Sidni A. Justus, KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY, sjustus2@kennesaw.edu
Gianni Bisio, SOUTH COLLEGE, gianni.bisio@gmail.com
Teresa P. Raczek, KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY, traczek@kennesaw.edu

Course Withdrawal in Higher Education: Exploring Emotional and Practical Factors Behind Student Non-Completion Decisions

ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine students' reasons for course non-completion at a large diverse, public research university in the state of Georgia, using multiple datasets and a mixed methods approach. While many studies have framed course withdrawals as rational decisions based on academic or personal factors, this study explores a variety of factors, including both practical and emotional considerations, that shape students' withdrawal decisions. We analyzed emotional sentiment and reasons for course non-completion cited at the moment of withdrawal (i.e., disclosed on the registrar withdrawal form) as well as at retrospective timepoints (i.e., in a survey and semi-structured interview). At the time of withdrawal, students most frequently cited academic, personal, or mental health struggles as reasons for withdrawal, often expressing negative emotions. In some cases, students indicated the need for immediate crisis intervention. However, retrospective reflections revealed more positive emotions about their decisions and cited poor academic performance and an overall imbalance in their lives as key reasons. These findings highlight the complex interplay between academic challenges and emotional responses in the withdrawal process, suggesting that educators should consider both factors when addressing course non-completion. We also discuss the implications for future research and administrative policy.

KEYWORDS

course withdrawal, student mental health, student persistence, higher education retention

INTRODUCTION

In spring of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, course withdrawals spiked across institutions (Day, Chang, Chung, Doolittle, Housel, and McDaniel 2021; Day, Chung, Doolittle, Housel, and McDaniel 2023; Gazica, Leto, and Irish 2022). Since then, withdrawals from courses (i.e., lectures, labs, or modules) have leveled out and begun to resemble pre-pandemic trends (Bulman and Fairlie 2022). However, students continue to struggle with challenges during their educational journeys, including ones related to mental health, economic pressures, and family obligations. Given this context, we set out to study anew the ways that students think and feel about withdrawing from classes, how they make the decision, and what they think the impact will be on their academic careers, both in the moment and after time has passed. Thus, we undertook a mixed-method study that included analysis of student withdrawal forms, a brief survey, and follow-up interviews to

CC-BY-NC License 4.0 This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons – Attribution License 4.0 International which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed.

investigate the emotional experience of course withdrawals. This study approaches students as individuals embedded within broader society who are navigating complex social and emotional worlds while pursuing higher education.

Usually defined separately from dropping a class in the opening weeks of the semester or leaving school entirely, course withdrawal or course attrition can impact college persistence, retention, and the time and cost to complete degree requirements (Mozahem 2019). Researchers and students alike often see withdrawal negatively, often as an "unsuccessful attempt" (e.g., Bosshardt 2004; Glazier Hamann, Pollock, and Wilson 2021). However, withdrawing from a course may be considered a move toward academic maturity and success (Diaz 2002; Wheland et al. 2012). Choosing to start the semester with more demanding curricula or higher course loads demonstrates student ambition and positive risk-taking, and withdrawing from one class to protect grade point average (GPA), scholarships, or time spent on other classes can be a smart move. Further, withdrawing from classes to focus on health, mental health, or family allows students to balance the many facets of adult life. Although students who withdraw may express some regret, others express relief (Wheland et al. 2012). While these decisions can be examined through a rational lens (Boldt, Kassis, and Smith 2017; Bosshardt 2004; McKinney, Novak, Hagedorn, and Luna-Torres 2019), it can be difficult to pinpoint a single reason for withdrawal. Students develop their priorities in nuanced ways and make decisions based on multiple factors, including their broader life circumstances. Complex emotional and personal factors as well as academic struggles influence these decisions. Heightened emotional states (e.g., stress, frustration) can act as drivers alongside practical concerns when deciding to withdraw from a course.

Existing themes in course withdrawal

Previous studies have identified many causes for student course withdrawal (Bawa 2016; Bicak 2024; Boldt et al. 2017; Lee and Choi 2011). Predominant factors include high school GPA, college GPA, scores on standardized tests like the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) (Bicak 2024; Boldt et al. 2017; Bosshardt 2004; Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams III, and Wiklund 2002), and whether the student earned a high school diploma or completed an equivalency exam (e.g., the General Educational Development test or GED; McKinney et al. 2019). Additionally, students who withdrew from a class in the past and students who attempted a higher course load are more likely to withdraw from a class (Adams and Becker 1990; Boldt et al. 2017; Bosshardt 2004; Conklin 1997). Demographic factors, such as age, race/ethnicity, gender, and disability, also influence withdrawal patterns, though their impact varies across contexts (Adams and Becker 1990; Boldt et al. 2017; Mozahem 2019). Course-specific reasons include quality of teaching and either course (Friedlander 1981) or professor dissatisfaction (Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Conklin 1997; Dunwoody and Frank 1995). Often, students express a class' failure to meet their interest or their expectations in terms of content or rigor (Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Dunwoody and Frank 1995; Reed 1981). Historically, students tend to withdraw from online classes at higher rates (Bicak 2024; Boldt et al. 2017; Diaz 2002; Glazier 2021; McKinney et al. 2019). The trend is more pronounced for at-risk students or students who take more of their courses online (Glazier et al. 2021).

A student's broader life also impacts their decision and associated emotions. Financial difficulty is a leading cause (Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Dunwoody and Frank 1995; Facchini, Triventi, and Vergolini 2021), as students may need to spend more time working and less time on coursework. Additionally, work schedules can create time conflicts (Michalski 2014) and may negatively affect mental and physical health (Oviatt, Baumann, Bennett, and Garza 2017). Those with merit-based

scholarships may especially need to protect their GPA from a bad grade (Adams and Becker 1990; Boldt et al. 2017). Other life factors include family obligations, such as caregiving (Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Wladis, Hachey, and Conway 2017).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, student retention and persistence rates posed problems for college administrators who were concerned about graduation rates (Caruth 2018). Now, even more institutions are eager to improve student outcomes. We argue here that examining the emotional sentiment connected to course withdrawal helps to identify deeper issues that universities need to address in real time.

