed to determine students' sense of belonging to campus as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching.

In determining a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging, the goal of this study existed to provide St. Cloud State University with enriched understanding on the impact of Peer Wellness Coaching as an intervention strategy for student retention rates. As well as, provided feedback and direction for future programming of St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching program.

Scope of the Problem

In the past few decades, students have had increased access to college; however, completion rates have not followed this increasing trend (Yeager et al., 2016). Kena et al. (2014) claimed the national rate for graduating within six year with a bachelor's degree has remained less than 60 percent—these rates were significantly less for minority students, namely Black, Latinx, and low-income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018c; Yeager et al., 2016). Additionally, the prevalence of mental health disorders among college students steadily increased over time (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2019). A study completed by Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer (2013) found approximately one in three undergraduate students have clinically significant mental health symptoms, most often depression and anxiety. Similarly, College Student Health Report (2017) found 39 percent of St. Cloud State University students reported at least one mental health diagnosis, in their lifetime; with 28.1 percent and 26.3 percent anxiety and depression diagnoses, respectively, within the past year.

First to second year retention rates for St. Cloud State University, for Fall 2018, included 72 percent for full-time students and 55 percent, for part-time students (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2018a). St. Cloud State University's first to second year retention rates, fell short of the national average, for a four-year institution, of 75.5 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018b). Graduation rates, within six years, for full-time, first-time, degree seeking undergraduates, at St. Cloud State University were 44 percent in 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a). Graduation rates, or retaining at St. Cloud State University until graduating, varied widely by race: 47 percent of White students graduated within six years, 32 percent of Black/African American students and 32 percent of Asian students, 25 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native students and 25 percent of Hispanic/Latino students, and 63 percent of international students reached graduation within six years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a). Compared to St. Cloud State University's 44 percent graduation rate for undergraduate, first-time, full-time, degree seeking students, the national average was 60 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Davis et al. (2019) found, at St. Cloud State University, students' social belonging to be significantly related to retention rates from term to term. If a student rated high in social belonging, the student was more likely to matriculate to the next term; however, students who had low social belonging, were significantly less likely to remain enrolled.

Role of Social Worker

Social workers can play an influential role in growing retention rates on college and university campuses when they integrate the principles of social justice into their practice. Factors such as race (Lane, 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2011) social class (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2011) and being a first generation student (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014) all lead to distinctions between a student's sense of belonging to their campus. Social workers need

to be mindful of the disparities between students who are marginalized and the majority group when designing programs to increase students' sense of belonging—ensuring equity for all students.

Social workers can promote equity for college or university students by providing services and programs to better assist each student to attain degree completion. This study intended to show the effectiveness of Peer Wellness Coaching—a program designed to make retention on St. Cloud State University's campus more equitable, by providing a service to all students, which may aid in increased rates of belonging. Through program development and gathering and analyzing data, social workers can ensure the effectiveness of Peer Wellness Coaching's impact of providing a service to increase belonging for students who otherwise may have been disadvantaged, through their lack of connections on campus; leading to lower rates of attrition.

Research Question

Is there a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and belongingness ratings, in terms of increasing students' retention, in post-secondary education, at St. Cloud State University?

Hypothesis

Based off the research, it was hypothesized that students who participated in Peer Wellness Coaching sessions would indicate higher scores of belonging, which in turn, would lead to increased retention rates, at St. Cloud State University.

Variables

Given the research question, the independent variable measured in this study was Peer Wellness Coaching. Peer Wellness Coaching was implemented to all students who completed the surveys, analyzed for this study. Some students may have participated in several Peer Wellness Coaching sessions, while others, only one. Participants were not obligated to continue coaching sessions, but rather given the opportunity to complete the post-session survey after each session. It was not known, to this researcher, how many Peer Wellness Coaching sessions each student completed; it is known that each Peer Wellness Coaching session was completed with a coach, trained in motivational interviewing. Students were allowed to complete a wellness goal of their choosing, not based on the coaches' ability to effectively use motivational interviewing skills to elicit positive change behavior, related to the students' wellness goal(s).

The dependent variable measured in this study consisted of post-session, Peer Wellness Coaching, surveys as well as a mid-term and final-term survey. All participants of Peer Wellness Coaching, were given the opportunity to complete the post-session survey, after each coaching session. Additionally, each student who completed a coaching session during the respective half of the semester, were asked to complete the mid-term or final-term survey. Measurement of the dependent variable was collected during the Fall 2019 semester (August 2019- December 2019).

The dependent variable was measured based on student responses to the two Peer Wellness Coaching surveys. For the post-session survey, data was collected after each coaching session, as long as the coach remembered to ask the student to complete the survey. For the midterm and final term survey, students were provided a two week window to complete the survey, via an email link.

Purpose

The Objective of this study was to further the body of knowledge available regarding the relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and experiences of students' belonging. This study aimed to build on available research which demonstrated how an individual's perception of belonging at their college/university is related to retention rates. Research on belongingness has shown students' feelings of belonging correlates to retention and degree completion (Davis et al., 2019). Understanding the importance of belonging, to the research conducted will build on services available to increase a student's sense of belonging and connection to campus. A program at St. Cloud State University intended to increase belongingness is Peer Wellness Coaching. This research worked to determine if Peer Wellness Coaching is an effective intervention strategy to increase a student's sense of belonging at St. Cloud State University.

Definition of Terms

Definition of particular terms have been comprised to support the reader in gaining clarification by what is meant by said terms and to ease misperception over words that may have more than one mutual definition in general use. Terms are defined through a combination of definitions that best fit the purpose of this study.

Attrition. Rate in which a student leaves an institution (Kahn & Nauta, 2001).

Belonging/Sense of belonging. Consists of both academic and social belonging, where a student's perceived support on campus, feelings of connectedness, being valued, accepted, and being important to a group (Davis et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2012).

Coaching. One-on-one conversations with students/clients in an encouraging and collaborative environment, which stimulates them to make the most of their personal potential

through the use of motivational interviewing techniques (International Coaching Federation, 2019). For the purpose of this study, Peer Wellness Coaching at St. Cloud State, uses a diverse group of graduate and doctoral students as coaches. Coaches came from a variety of degree backgrounds, including: Educational Administration & Leadership, Higher Education Administration, Rehabilitation Counseling Education, Rehabilitation & Addiction Counseling, and Social Work—coaches participate through Graduate Assistantship, internship, or volunteer basis (Peer Wellness Coaching, 2019).

Retention. Rate in which a student stays at an institution, from one term to another, to persist toward degree completion (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018b).

Students/Clients. Persons who are enrolled in a two or four year college or university. When discussing students/clients within the Peer Wellness Coaching program: persons who are enrolled at St. Cloud State University or St. Cloud Technical Community College.

Wellness. Multidimensional concept which is comprised of a wide variety of components including: physical, emotional, social, academic/career, spiritual, and intellectual (Gieck & Olsen, 2007; Myers & Sweeney, 2005).

Justification of the Study

A recently published report on St. Cloud State University's campus by Davis and colleagues (2019) showed a connection between increased rates of student belonging and increased retention rates. Peer Wellness Coaching on St. Cloud State University's campus created as an intervention strategy to increase student's feelings of connectedness to campus, in turn, improving retention rates. This study aimed to confirm the effectiveness of St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching program at achieving their desired goal of improving

students' sense of belonging, by determining a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging rates.

Significance and Contribution of the Thesis to the Knowledge of the Profession

Social workers are to adhere to six core values and ethical principles, one of which is to “aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession” (National Association of Social Workers, 2017, para. 19). This research contributed to the knowledge base of social work by providing insights into program development and assessment for the betterment of a community. In this case the community is St. Cloud State University and the program is Peer Wellness Coaching. Working to determine a relationship between students' sense of belonging and Peer Wellness Coaching could aid in supporting the effectiveness of the Peer Wellness Coaching program's impact of improving student retention rates at St. Cloud State University.

The success of Peer Wellness Coaching's relation to students' sense of belonging—therefore increasing retention rates, consists of two main benefits. Financially, St. Cloud State University would be wise to retain students through to graduation. Secondly, social workers have an ethical obligation to provide a service, Peer Wellness Coaching, to help ensure students are provided support to address social problems, ahead of self-interest (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). There becomes, a delegate line, maintaining the interests of students, ahead of the interests of the university's financial outlook.

From a social worker's viewpoint, the more effective services available to students, in need, which provide opportunities for success and well-being, the more congruent in achieving the ethical principle of service (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). To achieve this principle, this study drew on knowledge, values, and skills to assist those in need—ensuring Peer

Wellness Coaching is effectively impacting students' sense of belonging, which in turn, allows students to feel more connected to campus.

Furthermore, as research indicated, students' sense of belonging, unfairly, negatively impacts students' of color (Walton & Cohen, 2011; Yeager et al., 2016). Social workers have an ethical responsibility to challenge social justice, especially for oppressed groups of people (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Not only did this study work to show the impact of Peer Wellness Coaching on students' sense of belonging, but harmoniously, explored an avenue for minority students to become more connected to campus—increasing their sense of belonging. The purpose of this study was not to independently increase retention rates, rather, the study focused on the impact of Peer Wellness Coaching on improving students' health, well-being, and success through an increased sense of belonging.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Sense of belonging, including both social and academic incorporation, have played a role in students' decisions whether to retain through graduation or leave an institution, being dated for more than forty-five years by researchers (Tinto, 1975). As stated by Stewart (2016) students' sense of belonging can be tied directly to students' relationships with others; finding the quality of students' relationships influences students' academic performance and decision to persist at school. Congruently, a review of literature found students' sense of belonging, namely, feeling cared for or fitting in to campus, is a valuable indicator of student success (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012). Meaning, having a connection to individuals within a university environment can stimulate students to participate in academically purposeful happenings, leading to positive outcomes (Strayhorn, 2012). Finally, consistently overtime, researchers have found students' sense of quality of life, or belonging, has been related to persistence among college universities (Davis et al., 2019; Hausmann et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2012).

