College Success: First Year Seminar’s Effectiveness on Freshmen Academic and Social Integration, Impact on Academic Achievement and Retention at a Southern Institution

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Abstract

Increasing student retention and improving graduation rates continues to remain a critical issue for undergraduate institutions. Previous research suggests that student attrition is predominantly voluntary, and is influenced by institutional characteristics. The importance of academic and social integration as a strategy to reduce attrition is achieved with peer and faculty interactions (Tinto, 2002; Astin, 1993). First Year Seminars (FYS), designed to help students in their transition and promote such interactions, are in place at many higher education institutions. The purpose of this ex-post-facto, sequential mixed-methods study is to ascertain the influence of FYS attendance on student integration, academic achievement, and retention.

This study focused on a voluntary, not-for-credit sample of freshman (N = 99) participants who responded to an online survey. Respondents were assigned to two groups, Group A attended 5 or less (n = 37) and Group B (n = 62) attended six or more sessions.

Data analysis revealed that while the mean scores for Group B were greater than Group A, there were no statistical differences in the academic integration between Group A (M = 5.12, SD = 1.58) and Group B (M = 5.39, SD = 1.31); t = (95) = -0.919, p = .176. Social integration measures provided similar results, Group A (M = 5.35, SD = 1.34) and Group B (M = 5.66, SD = 1.12), t = (96) = -1.206, p = .267. GPA comparisons between Group A (M = 2.90, SD = 0.724) and Group B (M = 3.00, SD = 0.078), t (97) = 0.745, p = 0.46 reported no statistical differences. Retention for Group B (75.8%) was higher than Group A (64.9%); but chi-square analysis revealed no significant statistical differences $\chi^2 (1, n = 99)$, $P = 0.24$. Results of the regression analysis found no statistical significance of academic, social integration, and GPA contributing to retention.

Qualitative analysis revealed that Group B’s attendance in FYS provided them greater opportunities for campus involvement, whereas Group A cited the non-mandatory nature of the course and lack of credit as to why they did not attend. Results provide higher education personnel with a greater understanding of the First Year Seminar and its institutional value.
Chapter I

Introduction

Problem Statement

Millions of eager freshmen enroll in colleges and universities to realize their dreams of earning a college degree, leading to desirable employment, and successful lives. However, at the end of the first year, one out of two students drop out of a two-year program, and three out of ten drop out from a four-year program (Bean, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 2002). Students drop out leaving behind unfulfilled promises and unrealized dreams (Barefoot, 2004). While many find their way to other institutions, some drop out and end up on the failed-to-graduate list (Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon, 2004).

The subject of student retention has been the focus of numerous studies (Braxton, 2002; Tinto, 2006; Upcraft, Barefoot & Gardner, 2005). The seventy-year history of research on this subject has resulted in the formulation of various theories leading to a better understanding of the student departure phenomena; however, problems still exist (Braxton, 2002; Tinto, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education, Center for Educational Statistics, reports that only 50% of those who enroll in college earn a degree (Siedman, 2005). Failure to earn a degree is expensive; consequences and cost are borne by both dropouts and society (Barefoot, 2004; Braxton et. al. 2004). Lower earning potential, job security concerns and fewer opportunities are the harsh realities for most of the people in
this group (Braxton 2002, Barefoot 2004, Swail, 2004); while the public lives with and suffers the consequences of unpaid loans, increased incarceration expenses, and threats to national competitiveness (Barefoot, 2004, Braxton et al.).

In an era of fiscal constraints and increased accountability, there is increasing pressure on institutions to improve retention and graduation rates. Improving retention has become critical to sustain institutional budgets and graduation rates, which are perceived as hallmarks of quality (Bean, 1986; Tinto, 2004). At the same time, there is a change in institutional ideology that has moved away from the “survival of the fittest” mantra to the talent development model, which supports the notion that the right level of support leads to student success (Kezar, 2006).

The current environment presents a dilemma for academic institutions. On one hand, they are dealing with the reality of financial constraints imposed by budget cuts and increased scrutiny of retention numbers and graduation rates (Braxton et al. 2004). On the other, academic institutions are seeing record numbers of millennials making their way to college. Diverse, underprepared and overly protected by their parents, this generation of freshmen needs more support than ever to help them adjust to the independence of college life (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Howe & Strauss, 2001, 2007). Programs such as First Year Seminar (FYS) serve an important purpose to provide support
mechanisms to be successful in college; success that transcends the primary
goal of earning a college degree (Howe & Strauss, 2001, 2007; Pascarella &
Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al. 2005). "Freshmen succeed when they make
progress toward fulfilling their educational and personal goals: (1) developing
academic and intellectual competence; (2) establishing and maintaining
interpersonal relationships; (3) developing an identity; (4) deciding on a career
and lifestyle; (5) maintaining personal health and wellness; and (6) developing an
integrated philosophy of life (Upcraft, 1984)" (Upcraft, Gardner & Associates,
1989 pg.2).

Chapter one of this study serves as an introduction to the research
questions and provides the framework for them to be addressed. Included in this
chapter are definitions of terms as they apply to this study and the research
questions. The theoretical framework of this study outlines the variables which
contribute to the student departure decision and presents a case for increased
support in the first year.

**Definition Of Terms**

The following terms are defined as they are used throughout the study.

*First Year Seminar (FYS): First Year Seminar is a non-credit, voluntary eight-
week course taken by freshmen to help transition high school students to college.*
Course outcomes include improving students’ study skills, understanding institutional policies, exposure to student clubs, organizations and academic success.

**Academic Integration:** Academic Integration includes a number of factors that influence students’ ability to become a part of a scholastic college environment. These include: study strategies, academic and cognitive skills, critical thinking, usefulness of course readings, connections with faculty and managing time and priorities.

**Social Integration:** Social integration is the formal and informal social interactions that students experience at the university resulting from personal affiliations and from day-to-day interactions among different members of society (Tinto, 2002). Factors include: connections with peers, understanding of academic services and policies, sense of belonging and acceptance, increased out-of-class engagement and knowledge of wellness.

**Millennial(s):** A millennial is any person born in the late 1970s to early 1980s. The generation who currently comprises the traditional college student aged 18 – 22 years (Howe & Strauss, 2001, 2007).

**Freshmen:** Freshmen are full-time students who are attending college for the first time.
Retention: Retention is the number of full-time, first-time students entering in fall term who return to the institution for their sophomore year.

Grade Point Average (GPA): Grade Point Average is a measure of scholastic achievement on a 4-point scale. It is computed by dividing the total number of grade points by the number of credits.

Research Questions

Given the proliferation of first year seminar programs at college campuses across the nation, this research study will attempt to validate and extend the current body of knowledge. The study tests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the academic integration of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the social integration of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the GPAs of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.
Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in retention between those students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

Research Question 1: To what extent and in what manner do the FYS program elements of attendance, academic and social integration and GPA contribute to retention in FYS?

Research Question 2: What are the reasons some students continued to attend FYS and others stopped attending FYS?

This sample data will test the aforementioned hypotheses and research questions to provide partial measures of effectiveness of the FYS and provide measures of its influence on academic and social integration, academic achievement and retention.

Theoretical Framework

Neville Sanford (1962), a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Stanford University, presented a challenge and learning case for student support mechanisms (Evans et. al. 1998; Upcraft et al. 2005). Over the years, Sanford’s framework of challenge and learning has been adapted to present a case for challenge and support of college students (Evans et al.). This rationale can be traced into first year programs that are grounded in the work of Vincent
Tinto (1975) and his interactionalist theory of student departure, as well as Alexander Astin’s (1977, 1993) involvement theory to provide support to freshmen as they face the challenges of assimilating into a new environment.

Transition is the prevalent theme for the first year of college (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Siedman, 2005). Freshmen arrive at a college at different stages of the human development model, and with varying academic and social abilities (Tinto, 2002). The transition from high school to college results in a multidimensional transition for some students. On a personal level, the change involves moving from late adolescence to early adulthood, which can be challenging for some students. This, combined with a change in environment requiring academic and social adjustments, can be quite overwhelming for some students (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993; Braxton, 2002; Tinto 2002). With most students leaving home to go away to college, the responsibility falls on the academic institution to create the right conditions for a successful transition, which supports the cognitive and psychosocial development of students (Evan et al. 1998; Strange & Banning, 2000).

In his presentation of the Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure, Tinto (1975) posits that the students have the ability to make the initial transition to college. Staying in college requires students to get assimilated in the intellectual and social communities of the institution, which requires an effort from both the student and the institution.
Astin’s (1977, 1993) *Theory of Involvement* proposes that students learn more when they are involved in the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. Astin postulates that the quality and quantity of the students’ involvement influences individual learning and development. To create a successful environment, the institution is responsible for providing the opportunities and resources to encourage student involvement. Alignment of student inclination and commitment with institutional policies and culture creates the right climate for meaningful interactions.

The freshman year is critical in the undergraduate experience. It is the time when students develop skills for learning, learn to adjust to systems and rules of a new environment and foster relationships with peers and associates of the institution (Astin, 1975; Barefoot, 2000; Tinto 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005). The opportunity of new beginnings is tempered by the reality that a significant number of students will withdraw voluntarily in the first six to eight weeks of the academic year (Noel, 1985; Terenzini, 1986; Tinto, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005). To ease the transition, FYS programs are run at various colleges and universities throughout the United States. Results from a Policy Center on the First Year of College student study conducted in 2002, “reveals that 94% of accredited four-year colleges and universities in America offer a first-year seminar to at least some students and over half offer a first-year seminar to 90% or more of their first-year students” (Porter & Swing, 2006 pg.1). These programs are designed to improve academic performance and social engagement of freshmen students with
improved retention as the ultimate goal (Barefoot, 2000; Braxton, 2002; Goodman & Pascarella, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Upcraft et al. 2005).

Some students are not adequately prepared to handle the rigor of college level work resulting in an involuntary dismissal from the institution (Braxton, 2002; Tinto 2002). Others find it difficult to adjust from the structured, student-centered approach in high school to the unstructured, teacher-centric philosophy at college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This, combined with new found independence, creates prioritization and time management challenges for some students. This often results in students getting behind on their studies, which in turn affects their academic performance (Upcraft et al. 2005; Tinto, 2002). Low grades, loss of confidence compounded by employment, parental and financial pressures results in questioning the selection of their program of study and contributes to the decision to withdraw from the institution. (Braxton et al. 2004; Tinto, 2002).

On the social front, there are several factors that effect a student’s assimilation to a new environment with individual and institutional characteristics coming in to play (Braxton, 2002; Braxton et al. 2004; Tinto, 2002). The individual has to possess the skill, have the desire and demonstrate intent to put forth the effort to acquire the cultural competence of the environs. At the same time, the institution has to provide the framework for the new citizen to be willingly accepted as a full member (Astin, 1993; Braxton, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini,
2005; Tinto, 2002). When these two conditions, environment and inclination are aligned, successful transitions occur resulting in a mutual benefit for both the individual and the institution (Braxton, 2002; Roueche & Roueche, 1993; Tinto, 2002).

Most traditional freshmen are not equipped to make a successful transition from secondary to postsecondary environment (Hunter, 2006). This transition requires the presence and development of intellectual, academic and social competencies to help realize individual goals, institutional goals and societal expectations of producing contributing members of society (Upcraft et al. 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2002). Support programs, commonly known as FYS, are designed to ease the transition and improve student retention (Barefoot, 2004; Kuh, 2008; Schrader & Brown, 2008).

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations

The study relies on secondary data that was collected and maintained by the freshman experience coordinator and the registrar’s department. It is assumed that the data has been recorded accurately and confidentiality of student data is maintained as per FERPA regulations. This research is being
restricted to a midsize university in the southeast. Prevailing economic conditions brought about by a downturn in the economy and resulting credit crunch have impacted sources of student funding. These variables impact a student’s ability to return to the institution and are likely to influence the student’s perceptions of support, satisfaction with the institution and retention.

**Delimitations**

The study is limited to first-time, full-time business and hospitality students at a private, not-for-profit university located in the southeast. There are challenges in generalizing results from a single institution study. The majority of first-time, full-time students are classified as traditional (ages 18-22) college students. The results may not be applicable to non-traditional students who tend to be more mature and have more and different life experiences.

**Significance Of Study**

With the increasing pressure to increase retention and degree completion, institutions seek research to examine program effectiveness and their outcomes (Schuh & Associates, 2009; Voorhees, 2001). In their comprehensive analysis of more than 2,500 postsecondary studies related to how college programs and experiences affect student development, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state, “the weight of the evidence suggests that FYS participation has statistical and
substantial, positive effects on a student’s successful transition to college” (p. 403).

The study site located in the southeastern United States is part of a multi-campus university system. The university system experienced a decline in freshmen retention from 2004-2006. In 2006, the decline was substantial enough for the university leadership to sound the alarm and call for action to address the problem. A new strategic plan was unveiled, which addressed admission standards by increasing selectivity. In addition, the existing loan program was modified to result in increased financial aid grants to address affordability. To support university efforts, each campus was assigned the responsibility to create their own retention plans to improve freshmen retention.

The campus adopted a bottom up approach involving a broad cross section of employees, which included members of the faculty and staff, to create a campus retention plan. The initial plan included over 80 recommendations, which were whittled down to broad based themes to improve the student experience with the goal of improving retention and graduation rates. Improving academic advising, introducing a first year seminar, focusing on customer service and invigorating student life by increasing student-oriented events and activities were the major themes of the plan.
Freshman seminar was introduced as a pilot program for business students in 2007 resulting in a significantly lower number of first term drops compared to previous years. End of the year results saw the business college achieving their best retention since the opening of the campus in 2004. These results inspired confidence in the program and resulted in expanding the program to include hospitality students in 2008.

Table 1

*First Term Drops in Business and Hospitality*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Percentage of Drops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study will provide insight into the effectiveness of the program, insight on the impact on the program’s participants, its contribution to student development and level of engagement with the institution. The results will be used to rebalance various facets of the FYS course and influence changes to student affairs programming.

In addition, the study will provide campus and FYS program administrators with a baseline measure to serve as a platform to conduct future research, inform future funding decisions, provide evidence to increase the offering to include
culinary students and consider providing academic credit for FYS. At the university level, the framework of this study will provide valuable insights to the newly created Office of Institutional Research.

**Assumptions**

This study makes an assumption that the sample of freshmen enrolled in fall 2008 for the purpose of this study represents the general population of freshmen enrolled at this campus. The study also assumes that freshmen enrolled in the business and hospitality programs in fall 2008 enrolled with the goal to remain continuously enrolled and graduate from this campus with a bachelor’s degree. The questions framed in this study are based on the assumption that there is a causal relationship between attending FYS and academic and social integration of freshmen. These assumptions are based on the rationale that academic and social integration influence participants’ academic achievement and freshmen persistence; this relationship may not exist.

This study makes the assumption that academic achievement (GPAs) and retention are the appropriate dependant variables for measuring the effectiveness of the FYS program. Other dependant variables may be equally or more effective to measure the treatment of independent variables used in this study.
Summary

Retention is a complex problem that has plagued institutions of higher learning for decades. Low retention is detrimental for dropouts, institutions and society at large. While the decision to dropout is an individual one, institutions that enroll students are responsible for creating an environment that supports the transition from high school to college. FYS are employed by many institutions to help assimilate students into the academic and social realms, and higher GPAs and increased retention are the common outcomes of such programs. This research study is designed to assess the effects of FYS attendance on academic and social integration, academic achievement and retention.

