THRIVE: WELL-BEING AND SELF-CARE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EMPLOYEES:

A MIXED METHODS RESEARCH STUDY

A Dissertation
by
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**Abstract**

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EMPLOYEES: A MIXED METHODS RESEARCH STUDY

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This mixed methods research study explores the interconnection of job satisfaction, well-being/flourishing, self-care, belonging, and trust in employees at an Urban Community College, UCC (Name removed to protect privacy of participants). Research has shown that there are a variety of factors that contribute to employee burnout, retention, and separation. The goal of this study is to shift the culture of the workplace by focusing on positive well-being for all employees. I collaborated with, surveyed, interviewed, and held focus groups with approximately 200 adult employees (over two cohorts) who work at this Urban Community College. Employees were invited to participate in a six-part professional development program called Thrive. This program was created utilizing many of the principles of positive psychology. It was designed to increase personal engagement as well as collaboration and teamwork amongst participants.

Many educators and educational support staff feel disconnected, not appreciated, out of place, and on edge. Those who do not feel included, feel repressed, or do not feel like they belong become detached and uninvolved. Passion and enthusiasm for working with students was not an issue. In this study, lack of energy, resources, time, and lack of appreciation were the

driving forces that caused lower job satisfaction and flourishing scores. The findings suggest that a positive environment, a focus on employee care and opportunities to engage in collaborative activities as well as a culture of recognition, all have significant impacts on an employees overall well-being. Workplace wellness could become the new normal; happy, healthy workers can lead to a happy and healthy workplace. Employees that are motivated and thriving will be happier, higher performing employees. They will pass on their attitudes and principles to those around them.

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Thank you, Appalachian State University, for another amazing experience. This is my third degree completed at APP State. A special thank you to Chris, Karen, and Shawn for guiding me through this process. Your wisdom and patience have been invaluable. Chris, thank you for reminding me that messy writing is part of the process and the encouragement to keep pushing forward. Karen, thank you for reminding me to breathe, sing, dance and enjoy the experience. Shawn, thank you for the reality checks and words of encouragement when I needed them. I want to thank everyone at my institution for their support and encouragement throughout this process. Jon, James, Janet, and so many others have been partners in this Wellness journey. Molly, Bek, Eric, Lisa, and Kathleen, thank you for your edits, thoughts, and suggestions when I was at a loss for words. It takes a village to finish a dissertation.

**Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my children, my chosen family, cohort 2020 2A and all my Thrive participants. Thank you all for taking this journey with me. The endless hours of classes, reading, and writing. Thank you for all the text messages, words of encouragement and putting up with a few bouts of the galloping grumps. I love you all, you know who you are. I could not have done this without you. It is finished!! Let the next part of this journey begin.

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**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

*"I knew who I was this morning, but I've changed a few times since then" (*Carroll, 1865, p. 90).

**Introduction: The Thrive Story**

Every research expedition has a start, but good research never really ends; it simply evolves and creates an adventure of its own. This dissertation starts with a little of my personal story, my theoretical framework, and my research perspective. It plunges into the research which discusses burnout, job stress, well-being, trust, belonging, and self-care. An explanation of how the Thrive program was created, its purpose and how it evolved and changed is followed by an exploration of employees' perspectives (including my own) on how they fared before and after the program. The dissertation offers a discussion of the changes in the institution due to the Thrive program, lessons learned and further research questions that could evolve from this project.

In the beginning, it is important to understand our personal stories; after all, we need to know our own narratives if we want to learn how they interlace with others'. This project is focused on the Thrive program which is all about making the lives of the people around me better. My journey and the evolution of the Thrive program are intertwined throughout this venture. My interest in people began when I was in elementary school. My parents divorced when I was seven and both remarried. My mother moved us across the country, and I had to start a new school in third grade. I was a shy child, and making friends in a place that was foreign to me was difficult. I heard "you aren't from around here" daily and was called "four-eyes" from the moment I arrived in my new school. I was a good student and found that I was at least a year ahead of my peers in my new school. I was put into the academically gifted program and

excelled academically. I learned that if I buried myself in my education, I could find a reprieve from my social struggles.

My teachers liked me, and I felt safe with them. I discovered the value of education at this early age, and it became my way out of the circumstances in which I found myself. This is where my love of learning began, and my thirst for knowledge expanded into a thirst for understanding people. I was perplexed by them. I wanted to know what makes some people so mean and what makes some selflessly give their lives to others. My interests varied, but I knew I wanted to do something to make things better and improve the lives of others. I am a natural helper. Psychology became my passion. I earned my BS and MA in psychology and began working in direct care and counseling. I continue to live and breathe people; I am always pondering why people do what they do. What are they thinking? What are they feeling? And how do these thoughts and feelings influence their behavior?

When I was in graduate school the first time, I was asked which "school" of psychology I believed in; I never had a good answer. They didn't accept "all of them" or "none of them" as appropriate answers. I simply identified as "eclectic," which did not sit well with the purists in the field. Several years after graduation, the opportunity to teach arose and I jumped on it. For me, education was life changing, and I wanted to be able to give others that experience as well. I have been in higher education, in the classroom and in leadership roles, for more than 20 years. I strive to teach my students, and those I supervise, tools that they can use to be successful in their lives and careers. Palmer (2000) said it perfectly: "A scholar is committed to building on knowledge that others have gathered, correcting it, confirming it, enlarging it" (p. 50). If we allow knowledge to change us, we can slowly change the world.

I applied and was accepted into the Doctoral Program in the early Spring of 2020. I was looking for something to challenge me, to open my eyes and give me a fresh perspective on the world. I have been trained in the ways of science and I believe that the scientific method can be an effective tool to solve some of the world's problems. It has been part of my personal expedition to find my purpose and meaning, utilize my creativity and find my own style of leadership. When I started this program, I wanted to find ways to combine my psychology background with my years of experience in education to try to slowly change the environment/work culture at my institution. Little did I know that I would embark on a life-changing venture that would not only change the way I saw the world but would change the way the world saw me.

In March of 2020, the world changed before our eyes. The COVID-19 pandemic halted all our plans, and changed the world of education as we know it. I saw my friends and colleagues rise to the challenges and do the best we could with what we had. We changed everything about how we taught and how we provided services to our students. We had to modify nearly every aspect of our jobs. The word "change" became our daily life. The pandemic continued and people started getting tired; after all, this was a worldwide phenomenon. Burnout and mental health issues hit an all-time high. In the Spring of 2020, I was also preparing to teach my positive psychology course for the first time, set to roll out in the summer of 2020. It was originally part of a study abroad program to Europe, that was canceled. The goal was to teach positive psychology as we strolled around Europe. We were going to stop in the park and do yoga, enjoy walks along the Seine, take in a west end theater show and marvel at the amazing art in the Louvre. I went from planning an in-person class in Europe to a fully remote class that everyone would be doing from their living room during quarantine. The positive psychology course filled

up in that first semester and has filled every semester since. Students say, "It is a life changing course for them."

Positive psychology comes from the humanistic school of psychology. It is based on the idea that we seek purpose and meaning in our lives. It is focused on strengths and keeping our minds and bodies in connection with each other (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology embraces multiple facets of our being and helps us find balance. Balance is an important word, for me, and was the inspiration for this whole journey. The combination of the positive psychology course and the doctoral curriculum became the framework for what would be my ongoing theme through the doctoral program and my dissertation.

The Thrive program started out as a conversation with a colleague about my positive psychology course. Through a series of conversations, I was offered an internship to work with my colleague's department, the Center for Teaching and Learning. My internship turned into my dissertation project and culminated in the creation of the Thrive program, which is based on the core principles of positive psychology. Positive psychology changed my life and I wanted to share it with the entire college. I wanted to bring a little light into our "world of chaos."

The objectives of Thrive were simple: teach people the core principles of positive psychology and give them a variety of ideas to incorporate into their jobs and personal lives. The focus of Thrive is on employee wellness and positive mental health. This program used my strengths, the love of learning and the appreciation of beauty, and allowed me to combine my love of art, nature, and mindfulness and the desire to help others flourish. I created a series of professional development sessions. The Thrive program was developed in the fall of 2020 and the first professional development cohort took place in the spring of 2021. The second cohort took place in the spring of 2022. My original hope was to spread these ideas to all parts of the

college and to encourage an atmosphere of teamwork. It evolved into much more than that. In the next section I am going to explain my theoretical perspectives concerning research and how that formulated my ideas and inspirations for this project.

## Theoretical Framework

In my doctoral program, we studied power, politics, leadership, privilege, and the ins and outs of the educational systems, flaws, and all. We were challenged to look at ourselves, our institutions, and to explore the research paradigms. When conducting research, one must start with the process of personal inquiry followed by an interpretation of what others understand (Coiro et al., 2016). I would argue that the first inquiry questions start through conversations with others long before the official research begins. Who am I as a researcher (research paradigm)? How do I view knowledge and what is knowledge (epistemology)? What are my values as a researcher (axiology)? What is reality and/or what counts as real (ontology)? How can I go about gaining the knowledge I need, and what are the best procedures for doing so (methodology)? Palmer (1993) noted the idea of communal knowledge, stating that "we look at knowledge and research to transform our mind and how we see things and work together to grow our knowledge and to find a consensus" (p. 9).

There is a direct relationship between my research interests and the pragmatic way of thinking. I am a proponent for action research and improvement science, both of which are based on pragmatism. Being a social scientist and an educator requires versatility and resourcefulness. I am a natural problem solver. I try to use multiple approaches and include multiple perspectives when looking at any problem. Once I analyze a problem, I want to move into action, and discover possible solutions. I have never liked the idea that there is only one way to believe, or one way to do something. I believe that there is always a way to make a small difference and that

each small change can lead to larger changes. I am also an optimist and I believe that what we do makes a difference. Greene and Freed (2005) encouraged us to make research as meaningful to others as it is to ourselves. My current research inquiry combined components of the frameworks of pragmatism and critical theory. Recent researchers that draw from both theories have coined the term "critical pragmatism" (Bourgeois 2010; Forester, 1999; Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Kadlec, 2006; Pappas, 2016). Understanding our own ideology helps us to understand why we do what we do. In the following sections, I will highlight a few of the key components of classical pragmatism, critical theory, and the newer ideology of critical pragmatism, giving the reader the foundation of my research perspective.

**Key Assumptions of Pragmatism**

Pragmatism began to emerge as a theory of truth through the ideas of William James, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Peirce, and John Dewey. Pragmatism continued to evolve throughout the 20th century, being picked up by other theorists such as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, and Stanley Fish, with an intention of addressing some of the injustices within our society (Bourgeois 2010; Forester, 1999; Harwood & Hadley 2004; Kadlec, 2006; Pappas, 2016). Pragmatism is based on the idea that we take what we know at any given moment, and we use it to make decisions that guide our lives and our behavior. Pragmatism considers words and thought as tools for prediction, problem solving, and action. The pragmatic research approach is about assessing a problem, understanding it, and then trying to find ways to change it (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As a pragmatist, it is essential to understand that no two people are the same; their experiences and knowledge determine their current and future behavior. Pragmatists start and end with these questions: What works? Who will it work for? And under what circumstances will it work?

The epistemology of pragmatism is the notion that we gain knowledge from our experiences of life itself. We use what we know to guide our behavior and respond to the problems of life as we experience them. James (1995) states that all realities influence our practice, and that influence is the meaning for us. James said, "there is no one truth: truth is plural, truth makes itself as we go" (p. 51). In his essay "Circles," Emerson (1995) states that there are no fixtures in nature, the universe is fluid and volatile, and permanence is but a world of degrees. Emerson believed that the key to every person is their thoughts, and that the life of a person is a self-evolving circle. Emerson indicated that "our truth and our knowledge change as a new truth emerges. In nature, every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten" (p. 32). We are different day-to-day, and nothing is ever the same as it was before. Our truth is made through knowledge, and knowledge comes from our freedom, our creativity, and our overall intelligence.

The ontology of pragmatism is not a one-size-fits-all reality. Pragmatists believe that reality is created as individuals interact with the world. Reality and our knowledge change based on our experiences. Charles Peirce (1995) writes that "reality is independent, not necessarily of thought in general, but only of what you or what any individual thinks about. We encounter reality, but do not possess it; it is still in the making and awaits part of its completion from the future (p. 104)". Through self-awareness, reflection, and social intelligence, we take what we learn, change ourselves, and create a better future based on our knowledge. We are a work in progress and there is always room for growth. As we say in counseling, it is the process, not the product.

Pragmatic axiology is based on the idea that we are individuals and that what works for one person may not work for someone else. If we allow knowledge to change us, we can, in turn,

change the world (Palmer, 1993). Like our reality, our values can also change from moment to moment, day to day, based on our circumstances at any given time. Our values lead us to create solutions to our problems, and these can change from generation to generation and from culture to culture.

Pragmatism is based on what works, which means that it can draw from any of the paradigms, theories, and methodologies to answer the questions and solve the problems at hand. When researching recent pragmatic theorists, I could see how they also included components of critical theory and combinations of social constructivism and poststructuralism. This is pragmatism at its heart. A pragmatist would never be able to put themselves in a box and stay there. They would create something with the box and find a way to show others how to create their own unique boxes.

Greene and Freed (2005) express that researchers learn by doing and that our individual perspectives are constructed and reconstructed in environments where research ethics give the researcher choice and autonomy to find methods that make sense to them. Greene and Freed (2005) compare research to theatrical improv and dance; as the music changes, so should the dance that accompanies the music. I am aware that most researchers criticize eclecticism and pragmatism, which is discouraging. The criticisms usually come down to the question of who is right, who is more powerful, and the idea that only the truth they believe in is what ultimately matters (Bourgeois, 2010; Harwood & Hadley, 2004). I would argue that pragmatism does not disagree with any of the other theories; at the core, it says everything is up for interpretation and that we create our own realities based on our perceptions, our thoughts, and our beliefs. Pragmatism looks for answers to our questions. How do we guide our knowledge and our values? How do they influence our daily life? We look at knowledge and research to transform

our mind and how we see things and work together to grow our knowledge and to find a consensus (Palmer, 1993). Pragmatism is focused on our thoughts themselves with the goal of leading to change. "When we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change" (Dyer, 2017, p. 39).

**Key Assumptions of Critical Theory**

Critical theory is a theoretical tradition developed by Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse at the Frankfurt School. Their work is a critical response to the works of Marx, Kant, Hegel, Weber, and Freud (Corradetti, 2011). Critical theory looks at the world, society, and culture through both the lens of the researcher and the community. Brewer and Miller (2003) define critical theory as a high-level appraisal of society, specifically society's constriction on the thoughts and actions of individuals. The essence of critical theory is to understand the current social structures and discover the underlying assumptions and practices that dominate and oppress people. Critical researchers take what they learn to expose and challenge the dominant practices and explore alternative opportunities (Horkheimer, 1982; Scherer, 2009).

Critical theory is transactional and transformative; the goal is to make the voices of the people heard. Through interaction, stories, and a focus on social justice, these voices expose inequities and inform the world about them. Critical theory seeks to expose the domination, control, and suppression that hides behind that which at first appears neutral, progressive, and necessary. Horkheimer's (1993) definition of critical theory is dependent on being descriptive, practical, and standardizing. Critical theorists aim to create social change through the identification and illumination of those with less power (Bohman, 1999; Brewer & Miller, 2003; Corradetti, 2011). The overarching goal of critical theory is to break down the walls of tyranny,

expose the power discrepancies, and empower those who have not been allowed to give their voice to the world. Critical theory is about inequity, social justice, and change.

Critical theory is based on the notion that we cannot separate ourselves from what we already know, and we gain knowledge by interacting and engaging with other people's experiences. Knowledge is to help explain and understand. It is meant to be practical and emancipatory. The goal is to look at history; look beneath the surface to find out how people are exploited in society (Brewer & Miller, 2003). Hearing other people's stories is vital to critical theory. Multiplicity leads to better interpretation; going beyond a single story helps us understand the bigger picture. It allows us to understand, to take an interest in other people's perspectives, and to look at things from multiple angles (Chinnery, 2008; Grumet, 1987).

The ontology (how we exist and how we determine other things exist) of critical theory is that our reality is created by social forces. It is influenced by cultural, political, economic, and gender-based norms. The social constructs have been created and solidified over time and are taken to be our reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theory shows us how our reality can be biased and oppressive in nature and tries to expose the unjust social compositions of our world. It encourages us to open our senses to what is going on around us.

The axiology of critical theory (values) is based on the idea that we as individuals need to focus on social justice and change. Once we gain knowledge and understand the power structures, we need to do something to push for democracy for everyone. We must start by looking at ourselves and then turn our attention to society. We all have intentional or unintentional biases and discriminations that invade our lives. Whether we realize it or not, we are all guilty of implicit bias -- buried prejudice. We start with self-reflection, confronting our own biases, examining our areas of privilege. Chinnery (2008) declares "we must be willing to

turn ourselves inside out, give up the sense of who we are, and be willing to see ourselves

through the unflattering light of another's angry gaze" (p.45).

Critical researchers expose and challenge the dominant practices and explore alternative

opportunities with the goal of giving people a voice and emancipation (Horkheimer, 1982;

Scherer, 2009). Critical research should have a direct social impact and include social change

and the voice of the people. Researchers ask questions such as: who is in power, how are they

oppressing people, and who dismantles the status quo? Grumet (1987) demonstrates an example

of critical theory in practice. Grumet discusses the feminist perspective and refutes that teaching

is stigmatized as "women's work" and needs to be transformed. Grumet shows how our

perceptions should be changed and indicates that teaching should be framed as important, not

branded as women's work but instead changed into the phrase "work of women" (p. 87). Grumet

discusses how important it is for women in education to take what we know, how we feel, our

experiences, and change them for the next generation. Critical inquiry seeks to find a way to look

at what has happened in the past, enrich the lives that have been oppressed in the present, and try

to change the world for others in the future.

**Key Assumptions of Critical Pragmatism**

Critical pragmatists combine both the methods of pragmatism and critical theory by

harnessing the strengths of both perspectives. It is meant to be adaptive with an emphasis on

creating change. Forester (2013) emphasizes that the distinctive difference of critical pragmatism

from classical pragmatism is the focus on how power relations contribute to the problems of

marginalized communities. Critical pragmatism is user-centered and problem specific (Feinberg,

2014). The goal is to critically examine the power generating rules of society as they intersect

with issues of marginalized communities, and then to challenge mainstream liberal approaches to

social justice. Critical pragmatism is still problem driven and is seen as a practical approach to specific problems posed by life as we experience; however, when engaging in improvement work, critical theorists focus on power dynamics and systemic deficits (Kadlec, 2006). Forester (2013) identifies critical pragmatism in five steps:

> "(a) analyze a problem/process; (b) look for inconsistencies and deficits in structure; (c) understand the situation/system from the community perspective; (d) engage the stakeholders in designing/producing the solutions; and (e) implement the solutions with the goal of social change" (p. 14).

Critical pragmatism involves a transparent participatory process and uses the power of the combined wisdom of many, encouraging stakeholders to engage in the full process (Forester, 1999). Greene and Freed (2005) state that we are happiest when we are in collaborative relationships, where we work together towards a common goal, doing research that invites participation and shows respect for the individual. The goal is not to change the people themselves but improve the system at hand (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Research in the critical pragmatic lens is about understanding the problem and then acting. How do we gain a better understanding of how the concepts of power, culture, social class, and inequities are involved in a problem? How do we take what we know to bring about immediate social change to make the lives of everyone better?