Students' sense of belonging and academic success can be increased as students form relationships within their university environment and lean on those relationships for support (Yeager, Walton, & Cohen, 2013). Additionally, Williford, Wadley, and Association for Institutional Research (2008) claimed students who felt they are involved with peers in academic work, both in and out of the classroom, are more likely to persist—while the opposite is true for students who do not feel connected to peers in their academic work. Furthermore, students who indicated they felt they belonged at a university, through social belonging, were more likely to persist to the next term, compared to those who did not have a high sense of belonging (Wayt,

2012, Williford et al., 2008). This study, aimed to build on this research, by providing opportunities for students to become more engaged and involved to campus. Peer Wellness Coaching allowed students to build relationships with peers, through engaged one-on-one coaching sessions and referrals to on-campus resources/events.

Since research has shown students' sense of belonging plays a significant part in students' decision to persist at a university and a predictive index has been created to effectively identify students who are at risk for low rates of belonging (Davis et al., 2019), a tool for improving students' sense of belonging is imperative to help increase student success and retention. Furthermore, current retention methods for students with a mental health or emotional issues, affecting their academic performance, are frequently limited to counseling service—often unable to provide longstanding, continuing support (Lisciandro, Jones, & Strehlow, 2016). Traditional counseling services are vital to success on college campus, playing a crucial role in helping students with mental health or emotional issues; however, due to increasing mental health concerns on campus (Gallagher, 2012), other resources are becoming increasingly necessary. As a result, this study aimed to show Peer Wellness Coaching has an impact on providing another resource to students, outside of traditional counseling services, to improve students' sense of belonging—therefore having a positive impact on students' retention rates.

Researchers have identified two types of intervention strategies to help improve students' sense of belonging, the first, conveying positive messages to students in regards to their social belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2011; Yeager et al., 2013). This intervention method involved using motivational delivery style, which allowed students to swiftly alter their beliefs in terms of whether or not they belong—leading to a belief the students can be successful. The second

intervention strategy outlined by Yeager et al. (2013) provided students with a chance to reflect on personal values, which brought the students a sense of belonging and individuality; a strategy that included values affirmation strategies. Informing students the idea that although they may not initially feel as if they belong to a university environment, they can come to improve their sense of belonging over time, has been shown, over three years, to improve grade-point-average amongst Black students (Walton & Cohen, 2011), increase cumulative grade-point-average among disadvantaged students (Yeager et al., 2016), while also improving full-time enrollment among first-year students (Yeager et al., 2016).

Attempts of using a mentorship-type interventions have been shown to increase satisfaction and retention—providing first-year teachers with an experienced mentor, in the teacher's field of study, had shown increased novice teacher satisfaction and retention (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Furthermore, researcher Rockoff (2008) found simply having a mentor, with experience working in the first-year teachers' school, or working with a similar student population, had a positive effect on the mentor-mentee relationship. Knowing the impact mentor-mentee relationships have on satisfaction and retention; this study provided an opportunity to examine the influence of mentor-mentee relationships from coaching sessions. Contrary to research examined, this study was not specific towards first-year mentees, but rather, explored the impact for all students on St. Cloud State's campus—undergraduate and graduate students.

As stated by Coley et al. (2016) an effective way to motivate many students is to provide an atmosphere where the students know someone in the university cares about how they are performing. Furthermore, in a national, multi-institutional data review, Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, and Oseguera (2008) found students converging to a university setting, were found to

have an enhanced sense of belonging, when they engaged with diverse peers. Furthermore, a study found the value and regularity of interactions with diverse peers improved the students' sense of belonging, for some racial groups (Johnson et al., 2007). Lane (2016) went to say, programs that create occasions for students to engage with diverse peers are critical for providing a compassionate atmosphere. Further research by Hausmann et al. (2009) proposed providing chances for students to engage with diverse peers may create an impact on increased sense of belonging, which in turn, leads to improved student retention and academic success.

Understanding the value of engaging with diverse peers, Peer Wellness Coaching, purposefully recruited a diverse group of coaches to provide coaching to students. Desired to be representative of St. Cloud State's diverse campus, Peer Wellness Coaching, included eight coaches from five degree majors and a variety of self-disclosed ethnic/racial/sexual backgrounds.

Not surprisingly, research has shown students' relationships, which have developed socially, have a greater effect on students' retention than academic relationships—those with faculty, classmates, and advisors (Wayt, 2012). However, students who do not feel connected to their peers, in their educational toil, remained more probable to leave the university campus (Williford et al., 2008). Peer Wellness Coaching appointments were voluntary in nature, attempted to mimic a more natural way for students to stimulate social relationships. Much of Peer Wellness Coaching involved helping students work toward a wellness goal of their choice—often, allowed an opportunity for students to become engaged and involved with their peers, as a means to reach their wellness goal. Although some students participated in Peer Wellness Coaching for class points or class extra credit, the relationships which were created through accomplishing a wellness goal, were often social, in nature.

It is important to note, research has shown a students' experience within their first year on campus is crucial to their sense of belonging; studies have shown earlier academic success is a forecaster of forthcoming achievement (Coley et al., 2016). Additionally, findings have shown intervention strategies on college campuses, intended to increase students' sense of belonging, as it relates to social norming, have aided developing persistence among first-year students (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2011). With that, it takes a wide variety of programs to produce a meaningful impact on students' sense of belonging, namely, why St. Cloud State University had implemented several initiatives over the past several years to help improve students' sense of belonging, these include: having all first-year and first-year transfer students complete a Sense of Belonging Index survey, educating students during Advising and Registration Days, providing each student with a 'student success team'—academic, financial, and career advisor—and Peer Wellness Coaching, among other initiatives.

Historical Perceptions of Wellness Coaching

The concept of wellness has been around for thousands of years, Global Wellness Institute (2016) dates a holistic approach to health and wellness to the roots of Western medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Ayurvedic regimens. Additionally, Aristotle first provided a definition of wellness, termed eudemonia, in the fifth century B.C.E. (Myers & Sweeney, 2005). Coaching professionals span a large variety of environments, including medical services, corporate industries, and private practice, among others—having recently gained traction in the field of higher education (Larcus, Gibbs, & Hackmann, 2016). Peer Wellness Coaching, on St. Cloud State's campus, had been largely designed around existing coaching programs, using

strategies and techniques—proven to be successful—from various colleges/universities, altered to fit our unique campus.

Coaching within university-based environments, is typically provided to students through one of two means, the first being focused on a specific purpose, increase academic performance and/or preparation (Dalton & Crosby, 2014). Contrariwise, university coaching programs can focus on providing support and resources for current students (Dalton & Crosby, 2014; Larcus et al., 2016). Traditionally, much of the university-based coaching programs are based around reaching students who are considered ‘at risk’ (Dalton & Crosby, 2014). Although, all St. Cloud State University Peer Wellness Coaching students participated on a voluntary basis, some students who were deemed ‘at risk’ were directly targeted for outreach; however, the majority of students who participated in Peer Wellness Coaching do so on their own merit.

Regardless, of the external or internal nature of the university’s coaching program, the intent is to improve students’ success, both academically and within the students’ social wellness (Larcus et al., 2016). A review of the literature has shown universities’ efforts to sponsor health and wellness behaviors among students caused an impact on several fronts, from academic and student success, to imparting permanent positive behaviors (Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson, & Odes, 2009; University of Minnesota, 2008).

Wellness Coaching and Motivational Interviewing

Wellness coaching is intended to be a relatively brief intervention strategy to help students resolve ambivalence in regards to a negative behavior, which is affecting their social connection and/or academic success (Peer Wellness Coaching, 2019). Wellness coaching, more specifically, Peer Wellness Coaching at St. Cloud State University, is grounded in motivational

interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a goal-oriented, client-centered, counseling style for generating behavior change through resolving ambivalence (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Designed to be a fairly short-term approach, motivational interviewing is an evidenced-based practice, which can be applied to an assortment of behavior problems (Miller & Rose, 2009). Motivational interviewing allows students to maintain autonomy around their desired behavior change, as students are provided an opportunity to express their own motives and procedures for change (Resnicow & McMaster, 2012).

Students, and individuals in general, are inherently resistant to being forced or told to change their behavior, namely, why motivational interviewing is used to provide guiding towards positive change, which has been shown to lessen resistance to change (Petroliene, 2013). Additionally, motivational interviewing works from a strengths perspective, which aims to evoke a desire to change from students, compared to an attempt to pressure a desire to change within students (Petroliene, 2013). To ground this study in an evidence-based practice, all Peer Wellness Coaching, coaches were trained in motivational interviewing. Using techniques and strategies, in motivational interviewing, coaches guided discussions, which allowed students autonomy to reach wellness goals of their desire.