Emotional experiences in course withdrawal

Many students fit college into their broader lives which often includes working full or part time (Perna 2023; Robbins 2010), caring for family members, such as children or older adults (Pearson 2019; Samra, Waterhouse, and Lucassen 2021), and living off-campus (Lefkowitz and Walters 2022). Scholars have previously linked these factors to an increased likelihood of course withdrawal (Alfano and Eduilee 2013; CCCSE 2025; Simpson and Burnett 2019; Wladis et al. 2017). Additionally, young adult college students must master a new educational environment alongside the responsibilities of emerging adulthood, such as living on their own for the first time, learning how to accept responsibilities, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett 2023). Attending college creates an additional layer of opportunities and challenges for this age group (Bishop et al. 2019; Murray 2019). For example, academic exploration may result in frequent course and major changes as students form a distinct career-centered identity separate from the expectations of their caregivers and parents (Magolda and Taylor 2016). However, the instability and self-focus associated with emerging adulthood can contribute to increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Adams and Sharkin 2019). Some emerging adult students find difficulty balancing individual and relational role commitments and thus develop depressive symptoms (Bishop et al. 2019). Balancing academic and social pressures can impact academic performance and persistence.

Finally, students pursue education while managing physical and mental health needs that may influence persistence (e.g., Hjorth, Bilgrav, Frandsen, Overgaard, Torp-Pedersen, Nielsen, and Bøggild 2016). Pre-pandemic, mental health problems had been rising, with over one-third of college students reporting at least one disorder (Lipson, Lattie, and Eisenberg 2019). The pressures of COVID-19 exacerbated mental issues, including anxiety and depression (Clabaugh et al. 2020; Hamza, Ewing, Heath, and Goldstein 2020; Kecojevic, Basch, Sullivan, and Davi 2020; Rudenstine, McNeal, Schulder, Ettman, Hernandez, Gvozdieva, and Galea 2021). College student resilience has also decreased (Finch and Ong 2024; Naidu 2021). However, most students, particularly minority students, do not ask college faculty or staff for help when they are trying to navigate mental health challenges (Gannon, Richardson, and Ritzert 2024). Students often rely on peers for academic advice, including course withdrawal decisions (Wheland, Butler, Qammar, Bobkoff Katz, and Harris 2012). Unfortunately, the pandemic lockdowns increased the challenges students face in making these connections with others. This is significant because academically and socially integrated students tend to have higher graduation rates (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, and Cribbie 2007; Hopmeyer, Terino, Adamczyk, Corbitt Hall, DeCoste, and Troop-Gordon 2022; Tinto 1975).

In sum, being a few years past the COVID-19 shutdowns, socioemotional challenges related to mental health and diminished social skills have re-emerged or intensified (Cerutti, Burt, Moeller, and Seehuus 2024; Son, Hegde, Smith, Wang, and Sasangohar 2020; Tasso, Hisli Sahin, and San Roman 2021). This context warrants a fresh examination of the factors influencing student course withdrawal.

Assessing the shifting impact of student mental health on course withdrawals and ways that students reflect on these decisions can help institutions prioritize student success. Importantly, capturing student responses in real time can also assist institutions in identifying students who are in crisis and need rapid intervention.

The present study

This mixed-methods investigation contributes to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) literature by examining how students make sense of and reflect on withdrawing from a course. Using institutional records, student surveys, and follow-up interviews, we explore current trends in students' reasons and emotional sentiment surrounding withdrawal from a course. Guided by Hutchings (2000) taxonomy of SoTL questions, we frame our work as a "what is?" inquiry, seeking to document and better understand how students experience and interpret withdrawal decisions at different points in time. Aligned with Felten's (2013) emphasis on context and rigor, we also consider how institutional processes may create opportunities for students to disclose experiences that could meaningfully inform future support and intervention.

For dataset one, we performed comprehensive thematic and sentiment analyses of a large, anonymized institutional-level dataset that featured quantitative and qualitative data from student feedback forms and administrative records. This analysis explored reasons for leaving a course and how students felt when submitting their withdrawal form. For dataset two, we recruited a sample of current students to complete a survey that captured sociodemographic factors. We then conducted follow-up semi-structured interviews with a subset of these students in order to capture their retrospective reflections on the decision. This analysis also explored reasons cited by students and how they retrospectively felt about withdrawal. Each method and corresponding results are detailed below.

Institutional context

We conducted this study at Kennesaw State University, a large regional comprehensive university with about 50,000 students and R2 status in the Carnegie classification. Located in the greater Atlanta metropolitan region, the university attracts commuter and online students as well as students from across Georgia and nearby states who live on or near campus. A small portion of students also come from across the US and the world. The student body is racially and ethnically diverse, and it includes many students who work full or part-time as well as many first-generation college students. Most students receive some level of financial aid. This sample, therefore, is particularly suited to exploring post-COVID-19 course withdrawal behaviors.

Kennesaw State University distinguishes withdrawals from add/drops during the first few days of the semester. The withdrawal date occurs at mid-semester, often after students take midterm exams and receive some assignment grades. The current policy limits students who enter as freshmen to a total of eight withdrawals. Students who withdraw before the designated withdrawal date will not have any GPA impact. However, students who do so after this date receive an F or a WF, which factors into student GPAs as an F. Students only receive a refund by withdrawing from all classes, not individual courses. Exceptions are made for documented reasons, including medical issues and calls to active duty.

METHODS

Dataset 1: Thematic and sentiment analysis of withdrawal forms

The registrar provided de-identified data from undergraduate withdrawal forms that students submitted in calendar years 2019 and 2022. Variables included semester, year, cumulative GPA, and intended college/major. The data did not include student names, IDs, and course sections/faculty names. The 2022 form included an open-text field for students to explain their reason for withdrawing, though the university did not design it for this study. The 2019 dataset only compared overall withdrawal counts pre-pandemic, as that form did not include an open-text field for withdrawal reasons.