The second chapter of this study provides a review of the literature that focuses on student retention and first year seminar. The literature review begins with the problem of student retention, its causes and consequences. Student retention theories posited by Astin and Tinto, which provide the theoretical framework for this study, are presented. The chapter concludes with summaries of FYS research studies and their findings on the relationship of participation and impact on student retention and academic achievement.
II. Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of attending FYS on student academic and social integration, academic achievement and retention. Literature highlighting the importance and complexity of student retention is presented in this section. Reasons for student departure and implications for the individual student, the institution and community are reviewed and presented. Theoretical underpinnings for this study are grounded in Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure. The literature review also includes results of empirical first year seminar studies conducted at other institutions that assess the effectiveness of the program as it relates to academic achievement and student retention.

Degree completion has become the Achilles heel of American higher education (Hunt, 2006). Hunt’s assertion is not a modern day revelation; the issue of retention has plagued university administrators for the past century (Braxton, 2002; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While faculty and administrators acknowledged the problem, little was done to resolve the issue (Gardner, 1986). A sink or swim attitude was prevalent on college campuses; surviving college became a rite of passage (Braxton, 2002; Tinto, 1975, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005). Epitomized in the 1973 movie, The Paper Chase, actor John Houseman, playing the role of a stern law professor proclaims
to his class, “Look to the left of you. Look to the right of you; by the end of the semester, one of you will be gone” (Stover, 2005; Hunter, 2006).

While the tone has changed, the reality has not; 40% of a freshmen class leaves during the first few weeks of the first term. Others leave at various stages in the first year with many leaving during the summer (Astin, 1975, 1993, Tinto, 1975, 2002; Dietsche, 2007). New realities, combined with greater awareness, have changed institutional thinking to focus on retaining students by providing adequate support and, as a result, high student attrition is no longer considered a badge of honor or a hallmark of excellence (Braxton, 2002; Stover, 2005; Hunter, 2006).

Braxton (2002) asserts that student retention has been the topic of empirical study for over 70 years. Research on the topic has resulted in a better understanding of the reasons why students leave and analysis of this data has helped guide development of strategies to improve retention (Astin, 1975, 1993; Braxton, 2002; Levitz & Noel, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail, 2004).

**Reasons For Student Departure**

Students leave for a variety of reasons. As a result of the complexity of the problem, Braxton (2002) labels it the student departure puzzle. Dietsche (2007) suggests that one in seven leave at the end of the first year. Poor and minority
students leave at higher rates than white and Asian students (Dietsche).

According to Tinto (1987), 20% of freshmen departures are a result of academic dismissals. Some students are academically underprepared to tackle college level work, while others lose interest in the major or are uninspired by faculty and give up (Braxton, 2002, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002). The end result is the same; they either leave or are dismissed from the institution (Braxton; Pascarella & Terenzini; Swail; Tinto).

Dropping out for financial reasons ranks as the number one reason for leaving (ACT, 2010; Lewin, 2008). Some students just cannot afford to continue to attend the institution in which they enrolled because of changes to their personal circumstances, while others lose their ability to qualify for aid if their academic performance drops below unacceptable levels (Cuseo, 2002; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002). Changes to funding sources, affordability and the current financial downturn have affected personal college savings funds. While some were fortunate to have this benefit, the majority of students rely on federal loans and grants, institutional aid and private loans (ACT, 2010, Kahlenberg, 2006; Swail, 2004). Some students weigh the cost of attending a particular college with the benefits and determine that the price-value relationship is out of balance. The result is that they drop out or transfer to another institution (Braxton, 2002; Braxton et al. 2004; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002).
While affordability and academic preparation are important, so is the social fit between the student and the institution; just as each student is unique, so is each academic institution (Braxton, 2002; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002). Each institution has its own academic standard, programs of study, student body, traditions, practices, rules and policies that contribute to creating an institutional culture (Braxton, 2002; Braxton et al. 2004; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002). New students have to fit into this culture, learn new behaviors, and make adjustments to fit into the culture. There has to be a level of comfort and congruency in expectations of both the individual and the institution to create the right fit (Braxton; Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon; Swail; Tinto). Dissatisfaction, marginalization and isolation occur when these elements do not align, resulting in the student leaving the institution (Braxton et. al.).

Adjusting has various dimensions. The new found freedom in college creates problems for some students. Some take the opportunity to explore the boundaries of their new freedom and end up violating the student code of conduct and/or breaking the law resulting in judicial dismissals from college (Evans et al. 1998).

**Importance Of Retention**

In the twenty-first century, it is important that institutions create a campus culture and a supportive environment that affords every student the opportunity
to graduate (Lau, 2003, Hunt, 2006; Tierney, 2006). The emergence of a knowledge-based economy has created a demand for highly trained and educated workers, and advancements in technology and telecommunications have erased traditional borders (Tierney, 2006; Friedman, 2005). These phenomena, combined with the shortening of business development and execution cycles and increased reliance on automation and technology, imposes new challenges on the psyche of a nation whose workforce was able to earn a decent living in the past with little more than a high school education. (Friedman, 2005; Hunt, 2006) The flight of knowledge-based jobs to countries where there is a supply of knowledge-based workers is very different from previous flights of low-skilled jobs, and at stake are global competitiveness, the standard of living and the American way of life (Tierney, 2006; Friedman, 2005). Globalization presents new opportunities and challenges to the higher education community to produce graduates who have the ability to survive and thrive in this new environment (Carnevale & Deroches, 2003; Friedman, 2005; Hunt, 2006; Lau, 2003; Tierney, 2006).

With over 15.3 million undergraduates enrolled in 6700 Title IV institutions, the United States takes the top spot as the largest, most expensive and diverse higher education system in the world (ACT, 2010; NCES, 2006). However, when it comes to graduation rates the nation is fourth in the standings (Henry, 2000). In the U.S., unlike other countries, the higher education access is not limited to the best and brightest; it is possible for anyone regardless of age, sex and academic
ability to earn a degree (ACT, 2010; Kahlenberg, 2006). Hacker (2010) suggests that universal enrollment should be a national goal. While this philosophy of open access is admirable and defines the American spirit, it also invites millions of underprepared students who, in many instances cannot afford this education, to give it their best shot at the American dream (Lucas, 1994; Tierney, 2006).

**Macro Environment Implications On Retention**

Market conditions limit selectivity to a handful of colleges; only 20% of American institutions are highly selective and can afford to be so, attracting the best and the brightest (Kuh & Pascarella, 2004). Academic aptitude and ability to pay are the two most important facets of selectivity used by institutions (Kuh & Pascarella). Selectivity and reputation are interlinked; highly selective institutions enjoy elite status, higher rankings in magazines and attract star students (Braxton, 2002; Reich, 2000). The remaining 80% vary in their selectivity, performing a delicate balancing act to enroll the right type of student to maintain a revenue stream to sustain the institution while presenting the right message of institutional quality in the marketplace (Kuh & Pascarella).

Faced with fiscal realities of managing budgets in a competitive marketplace, institutions have to balance student needs for state-of-the-art technology and modern amenities with attracting and retaining qualified faculty vested in the success of students all the while dealing with shrinking budgets and
diminishing state support (Bean, 1986, Kahlenberg, 2006; Moore, 2000). Demographic changes, changes in the market place resulting in commoditization of education, funding issues in secondary education and fiscal policy changes have changed the external environment for higher education (Choy, 2002, Moore, 2000). Faced with this new reality, it is important to review some trends that higher education will have to contend with as they accommodate a new breed of freshman (Howe & Strauss, 2001). The U.S. Department of Education projects the number of high school graduates to increase nationally by 11% from 2001 to 2013 (Choy, 2002). These projections are consistent with the 2000 census report that projected that the 18-24-year old population would increase by 5 million with the largest increase in the Latino and Asian populations (Choy). The change in the 18-24 demographic is significant. By 2013, there could be 18 million students enrolled in various colleges and universities across the nation (Choy, 2002; NCES, 2006).

It is important to note that not only will this change the demographics of the nation but it will also impact the postsecondary education community. Approximately 80% of these students will be non-white with Hispanics making up about half this population (Choy, 2002). By 2013, the female college population is projected to grow 21% to total 10.4 million; the male population is projected to total 7.7 million representing a 15% increase (NCES, 2006; Upcraft et. al. 2005).
Implications Of Demographic Trends On Retention

The implications of changing demographics are that college campuses will become more diverse. Probing deeper into the diversity is necessary to get a better handle on reality to deal with the influx of students (Roache, 2001). In the next decade, one of out of five new students will be first generation as a result of changing immigration patterns (Hurtado & Pryor, 2007). Upcraft et al. (2005) claim that 9% of the current college student population has a learning disability, and these numbers are projected to increase in the future. Estimates peg the gay/lesbian/bisexual population at approximately 7% (Upcraft et al.). These estimates are considered conservative as some students chose to remain in the closet fearing prejudice, violence and harassment (Evans et al. 1998; Upcraft et al.).

Just as demographics of current students have changed so have their mental health needs (Kitzrow, 2003). Numerous first year surveys report that students coming to college are overwhelmed and more damaged than previous generations; experts cite a combination of poor parenting skills, family instability and increased pressure to succeed as reasons (Evans et al. 1998; Braxton, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005; Hurtado & Pryor, 2007). Administrators and student life professionals deal with a myriad of issues stemming out of growing up in dysfunctional and/or multicultural families, including gender issues, career and developmental needs, challenges of life transitions, stress and increased
exposure to violence (Evans et al.; Kitzrow). Transition is further complicated by alcohol abuse, experimenting with drugs and sex, eating disorders, gambling issues, and an increase in attempted suicides, all of which are common place issues on college campuses (Evans et al.; Berger; Kitzrow).

State of mind and mental stability notwithstanding, this group of students brings to the table a mixed scorecard on academic preparation. High school graduate test score data analysis completed by ACT reveals that only 25% are prepared to handle college level work (Lewin, 2006; Arenson, 2007). It comes as no surprise that there are more students who require remediation in basic writing, reading and computational skills (Lewin, 2006). This number has steadily grown since 1984, and some of these results are consistent with student surveys where high school students indicate that they spend less than 6 hours a week on homework (Lewin, 2006; Hurtado & Pryor, 2007; Upcraft et al., 2005 2005).

So how does the academic community prepare for “Tidal Wave II” made up of “millennials” (Howe & Strauss, 2001)? This generation, born between the ‘70s and ‘80s, started entering college in 2000 (Howe & Strauss). Their experiences, values and preferences shape their expectations. Like previous generations, they will challenge existing paradigms to bring about global change (Howe & Strauss, 2001; Rivera & Huertas, 2006). Treated as special, heaped with praise and overly protected, this generation is very comfortable with social networking technology but awkward in interpersonal social skills (Howe & Strauss;
Rivera & Huertas). Growing up with a constant pressure to perform and regimented by schedules, this group is rule compliant and respects authority while being socially conscious in their outlook (Howe & Straus).

Students are the heart beat and economic engine of a college community and the goal of academia is to graduate students to become contributing members of society (Astin, 1975, 1993; Braxton, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005) Unfortunately, those who don't graduate leave behind unfulfilled academic goals and unrealized career goals (Barefoot, 2004). Lower earning potential, job security concerns and fewer opportunities are the realities for this group (Barefoot, 2004; Braxton 2002; Swail, 2004). It's not just the students who feel the pain. Loss of students results in financial implications for both private and public institutions (Swail, 2004).

Each student represents significant economic value to the institution. When a student leaves, it results in a loss of direct and indirect revenue (Barefoot, 2004; Braxton, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail, 2004, Tinto, 2002). These departures also negatively impact institutional pride, reputation and student body morale (Bean, 1986; Barefoot, 2004). With student retention and graduation rates becoming the subject of additional scrutiny by external constituencies, such as accreditation agencies, legislators, parents and publications, it is important that institutions pay attention to retention (Braxton, 2002).
There is a cost to society as well. A large burden is borne by taxpayers who indirectly provide subsidies to students enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Barefoot, 2004; Swail, 2004). In some cases, social services get straddled with added need for welfare, incarceration costs and other social subsidies (Barefoot, 2004; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002). Everyone loses when a student drops out; the student walks away from an unfulfilled dream; there is a financial impact for the institution, and; society loses an opportunity (Barefoot, 2004).

While much has been written about the loss of opportunities and the limited earning potential for those who drop out of college, the change in the financial landscape is bringing to light a new financial reality, which adds another dimension to the retention issue (Barefoot, 2000; Stover, 2005; Hunt, 2006). With the cost of college doubling in the last decade, over 80% of students borrow money to attend college (Kahlenberg, 2006; Lewin, 2008). This need comes from the fact that in the last 25 years, college fees increased 438%, while the median family income increased by 147% (Lewin, 2008). The gap in affordability creates the need to borrow money (EPI, 2008; Kahlenberg, 2006). A combination of parental support from savings, government aid in the form of loans and grants, private loans and institutional aid contributes to creating a complex package for a student (EPI, 2008; Lewin, 2008). Eager to enroll, most sign financial documents with very little understanding of the long term costs of attending college and implications of loan defaults (EPI, 2008).
Loans do matter. Students who do not complete their degrees owe money to the federal government, private lenders and credit card companies (Field, 2010). Gladieux and Perna (2005) state that 2% of those who graduate with four-year degrees will default on loans, and 22% of those who do not complete default on their loans. Recent data released by the Department of Education substantiates these findings while giving them a new reality. At the end of 2008, $35.1 billion in loans were in default; by 2009, this number had increased to $50.8 billion (Field). While some of the defaults can be attributed to increasing unemployment rates brought about by the economic downturn, the default contributions of drop outs should not be discounted (Hechinger & Tomsho, 2009).

Again, the cost of failure is shared by all. Defaults contribute to the increasing national deficit, reducing the opportunities to do other things to benefit the nation (Barefoot, 2000). Field (2010) suggests that the individual defaulter loses the opportunity to access funding to complete their education or seek another degree when circumstances do change. In some cases, the federal government garnishes wages and tax refunds. Credit scores suffer, resulting in higher interest rates, denial of opportunities to secure employment, rent or buy a home or a car and access to credit cards (Field). Recent changes to the lending market have resulted in many institutions taking on the role as a direct lender. With the government monitoring loan default rates, student retention will take on a new meaning for many institutions.
Hunter (2006) states, the first year of college is not “grade 13”. The transition from high school to college is challenging for students on various fronts. Some leave home to go away to college where they face a new environment with a different set of rules and protocols. This new environment requires students to make social adjustments to adapt to a new culture. While some possess the where-with-all to make an adjustment, others struggle. They either don’t possess the social capital or their personalities are not developed adequately to make an adjustment (Upcraft et al. 2005).

Retention is about students, and students are unique individuals who influence retention (Braxton & Lyon, 2001). Braxton and Lyon (2001) also posit that retention is influenced by the supply and type of student entering academia. Increased numbers and diversity in the entering class complicate retention for institutions. This view supports Braxton’s (2002) assertion that retention is an ill-defined problem; one that cannot be solved with a single solution. This definition is influenced by the various reasons for which students leave college. Braxton termed it the student departure puzzle. Academic interest in this topic gained momentum in the ‘70s with the awareness that large numbers of students were not graduating from college. Initial research focused on single institution studies (Braxton & Lyon). Research on this topic gained momentum in the ‘80s with increased numbers of studies and development of retention theories (Braxton & Lyon; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Theoretical Models

This study utilizes the theoretical models presented by Alexander Astin and Vincent Tinto to examine the impact a first year seminar program has on academic and social integration and their influence on student retention. Astin, a psychologist by training, presented his Student Involvement Theory (1975), which is grounded in Sigmund Freud’s cathaxis rationale that people invest psychological energy on persons, objects and ideas. Using data collected from over 20,000 college students, Astin (1975) extends this rationale to student involvement and its relationship to retention. Astin's theory has a simple premise, college impacts students in many ways. In order to realize the benefits of college, students need to remain enrolled in college and retention is influenced by involvement. Astin (1975) defines involvement as an action representing what an individual does or how they conduct themselves. For students, involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychosocial energy invested into the academic experience. Astin postulates, that an involved student invests time and energy on academic and social pursuits, is active on campus and interacts with faculty and peers. This could be as specific as a student spending time to study for a math test or as general as spending time in the student center with peers (Upcraft et al.1989). Astin’s (1975) contention is that involvement occurs along a continuum, students demonstrate varying levels of commitment to different purposes at different times based on interest. The amount of learning and
personal development is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological investment by the student.