As mentioned by Gibbs and Larcus (2015) The Ohio State University, used motivational interviewing, for their wellness coaching program, to help students focus on expansion within a complete model of wellness. Motivational interviewing served as a foundation to provide emphasis on wellness and other concepts—sense of connection, positive outlook, and academic involvement and persistence—related to students' ability to thrive (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015). Designed from a proven program—modeling St. Cloud State's Peer Wellness Coaching program

around aspects of The Ohio State University's coaching program—allowed for guidance towards developing a successful wellness coaching program.

Motivational interviewing, through wellness coaching, is an effective tool to elicit behavior change and encourage students to reach their desired goals (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015). Furthermore, Schreiner (2010) found peer coaching provided an avenue for students to improve their academic, social, and emotional ability to succeed within a university setting. Additionally, motivational interviewing endorsed intervention strategies, among college students, have been found effective in reducing rates of alcohol use (Appiah-Brempong, Okyere, Owusu-Addo, & Cross, 2014). Similarly, Branscum and Sharma (2010) found motivational interviewing interventions to be effective at reducing alcohol consumption rates of students with high rates of use. Finally, motivational interviewing allowed students an opportunity to initiate and maintain a desired behavior change, providing an ideal framework for wellness coaching (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015). Given the large scope of impact, using motivational interviewing, this study, through Peer Wellness Coaching, endorsed motivational interviewing as a framework for coaching sessions.

Wellness Coaching and Academic Success

Larcus et al. (2016) mentioned coaching programs can address both wellness and academic retention, on university campuses. Research completed at The Ohio State University by Gibbs and Larcus (2015) had found 90 percent of students ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ to having an increased awareness, knowledge, and skills for their individual wellness. While 84 percent of students claimed to have an improved ability to create and achieve goals, additionally, 83 percent of students stated they have an enhanced ability to utilize their individual strengths. Furthermore, in the same research study, students ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ to have an

increase ability to sustain positive perspective, 88 percent of the time, as a result of wellness coaching, 68 percent indicated increase social connectedness, and 63 percent stated an enhanced academic motivation, while 63 percent 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with wellness coaching promoting engaged learning (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015).

Peer coaching has been found to provide an environment for students to flourish in a university setting by enhancing academic motivation and engagement, while improving sense of social belonging, and promoting positive emotions (Schreiner, 2010). Other coaching, mentor, or peer-based programs have shown positive results, in regards to, improving students' academic performance (Dalton & Crosby, 2014) positively impacting student engagement (Black & Voelker, 2008), improving retention (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) and increasing connections (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Positive results from a similar, in design, peer-to-peer coaching program, allowed light to understand expectations of Peer Wellness Coaching. Knowledge on effectiveness of wellness coaching, allowed this study to predict success at reaching its research goal of impacting students' sense of belonging.

The University of Minnesota (2008) claimed since research has shown connections between academic success and health behaviors, such as lower grade point average being correlated with alcohol use, increase stress levels, and lack of sleep, university campuses and students should prioritize all-inclusive health promotion. Being a means for holistic health promotion, wellness coaching provides universities an opportunity to empower students among several areas of their well-being (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015). Building on the importance of holistic approach, this study, through Peer Wellness Coaching, provided an all-inclusive approach to

students' well-being. Students were empowered to discuss any wellness goal of their desire—which allowed students autonomy to a holistic tactic to reach their wellness goal.

Wellness Coaching and Mental/Emotional Health

Mental health concerns, have increasingly become a focus among college campuses, Sponsler and Wesaw (2014) identified mental health as the top health and wellness issue for college campuses. Congruently, the demand for counseling services on university campuses has increased considerably, in recent years (Gallagher, 2012). Promoting mental health, for all students, is progressively becoming a noticeable way for universities to enhance student well-being and academic success (Gibbs & Larcus, 2015). Fortunately, a majority of university campuses offer counseling services, on campus, which have been deemed a necessity to adequately provide for students' well-being, but these counseling services usually service rendering to a traditional medical model (Larcus et al., 2016).

Due to a recent increase in need for services, counseling centers on college campuses have moved more toward a focus on triage or crisis appointments (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2019). Counseling services, on campus, were designed to serve students presenting with mental health concerns; however, much of the time, on-campus counseling services end up serving students simply pursuing support services (Gallagher, 2012). A result of only providing traditional counseling services, students who do not need clinical level care, end up seeking counseling help, leaving those who need mental health counseling, without access (Larcus et al., 2016). Programs like Peer Wellness Coaching were designed to help alleviate this need—providing an alternative, to traditional counseling services, which allowed services to students

seeking help and direction. All the while permitting counseling services to serve students who need clinical level of care.

Some researcher have concluded adults, aged 18-29 years of age, have the highest 12-month occurrence rate for mental health diagnosis—which may be due, in part, to university campuses endorsement of traditional counseling services—while ignoring the importance of the unique challenges faced by emerging adults (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014). Contrary to the traditional medical model of diagnosis and treatment, a wellness-based approach, focused on creating opportunities for well-being, specifically in different domains of functioning: psychological, emotional, and social (Larcus et al., 2016). Additionally, wellness coaching is designed to serve all students, not just those who meet criteria for a mental health disorder. Thus, all students could profit from one-on-one coaching and have the potential to work toward more ideal mental health and well-being (Larcus et al., 2016).

Research by Eisenberg, Lipson, and Posselt (2016) stated peer-to-peer support has increasingly became a key way for universities to provide mental health services, which are crucial for student persistence. Eisenberg et al. (2016) continued to make a connection between high mental health rates on college campuses, with low retention rates, which claimed a university wide focus on students' resiliency through mental health services as an opportunity to enhance students' academic success. Resilience played a vital role in students' ability to succeed, both in academics and general well-being (Larcus et al., 2016). Researchers Eisenberg et al. (2016) theorized students' resilience can both directly and indirectly impact retention, based on students' capability to maneuver challenges and mental health issues. Furthermore, research has shown, several ways to improve students' resilience including social supports (Howard, Dryden,

& Johnson, 1999), tying back to the importance of students' sense of connection to campus. This study aimed to provide support for students to move through struggles and mental health concerns—by involvement in Peer Wellness Coaching—impacting sense of belonging.

Novel intervention strategies to help improve students' resilience have been increasing, as of late, including peer-to-peer programs (Eisenberg et al., 2016). Additionally, Eisenberg et al. (2016) highlighted the importance and benefits of having an online service to reach students with mental health concerns, noted many students who struggle with mental health do not utilize traditional services. Online programs provide an opportunity to provide for many students, with minimal cost. In addition to traditional face-to-face appointments, Peer Wellness Coaching at St. Cloud State University, will be, beginning Spring 2020 semester, offering online coaching appointments, to better meet the needs of all students.

It should be noted, as mentioned by Larcus et al. (2016), wellness coaching is not intended to negate traditional counseling services, but rather, serve to provide an environment which allows students to succeed in a university setting, by empowering students' ability to manage challenging transitions, while promoting mental health. Moreover, peer-to-peer services, such as wellness coaching, can provide a valuable supplement to traditional services on university campuses (Eisenberg et al., 2016).

Gaps in the Literature

From a review of the literature research has shown students' sense of belonging played an integral role in student success and retention (Davis et al., 2019; Hausmann et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1975; Wayt, 2012; Williford et al., 2008; Yeager et al., 2013). Furthermore, a review of the literature has shown the success of peer mentor programs, in a

variety of settings (Black & Voelker, 2008; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Dalton & Crosby, 2014; Gibbs & Larcus, 2015; Larcus et al., 2016; Rockoff, 2008; Schreiner, 2010; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Wellness coaching programs have been shown to be an effective way to improve students' engagement, retention, and sense of connection (Black & Voelker, 2008; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). However, what is lacking in the current literature, what this research study is looking to further, is the impact of Peer Wellness Coaching in relation to students' sense of belonging to a university environment, and how this impacts students' retention rates.

Survey Design

For this study, an explanatory research design was used to understand a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging. Similar research, Black and Voelker (2008) examined the role of preceptors in introductory courses through the use of a questionnaire, at the end of an intervention, to establish the extent which preceptors, in the class, had an impact on students' engagement. Likewise, this study, used a questionnaire—following Peer Wellness Coaching—to examine an impact on students' sense of belonging. This study used a post-session survey, which received direct responses from students, following a Peer Wellness Coaching session—a technique adopted from Gibbs and Larcus (2015) who used survey questionnaires, at the completion of coaching sessions, to gauge changes in students' perceptions of health and wellness, social connectedness, and qualitative feedback on their coaching program. Furthermore, Davis et al. (2019) and Hausmann et al. (2009) used multiple surveys to measure students' sense of belonging. Survey questionnaires used in this study, contained

questions designed around Davis et al. (2019) Sense of Belonging Index; shown to be an accurate measure of students' sense of belonging—a predictor of students' retention.

Theoretical Framework

Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) adapted Tinto's Interactionalist Theory, to better explain the impact of how social integration transpired within students' sense of belonging. Finding when students were dynamically involved in their learning, additionally, the students were more likely to become socially involved. Furthermore, a student's degree of commitment to a university can impact their integration; however, other relationships, including to faculty and the university itself, can produce a part in developing academic integration, which leads to higher rates of student matriculation (Braxton et al., 2000). Building from the concept of student connections leads to increased rates of degree completion, this study aimed to improve students' interaction with peers, through Peer Wellness Coaching—a peer-to-peer approach to achieve wellness goals.