Coding strategy

We coded the 2022 open-text responses for the qualitative analysis. Our approach aligns with a theoretical or deductive ("top-down") approach (Boyatzis 1998) in which theoretical interest in an area drives the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). We began our thematic analysis by hypothesizing reasons for withdrawal in the data based on existing literature (e.g., Bicak 2024). After studying the literature and reviewing the dataset, we developed anticipated themes in order to inform our initial coding scheme. These themes included course-related concerns, personal health and mental health, family, work, finances, and transportation.

For each larger category, we created subcategories of different behavior types. Our iterative process resulted in a set of 79 sub-codes spanning nine larger categories: course-specific (e.g., difficulty with content or professor), changes in a students' larger academic plan (e.g., changing majors, course load, GPA preservation), personal health and mental health, family/relational obligations, employment, financial difficulties, administrative errors, other personal/life issues, and non-descriptive or blank responses. Our team performed coding of 10% of the data together to ensure agreement before dividing the remaining entries.

Results

There were more withdrawals in 2022 (N = 20555) than in 2019 (N = 12753). As mentioned above, the 2019 withdrawal form did not include open-text reasons, so subsequent results only include 2022 data.

In 2022, the cumulative GPA of students who withdrew from individual courses ranged from 0-4.0 (M = 2.69, SD = 0.93). Withdrawals were most common among majors in the humanities and social sciences (23.1%, n = 4747) and business schools (20.3%, n = 4168). The top five chosen or intended majors of students who withdrew from courses were psychology (7.2%, n = 1470), biology (5.7%, n = 1171), computer science (5.5%, n = 1140), nursing (5.5%, n = 1139), and mechanical engineering (3.9%, n = 803). All five are within Kennesaw State's top ten most enrolled programs.

Of the total entries from 2022, we could not code 2,930 (14.3%) into categories because the reason textbox was left blank (3.1%), contained only random letters or symbols (1.8%), consisted of responses such as "n/a," "no comment," or similar (6.7%), or provided a logistical response like "filed complaint to administrator," "not enough space," or "can contact for more information" (2.7%).

We coded the remaining 17,625 entries (85.7% of the dataset). Of these, 14,475 (70.4%) cited only one reason, while 2,890 (14.1%) cited two reasons. A smaller subset of 260 entries cited three or more reasons. Table 1 summarizes the frequency of each of the nine major coding categories. It

reflects how often students cited each category, regardless of whether they mentioned other categories as well.

Table 1. Frequencies of major categories of course withdrawal reasons in 2022 (N = 17,625)

Major category	Frequency (n)	Percent of coded entries (%)
Course-specific	6684	37.9%
Larger academic plan	5473	31.0%
Miscellaneous personal reasons	2977	16.9%
Health/mental health	2453	13.9%
Work related	1397	7.9%
Family/relational	1311	7.4%
Financial difficulty	476	2.7%
Administrative issues	280	1.6%

Note: The total percentage exceeds 100% because some students provided multiple reasons.

While Table 1 presents the frequency of mentions for each major category, Table 2 provides a more granular view of the most common sub-codes. These sub-codes represent factors that appeared in more than 15% of the entries within their respective category. Together, these findings indicated that academic challenges remain the primary drivers of course withdrawal, but personal and external factors, such as health, work, and family responsibilities, also contribute.

Table 2. Sub-codes of course withdrawal reasons: Frequency and proportions within (N = 17,625)

Major category	Sub-code	Frequency (n)	Percent of major category (%)	Percent of total dataset (%)
Course-specific				
	Difficulty with course content	1700	25.4%	9.6%
	Difficulty with professor	1456	21.7%	8.3%
	Falling behind	1125	16.8%	6.4%
	Poor assignment grades	1070	16.1%	6.1%
Larger academic plan				
	Planning to change major or minor	1407	25.7%	8.0%
	Managing overall course load	1249	22.8%	7.1%
	GPA preservation	1052	19.2%	6.0%
	Intention to retake the course	875	15.9%	5.0%
Miscellaneous personal reasons				
	Time management and lack of life balance	974	32.7%	5.5%

	Unspecified "personal problems"	676	22.7%	3.8%
	General distress	563	18.9%	3.2%
Health/mental health				
	Unspecified "mental health concerns	1032	42.1%	5.9%
Work related				
	Unspecified work obligations	862	61.7%	4.9%
	Work-specific scheduling conflicts	385	27.6%	2.2%
Family/relational				
	Unspecified "family issues"	531	40.5%	3.0%
	Grief/loss of loved one	321	24.5%	1.8%
	Family member health issues	262	20.0%	1.5%
	Caregiving responsibilities	204	15.6%	1.2%
Financial difficulty				
	Needing to work more	193	40.5%	1.1%
	Unspecified "financial difficulties"	156	32.8%	0.9%
	Course-related expenses	115	24.2%	0.7%
Administrative issues				
	Accidental registration	68	24.3%	0.4%
	Dropped a corresponding course	65	23.2%	0.4%

Note: Included sub-codes appeared in more than 15% of entries within their respective major category. When students provided multiple reasons, we coded withdrawals into multiple categories and/or sub-codes.

Some students provided nuanced responses that reflected multiple challenges rather than a single, clear reason for withdrawal. Many discussed multifaceted reasons like financial problems, family caregiving responsibilities, work, mental health, or additional issues. Others highlighted general struggles and feelings of fatigue while attempting to succeed academically and balance everything in their lives. They wrote that they were "struggling," experiencing a "difficult transition," and that "adjusting to college hasn't been easy." These responses illustrate the complexity of the withdrawal decision and provide insight into students' emotional lives in addition to rational decisions.

Dataset 2: In-depth surveys and interviews

Because the withdrawal forms provided only brief explanations, we also collected survey and interview responses from a separate student group. These retrospective reflections provided a complementary view to the real-time form data.