According to Astin (1975), the uninvolved student spends little time on campus, has little or no involvement in college-related extracurricular activities, has little or no contact with faculty and is a passive observer in the learning process. Dropping out is considered the ultimate act of lack of involvement and occurs when a student spends less time on college-related tasks, spends more time working outside and is not involved with the institution (Astin).

Astin's (1975) model, which is also known as the Input, Environment and Output (I-E-O) model, is referred to as a common sense approach to help researchers and administrators design an effective learning environment (Upcraft et al. 1989). Astin (1975) posits that the institution plays an important role to aid student involvement. Institutional policies and practices, which are created and controlled by the institution, should be designed to foster student involvement (Astin). In Astin's model, input refers to a set of characteristics students possess prior to their entry into college, some of which influence views and perceptions about college. Astin (1975, 1999) presented 146 pre-college input variables in his model; some of these are: age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, parental income, high school grades, reasons for attending college, and admissions test scores. The rationale presented by Astin is that these variables help provide a better
understanding of the influence of backgrounds and characteristics to a student’s ability to persist.

The second component of Astin’s (1975) I-E-O model is the environment, which refers to institutional characteristics and resources students are exposed to and interact with in college, resulting in the student's actual experience (Astin, 1975, 1993). Astin presented 192 variables, which he categorized into 8 classifications. Four of those classifications are: 1) Institutional characteristics refer to the type and size of the institution; 2) Faculty characteristics refer to credentials and qualifications, teaching methods, faculty values and ratio of full time to part time faculty; 3) Student peer group refers to the socio-economic status, academic preparation, values and attitudes of students enrolled at the institution, field of study, and place of residence, and; 4) Student involvement is the number of hours spent studying, working on and off campus and on extracurricular activities has an effect on involvement.

Outcomes are the effect of college, characteristics, talents or abilities developed as a result of attending and eventually graduating (Astin, 1975, 1993). Astin presented 82 outcomes. Included were academic achievement, satisfaction with the environment and career development. As stated earlier, Astin's longitudinal study concludes that college benefits students; however, in order for students to gain from the experience and develop as individuals, they have to remain enrolled and make the most of what college has to offer. Astin's theory
provides the framework to influence formulation of institutional policy, which
guides admissions standards, creates academic expectations and helps create
student support mechanisms such as first year programs. It is not a model that
can be applied to single institution studies or used to forecast student behaviors
such as persistence (Lang, 2006).

Vincent Tinto is credited with developing a predictive theory of college
student departure; it has served to provide a model of why some students persist
while others leave (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). Tinto’s (1975, 2002)
Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure emanates from the increased
interest in student retention. Tinto’s (1975, 2002) theory incorporates elements of
anthropology, sociology, psychology, and education. In his theory, Tinto (2002)
postulates that the level of student integration into the academic and social
systems influence the decision to stay or leave.

Tinto’s (1975, 2002) theory elaborates that each student enters college
with individual characteristics that include family and community background
characteristics (e.g., parental educational level, social status), individual
attributes (e.g., ability, race, and gender), skills (e.g. intellectual and social),
financial resources, dispositions (e.g. motivations, intellectual, and political
preferences), and precollege experiences with school (e.g., students high school
record of academic achievement).
A student’s initial commitment to the institution, the goal of college graduation, as well as the departure decision, is directly influenced by individual student entry characteristics (Tinto 1975, 2002). Initial commitment to the institution and commitment to the goal of graduation affect the student’s degree of integration into the academic and social systems of the institution (Tinto). Intention refers to the level and type of education desired by the student. Tinto elaborates that each attribute affects the departure decision by indirectly influencing the student’s intentions and commitments towards his education. Commitments indicate the degree to which a student is committed to attaining his goals (goal commitment) and to the institution (institutional commitment) (Tinto).

According to Tinto’s (1975, 2002) theory, the academic and social communities that make up the institution create an external environment each with its own set of values and behavioral requirements. Comfort, alignment and congruence with these requirements ease the transition and foster integration into the community (Tinto). Divergent, opposing views and conflicts result in reluctance to integrate, dissatisfaction with the experience and the institution (Tinto).

Tinto (2002) acknowledges the fact that external commitments do alter a student’s intentions (plans), goals and institutional commitments throughout the student’s college career. External commitments such as employment or changes in family circumstances are largely independent of the institution (Braxton, 2002).
According to Tinto, external events may indirectly influence integration and departure as well as impact academic and social integration. The result is that some individuals withdraw from college, even when their college experiences are positive (Braxton).

Given all individual attributes at the time of entry into the institution, Tinto (1975, 2002) puts forth the argument that subsequent experiences within the institution foster continuance at that institution. Institutional experiences include interactions with faculty, staff, and other members of the college, including other students. Tinto purports that positive interactions, which further one's social and academic integration, increase the likelihood of persisting to obtain a college degree. Conversely, a lower degree of academic and social integration is likely to cause a student to leave the institution (Tinto).

The origin of Tinto’s (1975) conceptual model is rooted in the foundation of Durkheim’s (1897) suicide theory, Van Gennep’s proposition of the rites of passage and Spady’s (1970) model of the student dropout process (Bean, 1986; Metz, 2002; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Tinto’s rationale is that the works of Emile Durkheim and Van Gennep provide a way of understanding how colleges, comprised of different social and intellectual communities, influence persistence and departures.
In his work, *The Rites of Passage*, Van Gennep, an anthropologist, presents the rationale that an individual goes through three stages during key transitions (Tinto, 1975, 2002). These transitions could be moving from one phase in life to another, for example from adolescence to maturity or from high school to college (Tinto). The first stage is separation from past associations. Transition is the second stage, in which the individual interacts with new ways with the group to which membership is sought (Tinto). Incorporation is the third stage, in which the individual becomes a fully participating member (Tinto). According to Tinto, the same rationality can be applied to a student’s transition from high school to college, adjustment and assimilation into a new community.

Durkheim’s (1897) theory of suicide states that an individual is more likely to commit suicide or voluntarily withdraw if he/she feels estranged or separated from society (Tinto, 2002). Durkheim viewed education as socialization, a system to inculcate morality and responsibility in individuals (Tinto). Durkheim also posits that voluntary withdrawal of individuals from society is a reflection of both the individual and the community (Tinto). Each of these tenants is still valid for modern day educational mechanisms. Education has a higher purpose; integration is key to creating a learning community and both the individual and institution bear responsibility for success (Barefoot, 2004; Braxton, 2002).

Tinto (2002), for his part, suggests the Durkheim theory is applicable in that students are more likely to leave an institution if they feel marginalized due
to the lack of connection between themselves and the institution. Marginalization occurs when there is a lack of satisfaction with the social and academic cultures of the institution (Tinto). Spady (1971) elaborated on Durkheim’s conclusions and subsequently outlined the presumed role that the social structure played in the retention process (Metz, 2002). Building on Spady’s conclusions, Tinto fine tunes and elaborates Durkheim’s and Van Gennep’s work relating it to student departure from college (Braxton, 2002; Metz, 2002).

Tinto (2002) coordinated massive amounts of research on the theory of student retention, integration and departure, focusing primarily upon the role that the institution of higher education plays in influencing the institution’s academic and social cultures (Bean, 1986; Braxton, 2002; Metz, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). Attention is focused on the interplay between the student’s attributes, skills and dispositions and student’s departure (Braxton, 2002). Tinto, in his college fit model, notes that the greater the congruence between the values, goals and attitudes of the student and those of the college, as well as between the student’s capabilities and the college’s demands, the more likely a student is to persist in college (Braxton).

There are many similarities between Astin’s and Tinto’s models; there is agreement that social and academic integration are critical to retaining students. A first year seminar course is a strategy employed by academic institutions to help students manage their transition to college life, encourage academic and
social integration and reduce first year student attrition (Cuseo, 2001; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006; Tinto, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005).

First Year Seminar

First Year Seminar courses are offered at over 90% of accredited, bachelor’s degree granting institutions (Upcraft et al. 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006). The University of South Carolina is credited with creating and implementing the framework for the FYS. Vestiges of similar efforts can be traced back to Harvard, Brown and Columbia, who introduced orientation programs to help students transition to college (Cuseo, 2002; Gardner, 1986; Gordon, 1989). Levine (1988) suggests that higher education concerns with freshmen students go back 150 years. In 1911, the Carnegie Foundation recommended that colleges and universities “do something to help freshmen find themselves” (Gardner, 1986).

FYS programs play an important role in easing the transition of students (Upcraft et al. 2005). Students arrive on campus with existing characteristics and varying commitment levels to the institution and educational attainment (Astin, 1975, 1993; Braxton, 2002; Tinto, 2002). The student’s experience and integration within academic and social systems of an institution influences the student’s commitment to the institution (Braxton, 2002; Tinto, 2002). Academic
and social integration play a significant role in facilitating a student’s re-enrollment decision (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2002).

Research informs us that student engagement plays an important role in integrating students to the institution (Astin, 1975, 1999; Braxton, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005; Tinto, 2002, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The freshman year is described as transitional for most students (Cuseo, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005). First year experience courses create an opportunity to introduce students to their “home institution” by informing them of the history, mission, traditions and unique facets (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). According to Upcraft et al., the first year seminar may be the only time when a representative of the institution can articulate what college is all about, why it is important to be here, what students have to do to be successful and where to go to get help.

Freshmen have very little academic planning experience and most of them are not aware of the resources and opportunities available to them in college (Astin, 1975, 1999; Braxton, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005). Addressing these issues helps create and nurture a relationship between the student and the institution, strengthening or validating their commitment. In some cases it helps the student get over buyer’s remorse, creating confidence and willingness to accept the new environment. This helps
the integration process and strengthens the student’s commitment to the institution (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Upcraft et al. 2005).

The freshman year is a critical year in the undergraduate experience (Gordon, 1989). It is the time when students develop skills for learning, learn to adjust to systems and rules of a new environment and foster relationships with peers and associates of the institution (Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005). The opportunity of new beginnings is tempered by the reality that a significant number of students will withdraw voluntarily in the first six to eight weeks of the academic year (Noel, 1995, Terenzini, 1986, Tinto, 2002, Upcraft et al. 2005). To ease the transition, FYS programs are run at various colleges and universities throughout the United States. These programs are designed to improve academic performance and social engagement of freshman students with improved retention as the ultimate goal (Barefoot, 2000; Braxton, 2002; Goodman & Pascarella, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Upcraft et. al.2005).

Overall, this body of knowledge demonstrates that programs designed to engage freshmen and transition them to college life are for the most part successful in aiding social transition and improving persistence rates (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Cuseo, 2002; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Hunter & Linder, 2005; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Upcraft et al. 2005). With this in mind, an examination of freshmen or first-year retention studies at various types, sizes, and missions of institutions yields different perspectives and results.
First Year Seminar Research

Bai & Pan (2009) conducted a comprehensive study of intervention programs designed to increase retention at a large urban university in the Midwest. First-time, full-time students (n=1305) who participated in 20 different intervention programs in fall 2000 provided the sample for the study. Intervention programs were categorized into four categories, advising, academic help, First Year Experience and social integration programs such as learning communities. The study used a multilevel approach to assess the effects of intervention program participation on student retention, interaction effects of student characteristics and type of intervention.

Analysis of the data revealed that FYE programs worked better for elder students ($\gamma = .46$, $p < .10$, $ES = 2.07$) and male students ($\gamma = .49$, $p < .10$, $ES = -2.06$) across 3 years. The results suggest that elder students were 11% more likely to stay in school and male students were 12% more likely to stay in school for 3 more years.

Female students benefited from participating in social integration programs ($\gamma = 1.15$, $p < .05$, $ES = 1.64$), suggesting that female students are 26% more likely to stay in school after the first year. Social integration programs also benefited students enrolled in selective programs ($\gamma = 1.09$, $p < .05$, $ES = 4.16$) inferring that this population was 25% more likely to persist beyond the first year.
Students enrolled in selective programs also benefited the most from advising programs ($\gamma = .94, p < .05, ES = 3.54$), suggesting that this population was 22% more likely to return for their sophomore year and beyond.

The study provided empirical evidence of the effect of specific intervention programs on retention confirming Tinto’s (1993, 2002) theory that involvement in academic and social communities aids persistence. Results of the study also suggest that “audience specific” interventions such as first year seminar and advising may be more beneficial than general programs such as orientations and that a combination of programs may be necessary to improve retention.

A study conducted at a public urban doctoral research institution in south Alabama measured the effects of a first year program on retention, achievement (GPAs) and graduation rates (Noble, Flynn, Lee & Hilton, 2007). Noble, Flynn, Lee and Hilton (2007) analyzed records of students who had participated in the university’s ESSENCE program in 1998 and 1999. The research team used multivariate analysis to compare GPAs of resident ESSENCE students, resident non-ESSENCE students and non-resident students. Controlling for pre-collegiate variables such as gender, high school rank and standardized test scores, the study concluded that ESSENCE participation improved GPA by 0.15 over residents and 0.25 over non-residents ($p < .001$). The study stated that improvement in GPAs increased the likelihood of this group graduating at a higher rate than the comparison group. Gains were attributed to the residential
status and program participation, which resulted in increased involvement of participants. The study's findings suggest that participating in the ESSENCE program increased the likelihood of graduating by 45% over non-ESSENCE participants and over 75% compared to non-resident students. While the program was found to be equally beneficial to white and minority students, the study recommended creation of support mechanisms beyond the first year to help increase the graduation rate.

Ex-post facto research conducted by Sidle and McReynolds (1999) at a medium-sized, research, 4-year public university investigated the relationship between participation in the institution's freshmen experience course, student retention and success. Sidle and McReynolds evaluated student records from 1993-95 by controlling for pre-entry criteria to identify an experimental (n = 431) and a control group (n = 431). Researchers used chi-square analysis to test the differences in second year performance, t-tests to measure statistical differences in cumulative GPAs, percent of general studies courses completed and ratio of credit hours earned by students in both groups. The study reported that 63% from the experimental and 56% (p < 0.5) of the control group returned for their second year. The experimental group earned a mean cumulative GPA of 2.17 compared to 1.99 for the control group. The study found a moderately high correlation (r = .76) between cumulative GPAs and the ratio of credit hours attempted to credit hours completed. The study concluded that students who participated in the program continued to remain enrolled at a higher rate than the
control group, completed more courses and earned higher GPAs compared to those who did not participate in the first year experience course.