Moreover, in addition to Tinto's Interactionalist Theory, Bean's Student Attrition Model is used by researchers to understand student retention and attrition on university campuses (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Bean's model included the use of workplace turnover to better understand student attrition, which found ten factors, likely to cause disparities in student attrition “intent to leave, practical value, certainty of choice, loyalty, grades, courses, education goals, major and job certainty, opportunity to transfer, and family approval of the institution” (Bean, 1981, p. 2). Kahn and Nauta (2001) found students are likely to persist at a university when they established positive feeling related to their experiences, such as feelings of confidence established from receiving a positive grade.

Practical recommendations to increase student retention, from Bean (1981) included knowing of the ten factors outlined above, gender, and students' confidence level, all which were found likely to influence a students' decision to leave. Furthermore, colleges and universities who provide student organizations and events, stimulating loyalty and positive image of the school, can be valuable to increase student retention (Bean, 1981). Understanding areas of students' perception, which impacted their desire to retain from one semester to another, can help educators better provide services to ensure retention. A combination of programs and procedures, at St. Cloud State, do just that, including Peer Wellness Coaching.

Another theory related to students' attrition and persistence includes Astin's Theory on Student Involvement (Astin, 1999). Astin's theory claimed students who are more involved in campus activities are more likely to succeed academically and persist from one term to the next. Astin found connections between students involvement on campus (i.e. living on campus, working on campus, involvement in student organizations, etc.) to be positive indicators of retention (Astin, 1999). As a result of the connection between relationships and student satisfaction, as it pertains to the theoretical and practical work related to retention, theorists and practitioners would discover worth in considering students' sense of belonging at college universities (Wayt, 2012). This study strived to impact students' sense of belonging, as a means to increase retention rates. Through Peer Wellness Coaching, students gain an opportunity to be involved on campus; through the program itself and referrals to additional campus resources.

Theoretical framework and approaches, in regards to coaching in higher education, has not been extensively researched in the current literature (Dalton & Crosby, 2014). Work by Larcus et al. (2016) noted student development theories have been used to provide a far-reaching

understanding how students develop during their college years. Student development theories expanded an assortment of areas of functioning: biological, psychological, spiritual, moral, cultural, and social (Astin, 1999, Braxton et al., 2000; Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Larcus et al. (2016) claimed that although student development theories provided valuable understanding for certain aspects of higher education, self-authorship theory, may be more in alignment with wellness coaching.

Self- authorship can be described as the decisions students' make, which influences their inner ability to create their beliefs, identity, and social relations (Baxter Magolda, 2014). College is seen as a transitional period for students, who come to a decision on their character and obligation to their environment. Self-authorship related to wellness coaching by empowering students to create the desired changed to transform into the person the student hopes to become (Larcus et al., 2016). As a result, this study used self-authorship theory as the guiding theme for development and understanding of students' sense of belonging. Self-authorship theory provided direction for Peer Wellness Coaching in helping students reach their wellness goals; therefore, becoming their desired self. With a clear theme, rooted in research, self-authorship theory allowed Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on students' sense of belonging to be explored.

Chapter III: Methodology

Health and wellness of college students, especially the degree to which students feel they belong to campus, has become an increasingly relevant topic as it relates to student retention (Coley et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2019; Gibbs & Larcus, 2015; Kena et al., 2014; Stewart, 2016). Pinpointing a students' sense of belonging as an indicator for academic success and matriculation is a key step in reversing low retention rates. However, specific strategies to help increase students' sense of belonging to college campuses, namely Peer Wellness Coaching, have been less studied.

St. Cloud State University enacted several initiatives intended to improve students' belonging, one of these measures being, Peer Wellness Coaching. Launched as a small scale, pilot program, during the 2018-2019 academic year, Peer Wellness Coaching served only 23 students. After initial success, Peer Wellness Coaching increased their available coaching hours per week from 4 to 30, during the 2019-2020 academic year, which officially launched their first year of formally offering services to campus.

Students who participated in Peer Wellness Coaching, during the Fall 2019 semester, the period of data collection—came to partake in a variety of ways. All students attended Peer Wellness Coaching on a voluntary basis, as well as additionally, completed surveys freely. Some students attended Peer Wellness Coaching after learning about the program through various methods: tabling sessions on campus, flyers hung around campus, or word of mouth. Other students were given extra-credit in their courses for participating in a minimum of three coaching sessions, one classroom gave course points for attending coaching sessions. Furthermore, a subset of students, were provided to Peer Wellness Coaching, from St. Cloud State University's

Belonging Initiative, as students who scored low belonging or did not complete their Sense of Belonging Index survey—both significant indicators of high rates of attrition (Davis et al., 2019). The students from the Belonging Initiative, as well as a few others, were given free St. Cloud State University gear (i.e. shirt, hat) upon the completion of three coaching sessions.

Peer Wellness Coaching began to serve several purposes, which included but not limited to: empowering students to set and achieve goals, improve students' ability to create and sustain wellness-related behavior, helping students become who they want to become, and increase students' sense of belonging to the campus community (Peer Wellness Coaching, 2019). The Peer Wellness Coaching program has gathered data, to help ensure the program is achieving the goals it set out to reach. Data is collected from two separate surveys, both of which are completed by students who have participated in at least one coaching session.

The first survey, referred to as, post-session survey, is offered to each student at the conclusion of each coaching session, via an iPad, which the coach brought to each appointment. Students were not required to complete the survey and they may have chosen to complete the survey after each session or after one but not the next—entirely the students' decision on whether or not they completed the post-session survey. The post-session survey consisted of four, Likert-scale questions, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The questions entailed whether the student would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to other students, if Peer Wellness Coaching helped the student belong to campus, whether the coach made the student feel comfortable, and if the location of the coaching session had been appropriate. Additionally, there was an optional question for students to leave their Student Identification Number, data omitted from this researcher.

The second survey, referred to as, mid-term and final-term survey, is one survey, offered twice a semester to all students who had completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session during the semester. If a student completed a coaching session between the start of the semester and October 18, 2019, the student received two email opportunities to complete the survey. Furthermore, if a student completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session between October 21, 2019 and the end of the semester, the student received two email opportunities to complete the survey. If a student completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session both before October 18, 2019 and after October 21, 2019, that student would have received an email to complete the survey, twice, both at the mid-term and final-term.

The mid-term and final-term survey, consisted of three short answer questions, asking students to describe how Peer Wellness Coaching had been most helpful, how the coach helped the student to feel more connected to campus, and what changes should be implemented to the program. Additionally, the survey included four, five-point Likert-scale questions, ranging from ‘much lower’ to ‘much higher’. The Likert-scale questions asked students to gauge their ability to initiate and maintain positive behavior change, both before and after Peer Wellness Coaching. Finally, an optional question asked students to provide their Student Identification Number, data omitted from this researcher.

It should be noted, Peer Wellness Coaching offered students the chance to win 25 HuskyBucks for completing the mid-term and final-term survey and providing their Student Identification Number on the last question. HuskyBucks can be used, similar to cash, at any on-campus food locations.

Setting

The data used for this research study were gathered at St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching. Peer Wellness Coaching provided all St. Cloud State University and St. Cloud Technical and Community College students—who were involved in the Community College Connection program—an opportunity to participate in coaching sessions free of charge. Peer Wellness Coaching was designed to help students receive one-on-one coaching, which used motivational interviewing techniques to help elicit and promote behavior change related to a wellness goal of the student's choosing. For the purpose of this research study, data were collected during the Fall 2019 semester, which determined the extent of a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging.

Sample/Participants

Participants for this research study consisted of students who completed at least one Peer Wellness Coaching session during the Fall 2019 semester at St. Cloud State University. A total of 53 students participated in a coaching session, during the identified time period, with a total of 129 coaching appointments.

Demographic information were not collected, for this study; however, the National Center for Education Statistics (2018a) reported St. Cloud State University's demographic information, which included the following: 54.5 percent recognized as female, while 45.5 percent recognized as male. Racial identity of students included: 67 percent White, 10 percent nonresident alien, seven percent Black or African American, five percent Asian or Pacific Islander, four percent as two or more races and race/ethnic identity unknown, and three percent Hispanic. Additionally, 82 percent of students were considered 'in-state' students, while 13

percent were ‘out-of-state’, and five percent of students were from foreign countries (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a).

The previously mentioned demographic information may not be accurate to students who completed Peer Wellness Coaching; rather, simply provide a basis of the student makeup on St. Cloud State University’s campus.

Students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session were not obligated to complete a post-session survey and each student had the opportunity to complete the survey at the conclusion of each coaching session. Some students may have completed the post-session survey more than once and some may have not completed the post-session survey at all. In regards to the mid-term and final-term survey, if a student completed a coaching session between the start of the semester and October 18, 2019 (mid-term) the student became eligible to complete the survey, one time. Similarly, if a student completed a coaching session between October 21, 2019 and the conclusion of Fall semester (final-term), the student became eligible to complete the final-term survey. It is important to note, students were told only one survey submission is allowed per student; however, since the survey is anonymous, there was no way to control if a student completed the survey more than once.