Participants

Thirty-nine adult students (ages 18–47 years, M = 21.5, SD = 4.6) who withdrew from at least one course participated in the survey and follow-up interview. We recruited participants via word of mouth and advertisements posted around campus during the fall 2023 semester. Twenty-two additional students completed the initial survey but had not withdrawn from a course (n = 12), opted out of the follow-up interview (n = 2), or did not reply to scheduling requests (n = 8). Because we anonymized the withdrawal form data, we cannot connect datasets one and two. We did not compensate participants for their participation.

Procedure

Participants accessed the brief (~five minute) Qualtrics survey by scanning a QR code on recruitment flyers with their own device or, during sidewalk recruitment, on a research team iPad. After scanning, they completed an electronic consent form before beginning the survey. The survey included demographic questions and basic questions about course withdrawal and consideration of withdrawal. At the end, participants indicated interest (Y/N) in a follow-up interview (<15 minutes) regarding their experiences and could provide their email for scheduling. We removed identifying information (consent names and emails) before analysis, and we linked survey results and follow-up interviews by participant number only. The interview included five, open-ended questions:

1. How did you make the decision to withdraw?
2. When did you make the decision to withdraw?
3. Who did you consult with prior to making this decision (e.g., faculty, advisor, peer, friend, etc.)?
4. What sort of factor or support would have led you to change your mind?
5. How did this impact your plans for taking other classes?

These questions aimed to further explore the context of students' decisions, including timing, influences, and perceived impact (i.e., thoughts about continuing with other current or future courses). We conducted follow-up interviews in a private room and used scripts. The research team also completed training to ensure reliability. The interviewer audio recorded each session. One author listened to the interviews and transcribed key excerpts from individual responses to each of the five questions into spreadsheets for summary analysis.

Results

Descriptives

Survey descriptives revealed that the sample (*N* = 39) was almost evenly split amongst those who had withdrawn from only one course (53.8%) and those who had withdrawn from multiple courses (46.2%). Most of the sample (75.9%) had not withdrawn from any course multiple times, 15.4% had withdrawn from one course multiple times, and 2.6% had withdrawn from multiple courses

multiple times. Further, most of the sample (79.5%) had considered additional course withdrawal but decided to persist in those courses. The demographics of interview participants (Supplementary Table) generally represent our university's demographics, although our sample has slightly more females and Hispanic students.

Interview

In asking students to reflect on how they decided to withdraw, we found that interviewees primarily factored in their current performance, likelihood of passing, and overall workload. For example, one student stated, "I looked at my grades and looked at the way that my assignments were going and just kind of figured out that this isn't going to work, 'I need to pull out now before I am going to tank my grade." Another reported, "This class is too hard for me right now . . . I got too many courses . . . It's better for me to withdraw than fail." Similarly, when evaluating when students made their withdrawal decision, students often mentioned withdrawing either after poor performance on a particular assignment (e.g., ". . . it had to be like exactly after that test") or when they realized their performance was unrecoverable (e.g., "When I felt like my grade was going really down").

Students differed in who, if anyone, they consulted for advice regarding this decision. Some mentioned regular consultation with academic advisors and/or faculty themselves. Others mentioned consulting with family, friends, or other personal connections or noted plans to do so in the future (e.g., "I make sure and consult with other people who have already taken the class to see how difficult it would be"). Lastly, some acknowledged they could have talked to outside parties but instead made decisions themselves (e.g., "I would say I talked with my academic advisor but I really just thought about it by myself . . ., this is my degree, college career, and I don't want to mess up and start off with Fs'. I just went for it.").

When asked if any factors or support would have led them to change their minds, students mentioned many possibilities. Some expressed desires for a better understanding of course expectations (e.g., "Knowing what the course consisted of before signing up") or increased faculty member support (e.g., "I wish the professor was more communicative. Like, they didn't really reach out to students as much, which I would have stayed if that was the case"). Similarly, others desired empathy around their life demands (e.g., "Maybe just like a little more sympathy from the professor in this case for being a working student."). Others reflected on their own actions (e.g., ". . . Maybe if I had gone to tutoring like more often, because I probably only went for like 1 or 2 weeks and I was like, 'I'm not seeing any improvement.' But, you know, I probably just didn't go long enough").

Lastly, when asked to reflect on how their decision impacted their larger academic plan, students emphasized behavioral rather than affective outcomes. Students commonly mentioned delayed graduation dates or being set back due to retaking the course. These results did not always off-put those earlier in their academic career (e.g., "It didn't impact it too much because it was a second-year class anyway. . . I'll just take it my second year, first semester second year"). Others noted decisions to change their major or field of study (e.g., "It opened up another opportunity for me to look elsewhere and take some classes that fit my pursuit of knowledge better"). Some also mentioned modifications in how they would approach choosing future courses (e.g., "I was a lot more careful in what I took together and the professors I decided to choose"). Finally, some students reflected positively on their overall experience, noting lessons learned and a sense of resolution. For example, one student mentioned, "It kind of showed me that I need to lighten my course load a little . . . it all worked out in the end," while another reflected, "But it was OK overall. It didn't ruin anything." These reflections imply growth and acceptance among respondents.

Sentiment analysis: Comparing withdrawal forms to interviews

To compare student feelings about withdrawing from classes at the moment of withdrawing to a later point in time, we conducted an automated sentiment analysis on the withdrawal forms and interviews using NVivo. In the withdrawal form dataset, we examined students' reasons for withdrawal. We first eliminated non-answers and answers that could not be auto-coded (e.g., "no comment," "N/A," "xxx"), which left 9232 responses to analyze. In the interview response dataset, we included responses to all interview questions (297 responses). We structured the sentiment analysis to create four different categories ranging from very negative to very positive. Neutral words were eliminated, which left 2,308 words from the withdrawal forms and 99 words from the interviews expressing sentiment. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Sentiment analysis on withdrawal forms and interviews

	Very negative	Moderately negative	Moderately positive	Very positive	Total entries
Withdrawal form	528 (23%)	1444 (63%)	262 (11%)	74 (3%)	2308
Interviews	24 (24%)	37 (37%)	25 (25%)	13 (13%)	99

While the student responses on the withdrawal form largely fell into the very to moderately negative categories, the answers for the interviews were more positive. While the percentage of those who used "very negative" words in interviews remained higher in interviews than on the form, there was a major shift in the interviews from "moderately negative" to the two positive categories. This suggests that over time, some students reshape their attitudes toward withdrawing from a class, viewing the outcome as positive instead of negative.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous research that identified various student and course characteristics as predictors of course withdrawal (e.g., Bicak 2024), this study analyzed such variables within a large public university in order to explore how these factors manifest in a post-COVID-19 academic environment. This study included an analysis of common reasons for course withdrawal and featured multiple data sources, investigating students' in-the-moment and retrospective thoughts. Here we summarize and discuss our study's major findings and implications for faculty, administrators, and future researchers.