Odell (1996) evaluated an 8-week, non-credit first year seminar, Avenues to Success in College, at a small New England business college. The study compared GPAs and retention of students (n = 158) who were assigned to the course with those who volunteered by responding to an invitation (n = 133) and completed at least half the sessions with those who did not complete. The results of the study indicate that students who completed the course earned a GPA of 2.68 compared to the non-completers who earned 2.53 ($t = 2.36$, $p = 0.19$) at the end of the first term (not statistically significant at the .05 level). Completers earned 2.69 compared to 2.56 earned by the non–completers, which was statistically significant at the .05 level ($t = 2.33$, $p = 0.02$). Retention of the volunteer group was 7% higher than the assigned group. The study found the program to be beneficial for high risk students. Recommendations included offering the course for credit.

Strayhorn (2009) conducted a study at a large, research extensive, predominantly white, public institution based in the southeast measuring the impact of FYS participation on academic and social integration and satisfaction with college life. A survey developed by the researcher solicited responses from freshmen (n = 755) to gather demographic information, level of involvement and engagement with campus activities, and gauge satisfaction with campus services.
and their college experience. The web-based survey registered a 40% response rate that included students (n = 286) who had participated in a FYS program.

Using descriptive statistics to profile respondents and independent t-tests to report differences between those who attended and did not attend the first year program, the study reported no significant differences in academic and social integration and found no differences in the overall satisfaction of both groups. The test for academic integration was non-significant, \( t(688) = 0.72, p = 0.47 \). The test for social integration was non-significant \( t(660) = 0.07, p = 0.94 \). The study found that were no statistical differences in student satisfaction of participants and non-participants \( t(660) = 0.40, p = 0.94 \). The study concluded that mere participation in FYS programs does not necessarily translate to improved outcomes. Strayhorn (2009) recommends that meaningful involvement and learning experiences that foster student development are needed to make a real difference.

**Summary**

Student retention is a complex issue, one which continues to plague higher education. Seventy years of research on the topic has resulted in better understanding of the reasons for student departure. Attention to the issue, calls for increased accountability and financial implications are forcing institutions to implement retention improvement strategies. These events are occurring
simultaneously. The competiveness of the nation is at stake in the global marketplace, and the incoming flow of students to institutions of higher learning is increasingly diverse and underprepared.

Research on this topic is influenced by Tinto’s (2002) model of student integration to reinforce a student’s commitment to an institution. Sanford’s (1962) suggestion that postsecondary institutions create a challenging and supporting environment brings the role of faculty into focus. As the literature suggests, some college freshmen are inadequately prepared to navigate the opportunities at college (Tinto, 2002). A combination of unrealistic estimation of their academic ability and questionable ambition in a new environment creates interesting challenges for both the student and the institution. A shift in institutional thinking has resulted in the creation of support mechanisms to help students in their transition. First year programs can play an important role in helping freshmen transition successfully from the first year to graduation (Cuseo, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005).

While studies have shown that first year programs aid student persistence and academic achievement, the results are influenced by institution type and the composition of the student body (Braxton, 2002; Upcraft et al. 2005). Bai & Pan (2009) conducted multilevel analysis of four first year intervention programs; results of their study suggest that each intervention program benefited a different student segment on campus. First year programs were found to have a 3-year
effect on increasing freshmen persistence. A study conducted by Noble, Flynn, Lee and Hilton (2007) evaluated the effect of the ESSENCE program. Program participants earned higher GPAs and demonstrated an increased involvement with institutional activities. Similar findings were reported by Sidle and McReynolds (1999) who measured the relationship of first year program participation in student retention and success at a research institution.

Positive indicators of program effectiveness are cited in Odell’s (1996) study of an 8-week, non-credit first year seminar at a small New England business college, reporting higher academic achievement and persistence rates for course completers. However, Strayhorn’s (2009) study conducted at a large institution concluded that mere participation in a first year program did not result in increased academic and social integration and satisfaction with the college experience.

Although we know more about the reasons for student departure and persistence, academic institutions are still faced with this issue. The uniqueness of institutions combined with complexity of dealing with an “ill-defined” problem (Braxton, 2002) prevents the implementation of a silver bullet solution (Barefoot, 2000). Each institution has to create a retention solution with various facets and then evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy (Barefoot; Braxton).
Varying results of the studies cited, supported by recommendations in the literature, provide the rationale to undertake the study at this institution to assess the effectiveness of the FYS program. The next chapter presents in detail, the research questions, participants, data collection and data analyses.
III. Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study to address the research questions presented in the literature review. The organization of this chapter includes: the purpose of the study, the hypotheses and research questions, the study design, sample and sample design, instrumentation, data collection, analysis used to test the hypotheses and research questions and limitations to the research design and data collection used in this study.

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of attending FYS. Student integration, academic achievement (GPA) and retention of first time, full time students at a southeast university are studied. Using an ex-post-facto design, this sequential mixed-method action research study investigates the impact of attending FYS. Freshmen who in enrolled in the business and hospitality bachelor's degree programs in fall 2008 are the subjects of this study.

A FYS course is one of the retention improvement strategies created by a campuswide retention improvement task force in summer 2007. College of Business freshmen were put through a pilot course in fall 2007. Improvements in student retention and positive feedback from participants resulted in an expanded roll out for business and hospitality students in fall 2008.
Administrative concerns about the effectiveness of the course created challenges for awarding academic credit for the course. The research site, one of four campuses in a multicampus institution, is the only location to offer this not-for-credit program to bachelor’s degree program freshmen.

**Research Questions**

Given the proliferation of FYS at college campuses across the nation, this action research validates and extends the current body of knowledge by investigating the effectiveness of attending a voluntary, not-for-credit FYS program. Two comparison groups were examined: 1) students who attended 0-5 sessions of the seminar, and; 2) students who attended 6 or more sessions. The study examines program outcome effects on first-to-second year retention, grade point average performance, and academic and social integration of first-time, full-time business and hospitality students.

The following hypotheses and research questions were tested in this study:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the academic integration of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the social integration of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.
Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the GPAs of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in retention between those students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

Research Question 1: To what extent and in what manner do the FYS program elements of attendance, academic and social integration and GPA contribute to retention?

Research Question 2: What are the reasons some students continued to attend FYS and others stopped attending FYS?

Action research, a form of field-based, self-reflective inquiry, involves testing of ideas in practice to result in improving social conditions and increasing knowledge (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998). The research-action-reflection cycle is employed in this study to investigate the influence of attending FYS on academic and social integration, academic achievement and student retention.

Sample

A purposeful sampling design consisting of first-time, full-time business and hospitality freshmen (n = 176) starting their college education in the fall term 2008 and assigned by the campus registrar to non-credit FYS courses became the subjects and focus of this study. Purposeful sampling is helpful in providing information rich subjects for this type of in-depth study, which studied the
outcome of attending FYS on academic and social integration and impact on academic achievement and retention (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Two different groups of students enrolled in the FYS course were classified based on the number of sessions they attended. The first group (n = 39) included students who indicated attending between 0-5 sessions, while the second group (n = 74) attended six or more sessions.

Freshmen (n = 176) enrolled in the business (n = 110) and hospitality programs (n = 90) were assigned by major to 10 different sections of a non-credit, voluntary FYS course in fall 2008. FYS participants were invited to complete a First Year Initiative survey during the eighth week of the 10-week course. The survey was completed by 99 students (56.25%), of which 33% (n = 33) were male and 66% (n = 66) were female. Forty-four percent (n = 43) of the respondents were white, non-Hispanic; 39% (n = 38) were African American; 6% (n = 6) checked off Hispanic. The remaining 9% (n = 9) were Asian American, mixed race, non-resident aliens, unknown and other. The number of females and African American respondents was higher than the campus average. Sixty-nine percent (n = 69) were 18-years old or younger; 28% (n = 28) fell into the 19-21 age group. The respondents’ sample is consistent with the average age of the student body, which falls in the 18-24 age group.
The First Year Seminar

The First Year Seminar course (FRSH0001) was scheduled for 10 weeks in the fall term 2008. The course was designed to introduce the campus and university to new students and help them make a successful transition from high school to college. One of the outcomes of the course was to help students develop supportive relationships with staff, faculty and peers. Another was to introduce students to the concepts of the learning process and help them develop and realize their academic goals. Assisting students with refining their communication and interpersonal skills to help them with personal and professional relationships was another outcome for the course. The seminar endeavored to help students grow and develop as persons who are responsible students and citizens.

The interactive, informal course, which met for two hours each week, was designed to be purposeful in providing information on subjects not traditionally covered in courses but are valuable for college life and beyond. Students were introduced to topics dealing with locus of control and goal setting, learning styles and academic planning, study strategies and time management. Topics such as budgeting, understanding credit and managing finances were introduced to students along with issues of alcohol awareness and physical and emotional well being. The strategy of focusing on the individual, followed by creating an awareness of the resources available on campus was intentional. Since the
course was non-credit bearing, there were no tests or exams. Students were
given in-class assignments, reflection papers in the form of one-minute papers
and in-class discussions.

Freshman seminars were taught by a combination of full-time faculty and
staff members. There were a total of 10 sections offered in fall 2008, six for
College of Business students and four for Hospitality College freshmen. Staff
taught four sections, while two full-time culinary faculty volunteered to teach one
section each. One full-time hospitality faculty member taught two sections as part
of his teaching load. The remaining two sections were assigned to a second full-
time faculty member who resigned in the second week of the term. Two staff
members stepped in to teach those sections in the third week of the term.

A notice seeking qualified volunteers interested in teaching FYS was sent
out to the campus community in spring 2008. Qualifications included teaching
experience and a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. Those interested in teaching
attended an orientation session in spring 2008. During this session, they were
given an overview of the program, its purpose, goals and objectives along with a
brief history of first year programs in general. The FYS coordinator and those
interested in teaching used the session to make a determination of suitability to
teach FYS.
Based on expressions of interest and determination of suitability, assignments were made by the FYS coordinator in concert with academic department chairs and department heads. A day-long training session was conducted by the FYS coordinator in August, two weeks prior to the start of the fall term. During this session, FYS instructors were provided with teaching manuals, handouts and resources to insure consistency. Course syllabus and outcomes for the course were shared with instructors. Those who did not possess expertise in a specific area were given a list of guest speakers representing areas such as: the registrar's office, which provided information on the academic scheduling process; learning specialists from the Center of Academic Support who designed and provided information on learning styles, locus of control and time management; and a list of counselors to deal with issues of personal well being and conflict resolution.

Instrumentation

The First Year Initiative (FYI) survey was used as the instrument to collect data for the study. Business and hospitality freshmen assigned to FRSH0001, a non-credit, voluntary course were invited by the freshman studies coordinator to participate in the survey. The FYI survey is owned and administered by Educational Benchmarking Inc. (EBI), an independent academic assessment enterprise based in Indiana. The FYI survey is used at over 67 institutions in the United States to assess the effectiveness of first year programs (EBI, 2008).
The FYI survey was developed by Randy Swing and John Gardner, who were instrumental in creating the First Year Seminar Resource Center at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC (Darlene Thomas, personal communication December 7, 2009). The FYI survey was designed and is based on Alexander Astin’s student involvement and assessment models (Swing, 2002 as cited in Montero, 2009).

The 70-question survey to assess first-year seminar courses has an overall 0.89 reliability and uses a 7-point Likert Scale to measure student responses on 15 factors. For the purpose of this study, the following factors will be used to measure academic integration:

1. Course improved study strategies, Reliability: 0.90
2. Course improved academic and cognitive skills, Reliability: 0.89
3. Course improved critical thinking, Reliability: 0.91
4. Course improved connections with faculty, Reliability: 0.82
5. Course improved managing time and priorities, Reliability: 0.92
6. Usefulness of course readings, Reliability: 0.90

The following factors will be used to measure social integration:

1. Course improved connections with peers, Reliability: 0.90
2. Course increased out-of-class engagement, Reliability: 0.90
3. Course improved knowledge of campus policies, Reliability: 0.89
4. Course improved knowledge of academic services, Reliability: 0.85
5. Course improved sense of belonging and acceptance, Reliability: 0.90

6. Course improved knowledge of wellness, Reliability: 0.90

Reliability of all FYI factors is based on Cronbach's Alpha, with $\alpha = 0.5$ as acceptable; $\alpha = 0.7$ as good and $\alpha = 0.8$ as excellent. The FYI survey has reliabilities ranging from 0.82 to 0.90 (EBI, 2008).

Educational Benchmarking Inc. used three tests to establish validity for the FYI survey. The first test, used to establish face validity, was consulting first year seminar and higher education experts during the survey development phase. This input was used to develop and refine questions for relevance, clarity and importance. A pilot study was conducted in 2000, soliciting feedback from over thirty thousand students in 62 institutions (Porter & Swing, 2006; Montero, 2009). The results of the pilot established that the questions were reasonable, clear to understand, unambiguous, applicable and relevant for various respondents spread across different types of institutions (Montero, 2009). The instrument has been tested for convergent or predictive validity, and divergent or discriminate validity (Montero).

Data Collection

Freshman programs are managed by a full-time administrator who is responsible for planning, coordinating delivery, selecting and assigning
instructors and managing assessments. The coordinator reports to the dean of
Student Affairs and collaborates with various departments and individuals on
campus for content and delivery of this seminar.

All course communication was managed by the coordinator of FYS.
Attendance records were submitted on a weekly basis by instructors to the FYS
coordinator. Students enrolled in the course were informed in the first class
session about the survey and the purpose of the assessment (Kendra Miller
personal communication, December 12, 2008). The link to the survey was
embedded in an e-mail sent to all course participants by the first year seminar
coordinator in the last week of the seminar. Recipients were based on enrollment
lists provided by the registrar’s office (Kendra Miller personal communication,
December 12, 2008). E-mail was chosen as it is the means of communication as
it is preferred by millennials and it was also the only way to reach those who had
stopped attending the seminar (Howe & Straus, 2001).

Web Enables Survey System (WESS), a proprietary web-based survey
system owned by Education Benchmarking Inc. was used to manage responses.
As per agreement and stated protocols, no identifying information was solicited
by the institution and Educational Benchmarking Inc. provided data in aggregate
form to the institution.
All FYS seminar attendees were invited via e-mail to participate in focus groups scheduled during week 8 of spring 2009. Two, one hour-long focus group sessions were conducted. The first session consisted of ten (n = 10) voluntary participants who had attended 6 or more FYS sessions. The second session included four (n = 4) voluntary participants who had attended five or less FYS sessions. Questions for the sessions were developed by the researcher and the FYS coordinator. The focus groups were conducted by the first year seminar coordinator.

Protocols established by the Office of Institutional Research were followed in this research study, written consent was provided by each participant prior to the start of the session. Both sessions were recorded and results transcribed by the Student Affairs department administrative assistant. Recordings and data were turned over to the researcher in June 2009, were kept confidential and in safe custody. As per agreement and stated protocols, no identifying information was solicited by the institution. Educational Benchmarking Inc. provided data in aggregate form to the institution.

To measure program effectiveness, participant data on FYS completers and dropouts was provided by the FYS coordinator using the SunGard SCT Banner™ higher education administrative records management system. The University Provost’s Office provided executive summaries of retention rates across different majors. Student files were sent via e-mail attachments to the
researcher. Data was stored in the researcher's office on a password controlled desktop computer.

**Data Analysis**

The study employed quantitative analysis to compare student responses to survey questions to assess differences in academic and social integration between two groups: Group A, who attended five or less and Group B, who attended six or more FYS sessions. Differences between the groups in academic achievement and retention were also measured using quantitative analysis. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 16.0, licensed to the institution, was used to conduct quantitative analysis.

Means and standard deviations of student responses to the EBI First Year Survey were calculated for FYS students and the comparison group students. T-tests with 95% confidence intervals were constructed on the sample means to test all the hypotheses. The findings were substantiated with stepwise multiple regression to ascertain relative contribution of FYS program elements to student retention. Qualitative data from each of the focus sessions transcriptions were analyzed using a combination approach of constant comparative analysis and the ‘zigzag’ approach (Creswell, 2003). Categories were developed from the data to refine emergent themes in an attempt to corroborate the quantitative findings. Lastly, categories, patterns, and emerging themes from students’ transcriptions
of focus groups were determined using lexical analysis function on Sphinx™
software to assess the results of two focus groups data and refine emergent
themes in an attempt to corroborate the quantitative findings. All statistical tests
used a .05 alpha level.

Limitations

The study relies on secondary data that was collected using a third party
survey. Attendance records for the FYS were maintained by instructors and
communicated to the freshman experience coordinator. Inconsistencies in record
keeping resulted in inaccurate information being provided to the researcher, thus
forcing the researcher to rely on self-reported attendance information provided by
the respondents in the survey. Data and records for the program were
maintained by the freshman experience coordinator and the registrar’s office. It is
assumed that the data has been recorded accurately and confidentiality of
student data is maintained as per FERPA regulations.

Data for the qualitative part of the research was provided by the
respondents in survey questions asked by the institution. It is assumed that
respondents were honest and accurate in their responses. Focus groups were
conducted by the first year experience coordinator.
IV. Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of attending FYS on academic integration, social integration, academic achievement (GPA) and retention. Freshmen enrolled in business and hospitality bachelor’s degree programs in fall of 2008 are the subjects of this study. This research study uses ex-post facto and mixed-methods design to investigate the impact of attending FYS.

This chapter presents the profile of the two groups’ participants based on attendance of FYS sessions. Demographic information such as gender, race, age, residence status, reliance on financial aid and academic preparation are presented to highlight similarities and differences of both groups. The presentation of descriptive data is followed by a summary of statistical analysis to fail to reject each of the hypotheses, and qualitative data summations to answer each of the research questions.

Description of the Sample

The FYS was offered to freshmen enrolled in the business and hospitality programs. The total enrollment for both programs was 226 new students; out of this group (N = 176) students were identified as first-time college attendees and
assigned to the FYS course. An e-mail invitation to participate in an online first year seminar survey was sent to participants in week 8 of the fall term. Ninety-nine students (56.2%) who responded to the survey are the subjects of this study.

Respondents were classified into two groups based on attendance information provided in the first year seminar survey; this information was verified with the attendance records provided by the FYS coordinator. Group A was comprised of students who attended five or less sessions and Group B was made up of those who attended six or more sessions. The analysis revealed that five (n = 5) respondents had overestimated the number of sessions they had attended; they were moved from Group B to Group A.

Table 2 shows the number of classes attended by groups A & B (n = 99). Group A (n = 37) represents business and hospitality freshmen students who attended 5 or less sessions of a voluntary freshman seminar course. Group B (n = 62) represents business and hospitality students who attended 6 or more sessions.
Table 2

*First-Year Seminar Classes Attended (n = 99)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Classes Attended</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A (5 or less)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B (6 or more)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographics**

Self reported data from the First Year Seminar survey and institutional records accessed from SCT Banner were used to create demographic profiles of first year seminar participants. Student responses to demographic information questions were used to extract information on gender, age, ethnicity, housing status, academic preparation and financial aid information. Individual student records were accessed to verify gender and ethnicity, and to provide information on the major, GPA and retention status.

Data was collected, tabulated and analyzed to determine if there were significant differences between Group A and Group B using chi-square tests of homogeneity. Nominal demographic data variables included gender, ethnicity, age, housing status, major and academic preparation scores such as SAT and/or ACT scores.
As illustrated in Table 3, the data reveals that the number of females exceeds the number of males; this number is consistent with the overall population of the campus, which is comprised of 55% female and 45% male students. Group B has a higher percentage of black students and business students. The number is consistent with enrollment profiles of the individual colleges, and black students make up 65% of freshmen in the business program. Age group of both groups was consistent with the rest of the campus with 18-24 year olds making up 85% of the enrollment in both these colleges. The majority of the respondents in both groups lived on campus, relied on loans and scholarships to meet their college expenses. The number of respondents who did not take or report their academic preparation score was higher in Group B.

Casual observation and interpretation of demographic data depicts consistency with the overall population and highlights some differences between the groups. However, chi-square analysis revealed that there were no significant differences between Group A and Group B respondents on any of the demographic characteristics.
Table 3

*Comparison of Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Housing Status, Major and Academic Preparation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group A (n = 37)</th>
<th>Group B (n = 62)</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/ Asian/Other</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.013</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 or younger</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-27</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.596</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorms/-n-campus</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off campus w/ family</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off campus w/out family</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.855</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT/ACT Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.923</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT 810 -1030; ACT 17-22</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT 1040 -1170; ACT 23-26</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT 1180- -1310; ACT 27-30</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT 1320-1430; ACT 31-33</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know/Did Not Take</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Financial aid data for Group A and Group B were summarized and analyzed to depict the sources of aid and amount of tuition, fees and textbook expenses covered by aid. Chi-square tests of homogeneity were performed for both groups and sets of data. Data from the analysis presented in Table 4 demonstrates that there are no significant differences between the two groups.

Table 4

Sources of Aid and Amount of Tuition, Fees and Books (expenses covered by aid)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group A (n = 37)</th>
<th>Group B (n = 62)</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Aid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Aid</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1.588</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Loans</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Scholarships</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans &amp; Scholarships</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other forms of Aid</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of tuition, fees and books covered by aid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than ¼</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3.738</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4 to nearly ½</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 to nearly ¾</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4 to full cost</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the academic integration of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

A multi-step process was utilized to measure differences between academic and social integration of the two groups. In the first phase, ANOVA was used to measure statistical difference of means for each factor contributing to academic and social integration.

Table 5 presents the difference in means and standard deviations for each of the factors contributing to academic integration. While Group B mean scores for each of the factors are greater than Group A, there is no significant difference between the two groups: Study Strategies, F(1,89) = 0.38, \( p = .847 \); Academic and Cognitive Skills, F(1,90) = 4.39, \( p = .509 \); Critical Thinking, F(1,87) = .398, \( p = .162 \); Connections with Faculty, F(1,93) = 2.15, \( p = .146 \); Managing Time and Priorities, F(1,90) = 3.15, \( p = .079 \), and; Usefulness of Course Readings, F(1,93) = .726, \( p = .397 \).
Table 5

*Difference in Means for Academic Integration Between Those Who Attended and Did Not Attend FYS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Variables</th>
<th>Group A (n = 37)</th>
<th>Group B (n = 62)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Strategies</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and cognitive skills</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections with Faculty</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Time and Priorities</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of Course Readings</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second step, *t*-test for two independent samples was performed to measure differences in academic and social integration between the two groups. Results for *t*-tests are presented in Table 6.
Table 6

T-test Results for Academic Integration Between Those Who Attended and Did Not Attend FYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis shown in Table 6 reveals that there was no statistically significant difference between Group A's Academic Integration ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.58$) and Group B's Academic Integration ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.31$); $t = (95) = -0.919$, $p = 0.176$. The hypothesis failed to be rejected.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the social integration of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

A multi-step process was utilized to measure differences between academic and social integration of the two groups. In the first phase, ANOVA was used to measure statistical difference of means for each factor contributing to academic and social integration.
Table 7 presents the ANOVA results, the difference in means and standard deviations for each of the factors contributing to academic integration. While Group B mean scores for each of the factors are greater than Group A, there is no significant difference between the two groups: Connection with Peers, $F(1,89) = .038, p = .509$; Out of Class Engagement, $F(1,88) = 2.564, p = .113$; Knowledge of Campus Policies, $F(1,94) = 2.840, p = .095$; Knowledge of Academic Services, $F(1,94) = 2.703, p = .103$; Sense of Belonging and Acceptance, $F(1,91) = 5.782, p = .018$, and; Knowledge of Wellness, $F(1,95) = .007, p = .934$.

Table 7

*Differences in Means for Social Integration Between Those Who Attended and Did Not Attend FYS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Variables</th>
<th>Group A (n = 37)</th>
<th>Group B (n = 62)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection with Peers</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-class engagement</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of campus policies</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of academic services</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging and acceptance</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of wellness</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The *t*-test for two independent samples was performed to measure differences in social integration between the two groups. Table 8 shows the results from the *t*-test analysis used to measure the difference between Group A's Social Integration ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.34$) and Group B's Social Integration ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 1.12$). This yielded no statistical difference, $t = (96) = -1.206$, $p = .267$. The null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

Table 8

*T*-test Social Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 3**

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the GPAs of students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

Grade point average is an indicator of academic achievement. First-year individual student GPAs were provided by the registrar's office. These scores were aggregated by groups and analyzed for statistical differences using *t*-tests. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 9.
Table 9

**T-test Academic Performance Between Those Who Attended and Did Not Attend FYS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.724</td>
<td>0.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.616</td>
<td>0.078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test reveal the following results: Group A (\(M = 2.90, SD = 0.724\)) and Group B (\(M = 3.00, SD = 0.078\)), \(t (97) = -0.745, p = 0.46\), which indicate that there is no statistical difference in academic performance between those students who attend and do not attend FYS. The null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

**Hypothesis 4**

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in the retention between those students who attended FYS and those who did not attend.

First year retention data for this hypothesis was retrieved from the university's information system, SunGard SCT Banner™, in fall 2009. The results shown in Table 10 depict the numbers and percentages of students who returned to the institution as sophomores. The retention rates for those who attended FYS are higher than those who did not attend; however, chi-square
analysis of the data yield no statistically significant differences in retention, \( \chi^2(1, n = 99), P = 0.24 \).

The null hypothesis, there is no significant difference in the retention between those students who attend FYS and those who do not attend, failed to be rejected.

Table 10

*Results of the Chi-square Statistic: Retention of Those Who Attended and Did Not Attend FYS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention</th>
<th>Group A (n = 37)</th>
<th>Group B (n = 62)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Retained</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retained</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1: To what extent and in what manner do the program elements of attendance, academic and social integration and GPA contribute to retention in FYS?

A two-step approach was taken to answer the research question. The first phase involved a qualitative analysis conducted in spring 2009 prior to the
students leaving for summer. Two focus group sessions, one for students who attended and one for students who did not attend were conducted. The first session representing those who attended six or more sessions had 10 participants. The second session focused on those that attended five or fewer sessions and had four participants.

In the second phase, a linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the effect of FYS on retention and provide additional insight into the effect of academic integration, social integration and academic achievement (GPA) on retention. This was conducted in three separate phases. Phase one looked at the retention of Group A, those who attended five or less sessions. In the second phase, Group B, those who attended six or more sessions, was analyzed. Phase three looked at both groups combined with retention coded as a dummy variable (1 = returned, 0 = did not return).

The linear regression analysis provides two separate sets of data, which are provided in Table 11. In the first set, the Multiple R column contains the correlations between the independent variables: academic integration, social integration and GPA. The second indicator, the R Square column (11.6%), reflects the portion of the variance of the dependant variable, retention, which is affected by these variables.
Table 11

Retention Regression Results Regression Model for Group A, Group B and All FYS Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>.340</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.49279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.43962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.47734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANOVA results are presented in Table 12. The F column indicates the division of the mean square regression by the mean square residual for the model. The Sig. column depicts the significance level of the variables included in the model. The results of the regression analysis indicate that the variables included in the analysis were not significant at the $p < .05$ level.
Table 12

ANOVA Results for Regression Model for Group A, Group B and All FYS Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>1.089</td>
<td>.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>6.071</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.865</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td>1.494</td>
<td>.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>12.369</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.235</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>1.509</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.503</td>
<td>2.207</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>21.190</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22.699</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the statistical analysis does not yield any significant results to demonstrate the contribution of GPA, academic and social engagement to retention, the focus groups provide rich, contextual data in the participants’ own words. Qualitative data from the focus groups provide students’ perceptions of the influence of FYS attendance on academic and social integration during their first year on campus. In the first hour-long session, 10 participants from Group B
were asked a series of semi-structured questions. Interview questions were designed to gain a better understanding of the impact of the FYS.

In what ways have you developed throughout your first year of college?

Student L, a participant from Group A, stated that the first year had been a learning experience, "I am finding out who I am." Students M and N admitted that they had to learn to deal with conflicts in their relationships. "I have learned who my real friends are," affirmed Student M. Student N echoed a similar sentiment, "I started the school year with a broad circle of friends, now I have a small group of friends".

In Group B, three (n = 3) participants responded that they had become tougher. “I have gotten meaner”, student B admitted, “I was a people pleaser and accommodating to others, now I say what I think, instead of being walked on.” Student E affirmed this and added, “I have learned how to balance being honest with kindness.” The third participant, Student G responded, “I don’t feel I have changed, just become stronger.” The student qualified this response by stating that the sentiment was a result of assimilation in the social environment of the campus and becoming more confident.

Participants expressed how they had changed since their arrival on campus. Student D expressed some remorse, "I have made some poor decisions
that I would have not made at home. I feel like I lost who I was, everything from home, I lost.” Student H shared a new found appreciation for home and stated that home visits provided the student with an opportunity to reflect about various things.

Student responses provide insight into how they changed individually. While some students affirmed that they had become tougher, stronger and more confident, for one student, home became a haven to think and reflect. Another student was apprehensive about some choices and decisions.

Were any of these developments impacted by FYS?

A summation of various responses to this question resulted in the emergence of the ‘involvement’ theme.

In Group B, Student G affirmed that FYS had helped with the adjustment, "It made me more independent." Learning about the availability of campus resources helped with the transition; "I was less confused," claimed Student J. Student F stated, “I would not be aware of how to do things or know where things are such as registering for classes.” Three students, B, C and E, offered similar responses and claimed that finding things on campus would have been difficult without the FYS experience. Responses from students indicated that
participating in the seminar had helped them get answers to questions and helped create a sense of awareness.

The willingness of staff and faculty to provide assistance was a theme that resonated with many participants. Students singled out college chairs, faculty and staff as being available, accessible, encouraging and guiding. Student J said, "Getting involved has helped me get a sense of belonging. When I got here, I felt bored. My first year seminar instructor pushed me to get involved instead of sitting back and waiting." Student G echoed a similar sentiment, "My residential life coordinator encouraged me to join Emerging Leaders. I am going to apply and I hope I'll be accepted." Student C expressed the following sentiment, "I would have not met Instructor X if I had not participated in FYS. He was great; he helped me with career planning information and shared employment opportunities."

Group A participants were asked the following question: “Do you feel connected on campus and have you experienced a sense of belonging to JWU? If so, what caused this sense of belonging?” Student M, responded that being employed as a work study in the registrar's office had proved to be very helpful in getting to know people and know what was going on around campus. Student K, a commuter student responded, "It's a challenge for me to participate in some of the activities." The student singled out her teachers and department chair for demonstrating an interest in her welfare, "Professor Y explained the importance
of earning good grades in all my classes.” The assistance provided by staff, faculty and department chairs was echoed by participants M and N as well.

Academics

Both Group A and B focus group participants attributed campus size, small numbers of students in classes and the opportunities to get to know professors informally as positives. In Group A, Student N affirmed that taking classes in the major as a positive, “Taking classes in my major has kept me interested. Professors are really helpful; I liked the smaller classes and my department chair.” Student M stated, “Tutoring services helped me academically and with relationships.”

In Group B, Student D claimed, “I find the academic support beneficial; it’s always nice to see a friendly face.” Level of comfort was mentioned as an outcome of engagement with faculty, understanding of policies and awareness of academic support systems, “Being involved, I know what’s going on; planning stuff for next year has helped me get excited about next year.”

Student A attributed taking classes in her major as a positive, "I wanted this major; I fit in this major. I like the academic courses here. I feel like the institution is a good fit for me.” Students B, C and F stated that FYS had helped
them with their schoolwork and helped them "study purposefully." Student I claimed, "I did better academically in the fall term when I was in FYS."

Social

Group A participants M and N both stated that they participated in many of the campus-sponsored activities. "There is always something going on, I like the movies and other activities," claimed Student M. Student K explained that most of her friends were attending a local college and she spent time with them.

In Group B, Student H stated, "I would have gone home. I was able to express myself and work through things by writing in my journal." Student I shared with the group that a roommate had been instrumental in helping create a circle of friends. Employment on campus helped some students get better acquainted with staff and faculty. Student E volunteered to serve as a member of the College Ambassadors Team (CATS), "My involvement with CATS helped me make friends."

Once some of the students realized that they were in the same classes, so they created their own support system, "We looked out for each other, if someone was not in class we shared the information given to us by the instructor."
Four students, B, C, G and J, found guest speakers to be very beneficial; they appreciated the opportunity to be presented with different perspectives on topics. Three participants, students A, D and H, found the alcohol awareness program to be beneficial while one of the participants, Student I, thought some of the topics were very "lame" and of little benefit.

How many plan to return for next year?

In Group B, the majority of the participants 70% (n = 7) stated that they were confident about returning to the campus for their sophomore year. Three students said that they were planning to transfer to another institution. One student wanted to be closer to home and explained that the program of study she was currently enrolled in was not aligned with her career goals. The second student wanted to pursue a degree in nursing, which was a major not offered at this institution, and a third was just unsure, "I don't know, I'll think about it over the summer."

In response to the same question, Group A was divided. Two students were confident that they would be returning for their sophomore year. The remaining two were considering transferring to another campus in the university system because they wanted to experience another part of the country.
A summary of student responses indicates that students in both groups dealt with adjustment issues during their first year in college. Participants from both groups appreciated taking courses in their major, the access to faculty and friendliness of the staff. Group B students created their own support network and helped each other out. Group B participants acknowledged that they were encouraged to get more involved on campus by faculty and staff. This group of students also expressed an increased willingness to return to the institution.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2: What are the reasons some students continued to attend FYS and others stopped attending FYS?

Two sources were used to collate responses for this question. The first source was an open-ended client question on the EBI survey: “If, at some point you stopped participating in the FYS, please share the reason.” The second source was the two focus group sessions.

In the first session, 10 participants from Group B provided their reasons for continuing to attend FYS. "It's just the type of person I am," claimed Student I, "When I start something, I finish it." Student B explained that it was included in the tuition, "I know we are paying for it someway, I might as well get the most of
"out it." The student went on to explain that it did not matter if the course was not for credit or mandatory, "I earned life credit and learned valuable lessons."

Three students, C, E and J, admitted that their parents encouraged them to keep attending the class and they felt that they got a lot out of it, “I am glad I stuck with it,” affirmed Student J. This was supported by Student A, "Everything was important and informative; I liked the topics; I appreciated the value of the course at the end, when I realized all that I had learned."

Student D explained, "I used the course to develop a relationship with a person and a teacher." The student elaborated that it was important to make the right impression on teachers as it may prove to be helpful during their tenure as a student. Student C claimed, "I attended out of respect for the teacher." The last word belonged to Student G who summed it up for the group, "It was a fun class, never boring; it didn't feel right not being there."

Two students cited the $30 gift card offered as the motivation incentive to complete the course, "The money did not hurt and the banquet at the end was an added bonus." Incentives and rewards elicited a dialogue among the participants. While the majority thought they were a "nice" gesture, some thought that the certificates awarded at the end of the course were "cheesy."
The majority of the responses for Group A were extracted from the results of the survey. There were 33 responses to the open ended question: "If, at some point you stopped participating in the FYS, please share the reason." The majority of the students, 17 respondents, stated that they stopped attending when they found out that the course was not mandatory. Some of the respondents stated that since the class was not mandatory, it gave them additional time to work on assignments for other classes and focus on other priorities "like schoolwork and employment." "I had more time to complete other assignments from other classes. When FYS doesn't have a grade and there is no push/drive to be there, I'd rather spend more time studying and being prepared for classes that matter," wrote one student. Another student offered the following reason, "Because I thought I would be able to use my time more wisely, like for school work." While another stated, "I needed extra help with certain subjects and that was the time that was available."

Oversleeping and "not waking up on time" were reasons cited by 7 respondents. Scheduling of the class was a reason cited by a respondent, "It was not required, so I did not feel the need to wake up at 8 a.m. and go to class when I could wake up at 11 a.m." Another student provided the following rationale for not attending, "I either fell asleep or was doing work for other classes."
Six respondents cited no grades and no credit as reasons for not attending FYS sessions. As one student put it, “Since I was not earning credits for the class, I lost interest and stopped attending.”

Lack of interest in the material presented in the FYS was cited as a reason by 3 respondents. One student posted the following comment, "The instructor tried hard to teach his lesson, but I increasingly found it to be a waste of my time. The subject matter was boring and there was no motivation to go or consequence if I didn't. The first couple of classes were attempts to help students become acclimated to the campus and academics here." One student did not care for the teacher and stated that the person was not qualified to teach since they represented a discipline other than the major in which the student was enrolled.

The second set of responses was provided by the four students who attended the second focus group session. These participants represented Group A, students that attended five or fewer sessions of the FYS. The question posed to the group was why they stopped attending the FYS course. Student M said, "I really liked the teacher but I had other priorities. It was my first term and I was struggling academically." The student went on to explain that the time at which the class was scheduled was not convenient, "I am not a morning person; I needed help to get organized and plan effectively." A second participant, Student N, also cited early classes as the reason to stop attending FYS, "I had three
classes that day; I was tired and wanted to focus on credit-bearing classes, maintain my grades and hang out with my friends."

A similar sentiment of not earning credits was expressed by the third participant, Student K, "I stopped attending when I found out that the course was not for credit. I asked my friends, someone said it was one credit and others zero. I felt bad not attending. My parents were paying for it but I was not going. I discussed it with my parents and they said it was up to me. I never told them I stopped attending. I looked at the course content and felt that I could ask others about the stuff I did not know."

The fourth participant, Student L asserted that students had just finished attending student orientation, which provided students with similar information, "I did not think I needed this information. We had a week to explore the campus and get comfortable with the place."

Participants in Group A cited the lack of credit as the primary reason for not attending sessions. Some students used the time to complete assignments for credit bearing classes; others used the time to catch up on their sleep. A few students expressed that they did not find the content valuable.
Summary

This chapter presents quantitative and qualitative data and analysis to answer questions to assess the effect of first year seminar attendance on academic and social integration, academic achievement and retention. Analysis of the data found that while the mean scores for Group B are greater than Group A, there are no statistical differences in the academic and social integration and GPA, thus resulting in the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. There were more Group B students retained than Group A; however chi-square analysis reveals no significant statistical differences between the groups. Results of the regression analysis found no statistical significance of academic and social integration and GPA to retention.

Qualitative analysis reveals that students in Group B found the FYS helpful in getting involved. Opportunities and encouragement for involvement were provided by FYS instructors. Students developed their own peer support network when they realized that they were in the same classes. Students felt comforted by the level of support and empowered with the knowledge about processes and locations of offices. The majority of the students expressed that they would be returning for their sophomore year.

The non-mandatory, lack of credit nature of the course, coupled with oversleeping, conflicts with workload for other classes and general struggles with
first year adjustment, were cited as reasons for not attending sessions. Students from Group A suggested that they would have been more inclined to attend if the course was for credit.

The following chapter provides a discussion of the study results, implications for practice based on the results, recommendations for future research and conclusions for the study.
V. Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study and attempts to synthesize how results of this study contribute to the existing knowledge base of first year programs and retention literature. A brief summary of the framework of the study is provided, followed by results of the three hypotheses. Results of the quantitative component of the study are supported with discussion of results and implications. Research questions are answered in the qualitative section of the study. Recommendations emanating from the findings of this study, and opportunities for future research, are followed by a conclusion in this final chapter.

The freshman year is a critical year in the undergraduate experience. It is the time when students develop skills for learning, learn to adjust to a new environment and build relationships with peers and associates of the institution (Barefoot, 2000; Tinto 2002; Upcraft et al., 2005 2005). The opportunity of new beginnings is tempered by the reality that a significant number of students will withdraw voluntarily in the first six to eight weeks of the academic year (Noel, 1985, Terenzini, 1986, Tinto, 2002, Upcraft et al.). To ease the transition, FYS programs are run at various colleges and universities throughout the United States. These programs are designed to improve academic performance and social engagement of freshmen students with improved retention as the ultimate
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of first year seminar attendance on academic integration, social integration, academic achievement and the affect of these variables on student retention. Business and Hospitality freshmen who enrolled in fall 2008 were assigned to a 10-week voluntary FYS. Attendance at FYS sessions started declining as soon as students became aware that the course was not for credit and there was no formal consequence for not attending.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the study focuses on a sample of 99 freshmen (n = 99) representing business and hospitality students who responded to the first year seminar effectiveness survey. Students were categorized as those who attended and did not attend based on their attendance.
Principal Findings

Affect of FYS attendance on academic integration

The following factors constitute the academic integration for the purpose of this study: FYS course bearing on study strategies, improving academic and cognitive skills, critical thinking, managing time and priorities, connections with faculty and usefulness of course readings. In comparing students who attended five or less sessions with those who attended six or more sessions, the study reveals mixed results. Group B, students who attended six or more sessions, reported a higher mean for all the factors but upon further analysis these differences were not found to be statistically significant. The null hypothesis was failed to be rejected.

The difference in higher mean scores for those who attended are consistent with postulations of Fidler and Hunter (1989), who posit that improved study habits, critical thinking and connections with faculty as benefits of FYS participation. Wratcher (1991) observed that the transition from a teacher-directed to a student-directed environment creates time management issues; many students struggle to find the right balance to prioritize tasks and complete their assignments on time. University assistance in the form of specific programs, such as FYS, helps develop coping mechanisms, assist in the transition and teach students lifelong skills (Schrader & Brown, 2008). High mean scores in
time management are consistent with the recommendations of these authors and indicate the positive benefits of attending FYS.

The lack of statistical significance in the difference between the two groups could be attributed to campus size and small enrollments in business and hospitality. The average class size for courses in the students' majors is 35; small classes combined with the informality of a small campus creates opportunities for faculty-student interactions resulting in higher levels of academic engagement. The FYS was scheduled for two hours each week; freshmen are scheduled for 18 credits taught by full-time faculty. Business and hospitality are smaller programs on campus and rely on full-time faculty to teach the majority of the courses. This, combined with the institution's philosophy of scheduling students for courses in their respective major in the first term, could have influenced students' perceptions and dispersed the effect of FYS influence on these factors.

Results of this study are consistent with the findings of Strayhorn (2009), who conducted a study at a large, research extensive, predominantly white, public institution based in the southeast measuring the impact of FYS participation on academic and social integration and satisfaction with college life. Using descriptive statistics to profile respondents and independent *t*-tests to report differences between those who attended and did not attend the first year program, Strayhorn reports no significant differences in academic integration.
Affect of FYS attendance on social integration

The following factors constitute the social integration for the purpose of this study: course influence on connections with peers, increased out of class engagement, improved knowledge of campus policies, improved knowledge of academic services, knowledge of wellness and sense of belonging and acceptance.

In comparing students who attended five or less sessions with those who attended six or more sessions, the study revealed mixed results. Group B, students who attended six or more sessions, reported a higher mean for all the factors. However, the differences in means for these factors were found to be statistically insignificant; the null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

The results of this study are consistent with Strayhorn’s (2009) research. Strayhorn’s study conducted at a large research institution found that participation in a first year experience program had little effect on the social integration of participants. His study concluded that meaningful involvement and learning experiences that encouraged student development were more beneficial than mere participation in first year experience programs.

The importance of peer networking, greater awareness of academic policies and academic services, out of class involvement and knowledge of
wellness and their role in encouraging social integration has been highlighted by researchers (Astin, 1975; Braxton, 2000; Kuh, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2002). Tinto (2006) suggests that the classroom is the ideal environment to foster social integration. Though there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups in this study, the fact that students are aware of services and policies and are engaged with their peers in and out of class are noteworthy, and direct us to the benefits of attending a small campus.

A campus with an enrollment of 2300 students presents an opportunity for students to engage with faculty and staff. Plus, the influence of the majority of students living on campus cannot be discounted; Astin (1993) suggested that living in residential halls enhances social integration. In his theory of involvement, Astin posits that living on campus has a bearing on the amount of time spent on campus; this results in better identification and attachment with college life. Sharing living space and participating in student life programs influence membership in the campus community (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 2002).

**Affect of FYS attendance on GPA**

Freshmen who attended five or less FYS sessions and were categorized as Group A (n = 31) had a mean GPA of 2.69; those who attended six or more sessions and were part of Group B had a mean GPA of 2.96 at the end of their freshmen year. Group B participants had a higher mean GPA; however, this
difference in mean was not found to be statistically significant. The hypothesis, there is no difference in academic achievement between those who attended and did not attend FYS, failed to be rejected.

Academic achievement indicated by a student's GPA is identified as the variable most strongly associated with staying in college by Astin (1993). Supporting Astin's position, Tinto (2002) is quoted, "There appears to be an important link between learning and persistence that arises from the interplay of involvement and the quality of student effort. Involvement with one's peers and with the faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, is itself positively related to the quality of student effort and in turn to both learning and persistence" (p. 71).

Astin (1993) and Tinto's (2002) postulations are substantiated by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) who state, "Probably no other variable's relation to persistence or degree completion has attracted more attention than grade performance...college grades may well be the single best predictor of student persistence, degree completion and graduate school enrollment" (p. 396). They go on to emphasize, "Virtually without exception, students' grades make statistically significant, frequently substantial, and indeed often the largest contribution to student persistence and attainment" (p. 397).
Although the findings of this study do not find any statistical differences in GPA between the two groups, students who attended six or more FYS had a higher mean GPA and higher retention rates. The ex-post facto research conducted by Sidle and McReynolds (1999) at a medium-sized, research, 4-year public university investigated the relationship between participation in the institution’s freshmen experience course, student retention and success. The study found a moderately high correlation ($r = .76$) between cumulative GPAs and ratio of credit hours attempted to credit hours completed. Sidle and McReynolds conclude that students who participate in the program continue to remain enrolled at a higher rate than the control group, completing more courses and earning higher GPAs compared to those who do not participate in the first year experience course. These findings are consistent with the current study.

Similar findings are also reported by Lang (2006), who researched the impact of a first year experience course on academic performance, persistence and graduation at a research intensive institution. The study reported a higher GPA mean and higher graduation rates for first year seminar participants.

Ironically, the research site has an attendance policy for academic courses; students are allowed to miss 3 sessions of an 11- week term. In this instance, since the FYS is a retention initiative implemented by the research site, the voluntary, non-credit status makes it an outlier to university protocols. It is likely that freshmen students took full advantage of the latitude offered in this
course to exercise their freedom to skip sessions at their convenience. In some instances, they used the time to study and complete projects for credit bearing classes.

**Affect of academic and social integration on retention**

Students who attended six or more sessions scored higher means on both academic integration and social integration factors. The cumulative GPA for this group was also higher than those who attended five or less FYS sessions. *T*-tests on mean GPAs of both groups revealed no statistical difference between the two groups; the null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

Astin (1993) and Tinto (2002) both posit that the level of student integration into the academic and social systems influences the decision to stay or leave. Astin’s Theory of Involvement and Tinto’s Student Interactionalist Departure are the theoretical underpinnings for this study. Astin defined student involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. The theory delineates that involvement contributes to the student remaining in college, whereas the student’s dropping out implies a lack of involvement (Astin, 1993). Tinto’s Student Integration Model indicates that the probability of a student leaving the university declines when the student is integrated into, and becomes more interdependent with, both academic and social elements of the university.
Hendel (2006) conducted a study at a large research institution to study the efficacy of FYS participation on student satisfaction and retention using logistic regression to test variables of gender, ethnicity, academic achievement and collegiate unit of enrollment. Using t-tests to assess differences between those who participated and those who did not, Hendel's study found positive results from those who attended FYS, particularly a better sense of community and greater participation in academic advising; but the study found no effect on retention between the two groups.

Whereas statistical results of this study are inconclusive to affirm the FYS participations role in academic and social integration and subsequent impact on retention, data from the qualitative component of the study provide valuable and meaningful insight into student experiences. In their own words, focus group participants narrated their experiences, which were categorized as academic and social involvement. The students found the small class size and informal nature of the course appealing; it provided them with the opportunity to get to know faculty, instructors and peers. Participating in the program gave them an opportunity to gain a better understanding of campus policies and academic support systems.

Participating in the FYS seminar created socialization opportunities for students. Some found employment opportunities on campus and joined student organizations as a result of encouragement from instructors. Others made new
friends and were able to expand their social circle; some created their own support system when they realized that they were in the same classes.

Qualitative findings of this study are consistent with Lynn's (2008) research. Her mixed-method study conducted at Western Illinois University revealed that small class size allowed for increased interaction in and out of class with peers and professors. Students noted that peers helped with first year transition and participants acknowledged developing stronger bonds with this group. Participants also acknowledged the seminar's influence to help them create and participate in co-curricular activities.

Why students chose to attend and stop attending FYS

Two sources of data, open-ended comments in the first year effectiveness survey and a focus group provide insight into why some students stopped attending the FYS. A majority of the students cited the course not being credit bearing and voluntary as reasons for not attending. Attendance dropped as soon as the students learned that there was no consequence for skipping the class. Some students cited the timing of the course as an inconvenience; others stated that they used the time to complete assignments for other courses. Some respondents cited their inability to wake up in time as the reason for not attending. A small number of students found the content of the course to be of
little use; one student was turned off by an instructor who represented a different major.

These responses provide insight into the prioritization and decision making rationale of college freshmen. Tinto (2002) writes, "Lest we forget, most new students are teenagers who have had precious little chance to live on their own and attend to the many challenging issues of adult life" (p. 47). Freshmen are at different levels of maturity, and some find it difficult to adjust and prioritize (Tinto, 2002). On the subject of integration and retention, Tinto presents the following rationale: full integration is not necessary to leave and suggests that failure to integrate does not lead to departure. Some students may be more integrated into the academic domain than social; a student may persist as long as they meet the minimum requirements of the institution.

Secondary Findings

Quantitative analysis of the study provide some additional results that have important implications for retention research and the institution. Group B, those who attended six or more sessions, had a higher mean score for satisfaction with the university compared to Group A.

Developing a broad array of satisfied constituents such as students, parents of students, alumni, employers and the community, should be the
primary goal for colleges and universities (Seymour, 1993). Increases in cost of attendance, changes in the competitive landscape and demographic shifts will force institutions of higher learning to pay attention to the role of student satisfaction for their survival (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Student satisfaction or dissatisfaction results in decisions to stay or leave the institution. By focusing on student satisfaction, institutions can affect retention (Pascarella, 2001).

Hendel’s (2007) study researches the link between first year seminar participants’ satisfaction levels and retention at a research extensive institution. The study’s findings conclude that while first year seminar participants expressed more satisfaction with the institution; there is no effect on retention.

**Conclusion**

Retention continues to be an important issue for the research site and higher education. While much has been learned from the exploration of existing literature and this focused inquiry, the reality is that there is no simple fix for a complex, complicated problem (Braxton, 2002). The decision to stay or leave is the prerogative of the individual student with implications for the institution and the community at large (Braxton, 2002; Tinto, 2002). For the tuition dependent research site, the small enrollments of freshmen in business and hospitality present both an opportunity and a challenge; each student matters. The
opportunity lies in creating a campus environment that is engaging and supportive.

This focused research presents the results of one specific strategy in a broad strategic plan to increase first year retention and subsequently improve graduation rates. Although some of the results of this study do not pass the rigor of statistical validity, the study fills some of the gaps in existing literature by presenting qualitative and quantitative measures of FYS effectiveness. In doing so, it also creates a construct for future measures of interventions and provides a framework for the newly formed Office of Institutional Research to conduct additional research.

Findings and recommendations in the study will assist campus leadership in assessing the effectiveness of the FYS program. The benefits of the program and the value of attending should provide factual evidence to review course attendance policies, consider credit for such interventions and perhaps consider a FYS seminar for all students in the system.

As John Gardner (1986) noted, even though the benefits to the institution were questionable, the individuals who attend FYS gain something positive from the experience.
Recommendations

The results of this study provide important findings for the research site. The institution aspires to evolve from an entrepreneurial enterprise driven by business instinct to a mature academic enterprise that makes data driven policy decisions. The study also marks an important first for regional campuses that have sought to demonstrate initiative and develop unique programs for their students. Since this study is limited to a single site within a multi-campus system, the results of this study are limited. Implementation of the FYS program is not campuswide; it is currently limited to business and hospitality programs.

The study focuses on specific outcomes associated with the implementation of the FYS program. Questions about treatment and course outcomes are beyond the scope of this study. Knowledge, teaching style and experience of FYS instructors are not part of this study; it is possible that these factors may have influenced the outcome. The majority of the instructors were staff members. Faculty scheduling conflicts, relatively low number of full-time faculty, teaching overload compensation and freshmen enrollment numbers in specific majors within the college are constraints, which limit the ability of full-time faculty to teach FYS. In 2008, no business faculty was involved in teaching FYS; contact with faculty within the major may provide a different outcome. The informality of FYS could provide the impetus to foster relationships between
faculty and students, resulting in students becoming comfortable with faculty and create opportunities for increased out of class interaction (Lynn, 2008).

The results of the study affirm views expressed by Astin (1991), Gardner (1985) and Cuseo (2002) that a single intervention such as FYS will not improve retention. The study supports that in its current state; the FYS program has limited benefits and the easy business decision would be to redirect funding to another project. However, Astin (1997) reminds us that the long term goal is student graduation.

1. The results of the study demonstrate some promise. The recommendation of the researcher is that FYS be continued. The researcher suggests that campus administration give due consideration to the recommendations of this study to create a supportive environment for students.

2. A review of aggregate scores of factors provides the impetus for specific recommendations on course content. Out-of-class engagement earned low scores from both groups. This creates an opportunity to make changes to the course content by connecting the course participants with campus activities that encourage student interactions outside the classroom. The addition of co-curricular programming presents an opportunity for student affairs, academics and other departments to partner with FYS, thus creating an array of opportunities for participants. Collaborative programs help students make
connections within the campus context, and social activities enable students to meet one another, form friendships and create support networks (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

3. Questions contributing to specific academic integration factor, course improved academic and cognitive skills indicate the need for FYS instructors to have some knowledge and awareness of how students learn. A short training session is not adequate for an instructor to master the nuances of pedagogy and become familiar with the information to be covered in the 10-week seminar. This specialized area presents an opportunity for collaboration. Qualified instructors and expert teachers, along with specialists from the learning center can be invited to deliver components of the course and help students become better learners.

“We must take seriously the importance of classrooms for student retention” (Tinto, 2002 pg. 8). Recent work on retention emphasizes the importance of teaching, classroom related activities and their influence on academic and social integration into the institution (Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 2006). The concept of pedagogy as an avenue of student engagement calls for shift in teaching practices (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Moving from a passive teaching environment to an active learning-based ideology incorporating collaborative and cooperative learning presents opportunities to engage
students. The classroom presents a gateway to academic and social communities (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000).

4. Earning credits for the course is the highest recommendation for change to the course. Student feedback on the course completion incentive cited some disappointment with the certificate of completion. Since the FYS course is only offered at one campus, the possibility of awarding credit is limited. Results of the study show that participants benefited in various ways. Campus administration should consider increasing financial aid grants to those who complete the course. Student demographic data suggests that the majority of students enrolled in FYS programs rely on loans and scholarships to pay for tuition, fees and books. This incentive may prove to be the right enticement to increase participation in the program.

5. Results of this study show that engaging with faculty is important for students. Students found the presence of a familiar face comforting; others pointed to the role played by faculty and staff in directing them to take advantage of different opportunities on campus, such as employment, participating in clubs and other student organizations. First year students have a need for good advising (Astin, 1993; Strommer, 1989; Pascarella, 2005).

The focus on retention presents an opportunity for the enterprise to revisit advising. With many models available and a readily available technology
infrastructure in place, combined with the faculty’s positive outlook and inclination to help students, the system can be successful. Consideration will have to be given to developing goals for the program and measurement of effectiveness (Lynch, 2000). Additional attention will have to be paid to the existing workload for faculty to balance teaching, scholarly work and advising responsibilities (Kerr, 2000). The institution should consider this a worthy employee development initiative as an investment will have to be made to select, train and develop faculty to become effective advisors.

Opportunities for Future Research

This study reports the findings of a small scale, focused study of one course. The limitations of this study point to the need for future research to focus on social and academic integration resulting in a deeper theorizing of the role of first year intervention programs on social and academic integration. Future research could expand the scope of this study to explore the relationship of institutional and federal financial aid awarding to examine the price value relationship and the overall experience of the students and subsequent impact on retention.

While the institution has made some progress in sharpening admissions standards, selectivity remains an important lever to influence retention rates.
Evidence from the study suggests that many of the students reporting not taking or stating SAT and ACT scores. Future research should explore the relationship of academic preparedness and pre-entry characteristics with academic integration, academic achievement and retention.

This investigation is limited in its scope. Future research could focus on non-student population associated with the FYS. Views of staff and faculty involved with program delivery would be beneficial. The FYS coordinator could be assisted by credentialed faculty with expertise and interest in conducting such an investigation.

A longitudinal investigation of FYS attendance, academic performance, retention and graduation rates for this sample would be helpful in determining the long-term relationship of the intervention and these variables. A follow-up study of those who attended but did not persist, dropped out or transferred to another institution would be helpful to provide information on where they went and why they dropped out. The results of such an inquiry would be beneficial in extending the understanding of this study and subject.

Lastly, the findings of the qualitative component of this study provide rich insight into the experiences of FYS seminar participants. While it is important that the institution continue broadening the scope of empirical research on this topic, focus groups representing a cross section of the student population will be
helpful in filling some of the deficiencies in FYS and retention research. This suggested course of action will extend the knowledge base on this topic and answer the call by notable researchers such as Vincent Tinto (2002) and Ernest Pascarella (2005) to utilize mixed methods approaches to study why and how interventions such as FYS affect student outcomes.
References


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## First-Year Initiative (FYI) Survey

**Appendix A**

### First-Year Initiative (FYI) Survey

1. Please record **one response per question**, by carefully darkening the circle completely with a No. 2 pencil (no mechanical pencils, please).

2. **College/University:**

   (Please Print Clearly)

3. **RESPONSE KEY FOR QUESTIONS 1 to 63**

   - not at all
   - somewhat
   - significantly
   - not applicable

4. **COURSE EFFECTIVENESS**

   - This course/experience improved my:

     1. Understanding of my academic strengths
     2. Test preparation skills
     3. Ability to find what I need through the library
     4. Writing skills
     5. Reading skills
     6. Decision-making skills
     7. Computer skills
     8. Oral presentation skills
     9. Efforts to get to know students in my classes
     10. Ability to meet new people with common interests
     11. Ability to establish close friendships with peers
     12. Ability to deal with stress
     13. Consider how this course/experience affected your other courses. Has it improved the degree to which:

   14. Review my class notes before the next class meeting
   15. Complete homework/assignments on time
   16. Study with other students
   17. Take effective notes in class
   18. Cope with test anxiety
   19. Am able to see multiple sides of issues
   20. Identify solutions for complex problems
   21. Evaluate the quality of opinions and facts
   22. Understand faculty expectations of students
   23. Communicated with my instructors outside of class

   - This course/experience increased my understanding of:

     24. College/University rules regarding academic honesty
     25. The grading system
     26. Academic probation policies
     27. Registration procedures
     28. Financial aid procedures
     29. The role of my academic advisor
     30. How to obtain academic assistance
     31. How to obtain a tutor
     32. Available library resources

   - **INSTRUCTION**

   To what degree did this course/experience include:

   33. College students’ sexual issues
   34. The impact of alcohol consumption
   35. The impact of drug use
   36. The impact of exercising regularly
   37. The impact of establishing personal goals

   - **COURSE READINGS**

   To what degree did you find the readings:

   38. A variety of teaching methods
   39. Meaningful class discussions
   40. Challenging assignments
   41. Productive use of classroom time
   42. Encouragement to speak in class
   43. Encouragement for students to work together
   44. Meaningful homework

   - **SKILLS/ABILITIES**

   Consider how this course/experience affected your other courses. Taking it has increased the degree to which:

   45. Relevant
   46. Interesting
   47. Helpful

   - **CAMPUS ACTIVITIES**

   To what degree:

   48. Participated in class room discussions
   49. Prepared for tests well in advance
   50. Established an effective study schedule
   51. Set priorities so I can accomplish what is most important to me
   52. Organized my time to meet my responsibilities

   - **RELATIONSHIPS**

   To what degree:

   53. Participated in campus-sponsored organizations
   54. Contributed to the success of campus-sponsored organizations
   55. Volunteered my time for worthwhile causes
   56. Attended campus cultural events

   - **COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE**

   To what degree:

   57. Are you accepted by students at this college/university
   58. Is it easy for you to make new friends at this college/university
   59. Are you able to identify other students with similar interests

   (OVER)
64. When you compare the expense with the quality of your education, how do you rate the value of the investment you are making in your education at this college/university?

- very poor
- poor
- fair
- good
- very good
- excellent
- exceptional

THE BOTTOM LINE - OVERALL PERCEPTIONS

RESPONSE KEY FOR QUESTIONS 65 TO 69

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not at all</th>
<th>somewhat</th>
<th>significantly applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

To what extent did this course:

65. Include interesting subject matter

66. Contribute to your ability to succeed academically

67. Contribute to your ability to adjust to the college social environment

68. Cover topics important to you

69. Would you recommend this course to other first-year students

70. Rate your level of effort in this course

- very little
- some
- considerable

DEMOGRAPHICS: Answers to the following questions will be kept anonymous.

A. Course Section Code: Leave blank if code not provided.

Example: Code 0024 = 1st digit "0", 2nd digit "0", 3rd digit "2", 4th digit "4"

1st digit

2nd digit

3rd digit

4th digit

B. Population Code (leave blank if not provided):

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

C. Your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other

D. What was your SAT or ACT score?

(Highest score you took the test more than once)

- SAT 810 / ACT 17 or below
- SAT 820-890 / ACT 18-19
- SAT 890-970 / ACT 20-21
- SAT 980-1030 / ACT 22
- SAT 1040-1100 / ACT 23-24
- SAT 1100-1170 / ACT 25-26
- SAT 1170-1240 / ACT 27-28
- SAT 1240-1310 / ACT 29-30
- SAT 1320-1420 / ACT 31-32
- SAT 1430 / ACT 33 or above
- SAT 1430 / ACT 33 or above
- don't know/didn't take

E. Your ethnic group: (check only one)

- Multi-racial
- White, Non Hispanic
- African American
- Non-US Citizen
- Asian American
- Permanent Resident
- Native American
- Unknown
- Hispanic American
- Other

F. Your age:

- 18 or younger
- 19 to 21
- 22 to 24
- 25 to 27
- 28 to 30
- 31 or older

G. Which best describes your high school grades:

- lower than C
- mostly B and C
- mostly A and B
- mostly C
- mostly B
- mostly A
- very poor

H. Which best describes your current academic performance at this institution?

- lower than C
- mostly B and C
- mostly A and B
- mostly C
- mostly B
- mostly A

I. Identify the number of college/university sponsored extracurricular activities in which you have participated during the current academic term:

- none
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 or more

J. Average number of HOURS PER WEEK you spend studying for all classes during the current term:

- none
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 or more

K. Average number of HOURS PER WEEK you work (paying a job) during the current term:

- none
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

L. Where do you live:

- campus residence hall
- off-campus not with family
- campus apartment
- Greek housing
- off-campus with family
- other

M. If you commute, how many hours do you spend on campus:

- none
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

N. If you do not live with family, how often do you go home in addition to regularly scheduled breaks:

- every weekend
- a few weekends
- once a week
- twice a week
- more than twice a week

O. How frequently do you consume alcohol in a typical WEEK:

- once a week or less
- twice a week
- more than twice a week

P. How many alcoholic drinks do you typically consume per EVENT when you drink (beer, wine, mixed drinks, etc.):

- one drink
- two drinks
- three drinks
- four drinks
- five drinks
- six drinks
- seven drinks
- eight drinks
- more than eight drinks

Q. To what extent do you plan to transfer to another institution?

- definitely will transfer
- probably will transfer
- uncertain
- definitely will not transfer
- will not transfer

R. To what extent do you plan to attend any college next fall?

- definitely will attend
- probably will attend
- uncertain
- definitely will not attend
- will not attend

S. About how much of your college tuition/fees/books is covered by financial aid (loans/grants/scholarships)?

- less than 1/4 of total
- 1/4 to nearly 1/2
- 1/2 to nearly 3/4
- nearly 3/4 to full cost
- full cost

T. Which best describes the major source of any financial aid you are receiving this year?

- only scholarships
- only loans
- only other forms of financial aid
- no financial aid

INSTITUTION SPECIFIC QUESTION RESPONSES

(Leave blank if no additional questions were provided)
Appendix B

2008-2009 EBI First-Year Initiative Assessment
Factor Composition

Factor 1. Course Improved Study Strategies  Reliability: 0.90

Q1: Course Improved: Understanding of my academic strengths
Q2: Course Improved: Test preparation skills
Q3. Course Improved: Ability to find what I need through the library
Q13. Course Improved: Reviewing class noted before the next class meeting
Q14. Course Improved: Completing homework assignments on time
Q15. Quality of Instruction and Faculty in Education Courses: Feedback on assignments (other than grades)
Q16. Course Improved: Taking effective notes in class
Q17. Course Improved: Coping with anxiety

Factor 2. Course Improved Academic and Cognitive Skills  Reliability: 0.89

Q4. Course Improved: Writing skills
Q5. Course Improved: Reading skills
Q6. Course Improved: Decision-making skills
Q7. Course Improved: Computer skills
Q8. Course Improved: Oral presentation skills

Factor 3. Course Improved Critical Thinking  Reliability: 0.91

Q18. Course Improved: Ability to see multiple sides of issues
Q19. Course Improved: Identifying solutions for complex problems
Q20. Course Improved: Evaluating the quality of opinions and facts

Factor 4. Course Improved Connections with Faculty  Reliability: 0.82

Q21. Course Improved: Understanding faculty expectations of students
Q22. Course Improved: Feedback sought from instructors
Q23. Course Improved: Communications with instructors outside of class

Factor 5. Course Improved Connections with Peers  Reliability: 0.90

Q9. Course Improved: Efforts to get to know students in my classes
Q10. Course Improved: Ability to meet new people with common interests
Q11. Course Improved: Ability to establish close friendships with peers

Factor 6. Course Increased Out-Of-Class Engagement  Reliability: 0.90

Q9. Course Increased: Efforts to get to know students in my classes
Q10. Course Increased: Ability to meet new people with common interests
Q11. Course Increased: Ability to establish close friendships with peers
Factor 7. **Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies**  
Reliability: 0.89

Q24. Course Increased Understanding of: College/University rules regarding academic honesty
Q25. Course Increased Understanding of: The grading system
Q26. Course Increased Understanding of: Academic probation policies
Q27. Course Increased Understanding of: Registration procedures
Q28. Course Increased Understanding of: Financial aid procedures

Factor 8. **Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services**  
Reliability: 0.85

Q29. Course Increased Understanding of: The role of the academic advisor
Q30. Course Increased Understanding of: How to obtain academic assistance
Q31. Course Increased Understanding of: How to obtain a tutor
Q32. Course Increased Understanding of: Available library resources

Factor 9. **Course Improved Managing Time and Priorities**  
Reliability: 0.92

Q37. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of establishing personal goals
Q49. Course Increased: Preparation for tests well in advance
Q50. Course Increased: Establishing an effective study schedule
Q51. Course Increased: Setting priorities to accomplish what is most important
Q52. Course Increased: Organizing time to meet responsibilities

Factor 10. **Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness**  
Reliability: 0.90

Q12. Course Improved: Ability to deal with stress
Q33. Course Improved Understanding of: The college students’ sexual issues
Q34. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of alcohol consumption
Q35. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of drug use
Q36. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of exercising regularly

Factor 11. **Sense of Belonging and Acceptance**  
Reliability: 0.90

Q57. The Degree That: Student is accepted my students at this college/university
Q58. The Degree That: It is easy for you to identify other students with similar interests.

Factor 12. **Usefulness of Course Readings**  
Reliability: 0.90

Q45. Course readings were: Relevant
Q46. Course readings were: Interesting
Q47. Course readings were: Helpful

Factor 13. **Satisfaction with College/University**  
Reliability: 0.89

Q60. The Degree That: Student wants to return to this college/university for the next fall term
Q61. The Degree That: Student would recommend this college/university to a friend
Q62. The Degree That: Student’s college experience was a high-quality learning experience
Q63. The Degree That: Student’s college experience was a positive experience
Q64. Comparing Expense with Quality of Education: Rate the value of the investment made by the education at this school

**Factor 14. Course Included Engaging Pedagogy**

Reliability: 0.91

Q38. Course/Experience Included: A variety of teaching methods
Q39. Course/Experience Included: Meaningful class discussions
Q40. Course/Experience Included: Challenging assignments
Q41. Course/Experience Included: Productive use of classroom time
Q42. Course/Experience Included: Encouragement to speak in class
Q43. Course/Experience Included: Encouragement for students to work together
Q44. Course/Experience Included: Meaningful homework
Q48. Course Increased: Participation in classroom discussions

**Factor 15. Overall Course Effectiveness**

Reliability: 0.91

Q65. Overall Course Effectiveness: Included interesting subject matter
Q66. Overall Course Effectiveness: Contributed to the ability to succeed academically
Q67. Overall Course Effectiveness: Contributed to the ability to adjust to the college social environment
Q68. Overall Course Effectiveness: Covered topics important to student
Q69. Overall Course Effectiveness: Student would recommend this course to other first-year students
Appendix C
Course Syllabus and Course Outline, First-Year Seminar

COURSE SYLLABUS
First-Year Seminar

Term: 200910
Course Title: First-Year Seminar
Course Number: FRSH 0001
Prerequisite(s): Freshman Status Only

Course Description: The First-Year Seminar is a course for first-year students and serves as an introduction to the nature of higher education and a general orientation and transition to Johnson & Wales University. First-Year Seminar will enable first-year students to be equipped with the tools, skills, and resources needed to adapt to university life, acquire a balance between personal freedom and social responsibility, and develop an understanding of the learning process and engage in a most successful university experience.

Course Outcomes:

1. Students will develop supportive relationships with staff, faculty, and other students.
2. Students will enhance their competency in skills that will assist them in reaching their academic goals.
3. Students will understand and demonstrate basic written and oral communication skills as they relate to interpersonal relationships, the academic setting, and the work environment.
4. Students will discuss policies & resources which exist at JWU and within the Charlotte community, not only to meet their needs but also to bring an awareness of how they can contribute to their surrounding community.
5. Students will develop knowledge of their own talents, values, and personal characteristics so that they can be responsible students and citizens.

Means of assessment: Journal writing, one-minute papers, in-class assignments.
Course Outline:

Session 1
- Icebreakers
- Review syllabus
- Campus resources

Session 2
- Locus of control
- Goal setting

Session 3
- Academic policies and resources
- Learning styles
- Planning accordingly for each term

Session 4
- Time management
- Study strategies

Session 5
- Academic planner
- Online registration
- Degree Works
- Academic advising

Session 6
- Managing finances
- Developing a budget
- Understanding credit cards

Session 7
- Alcohol awareness
- Healthy decision-making
- Personal health (physical and emotional)

Session 8
- Values
- Civility
- Code of Conduct

Session 9
- Communication & relationships
- Email communication
- Conflict Resolution

Session 10
- Assessment
- Diversity / Celebrating our individuality
- Course wrap-up

Celebration
- Monday, November 17, 2008 from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. (location TBA)

Social Activity: There will be one social activity planned during this term. More details (time, location, etc.) to come.
**Required Text:** *New To JWU: A Guide for First-Year Students* (provided during the first class session)

**Evaluative Criteria:**
1. Abide by university policies:
   a. Professional Attire
2. Abide by FYS policies:
   a. If you miss less than 2 class sessions, you will receive a FYS gift (includes the social activity planned by your instructor).
3. Code of Conduct:
   a. Show respect for others
4. Requirement:
   a. Participation
   b. Personal reflections, journal entries, in-class assignments

**Outcomes Assessment:** Johnson & Wales University is committed to outcomes assessment. Faculty and students are, therefore, part of an ongoing effort to determine and refine the effectiveness of instruction and learning. Names of individual students will not be used when reporting results.

**Special Needs:** Please inform me of any special needs accommodations required. Accommodations will be made once proper documentation is received from the Center for Academic Support. Student must request this.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity is an essential part of our institutional mission. Any student found responsible for cheating, plagiarizing or in any other way compromising academic integrity may be subject to both academic disciplinary action and student conduct review action (up to and including dismissal from the university).

For further details of university policies on academic conduct, see Academic Policies in the Student Handbook (available online at http://www.jwu.edu/charlotte/life.htm).

**Student Email:** Students are required to obtain and use a Johnson & Wales email account for university communication.

Persons other than registered students are not allowed to attend academic sessions, laboratory classes, computer labs, and other university academically supported areas.

No food or drink in the classroom.

Communication devices must be turned off in the classroom.
First-Year Seminar (FRSH 0001)
Fall 08 Course Outline

Session 1
Content:
- Icebreakers
- Campus resources
- Review syllabus

Session 2
Content:
- Locus of control (including LOC self-assessment)
- Goal setting

Session 3
Content:
- Academic policies and resources
- Learning styles
- Long-term planner

Session 4
Content:
- Time management
- Study strategies

Session 5
Content:
- Academic Planner
- Online registration
- Uconnect/Degree Works
- Advising

Session 6
Content:
- Health & Wellness
- Decision making
- Alcohol Awareness (Delivered by Rob Allen)

Session 7
Content:
- Managing finances
- Budgeting
Session 8
Content:
  • Ethical student
  • Civility
  • Code of Conduct

Session 9
Content:
  • Communication & Relationships
  • Email Communication
  • Conflict Resolution Strategies

Session 10
Lesson Plan: Written by Stephanie Heupel
Content:
  • Diversity
  • FYS Assessment

Celebration
  Monday, November 17, 2008 from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Focus Group Purpose and Procedures
You are being asked to participate in a focus group to investigate student attitudes and perceptions of the First-Year Seminar program at Johnson & Wales University (JWU). Findings from this focus group will be included as part of a broader review of the First-Year Seminar program.

A focus group is a small group of people (about 7 to 10) who provide responses to questions asked by a facilitator. The questions you will be asked today have been specifically designed to assess your opinions and understanding of JWU’s First-Year Seminar program. The focus group will be transcribed and will last approximately 1 hour. Everyone’s participation is encouraged.

Benefits
You will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card for participating in this focus group. Also, this research is expected to yield knowledge about student perceptions of JWU’s First-Year Seminar program and results will be used to help inform the University’s overall review of the program.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no known risks or discomforts to you.

Privacy
All information gathered from the focus group will remain private. Your identity as a participant will not be disclosed to any unauthorized persons. Any references to your identity that would compromise your privacy will be removed or disguised prior to the preparation of the focus group report. Your participation will not affect your grades or standing at JWU.

Withdrawal without Prejudice
Participation in this focus group is voluntary, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You are free to make your own choice about whether to take part, and you may withdraw from the group at any time.

Questions
If you have any questions concerning the focus group or how the data will be used, please contact Tarun Malik, Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs at (980) 598-1014 or tarun.malik@jwu.edu
Signature
Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this focus group. Your signature also indicates that you fully understand the purpose of the focus group, what will be required of you, and that you are signing this consent form voluntarily.

Name (please print)
___________________________________________________________________

Signature of participant_____________________________________________
Date________________

Signature of focus group leader_______________________________________
Date________________
Appendix E
Focus Group Questions

Group B

- In what ways have you developed throughout your first year of college?
- Were any of these developments impacted by the FYS?
- You’re at the end of your spring term – what has made you feel at home here and experience a sense of belonging? Did the FYS make a difference in establishing this sense of belonging?
- What if you hadn’t participated in the FYS? Would you have noticed any difference?
- If it had been for credit, what difference would that have made?
- Was FYS instrumental in making friends?
- Why did you continue to participate in the FYS?
- What did you like about the course?
- What would you change about the course?
- Have you registered for the fall term? If so, why did you decide to return? If not, why?

Group A

- In what ways have you developed throughout your first year of college?
- At what point did you decide to stop attending/participating in the FYS?
- If the course were for credit, would you have continued to attend?
- Do you think this course should be for credit?
- Had you continued your participation in the FYS, do you believe this course would have been helpful? If yes, how so? If not, why?
- Do you feel connected on campus and have you experienced a sense of belonging to JWU? If so, what caused this sense of belonging?
- Was there anything else JWU could have done or provided to help prepare you for your first year of college?
- What person/service/program was most influential in helping this year to be successful for you?
- Have you registered for the fall term? If so, why did you decide to return? If not, why?
From: Christopher Hourigan  
Sent: Wednesday, January 27, 2010 2:20 PM  
To: Tarun Malik  
Subject: RE: Research Proposal

Hi Tarun,

I am writing to inform you that the research group did meet today and approved your dissertation proposal. We do want to be sure to stress, however, that all FERPA guidelines be followed when working with individual student data. Also, I am thinking that you and I should have a discussion about your methodology at some point, especially since I, too, have been asked to look at the effectiveness of the first year seminar.

Thanks,

Chris

Christopher P. Hourigan  
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Johnson & Wales University  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903  
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Fax: (401) 598-2024  
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