Instruments

Peer Wellness Coaching at St. Cloud State University created survey questions based on Davis et al. (2019) Sense of Belonging Index, which had been shown to be an effective indicator of students’ connectedness on campus as a means in predicting retention. Since the purpose of the survey was to measure success and sustainability of the Peer Wellness Coaching program, the Sense of Belonging Index, was only a minor aspect of the survey, which focused more

specifically on St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching program in relation to success and sustainability of the program.

The survey included questions about students' sense of fitting in as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, ability to elicit and maintain behavior change as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, and the positive and negative aspects of the Peer Wellness Coaching program. A copy of the two instruments used can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Data Analysis

This research study used a quantitative research design, explanatory research. The research attempted to explain whether or not a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging, in regards to retention rates, exists. This study used secondary data analysis, because data necessary for evaluation of Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on students' sense of belonging, had previously been collected by the program itself. It is important to note, the secondary data, used for this study, is owned by St. Cloud State University. Peer Wellness Coaching supervisors, Erica Karger-Gatzow and Jennifer Waletzko Johnson, allowed this researcher to use survey data, from Peer Wellness Coaching appointments, collected for purposes of program development—with prior Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix C).

This study considered the survey data for general observations in regards to how students ranked their degree of belonging to St. Cloud State University in relation to Peer Wellness Coaching. The data, provided clarity on student's perception of the Peer Wellness Coaching program and how the program related to the students' connection to campus.

Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of not replicating data, which had previously been gathered, this research study used secondary data obtained from St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching, who gathered the data for the purpose of program sustainability and development. Using data gathered from a natural environment and non-manipulated completion of surveys, protection from harm was minimized. Additionally, the data obtained for the purpose of this research study included no identifiable information of the students involved in the study.

Knowing the importance of student retention rates to universities (Davis et al., 2019), from a financial aspect, it begs the question whether this research had been completed for financial gain to the university or the ethical obligation to work towards a betterment of students' health, well-being, and success. Although the financial benefits of students matriculating to graduation are undoubtedly strong, the purpose of this study, was to understand the impact of Peer Wellness Coaching on students' sense of belonging—gaining insight on the effectiveness of Peer Wellness Coaching at accomplishing what it had aimed to achieve. Financial gains are important, but this researcher aimed to make a meaningful contribution to the field of social work, by examining a newly formed program, designed to improve students' health, well-being, and success in a university setting.

Chapter IV: Results

Process of the Collection of Data

All data collected for the use of this research study had been previously gathered by Peer Wellness Coaching program on St. Cloud State University's campus, for a purpose unrelated to this research study. Approval to use this data for the purpose of this research study was obtained from the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board under IRB# 1962-2535 (See Appendix C).

Data used for the purpose of this research study were collected from a secondary source, St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching. The data were collected anonymously from student responses, who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session during Fall 2019 semester; data were collected through Qualtrics surveys. The data were reflective of student responses, from two separate surveys, one provided after each coaching session—the other during either mid-term or final-term of the semester. The online survey utilized Likert scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and text entry questions. All data collected from Peer Wellness Coaching was printed from the online Qualtrics survey and kept in a locked file cabinet, within a locked room. While the data did not contain any identifiable information, only this researcher, the chair of this researcher's thesis committee, and Peer Wellness Coaching staff had access to the collected data. The data will be stored for three years, per the Institutional Review Board standards. Furthermore, Peer Wellness Coaching will receive a copy of the final results from this research study.

For the intent of this research study, the data were examined to determine a relationship between the impact of Peer Wellness Coaching on students' sense of belonging. This study

presented the findings from Peer Wellness Coaching's surveys, first analyzed each survey question with a descriptive analysis. Next, two variables were related to one another using Chi-Squared Test to distinguish a relationship between the variables as they relate to increasing students' sense of belonging to St. Cloud State University.

Table 4.1

Post-Session Survey: I Would Recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to Other Students at St. Cloud State University




I would Recommend PWC					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Strongly Agree					41	61.2%	61.2%
Agree					20	29.9%	91.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree					6	9.0%	100.0%
Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Strongly Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	67	100.0%	

Table 4.1: The data indicated from the post-session surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ they would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to a peer 91 percent (61 out of 67) of the time. Nine percent (6 out of 67) ‘neither agree nor disagree’ in recommending Peer Wellness Coaching, while zero students indicated they ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with recommending Peer Wellness Coaching to other students at St. Cloud State University.

Table 4.2

Post-Session Survey: As a Result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am Fitting in at St. Cloud State University




Feeling Connected					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Strongly Agree					27	40.3%	40.3%
Agree					19	28.4%	68.7%
Neither Agree nor Disagree					21	31.3%	100.0%
Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Strongly Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	67	100.0%	

Table 4.2: The data indicated from the post-session surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ they feel more connected to St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, 68.7 percent (46 out of 67) of the time. Less than a third, 31.3 percent (21 out of 67) of the time students ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ to feeling as if they are fitting in to campus more than before Peer Wellness Coaching. Zero students indicated they ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ they felt a sense of belonging at St. Cloud State University as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching.

Table 4.3

Post-Session Survey: My Coach Made Me Feel Comfortable Discussing My Wellness Goals




My Coach Made Me Feel Comfortable					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Strongly Agree					45	70.3%	70.3%
Agree					17	26.6%	96.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree					2	3.1%	100.0%
Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Strongly Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	80.0%	64	100.0%

Table 4.3: The data indicated from the post-session surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ their coach made them comfortable in discussing their goals 96.9 percent (62 out of 64) of the time. Three percent (2 out of 64) ‘neither agree nor disagree’ in feeling comfortable discussing their goals, while zero students indicated they ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with their Peer Wellness Coach making them feel comfortable discussing their wellness goals.

Table 4.4

Post-Session Survey: The Location for My Coaching Appointment was Appropriate for the Session




The Location was Appropriate					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Strongly Agree					40	62.5%	62.5%
Agree					19	29.7%	92.2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree					5	7.8%	100.0%
Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Strongly Disagree					0	0.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	64	100.0%	

Table 4.4: The data indicated from the post-session surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ the location for their coaching session was appropriate 92.2 percent (59 out of 64) of the time. Less than one tenth, 7.8 percent (5 out of 64) ‘neither agree nor disagree’ the location of their appointment was appropriate, while zero students indicated they ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with the location being appropriate, for their coaching session.

Table 4.5a

Chi-Squared Test of Relating As a Result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am Fitting in at St. Cloud State University to I Would Recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to Other Students at St. Cloud State University

Chi-Squared Test	
Chi Square	27.9
Degrees of Freedom	4
P-Value	0.0000129
Effect Size (Cramer's V)	0.456
Sample Size	67

Table 4.5a: Examining the relationship between fitting in at St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, and recommending Peer Wellness Coaching to other students on campus, a Chi-Squared Test was completed. The data indicated a Chi Square result of 27.9 with 4 Degrees of Freedom, meaning a p-value of 0.0000129 and an Effect Size of 0.456, expressing a strong statistically significant relationship between the two aforementioned variables.

Table 4.5b

Relating As a Result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am Fitting in at St. Cloud State University to I Would Recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to Other Students at St. Cloud State University

	I Would Recommend PWC			
Feeling Connected	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Total
Strongly Agree	96.3%	3.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Agree	47.4%	47.4%	5.3%	100.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	28.6%	47.6%	23.8%	100.0%

Table 4.5b: The data indicated if students stated they ‘strongly agree’ they feel more connected to St. Cloud State University as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, 96.3 percent also stated they ‘strongly agree’ they would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to other students. Furthermore, students who ‘strongly agreed’ with feeling more connected to campus as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching ‘agreed’ or ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ they would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to a peer at a rate of 3.7 percent and 0.0 percent, respectively. Students who claimed they ‘agree’ they are fitting in at St. Cloud State University more, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with recommending Peer Wellness Coaching to other students at a rate of 47.4 percent, for both categories. Finally, students who indicated they ‘neither agree nor disagree’ with being more connected to St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, stated they ‘strongly agree’ they would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to other students only 28.6 percent of the time. Additionally, students who ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ in feeling more connected to campus, as a result of Peer Wellness

Coaching, stated they ‘agreed’ or ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ with recommending Peer Wellness Coaching, to peers, at a rate of 47.6 percent and 23.8 percent, respectively.

Table 4.6a

Chi-Squared Test of Relating As a Result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am Fitting in at St. Cloud State University to My Coach Made Me Feel Comfortable Discussing My Wellness Goals

Chi-Squared Test	
Chi Square	15.2
Degrees of Freedom	4
P-Value	0.00438
Effect Size (Cramer's V)	0.344
Sample Size	64

Table 4.6a: Examining the relationship between fitting in at St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, and student's coach making the student comfortable discussing their wellness goals, a Chi-Squared Test was completed. The data indicated a Chi Square result of 15.2 with 4 Degrees of Freedom, meaning a p-value of 0.00438 and an Effect Size of 0.344, expressing a statistically significant relationship between the two aforementioned variables.