The institutional data showcased student reasons for withdrawing that echoed course specific or academic plan issues previously discussed in the literature (e.g., Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Bicak 2024; Conklin 1997). Students also identified personal reasons, including health and mental health, financial and work issues, and family responsibilities, which were all previously discussed (e.g., Dunwoody and Frank 1995; Facchini et al. 2021; Michalski 2014; Wheland et al. 2012). Personal reasons are likely more prevalent today as the current study population often balances work (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; Perna 2023) and caregiving responsibilities (Pearson 2019; Samra et al. 2021) to a greater extent than students in previous decades. These responsibilities are further projected to increase due to demographic trends and rising family care demands (Knopf, Wazinski, Wanka, and Hess 2022). Notably, our participants cited personal and mental health as reasons for withdrawal more frequently (13.9%) than financial difficulty (2.7%), which was the most common

personal reason cited in prior studies (e.g., Aldridge and Rowley 2001; Facchini et al. 2021). This is unsurprising as college students' mental health has declined over the last decade (Lipson et al. 2019). Importantly, additional instances of personal/mental health, financial, and other difficulties are undoubtedly embedded in the unspecified "personal problems" code for which we did not have additional context available to sub-code. The miscellaneous personal reasons category (16.9%) was the top personal reason for withdrawal, ahead of health/mental health issues and only behind the two academic-related reasons. Collectively, these findings suggest a variety of ways that faculty and administration can support students and lessen the likelihood of withdrawal.

Another notable finding is that students had complex and nuanced reasons for withdrawing; many identified multiple issues or cited general difficulties. Others seemed overscheduled and shared various ways that they were too busy, overextended, and overcommitted. This can happen as students try to balance an academic load with work, family obligations, and other responsibilities that are more common in today's student population (Glazier 2021; Oviatt et al. 2017; Pearson 2019; Perna 2023; Samra et al. 2021). Additionally, many are navigating academic and career paths during the inherently unstable life stage known as emerging adulthood, typical for many traditional-aged college students (Arnett 2023). Difficulties balancing various roles and responsibilities may account for the heightened reports of mental health challenges in our study, a finding that echoes previous research (Adams and Sharkin 2019; Bishop et al. 2019). This may be why some students discussed burnout and stress in their withdrawal forms, writing, "I felt like I needed a break," "I need a chance to breathe," and "I yearn for rest." Still others expressed overwhelm with everything in their lives: "I feel like I'm drowning," "Everything is too much for me," "life = too much right now," "overwhelmed with life itself." Burnout is a critical issue in higher education that negatively impacts academic achievement (Madigan and Curran 2021) and increases the likelihood of dropping out (Marôco et al. 2020). These findings underscore the importance of addressing burnout proactively in order to ensure student well-being and success.

Our study also indicates that course withdrawal may signal a crisis or distress that universities should help students address in real time. Our sentiment analysis supports the idea that the decision to withdraw was in fact emotional. Dataset one reasons were often connected to strong emotions, negative thoughts, and a generally discouraged outlook. Some students drew a sad emoji or just wrote the word*, "sad."* Some blamed themselves for the context that led to their withdrawal: (e.g., "I was irresponsible," "I did not put in the effort required. I am sorry," "time management"). Some students went further to chastise themselves for not succeeding in the class, writing "Felt incompetent," "I hate myself," "I'm simply not good enough to pass this class," "I suck," "small brain," "I'm too stupid," "I'm a loser." These elicitations demonstrate the strong emotions students feel when withdrawing from a class and how that action can impact their broader mental health. Importantly, some students provided statements that indicated an immediate crisis and need for intervention. Some felt they were directly addressing a person on the form, including, potentially, their professor. For example, some apologized for withdrawing: "I'm so sorry I will do better next semester," "Sorry for the inconvenience," "I do apologize." Some thanked the professor for helping or for a good class. Others said their reasons were "none of your business," or "fuck off." Some mild statements that indicated distress include: "Been on a down spiral in my life," "I'm not feeling like myself anymore," "Mentally exhausted and sick," and "Can't take it anymore." Some also wrote specific statements that implied suicide ideation, sexual assault, domestic violence, and general safety issues. Others noted that they were evicted, forced to leave their family home, lost their housing for other reasons, or were homeless. A few mentioned disability support issues. In sum, the data revealed that many students

likely assumed their withdrawal forms would be read by another invested party and that the reasons provided would be reviewed and potentially acted upon. This assumption highlights a critical discrepancy between students' expectations and the primarily procedural nature of most institutional withdrawal processes. We therefore suggest that administrators at institutions with similar student demographics and resource capabilities consider implementing similar withdrawal forms while establishing real-time monitoring protocols to detect indicators of crisis, harm, or unmet needs. These efforts would allow institutions to intervene when required in a timely and supportive manner. Additionally, we suggest that faculty follow up with students who withdrew from their classes to identify potential crises. That is, course withdrawal may function as an early or acute signal of student distress and should be treated as an opportunity for engagement. Existing early alert or behavioral flag systems at many institutions could be enhanced by incorporating data from withdrawal forms. Universities are uniquely positioned to address non-academic issues affecting students' lives as well. For example, they can provide counseling and advising services and expand existing academic resources to be accessible 24 hours a day in order to accommodate diverse work schedules. Faculty who are attentive to students who withdraw can contribute to these goals.