The critical pragmatic approach uses a mixed methods design of research combining several approaches (Forester, 2013). Critical pragmatists look at the numbers and the stories of individuals, take both things into consideration and then ask the question; what are we going to do about it? The idea is to look at things like the broader concepts, patterns, or concerns about inequality, and then look to see what policies/programs/practices are in place (Forester, 2013;

Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The critical pragmatic nature is embedded in improvement science, transformative leadership, and action research. These ideas are all examples of how multiple paradigms can be combined to create something that can be practical, emancipatory, and change-making.

## My Research Perspective

I am a critical pragmatist by nature and a firm believer in the idea that if you do not like the way something is, you should do something to change it. My approach to research is wide-ranging. I believe that all change starts within each of us. I am a woman of action; if I see people hurting and see the world around me collapsing, I want to do something to fix it. If I cannot fix it, I can at least help to improve the quality of life and decrease distress. My goal is to help others see their strengths and teach new skills in the process. Palmer (1993) states that every way of knowing becomes a way of living and education is "soul-making." The eclectic nature of pragmatism allows me to pull from multiple theories and use a variety of methods to develop a plan that will work in a particular set of circumstances. I understand the importance and benefits of utilizing a combination of research paradigms and methodologies to solve a problem.

As both an educator and a supervisor, I have a unique role that allows me to influence my institution from multiple angles. I have a direct influence on the students and faculty, and an indirect influence on the administration. I am an advocate for empowerment. Empowering and educating individuals to analyze, think critically, and move into action can move us into a sense of reconstruction, hopefully making a more inclusive, forgiving world than the one we have right now. James (1995) argues that the greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter their life by altering their attitudes of mind (p. 69). I believe in the ideas of a true

democracy and equitable society. I want to do what I can to improve our world one thought and one action at a time.

Over the centuries, our social structure has territorialized spaces, including our schools, constructing them as places where the social policies are enacted, reconfigured, and, above all, maintained (Allen & Liou, 2019). Children are taught what is expected of them through strict disciplinary practices and expectations imposed on them the minute they enter a classroom (Buchanan & Badham, 2020). It is vital that we look at how power and politics play a role within our society and our organizations.

The education system mirrors many other power structures in place throughout America (Buchanan & Badham, 2020; Tate, 1997). It is vital that we look at how power and politics play a role within our society and our organizations. There are power struggles, divisions based on belief systems, organizational changes, unequal policies, archaic and oppressive procedures, unequal pay scales and so much more. The policies, expectations, and cultural conventions that we follow are unwritten, and written, into the bylaws. They are modeled after the same ideas we find in the United States Constitution and most other policies that have established American culture and institutions.

In most institutions the president, CEO, or other members of the executive leadership team are the decision makers. The expectations of behavior and the social order are dictated by this group. They sustain their power through policies and structures put in place to protect the dominant culture, those in power, and continue to minoritize others, such as the faculty and staff (Buchanan & Badham, 2020). Like most institutions, those in power of the education system hold on to their power at all costs. Those in power decide what is going to happen and roll out

these expectations to the rest of the institution. We are expected to accept it as normal and act accordingly or get out of the way.

We maintain the social rules/contracts without challenging, thinking about their impact, or going past the idea that "this is the way it is" or that "this is how we have always done it" (Tate, 1997). Culture itself is powerful because it is present in everything we do and at the same time difficult to name or identify (Okun, 1999). The dominant culture dictates where people can live, where they can go, the basic contours of their lives down to the clothing they wear and the type of education they get. The characteristics of the dominant culture show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us; "they are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group." (Okun, 1999, p. 1).

We live and work in a racially biased, patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist society that dehumanizes and represses anyone that is a member of one of these "outgroups," also known as marginalized populations. Those in the minority have been discriminated against since the moment they were born (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). They have never been given the same privileges as the ruling class. Freire (1968) mentioned that the oppressed internalize the image of the oppressor and adopt the oppressor's guidelines. They are used to being oppressed and do not know how to speak for themselves. It is important to give everyone a responsibility and process in which all are allowed to grow; through this, we can end the silence to give all people a voice (Freire, 1968).

Pinar (2011) states that freedom in education has been stolen by corporate/political America; those who dictate education determine what we can and cannot say in our classrooms. We need to let the world know of this injustice and fight for their rights to have an equitable opportunity. As educators, it is time to take back the parts we can control. Who dismantles the

"status quo?" Who can make the changes we so desperately need in education? If schools were all equally funded and we were able to give equal resources to all students, we could raise the bar for everyone and we could change some of the educational inequities. Education is one way to even the playing field if we give the same opportunities to all our students. As educators, we need to give our students the chance to be creative and think critically. We need to engage students, give them reasons to want to learn and the ability to think for themselves. To change the system, we must change the way we teach and change the content we teach. We can spend all day "feeding" students information, but they must choose to engage with the material. They need to choose to use their education to change their world. Education can inform them, give them the same rights and privileges, and give them a voice (Pinar, 2011).

Real change is not easy and does not happen overnight. We may not be able to change everything at once, but over time if we work together, we can continue to improve our policies and procedures. We can make a difference in our institutions and our communities one person at a time. "When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower." (Heijer, 2018, p. 38). There is no easy answer to ending all the world's challenges with racism and the social tendency to resort to "otherness." It needs to start with naming the problems for what they are and having the willingness to analyze them. We need to address the isolation, oppression, and hypervisibility of our marginalized populations (Haynes et al., 2020). We need to cultivate a deep engagement within the community, allow exposure to diverse practices, and explore multiple perspectives (Capper, 2018). We need to have multiple opportunities for learning, give people a voice, have realistic expectations, recognize everyone's contributions, allow for differences, include everyone in the decision-making processes, take the time to slow down and give people time to think creatively, allow people to raise hard issues and

challenge the status quo (Allen & Liou, 2019; Buchanan & Badham, 2020; Capper, 2018). Our institutions need to encourage teamwork, develop shared goals, look at the long term, and be ok with being uncomfortable. The ideal leader in education is one who can discuss and consider ideas, accepting challenges as Socratic rather than personal. (Buchanan & Badham, 2020; Okun, 1999).

## The Problem and the Significance of the Study

Throughout the past few years both employees and students have struggled with mental health as well as a sense of belonging and trust (Lischer et al., 2021; Salimi et al., 2021). The success of faculty and staff in higher education is vital for student's educational success (Deming & Figlio, 2016). Employees and students need to be engaged, have reasons to learn, be creative, think critically, and ultimately flourish.

With the onset of COVID-19, the world of education as we knew it changed. We were asked to change every aspect of the way we teach. New methods and innovative technologies were now needed to transform traditional classroom instruction into a format better suited to the new virtual learning environments. We had to learn to teach, record, and move all our content online, and be sure that we had accessibility standards in place to reach all our students. In essence, we all learned how to add "producer" to our long list of skills to put on our resumes. I was talking to my team online after another long day of Zoom calls. We were counting down the days of what seemed to be the longest semester in the history of our teaching careers. We went from teaching and learning in ways that we were used to (classroom, activities, lecture, etc.) to transforming into multi-modal experts overnight. We had to learn the juggle of talking to a group of students while managing a virtual classroom and covering content. The learning curve was dramatic for everyone, teachers, and students alike.

As educators, we are used to stress and consistent change, but this type of stress was different. Words such as "burnout," "fatigue," "anxiety," "fear," "isolation," and "stress" were the main parts of our conversation. It felt like everyone was in survival mode. These feelings are not necessarily new to the educational arena, but the pandemic brought all of these to the surface rapidly. This story is not unique to my institution; it has moved into most realms of education. We know it is impossible to do our job and do it well if we are in a constant state of stress and burnout.

Teachers and student-support employees in all levels of education are exposed to high levels of stress in the ever-changing world of education (Connolly, 2000). They start out with the passion to change the world, but many find themselves exhausted and are ready to leave the field of education in a matter of a few years. Having a sense of belonging, feelings of trust, and overall job satisfaction are vital to an educator's retention. Schools that focus on employees' well-being and have strategies in place to combat burnout and compassion fatigue are more successful in decreasing attrition rates (North Carolina Community College System, 2022; Kortum, 2014; Lawson & Meyers, 2011; Luthans & Frey, 2017).

I have spent many years observing what makes a good teacher and what keeps them motivated, effective, and happy. I am naturally curious; questions consistently enter my mind and spur my passion for research. What inspires teachers? What keeps them up at night? Why do so many hit a breaking point and leave? Is it the work environment? The students? The lack of self-care? I want to hear people's stories and understand their perspectives. I have seen amazing educators come and go. They have a passion for teaching, a passion for the students; but they burn out, they get frustrated, and they leave to go on to other things. Educators are some of the most selfless people out there. They put their all into what they do, and sometimes they struggle

or neglect to take care of themselves. Teacher attrition has always been high, with nearly eight percent of teachers leaving the profession every year (Jotkoff, 2022). In a recent National Education Association (NEA) survey, more than half (55%) of NEA members say they are more likely to leave or retire from education sooner than planned because of the pandemic. When asked why they were leaving, teachers stated that the working conditions were unsustainable and they were pushed to a breaking point, with no relief in sight. This trend is not only happening in the educational arena; according to a large survey of the global workforce, one in five employees were planning to quit their jobs in 2022 (Ellerbeck, 2022). When asked why they were leaving, most stated they are seeking higher salaries and a more flexible work environment. Over two-thirds said they were seeking more fulfillment in the workplace (Ellerbeck, 2022).

My pragmatic nature pushes me to take what I know and to find ways to fix the problem, or at least make it better. This is what spurred the development of Thrive. Thrive has a participatory focus including education, collaboration, and teamwork. It is meant to empower the employees themselves to take part in the change process as well as develop ways to increase cooperation across departments and divisions. The Thrive program utilizes a variety of positive psychology strategies and techniques that have been beneficial in increasing overall happiness, well-being, and overall health. The interventions of the Thrive program include gratitude journals, gratitude letters, mindfulness/meditation practices, goal setting, meaning making, strengths-based practices, stress management, health and vitality practices, and educational tools geared towards increasing overall self-care strategies. My hypothesis is that if employees have a positive workplace, with proper support in place, they will thrive, even with the ongoing stressors indicative of working in education. If employees change how they feel about work, becoming engaged and energized, it will spread to their classroom and all their interactions with

students. Employing such a program would include a focus on both mental and physical health as well as how to manage student issues. I want to see my colleagues and my students thriving, to have a greater sense of trust, well-being, and overall job satisfaction. Positive psychology reminds us that we are all human beings and focuses on all aspects of the person.

## Purpose Statement

This mixed methods research study explores the interconnection of job satisfaction, well-being/flourishing, self-care, belonging, and trust in employees at an Urban Community College, UCC (Name removed to protect privacy of participants). The goal of this study was to shift the culture of the workplace, by focusing on positive well-being for all employees. I collaborated with, surveyed, interviewed, and held focus groups with approximately 200 adult employees (over two cohorts) who work at this Urban Community College. Employees were invited to participate in a six-part professional development program called Thrive. This program was created utilizing many of the principles of positive psychology. It was designed to increase personal engagement as well as collaboration and teamwork amongst participants. A full list of the session topics and activities is listed in chapter three.

## Research Questions

Research has shown that there are a variety of factors that contribute to employee burnout, retention, and separation (Jex & Britt, 2008; Freudenberger, 1975; Mishra & Mishra, 2013). This research study focuses on five of these factors: job satisfaction, overall well-being/flourishing, psychological safety/trust, acceptance/belonging and self-care. Three research questions formed the foundation of this research study.

Q1. How are Urban Community College employees faring in relation to the factors such as job satisfaction and overall well-being/flourishing that can often lead to burnout?

Q2. How are employees reporting their overall sense of trust and belonging within the Urban Community College setting?

Q3. Are the factors leading to burnout, employee perceptions of their overall well-being, and feelings of trust/ belonging impacted by participation in the Thrive Program?

## Organization of the Dissertation

The first chapter of this dissertation introduces my background, my theoretical framework, the purpose of the study, the overall research topic and the research questions that are guiding this study, as well as the significance and benefits of doing this research. Chapter two examines the literature surrounding the reasons educators leave their jobs, focusing on job satisfaction, burnout, compassion fatigue, and overall well-being. This chapter also investigates belonging, trust, and psychological safety as well as exploring how some of the principles and interventions found in positive psychology and expressive arts therapy can make a difference in these factors. Chapter three provides an explanation of the research methodology used in this study. It explores mixed methods, the different qualitative and quantitative measures that were used in this study. Chapter four offers a report on the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative measures, descriptive statistics, and an integration of the findings. Chapter five discusses the findings, overall conclusions for the current practice, implications for future inquiry and a proposal for moving forward with the Thrive Program in the future. IRB approvals, consent forms, the various surveys and qualitative questions are attached in the appendices.

**CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

*"Teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be"* (Palmer, 2007, p. 11).

**Why do Educators Leave the Workplace?**

People are drawn to education for many reasons. Whether they are teachers, counselors, or in a student support role, those drawn to education want to make a difference in the lives of their students. They have a passion for people and feel like teaching fulfills their sense of purpose (Hansen, 1995). Educators see the profession as an opportunity to change the world itself by supporting each student's educational aspiration (Palmer, 2007). Many are drawn to the field because they had an inspirational teacher/coach and want to be that person for someone else (Hansen, 1995). Teachers often want to spark a love of learning in their students and are passionate about their subject; they want to share it with the world (Palmer, 2007). Palmer (2007) says every profession that attracts people for "reasons of the heart," such as education, is a profession in which people and the work they do suffer from losing heart. How does this happen? How do we go from passion to apathy? Why do good educators burn out and leave their workplace?

The answer to the question of why people leave education is complex and comes from a variety of reasons; it is not something that happens overnight. There are many aspects of education that are rewarding and inspirational, and there are also many aspects that are challenging and exhausting. Educators in general, but community college educators, face a variety of challenges in their everyday work life that are not part of the official job description. Education is complicated and full of surprises, both good and bad. There are multiple factors that build up over time that push people to the breaking point. College educators are exposed to a variety of circumstances that they never bargained for, at times putting them into the role of a

social worker, without the proper training. Educators are exposed to violence, trauma, mental health struggles, substance abuse, and an assortment of other circumstances (Hydon, 2015; Pettit, 2006). Other contributing factors are long hours, overwork, low pay, few resources, isolation, lack of respect from superiors, lack of autonomy, behavioral issues from the students, unrealistic expectations, demanding schedules, organizational pressures, constant organizational change, burnout, and compassion fatigue (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019). There is not one specific reason why educators find themselves at the breaking point. The research focuses on several of the factors that push people to leave their careers more rapidly than others: burnout/compassion fatigue, low job satisfaction, a low sense of belonging/trust in the organization, organizational trauma, low levels of psychological safety, and a lack of focus on well-being/self-care within the workplace (Hydon, 2015; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019; Pettit, 2006; Yang et al., 2009).

**Burnout/Compassion Fatigue**

When learning to become teachers, candidates are trained to focus on curriculum and lesson plans but are not prepared for the emotional aspects of teaching, the pain and suffering that their students face, the tragedies, the hardships, the adversities; they are not prepared for the other aspects of the job (Hydon, 2015; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019; Pettit, 2016). Educators tend to accept that stress, sadness, and fatigue are the default and often do not stop to question where these feelings are coming from (Pettit, 2016).

The concept of burnout was originally defined by Freudenberger (1975) who stated that burnout includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decreased sense of accomplishment. Burnout and compassion fatigue are the result of chronic stress associated with working in environments that have excessive work demands, few resources, unclear expectations, exposure to secondary trauma, and a low sense of belonging to the organization

(Hydon, 2015; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019). Palmer (2000) described burnout as a state of emptiness, not only resulting from giving all we have but also revealing the nothingness from which we were trying to give in the first place.

Institutes of higher education and K-12 schools are faced with continuous organizational change; there are new technologies, cultural differences and continuous new expectations being implemented. A constantly changing workplace can lead to high levels of stress among employees (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019). Teacher stress, left unchecked, can lead to burnout, and contribute to the high turnover rate in education (Yang et al., 2009). Over 40 percent of teachers report feeling high stress every day during the school year; within six months to a year, many people new to the education arena find themselves suffering from burnout and compassion fatigue with more that 30 percent of teachers and professors experiencing high levels of burnout (Farber, 1991; Hutel et al., 2013). Stress and burnout are rampant within the educational arena with forty-one percent of new teachers leaving the profession within their first four years (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019; Farber, 1991).

**Trauma**

Trauma is abundant throughout our society and is especially common in childhood and the young adult years. Trauma is defined as the experience of intense physical or psychological stress in response to an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual (SAMHSA, 2015). Research on adverse childhood events (ACEs) confirms that the number of children and young adults who have experienced trauma is high with disproportionately higher rates in low-income schools and community colleges (Brunzell et al., 2016). These (ACEs) can have impacts that extend far beyond childhood, and include higher risks for alcoholism, liver disease, suicide, and other health problems later in life (SAMHSA,

2015). Trauma affects the lives and well-being of students who are directly involved and has a secondary effect on the educators who work with these students (Brunsell et al., 2016; Fowler, 2015). When educators are exposed to students with trauma, they are at high risk for secondary trauma, also known as compassion fatigue, or sometimes labeled as the "cost of caring" for others (Figley, 1995). Examples of secondary trauma include learning about the death of a student's loved one or hearing about a student's experience with sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, disasters, homelessness, or food insecurity; these are rampant in low-income schools and community colleges (Bridgeman et al., 2018; Figley, 1999; Lynch & Glass, 2020).

The impact on educators' well-being ranges widely depending on the support they receive, how they reflect and make sense of the traumas encountered, and whether they internalize the events. There is an inherent risk of significant emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes in anyone exposed to secondary trauma (Bridgeman et al., 2018; Figley, 1999; Lynch & Glass, 2020). When looking at things through the trauma lens, it is important to focus on the exposure to secondary trauma beyond the physical symptoms. There needs to be more of a holistic approach to educators' work lives – a focus on increasing their overall well-being and creating and maintaining a supportive work environment (Lynch & Glass, 2020). When questioned, burned-out educators often described specific impacts such as negative changes in moods, frustration, decreased work performance, absenteeism, changes in physical well-being (including symptoms such as anxiety, depression, guilt, and irritability), substance abuse, poor eating habits, high blood pressure, and headaches (Bridgeman et al., 2018; Hydon, 2015; Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Rather than reaching out for help, educators often internalize their feelings, which isolates them further. If they do reach out, they go to the doctor to treat the

symptoms, but do not treat the underlying factor that is causing the symptoms (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019).

**Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is the psychological feeling that accounts for an individual's sense of positive work experience (Mishra & Mishra, 2013). It is also defined as any combination of psychological and environmental circumstances in which a person is honestly expressing enjoyment and value with their job (Hoppock, 1935). The productivity of an organization is enhanced when a worker is satisfied and has a positive attitude. Roos and Van Eeden (2008) found that employees who are motivated, have high job satisfaction and are flourishing are more effective and have a better overall performance in their jobs. According to Jex and Britt (2008), satisfaction in the workplace is crucial for organizational success. They also argue that satisfied employees commit more to work and have higher rates in retention and productivity. A satisfied worker often brings a high value of work. Employees that have high levels of job satisfaction have lower levels of absenteeism and higher levels of mental and physical health (Jex & Britt, 2008; Wayman, 2010). There are several factors that research has shown lead to higher overall job satisfaction: self-confidence/awareness, purpose, balance of work/home, challenging work, variety, autonomy, room for advancement, balanced workload, and good relations with supervisors at work (Harrison et al., 2006; Jex & Britt, 2008; Wayman, 2010). Social network integration and work-family balance have also been found to have a positive influence on job satisfaction (Callister, 2006; Roos & Gatta, 2009; Smith & Calasanti, 2005).