Table 4.6b

Relating As a Result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am Fitting in at St. Cloud State University to My Coach Made Me Feel Comfortable Discussing My Wellness Goals

	My Coach Made Me Feel Comfortable			
Feeling Connected	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Total
Strongly Agree	96.3%	3.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Agree	52.6%	42.1%	5.3%	100.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	50.0%	44.4%	5.6%	100.0%

Table 4.6b: The data indicated if students stated they ‘strongly agree’ they feel more connected to St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, 96.3 percent also stated they ‘strongly agree’ their coach made them feel comfortable discussing their wellness goals. Furthermore, students who ‘strongly agreed’ with feeling more connected to campus, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, ‘agreed’ or ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ they felt comfortable discussing their goals, with their coach, at a rate of 3.7 percent and 0.0 percent, respectively. Students who claimed they ‘agree’ they are fitting in at St. Cloud State University more, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with being comfortable discussing their wellness goals at a rate of 52.6 percent and 42.1 percent, correspondingly for both categories. Finally, students who indicated they ‘neither agree nor disagreed’ with being more connected to St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, stated they ‘strongly agree’ their coach made them feel comfortable 50.0 percent of the time. Additionally, students who ‘neither agree nor disagreed’ in feeling more connected to campus, as a result of

Peer Wellness Coaching, stated they ‘agreed’ or ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ with their coach making them feel comfortable at a rate of 44.4 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively.

Table 4.7a

Chi-Squared Test of Relating As a Result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am Fitting in at St. Cloud State University to The Location for My Coaching Appointment was Appropriate for the Session

Chi-Squared Test	
Chi Square	14.9
Degrees of Freedom	4
P-Value	0.00502
Effect Size (Cramer’s V)	0.341
Sample Size	64

Table 4.7a: Examining the relationship between fitting in at St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, and the location for the coaching appointment being appropriate, a Chi-Squared Test was completed. The data indicated a Chi Square result of 14.9 with 4 Degrees of Freedom, meaning a p-value of 0.00502 and an Effect Size of 0.341, expressing a statistically significant relationship between the two aforementioned variables.

Table 4.7b

Relating As a Result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am Fitting in at St. Cloud State University to The Location for My Coaching Appointment was Appropriate for the Session

	The Location was Appropriate			
Feeling Connected	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Total
Strongly Agree	88.9%	11.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Agree	47.4%	42.1%	10.5%	100.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	38.9%	44.4%	16.7%	100.0%

Table 4.7b: The data indicated if students stated they ‘strongly agree’ they feel more connected to St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, 88.9 percent also stated they ‘strongly agreed’ the location of their Peer Wellness Coaching appointment was appropriate. Furthermore, students who ‘strongly agreed’ with feeling more connected to campus, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, ‘agreed’ or ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ their coaching appointment location was appropriate at a rate of 11.1 percent and 0.0 percent, respectively. Students who claimed they ‘agree’ they are fitting in at St. Cloud State University more, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the location of their appointment being appropriate 47.4 percent and 42.1 percent of the time, correspondingly for both categories. Finally, students who indicated they ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ with being more connected to St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, stated they ‘strongly agreed’ the location of their Peer Wellness Coaching appointment was appropriate only 38.9 percent of the time. Additionally, students who ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ in feeling more connected to campus, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, stated they ‘agreed’ or

‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ the location of their appointment being appropriate at a rate of 44.4 percent and 16.7 percent, respectively.

Table 4.8

Mid-term and final-term survey: Prior to Beginning Your Work with Peer Wellness Coaching, Rate Your Ability to Initiate Positive Change to Your Behavior(s)





Prior PWC – Ability to Initiate					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Much Higher					1	4.0%	4.0%
Slightly Higher					7	28.0%	32.0%
About the Same					8	32.0%	64.0%
Slightly Lower					9	36.0%	100.0%
Much Lower					0	0.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	25	100.0%	

Table 4.8: The data indicated from mid-term and final-term surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session rate their ability to initiate positive behavior change, prior to having a Peer Wellness Coaching session, as ‘slightly lower’ or ‘about the same’ 36.0 percent (9 out of 25) or 32.0 percent (8 out of 25) of the time, respectively. Students rated their ability to initiate positive behavior change, prior to engaging in Peer Wellness Coaching, as ‘slightly higher’ 28.0 percent (7 out of 25) of the time, while 4.0 percent (1 out of 25) of the time as ‘much higher’. Zero students indicated their ability to initiate behavior change as ‘much lower’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching.

Table 4.9

Mid-term and final-term survey: After Your Work with Peer Wellness Coaching, Rate Your Ability to Initiate Positive Change to Your Behavior(s)





After PWC – Ability to Initiate					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Much Higher					4	16.0%	16.0%
Slightly Higher					15	60.0%	76.0%
About the Same					5	20.0%	96.0%
Slightly Lower					1	4.0%	100.0%
Much Lower					0	0.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	25	100.0%	

Table 4.9: The data indicated from mid-term and final-term surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session rate their ability to initiate positive behavior change, after completing a Peer Wellness Coaching session, as ‘slightly higher’ or ‘much higher’ 60.0 percent (15 out of 25) or 16.0 percent (4 out of 25) of the time, respectively. Students rated their ability to initiate positive behavior change, after participating in Peer Wellness Coaching, as ‘about the same’ 20.0 percent (5 out of 25) of the time, while only 4.0 percent (1 out of 25) of the time as ‘slightly lower’. Zero students indicated their ability to initiate behavior change as ‘much lower’, after engaging in Peer Wellness Coaching.

Table 4.10

Mid-term and final-term survey: Prior to Beginning Your Work with Peer Wellness Coaching, Rate Your Ability to Maintain Positive Change to Your Behavior(s)






Prior PWC – Ability to Maintain					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Much Higher					1	4.0%	4.0%
Slightly Higher					6	24.0%	28.0%
About the Same					8	32.0%	60.0%
Slightly Lower					9	36.0%	96.0%
Much Lower					1	4.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	25	100.0%	

Table 4.10: The data indicated from mid-term and final-term surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session rate their ability to maintain positive behavior change, prior to having a Peer Wellness Coaching session, as ‘slightly lower’ or ‘about the same’ 36.0 percent (9 out of 25) or 32.0 percent (8 out of 25) of the time, respectively. Students rated their ability to maintain positive behavior change, prior to engaging in Peer Wellness Coaching, as ‘slightly higher’ 24.0 percent (6 out of 25) of the time, while 4.0 percent (1 out of 25) of the time as both ‘much higher’ or ‘much lower’.

Table 4.11

Mid-term and final-term survey: After Your Work with Peer Wellness Coaching, Rate Your Ability to Maintain Positive Change to Your Behavior(s)





After PWC – Ability to Maintain					Count	Percent	Cumulative
Much Higher					4	16.0%	16.0%
Slightly Higher					16	64.0%	80.0%
About the Same					4	16.0%	96.0%
Slightly Lower					1	4.0%	100.0%
Much Lower					0	0.0%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%	25	100.0%	

Table 4.11: The data indicated from mid-term and final-term surveys, students who completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session rate their ability to maintain positive behavior change, after completing a Peer Wellness Coaching session, as ‘slightly higher’ or ‘much higher’ 64.0 percent (16 out of 25) or 16.0 percent (4 out of 25) of the time, respectively. Students rated their ability to maintain positive behavior change, after participating in Peer Wellness Coaching, as ‘about the same’ 16.0 percent (4 out of 25) of the time, while only 4.0 percent (1 out of 25) of the time as ‘slightly lower’. Zero students indicated their ability to maintain behavior change as ‘much lower’, after engaging in Peer Wellness Coaching.

Table 4.12a

Chi-Squared Test of Relating Ability to Initiate Behavior Change After Peer Wellness Coaching to Ability to Initiate Behavior Change Prior to Peer Wellness Coaching

Chi-Squared Test	
Chi Square	20.4
Degrees of Freedom	9
P-Value	0.0154
Effect Size (Cramer's V)	0.522
Sample Size	25

Table 4.12a: Examining the relationship between ability to initiate behavior change, after Peer Wellness Coaching, and ability to initiate change, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching, a Chi-Squared Test was completed. The data indicated a Chi Square result of 20.4 with 9 Degrees of Freedom, meaning a p-value of 0.0154 and an Effect Size of 0.522, expressing a strong statistically significant relationship between the two aforementioned variables; however, given a limited sample size of 25 students, the data may not actually be significant.

Table 4.12b

Relating Ability to Initiate Behavior Change After Peer Wellness Coaching to Ability to Initiate Behavior Change Prior to Peer Wellness Coaching

After PWC- Ability to Initiate	Prior PWC – Ability to Initiate				Total
	Much Higher	Slightly Higher	About the Same	Slightly Lower	
Much Higher	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Slightly Higher	0.0%	40.0%	20.0%	40.0%	100.0%
About the Same	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Slightly Lower	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.12b: The data indicate if students stated their ability to initiate behavior change improved to ‘much higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, 50 percent of those students indicated their ability to initiate behavior change was ‘slightly lower’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching. Additionally, of those students who indicated their ability to initiate behavior change as ‘much higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, 25 percent of those students indicated their ability to initiate positive behavior change, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching, as each ‘much higher’ and ‘slightly higher’. Furthermore, 100 percent of the students who stated their ability to initiate positive behavior change remained ‘about the same’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, also indicated their ability to initiate positive behavior change as ‘about the same’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching. Similarly, 100 percent of the students who reported their ability to initiate positive behavior change as ‘slightly lower’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, also rated their ability to initiate behavior change as ‘slightly lower’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching. Finally, the students who designated their ability to initiate positive behavior change as ‘slightly higher’,

after Peer Wellness Coaching, 40 percent indicated their ability to initiate positive behavior change as each ‘slightly higher’ or ‘slightly lower’ before Peer Wellness Coaching. Additionally, 20 percent of the students who reported their ability to initiate positive behavior change as ‘slightly higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, rated their ability as ‘about the same’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching.