Compared to the institutional data, we conducted the survey and follow-up interviews after students had time to reflect on their decision. Several expressed a more positive outlook, noting benefits such as GPA protection or maintaining scholarships. Students also highlighted lessons learned, such as lightening their course load, focusing more on current classes, and selecting professors and courses that better fit their needs. These reflections align with literature on emerging adulthood as a period of exploration and self-discovery in which shifting academic interests can support career readiness, clarity, and identity formation (Arnett 2023; Tanner 2006). Ultimately, this process contributes to developing well-rounded students who are better prepared for their future careers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study is subject to limitations, including the smaller sample size in dataset two, which provided rich qualitative insights but may not be sufficiently powered to draw broad demographic conclusions or statistical analyses. Future research with larger samples, possibly encompassing multiple universities, would allow for a more robust comparison and help identify meaningful patterns in withdrawal behaviors.

As we utilized anonymized institutional data for dataset one, we could not determine how many courses each student withdrew from. Thus, this research cannot differentiate the causes and experiences between students who withdrew from a single course versus all courses. Future work should compare these two types of withdrawal. In addition, our surveys and interviews (dataset two) only included undergraduate students who were on campus and not those who completely withdrew from school or who took all online classes. Thus, our findings may not apply to those populations. Instead, our findings show how withdrawing from a class can be an important strategy for undergraduate students who continue their studies on campus.

Further, given the anonymity of dataset one (withdrawal forms), we cannot confirm whether any of the same students appear in dataset two (survey/interviews). Future studies with longitudinal data tracking the same students could further explore shifts in emotional sentiment, from negative at the time of withdrawal versus positive reframing subsequently.

Finally, our survey and interviews did not explicitly assess time since withdrawal. Students' retrospective accounts were more positive and reflective than the immediate withdrawal form

responses. Future studies should measure elapsed time to identify when shifts in reflection and emotionality emerge and to guide the timing of support and intervention.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests a need for targeted interventions that address both the academic and non-academic factors influencing student course withdrawal and ultimately retention and progression rates. Students continue to state that academic difficulties are the main issue when pursuing a college degree. However, academic difficulties spring from challenges students face in their broader lives. Many students discussed competing demands in their overscheduled lives as well as work, financial issues, mental health, and family responsibilities. Moreover, we found that the decision to withdraw was not only a rational one, but an emotional choice, which sometimes led to students expressing sadness, despair, or distress. These findings suggest that emotional and psychological factors may play a role in course withdrawal, though the prevalence and nature of these factors may differ depending on the institutional context. Nonetheless, these insights challenge the assumption that withdrawal decisions are inherently impulsive. Instead, they often reflect deliberate, emotionally charged judgments shaped by current life circumstances. Further, some students used the withdrawal process to communicate suicide ideation, a violent incident in their lives, a lack of safety, or general distress. These disclosures underscore the need to implement real-time monitoring by trained staff to transform these forms from merely documentation tools into proactive avenues for student support. Those students who continue with their studies may reflect more positively on withdrawing and on the lessons learned that helped them progress academically. While this study focused on a single, large public research university, we believe the findings regarding the interplay between academic and personal factors in course withdrawals are relevant to other postsecondary institutions facing similar challenges. Further research, therefore, remains essential in order to understand how students across diverse contexts experience course withdrawal and to inform institutional practices and compassionate, student-centered approaches that support retention.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Sidni A. Justus (United States) is an assistant professor of psychological science at Kennesaw State University.

Gianni Bisio (United States) was a doctoral candidate in international conflict management at Kennesaw State University at the time of this research and currently works at South College.

Teresa P. Raczek (United States) is a professor of anthropology at Kennesaw State University.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank several people for their support and feedback on this project, including Michael Chen, Chanler Hilley, Paul Parker, Mark Patterson, Hillary Steiner, KSU's Office of Institutional Research, KSU's Radow College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and research assistants Emily Hutson and Tiana Lawton. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments.

ETHICS

We conducted the study according to the informed consent protocols outlined in IRB-FY23-163, which was approved by the Kennesaw State University IRB office.

REFERENCES

Adams, John L., and William E. Becker. 1990. "Course Withdrawals: A Probit Model and Policy Recommendations." *Research in Higher Education* 31: 519–38. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00992619.

Adams, Aimee C., and Bruce Sharkin. 2019. "Problems Associated with Emerging Adulthood." In *Emerging Adulthood and Higher Education*, edited by Joseph L. Murray and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. Routledge.

Aldridge, Sue, and Jennifer Rowley. 2001. "Conducting a Withdrawal Survey." *Quality in Higher Education* 7 (1): 55–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320120045085.

Alfano, Halley J., and Nina B. Eduljee. 2013. "Differences in Work, Levels of Involvement, and Academic Performance between Residential and Commuter Students." *College Student Journal* 47 (2): 334–42.

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2023. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. Oxford University Press.

Bawa, Papia. 2016. "Retention in Online Courses: Exploring Issues and Solutions–A Literature Review." *SAGE Open* 6 (1): 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015621777.

Bicak, Ibrahim. 2024. "Course Withdrawal Behaviors and Predictors of Course Withdrawal among College Students." *Research in Higher Education* 65: 354–77. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-023-09757-4 .

Bishop, Jennifer L., Jerika C. Norona, Patricia N. E. Roberson, Deborah P. Welsh, and Sara K. McCurry. 2019. "Adult Attachment, Role Balance, and Depressive Symptoms in Emerging Adulthood." *Journal of Adult Development* 26: 31–40. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-018-9295-z.

Boldt, David J., Mary M. Kassis, and William J. Smith. 2017. "Factors Impacting the Likelihood of Student Withdrawals in Core Business Classes." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice* 18 (4): 415–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115606452.

Bosshardt, William. 2004. "Student Drops and Failure in Principles Courses." *The Journal of Economic Education* 35 (2): 111–28. https://doi.org/10.3200/JECE.35.2.111-128.