Many employees who are not satisfied with their job eventually leave the organization, have lower productivity, which can cause losses to the employer (Erez, 2010; Hamid,  2020). Choi (2017) found that individuals who held a minority status in their agency may bring lower

job satisfaction to both racial/ethnic minority employees vs white employees. It has often been reported that women and minorities are more likely to experience feelings of social isolation in academic work environments. The lack of social networks and feelings of isolation also have been found to have a negative impact on job satisfaction (Callister, 2006; Roos & Gatta, 2009; Smith & Calasanti, 2005). Many employees with low job satisfaction stay in their jobs even if they are not satisfied; they may have low job prospects elsewhere, be committed to their work, be unable to take a loss in pay/benefits or have close relationships with their colleagues (Mobley et al., 1978; Roos & Gatta, 2009; Smith & Calasanti, 2005). Workers that have low job satisfaction have been found to be associated with poor motivation, absenteeism, burnout, anxiety, depression, and high employee turnover (Hamid, 2020; Roos & Gatta, 2009). Lowered job satisfaction and social isolation are interconnected components that might make employees leave the workplace (Callister, 2006; Mobley et al., 1978; Smith & Calasanti, 2005).

**Belonging/Trust**

Educators and other helping professionals often find fulfillment when they feel valued, have a sense of belonging in the workplace, feel like they are making a difference, and feel supported (Larsen & Stamm, 2008; Lawson & Meyers, 2011). Feeling a sense of belonging as well as trust in colleagues, personal relationships, the community, and leadership is essential for job satisfaction and overall well-being (Brown, 2021). Belonging is defined as a sense of acceptance, the ability to have a connection to humanity and the freedom to express individuality without fear. A sense of belonging in close relationships and within the community is essential for well-being. Members of marginalized groups often question their sense of belonging and have stronger feelings of isolation when in negative spaces and can also convey lower levels of trust (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Trust is considered a basic human need and encompasses multiple components including accountability, generosity, integrity, confidence, and reliability. The common definition of trust is knowing you can count on someone, be able to confide in them, and know that they will deliver on their commitments (Brown, 2021). Trust motivates people to engage more and succeed in their endeavors (Praska & Yulianti, 2020; Zac, 2017). Zac (2017) found that employees who have high trust in their organizations have more energy, are happier with their lives overall and have lower levels of stress. Organizations are more efficient and productive when people feel valued and trust one another. Employees are more likely to be honest, give constructive feedback and be more realistic about their abilities. Gladstone (2016) found that teachers who were able to take part in decision-making, felt respected by their leaders, and felt free to be creative and try new ideas had a higher sense of trust in their leadership.

An employee's relationship with leadership is essential for building a sense of trust, allowing for a sense of belonging and the ability to handle the pressures of work (Praska & Yulianti, 2020). Leaders need to be fair, open, and honest with their employees. Supportive leaders bolster their employees, encourage them, and pay attention to their issues or concerns. They deal with frustration, anxiety, and conflict with fairness and respect. Gladstone (2016) found that leaders who were approachable, recognized their teachers' accomplishments, and allowed for shared decision-making had higher levels of trust and belonging in their schools. Gladstone also found that the schools where leaders showed low levels of integrity, took credit for accomplishments, showed favoritism and unfair treatment to their employees revealed very low levels of trust and belonging. Employees who have high levels of trust are more productive, have better collaborative relationships with their colleagues, and lower attrition rates (Zac, 2017).

There are several important components an organization needs to exhibit to establish a sense of trust with its employees: open communication from all levels of an organization, a focus on collaboration and teamwork, a clear direction in where the organization is going, the ability to be innovative and creative, and a focus on the whole person and their well-being (Schmidt et al., 2014; Zac, 2017). Establishing a sense of trust and belonging is essential for retention and overall employee satisfaction. There needs to be a specific focus on educator retention with the high levels of attrition; it is essential for schools at all levels to recruit and retain high-quality educators who have been well trained (Lester, 1990).

**Organizational Trauma/Psychological Safety**

Vivian and Hormann (2013) describe how organizational trauma is emotionally and cognitively overwhelming and leaves us feeling vulnerable and helpless. Trauma has lasting impacts, especially if left unaddressed. Many organizations do not address what happens within the organization. Leaders often want to hear about what is going well, and talk about the positives, but do not want to hear what is really going on with the employees within the organization (Kahn, 2005; Waller, 2021). Compassion fatigue and organizational trauma are widespread. People are overworked, overwhelmed by the many changes, and suffering from burnout; work/life balance is all but nonexistent. Kahn (2005) stated that traumatic stress affects caregivers who work with others in emotional pain, and they soak up such pain themselves. In most educational institutions it is acknowledged that wellness is important, but the focus is on the students, and employees are typically left to fend for themselves.

All this ties into the concepts of psychological safety and trust, which seems to be missing from many institutions right now (Waller, 2021). Power seems to be an underlying factor for psychological safety in my institution. Those in positions of power are often not in

touch with the people they govern, and do not understand what daily life is like for people that do not live as they do. Their job is to look at the big picture, the institution itself, but not to focus on the individual or the masses. Institutional leaders highlight the success stories, talk to those who are doing well, or those who have overcome obstacles and are successful in the end. They are not dealing with the daily struggles and frustrations, they do not interact with the students who are failing, struggling to keep it together; in essence, they do not deal with the day-to-day life of students nor fathom what it is like to be in these positions. The people they interact with are working professionals and, though they have their own concerns and issues, it is not the same. This becomes an example of "othering," even if unintentional. Though an institution might proclaim that they want to be multicultural and inclusive, in reality they may only allow other people and cultures to come in if they adapt or conform to already existing cultural norms (Okun, 1999, p. 7).

Edmonson (2018) stated that psychological safety lives at the level of the group; different groups seem to have different interpersonal experiences. It is not uncommon that some groups of an institution find it easy to speak up and bring their full self to work while other groups would speak up as a last resort because of a fear of consequences. Saveland (2008) stated that complex systems would be fine if it were not for the erratic behavior of some unreliable people in the organizations. What causes one group to trust and another to feel isolated and alone? Saveland (2008) noted that the closer an individual is to administration, the more freedom they might feel that they can speak their mind without the fear of repercussions. Individuals who have more direct contact with students and are not in higher levels of leadership have a much lower level of psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018). In educational institutions, it is not uncommon for faculty, those in student services, and the support staff to feel like they are replaceable and

that their voices do not matter (Vivian & Hormann, 2013). Individuals have a deep need to belong; we have the need for positive and ongoing relationships, both personally and professionally (Waller, 2021). This need is deeply rooted in our evolutionary history. Leaders need to be attentive to organizational patterns and be aware of their own strengths and shortcomings. Leaders who are self-aware can offer optimism, confidence, and energy in times of need. They can model kindness and compassion and provide a framework for making sense of what is happening.

Edmondson (2018) noted that a culture built on psychological safety can have benefits for learning, engagement, and overall performance in any organization, but a culture of silence is a dangerous culture and when people do not speak up with questions or concerns, they can put the safety of everyone involved in an organization at risk. Edmondson said that if we want to see things get better and want people to feel accepted, supported and that they belong, we must "see them" and try to understand their perspective. Edmondson (2018) stated, "Working in a psychological safe environment does not mean that people always agree with one another for the sake of being nice" (p. 15). Trust builds over time. It is difficult to show up, have the courage to be seen, and have tough conversations. Brave leaders show their vulnerability, speak up, and dare to confront their own biases (Brown, 2021).

Sometimes it is easier to answer a question by looking at the contrasting factors. How do people dealing with the same struggles and adversities stay in their jobs and do well? What gives them a sense of satisfaction? Resilience, in the context of exposure to significant adversity, is the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being. Resilience also refers to their capacity to negotiate for resources and experience job satisfaction in culturally meaningful ways (Ungar, 2008). Miller

and Flint-Stipp (2019) affirmed the need for teacher education programs including resiliency, trauma informed practices, and self-care for educators. Solutions that incorporate a trauma-informed framework can improve outcomes for both educators and students (Carter & Blanch, 2019; Malchiodi, 2020).

**Well-Being/Self-Care**

Miller (2016) described how professionals who deal with students struggle with balancing giving constant student support and their own personal well-being. It is a struggle to support and promote the health and well-being of not just students, but also those who serve them. It is important for those in the helping professions to maintain health and balance and engage in self-care. Lazar et al. (2010) defined work/life balance as the association between remunerated work and unpaid duties. Carlson et al. (2009) characterized work/life balance as an achievement of life related needs of an individual between work and family. People who practice good self-care and a good work/life balance have better performance at work and are happier at work overall (Simon-Thomas, 2018). Organizations that promote the well-being of their employees generate benefits to both employees and the employers. Numerous studies have shown that there is an increase in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and a decrease in absenteeism and employee attrition (Griffith et al., 2000; Meyer et al., 2002).

The relationship between physical and emotional well-being and work performance is well-established. Educators who are exhausted, stressed, or sick are unlikely to be energizing, encouraging, inspirational, or innovative teachers (North, 1991). A focus on overall employee mental health, strengths, and individual competencies is vital for a successful organization. There are five main ingredients to a positive workplace: rest, recreation, reflection, recognition, and relationships (Kortum, 2014). It is important to promote the use of regular breaks and encourage

adequate rest and relaxation (Maslach, 2003). The support of colleagues and supervisors can decrease the risks and effects of burnout and compassion fatigue (Csiernik & Adams, 2002). Taking the time to reflect on the positives and negatives of an employee's performance is also important. Recognizing where an employee excels and encouraging them to be creative and innovative also enhances an organization (Meyer et al., 2002).

Palmer (2000) stated that self-care is never a selfish act and allows individuals to use the gift they were put on earth to offer others. It is impossible to be effective at educating students if someone is not practicing self-care and supporting their own inner life. There are a variety of self-care practices that are beneficial including positive health behaviors such as proper hydration, a nutritious diet, adequate sleep, and regular exercise. Engaging in outdoor activities, recreational activities, and creative forms of self-expression such as drawing, painting, dancing, singing, writing, or cooking can also help buffer the effects of professional burnout and compassion fatigue (Newell & Nelson-Gardell, 2014). Further research has shown that engaging in the arts has been connected to a decrease in stress, trust building, and higher levels of engagement (Greenwood, 2012; Rolling, 2013; Wang, 2016), Employees who thrive will be better employees, will be happier overall, and will pass on their attitudes and principles to everyone around them (Goffee & Jones, 2013).

All these factors lead to some of the initial questions. How can organizations increase overall well-being, job satisfaction, and trust in the workplace? How can institutions incorporate creativity, trust, belonging, and encouragement into the work environment? Would a program-focused collaboration based on the principles of positive psychology increase overall well-being and job satisfaction for employees and the college? Research indicates that using many of the

principles of positive psychology could improve the overall well-being, success, and ultimately the effectiveness of employees within any institution.

**Positive Psychology in the Workplace**

Positive psychology is defined as the scientific study of what enables individuals and communities to thrive; the focus is on the positive aspects of the individual including their subjective experience, personal traits, and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is the study of what is "right" about people, their positive attributes, and psychological assets (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Seligman (2011) shifted his research from happiness to wellbeing and what allows individuals to have a full or flourishing life. The flourishing construct, originally developed by Keyes (2007), defined flourishing as a pattern of positive feelings and positive functioning in life. The flourishing model, also known as the PERMA model, proposes five elements that define wellbeing: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Seligman (2011) concluded that the way to measure wellbeing is through personal development, and that individuals can flourish through enhancing their personal development leading to positive mental health.

Positive psychology offers novel approaches for bolstering psychological resilience and promoting mental health, and thus may enhance efforts of health promotion generally and of mental health promotion specifically (Barry & Jenkins 2007; Hershberger, 2005). Positive psychology does not claim a focus on pathology, nor that mental illness is not important. Its aim is not to counter the importance of distress or negative experiences in life. The goal is to understand and foster the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to thrive (Fredrickson, 2001).

Positive organizational scholarship (POS) was developed based on the principles of positive psychology. The focus of POS is to create, improve, and advance positive employee well-being in the workplace (Flores, 2015). POS is defined as the scientific study of human strength and optimal functioning of individuals and of groups in organizations. The implementation of these principles should lead to effective management, better performance, economic benefits, employee and client satisfaction, organizational excellence, and the enhancement of the overall health, happiness, and well-being of their employees (Cameron et al., 2003). There are a variety of theories that can be used to look at the effects of flourishing individuals and organizations; those who flourish show higher job satisfaction, dispositional affectivity, affective commitment, and a higher mood overall at work (Fisher, 2010). Putting positive psychology practices into the workplace creates an environment that is productive, pleasant, and congenial. Positive psychology plays an important role in dealing with stress at the workplace.

Employing the principles of positive psychology will lead to a positive work environment and a positive educational experience for everyone around them (Ackerman, 2020; Thackray, 2018). Implementing positive psychology concepts and individual positive traits such as optimism, well-being, and personal strength at the workplace increase employees' performance and hence organizational productivity (Kour & Sriratanavriyakul, 2019). Porath et al. (2012) showed that high levels of thriving are positively correlated with higher professional development levels, better physical health, and a lower level of burnout. Diedricks and Rothmann (2014) demonstrated that flourishing has a positive relationship to job satisfaction, employee attitudes, and organizational commitment. Teachers who are engaged and feel good about the work they do in the classroom are more likely to produce positive outcomes for their

students (Andrew, 1985). Employees who are motivated, have high job satisfaction, and are flourishing, are more effective and have a better overall performance in their jobs (Roos & Van Eeden, 2008).

**Utilizing the Expressive Arts and Creativity in the Workplace**

Creativity and utilizing some of the principles found in the expressive arts are other ways to bring higher levels of job satisfaction and an increase in employee well-being in the workplace. Most do not think of the workplace as a place where the creative imagination is recognized, though many would reason it is the place where creativity is most needed. Creativity is defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others (Franken, 1994). Csikszentmihalyi (2013) described creativity as any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one.

Creativity inspires employees to collaborate with each other. Working together in groups through dialogue, cooperation, interaction, and teamwork helps groups come together in a way little else can. Art allows individuals to get outside of themselves and their "traditional roles;" it brings in imaginations and allows employees to integrate that into their work (Eisner, 2009). McNiff (2003) stated that the experience of creativity in groups brings people closer to letting go, to getting beyond mental resistance and judgment. He noted that the breakthrough happens when employees surrender to doing the activity for its own sake, no matter what the outcome might be.

It is important to look at how creativity directly affects the workplace. With the ability to think creatively and outside the box, employees are more likely to produce unique and innovative solutions to obstacles they encounter. This eagerness to solve problems can lead to

new ways to accomplish tasks and run the organization more effectively (Dean, 2018). Using art in the workplace among teams or departments of workers can help build connections and partnerships, and increase morale (Dean, 2018; McNiff, 2003; Smiraglia, 2014). Creative workplaces allow employees to look at larger problems; they experience more psychological distance and can think of more innovative solutions. Increasing spatial distance between individuals and problems boosts creativity and productivity (Jia et al., 2009). Smiraglia (2014) found that there are multiple ways that employees can be impacted by creating and expressing art in their workplace: art promotes social interactions, elicits emotional responses, facilitates personal connection-making, enhances the workplace environment, and fosters learning. Making art in groups can lead to a better investment in the common goals of the team as well as the growth of enhanced cohesion within the workplace, which may result in higher job satisfaction and increased employee retention (Dean, 2018; Kudesia, 2015). Art making becomes a means of getting to know one another, identify strengths, and build collegial relationships while honoring individuality.

Positive psychology presents new strategies for strengthening resilience and for encouraging mental health, and thus may bolster efforts of health promotion (Barry & Jenkins, 2007; Hershberger, 2005). Research has shown that specific interventions that are based on positive psychology can be accurately measured and have demonstrated an increase in overall mental health and well-being (Diener et al., 2009; Friedli, 2009; Luthans & Frey, 2017).

### Current Manifestations

The COVID-19 pandemic brought some of the concepts utilized in expressive arts therapy to the forefront. Organizations began looking at ways to foster employee wellbeing by finding a creative direction, enabling people to sustain momentum to find purpose in what they

do and be better at it (Kiernan et al., 2021; Mak et al., 2020). By developing an environment where inventive minds are welcome, companies can attract more talented professionals who are more likely to stay on board because of the creative environment. Intermodal expressive arts give everyone the opportunity to become more invested and more motivated toward personal growth and change throughout the process. Intermodal expressive arts can be any mixture or combination of music, dance, narrative, drawing, painting, sculpting, gardening, etc. Art can change and touch each of us in a unique way. Individuals often express themselves through art in a way that other forms of communication don't allow. Art can be healing; it can help us to invent ourselves and can enhance every aspect of our learning. Education can be compared to the theater; it is a mixture of song, dance, acting, and improv. Most stories are a mixture of comedy, tragedy, drama, and romance. There is always room for a plot twist and in the end, there was growth, understanding, and personal reflection. We never come out of a production without learning something, laughing a little, crying a little and forever changed by the smallest, unexpected detail.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought on a world of new challenges and exacerbated many of the existing issues in the educational arena. It has forced institutions to make rapid changes and adapt quickly to an evolving situation. Some of these changes have been effective and could bring about innovative ways of doing things, such as using a multi-modal format for classes, and allowing flexibility in attendance and modality for both faculty and students. Other changes highlighted some existing issues such as the lack of resources, internet access, access to computers, food insecurity, limited transportation, etc. (Chen, 2022; Weissman, 2022). During the pandemic, the focus was on getting the job done and learning what worked and what did not. Everyone was in survival mode. Community colleges have been seeing higher drop rates, higher

levels of attrition, and higher failure rates especially in minoritized, lower performing students. (Bradley University, 2021; Chen, 2022; Weissman, 2022). Faculty are seeing more behavioral issues, higher levels of allegations against teachers, and an overall lack of accountability from students. Faculty spent the past three years in a constant state of change, trauma, and stress and still do not see the light at the end of the tunnel. All of this has led to a culture of organizational trauma; faculty are doing their best to help students, colleagues, families, and friends (Andreatta, 2022; Bradley, 2021; Chen, 2022). Faculty are tired and recognize they need boundaries but feel there is so much work to do that they do not have time for that. The attrition rate for employees is rampant; people are calling it the great resignation (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). Self-care and mental health have been "buzz words" over the past two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time there has been a push to change everything and modify the way teachers teach and construct classes. Educators have found positives and negatives in the past few years amidst all the changes. Many institutions have found ways to work together and enhance connections and others have left their employees isolated and alone (Andreatta, 2022). Work/life balance is much harder when working from home. It is so much easier to answer email at all hours of the day, to keep working instead of detaching after work. There is always something to do and it is extremely hard to unplug when you are on the computer all day. The positives are that we have found ways to connect with each other and our students, our pets and kids have come to class at times. We are more flexible and have more mercy and grace with each other (Andreatta, 2022; Waller, 2021).

A recent article from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Brown, 2021), discussed how students and employees at a university were faring over this past year. Most of the students said they were making it through their classes and dealing with their other obligations, but they did

not feel connected to anyone. Faculty and staff said they were feeling traumatized and overwhelmed. The university put together a group to work on a "human centered and trauma informed" return-to-campus plan; their aim was to help everyone form connections again, take care of themselves, and have a place to process how they are feeling. The plan included training, campus wide discussion, and spaces for meditation and reflection (Brown, 2021).