Table 4.13a

Chi-Squared Test of Relating Ability to Maintain Positive Behavior Change After Peer Wellness Coaching to Ability to Maintain Positive Behavior Change Prior to Peer Wellness Coaching

Chi-Squared Test	
Chi Square	17.4
Degrees of Freedom	12
P-Value	0.136
Effect Size (Cramer's V)	0.481
Sample Size	25

Table 4.13a: Examining the relationship between ability to maintain positive behavior change, after Peer Wellness Coaching, and ability to maintain positive behavior change, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching, a Chi-Squared Test was completed. The data indicated a Chi Square result of 17.4 with 12 Degrees of Freedom, meaning a p-value of 0.136 and an Effect Size of 0.481, expressing no statistically significant relationship between the two aforementioned

variables; however, given a limited sample size of 25 students, the data may actually be significant, with a larger dataset.

Table 4.13b

Relating Ability to Maintain Positive Behavior Change After Peer Wellness Coaching to Ability to Maintain Positive Behavior Change Prior to Peer Wellness Coaching

After PWC- Ability to Maintain	Prior PWC – Ability to Maintain					Total
	Much Higher	Slightly Higher	About the Same	Slightly Lower	Much Lower	
Much Higher	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Slightly Higher	0.0%	31.3%	18.8%	43.8%	6.3%	100.0%
About the Same	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Slightly Lower	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%

Table 4.13b: The data indicated of the students who stated their ability to maintain positive behavior change improved to ‘much higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, 25 percent (per category) designated their ability to maintain behavior change was ‘much higher’, ‘slightly higher’, ‘about the same’, or ‘slightly lower’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching. Furthermore, 100 percent of the students who stated their ability to maintain positive behavior change remained ‘about the same’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, also indicated their ability to maintain positive behavior change as ‘about the same’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching. Likewise, 100 percent of the students who reported their ability to maintain positive behavior change as ‘slightly lower’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, also rated their ability to maintain positive behavior change as ‘slightly lower’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching. Finally, the students who designated their ability to maintain positive behavior change as ‘slightly higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching,

designated their ability to maintain positive behavior change, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching as ‘slightly lower’ or ‘slightly higher’ at a rate of 43.8 percent and 31.3 percent, respectively.

Moreover, 18.8 percent of the students who reported their ability to maintain positive behavior change as ‘slightly higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, rated their ability as ‘about the same’, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching. While, 6.3 percent and 0.0 percent who reported their ability to maintain positive behavior change as ‘slightly higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching, rated their ability to maintain positive behavior change as ‘much lower’ or ‘much higher’, correspondingly.

Analysis

Data from the post-session survey indicated 97 percent of students ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ their Wellness Coach made them comfortable discussing their wellness goals (see Table 4.3); while, 92 percent of students ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ the location of coaching appointments were appropriate (see Table 4.4); whereas, 91 percent of students ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ to recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to a peer (see Table 4.1); finally, over two-thirds, 69 percent, ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ that as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching they belong at St. Cloud State University (see Table 4.2). Results from the post-session survey have shown, students overwhelmingly thought Peer Wellness Coaching was a comfortable place to share their goals, was held in an appropriate location, and would recommend the program to other students. Additionally, nearly seven out of ten students designated feelings of belonging to St. Cloud State University, as a direct result of Peer Wellness Coaching.

Given this study’s research question, the post-session survey results, provided positive initial results, for Peer Wellness Coaching having an impact on students’ sense of belonging. To further understand the relationship between students’ feeling connected to St. Cloud State

University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, a Chi Squared Test was performed to determine a relationship to other variables. A strong statistically significant relationship was found between students who claimed they are fitting in at St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching to students who indicated they would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to a peer (see Table 4.5a and Table 4.5b). Which can be summarized as, when students indicated they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ to recommending Peer Wellness Coaching to a peer, there was a strong statistical significance that students would ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ that Peer Wellness Coaching was the result of them fitting in at St. Cloud State University.

Additionally, a statistically significant relationship was found between the following two relational tests: when a coach made the students feel comfortable discussing their wellness goals—fitting in at St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching (see Table 4.6a and Table 4.6b) and, when the location was appropriate—fitting in at St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching (see Table 4.7a and Table 4.7b). Both of these tests, and the one previously mentioned, provided understanding for the success of Peer Wellness Coaching to impacting students’ sense of belonging. Gaining understanding on what students’ perceptions related to students’ feeling connected to campus, has provided direction of emphasis to Peer Wellness Coaching. Knowing when a student: would recommend the program, feels comfortable, or thought the location was appropriate, were all key variables, related to students’ sense of belonging, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, will allow guidance for the future of Peer Wellness Coaching.

The mid-term and final-term survey provided pre and posttest analysis on students’ ability to initiate positive behavior change and maintain positive behavior change. The results

indicated prior to Peer Wellness Coaching, 32 percent of students rated their ability as ‘much higher’ or ‘slightly higher’ (see Table 4.8); compared to after Peer Wellness Coaching, 76 percent of students rated their ability to initiate positive behavior change as ‘much higher’ or ‘slightly higher’ (see Table 4.9). In regards to students’ ability to maintain positive behavior change, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching, 28 percent of students indicated their ability as ‘much higher’ or ‘slightly higher’ (see Table 4.10); whereas, after Peer Wellness Coaching, 80 percent of students indicated a ‘much higher’ or ‘slightly higher’ ability to maintain positive behavior change (see Table 4.11).

This study further explored the relationship between the results of pre and posttests; through the use of Chi Squared Test. The data designated a strong statistically significant relationship between students’ ability to initiate positive behavior change after Peer Wellness Coaching, compared to the students’ ability prior to Peer Wellness Coaching (see Table 4.12a). Furthermore, 50 percent of the students who claimed, prior to Peer Wellness Coaching, their ability to initiate positive behavior change as ‘slightly lower’, improved their ability to ‘much higher’, after Peer Wellness Coaching (see Table 4.12b); however, given the limited sample size, 25 students, this study could not confidently claim a statistically significant relationship between the variables, in relation to the impact, prior to after Peer Wellness Coaching. The data did not indicate a statically significant relationship between students’ ability to maintain positive behavior change after Peer Wellness Coaching, compared to the students’ ability prior to Peer Wellness Coaching (Table 4.13a and Table 4.13b); again, it should be noted, given the limited sample size, there may or may not be significance, with a larger sample size.

This study provided an understanding between the relationship of students' ability to initiate and/or maintain positive behavior change, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching. In terms of students' sense of belonging, students who perceived themselves in positive health and wellness, are more likely to be their desired self, as mentioned by Schreiner (2010); therefore, feel connected to their campus community. Having an understanding of Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on students' ability to create and sustain positive behavior change, provided a starting block towards impacting students' sense of belonging, in terms of increase retention rates.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study examined whether or not a relationship existed between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging, in terms of increasing retention rates, at St. Cloud State University. Prior research has shown peer/mentor wellness programs positively impact several areas of student well-being and academic success (Larcus et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Furthermore, previous research has shown the importance of students' sense of belonging, as a predictive indicator, for students' retention rates (Davis et al., 2019). Even though research has consistently shown value in peer/mentor wellness programs, to achieve wellness and academic success, research has lacked the impact of peer/mentor wellness programs on students' sense of belonging to a college or university campus.

This study's purpose was to further the knowledge base available regarding the impact of Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging. Prior research had found retention rates are strongly correlated to students' sense of belonging to their college or university (Davis et al., 2019). Peer Wellness Coaching was used as an intervention to impact sense of belonging, in turn, improving students' retention rates. Using secondary data, owned by St. Cloud State University, this study analyzed two surveys, to determine a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging to St. Cloud State University. This final chapter will discuss the findings of this study and the meaning of those outcomes, limitations of the study, recommendations for future work, and implications of this study for future research.

Findings

The results of this study exhibited data which suggests a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging. This study examined two separate

surveys—both completed by students after they had completed a Peer Wellness Coaching session. The study found over two-thirds of students reported they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with they had an increased sense of belonging, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching.

Due to the findings, the hypotheses of the study were partly supported. The hypothesis stated, participating in Peer Wellness Coaching would indicate an improved sense of belonging, which in turn, would improve retention rates, at St. Cloud State University. The first half held true, students who participated in Peer Wellness Coaching indicated a higher sense of belonging to campus, at a rate of nearly 69 percent. However, the second half of the hypothesis was not concluded, due to limited time frame to complete this study, the findings were unable to be referenced back to participants Social Belonging Index—meaning unable to confirm the impact on retention rates.

Not only did this study find over two-thirds of students expressed an increase sense of belonging to St. Cloud State University, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching; additionally, this study found key variables of Peer Wellness Coaching, which were found to be statistically significant to an increased sense of belonging. The results found students who would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to a peer, felt comfortable discussing their wellness goals, and thought the location was appropriate were all statistically significant relationship to reporting an increased sense of belonging, as a result of Peer Wellness Coaching.