Boyatzis, Richard E. 1998. *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development.* Sage.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Bulman, George, and Robert Fairlie. 2022. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Community College Enrollment and Student Success: Evidence from California Administrative Data." *Education Finance and Policy* 17 (4): 745–64. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00384.

Caruth, Gail D. 2018. "Student Engagement, Retention, and Motivation: Assessing Academic Success in Today's College Students." *Participatory Educational Research* 5 (1): 17–30. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.18.4.5.1.

Cerutti, Janine, Keith B. Burt, Robert W. Moeller, and Martin Seehuus. 2024. "Declines in Social-Emotional Skills in College Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Frontiers in Psychology* 15: 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1392058.

Clabaugh, Alison, Juan F. Duque, and Logan J. Fields. 2021. "Academic Stress and Emotional Well-Being in United States College Students Following Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12: 1–8. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.628787.

Community College Survey of Engagement. 2025. "Multiple Responsibilities, Single Mission: Understanding the Experiences of Community College Parenting Students." https://cccse.org/parenting-students/report.

Conklin, Karen A. 1997. "Course Attrition: A 5-Year Perspective on Why Students Drop Classes." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 21 (8): 753–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/1066892970210807.

Day, Terence, I-Chun Catherine Chang, Calvin King Lam Chung, William E. Doolittle, Jacqueline Housel, and Paul N. McDaniel. 2021. "The Immediate Impact of COVID-19 on Postsecondary Teaching and Learning." *The Professional Geographer* 73 (1): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2020.1823864.

Day, Terence, Calvin King Lam Chung, William E. Doolittle, Jacqueline Housel, and Paul N. McDaniel. 2023. "Beyond COVID Chaos: What Postsecondary Educators Learned from the Online Pivot." *The Professional Geographer* 75 (1): 14–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2022.2081225.

Diaz, David P. 2002. "Online Drop Rates Revisited." *The Technology Source* 3 (3): 35–51.

Dunwoody, Philip T., and Michael L. Frank. 1995. "Why Students Withdraw from Classes." *The Journal of Psychology* 129 (5): 553–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1995.9914927.

Facchini, Marta, Moris Triventi, and Loris Vergolini. 2021. "Do Grants Improve the Outcomes of University Students in a Challenging Context? Evidence from a Matching Approach." *Higher Education* 81: 917–34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00586-3.

Felten, Peter. 2013. "Principles of Good Practice in SoTL." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 1 (1): 121–25. https://doi.org/10.2979/teachlearninqu.1.1.121

Finch, Bethany, and Elsie Ong. 2024. "Exploring Coping Resiliency and Depression Among University Students in a Post-Pandemic Context." *Advances in Mental Health* 22 (3): 711–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/18387357.2024.2323507.

Friedlander, Jack. 1981. "Why Students Drop Courses." *Junior College Resource Review*. ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges.

Friedlander, Laura J., Graham J. Reid, Naomi Shupak, and Robert Cribbie. 2007. "Social Support, Self-Esteem, and Stress as Predictors of Adjustment to University Among First-Year Undergraduates." *Journal of College Student Development* 48 (3): 259–74. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2007.0024.

Gannon, Kylie R., Leah R. Richardson, and Timothy R. Ritzert. 2024. "The Mental Health Climate and Mental Health-Related Academic Help Seeking on US College Campuses." *Stigma and Health* 10 (1): 122–31. https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000502.

Gazica, Michele W., Grace D. Leto, and Andrea L. Irish. 2022. "The Effects of Unexpected Changes to Content Delivery on Student Learning Outcomes: A Psychological Contract Perspective During the COVID-19 Era." *Psychology in the Schools* 59 (8): 1473–91. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22685.

Glazier, Rebecca A., Kerstin Hamann, Philip H. Pollock, and Bruce M. Wilson. 2021. "What Drives Student Success? Assessing the Combined Effect of Transfer Students and Online Courses." *Teaching in Higher Education* 26 (6): 839–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1686701.

Glazier, Rebecca A. 2021. *Connecting in the Online Classroom: Building Rapport Between Teachers and Students*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hamza, Chloe A., Lexi Ewing, Nancy L. Heath, and Abby L. Goldstein. 2020. "When Social Isolation is Nothing New: A Longitudinal Study on Psychological Distress During COVID-19 Among University Students with and without Preexisting Mental Health Concerns." *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne* 62 (1): 20–30. https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000255.

Hjorth, Cathrine F., Line Bilgrav, Louise Sjørslev Frandsen, Charlotte Overgaard, Christian Torp-Pedersen, Berit Nielsen, and Henrik Bøggild. 2016. "Mental Health and School Dropout Across Educational Levels and Genders: A 4.8-Year Follow-Up Study." *BMC Public Health* 16: 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3622-8.

Hopmeyer, Andrea, Beatrice Terino, Katarzyna Adamczyk, Darcy Corbitt Hall, Kathleen DeCoste, and Wendy Troop-Gordon. 2022. "The Lonely Collegiate: An Examination of the Reasons for Loneliness Among Emerging Adults in College in the Western United States and West-Central Poland." *Emerging Adulthood* 10 (1): 237–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696820966110.

Hutchings, Pat. 2000. *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Kecojevic, Aleksandar, Corey H. Basch, Marianne Sullivan, and Nicole K. Davi. 2020. "The Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on Mental Health of Undergraduate Students in New Jersey, Cross-Sectional Study." *PLOS ONE* 15 (9): e0239696. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239696.

Knopf, Lea, Karla Wazinski, Anna Wanka, and Moritz Hess. 2022. "Caregiving Students: A Systematic Literature Review of an Under-Researched Group." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 46 (6): 822–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.2008332.

Lee, Youngju, and Jaeho Choi. 2011. "A Review of Online Course Dropout Research: Implications for Practice and Future Research." *Educational Technology Research and Development* 59 (5): 593–618. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-010-9177-y.

Lefkowitz, Eva S., and Tracy L. Walters. 2022. "Selection and Socialization Effects of Living On vs. Off Campus." *Emerging Adulthood* 10 (5): 1108–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968221102001.