At my institution in the past three years, we have added social workers/counselors, food pantries, a clothing closet, and baby showers for students. We have implemented professional development including mental health first aid and have engaged in two mental health symposiums. This is all geared toward our students, however. There has been extraordinarily little focus on the employees that are implementing all these essential initiatives. The pandemic has changed our lives forever, dealing with isolation, withdrawal, and constant change. Every campus needs to have a focus on well-being for faculty, staff, and students. If we do not take care of ourselves, we will not have the energy to manage the challenges at hand and focus on our students. Self-care, according to Yang et al. (2009) is about individuals taking care of their health and making sure that they have everything they need to thrive as a teacher. Practicing self-care is in everyone's best interests and helps educators maintain a positive attitude, healthy mindset, and healthy body, which in turn helps them help their students succeed, too (Yang et.al., 2009).

Organizations are complicated. Leading organizations is complex and difficult. Weick (2015) noted that managing is firstly and fundamentally the task of becoming aware, attending to, sorting out, and prioritizing an inherently messy, fluxing, chaotic world of competing demands that are placed on a manager's attention. Weick asks "Why do we hold on to things with all our might? Is it the fear of failure, fear for our safety, lack of trust, or the loss of control? Do we hold on because everyone else holds on for dear life and we do not want to be different?

Do we cling to who we are supposed to be because everyone else says so?" (p. 97). Weick concludes by saying that maybe we are too busy during the chaos to see the other side of it.

Life gets a little bit murky sometimes and individuals need to stop and take the time to make sense of it before they can decide what to do with it. Weick and Sutcliffe (2008) noted that mindful organizing is about listening, asking questions, and acting to better understand a developing story. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the world and how individuals perceive it. Live theater teaches that sometimes things do not go as planned, but the show must go on. It is important to focus on the moment, improvise as needed, not be afraid to ask for help, and when all else fails keep it simple. Weick (2007) stated that human potential is often realized as much by what is dropped as by what is acquired. Learning to drop one's tools to gain lightness, agility, and wisdom tends to be forgotten in an era where leaders and followers alike are preoccupied with knowledge management, acquisitions, and acquisitiveness (Weick, 2007).

Leaders must accept ambiguity and not knowing all the answers. Leaders need to learn from mistakes and not be afraid of failure; they need to address the isolation, oppression, and hypervisibility of marginalized populations (Haynes et. al., 2020). Leaders need to cultivate a deep engagement within the community, maintain exposure to diverse practices, explore multiple perspectives and give room for other cultures, opinions, thoughts, and beliefs (Capper, 2018). Institutions need to have multiple opportunities for learning, give people a voice, have realistic expectations, recognize everyone's contributions, allow for differences, and include everyone in the decision-making processes. They need to take the time to slow down and give people time to think creatively, allow people to raise hard issues and challenge the status quo, form a culture of psychological safety and a focus on employee well-being to thrive.

**Current Research Study**

The literature is clear that if there were more opportunities for employees to engage in self-care and have a better work life balance that they would have higher overall job satisfaction (Ackerman, 2020; Griffith et al., 2000; Meyer et al., 2002; Thackray, 2018). It is also clear that there needs to be a focus on collaboration and teamwork that could lead to an overall increase in trust and belonging. A focus on well-being and the importance of both employees and students would go a long way to improving the climate/culture at any institution. There is a large gap in the research as it pertains to educators, especially at community colleges. I was unable to find any research that specifically looked at community college employees and how they fared concerning the research parameters. This led to the purpose of this study.

My investigation explored the interconnection of job satisfaction, well-being, self-care, belonging, and trust in community college employees. All of these are essential concepts surrounding employee retention. I hypothesize that if institutions can change how the employees feel and get them engaged and energized, it will spread to their classroom and interactions with students. Higher education faculty success is vital for educational success in the state and nationwide. Faculty members have a significant impact on student achievement (Deming & Figlio, 2016). Employees need to have the chance to be creative, and to think critically. They need to be engaged and have reasons to learn and flourish. Adding in more professional development focused on well-being and mental health can help make any organization thrive. In the end, I want to see my colleagues and my students thriving, having a greater sense of trust, well-being, and overall job satisfaction. This will help to increase a sense of equity and belonging at my community college.

**CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

*"Transformation in the world happens when people are healed and start investing in other people."* (Smith & Thomas, 2000, p. 24)

**A Concurrent, Mixed Methods Research Approach**

In this concurrent, mixed methods research study, I explored the interconnection of job satisfaction, well-being/flourishing, self-care, belonging, and trust in employees at an Urban Community College. The goal of this study was to shift the culture of the workplace by focusing on positive well-being for all employees. I collaborated with, surveyed, interviewed, and held focus groups with approximately 200 adult employees (over 2 cohorts) who work at an Urban Community College. Employees were invited to participate in a 6-part professional development program called Thrive. This program was created utilizing many of the principles of positive psychology and designed to increase personal engagement as well as collaboration and teamwork amongst participants.

**Research Questions**

Research has shown that there are a variety of factors that contribute to employee burnout, retention, and separation (Jex & Britt, 2008; Freudenberger, 1975; Mishra & Mishra, 2013). This research study is focusing on these five factors: job satisfaction, overall well-being/flourishing, psychological safety/trust, acceptance/belonging and self-care. Three research questions formed the foundation of this research study.

Q1. How are Urban Community College employees faring in relation to the factors such as job satisfaction and overall well-being/flourishing that can often lead to burnout?

Q2. How are employees reporting their overall sense of trust and belonging within the Urban Community College setting?

Q3. Are the factors leading to burnout, employee perceptions of their overall well-being, and feelings of trust/ belonging impacted by participation in the Thrive Program?

**Design Rationale**

Data is everywhere in society; we are all consumers. There are a variety of methodologies and methods of data collection and analysis that researchers can use to gain a greater knowledge of the world and its people. Quantitative analysis helps researchers gain a broad understanding of large groups of people. It allows exploration of the differences between groups of people and the ability to statistically determine if an intervention is effective. This type of information is essential for helping gain an overall understanding of the world. Qualitative analysis allows researchers to seek the deeper meaning of individual human experiences. Qualitative analysis lets researchers address complicated phenomena by providing vivid descriptions of a concept or a question from the perspective of the research participants (Watkins & Gioia, 2015, p. 7). Mixed methods research is designed to answer the what, the how, the why, and sometimes the when. It also can allow the research participants to play an active role in the research process. The research questions drive the decision for which method is the most appropriate to use. Maxwell (2004) maintained that all social research requires a combination of empiricism and interpretation. Several researchers contended that both quantitative and qualitative approaches are necessary to adequately understand complex social systems and

human behavior (Creswell, 2003; Watkins & Gioia, 2015; Weiss, 2005), making mixed methods my method of choice.

Mixed methods research is rooted in pragmatism, focuses on the consequences and importance of the research, is action based, and allows for flexibility. Researchers using this approach look at the questions asked and determine the methods that will be the most helpful in understanding the problem and moving towards a potential solution. In mixed methods research, quantitative and qualitative methods are blended, integrating the data at one or more phases during the research process (Creswell, 2003). Innovation and openness are invaluable when using mixed methods. The strength of mixed methods designs is to balance flexibility of qualitative exploration with the fixed characteristics of most quantitative approaches.

Weiss (2005) understands that mixed methods approaches could only be rough guides and that planned designs might have to give way to real-world problems of data availability and deadlines. Using a variety of mixed methods approaches adds creativity and flexibility in their analysis and yields valuable considerations that might not have been realized through more conventional research. Transformative mixed methods studies are usually supported by a theoretical perspective that influences the selection of a particular research design and shapes the research process (Bazeley, 2011; Creswell, 2003). The purpose of transformative designs is to seek social justice for under-represented and marginalized individuals; they are intended to be change oriented (Watkins & Gioia, 2015). The strength of mixed methods research positioned in the transformative framework is that it helps to empower individuals, employ change, and allow participants to play an active role in the research (p. 37). This allows the research to be useful to the community as well as the stakeholders of the study itself.

**The Research Process**

The research process included a selection of the site and participants, the introduction of the Thrive Program (including session layout, the Thrive schedule and topics, and activities and interventions), and the choice of methods for investigation and analysis.

*The Site and Participants*

The research I conducted was at a mid-sized urban southeastern US community college with approximately 1500 employees and 10,300 credit seeking students. A basic demographic makeup of the college is as follows: 52 percent white, 48 percent minority, 58 percent female, 42 percent male, 38 percent attending full time, 62 percent attending part time, 42 percent receiving financial aid (North Carolina Community College System, 2022). Permission to conduct this research was granted from the campus IRB as well as full IRB approval from the graduate school; see Appendix A and Appendix B. All employees, faculty, administration, and staff were invited to participate in the initial survey and were also invited to participate in the Thrive professional development program. See Appendix C. A statement of agreement to participate in the research and informed consent were given during the initial survey and to all participants in the Thrive Program. See Appendix D. The Thrive Program was offered in the Spring 2021 semester and a second time in the Spring 2022 semester. Employees were given professional development credit for attending the program. A total of 220 employees participated in the program during one of the two cohorts. See Table 1 for demographic information of the participants who completed the surveys. Participants were allowed to participate even if they did not complete the surveys. Participants were also allowed to take part in one or more sessions. Participants could participate in both cohorts one and two but were asked not to complete the

surveys again if they had completed them in cohort 1. Employees self-selected to participate in

both cohorts.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Participants Who Completed Surveys*

| Participant ID | | Cohort 1 | Cohort 2 | Total Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Participants in Program | | 165 | 55 | 220 |
| Total Participants that filled out surveys | | 155 | 23 | 178 |
| Mean Age | | 50.3 | 46.48 | |
| Mean # of years at college | | 9.75 | 9.48 | |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| | White/Caucasian | 116 | 17 | 133 |
| | Black/African American | 25 | 4 | 29 |
| | Hispanic/Latinx | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| | Asian | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| | Mixed Race | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | Prefer Not to Say | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Gender | | | | |
| | Male | 22 | 4 | 26 |
| | Female | 129 | 19 | 148 |
| | Trans-Spectrum | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Prefer not to say | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Relationship Status | | | | |
| | Married | 102 | 12 | 114 |
| | Single | 33 | 8 | 41 |
| | In a committed relationship | 11 | 2 | 13 |
| | Other | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| | Prefer Not to Say | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Employee Status | | | | |
| | Full time | 128 | 22 | 150 |
| | Part time | 27 | 1 | 28 |
| Employee Type | | | | |
| | Staff | 67 | 14 | 81 |
| | Faculty | 79 | 8 | 87 |
| | Administration | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Minority Status (Can pick more than 1) | | | | |
| | Ethnic Minority | 30 | 5 | 35 |
| | Low Socioeconomic Status | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | LGBTQIA+ | 10 | 2 | 12 |

| Participant ID | Cohort 1 | Cohort 2 | Total Count |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st Generation College Student | 48 | 7 | 55 |
| Disability | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| Undocumented, DACA | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| None | 75 | 10 | 85 |

**The Thrive Program**

Employees participated in a 6-part professional development program designed with many of the principles of positive psychology. Each of the Thrive sessions consisted of a 2-hour interactive educational session including activities geared to increase personal engagement as well as collaboration and teamwork amongst participants. Thrive was advertised as EMP 161-CTL: Thrive (Positive Education Learning Community): *This Learning Community, open to all faculty and staff, will be exploring self-care, wellbeing, happiness, positive thought, balance, stress management, positive coping skills and how to apply these techniques to your work and your life.*

*Session Layout (Two Hours Each Session)*

- 15 minutes - intro/icebreaker/team building exercise.

- 45 minutes - topic of the day

- 30 minutes - small group activities- teamwork on topic

- 30 minutes - small group roundtables- discussing qualitative questions- ways to use information in the office/ team/ classroom etc.

*Thrive Schedule and Topics*

- Session 1: Positive Psychology: What is Positive Psychology? Happiness defined? Well Being- Why is it important? PERMA model of well-being, job satisfaction, work life balance

- Session 2: Positive Health/Physical Wellness: Overall vitality, sleep, nutrition, hydration, exercise/physical activity, good hygiene, nature, stress, and stress management

- Session 3: Positive Thoughts/Psychological Wellness: Attitude/mindset, expectations/motivation, self-worth, emotional intelligence, hope/optimism, mindfulness

- Session 4: Positive Coping: Burnout, dealing with hardship and change, dealing with frustration and fear, dealing with grief and loss, forgiveness, letting go, resilience and grit, gratitude, work life balance, hobbies and leisure, mindfulness revisited, creativity and flow.

- Session 5: Positive Relationships: Getting along, dealing with difficult people, effective communication, mutual respect, empathy, friendship and intimacy, trust, positive boundaries, enhancing relationships, collaboration, and teamwork, using your story.

- Session 6: Positive Workplace: Workplace well-being, strengths, what is my purpose? meaning making, goal setting, what can I do? having fun at work, wisdom.

*Activities/Interventions*

1. Thrive daily journal (included the following)

    a. Gratitude journal (three things that went well each day)

    b. Self-care daily practices (a list of ideas to practice self-care)

    c. Mood tracker (Likert mood scale 1-5)

    d. What went well today? (Focus on positive aspects of the day)

    e. Goal for the next day (What to accomplish tomorrow)

      f.   What am I learning about myself? (Self-reflection)

2.  Challenges/activities given to participants during the Thrive program

      a.   Imagine your best possible self.

      b.   Character strengths exercise

      c.   Dear future-self letter

      d.   Bucket list

      e.   Life balance wheel

      f.   Mindfulness/meditation exercise

      g.   Ongoing future self-care plan

      h.   Acts of Kindness challenge

      i.   Vision board

      j.   Creativity challenge

      k.   Make new friends challenge.

      l.   Stop and smell the roses sensory challenge-savoring.

      m. Make a difference challenge.

      n.   Buying happiness challenge

      o.   Gratitude letters

**Methods of Investigation**

The study used a concurrent mixed methods design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected throughout the Spring 2021 (cohort 1) and Spring 2022 (cohort 2) semesters. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis were important for both understanding and interpretation of the research questions (Creswell, 2003). Both methods were

given equal priority and the data from both cohorts were combined for final interpretation.

Figure 1 gives a visual representation of the methodology in this investigation.

**Figure 1**

*Mixed Methods Design and Analysis*
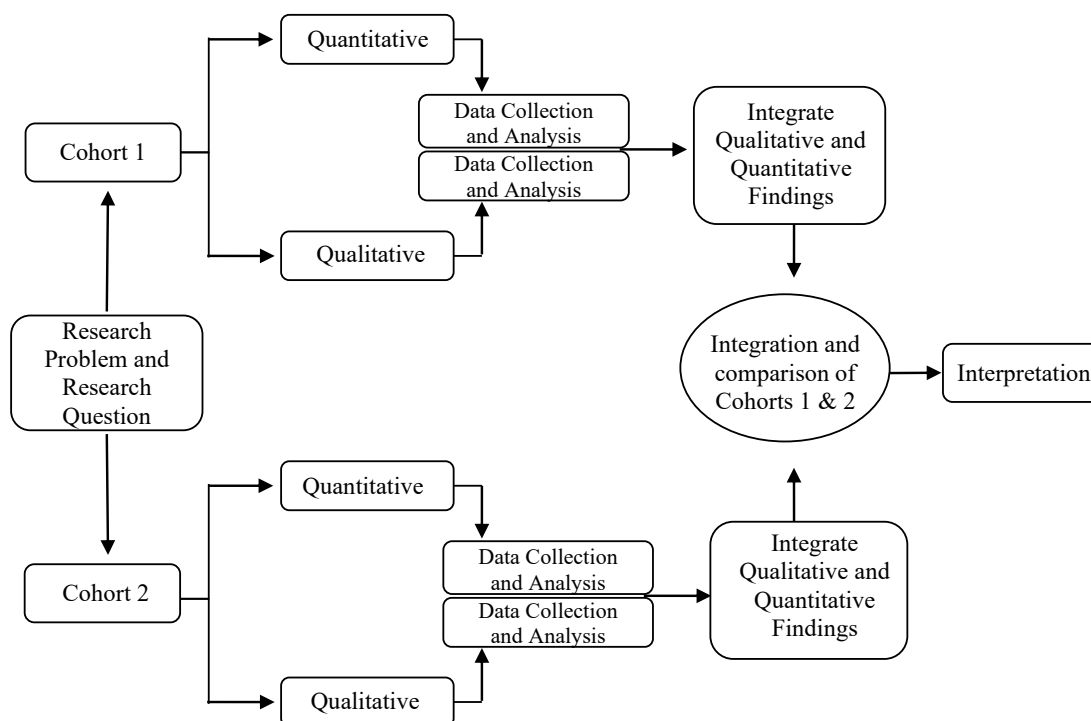


*Quantitative Methods*

A pre-program 70-question survey was offered to all employees. This survey comprised demographic questions, questions from the Harvard Flourishing Scale (VanderWeele, 2017), the 2019 Job Satisfaction Index (Job Satisfaction Knowledge Center, 2019), and 10 questions, specific to Urban Community College, written by me, asking about trust, belonging, overall job satisfaction, and well-being. The Harvard Flourishing Scale consists of two questions from each of five flourishing domains: happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships (VanderWeele, 2017). The Job Satisfaction Scale contains 47 questions intended to reflect an employee's overall satisfaction

with their job, their well-being and motivation (Job Satisfaction Knowledge Center, 2019). See Appendix F for survey questions. See Appendix E for demographic survey. Instruments demonstrated reliability through Cronbach's alpha on the scales with multiple questions. The Cronbach's alpha score on the Job satisfaction index was .974. The Cronbach's alpha score for the Flourishing scale was .839. The Cronbach's alpha on the Trust scale was. 808.. The Cronbach's alpha on the self-care descriptive was .871. All other measures were singular questions.

A post-program survey containing the same questions (see Appendix F) was given to all participants in the Thrive Program to see if there were differences in those who participated in the program vs. the general population of the college. The change score for individuals was also calculated for those who completed both surveys. Both cohorts were surveyed using the pre/post survey Spring 2021 and Spring 2022; See Figure 2 for a visual representation.

*Qualitative Methods*

Each of the Thrive sessions consisted of a 2-hour interactive educational session as well as activities geared to increase collaboration and teamwork amongst participants. Each session had small break-out/focus groups; participants were given five questions to discuss and report on during each of these sessions. The fifth question allowed for any comments not given on the other four questions (see Appendix G). One participant from each group was asked to be the notetaker during each session. This role was voluntary and self-selected during each group. Notes were taken on an anonymous Google form and submitted after each session with only the session number for tracking purposes. After completing the Thrive program, participants were also given a closing open-ended written qualitative survey of nine questions concerning the Thrive experience (see Appendix G). All participants in the Spring 2021 cohort were invited to a

small focus group with semi structured interview questions to dive deeper into the campus

climate and help improve the Thrive program and implement further employee programming

around the Thrive construct. A total of 20 participants elected to participate in the focus group

interviews. Two focus group interview sessions were held with 10 participants each. See

Appendix G for the questions. Both cohorts were asked the same qualitative survey questions in

Spring 2021 and Spring 2022; see Figure 2 for a visual representation.

**Figure 2**

*Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Used in Investigation*
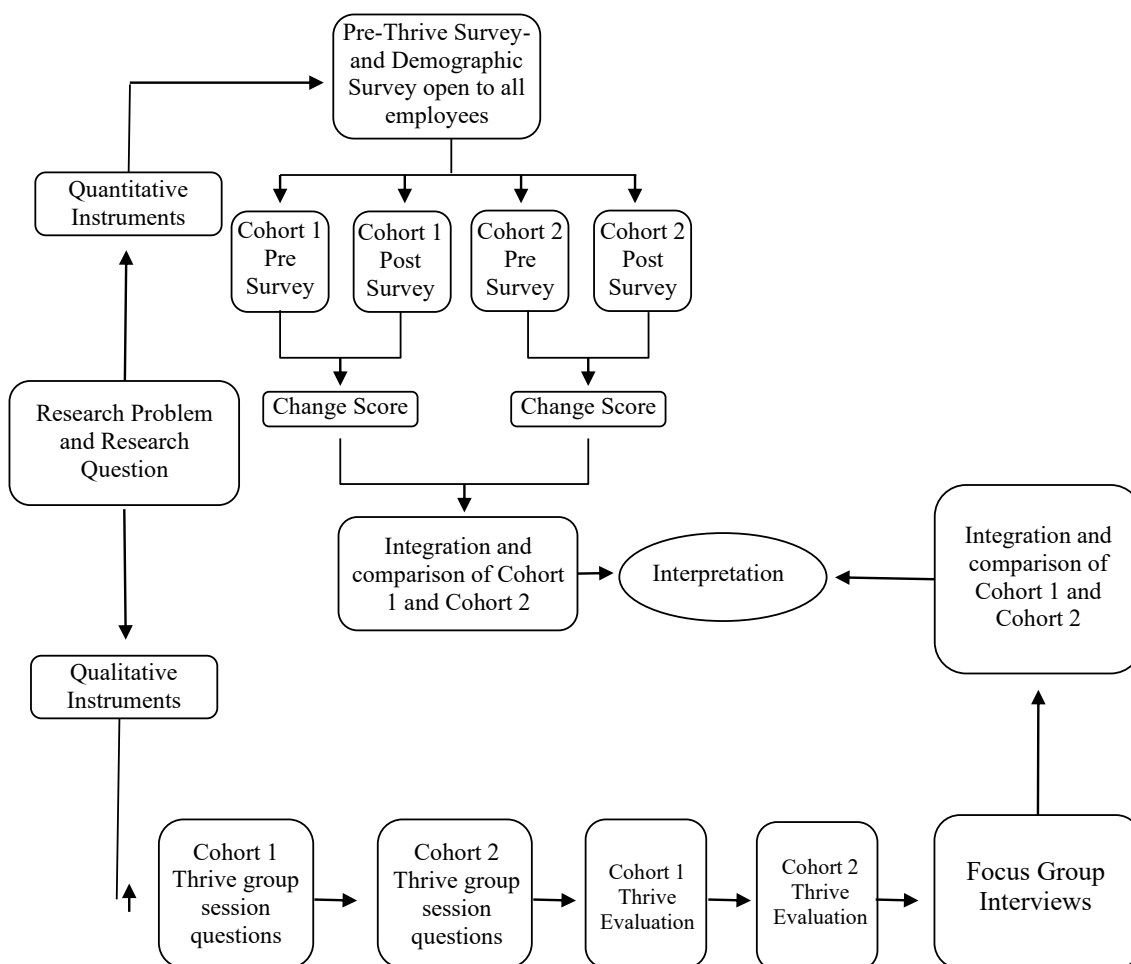
**Methods of Analysis**

This section discusses quantitative methods, qualitative methods, and integration of the measures.

*Quantitative Methods*

Descriptive statistics, (mean, median, and standard deviation) were completed using the demographic information and each of the research indicators. Correlation analysis between each of the research variables was conducted. The specific research indicators were job satisfaction, flourishing, trust, acceptance, self-care, and optimism. See Appendix F for the survey questions. Comparisons were completed between different demographic categories with each of the research indicators. Variance analysis was done at both the individual level as well as at the cohort level. The change scores, the difference between an individual's pre and post results, were calculated as well as the group change scores, the difference between pre and post results for each cohort. A comparison of all scores was also completed between the two cohorts. Tables with all analysis are included in Chapter 4.

*Qualitative Methods*

Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. All the qualitative surveys, transcripts of the sessions, and transcripts of the focus groups were analyzed. The researcher began by using the words of participants, looking for common patterns, opinions, experiences, and insights allowing the researcher to make broader generalizations. Data were compiled to build on both individual experiences and the overall group experiences. Information was coded into thematic groupings to answer each of the research questions and establish meaning within each category. Findings are included in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

*Integration of the Measures*

Mixed methods design includes a purposeful integration of qualitative and quantitative methods. Integration during this study happened at the data analysis/interpretation phase and is reported in the findings section of this dissertation. Integrated comparative analysis was used to combine the data. Each of the research questions is designed to be answered through both quantitative and qualitative results. Themes and patterns emerged through the coding process. Qualitative data were linked with the quantitative data to answer the research questions. The themes each have several subthemes to provide a balanced view of the data. The current study incorporated frequencies to help contextualize and partially quantify the qualitative data for comparison. This allowed for a triangulation cross case analysis in comparing coded qualitative data in relation to quantitative variables (Bazeley, 2011).

**Maintaining Integrity**

Integrity is a broad term that covers the role of the researcher, reflective and reflexive inquiry, and significance and ethical concerns.

*The Role of the Researcher*

My role in mixed methods research was to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants as well as gain a broader picture of the overall institution being researched. My previous graduate work was in psychological research, and I have experience with both qualitative and quantitative research. I am a member of my institution's data team and serve on the IRB committee. I have led and participated in many research teams. In this study, I led all the interviews, presented all the professional development sessions, and created all the research questions.

Research is not an easy task and usually requires the researcher to keep their own biases at bay. The data were analyzed with as little bias as possible. Each conclusion that was drawn and reported has been through the synthesis of multiple data points and data triangulation. I did play an active role in leading the sessions but did not participate in the small group discussions. Each group had a notetaker and participants were able to complete each of the questions anonymously. I facilitated the focus groups, but only recorded the answers given; I did not give my opinion nor lead any of the participants to give any specific answers. I created this program and want it to be successful, but I have worked hard to remain as objective as possible and give accurate representation of participants' experiences and opinions. I have kept a reflective journal throughout the process and included my thoughts in the findings and discussion sections. This allowed for my voice to be heard but not to be represented as a voice from the participants.

### *Reflective Inquiry/Reflexivity*

Reflective inquiry is an essential part of engaging in research. The process of reflexivity helps to provide accountability, trustworthiness, and clarity to the study (Creswell, 2003). It is important to be clear in how the data is collected, analyzed, and reported. We cannot be blind observers without opinions if we are truly curious researchers. As much as researchers would like to remain unbiased, our thoughts, opinions, and observations are always part of the research process. During my doctoral program and the dissertation journey, I have kept a reflective journal. I recorded my thoughts, questions, and opinions as I prepared for and conducted this study. I recorded what went well, what did not go well, what I learned, and what I would do differently next time. I have grown as a person and progressed through a learning expedition like nothing I have ever undertaken before. I have developed a clearer awareness of my own thoughts and feelings as well as achieved an improved understanding of the experiences of others. Though

no one can truly put themselves into someone else's shoes, we can see the world through another person's perspective if we learn to listen.

My reflexivity starts here: I work at the institution where the research was conducted. I am a colleague to all the participants, and a supervisor to some of the participants. I am invested in the institution and in the Thrive Program. I accept this and do my best to report the experiences of all participants, not just those who agree with my values. I opted to use a research design that would have multiple data sources offering as much of the picture at Urban Community College as possible. Throughout the findings and discussion chapters I will make clear distinctions between my perspective (my theoretical framework and approach to the research) and the perspectives of the participants.

### *Significance and Ethical Concerns*

A mixed methods design was chosen to get a variety of information from both a large group as well as a smaller pool of participants to try to gain the full picture of the indicators at Urban Community College. IRB exemption/approval was given for this research; see Appendix A and Appendix B. There are always small risks involved with doing research. Informed consent and confidentiality are extremely important. I have put safeguards in place to protect all participants and their data. Participants were voluntary and could refrain from answering any questions that they did not want to answer. Participants were protected by confidentiality and are not identified in any way in the research. Each participant was given a unique code that they created to use on all surveys. This code was used to track individual responses, but only the participant knew their code. No names or identifying characteristics were used in any data analysis. All participants were given a safe place where they could give honest answers for all parts of the research without undue risks. The quantitative measures were tested for reliability

and validity. The quantitative research team at the College assisted with the quantitative data analysis for assurance of accuracy of the statistical findings. SPSS was used to conduct quantitative analysis. A triangulation of data was used to integrate the qualitative and quantitative data from both cohorts.

We had a change in leadership between cohorts one and two and the second cohort did not have the same support as the first cohort. Not as many people knew Thrive was happening again and it was not able to reach as many people as the first cohort. Small cohorts work for team building but are not as effective at moving the needle forward. It is important to advertise, advertise again, and advertise again. Large groups of people are needed to pull in data on a larger scale. Having a smaller sample size limits the generalizability of the study to compare it with other populations/institutions.

In the next chapter each of the research questions will be discussed and analyzed based on the findings of this study. There is never a complete answer to any question and one study is not enough to give the full picture of the research questions at hand. I attest that the content and material that I created for the Thrive Program was as transformational for me as it was intended to be for the participants. This is just the beginning of my expedition to investigate and understand why those with a heart for education lose their enthusiasm and pursue other vocations.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

*"The outcome of any serious research can only be to make two questions grow where only one grew before"* (Veblen,1899, p. 11).

**Research Questions**

Research has shown that there are a variety of factors that contribute to employee burnout, retention, and separation (Jex & Britt, 2008; Freudenberger, 1975; Mishra & Mishra, 2013). This research study is focusing on these five factors: job satisfaction, overall well-being/flourishing, psychological safety/trust, acceptance/belonging and self-care. Three research questions formed the foundation of this research study.

Q1. How are Urban Community College employees faring in relation to the factors such as job satisfaction and overall well-being/flourishing that can often lead to burnout?

Q2. How are employees reporting their overall sense of trust and belonging within the Urban Community College setting?

Q3. Are the factors leading to burnout, employee perceptions of their overall well-being, and feelings of trust/ belonging impacted by participation in the Thrive Program?

Employees participated in a 6-part professional development program designed using many of the principles of positive psychology. Each of the Thrive sessions consisted of a two-hour interactive educational session as well as activities geared to increase personal engagement as well as collaboration and teamwork amongst participants. Thrive was advertised as

> "EMP 161-CTL: Thrive (Positive Education Learning Community), This Learning Community, open to all faculty and staff, will be exploring self-care, wellbeing, happiness, positive thought, balance, stress management, positive coping skills and how to apply these techniques to your work and your life".

The Thrive program was designed to mitigate some of the damaging consequences of burnout and focus on the factors that promote a healthy work environment and encourage people to stay at their jobs. The Thrive program involved the building of skills surrounding trust and belonging, as well as increasing employee rewards, appreciation, and incentives. Thrive also promoted healthy work schedules and work-life balance through self-care practices and personal management of time, etc. Thrive discussed transparent, open communication and gave a variety of coping mechanisms for dealing with the more difficult aspects of the work environment.

This chapter explores this mixed methods research study by analyzing both the quantitative results and the qualitative findings to give an integrated response to each of the research questions. This chapter will start with several tables displaying some of the quantitative results with an explanation of the information found in the tables. This will be followed by a summary of the quantitative and qualitative findings as they pertain to each of the research questions. The quantitative data give an overall picture of the Urban Community College employee, and the qualitative findings demonstrate participants' voices given throughout the different parts of the Thrive program. In chapter five I will give an integrated answer to the three research questions and discuss the ongoing impact that the Thrive program had on the institution during a time of ongoing change.

**Quantitative Findings – Thrive Program**

Results of the pre-survey given before the first cohort show baseline data as it was compiled before the Thrive program started on campus. The pre-survey is a representative sample of all Urban Community College Employees, but not a random sample. Participants self-selected to participate in the surveys as well as one of the Thrive cohorts. It is also important to note that many employees participated in Thrive but did not complete one or more of the

surveys. There were 220 total participants in the Thrive program in some way, whether they attended at least one session or filled out one or more of the surveys. The mean age for participants who filled out the survey was 50.3 in cohort one and 46.48 in cohort 2. The mean number of years working at the college was 9.75 for cohort one and 9.48 for cohort 2.

The five quantitative factors measured in this study were job satisfaction, overall well-being/flourishing, psychological safety/trust, acceptance/belonging and self-care. Each of the factors was compared with the other indicators, with demographic factors, and with both pre and post measures taken for participants in the Thrive cohorts. This section includes a short discussion of each of the quantitative data tables listed in chapter 4. Both the quantitative and qualitative results will be interspersed throughout chapter 4 as they pertain to each of the research questions.

### *Correlation Between Five Research Factors*

Table 2 shows the correlation between each of the five research factors. There was a moderate to strong positive correlation between each of the factors with significance at the p=.01 level on a 2-tailed Pearson's correlation test. It is important to remember that correlations are not causal, but these correlations are an indicator that these factors all move in the same direction. These results indicate that if a positive difference/change were made to one or more of these factors, the other factors could also be impacted in a positive manner. This could lead to the conclusion that if an organization were to spend time and resources improving one or more of these factors the other factors could also potentially see improvement.

Table 2 indicates that there is a significant strong positive correlation between each of the research factors with p values below the .01 level of significance. This indicates that if one or more of the factors improve that the others are also likely to improve.

Based on the correlations shown in Table 2, if each of these factors increased, an increase in job satisfaction and an increase in an overall sense of well-being would also be predicted.

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlations Between Factors*

| Factors | Job Satisfaction | Flourishing | Trust | Acceptance | Self-Care |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Job Satisfaction | 1 | .543** | .553** | .698** | .403** |
| Flourishing | .543** | 1 | .552** | .434** | .702** |
| Trust | .553** | .552** | 1 | .597** | .447** |
| Acceptance | .698** | .434** | .597** | 1 | .310** |
| Self-Care | .403** | .702** | .447** | .310** | 1 |

N=145      **Correlation is significant at $p = 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

Employees participating in Thrive were given a pre and post survey measuring these five factors: job satisfaction, flourishing, trust, acceptance, and self-care. Many participants completed one or more of the surveys as requested; however, only 49 total participants completed both the pre and post surveys with the proper indicators to assess the change scores (participants created their own unique ID number and were asked to use it for both surveys). 37 participants in cohort one and 12 participants in cohort two completed both the pre and post surveys using the correct indicators needed to calculate their change scores.

### Pre/Post Scores on the Five Factors and the Change Scores for Both Cohorts

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and the overall change scores on each of these factors for both cohorts 1 and 2. It is important to remember that the *t*-tests were measuring individual test scores and how each of them changed. In cohort 1, the change scores on all five indicators showed significant improvement on the *t*-tests at least at the $p < .05$ significance level.

In cohort 2 the factors moved in a positive direction but were not found to be significant on the *t*-test measures. The most likely cause of this is low sample size; 12 is not a substantial sample size.

Table 3 also shows the comparison of the group mean scores on the pretest survey to the posttest survey; the results again indicate a positive change on all the factors in cohort 1 and three out of five factors in cohort 2. This aligns with the results shown in Table 2. If a change can be made to one or more of the factors, the other factors could potentially increase as well. This also indicates that the Thrive program did make a difference on each of the factors in cohort 1 and three out of five factors in cohort 2.

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviation scores for employees in both cohorts on both the pre and post surveys. Job Satisfaction and Flourishing scales are based on a 10-point Likert response of agreement with 0 indicating not at all to 10 being complete on the job satisfaction index, and 0 was labeled as "strongly disagree" or "not at all" to 10 labeled as "strongly agree" or "completely true of me" on the flourishing scale. Table 3 also displays the mean scores from each of the research factors. The mean scores for trust were the lowest for both cohorts, followed by self-care and acceptance as the second and third lowest mean scores. Out of a 10-point scale, the scores for trust and acceptance/belonging are at the moderate level for the employees in this study.

The change scores for both cohorts were calculated to determine if the mean difference presented between the pre survey, and the post survey on each of the research factors was statistically significant. This change would indicate that a difference was made in participants' responses after participating in the Thrive program. In Table 3 the *t*-test column indicated the obtained *t*-value, the "df" column represented the degrees for freedom and the p column

indicated the probability of obtaining the "Change score" observed independent- $t$-value, (2-tailed). For the independent-samples $t$-test, if $p < .05$ it means the mean difference between the two groups is statistically significant. If $p > .05$, it means that there is no statistically significant mean difference between the two groups. In this study the independent $t$-test change scores for cohort 1 were all found to be significant at the $p < .05$ level. In cohort 2 the difference between the means moved in the direction of positive change for 3 out of 5 of the factors, however the change scores for cohort 2 were not found to be statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. When looking at the mean differences there is an indication that the mean scores were higher on the post-survey than the pre-survey in all research factors for cohort 1 and 3 out 5 of the research indicators in cohort 2. The sample size for the $t$-test in cohort 2 was only 12, which is not seen to be a large enough sample size for this type of statistical analysis. The numbers indicate that the Thrive program benefited nearly all employees that participated in some manner. When asked directly if the Thrive program impacted them in a positive manner, 99.9 percent of employees stated "Yes," they loved the program. They also discussed how much the program meant to them.

**Table 3**

*Pre/Post Scores on the Five Factors and the Change Scores for Both Cohorts*

| | Pre-Survey | | | Post Survey | | | Pre/Post Paired Change Score | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cohort 1** | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | t-Test | p | N |
| Job Satisfaction | 7.5 | 1.42 | 145 | 7.89 | 1.1 | 51 | -2.07 | 0.045 | 37 |
| Flourishing | 7.2 | 1.3 | 145 | 7.54 | 1.11 | 51 | -2.05 | 0.047 | 37 |
| Trust | 6.31 | 1.76 | 145 | 6.84 | 1.66 | 51 | -2.9 | 0.006 | 37 |
| Acceptance | 7.19 | 2.22 | 145 | 7.9 | 1.72 | 51 | -2.73 | 0.014 | 37 |
| Self-Care | 6.54 | 1.78 | 145 | 6.86 | 1.75 | 51 | -2.25 | 0.031 | 37 |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| **Cohort 2** | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | t-Test | p | N |
| Job Satisfaction | 7.63 | 1.51 | 21 | 7.36 | 1.5 | 16 | -0.531 | 0.56 | 12 |
| Flourishing | 6.8 | 1.35 | 21 | 7.05 | 1.3 | 16 | -1.509 | 0.16 | 12 |
| Trust | 5.57 | 2.35 | 21 | 5.31 | 2.13 | 16 | -1.601 | 0.14 | 12 |
| Acceptance | 6.55 | 2.48 | 21 | 6.63 | 2.22 | 16 | -0.462 | 0.62 | 12 |
| Self-Care | 5.83 | 2.05 | 21 | 6.44 | 2.3 | 16 | -1.963 | 0.07 | 12 |

### *Demographics Comparison of Mean Scores on the Five Factors in Cohort 1*

A demographic analysis was completed between the five factors and the demographics of participants in the first survey given to anyone at the college who chose to complete it. These numbers were used as a baseline for how the members of an Urban Community College were doing. Table 4 displays some of the different demographics and their scores on the five research factors.

Table 4 shows some of the employee demographics by scores on these research factors. There are some differences indicated by the mean scores on race, gender, relationship status and employee status; on the *t*-tests, none of the differences in means were found to be at the p < .05 significant level on any of the five factors.

**Table 4**

*Demographics Comparison of Mean Scores on the Five Factors in Cohort 1*

| | | Job Satisfaction | | Flourishing | | Trust | | Acceptance | | Self-Care | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demographic Label | N | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| Race | 145 | | | | | | | | | | |
| White | 111 | 7.56 | 1.31 | 7.23 | 1.31 | 6.47 | 1.59 | 7.32 | 2.12 | 6.48 | 1.75 |
| Black | 22 | 7.52 | 1.64 | 7.19 | 1.33 | 5.58 | 2.1 | 6.95 | 2.04 | 6.62 | 2.1 |
| Other* | 12 | 6.88 | 1.91 | 7 | 1.25 | 6.22 | 2.35 | 6.6 | 3.29 | 6.97 | 1.78 |
| Gender | 145 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 21 | 7.4 | 1.28 | 7.21 | 1.31 | 6.29 | 1.74 | 6.71 | 1.85 | 6.46 | 1.8 |
| Female | 122 | 7.55 | 1.43 | 7.22 | 1.29 | 6.37 | 1.74 | 7.34 | 2.21 | 6.57 | 1.76 |
| Prefer Not to Say | 2 | 5.32 | 0.42 | 6 | 1.3 | 3.5 | 1.18 | 3 | 2.83 | 5.33 | 3.77 |
| Relationship Status | 145 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Married | 96 | 7.58 | 1.3 | 7.24 | 1.32 | 6.45 | 1.68 | 7.29 | 2.04 | 6.42 | 1.71 |
| Single | 32 | 7.71 | 1.39 | 7.14 | 1.31 | 6.25 | 1.93 | 7.47 | 2.48 | 6.94 | 1.9 |
| Other* | 13 | 7.06 | 2.1 | 7.09 | 1.3 | 5.49 | 1.94 | 6.46 | 2.4 | 6.1 | 1.8 |
| Employee Status | 145 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Full Time | 121 | 7.39 | 1.47 | 7.13 | 1.23 | 6.2 | 1.7 | 7.14 | 2.25 | 6.39 | 1.75 |
| Part Time | 24 | 8.02 | 1.01 | 7.56 | 1.59 | 6.89 | 1.98 | 7.46 | 2.09 | 7.31 | 1.77 |
| Staff | 64 | 7.34 | 1.53 | 6.98 | 1.26 | 6.02 | 1.77 | 7.09 | 2.31 | 6.25 | 1.87 |
| Faculty | 73 | 7.56 | 1.36 | 7.34 | 1.34 | 6.49 | 1.75 | 7.19 | 2.24 | 6.76 | 1.66 |
| Administration | 8 | 8.18 | 1.42 | 7.76 | 0.93 | 7.13 | 1.38 | 8 | 0.93 | 6.88 | 2.05 |
| Minority Status | 145 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Minority Membership (any) | 94 | 7.11 | 1.53 | 6.9 | 1.3 | 5.93 | 1.98 | 6.84 | 2.3 | 6.05 | 1.97 |
| No Minority (none) | 69 | 7.91 | 1.19 | 7.52 | 1.22 | 6.72 | 1.5 | 7.65 | 2.01 | 6.9 | 1.59 |

*Other categories were collapsed due to small N's*

### Minority Membership vs No Minority t-test Score on the Five Factors

Table 5 displays the significant findings gained from the demographic analysis on the minority populations. Minority membership in this study was defined as a self-identified member of one or more of these indicators: race/ethnic minority, low SES, LGBTQIA+, first generation college student, disability, or other. If someone identified as a member of a minority, their scores

on all five of the research factors were found to be significantly (*t*-test) lower than those who did not identify as a minority member. This finding could suggest that organizations wanting to level the playing field with minority employees could focus on one or more of these five factors to significantly improve their overall mental health as well as work performance. One individual minority group did not show a significant difference over another minority, but there was a significant difference between those who identified in one of the marginalized groups and those who did not identify as being part of a marginalized group.

Table 5 shows the significant differences found in the demographics analysis between those who classified themselves as a minority versus those who did not. Minority members scored significantly lower on all five factors compared to those who did not indicate a minority status. These scores are consistent with much of the research on acceptance and belonging among minoritized populations (Brown, 2021; Praska & Yulianti, 2020; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

**Table 5**

*Minority Membership vs No Minority t-test Score on the Five Factors*

| | Minority Membership | | | No Minority Membership | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | N | t | df | Sig (2-tailed) |
| Job Satisfaction | 7.1 | 1.53 | 94 | 7.91 | 1.19 | 69 | -3.77 | 161 | 0.000 |
| Flourishing | 6.9 | 1.3 | 94 | 7.16 | 1.3 | 69 | -3.12 | 161 | 0.002 |
| Trust | 5.93 | 1.97 | 94 | 6.71 | 1.5 | 69 | -2.89 | 161 | 0.004 |
| Acceptance | 6.84 | 2.3 | 94 | 7.65 | 2 | 69 | -2.35 | 161 | 0.020 |
| Self-Care | 6.04 | 1.97 | 94 | 6.9 | 1.59 | 69 | -3.06 | 161 | 0.003 |

**Qualitative Findings – Thrive Program**

Participant responses were taken from the surveys given at the beginning of Thrive, responses during the Thrive sessions, the post-Thrive surveys, and the two focus groups. All survey questions can be found in the appendices. Qualitative findings were compiled to answer each of the three research questions. The voices of the participants are invaluable in helping to tell the whole story of what is happening at Urban Community College and how the Thrive program influenced them.

*Research Question 1: Urban Community College Employees' Job Satisfaction / Burnout*

The first research question in this study was: How are Urban Community College employees faring in relation to the factors such as job satisfaction and overall well-being/flourishing that can often lead to burnout? When employees were asked if they were satisfied with their jobs more than 95% of employees indicated a score of moderately yes or higher. When asked about their overall well-being, 91% of employees said they were doing moderately well or higher overall. When asked about overall happiness at work, 99% said they were at least moderately happy.

The qualitative results for research question one are broken into several themes based on conversations during the Thrive sessions as well as during the focus groups. Employees were asked to talk about how they were doing and what it was like working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most employees discussed that the last few years had been very difficult and that they were struggling to keep their heads above water. Employees overwhelmingly agreed that they did not have a good work/life balance, they were working too much, cared too much about the students and their peers, were frustrated, and simply in need of a long break. "Burnout" and

"stress" were common words used, followed by "tired," "overwhelmed," "trying to bounce back," "stressed," and "not good at taking care of myself." Some people conversed about lower productivity, low morale, and the need to find a new job. Others talked about the factors that were leading to frustrations.

Several themes emerged from conversations with participants about what can lead to burnout, stress, and not being satisfied with their jobs: being overwhelmed and overworked, feeling unappreciated and unsupported and not having the proper resources or incentives to do their work well. These themes, with supporting employee quotes, will be discussed next.

**Themes Related to Job Stress / Burnout.** Employees overwhelmingly discussed how difficult the past few years have been. Nearly all the employees mentioned being overworked and overwhelmed by constant change. "So much has happened in the educational arena in the past few years that there hasn't been a moment to catch our breath." One employee stated, "During the COVID 19 pandemic, education was turned upside down and the 'new normal' hasn't really been established yet." Another employee stated, "So much has changed, so much must be rebuilt or modified into some sort of 'new normal' that most people aren't sure of what that even is." An additional employee indicated that "We live in a world of constant change, in modality and work environment. Expectations are in flux, rules change, supervisors change." This was followed by the statement, "It is hard to stay focused and balanced when you never know what will be next, once you get adapted to and master something, it changes again."

Employees also discussed having unbalanced workloads, inflexible work environments and not having a good work/life balance. One employee said, "Many of us are dealing with inflexible work environments, and feel pressured to work long hours and to be available all the time." Many others agreed and added, "Some of us work in a team of overachievers that never

stop working. We all don't have the stamina or desire to do that." Another participant said, "At first it was simply trying to do everything we could to work with our students. Now it is trying to decide when to stop." This statement was followed by, "Sometimes it seems that any time I am able to come up for air, I get more stuff piled upon me. I am like a duck, paddling fiercely under the surface." It was clear through these conversations that employees were tired and overwhelmed and dealing with a tremendous amount of stress.

Participants talked about feeling like their work is not appreciated, that their time and efforts are not valued, and they do not feel supported by the leadership. One participant acknowledged that, "It feels like our leaders are not listening to the opinions of employees on the front lines." Another stated that, "There is a lack of respect for our work, and many of us have non-supportive management." Another group of participants discussed the idea of being devalued as an expert in their field. One employee summed it up with this statement: "I became an educator because I love working with students. Sometimes I feel like everything I have learned over the years is ignored. I feel like I am not heard, and my knowledge is not appreciated." Employees discussed wanting to do their jobs and do them well but feeling like they did not even know what they were supposed to be doing part of the time. An employee gave this comment:

> There are times I really feel like we are on the right path, then we get handed down a lot of 'junk' that makes no sense, so we must redo what we already did. It feels like we have taken steps backwards.

Employees also discussed that they often perceive that they do not have the resources needed to do their jobs well and feel that there are very little to no incentives to really do a good job. Unfair hiring and promotional practices came up several times and many employees

expressed the expectation to do more with less. One employee acknowledged, "We have overwhelming caseloads and work expectations not feeling heard or appreciated, expectation to do more with less." This was followed by these statements, "The workload is not consistent across the college, some people do way more. Some people do nothing and keep getting promoted." "Others get credit for your work, you see others who do not carry the same workload get promoted while you are overlooked, it makes you seek other options."

Employees agreed that they were drowning and edging toward burnout. One employee summed it up well, "Burnout happens when we are continually given increases in assignment loads with no hope new help will be hired." This was followed by another statement taking it a step further, "You can only wear too many hats for so long. If the higher ups don't recognize the need for adequate staff for the load, then we leave rather than drown." When asked what participants were doing to mitigate their stress one summarized the consensus by saying, "Well, we know what we should be doing, but aren't good at actually doing it."

### *Summary – Research Question 1: Urban Community College Employees' Job Satisfaction / Burnout*

A review of quantitative results and qualitative findings reveals that employees are doing ok but are tired and overwhelmed. Some employees are doing better than others and for some it depends on the day or the situation. Employees are holding on, but at what cost? Even if they are maintaining the status quo, are they at high risk for burnout? People working in education typically do so because it is a passion for them. When the fire starts to go out, so does the passion for working with students. Globally, mental health among employees is at an all-time low. Dronnen (2022) found that for each additional 10 hours worked beyond 31 to 40 hours, the proportion of higher education staff who report poor mental health increases by around five

percent. According to *Gallup's 2022 State of the Global Workplace Report*, only a third of

employees worldwide are "thriving." The World Health Organization reported the COVID-19

pandemic triggered a 25% increase of anxiety and depression worldwide (Deonnen, 2022).

Burnout and poor mental health can decrease productivity and morale, and spur turnover.

Though the findings did not produce firm numbers, the turnover rates at Urban Community

College appear to be comparable to what is being seen across the nation at this time.

### Research Question 2: Urban Community College Employees' Sense of Trust and Belonging

The second research question asked: How are employees reporting their overall sense of

trust and belonging within the urban community college setting? Research has shown

(Gladstone, 2016; Lester, 1990) that employees with high levels of trust and a firm sense of

belonging have higher levels of job satisfaction and overall well-being/ flourishing scores.

Several themes emerged from conversations with participants about issues of trust, acceptance,

and belonging. Responses varied depending on which environment was discussed – Thrive

sessions or focus groups. There was a clear difference between the sense of belonging and trust

within departments and divisions vs working with different departments and divisions or with the

college leadership.

**Themes Related to Trust, Acceptance, and Belonging.** Many employees spoke of a

close connection with their immediate teams, but not with the organization overall. One said,

"We help each other a lot and we share the knowledge we have. We are a great team." It was

common for employees to say that they barely know people outside of their offices and rarely get

the opportunity to engage with others across the college. One employee said, "I feel included and

like I belong in my department and sometimes my division, but I am not sure how I fit in at the

college in general." Another indicated something similar, "I belong with my own team, but the

school as a whole I feel like a cog in the wheel, easily replaced so they don't need to worry how I'm doing." A different employee acknowledged, "I tend to trust those I work more closely with (i.e., within my department and division) more than those I only work with occasionally and indirectly." Nearly all participants acknowledged that their direct team/department was extremely important in how they feel concerning trust and belonging.

Employees indicated that they had relatively low levels of trust and did not feel a sense of belonging throughout the whole college community. When asked about the college most employees agreed that it differs from day to day. One employee acknowledged that "they didn't feel safe speaking up and the climate at the college seems to be hostile at times." Employees often discussed low levels of trust in the leadership overall. One employee commented: "There are times I feel I belong here, and I feel included, however, I do not have a strong sense of trust for some leadership because what is said and what is actual are different." Another expressed, "My sense of trust with my immediate team is strong, however with executive leadership I do not feel safe." Another participant said, "I feel valued for my talents and competence by my supervisor and my direct colleagues, not so much by senior leadership." Most people agreed that having a reasonable supervisor makes a big difference in their overall sense of trust and belonging.

### *Summary – Research Question 2: Employees' Sense of Trust and Belonging.*

Participants spent a lot of time during the focus groups and Thrive session sharing ideas about how to improve the overall work culture and what people could do in each of their areas to enhance their overall sense of belonging and trust. "Trust is not words but actions; supervisors showing they occasionally make mistakes helps." Employees were eager to share what they thought could make things better and help to improve the sense of belonging and trust at the

college. They focused on communication and transparency and an emphasis on employee needs such as appreciation.

Communication was at the top of the list of ways to improve trust and a sense of belonging. One employee indicated, "There is a lack of true transparency. We often see the practice of 'do as I say, not as I do.'" All participants agreed that clear, transparent communication was central to a healthy working environment. One said, "We need effective two-way communication (up & down the chain)." Participants discussed being transparent in all things, not just some things at all levels. Employees talked about being included in the conversations. The idea of "Bottom-up management (self-management)" came up in the conversations. One employee noted that, "All employees should have input into important/organizational changes, and these adjustments should be well thought out and troubleshooted before implementation." Another participant remarked that including "opportunities for employee leadership/involvement as well as regular meetings with immediate supervisor, not just once a year for performance review." Overall, employees stated that they wanted to have their voices heard and wanted to feel like they are included in all aspects of the workplace.

One participant noted how important it is to put "more emphasis on employee needs and not exclusively the students." Another declared, "We can't feel like we belong if we don't feel our needs are understood and we are merely replaceable." Employees discussed a variety of things that they felt could increase trust, acceptance/belonging, and respect in the work environment. Appreciation from management was a common statement. One participant discussed multiple ways to do this such as "Flexible work environments, more time off, genuine praise, pay incentives/rewards, and more employee wellness programs." Many participants

believed that having more opportunities to connect with colleagues would help. Activities such as team building exercises, exciting learning opportunities and, as one noted, "professional development that actually enhances performance or personal lives" would help. Another ongoing conversation included the need for more resources to do what is needed. One employee said, "Stop with the 'we appreciate your hard work 'emails and hire more people to do the jobs."

The conversations and discussions made it clear that most employees love what they do and have a passion for working with students. Most of the employees want to continue to do their jobs and do them well. Participants overwhelmingly stated that they want to be included, want to feel like they matter, and want to be appreciated. Participants were eager to learn and were engaged in trying to find solutions to some of the more challenging ongoing issues at this Urban Community College.

### *Research Question 3: Urban Community College Employees' Impact of Thrive Program*

The third research question asked: Are the factors leading to burnout, employee perceptions of their overall well-being, and feelings of trust/ belonging impacted by participation in the Thrive Program? The Thrive program was intended to provide participants with strategies and ideas that could potentially increase both their knowledge and practice of self-care strategies as well as increase their sense of trust, belonging, and acceptance.

Several themes emerged from conversations with employees about the impact of Thrive sessions on burnout, employee perceptions of their overall well-being, and feelings of trust/ belonging.

**Themes Related to the Impact of Thrive Sessions on Burnout, Employee Perceptions of Well-Being, and Trust / Belonging.** The most common responses to this research question related to the positive interactions with colleagues that they did not normally get to work with

and the sense of community that developed. Employees discussed how valuable the tips and tools given during the program were, as well as how it helped them focus on both their own mental and physical health. Participants found the focus on work/life balance and self-care helpful and expressed that the Thrive journal was an excellent tool to assist in reflecting on their own habits. Employees also enjoyed being able to take a break while getting professional development credit for it. One employee mentioned that this was the first time they allowed themselves to take a break and walk away from their computers. "Having permission to take a few moments to breathe and relax was refreshing."

### *Benefits of the Thrive Program.*

The following is a summary of individual responses to the benefits of the Thrive program. One participant said: "Thrive helped me so much while I was taking the course, and I am continuing my practice. It is honestly why I am still here because I got to talk to others who were also struggling with job satisfaction and job happiness. It almost felt like a support group, and I learned so much during the sessions that have helped me." In a similar vein, another participant indicated, "Thrive helped by giving tools for de-stressing, by giving us a group to work with who might not be from the same division which fostered a sense of belonging, trust, and inclusion with the whole organization." One of the participants noted the importance of a time to reflect:

> "A scheduled time to reflect on important aspects of life, work, well-being. It is hard to set aside time to reflect in this way, and this was a perfect end to the week (Friday afternoon) and colleagues who attended were so engaged and supportive. I liked getting to engage with colleagues from other parts of the college too."

***Thrive Helped in Some Areas but not Others.***

Several employees stated that the program helped with one area, but not others. Employees talked about how Thrive was a safe place and a temporary break, but that it did not change the dynamics and workload of their jobs. One participant said:

> "Doing this with colleagues certainly increased my sense of belonging. Additionally, it was very helpful on a personal level for increasing my awareness of (and control of) my own mindset to deal with work issues that are not in my control. It did not affect systemic, organizational problems that affect job satisfaction and burn out."

Another participant said the program "helps with personal overall happiness not employee job satisfaction or trust. It was nice while it lasted, but since then the work requirements have become overwhelming."

***Key Thrive Learnings and Takeaways.***

Participants were asked what they learned and their biggest take aways from the Thrive experience. The most common responses were the invaluable small group conversations, the opportunity to learn from each other, and the plethora of stress management and coping skills. For example, one participant said, "No is a complete sentence, give grace to everyone, take time to breathe and it's okay to walk away from the thing that is causing you stress for a few moments." Another participant offered that "my biggest takeaway is that even though I may not be able to control many aspects of my job, I am able to control my reactions and my perspective. I think this will be useful moving forward." The importance of community and connection was highlighted by a participant who said their biggest take-away was the importance of "finding a good balance. Knowing I was not the only one. There were about 150 participants at one time. We need time to debrief with colleagues and to have a forum to collaborate in a personal space."

Another participant summarized their learning in this way; "The biggest takeaway was I MUST make time for self-care, or I will burn out!"

### *Summary – Research Question 3: Impact of Thrive Program.*

Change scores and participants' qualitative responses reveal that Thrive did make an impact on the Urban Community College employees who participated in the program. Many participants discussed how refreshing it was to focus on the positive aspects of work and not focus on what is wrong. They liked that Thrive focused on the importance of both mental and physical well-being. Many participants discussed how they have begun setting boundaries, taking time to rest and reflect as well as setting more personal goals for themselves.

## Summary

This chapter presented the descriptive statistics of study participants, as well as a statistical analysis in answering the three research questions. Statistical analyses included independent-sample $t$-test, correlational analysis and mean scores on each of the research indicators. I also presented the results of a qualitative analysis pertaining to each of the research questions. The mixed methods approach offered a deeper understanding of each of the research questions and informed the conclusions that are presented in chapter 5. Chapter 5 offers an integrated answer to each of the three research questions and discusses the ongoing impact of the Thrive program on the institution during a time of ongoing change as well as the assumptions and limitations of the research and recommendations for future research in this area.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

*"Don't dwell on what went wrong. Instead, focus on what to do next. Spend your energies on moving forward toward finding the answer."* (Waitley, 2021, p. 105)

### Introduction

Chapter 5 finishes the narration of the Thrive story. It contains both how Thrive changed employees' perspectives (including my own) on addressing burnout, job stress, and a sense of trust, belonging, and self-care as well as how Thrive changed the institution. The end of this chapter offers a discussion of lessons learned and further research questions that could evolve from this project.

### Analyzing and Answering the Three Research Questions

The three research questions were simple, but not necessarily straightforward, to answer. I wanted to know how people were doing, how they were feeling, and if my Thrive program could have an impact on their overall well-being. In Chapter four, I gave the results for each of the research questions. In this section, I am going to discuss those questions through a mixed methods lens and talk about how both the quantitative and qualitative responses integrate to tell the story of Thrive at Urban Community College. These answers are specific to this Urban Community College, but I believe that this program could be beneficial to any institution.

### *Research Question 1: Urban Community College Employees' Job Satisfaction / Burnout*

Research Question 1 asked: How are Urban Community College employees faring in relation to the factors such as job satisfaction and overall well-being/flourishing that can often lead to burnout?

Employees are tired, overwhelmed and on the verge of burnout. The last few years have been challenging in the world overall, but especially in the educational arena. Change happens daily and the expectations that are put on colleges to succeed are almost insurmountable. Study

results show that employees are muddling through and are at a high risk for burnout. The average employee's scores on the surveys for job satisfaction index and the flourishing scale ranged from a 6.8 to a 7.6. If we were to think of this as our students and put it in the grading perspective, our employees are making between 68 percent and 76 percent on average. Employees are scoring in the C and D range on job satisfaction and overall well-being. These are highly educated individuals with a desire to work with others. What does this say for the general population? What does this say about the students we serve? Normative results show that those ranking 80-100 on Job Satisfaction Scale and the Harvard Flourishing Scale are considered to have high job satisfaction and high levels of flourishing. Those between 60-80 are in the moderate range of job satisfaction and moderate levels of flourishing. Those that rank below 60 are considered to have low levels of job satisfaction and low levels of flourishing (Job Satisfaction Knowledge Center, 2019; VanderWeele, 2017).

When asked directly about how they are doing, employees said they were doing OK. Those two letters say so much. Employees unanimously agreed that they were tired, stressed, overwhelmed, frustrated by the vast number of changes and in need of a very long break. Discussions about instability, lack of good self-care, very little work/life balance and an overall need to work until you drop were common. Employees uniformly agreed that it is nearly impossible to love your job, be good at your job, and remember to take good care of yourself. The sentiment was a feeling of constantly being on edge and putting out fires.

It was clear during the discussions and throughout the surveys that almost everyone wanted to do their jobs and do them well. Nearly everyone said that education was a passion for them, and they wanted to enrich the lives of the students they touched. Passion for the work is not the issue for employees. Lack of energy, lack of resources, insufficient time, and the lack of

appreciation or incentives seemed to be the driving forces that caused lower job satisfaction. Participants were eager to learn, completely engaged, and excited about the collaboration. They were full of great ideas to make the workplace better and how to make the lives of their colleagues and the students better. Every session contained a small group brainstorm to come up with solutions.

### *Research Question 2: Urban Community College Employees' Sense of Trust and Belonging*

Research Question 2 asked: How are employees reporting their overall sense of trust and belonging within the urban community college setting?

This question is complicated. The numbers show that employees' trust and acceptance/belonging average scores range between a 5.6 and a 7.2. Again, using the grading perspective, this is between 56 percent and 72 percent. Employees are scoring in the D and F range on these, and this is the average. This was especially disheartening when considering that the average time that the participants had been at the college was nine years. These are dedicated, highly involved employees with a passion for what they do. Trust and acceptance/belonging are essential to an overall sense of well-being. Most people spend about half of their waking hours at work; if they do not feel like they belong at work, this means that they spend half of their time feeling out of place and disconcerted. The numbers also show that those who fall into a minoritized group have lower scores on all the research indicators than those who do not, which indicates that the groups that are already often marginalized are feeling marginalized at work as well.

When employees were asked about their sense of trust and belonging directly, it became apparent that the answer to this question is not quite so simple. Employees said that they feel very comfortable and have a sense of belonging within their own departments and on their teams.

They generally like their coworkers and their supervisors and get along well. This would lead some to believe that the scores should have been higher. When asked for more information, employees stated that they do not feel that sense of belonging and trust with the whole college. They talked about not knowing most people outside of their departments and having little interaction with many people at the college. They talked about the high rate of turnover and that as soon as they learn a name or a face outside of their division, that person is gone, or has moved to a different position.

Participants also noted that supervisors and the leadership of the college were vital to this feeling of trust and belonging. Employees felt that if they had a good supervisor, they felt safe and secure, but if they did not, they were afraid to speak up for fear of reprimand. Psychological safety and trust were big discussion points and have been shown to be vital for positive mental health. There was a divide concerning trust in direct supervisors and trust in the overall leadership of the college. Many employees were happy with their direct supervisors and spoke of cohesive teams, though some provided horror stories of the issues they had encountered with their leadership. Most employees stated they felt disconnected from the highest level of leadership and struggled with some of the decisions and policies set in place by the overall college administration. Many employees did not even know the names of the administrators that make up the executive leadership team.

Employees made it clear that they wanted to be part of the college. They wanted to be included in the conversations and wanted to take an active role by serving on workgroups, collaboratives, etc. Employees discussed a variety of ideas that could help them feel connected to one another and the rest of the college. Some of these ideas are shared in the next section that talks about Thrive as a catalytic agent.

***Research Question 3: Urban Community College Employees' Impact of Thrive Program***

Research question 3 asked: Are the factors leading to burnout, employee perceptions of their overall well-being, and feelings of trust/ belonging impacted by participation in the Thrive Program?

Results from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the research reveal that Thrive had a significant impact on both the participants and the college. The next few sections of this paper go into the aftermath of the Thrive program and what has happened at the college after its completion. For this question, I am going to focus on the Thrive participants and how it impacted them.

The numbers show that there were significant changes in the scores of the participants from the pre-surveys to the post surveys in cohort one and moved in the right direction on most of the factors for cohort two. Findings reveal that 99.9 percent of participants indicated that they had benefited from participating in the Thrive program and would happily continue to be involved in future Thrive programming. When asked directly about the Thrive program and if it had an impact, everyone had something to say about it. Even the .1 percent had something that they learned from the program that they intended to use in their life. Participants discussed the stress management tips, the coping skills, the mindfulness techniques, and the positive conversational skills as all being extremely helpful. Participants talked about how the journal helped them reflect on their own practices and helped them start setting routines and establishing changes in their lives that were helping them to feel better. Many noted they were going to take these skills home and use them with their partners and children. The impact spread beyond the workplace.

One of the most noted findings of Thrive participation was the collaboration between the participants. Nearly everyone expressed how rewarding it was to interact with people they do not always get to engage with. The Thrive cohorts consisted of people from all parts of the college. Several people expressed the beginning of some new friendships. Another interesting phenomenon was that people liked having the scheduled time to take a break. Though they were engaging in professional development, which is a requirement for work, they felt like Thrive gave them a chance to catch their breath and relax at the end of a busy work week. Most employees expressed that they rarely took time for lunch, or go to the restroom, and they enjoyed the focus moving from "go, go, go" to "it's ok to take a break." This surprised me and caused me to make a more concerted effort with my own team to encourage them to take breaks and let themselves have time away from work. I continue to be impressed by the dedication of the participants to those we serve.

**Thrive as a Catalyst for Change**

Quantitative and qualitative findings show that the Thrive program became a catalyst and spurred a change in both direction and atmosphere of the college. I cannot take full credit for any of this, but I can say that through the Thrive program and the conversations that happened afterward, the college is moving in the right direction. One of the components of the Thrive program is to collaborate with each other and collectively come up with ideas and interventions that can assist in improving the lives of all Urban Community College stakeholders, faculty, staff, students, and the community. Thrive brought a variety of concepts and thoughts to the forefront and started a climate of communication, and a movement toward valuing and caring about the employees at the institution.

Participants were asked several questions during the Thrive sessions, Thrive evaluations and focus groups about what they could take from the Thrive program and use in their jobs and their personal lives. Here are a few of the questions that were asked of participants (see Appendix G for a full list of the questions):

1. What are some ideas that you have learned that you can share with other people to help make the lives of our students and our colleagues better?

2. What will you be able to take away from these sessions that you can use in your job?

3. What will you be able to take away from this experience that you can use in your personal life?

Three major themes developed out of these conversations. These ideas were compiled and shared with the executive leadership team (ELT) in the Fall of 2021. I am sharing them here, as well, as they were transformative for our institution and could be beneficial for any other institution willing to take on this charge.

**Theme 1: Focus on Wellness and Work Life Balance**

- Make Thrive a campus phenomenon.

- Promote work/life balance from the top of the institution all the way down.

- Decrease expectations of self-sacrifice, such as working at all hours and doing everything now.

- Hire a wellness director and create a wellness resource center, a place with truly holistic support for everyone, including counseling, food, clothing, and all other types of wellness resources.

- Revamp the wellness committee as a supportive and collaborative team to implement wellness initiatives.

- Ongoing professional development opportunities around wellness, stress management, burnout, self-care, etc.

- Mental health matters events - stress busters, monthly themed events for full community

- T- shirts, activities, competitions, snacks, a fully budgeted item to help increase campus wellness.

- Weekly Thrive activity sessions that encourage positive-collaborative fun for employees and students.

**Theme 2: Focus on Acceptance, Belonging, and Trust**

- Show employees that they matter, create the attitude from the top that "we care."

- Realize that change takes time and too much change all at once is difficult for everyone.

- Increase communication at all levels and work on true transparency.

- Create a safe place/space for regular discussions, listen and make collaborative decisions.

- Provide multiple opportunities for learning and growth.

- Offer regular support groups for all employees.

- Reduce the use of "they." Increase the use of "WE."

- Host an employee open house – a time to learn what each department does and who is in each department.

**Theme 3: Develop a Culture of Recognition**

- Focus on making all employees feel appreciated and that they matter.

- Recognition from administration, not just direct supervisor

- Weekly highlights of job well done

- Faculty and staff spotlights

- Promote from within; talented individuals are often overlooked.

### *The Impacts of Thrive on Urban Community College*

The Thrive program became the spark, that produced a culture shift in Urban Community College. Conversations and collaborations between departments and divisions have emerged and there have been significant changes in both the atmosphere and direction of the college. The next few paragraphs will discuss a few of the shifts seen in the past few years.

In 2021, the Cares office was formed. The Cares office connects students, staff, and faculty to the resources and support services they need. The Cares office provides critical support to students by answering questions, connecting them to emergency funding, and mental health resources. Wellness became one of the initiatives for the college's 2022 strategic plan. A food pantry has been established on each of our campuses as well as a free monthly farmer's market for the community. One of the Thrive sessions has become a standing presentation every spring during the new faculty training program. In 2022, Human Resources was renamed the Office of Inclusive Excellence and Employee Care, with a focus on belonging, inclusion, and wellness. Thrive inspired the president and the presidential advisory committee to hold a listening tour in the 2022 spring semester. A second tour is scheduled for spring of 2023. The intentions of these tours are to hear the voices of the employees across the institution, to collaborate, to gain ideas, and to assure employees that they matter. The "Staff Stars" blog was created in the Fall of 2022; each month different faculty and staff are recognized for doing a great job. A belonging survey was launched in the fall 2022 semester directed at gauging how employees feel and how the institution can better assist them. Here is a quote from the invitation to participate:

Urban Community College is a place of promise where YOU matter and belong and now, we need to hear from you! We are dedicated to fostering a more welcoming community where everyone–regardless of their background–knows that they belong to the Urban Community College Family.

The "Wellness Warriors" committee was formed in the spring of 2022 and given the initiative to focus on overall employee wellness. This committee hit the ground running and has added water bottle stations across campus and created both digital and physical walking/mileage maps of the campus. The college held a "De-Stress Fest" in the Fall of 2022. This spring the college will launch the "March Gladness" wellness campaign that is focusing on the eight pillars of wellness in a March Madness bracket style "competition." The "Wellness Warriors" have many additional activities in the works and plan to focus on one pillar a month during the 2023-2024 school year. In 2024, a campus wellness center for faculty, staff, and students will be completed as part of a larger construction project. The atmosphere at the Urban Community College has changed from a culture of fear to a culture of purpose. We have a long way to go to achieve the dream of success for all students, but we are making our way there, one step at a time.

**Limitations, the Gaps and Lessons Learned**

This project opened everyone's eyes to the world of organizational change and the impacts on individuals. Here are a few things that I learned along the way that could help to make the process a little smoother for others engaging in a project like this. It is important to have buy-in from the top of an organization before trying to make significant change. Talk to the leadership of the institution and be sure that they are ready to listen and engage in the process. It is key to understand that even through positive change, every organization will have its growing

pains and there will always be parts of the process that could have gone better. It is critical to assume positive intent and that though a change might be difficult, or different than what was planned, it is not necessarily bad. It is difficult to start a movement and control where it goes, sometimes this requires you to let others take your ideas and run with them. It is hard to be invited into the room where decisions are made, start the discussion, but not be able to be a part of the final decision.

I would recommend to other institutions taking on a similar project to start by talking to all the stakeholders. Specifically, those in leadership about their vision for the institution, to understand the mission and the range of possibilities that could be drawn from the program, to make sure to include questions that would be specific and useful to the organization they are working with. This might help prevent miscommunication and perceptual issues and possibly provide financial support to the programming. Implementation of the program and all the conversations would have been enhanced in this program with the backing of the top leaders.

It would also be beneficial to have several trusted individuals from the institution that are not in leadership as part of the implementation team. Outsiders are not always trusted and if the goal is collaboration and teamwork within an institution, it needs to be supported by the participants. Findings show that the program was well received by employees and did make a difference, both during the sessions and in the long-term. The changes resulting from the program are still happening, the culture is still shifting, and it will be exciting to see how this all continues to play out.

### Researcher Lessons Learned

I will end this section with a paragraph specifically about my lessons learned. As the researcher, I kept a journal throughout the entire process. These lessons come directly from that

journal. I am the first person to admit that when I started this journey, I was naïve in my thinking. I have learned so much and continue to grow and change. I have learned that I can turn something into a complicated mess and need to keep things simple. Sometimes things work out as they are supposed to, even if it is not how you thought it should or would. Life is messy. Life is an adventure. Expect the unexpected. We can learn something from everyone we meet. All people matter; yes, all people matter, even if you do not agree with them. Everyone wants their voice to be heard. Do not be afraid to stand up for what is right but understand that there might be consequences. Leadership is about the individuals you lead. Mindfulness should be the key in everything I do. Take the time to smell the roses, take the walk, take the trip, and remember to enjoy all the moments. Everything is a matter of perception and attitude. I have everything I need, most things I want, and that is enough. I understand that I can change the world around me but cannot control the changes that might happen.

**Other Research Areas to Explore**

While exploring the research, I have found other factors that also tie in and would be beneficial to look at: employee motivation, leadership styles, teacher/administrator self-efficacy, mindset, morale, and optimism. It would also be helpful to look at different divisions and positions within education to see if there are differences. Findings show that individuals who have been minoritized are at higher risk for burnout and decreased job satisfaction. A deeper dive into why minoritized populations have lower job satisfaction, lower overall well-being, and more issues with trust in the workplace would be worth exploring. It would also be helpful to explore other correlating factors to see if the same results are found. Do minoritized individuals have lower levels of optimism, struggle with self-esteem, self-worth?  The research explored burnout, compassion fatigue, and organizational trauma for this study, but other forms of trauma are also

evident within the lives of the employees. Collective trauma, community trauma and racial trauma are all factors that should be researched more in this setting. Looking at these features from a trauma theory perspective would potentially shed light on what is happening and give a bigger picture of the issue at hand. Additionally, most of the research focuses on K-12 schools and universities, but little focuses on the unique populations of the community college. Urban Community College experienced a high rate of turnover at my institution, as did many other community colleges. There is always more research to conduct; there are always more questions to ask.

**Significance and Implications of the Study**

Workplace wellness could become the new normal; happy, healthy workers can lead to a happy and healthy workplace. Sadly, so many educators feel disconnected, unappreciated, out of place, and on edge. Those who do not feel included, feel repressed, or do not feel like they belong become detached and uninvolved. The findings in this study could be used to change the culture at any institution. Findings could be used to increase happiness, increase well-being, provide self-care strategies, decrease burnout, and find ways to use innovation and creativity.

The interplay between utilizing creativity, positive psychology and overall focus on well-being and self-care can help everyone chase buried dreams, find a sense of adventure, and ultimately thrive. A positive environment can minimize the crippling effects of fear, trauma, and stress. These feelings can be transformed into creative energy and used as a catalyst for growth, connection, and transformation. Findings can also be used to continue to increase collaboration between faculty and staff and give everyone a voice. We cannot go back and change the past or erase barriers and adversities that many have faced, but we can try to mitigate these barriers/adversities going forward.

It is my hope that the findings of this study can have a larger impact on the community overall. As a pragmatist, I am always looking at the world around me and trying to find potential solutions to the issues at hand. It is important to remember that institutions are made up of people with different needs. To summarize: the guidelines and processes we have in place give us the outcomes we are getting. If we don't like those outcomes, it is important to look at what we can do differently to produce the results that we desire. At the end of the day, people are what matter to me: my kids, my family, my colleagues, my friends, my students, and the community in which I live. I believe what matters is making a difference in the lives of those I encounter. I believe that all work can be meaningful; finding the connection and the purpose to that work can be beneficial for everyone involved. Employees that are motivated and thriving will be happier, higher performing employees. They will pass on their attitudes and principles to those around them. My motto going forward is to chase what matters.

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## Appendix A: IRB Approval/Exemption Notice

[External] IRB Notice - 21-0115

Inbox

**IRB irb@appstate.edu <u>via</u> adminliveunc.onmicrosoft.com**

Fri, Dec

18, 2020,

8:16 PM

**To:** Becky Howell

College of Education

CAMPUS EMAIL

**From:** Nat Krancus, IRB Administrator

**Date:** 12/18/2020

**RE:** Notice of   Exempt Research Determination

**STUDY #:** 21-0115

**STUDY TITLE:** Thrive- Well-being and self-care for employees

**Exemption Category:** 1. Educational setting

**NOTE:**  This project, like all exempt and non-exempt research with human subjects at

Appalachian State University, is subject to other requirements, laws, regulations, policies , and

guidelines of the University and the state of North Carolina. As of August 24, 2020 and until

further notice, this includes the requirement by the Office of Research to pause in-person

research projects until it receives an additional review to ensure the existence of an adequate

COVID-19 mitigation protocol. Please see the full requirement on the Research Protections website, as well as answers to questions you may have

This study involves no more than minimal risks and meets the exemption category or categories cited above. In accordance with the 2018 federal regulations regarding research with human subjects [45 CFR 46] and University policy and procedures, the research activities described in the study materials are exempt from IRB review. If this study was previously reviewed as non-exempt research under the pre-2018 federal regulations regarding research with human subjects, the Office of Research Protections staff reviewed the annual renewal and the initial application and determined that this research is now exempt from 45 CFR 46 and thus IRB review.

What a determination of exempt research means for your project:

1. The Office of Research Protections staff have determined that your project is research, but it is research that is exempt from the federal regulations regarding research.

2. Because this research is exempt from federal regulations, the recruitment and consent processes are also exempt from IRB review. This means that the procedures you described and the materials you provided were not reviewed Office of Research Protections staff, further review if these materials are not necessary, and you can change these procedures and materials without review from this office. You can use the consent materials you may have provided in the application, but you can change the consent procedures and materials without submitting a modification. **Note that if your consent form states that the study was "approved by the IRB" this should be removed. You can replace it with a sentence that says that the study was determined to be exempt**

**from review by the IRB Administration. In addition, be sure that the number you have listed for the IRB is 828-262-4060.**

3. You still need to get consent from adult subjects and, if your study involves children, you need to get assent and parental permission. At the very least, your consent, assent, and parental permission processes should explain to research subjects: (a)the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the research; (b) if compensation available; (c) that the research is voluntary and there is no penalty or loss of benefits for not participating or discontinuing participation; and (d) how to contact the Principal Investigator (and faculty advisor if the PI is a student). You can also use exempt research consent template, which accounts for all of these suggested elements of consent: https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects-irb/irb-forms.

4. **Special Procedures and populations for which specific consent language is suggested.** Research involving children, the use of the SONA database for recruitment, research with students at Appalachian State University, or MTurk should use the specific language outlined by Office of Research Protections on our website: https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects-irb/consent-corner.

5. **Non-procedural Study Changes**: most changes to your research will not require review by the Office of Research Protections. However, the following changes require further review by our office:

- the addition of an external funding source,

- the addition of a potential for a conflict of interest,

- a change in location of the research (i.e., country, school system, off site location),

- the contact information for the Principal Investigator,

- the addition of non-Appalachian State University faculty, staff, or students to the research team, or

6. **Changes to study procedures.** If you change your study procedures, you may need to submit a modification for further review. Changes to procedures that may require a modification are outlined in our SOP on exempt research, a link to which you can find below. Before submitting a modification to change procedures, we suggest contacting our office at irb@appstate.edu or (828)262-4060.

**Investigator Responsibilities**:  All individuals engaged in research with human participants are responsible for compliance with university policies and procedures, and IRB determinations. The Principal Investigator (PI), or Faculty Advisor if the PI is a student, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants; conducting sound ethical research that complies with federal regulations, University policy and procedures; and maintaining study records. The PI should review the IRB's list of PI responsibilities.

**To Close the Study:**  When research procedures with human participants are completed, please send the Request for Closure of IRB Review form to irb@appstate.edu.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Administrator at (828) 262-4060.

Best wishes with your research.

**Important Links for Exempt Research:**

Note: If the link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser, or

visit https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects.

1. Standard Operating Procedure for exempt research

(#9):  https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/sop_9_

approved_1.21.2019.pdf

2. PI responsibilities:

https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/PI%20Respo

nsibilities.pdf

3. IRB forms:  http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects/irb-forms

**Appendix B: IRB Letter of Agreement**

11/13/2020

To the Appalachian Institutional Review Board (IRB):

I am familiar with Rebecca Howell's research project entitled Thrive: Exploration of employee well-being, job satisfaction, trust, and flourishing. I understand Urban Community College's involvement to be the agency to be researched, such as allowing employees to be interviewed, allowing employees to complete surveys and to participate in the workshop series given on campus. All data collected can be used for this ongoing research project.

As the research team conducts this research project I understand and agree that:

- This research will be carried out following sound ethical principles and that it has been approved by the IRB at Appalachian State University.

- Employee participation in this project is strictly voluntary and not a condition of employment at Urban Community College. There are no contingencies for employees who choose to participate or decline to participate in this project. There will be no adverse employment consequences as a result of an employee's participation in this study.

- To the extent confidentiality may be protected under State or Federal law, the data collected will remain confidential, as described in the protocol. The name of our agency or institution will not be reported in the results of the study.

Therefore, as a representative of Urban Community College, Rebecca Howell may assure participants that they may participate in surveys, interviews and workshops and provide responsive information without adverse employment consequences.

Sincerely,

Dr. A.E.

IRB Chairperson, Coordinator, Learning Assessment and Planning Strategic Innovation and Effectiveness

**Appendix C: Invitation to Participate**

Dear Employees,

Did you know that your well-being is important for you and for our students? Employees that are motivated, have high job satisfaction, have a good work life balance are more effective in their overall performance in their jobs.

I am inviting you to take part in an employee research study. There are two parts to this research study. One is an overall campus survey. The second is an opportunity to engage in a 7-part workshop series called Thrive.

By taking the survey you will be helping to gather important information about employee job satisfaction, happiness, self-care, and overall work environment. The goal of my research is to gain more information and then to facilitate a change the culture of the college by focusing on well-being. In turn it helps to improve completion, retention and graduation rates through holistic student supports as well as employee satisfaction, motivation, and overall flourishing.

If you choose to participate in the Thrive series, it is using some of the principles of positive psychology you will be given strategies and opportunities to collaborate with your peers, facilitate a more positive work environment and hopefully a positive educational experience. It could change your life. Please take the time to fill out this important survey. It will take you apx. 30 minutes. The first page is giving your consent to participate in this research.

If you are interested in participating in Thrive, click here to find out more and register:

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Becky Howell

**Appendix D: Informed Consent Form to Participate in Research**

<u>**Urban Community College**</u>

*Rebecca Howell,* Principal Investigator

Dr. Chris Osmond, Appalachian State University, Faculty Supervisor

**Why Is This Study Being Done?**

The purpose of this research study is to explore employee job satisfaction, overall employee happiness, look at work life balance, potentially increase collaboration and teamwork and explore ways to break down the silos on campus and increase overall student success. I am also completing this research as part of my internship and dissertation research as an EdD student at Appalachian State University.

**How Many People Will Take Part in the Study?**

<u>*20-500 employees will participate in the survey- All employees will be given the opportunity to participate*</u>, 18 and older, from Forsyth Tech will take part in this study.

**What Is Involved in the Study?**

The study involves the use of a demographic survey, followed by a survey of self-assessment questions for all employees that are willing to participate. There is also the option to participate in a workshop series. Those participating in the workshops will attend 7 workshops participate in all activities, answer the above questions as well as qualitative research questions throughout the study. No qualifying information will be shared with anyone beyond the researchers.

**Am I Eligible to be a Participant in this Study?**

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study, be between the ages of 18 and 64 and, be enrolled as a student of Forsyth Tech.

**How Long Will I Be in the Study?**

Participants in the workshops will be in the study from January until May with a follow up survey given at the end of the workshop series and one 6 months later. The full campus will have several opportunities to engage in the research over a 2-3-year period. Follow up research questionnaires will be given at 1- and 2-year intervals. Participants can choose not to participate at any time.

**What Are the Risks of the Study?**

We do not anticipate that your participation in this survey will cause increased risk to you, though there may be minimal risks.

Taking part in this research study may involve providing information that you consider confidential or private. Efforts, such as coding research records, keeping research records locked in a secure location and allowing only authorized people to have access to research records, will be made to keep your information safe. No qualifying information will be used in research reports or any published materials.

As part of this study, you will be asked personal as well as professional questions. You will also be asked to collaborate with others. We ask that all information and everything you share with each other be kept confidential as well. If we learn that you or someone else is in danger of harm, we are required to report that information to the proper authorities.

**Are There Benefits to Taking Part in the Study?**

You will learn new techniques and strategies to help improve your overall work life balance. All benefits will be up to you and if you choose to help others with what you learn in the future.

**What Other Choices Are There?**

Your alternative is to not participate in this study.

**What Are the Costs?**

There are no costs related to this study that are your responsibility.

**Will You Be Paid for Participating?**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

**Who is Sponsoring this Study?**

This study is part of a student internship/dissertation in practice through Appalachian State University.

**WILL YOUR RESEARCH RECORDS BE CONFIDENTIAL?**

The results of this research study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in scientific journals in order to further contribute to our research and educational communities. Your identity and/or your personal information will not be disclosed in any way, unless it is authorized by you, required by law, or necessary to protect the safety of yourself or others.

All data will be stored securely and identifying information will be removed. Digital spreadsheets and pdf documents will be kept for analysis, will be stored on a private, password protected secure computer, flash drive and, or Forsyth Tech Cloud based One Drive. Certain data may be secured on the researcher's private, password protected Google share drive. Forms collected and thumb drives used will be secured by two locks.

**What Are My Rights as a Research Participant?**

Taking part in this research study and completing the surveys is voluntary. Your participation in this study is not a requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your position at Forsyth Tech. You will be given any new information we become aware of that would affect your willingness to continue to participate in the study.

In addition to your rights as a research participant noted in the previous section, you are under no obligation to participate in this study. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without affecting your employment. You will not be pressured into participating in this research study by any statements or implied statements that would affect your willingness to enroll in the study.

**WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

For additional questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the study Principal Investigator, Rebecca Howell, email at: rhowell@forsythtech.edu, Phone at: 336-734-7057, or the faculty mentor, Dr. Chris Osmond, email at osmond@appstate.edu

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a study participant in this research have been violated at any time while taking part in this research, you may contact the Forsyth Tech IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office is an advocate for helping research study participants if they have any concerns regarding research activities. Contact Alexa Edwards, IRB Chairperson, Coordinator, Learning Assessment and Planning Strategic Innovation and Effectiveness at 336.734.7159 or adedwards@forsythtech.edu

You will be given a copy of a blank consent form to keep. A signed copy can be given to you upon request.

**Signatures**

I agree to take part in this study. I authorize the use and disclosure of my responses as described in this consent form and authorization form. If I have not already received a copy of the Informed Consent Form, I may request one or one will be made available to me. I have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered.

By signing this consent and authorization form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without it affecting my grades, performance evaluations, assignments or class standing. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

Participant Name (Printed):_____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____  Time:_____ am pm

Principal Investigator Signature:_____

Date:_____

**Appendix E: Demographics Survey**

Name _____

(Will be converted to a number. Only here to have demographic info that will be paired

with Qualitative questions- No qualifying information will be used in the results of this study.)

Age _____

Race/ethnicity (Check One)

o   White/Caucasian/European

o   Black/African American/African

o   Latino/Latinx/Hispanic

o   Asian

o   Middle Eastern

o   American Indian

o   Mixed race

o   Other

    Gender

o   Female

o   Male

o   Gender Queer/ENBY

o   Trans-spectrum

o   Prefer not to say

    Relationship Status

o   Married

o   Single

- In a committed relationship

- Other

- Prefer not to say

  Employee Status

- Part time

- Full time

  Employee Type

- Faculty

- Staff

  What Division/ Area do you work

- Curriculum

- EWD

  Do any of the following categories apply to you? Check all that apply.

- Ethnic Minority

- Low Socioeconomic Status

- LGBTQ+

- First generation college student

- Disability: Physical, Cognitive, Psychological

- Undocumented, 1st generation Immigrant, DACA

- Other

- None of these

  Consent

(Everything is confidential. No identifying factors will be used for research purposes, this includes names or anything that could identify any individual or any responses given. )

- o I agree to allow my responses in this class to be used for research purposes

- o I do not agree to participate in research

**Appendix F: Pre and Post Quantitative Research Survey Questions**

Questions derived from Factor questions in (Job Satisfaction Index 2019), Flourishing

index (VanderWeele, 2017) and specific factors to be included in this research.

Please respond to the following questions on a scale from 0 to 10

1. To what extent do you have a sense of meaning in your life overall?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ____

2. To what extent did you feel happy yesterday?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ____

3. How happy are you all in all?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ____

4. Which rung of the ladder would you say you personally feel you are standing on at this

   time? (The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, while the bottom of

   the ladder represents the worst possible life for you.)

   0=Bottom, 10= Top ____

5. To what extent do you feel your workplace is a good place to work overall?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ____

6. To what extent do you feel motivated to go to work?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ____

7. To what extent do you feel happy in your job?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ____

8. To what extent did you enjoy your most recent day at work?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ____

9. To what extent are you looking forward to the next time you go to work?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

10. To what extent can you influence how you perform your own work tasks?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

11. To what extent can you plan and structure your own work tasks?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

12. To what extent do you feel there is a proper balance between freedom and control at your

    workplace?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

13. To what extent do you feel you have proper participation at your workplace?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

14. To what extent do you feel you can influence key decisions of importance to your job?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

15. To what extent do you feel you fulfil an important function at your workplace?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

16. To what extent do you think your work makes a positive contribution to other people's

    everyday lives?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

17. To what extent do you feel your job is meaningful?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

18. To what extent do you feel you are contributing to a greater purpose through your job?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

19. To what extent do you feel you succeed as a person through your job?

    0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

20. To what extent do you feel your job is important in terms of who you are?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

21. To what extent do you feel you help make each other better professionally at your

workplace?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

22. To what extent do you feel able to handle new demands and changes in your job?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

23. To what extent do you feel there is a match between your work tasks and your skills?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

24. To what extent does your work give you professional satisfaction?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

25. To what extent do you feel you are developing your skills?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

26. To what extent is it obvious when you have performed a task?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

27. To what extent can you see concrete results from your efforts?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

28. To what extent does your job give you the sense of having accomplished something, e.g.

achieving results or subsidiary goals in the course of the day?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

29. To what extent do you feel there are clear and well-defined goals for what you have to do

at work?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

30. To what extent do you have the sense that you are making progress in your job?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

31. To what extent do you feel you have a good relationship with your manager?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

32. To what extent do you have confidence in your manager?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

33. To what extent do you feel your manager has good professional skills?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

34. To what extent do you feel your manager has good social skills?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

35. To what extent do you feel appreciated by your manager?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

36. To what extent do you feel your manager is a good leader?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

37. To what extent do you feel your manager sets a clear direction for your work?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

38. To what extent do you get along with your colleagues?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

39. To what extent do you have confidence in your colleagues?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

40. To what extent do you find it easy to be part of the community at your workplace?

   0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely    ___

41. To what extent do you feel you have good professional teamwork with your colleagues?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

42. To what extent do you feel part of the social community at your workplace?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

43. To what extent do you feel you and your colleagues are good at appreciating each other?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

44. To what extent do you feel your colleagues make you perform better in your job?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

45. To what extent do you feel there is ordinarily balance between your working life and your personal life?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

46. To what extent do you feel you have time to deliver the required quality in your job?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

47. To what extent do you feel there is balance between your tasks and the amount of time you have to perform them?

0 = Not at all, 10 = Completely ___

48. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?

0 = Not Satisfied at All, 10 = Completely Satisfied ___

49. In general, how happy or unhappy do you usually feel?

0 = Extremely Unhappy, 10 = Extremely Happy ___

50. In general, how would you rate your physical health?

0 = Poor, 10 = Excellent ___

51. How would you rate your overall mental health?

0 = Poor, 10 = Excellent ___

52. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

     0 = Not at All Worthwhile, 10 = Completely Worthwhile \_\_\_

53. I understand my purpose in life.

     0 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree \_\_\_

54. I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations.

     0 = Not True of Me, 10 = Completely True of Me \_\_\_

55. I am always able to give up some happiness now for greater happiness later.

     0 = Not True of Me, 10 = Completely True of Me \_\_\_

56. I am content with my friendships and relationships.

     0 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree \_\_\_

57. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be.

     0 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree \_\_\_

58. How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses?

     0 = Worry All of the Time, 10 = Do Not Ever Worry \_\_\_

59. How often do you worry about safety, food, or housing?

   0   = Worry All of the Time, 10 = Do Not Ever Worry

60. To what extent do you trust people overall?

     0   = Not at all, 10 = Completely   \_\_\_

61. To what extent do you trust the leadership at Urban Community College?

   0   = Not at all, 10 = Completely   \_\_\_

62. To what extent do you feel accepted or like you belong at Urban Community College?

0  = Not at all, 10 = Completely   ___

63. To what extent do you feel safe and comfortable at Urban Community College?

0   = Not at all, 10 = Completely   ___

64. How optimistic are you?

0     = Not at all, 10 = Completely   ___

65. How well do you manage your stress?

0   = Not at all, 10 = Completely   ___

66. How well do you take care of yourself overall?

0   = Not at all, 10 = Completely   ___

67. How is your work/life balance?

0   = Not at all, 10 = Completely   ___

68. How satisfied are you with your job overall at Urban Community College?

0   = Not at all, 10 = Completely   ___

69. What do you hope to learn/take away from this program? _____


All were given in one full survey via Qualtrics, 69 total questions, plus the demographics

section.

### Appendix G: Qualitative/Participant Questions

Post Survey-At end to be filled out with Quant survey-added to the end

4. What could we have done to make this workshop better?

5. What did you like the most about this series?

6. Were there any parts you didn't like?

7. What will you be able to take away from this experience to use in your job?

8. What will you be able to take away from this experience that you can use in your personal life?

9. Do you think this series has helped to increase your overall job satisfaction?

10. Do you feel any different after being part of this series?

11. What else would you like to learn?

12. Other courses/topics of interest?

Last 30 minutes of each session- Every week- as a group- round- table small group discussions

13. How can you use the information we have been discussing to apply to your job?

14. What are some ideas that we can gain to share with other people to help make the lives of our students and our colleagues lives better?

15. How can you use the information to apply to your work/life balance?

16. What is one strategy that you plan to use from today's session?

Discussion prompts before each session- To be filled out every 2 weeks before we meet. Each person individually

1. Based on the challenges from last week, how did they go?

2. Did they increase your overall happiness/well-being?

3. How did you feel after completing the challenges?

4. How is your daily journaling/self-care going?

5. What is going well?

6. What are your struggles?

   Focus Group Interviews

   Part 1- Thrive Program

1. Do you feel like you do a good job practicing self-care?

2. What was easy for you?

3. What has been a struggle?

4. Did you use the journal?

5. Complete the homework activities?

6. Did you find these helpful parts of the course?

7. Are there too many sessions? Not enough? Structured well?

8. Do you think this program Is beneficial?

9. How can we improve this program?

10. How can we use Thrive to help change the atmosphere of the college?

    Part 2 Campus

11. What have been some of the biggest challenges you have had to deal with while at Urban

    Community College?

12. How have you managed to work through these things?

13. Why do you think good employees leave their jobs?

14. What makes you stay at your job?

15. Do you feel like your voice is heard at Urban Community College?

16. Do you feel like you belong, that you are included in the discussions?

17. How do you think we could build an atmosphere of trust on campus?

18. Other thoughts

**Vita**

Rebecca (Becky) A. Howell graduated from Appalachian State University in December of 1995 receiving her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. She Completed her Master of Arts in Psychology in August of 2000 also from Appalachian State University. She has been a Professor of Psychology since 2001 and continues to work in higher education. In August of 2020 she began her doctorate program at Appalachian State University and received her Doctorate in Educational Leadership in May of 2023. She lives in central North Carolina and has dedicated her life to raising her four amazing children.  Her primary goal is to enrich the lives of her colleagues and students. When taking a journey remember to breathe, take a few moments to enjoy your surroundings, don't be afraid to play and try to remember to look for the positives.