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**Problem Statement**

American colleges and universities continue to experience draconian funding cuts, impacting operations to include tuition hikes and a myriad of staffing issues (Katsina et al., 2016; Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2017). At the same time, students are left to shoulder increased tuition and fees by arranging funding across multiple sources. The cruciality of the aforemention is even more poignant for small, liberal arts and sciences institutions – closures continue to make the news and students scramble for direction (Biemiller, 2019). Students’ mounting financial pressures make their persistence to graduation significantly less likely (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Raji & Schumacher, 2015), coupled with course-taking behaviors (Floyd, Shryock, Tripathi, Srinivasa, & Simon, 2015; Wong, 2018).

To explore the issue in great depth, this investigation takes a case study approach and piecemeals disparate sources of quantitative information. This aggregation strategy offers a unique opportunity to delve into the issue, shedding light on the borderlands of the bottomline and the student experience. Surprisingly, to date, no single empirical investigation has offered multiple frames of reference within a singular context, despite the far-reaching implications of such work. To respond to this area, using the data sources below, this work asks the following questions:

1. Does a particular sequence of courses benefit student persistence?
   1. Does sequence matter, after controlling for students’ background characteristics?
2. Does institutional funding impact student persistence?
   1. How much does financial support help, after controlling for students’ background characteristics?

**Data Sources**

*Institution-Level*

1. Financial Aid and Funding Sources – Populi, Student Information System
2. Enrollment Data – Populi, Student Information System
3. Students’ Beliefs and Perceptions – Internal datasets derived from and collected through validated survey instrumentation
4. Students’ Performances – Data from the Educational Testing Service’s Proficiency Profile (ETS PP) measuring quantitative, written, and critical thinking abilities

*Community-Level*

1. U.S. Census Data – Employed to glean insights into students’ communities of origin
2. U.S. Dept. of Education – Used to collect detail on students’ high schools

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