SYNTHESIZING UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENT PERSISTENCE:
A META-ANALYTIC STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL (162 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Jian Li, Ph.D.

Institutions have invested considerably in resources and staff to increase student success and persistence. However, retention rates have remained fairly steady over time. The purpose of this study was to synthesize undergraduate student persistence models into a singular parsimonious model using meta-analytic structural equation modeling to test the accuracy of the model across diverse studies. The analysis was successful in supporting many aspects of the major theoretical models proposed about college student persistence from a wide breadth of research on this subject. It was concluded that academic integration, social integration, institutional commitment, and organizational factors of the college/university all significantly contribute to student persistence. Student background characteristics and student external factors were not significantly related to college student persistence. The conclusions of this analysis suggest that all types of institutions invest in programs and services related to academic and social integration, institutional commitment, and organizational factors of the university environment. Recent statistical methods published by Cheung in 2015 made it possible to apply structural equation modeling techniques to meta-analytic research, which allowed for a more robust and complex analysis. Therefore, the contribution of this work is notable because it applies rigorous statistical methods and analysis to substantiate and/or question common theoretical constructs related to college student persistence over a period of 40 years.