Lipson, Sarah Ketchen, Emily G. Lattie, and Daniel Eisenberg. 2019. "Increased Rates of Mental Health Service Utilization by US College Students: 10-Year Population-Level Trends (2007–2017)." *Psychiatric Services* 70 (1): 60–63. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201800332.

Madigan, Daniel J., and Thomas Curran. 2021. "Does Burnout Affect Academic Achievement? A Meta-Analysis of over 100,000 Students." *Educational Psychology Review* 33: 387–405. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-020-09533-1.

Magolda, Marcia Baxter, and Kari Taylor. 2016. "Developing Self-Authorship in College to Navigate Emerging Adulthood." In *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood*, edited by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, 299–315. Oxford University Press.

Marôco, João, Hugo Assunção, Heidi Harju-Luukkainen, Su-Wei Lin, Pou-Seong Sit, Kwok-cheung Cheung, Benvindo Maloa, Ivana Stepanović Ilic, Thomas J. Smith, and Juliana A. D. B. Campos. 2020. "Predictors of Academic Efficacy and Dropout Intention in University Students: Can Engagement Suppress Burnout?" *PLOS ONE* 15 (10): e0239816. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239816.

McKinney, Lyle, Heather Novak, Linda Serra Hagedorn, and Maria Luna-Torres. 2019. "Giving Up on a Course: An Analysis of Course Dropping Behaviors Among Community College Students." *Research in Higher Education* 60: 184–202. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-018-9509-z.

Michalski, Greg V. 2014. "In Their Own Words: A Text Analytics Investigation of College Course Attrition." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 38 (9): 811–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2012.720865.

Mozahem, Najib. 2019. "Course Withdrawal: A Comparison of Business and Engineering Students in a Private University." *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* 11 (4): 828–43. https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-11-2018-0225.

Murray, Joseph L. 2019. "Emerging Adulthood and Psychosocial Development in College." In *Emerging Adulthood and Higher Education,* edited by Joseph L. Murray and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. Routledge.

Naidu, Som. 2021. "Building Resilience in Education Systems Post-COVID-19." *Distance Education* 42 (1): 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2021.1885092.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). 2022. *College Student Employment*. The Condition of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/2022/ssa_508.pdf.

Oviatt, David P., Michael R. Baumann, Janet M. Bennett, and Raymond T. Garza. 2017. "Undesirable Effects of Working While in College: Work-School Conflict, Substance Use, and Health." *The Journal of Psychology* 151 (5): 433–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2017.1314927.

Pearson, A. Fiona. 2019. *Back in School: How Student Parents are Transforming College and Family*. Rutgers University Press.

Perna, Laura W. 2023. "Introduction." In *Understanding the Working College Student: New Research and Its Implications for Policy and Practice*, edited by Laura W. Perna. Stylus.

Reed, Jeffrey G. 1981. "Dropping a College Course: Factors Influencing Students' Withdrawal Decisions." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 73 (3): 376–85. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.73.3.376.

Robbins, W. M. 2010. "Learning with Hard Labour: University Students as Workers." *Australian Bulletin of Labour* 36 (1): 103–20.

Rudenstine, Sasha, Kat McNeal, Talia Schulder, Catherine K. Ettman, Michelle Hernandez, Kseniia Gvozdieva, and Sandro Galea. 2021. "Depression and Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic in an Urban, Low-Income Public University Sample." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 34 (1): 12–22. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22600.

Samra, Rajvinder, Philippa Waterhouse, and Mathijs Lucassen. 2021. "Combining and Managing Work-Family-Study Roles and Perceptions of Institutional Support." *Distance Education* 42 (1): 88–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2020.1869530.

Simpson, Denise Balfour, and Dana Burnett. 2019. "Commuters versus Residents: The Effects of Living Arrangement and Student Engagement on Academic Performance." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice* 21 (3): 286–304. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025117707516.

Son, Changwon, Sudeep Hegde, Alec Smith, Xiaomei Wang, and Farzan Sasangohar. 2020. "Effects of COVID-19 on College Students' Mental Health in the United States: Interview Survey Study." *Journal Medical Internet Research* 22 (9): 1–14.

Snyder, C. Richard, Hal S. Shorey, Jennifer Cheavens, Kimberley Mann Pulvers, Virgil H. Adams III, and Cynthia Wiklund. 2002. "Hope and Academic Success in College." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94 (4): 820–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.94.4.820.

Tanner, Jennifer Lynn. 2006. "Recentering During Emerging Adulthood: A Critical Turning Point in Life Span Human Development." In *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, edited by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, 21–55. American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11381-002.

Tasso, Anthony F., Nesrin Hisli Sahin, and Gabrielle J. San Roman. 2021. "COVID-19 Disruption on College Students: Academic and Socioemotional Implications." *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 13 (1): 9–15. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000996.

Tinto, Vincent. 1975. “Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research.” *Review of Educational Research* 45 (1): 89–125. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089.

Wheland, Ethel R., Kevin A. Butler, Helen Qammar, Karyn Bobkoff Katz, and Rose Harris. 2012. “What Are They Thinking? Students’ Affective Reasoning and Attitudes about Course Withdrawal.” *NACADA Journal* 32 (2): 17–25. https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-32.2.17.

Wladis, Claire, Alyse C. Hachey, and Katherine Conway. 2017. “No Time for College? An Investigation of Time Poverty and Parenthood. *The Journal of Higher Education* 89 (6): 807–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1442983.



Copyright for the content of articles published in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* resides with the authors, and copyright for the publication layout resides with the journal. These copyright holders have agreed that this article should be available on open access under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited, and to cite *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* as the original place of publication. Readers are free to share these materials—as long as appropriate credit is given, a link to the license is provided, and any changes are indicated.

Justus, Sidni A., Gianni Bisio, and Teresa P. Raczek. 2026. “Course Withdrawal in Higher Education: Exploring Emotional and Practical Factors Behind Student Non-Completion Decisions.” *Teaching & Learning Inquiry 14*: 1–18. https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.14.54