The findings from this study support findings of other peer/mentor wellness programs. Although not much research has been completed on wellness coaching’s impact on sense of belonging, wellness coaching has been found to be effective at improving academic success (Dalton & Crosby, 2014), improving student engagement (Black & Voelker, 2008), and

increasing connections (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Through this study, further support for the benefits of wellness coaching were established—creating a need for further analysis of Peer Wellness Coaching.

As this study found a relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging. While previous research by Davis et al. (2019) found students' sense of belonging to be a strong indicator of retention rates. It would be worthwhile for future research to build on the findings of this study, to establish a connection between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' retention rates at St. Cloud State University.

Limitations

This study contained a few limitations, one involved around the collection of data. All data gathered for this study, were done so anonymously; after each Peer Wellness Coaching session, the student was given the opportunity to complete the survey. Some participants may have completed the survey, while other may not have. Additionally, some participants may have completed the survey several times. Furthermore, with the mid-term and final-term survey, students were instructed to complete the survey, only one time; however, due to the anonymity, there was no way to control for a student completing the survey more than once. Given a response rate of 56 percent, for post-session survey and 68 percent of mid-term and final-term survey, a limitation could have been only students with strong opinions—either for or against—completed the survey, excluding a more accurate analysis.

Another limitation included, the data, which were gathered via surveys, were all self-reported information. At the time of this study, there was no evidence to support a measurable shift in students' sense of belonging, other than their self-reported interpretation. As part of

program analysis and development, Peer Wellness Coaching has aimed, for the future, to compare their data with the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1742517, the ACCESS SSTEM project which supports the STEM Student Sense of Belonging research conducted by Drs. Melissa Hanzsek-Brill, Glenn Davis, David Robinson, and Mark Petzold, to interpret a measurable impact on students' Sense of Belonging Index—a proven measure of student retention (Davis et al., 2019)—before and after Peer Wellness Coaching.

A final limitation, from this study, was due to limited number of participants in Peer Wellness Coaching, during the period of data collection. Limited participants equated to relatively small number of responses to both surveys, especially mid-term and final-term survey. With a small sample size, this research cannot confidently be generalized to the entire St. Cloud State University campus.

Recommendations for Future Research

Association between peer/mentor wellness programs has been extensively studied, on college and university campuses, within recent years. Research has shown positive effects between peer/mentor wellness programs and academic success (Dalton & Crosby, 2014) and students' mental/emotional health (Eisenberg et al., 2016); however, research has lacked an association with students' sense of belonging. Continued examination into Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging, in terms of increasing students' retention is vital for the equity of student success. It will be essential for future research to include a variety of student demographics to ensure true generalization to the entire student population.

Future research would benefit from further examination of Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on students' sense of belonging, with regards to effective use of motivational

interviewing. Research has shown substantial support for motivational interviewing being effective at reducing ambivalence towards positive behavior change (Miller & Rollnick, 2012) but whether motivational interviewing is a vital aspect at impacting students' sense of belonging has been less explored. Research would gain worth in a distinction between the values of sufficient motivational interviewing skills in Peer Wellness Coaching sessions, compared to other variables, which may cause an impact to students' sense of belonging.

Additionally, future research would find value in examination of Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on students' academic success. Previous research has shown positive connection between students' academic success to peer/mentor wellness program (Dalton & Crosby, 2014) but what has been less studied is wellness coaching's relationship with academic success, in terms of improving sense of belonging. Understanding benefits of Peer Wellness Coaching to students' academic success, will not only impact students' sense of belonging, but additionally, play a role in matriculation.

Similarly, future research would benefit in examination of Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on student's mental/emotional health. Previous research has shown positive connections between students' mental/emotional health to peer/mentor wellness programs (Eisenberg et al., 2016) but what has been less studied is wellness coaching's relationship with mental/emotional health, in terms of improving sense of belonging. Gaining insight into Peer Wellness Coaching's impact on students' mental/emotional health, in regards to improving sense of belonging, will provide further analysis on the development of an effective wellness coaching program to improve students' retention rates.

Finally, besides examination of different variables associated with students' sense of belonging, the field would also benefit from a thorough exploration of a causal relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging. This study found an association between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging; however, a more complete analysis, understanding the casual effect of Peer Wellness Coaching on students' sense of belonging, in terms of improving retention rates, will assist social workers in providing services to students in need.

Implication for Future Research

Students' rates of retention, to degree completion within six years, has remained less 60 percent over the past several years (Kena et al., 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018c), leading to a generation with no degree and student loan debt. Prior research has shown, a major contributor to students leaving a college or university is due to the students' lack of connection or sense of belonging to their school (Davis et al., 2019). Through this study, a further understanding of Peer Wellness Coaching's relationship with students' sense of belonging was developed, which provided greater insight into opportunities for college and universities to more effectively impact students' retention.

Furthermore, research has shown disadvantaged students, students of color or low-income, being disproportionately impacted by higher rates of non-degree completion (Yeager et al., 2016). It is social workers' ethical obligation to help provide justice for individuals negatively impacted by systemic social injustice (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Many previous research studies have identified a distinct difference in sense of belonging between students of color and students in the majority (Walton & Cohen, 2011); however,

research had lacked solutions to elicit a level playing field. Although this study did not identify race or ethnic status, as a variable, the data analyzed in this study, provided a framework for additional research to examine Peer Wellness Coaching's relationship in helping create an inclusive university environment, where all students, have an enhanced sense of belonging—leading to increased retention.

This study provided evidence to support a relationship exists between Peer Wellness Coaching and students' sense of belonging; however, the field would benefit from additional research on resources and services available to students. It is unrealistic to believe a single program can impact all students' sense of belonging, in the same way. Colleges and universities would gain value examining a holistic approach to students' wellbeing (University of Minnesota, 2008), which includes sense of belonging; exploring a variety of programs and resources to positively impact students' connection to campus. St. Cloud State University has implemented several initiatives to improve students' sense of belonging: all incoming students complete a Sense of Belonging Index survey, each student receives an academic, financial, and career advisor, and educating incoming students on sense of belonging. Continued analysis and evaluation of these programs, as well as others, would best equip guidance on providing opportunities for students' success.

This study, and Peer Wellness Coaching, were grounded in self-authorship theory, which states the decisions students make are influenced by the students' inner ability to formulate their belief system, identity, and social relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2014). Although this study did not directly explore the relationship between Peer Wellness Coaching and concepts of self-authorship theory, prior research by Larcus et al. (2016) explored a relationship between a

similar peer coaching program and self-authorship. It is possible that self-authorship theory played a role in the relationship between variables discovered in this study. As Peer Wellness Coaching may have empowered students to shift into the person they hoped to become; therefore, the students' personal beliefs or sense of identity would have shifted, into their desired self.

Summary

This study examined the impact of a novel intervention strategy, Peer Wellness Coaching, on students' sense of belonging. Through the results of this study, it was discovered that Peer Wellness Coaching did in fact have an impact on students' sense of belonging. Being an explanatory research design, this study left the potential for further analysis of St. Cloud State University's Peer Wellness Coaching program and a causal relationship between students' sense of belonging, as it pertains to students' retention rates. The field of social work requires the ongoing evaluation of programs used to support equity to all individuals and groups of people. Continued evaluation on students' sense of belonging, will allow more equitable opportunities for all students to succeed and thrive within their post-secondary environment.

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Appendix A: Post-Session Survey

ST. CLOUD STATE
UNIVERSITY

I would recommend Peer Wellness Coaching to other students at St. Cloud State University.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

As a result of Peer Wellness Coaching, I am fitting in a St. Cloud State.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

My Coach made me feel comfortable discussing my wellness goals.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The location for my coaching appointment was appropriate for the session.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Student ID (optional)

Sharing your Student ID will help give feedback directly to Coaches on how they can improve their outreach.

Appendix B: Mid-term / Final-term Survey

ST. CLOUD STATE
UNIVERSITY

In what ways has Peer Wellness Coaching been most helpful to you?

Please describe how your coach helped you feel more connected to the St Cloud State community.

Prior to beginning your work with Peer Wellness Coaching, rate your ability to initiate positive change to your behavior(s).

Much lower
Slightly lower
About the same
Slightly higher
Much higher

After your work with Peer Wellness Coaching, rate your ability to initiate positive change to your behavior(s).

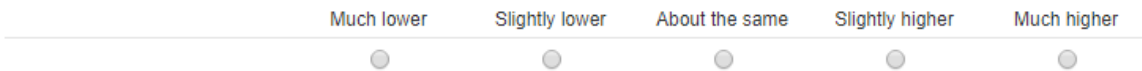
Much lower
Slightly lower
About the same
Slightly higher
Much higher

Prior to beginning your work with Peer Wellness Coaching, rate your ability to maintain positive change to your behavior(s).

Much lower
Slightly lower
About the same
Slightly higher
Much higher

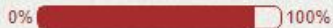
After your work with Peer Wellness Coaching, rate your ability to maintain positive change to your behavior(s).

Much lower Slightly lower About the same Slightly higher Much higher



What changes would you like to see made to the program?

Optional: Enter your Tech ID to be entered into the drawing for 25 HuskyBucks.



Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Jeremy O'Hara
Email: jdohara@go.stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: **Exempt Review**

Project Title Post-Secondary Belongingness Scores: How Peer Wellness Coaching Impacts the Results

Advisor Sara DeVos

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB#: 1962 - 2535	Type: Exempt Review	Today's Date: 4/3/2020
1st Year Approval Date: 4/3/2020	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date:	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date: