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# Retaining At-Risk Undergraduates Through Mandatory Interaction

Brian Jacob Gorman

*Eastern Illinois University*

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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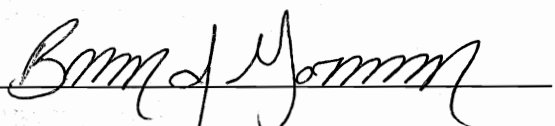
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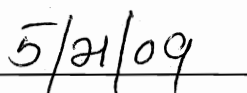
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Retaining At-Risk Undergraduates through Mandatory Interaction

By

Brian Jacob Gorman

B.A., Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, 2006

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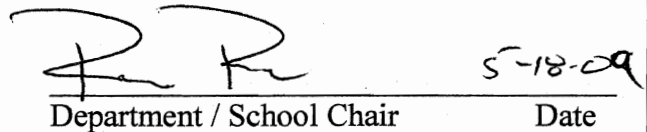
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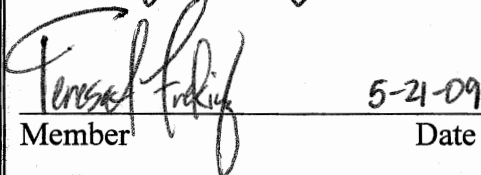
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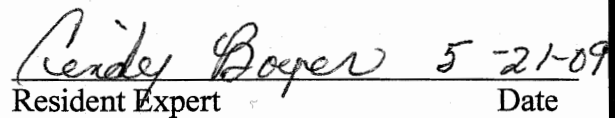
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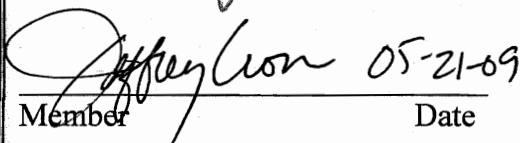
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## Abstract

Eastern Illinois University has developed an academic assistance resource center for low achieving students known as the Student Success Center (SSC). A major service of the SSC is EIU 2919, Strategies for Academic Success, a mandatory course for students who have fallen below a 2.00 cumulative GPA that focuses on removing barriers to success. In the first year of the Center's operation, the percentage of students on academic probation who regained good standing increased from 34% following the 2006-2007 academic year to 70% following the 2007-2008 academic year. The purpose of the present study was to define what course content within EIU 2919 students described as beneficial to their success, and what effect the course had on levels of self-reported student engagement in the college experience.

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## Retaining At-Risk Undergraduates through Mandatory Interaction

### CHAPTER I

#### Introduction

Graduating high school seniors are in need of postsecondary education more than ever before in order to become self-sufficient and competitive in an increasingly competitive world. The most popular form of postsecondary education is attending a college or university. Students see entering college and earning a college degree as the preeminent way to financial success and for good reason. Persons with a four-year degree made on average 62% more in their lifetime than those who held a high school diploma in 2003 (Nash, 2006). Unfortunately, many students who enter college have as their primary goal obtaining a diploma for employment purposes, not for acquiring a quality education. The desire to obtain a diploma, however, is not enough motivation for many undergraduate students to fully engage in the collegiate learning experience.

Full engagement in classroom learning is the primary means through which students earn their degree; however, engagement in co-curricular activities is equally important to students' holistic development. The National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh, 2007) and The Milwaukee Idea (UWM Report, 2005) both demonstrate that undergraduate involvement in co-curricular activities increases motivation, engagement, and achievement levels. Recognized Student Organizations (RSOs) such as intramural sports teams, fraternities or sororities, degree specific clubs, intercollegiate athletics, community initiatives, and other university sponsored programs are examples of co-curricular activities available to students.

The increasing proportion of all persons age 18 – 24 attending college also increases the diversity of institutional experiences and the overall quality of education (Gurin, Dey, Gurin, & Hurtado, 2003; Jayakumar, 2008). Student diversity is a very broad category that includes, but is not limited to, socio-economic status, race, culture, age, and ability levels. Increased diversity also includes health and family issues, financial aid, lack of college readiness, or low educational motivation that seriously challenges undergraduates' likelihood of success and/or desire to succeed. No longer can an institution prepare only for traditional college students who arrive right out of high school that are prepared for college and motivated to succeed. Institutions must be aware of the diverse backgrounds and personal circumstances students now bring with them to campus.

Nearly 50% of individuals who enter four-year institutions and 33% who enter two-year colleges do not complete a degree program (Downing, 2008). Health and family issues, financial means, and lack of college readiness are just a few examples of reasons that students do not complete a degree program. Academic struggles are a large reason for these statistics. Sixty-four percent of the 700 - 900 undergraduates at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) placed on Academic Warning (GPA <2.0 on a 4.0 scale) each academic year do not return to good standing within two semesters and may not return to the university for this reason (Cross, 2005, p.3).

These and other discouraging numbers make creativity a necessary component in developing remedial programs that will facilitate the engagement and academic success of at-risk undergraduates. The development of targeted institutional resources and staff

instructional methods that facilitate student engagement and reduce student barriers to success may increase both retention and persistence to graduation.

#### Statement of Problem

EIU 2919, Strategies for Academic Success (EIU 2919) was created as part of the Student Success Center (SSC) to help low achieving students overcome barriers to success. Since its implementation in the fall of 2007, the percentage of students returning to good academic standing, and subsequent retention rates of those students has increased markedly (Evaluation Analysis of EIU 2919, 2008). The purpose of the present research was to determine (1) what academic support would benefit students when first enrolled at EIU, (2) what components of EIU 2919 do students identify as being beneficial to their academic success, and (3) what impact has EIU 2919 had on students' perception of their engagement in the college experience? Although EIU 2919 has been successful, specific course topics have not been systematically identified by students completing the course that they considered beneficial to their subsequent academic success. No data have been compiled to assess whether students actually report becoming more engaged in the college experience as a result of their enrollment in EIU 2919. The present paper is a first effort to generate data based on student experience to support EIU 2919 course program development.

### Research Questions

Two general research questions focused the purposes of the present study. Each question is listed below with the specific program assessment items (Appendix A) designed to address the questions specified.

- I. What components of EIU 2919 do students identify as being beneficial to their overall academic success (Items 25 – 57, 65)?
- II. What impact has EIU 2919 had on student perceptions of their engagement in the college experience (Items 7 - 24, 58, 59, 62-64)?

### Definition of Terms

For the purposes of the present study definitions for several terms are listed below.

**Academic Success:** For the purpose of this study, academic success is defined as attaining a cumulative GPA  $\geq 2.00$  on a 4.00 scale.

**Academic Warning:** If, at the end of a grading period (semester or summer term), a student's cumulative GPA in courses taken at the University falls below 2.00, but not so low as to warrant academic dismissal, that student will be placed on academic warning ([http://catalog.eiu.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=373#acad\\_warn\\_prob\\_dism](http://catalog.eiu.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=373#acad_warn_prob_dism), Eastern Illinois University, 2007).

**At-Risk Students:** For the purpose of this study, at-risk students are defined as those who have earned a cumulative GPA below 2.00 on a 4.00 scale.

**Remedial Course:** For the purpose of the present study, a remedial course refers to academic and personal development courses.

### Reflective Statement

During the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 academic semesters I was a graduate assistant at Eastern Illinois University for the Student Success Center. Among my responsibilities was teaching 12 sections of EIU 2919. In working with these students, I have encountered many who had little motivation to succeed in college other than to receive a diploma. Students were more interested in receiving grades good enough to get by than in earning an education and immersing themselves in the college experience. Many of these students did not have clearly defined goals for themselves and saw college as a burden they must complete to achieve their goal of obtaining a diploma. Many of these students were not involved in university sponsored activities, clubs or organizations, and did not spend time on campus other than when they were in the classroom or in their residence hall, and were not enjoying their experiences while in college.

### The Student Success Center at Eastern Illinois University

Between August 2003 and August 2004, Eastern Illinois University completed an analysis of its academic programs and found two substantial weaknesses: a high failure rate of students on Academic Warning and low retention of minority students after their sophomore year (Cross, 2005). EIU submitted a grant proposal in 2005 that was accepted and funded through Title III of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act to combat said weaknesses. The proposal included the creation of a centralized location on campus with a parallel online presence to support all at-risk students known as the Student Success Center (SSC). A central feature of the SSC is a mandatory course for all students placed on Academic Warning for the first time, EIU 2919: Strategies for Academic Success



(EIU 2919). This mandatory course was designed to empower students to make choices that would facilitate greater academic, and personal success emphasizing topics such as goal setting, time-management, study skills, motivation, and learning styles (Course Syllabus, 2007). Grades for this class are included as part of a student's grade point average, but the successful completion of the course does not count for credit hours toward graduation.

#### Outcomes of Student Success Center

SSC and EIU 2919 goals were established within the grant proposal to monitor the progress and success of the new initiative. Goals as written in the proposal included:

- an increase in the percentage of students regaining good standing from 36% to 40% in year one
- 40% to 48% in year two
- 48% to 55% in year three
- 55% to 60% in year four

The percentage of students regaining good standing within two semesters after being placed on Academic Warning was 36 % when the proposal was written in 2005 (Cross, 2005, p.11). The return to good standing rate had decreased to 34 % for unknown reasons following the 2006-2007 academic year, the year before the implementation of the SSC (Evaluation Analysis of EIU 2919, 2008, p.5).

One hundred twenty-nine students took EIU 2919 in the fall of 2007. This cohort surpassed the established goals in the first year of the SSC's existence. The percentage of students who regained good standing increased from 34 % following the 2006-2007 academic year to 70 % following the 2007-2008 academic year (Evaluation Analysis of

EIU 2919, 2008, p.5). The fall 2007 cohort's average GPA rose from 1.41 the semester the students were placed on Academic Warning to 2.04 following their completion of EIU 2919 (EIU 2919, p.5, 2008). The average number of students placed on Academic Warning was 700-900 in the years when the grant proposal was being created.

Unfortunately, not all of these students return and enroll in classes at EIU the semester following their placement on Academic Warning. Five hundred sixty-five total students were placed on Academic Warning for the first time, while 455 (80.5%) returned to EIU, subsequently enrolling in EIU 2919 in 2007-2008, the first year of the SSC's existence. One hundred twenty-nine students were enrolled in the fall 2007 semester, and 326 in the spring 2008 semester. The significant enrollment increase in the spring was due to a large increase of freshmen students who, following their first semester at EIU, were placed on Academic Warning. Ninety-six students were enrolled in EIU 2919 in the fall 2008 semester. These three semesters had a combined total of 551 enrollees in EIU 2919.

Besides the academic benefits the SSC has been able to provide for students, student clients "saved" through the center's services have paid for or will pay \$10 million in otherwise lost revenue to the University (Cross, personal communication, May 7, 2009). The estimation for this amount is from tuition dollars paid by those students who otherwise may have been dismissed from EIU or left the University for other reasons, and the money saved in recruitment efforts to replace revenue lost from students who would have otherwise left the institution.

## Chapter Summary

The purpose of the present research was to determine (1) what academic support would benefit students when first enrolled at EIU, (2) what components of EIU 2919 do students identify as being beneficial to their academic success, and (3) what impact has EIU 2919 had on students' perception of their engagement in the college experience? Chapter II will contain a review of literature covering topics associated with student engagement and strategies for engaging students in the college experience. Chapter III will explain the research method used to address the central questions in this study. Chapter IV will outline results of data obtained from surveying the present study population. Chapter V will include the author's analysis of the study, implications for practice applied to the current structure of EIU 2919, and suggestions for further research on the scholarship of teaching that focuses on delivery of course content to affected students.

## CHAPTER II

## Review of Literature

*Introduction*

The research literature on student success is extensive. Remedial courses, cooperative learning, supplemental instruction, balancing academics and athletics, class attendance, and study habits have been studied in relation to student success. Research on remedial courses is relevant to the study because EIU 2919 is considered a remedial course at EIU. Nearly all of the student engagement strategies described in the literature review have been included as curricular elements in EIU 2919. EIU 2919 incorporates cooperative learning into its curriculum through team activities where students complete assignments and reflect on a vast array of personal experiences with each other. Supplemental instruction is encouraged by frequently involving students in class discussion where they are encouraged to express their ideas through dialogue, and/or develop strategies and solutions. Self-discipline and time-management strategies are also topics frequently discussed in EIU 2919 through the development of study schedules and weekly and semester calendars. Student attendance is required, and attendance is included in the computation of class grades. As Cross (2005) reported in his progress report on the success of the course to facilitate retaining a larger percentage of at-risk students, initial results were well beyond original expectations for improvement. The purpose of the present study is to survey student participants in the course in order to learn specifically what aspects of the course were perceived as the most useful to them, how useful practices can be incorporated into student experience immediately upon

enrollment at EIU, and how EIU 2919 has affected student perceptions of their engagement in the college experience. A review of relevant literature follows.

### *Remedial Courses*

According to the State of Washington's State Administrative and Accounting Manual (2009) (<http://www.ofm.wa.gov/policy/70.40.htm>), a remedial course is a course designed to remedy a deficiency and qualify a student for regular academic courses. Although EIU 2919 is not specifically designed to remediate for a specific discipline, course content is designed to remedy academic and personal deficiencies to prepare students for regular academic courses. Adelman (1999; 2004) examined factors that related to college graduation rates and time to degree of which remediation was a topic. He determined that many who take remediation courses are able to improve skills and graduate despite academic weak spots. Adelman also implied that poor high school preparation limited graduation rates, not taking required remedial coursework. Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) investigated the effects of college remedial courses on graduation rates. Overall findings suggested that students who take remedial coursework graduated at lower rates than did students who do not take remedial courses. This finding is not to imply that remedial coursework is the cause for lower graduation rates, rather without remedial classes the number of students who do graduate after taking such courses would not have continued in school, and thus not have had a chance to graduate at all.

### *Cooperative Learning*

Cooperative Learning has been found to be important in academic success for at-risk students. Cooperative learning allows students to work together in small teams, allowing for many different viewpoints and experiences. Walker (1996) concluded that cooperative learning in the classroom improved the experience of both students and instructors. Cooperative learning is an action-oriented approach to getting students involved in topics, allowing them to express their own views while becoming engaged in the material. Johnson & Johnson (1999) listed positive outcomes of cooperative learning including higher achievement, greater productivity, higher levels of reasoning, more frequent generation of ideas and solutions, greater transfer of information from one situation to another, higher commitment and persistence, and the development of interpersonal relationships among students who participated in cooperative learning. Instructional practices focusing on cooperative learning is a centerpiece of the EIU 2919 course structure.

### *Supplemental Instruction*

Supplemental instruction is a structured form of peer teaching where students voluntarily seek academic support from peers to increase their academic performance in difficult classes. Lazari and Simons (2003) as well as Hodges, Dochen, and Joy (2001) found a higher level of academic success among students who became involved in supplemental instruction. Bowles, McCoy, and Bates (2008) reinforced their findings of the positive effect of supplemental instruction on graduation rates when they concluded that “supplemental instruction attendance in freshman-level courses, holding all other

factors constant, increases the probability of graduation within approximately four years” (p.6).

### *Academics and Athletes*

Balancing academic responsibilities with athletic performance is very difficult for many college student-athletes. Simons and Van Rheenen (2000) conducted a study addressing non-cognitive predictors of student athlete academic performance. They concluded that student athletes who are successful academically find a way to use the same qualities that make them successful in athletics in academics. Many athletes actually do better academically in season because they have the extra incentive of eligibility to be more focused on academics. Also, their time is more structured. Student athletes who are not academically successful typically are not able to correlate successful behaviors of athletics with academics. These student athletes typically have lacked in academic performance in the past and see themselves as unable to be successful academically. Thus, these students lack determination of putting in extra effort on academics and put that effort into their athletics. This allows them to place blame on athletics for taking too much of their time.

Maloney and McCormick (1993) concluded that overall athletes do not perform as well in college as non-athletes. They tend to be less prepared for college and have lower SAT scores. They also concluded that athletes in non-revenue sports tend to perform at the same level in and out of season, while athletes in revenue sports such as football and men’s basketball perform at a lower academic level while in season. Not

being able to structure their time and the large amounts of pressure to perform athletically and from media exposure are reasons for lower academic performance.

### *Cutting Class*

Cutting class and being unprepared for college are major reasons for student failure. Gump (2005) conducted a study of the effects of cutting class on final grades in an introductory-level general education course at a large midwestern state university. As expected, conclusions showed a strong positive correlation between cutting class and poor final grades. Devadoss and Foltz (1996) found a strong positive correlation between class attendance and high academic performance. They determined several factors that influenced class attendance including motivation, prior grades, GPA, self-financing, hours spent on a job, the quality of teaching in the course, and the nature of class lectures.

### *Study Schedule*

An organized study schedule combined with effective study habits tends to have positive impact on student success. Reading, reviewing notes, and studying in a location where the student is not distracted are examples of effective habits (Widhalm, 2007). According to the Student Success Center's website (2007) (<http://www.eiu.edu/~success/WeeklyTimeChart.pdf>), the general rule of suggested study time for students has been two hours of study for each hour in the classroom. Thus, if a student is taking fifteen hours of class a week, she/he should spend thirty hours that same week studying. Few students meet such a rigorous expectation for hours of study in relation to credit hours enrolled. Milberg, Bower, and Eberly (2000) found in a self-report



sample of 483 students that the majority (63.5%, 307 of 483) indicated they studied no more than 10 hours a week.

### *Environment*

Pascarella (1980) concluded that student-faculty informal contact created a positive impact on student educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, academic achievement, intellectual and personal development, and institutional persistence. Students surrounded by a positive academic environment who develop relationships with faculty and administrators are more likely to graduate.

Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes Model (1993) begins with the notion that the success of a student is the function of who they were before entering college, and what happened to them after they enrolled. The model assesses "the impact of various environmental experiences by determining whether students grow or change differently under varying environmental conditions" (Astin, 1993, p.7). Astin hypothesized that students enter college with previous characteristics that influence their college views known as inputs. These included prior grades, race, ethnicity, age, gender, parental level of education, and reasons for attending college. The next component of Astin's model is environment. Environmental components deal with outside variables that may influence a student. For the purpose of the present study, these environmental components can include, but are not limited to EIU 2919, and the SSC. The final component of Astin's model is outcomes. Outcomes refer to the characteristics of a student after their exposure to the college environment.

### *Engagement*

Student engagement represents two critical features: student driven and institution driven. Student driven refers to the time and effort put forth by students in activities for the purpose of education. Institution driven refers to how an institution designs and develops resources, organizes curriculum, creates learning opportunities, and support services that lead to student experiences and outcomes that define student success, such as persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation (Kuh, 2007; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Kuh (2007) directs the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University at Bloomington and conducts the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE gathers information on actual student self-reported experiences from more than 600 institutions. The study showed that the key to undergraduates succeeding in college was their level of engagement. The amount of time and energy devoted to activities designed for educational purposes positively influenced GPAs. Following the study, Kuh developed six steps that institutions take to further engage students to help them become as successful as possible: (1) teach students how to use college resources as early as possible, (2) make the classroom the center of the community, (3) develop networks and early-warning systems to support students, (4) connect every student in a meaningful way with some activity or positive role model, (5) if a program works, make it available to everyone, and (6) remove obstacles to student engagement and success.

### *College Preparation Texts*

It is much more likely for college students to become engaged in the college experience if they are required to become involved in university resources early (Kuh, 2007; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Texts like *College Rules!* (Nist & Patrick,

2003) give helpful tips to students on what to expect from professors, textbooks, exams, time management, studying, and many others.

### Summary

Remedial courses, cooperative learning, supplemental instruction, balancing academics and athletics, class attendance, study habits, environment, and student engagement have been studied in relation to student success. Each of the previous topics discussed in the literature review are characteristics of EIU 2919, practices used in EIU 2919, or characteristics of students enrolled in EIU 2919. Chapter five provides a more detailed discussion of topics included in the literature review and their relation to EIU 2919.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### *Statement of Purpose*

The purpose of the present study was to determine (1) what academic support would benefit students when first enrolled at Eastern Illinois University, (2) what components of EIU 2919, Strategies for Academic Success, do students identify as being beneficial to their academic success, and (3) what impact has EIU 2919 had on student engagement in the college experience? If engagement is the key to success in college, what factors will motivate students to become engaged in the college experience? How could an institution get students engaged in educationally purposeful activities immediately? The present study gathered data about the experiences of undergraduate students who were required to take EIU 2919 because they were struggling in college at the time of the study, or who had previously struggled in college and had been required to take EIU 2919. Participants were asked how the content of EIU 2919 could become part of the first-year experience. This study contributes to the literature of university support and retention programs, as well as to literature focusing on motivation and student engagement.

#### *Site Description*

The present study was conducted at Eastern Illinois University (EIU), a four-year public comprehensive institution located in the mid-western city of Charleston, Illinois. EIU has a total enrollment of 12,179 with over 1,700 being graduate students (<http://www.eiu.edu/~pubaff/glance.php>). The SSC is a support service at EIU that

provides programs and services that connects students to resources that empower them to achieve academic and personal goals. The SSC also provides the course EIU 2919: Strategies for Academic Success, which emphasizes topics such as goal setting, time-management, study skills, motivation, and learning styles (Student Success Center, 2007, <http://www.eiu.edu/~success/>). EIU 2919 is held in the basement classrooms of one of three residence halls until construction of a new building is complete in 2009.

### *Data Collection*

The present study employed quantitative methodology. Quantitative data were collected through use of an online questionnaire the link to which was sent to students at EIU who had been enrolled in EIU 2919. Students were automatically enrolled in this course after generating a cumulative GPA of less than 2.00 for the first time while enrolled at EIU. The purpose of the survey was to gain information on what specifically may have helped students improve their academic standing and their opinions on whether certain topics and information from EIU 2919 were helpful in engaging them in the college experience. Quantitative inquiry allows for a greater number of participants, thus making the data more generalizable, decreases possible anxiety within the participants compared to that of an interview, and decreases possible researcher influence on respondents due to the presence of the researcher (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

All research participants were informed that by clicking the survey link, they were aware and understood the statement of informed consent (Appendix B) and voluntarily agreed to participate in the present study. Participants did not have online access to the instrument without such consent. All risks were identified and explained to the participants prior to their agreement of participation. Participants had the right to

withdraw from the present study without penalty at any time and had the right to choose not to answer any question at any time. All research participants were notified that they did not have to complete or even begin the survey and that it was completely voluntary. Participants were also informed that their survey responses were anonymous in that the researcher was not able to connect the participant to his/her responses.

Seven hundred six potential participants were solicited via their EIU e-mail accounts which were obtained as separate electronic distribution lists for the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 cohorts from the SSC. Only 521 of these potential participants actually were enrolled in EIU 2919. The remaining 185 for unknown reasons did not return to EIU following their placement on Academic Warning. Students who did not return to EIU were sent the survey because a separate electronic distribution list was not available to the researcher and students still had access to their email accounts for a short period of time. It is possible that some participants of the survey were from the population of students who did not return to the university. The initial participation request was sent December 4, 2008, and 23 course enrollees completed the survey over a two-week span. All 706 potential participants were solicited again two more times, thus it is possible that an individual could have participated in the study three times. The second request was posted on January 21, 2009, with 13 additional responses. The final solicitation was sent February 10, 2009, and the final 11 of 47 participants responded. Upon finishing the survey, participants had the opportunity to send an e-mail to the primary researcher which entered them in a pool to win a \$50 gas card at a local gas outlet. The researcher had no means of connecting responding participants for the gas card to their completed survey.

EIU 2919 is a mandatory course for all students who fall to Academic Warning for the first time at EIU. Students are unable to withdraw from the course, therefore complete the course either successfully or unsuccessfully.

### *Instrumentation*

A questionnaire designed by the researcher and members of the original thesis committee was used for the present study (Appendix A). The instrument featured 65 questions, 6 demographic questions, 18 pre/post-test questions, 33 questions asking for the level of perceived helpfulness of course topics in EIU 2919, and eight experiential questions. The questionnaire took on average 20 minutes to complete.

### *Demographic Data*

Survey items one through six requested descriptive demographic data. Data reported included gender (item 1), class level (item 2), residence on or off campus (item 3), full or part-time enrollment (item 4), semester enrolled in EIU 2919 (item 5), and grade received in EIU 2919 (item 6).

### *Pre-Post Class Assessment*

Survey items 7 - 24 and 58 - 59 addressed research question II by asking differences in participants' attitudes and actions prior to and after completing EIU 2919. For items 7 - 24, participants were asked to self-report their agreement with statements about attitudes and/or behavior on a five-point Likert scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree for each item. Item content included participant attendance in non-required university-sponsored programming (pre item 7, post item 16), main reason for initial enrollment in college the obtaining of a diploma (pre item 8, post

item 17, main reason for initial enrollment in college earning an education (pre item 9, post item 18), level of enjoyment while at college (pre item 10, post item 19), time spent on campus in the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc. (pre item 11, post item 20), the meeting of friends on campus other than while living in a residence hall (pre item 12, post item 21), cutting class (pre item 13, post item 22), enrollment in a full load of courses ( $12 \geq$  hours) each semester (pre item 14, post item 23), and completion of a full load ( $12 \geq$  hours) of coursework (pre item 15, post item 24). Participants were asked to report the average number of hours spent studying (pre item, 58, post item 59) by selecting from categories including none, 1 - 4, 5 - 10, 11 - 15, or 16+ hours per week.

#### *Course Content Items*

Topics for survey items were selected from chapter categories from the textbook used in EIU 2919 (Downing, 2008). These included: accepting personal responsibility, discovering self-motivation, mastering self-management, employing interdependence, gaining self-awareness, adopting lifelong learning, developing emotional intelligence, and making wise choices in college. The complete survey as administered is found in Appendix A.

*Perceptions of the Level of Helpfulness.* Questionnaire items 25 - 57 addressed research question I by asking participant perceptions of the level of helpfulness of topics covered in EIU 2919. Participants were asked to self-report the level of helpfulness on a five-point Likert scale of not helpful, slightly helpful, neutral, helpful, or very helpful for each item. For the accepting personal responsibility category item content included the creator role (item 25), wise choice process (item 26), and disputing irrational beliefs (item 27). For the discovering self-motivation category item content included designing a



life plan (item 28), committing to goals (item 29), commitment (item 34), visualization (item 30), and personal affirmations (item 31). For the mastering self-management category, item content included calendars (item 32), tracking forms (item 33), persistence (item 35), self-discipline (item 36), and self-confidence (item 37). For the employing interdependence category item content included developing supportive relationships (item 38), networking (item 39), active listening (item 40), and being assertive (item 41). For the gaining self-awareness category item content included recognizing when you are off-course (item 42), writing scripts (item 43), and self-defeating habits (item 44). For the adopting lifelong learning category item content included active learning (item 45), identifying learning styles (item 46), and developing self-respect (item 47). For the developing emotional intelligence category, item content included stress reduction (item 48), choosing your attitude (item 49), creating flow (item 50), and self-love (item 51). For the wise choices in college category item content included note-taking (item 52), study skills (item 53), test-taking strategies (item 54), and financial management strategies (item 55). Respondents also had a free response option on two items marked “Other” to write in topics not listed in the formal course content (items 56 and 57).

### *Behaviors and Attitudes*

Survey items 62 - 65 addressed research question II by asking course-related behavior and attitudes of participants. Item content included what the institution could have done to involve participants at the beginning of their college careers (item 62), what some characteristics are of activities participants have enjoyed or excelled at since arriving at EIU (item 63), what motivated participants to improve their grades (item 64),

and what some activities or programs are that have helped participants succeed in college (item 65).

*Initial Feelings of EIU 2919.* Survey item 60 did not address a specific research question, but was thought to be necessary by the primary researcher because of the implications that feelings about the course may have had on course participation. The item asked participants to select their initial feelings of being placed in EIU 2919 from a list of categories including thankfulness, excitement, frustration, anger, and embarrassment. Participants had the opportunity to write in another initial feeling not listed. Survey item 61 asked what other topics participants would see as helpful incorporated into EIU 2919. Survey item 65 addressed research question I by asking what specific activities or programs have helped participants succeed in college.

#### *Data Analysis*

Data obtained from participant surveys were evaluated by the committee chair and the student researcher. Only these two individuals had access to the data. Data from the questionnaire was transferred into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and analyzed for common and dissimilar themes. The data were presented in tables, figures, and narrative paragraphs highlighting consistent and important information from the questionnaire.

#### *Statistics Used for Analysis*

The research questions as stated anticipated the use of frequency distributions, means and standard deviations, Pearson Chi Square tests of the goodness of fit, and t-tests

of the differences between means (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Data were reported in tabular form. Chapter IV presents the results of the data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

## Results

The purpose of the present study was to determine what academic support would benefit students when first enrolled at Eastern Illinois University, what components of EIU 2919 did students identify as being beneficial to their academic success, and what impact has EIU 2919 had on student engagement in the college experience?

*Return Rate*

Forty-seven of the 706 potential participants who took the course, EIU 2919, in fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 responded to the survey after three attempts by the researcher to encourage participation in the online questionnaire (6.7 %). This chapter reports the survey results based on the 47 completed questionnaires, with possible duplications. Unfortunately, the original planned statistical analyses, specifically Pearson chi-square tests, were not possible to carry out due to the small number of participant responses. Cross tabulations comparing participant responses by items were employed to report results where appropriate below (Tables 2 - 11).

Data obtained for the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 combined cohorts of EIU 2919 students were as follows. Participant gender data were not available for the entire population. By class standing, 54% of respondents were freshmen (0 to 29 credits earned), 21% sophomore (30 to 59 credits earned), 15% junior (60-89 credits earned), and 10% senior (90+ credits earned) (Figure 1). Final grades obtained by the combined cohorts were 27.1% A, 27.6% B, 18.6% C, 5.3% D, and 21.2% F (Figure 2).

Among the 47 survey respondents, 31 (66.0 %) were female, and 16 (34.0%) were male. By class standing, one (2.1%) was a freshman, 24 (51.1%) were sophomores, seven

(14.9%) were juniors, and 15 (31.9%) were seniors (Figure 1). The majority of those who participated, 27 (57.4%) reported at the time of the present study they did not reside on campus. Nearly all participants, 46 (97.9%) reported at the time of the present study full-time enrollment status ( $12 \geq$  hours). Of those who participated in the survey, 13 (27.7%) were enrolled in EIU 2919 in the fall 2007 semester, 19 (40.4%) in spring 2008, and 15 (31.9%) in the fall 2008 semester. Twenty-one (44.7%) participants reported receiving an A in EIU 2919, 19 (40.4%) a B, five (10.6%) a C, one (2.1%) a D, and one (2.1%) reported an F (Figure 2).

Figure 1

*Class standing in EIU 2919 by percentage.*

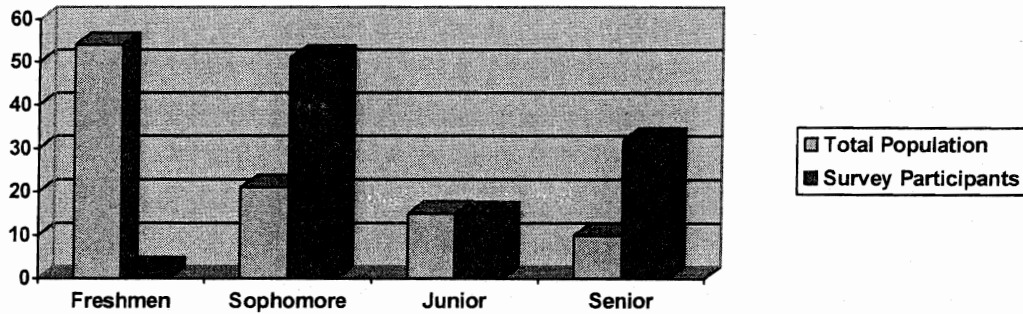
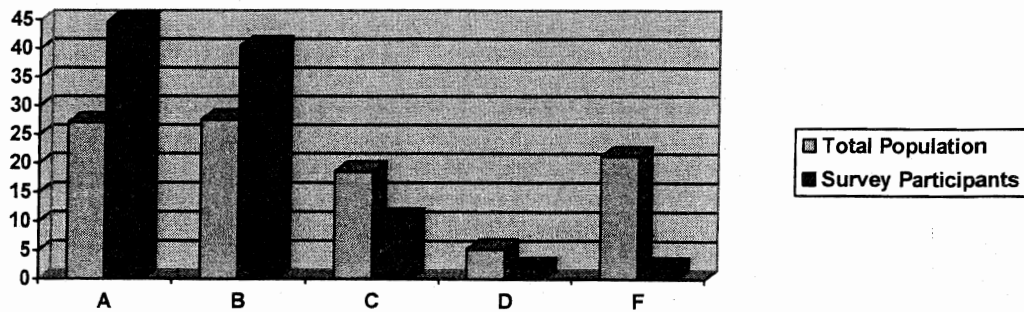


Figure 2

*Final grade in EIU 2919 by percentage.*



*Initial Feelings of Being Placed in EIU 2919*

Participants were asked to describe their initial feelings of being placed in EIU 2919 (Item 60, Table 1). Nine participants reported thankfulness (19.1%). Only one (2.1%) participant reported excitement. Just over half, 25 (53.2%), of those who participated reported feeling frustration. Seven (14.9%) respondents reported feeling anger. The majority, 32 (68.1%), of those who participated reported being embarrassed at being placed in EIU 2919.

Table 1

*Which of the following terms best describes your initial feelings of being placed in EIU 2919?*

Feeling	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Thankfulness	9	19.1
Excitement	1	2.1
Frustration	25	53.2
Anger	7	14.9
Embarrassment	32	68.1

*Pre-Post Class Results*

As shown in Table 2, participants were asked to report the average number of hours they spent studying per week prior to taking EIU 2919 (item 58) and the average number of hours per week they currently spend studying since completion of EIU 2919 (item 59). Thirty-four (72.3%) participants reported studying on average 0-4 hours per

week prior to taking EIU 2919. No participants reported not studying at all and only seven (14.9%) participants reported studying on average 1-4 hours per week after completing EIU 2919. Only 13 (21.3%) participants reported studying five or more hours a week on average prior to EIU 2919, while 40 (85.1%) reported studying five or more hours on average after completing EIU 2919.

Table 2

*Prior to EIU 2919, how many hours per week did you spend studying versus after completing EIU 2919, how many hours per week do you spend studying?*

Item 58 vs. Item 59		After Completing EIU 2919, how many hours per week do you spend studying				
		1-4	5-10	11-15	16+	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2919, how many hours per week did you spend studying	None	2	1	1	0	4
	1-4	4	22	3	1	30
	5-10	1	1	5	0	7
	11-15	0	0	2	1	3
	16+	0	0	0	3	3
Total After		7	24	11	5	47

For items (7 - 24) asking respondents to self-report behaviors and attitudes prior to taking EIU 2919 compared to after taking the Strategies for Academic Success course, preliminary statistical analyses indicated that response categories had to be collapsed due to the small number of participant responses (47) and the large number of Likert response categories (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree) with less than five responses. Response categories strongly disagree and disagree were combined to

disagree, neutral was not changed, and agree and strongly agree were combined to agree.

Data are reported in the form of contingency tables for each item.

Seven more participants reported they attended non-required university sponsored programs after completing the EIU 2919 course compared to their pre-course participation (Table 3). Two less participants indicated they did not attend university-sponsored programs after taking the EIU 2919 course.

Table 3

*Prior to EIU 2919, I attended university-sponsored programs that were not required versus after EIU 2919, I attended university-sponsored programs that were not required*

Item 7 vs. Item 16		After Completing EIU 2919, I attended university-sponsored programs that are not required			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2919, I attended university-sponsored programs that were not required	Disagree	14	2	3	19
	Neutral	3	6	4	13
	Agree	0	0	15	15
	Total After	17	8	22	47

Five fewer participants reported after completing EIU 2919, the main reason they attended college was obtaining a diploma than prior to EIU 2919. One fewer participant reported after completing EIU 2919, the main reason they attended college was obtaining a diploma than prior to EIU 2919 (Table 4).



Table 4

*Prior to EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was obtaining a diploma versus after EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was obtaining a diploma*

Item 8 vs. Item 17		After Completing EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was obtaining a diploma			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was obtaining a diploma	Disagree	1	0	0	1
	Neutral	2	4	3	9
	Agree	3	1	33	37
	Total After	6	5	36	47

Earning an education was the main reason 41 (87.2%) respondents said they were attending college on both pre and post measures (Table 5). Three more participants reported that after completing EIU 2019, their main reason for attending college was earning an education than prior to EIU 2019. One participant reported that prior to EIU 2019, their main reason for attending college was not earning an education. No participant reported in this response category after completing EIU 2019.

Table 5

*Prior to EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was earning an education versus after EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was earning an education*

Item 9 vs. Item 18		After Completing EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was earning an education		
		Neutral	Agree	Total After
Prior to EIU 2019, my main reason for attending college was earning an education	Disagree	0	1	1
	Neutral	3	2	5
	Agree	0	41	41
	Total After	3	44	47

Of all 47 participants, seven in ten said they enjoyed being in college at both times assessed (Table 6). Four more participants reported they enjoyed being at college after completing EIU 2019 than prior to EIU 2019. One more participant reported not enjoying college prior to EIU 2019 than did after completing EIU 2019.

Table 6

*Prior to EIU 2919, I enjoyed being at college versus after EIU 2919, I enjoy being at college*

Item 10 vs. Item 19		After Completing EIU 2919, I enjoy being at college			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2919, I enjoyed being at college	Disagree	0	2	2	4
	Neutral	2	4	3	9
	Agree	1	0	33	34
	Total Prior	3	6	38	47

Among all participants pre- and post-course, over 55% reported spending time on campus at the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc., on both occasions (Table 7). Eight more participants responded that after completing EIU 2919, they spent time on campus at the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc. than they did prior to EIU 2919. Ten more participants reported not spending time on campus at the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc. prior to EIU 2919 than they did after completing EIU 2919.

Table 7

*Prior to EIU 2019, I spent time on campus in the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc. versus after EIU 2019, I spend time on campus at the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc.*

Item 11 vs. Item 20		After Completing EIU 2019, I spend time on campus at the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc.			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2019, I spent time on campus in the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc.	Disagree	3	3	8	14
	Neutral	1	4	1	6
	Agree	0	1	26	27
	Total After	4	8	35	47

Five more participants reported they met most of their friends at college through being on campus other than in the residence halls after completing EIU 2019 than did prior to EIU 2019 (Table 8). Seven more participants reported they did not meet most of their friends at college through being on campus other than in the residence halls prior to EIU 2019 than did after completing EIU 2019.

Table 8

*Prior to EIU 2919, most of my friends at college I met through being on campus other than in the residence halls versus after EIU 2919, most of my friends were met on campus other than in the residence halls*

Item 12 vs. Item 21		After Completing EIU 2919, most of my friends were met on campus other than in the residence halls			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2919, most of my friends at college I met through being on campus other than in the residence halls	Disagree	8	7	1	16
	Neutral	1	3	5	9
	Agree	0	1	21	22
	Total After	9	11	27	47

Eighteen more participants reported cutting class prior to EIU 2919 than respondents self-reported they cut class after completing EIU 2919 (Table 9).

Table 9

*Prior to EIU 2919, I cut class versus after EIU 2919, I cut class*

Item 13 vs. Item 22		After Completing EIU 2919, I cut class			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2919, I cut class	Disagree	11	1	0	12
	Neutral	2	1	2	5
	Agree	10	10	10	30
	Total After	23	12	12	47

Among all participants, pre and post course, 44 (95.6%) reported having a full time course load of at least twelve hours on both occasions (Table 10). Two more participants reported having a full time course load of at least twelve hours prior to EIU 2019 than did after completing EIU 2019.

Table 10

*Prior to EIU 2019, I had a full time course load of at least twelve hours each semester versus after EIU 2019, I have a full time course load of at least twelve hours each semester*

Item 14 vs. Item 23		After Completing EIU 2019, I have a full time course load of at least twelve hours each semester			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2019, I had a full time course load of at least twelve hours each semester	Neutral	0	1	0	1
	Agree	1	1	44	46
	Total After	1	2	44	47

Among all participants, pre and post course, 38 (80.8%) reported completing a course load of at least twelve hours on both occasions (Table 11). Five more participants reported completing a course load of at least twelve hours after completing EIU 2019 than did prior to EIU 2019.

Table 11

*Prior to EIU 2919, I completed a course load of at least twelve hours each semester versus after EIU 2919, I completed a course load of at least twelve hours each semester*

Item 15 vs. Item 24		After Completing EIU 2919, I completed a course load of at least twelve hours each semester			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total Prior
Prior to EIU 2919, I completed a course load of at least twelve hours each semester	Disagree	0	1	7	8
	Neutral	1	0	0	1
	Agree	0	2	36	38
	Total After	1	3	43	47

### *Course Content Results*

Response frequencies by response category, means, and standard deviations are reported for each of 31 course content topics that participants were asked to rate in terms of helpfulness to them (Table 12). Topics were drawn from seven chapters in the Downing (2008) text. As a method of organizing the content topics for the purposes of this paper, means for each topic were grouped in descending order and divided into sections based on natural breaks in the data, where a noticeable gap occurred in the distance from one mean to the next lower mean. Means were grouped into five categories stipulated by the PI on the basis of gaps in the list of means in descending order, (1) High level of agreement of helpfulness, (2) General agreement of helpfulness, (3) Some agreement of helpfulness, (4) Mixed response of helpfulness, and (5) Agreement of a low level of helpfulness. No apparent order within the means for course topics was discovered in relation to chapter content.

Means ranged from a high of 3.98 to a low of 2.94. Five response options were available for each item, not helpful = 1; slightly helpful = 2; neutral = 3; helpful = 4; and very helpful = 5. A mean of 3.98 thus fell very near the fourth response option, “helpful”, while the lowest mean, 2.94, fell at the “neutral” response option.

*High Levels of Agreement of Helpfulness*—Course topics committing to goals (item 29,  $M=3.98$ ), the use of calendars (item 32,  $M=3.83$ ), and the discovering of preferred learning styles (item 46,  $M=3.83$ ) showed a high level of agreement among participants as topics that participants found had a high level of helpfulness to them.

*General Agreement of Helpfulness*—Course topics self-discipline (item 36,  $M=3.77$ ), recognizing when you are off course (item 42,  $M=3.77$ ), successful study skill techniques (item 53,  $M=3.77$ ), successful note-taking techniques (item 52,  $M=3.77$ ), designing a life plan (item 28,  $M=3.72$ ), increasing self-confidence (item 37,  $M=3.72$ ), developing self-respect (item 47,  $M=3.72$ ), test taking strategies (item 54,  $M=3.66$ ), being persistent (item 35,  $M=3.62$ ), the wise choice process (item 26,  $M=3.60$ ), developing a network (item 39,  $M=3.60$ ), being assertive (item 41,  $M=3.60$ ), keeping a commitment (item 34,  $M=3.57$ ), and developing supportive relationships (item 38,  $M=3.57$ ) all show general agreement among participants that course topics had a high level of helpfulness.

*Some Agreement of Helpfulness*—Course topics visualizing success (item 30,  $M=3.51$ ), active listening (item 40,  $M=3.49$ ), active learning (item 45,  $M=3.49$ ), choosing your attitude (item 49,  $M=3.47$ ), creating personal affirmations (item 31,  $M=3.45$ ), and reducing stress (item 48,  $M=3.43$ ) all showed a positive agreement among participants of a high level of helpfulness.



*Mixed Response of Helpfulness*—Course topics assuming the creator role (item 25,  $M=3.38$ ), developing self-love (item 51,  $M=3.36$ ), disputing irrational beliefs (item 27,  $M=3.32$ ), eliminating self-defeating habits (item 44,  $M=3.26$ ), using tracking forms (item 33,  $M=3.23$ ), successful financial management techniques (item 55,  $M=3.23$ ), and creating flow (item 50,  $M=3.21$ ) showed a mixed response among participants as to the level of helpfulness.

*Agreement of a Low Level of Helpfulness*—Course topic writing scripts (item 43,  $M=2.94$ ) showed the lowest level of agreement among participants in terms of its overall helpfulness to them.

Table 12

*Student satisfaction with the level of helpfulness of specified course content in Strategies for Academic Success, EIU 2919*

Course Topic	Not Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Neutral	Helpful	Very Helpful	$M$	$SD$
Creator Role	4	7	8	23	5	3.38	1.134
Wise Choice Process	3	8	4	22	10	3.60	1.192
Disputing Irrational Beliefs	3	9	11	18	6	3.32	1.125
Designing a Life Plan	1	9	4	21	12	3.72	1.117
Committing to Goals	1	5	5	19	17	3.98	1.053
Visualization	5	6	6	20	10	3.51	1.266
Personal Affirmations	4	8	6	21	8	3.45	1.212

Table 12 (Continued)

*Student satisfaction with the level of helpfulness of specified course content in Strategies for Academic Success, EIU 2919*

Course Topic	Not Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Neutral	Helpful	Very Helpful	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Calendars	4	4	6	15	18	3.83	1.274
Tracking Forms	5	8	14	11	9	3.23	1.255
Commitment	1	8	11	17	10	3.57	1.078
Persistence	3	6	8	19	11	3.62	1.171
Self-Discipline	2	5	9	17	14	3.77	1.127
Self-Confidence	3	5	7	19	13	3.72	1.174
Developing Supportive Relationships	6	4	8	15	14	3.57	1.347
Networking	8	1	8	15	15	3.60	1.409
Active Listening	6	5	4	24	8	3.49	1.266
Being Assertive	4	7	5	19	12	3.60	1.262
Recognizing When You Are Off Course	2	7	3	23	12	3.77	1.127
Writing Scripts	9	5	17	12	4	2.94	1.223

Table 12 (Continued)

*Student satisfaction with the level of helpfulness of specified course content in Strategies for Academic Success, EIU 2919*

Course Topic	Not Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Neutral	Helpful	Very Helpful	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-Defeating Habits	5	9	8	19	6	3.26	1.224
Active Learning	5	4	6	27	5	3.49	1.140
Identifying Learning Styles	3	4	6	19	15	3.83	1.160
Developing Self-Respect	4	4	7	18	14	3.72	1.228
Stress Reduction	6	7	9	11	14	3.43	1.395
Choosing Your Attitude	4	7	10	15	11	3.47	1.248
Creating Flow	6	8	9	18	6	3.21	1.250
Self-Love	4	9	9	16	9	3.36	1.241
Note-Taking	2	6	8	16	15	3.77	1.165
Study Skills	1	7	7	19	13	3.77	1.088
Test-Taking Strategies	2	7	11	12	15	3.66	1.203
Financial Management Strategies	9	3	14	10	11	3.23	1.402

*Behaviors and Attitudes*

Items 61-65 asked participants to choose from a list describing some of their course-related behaviors and attitudes. Participants were asked what other topics they would see as helpful to add into EIU 2919 (item 61). Sixteen (34%) reported information on how to deal with interpersonal issues would be helpful in EIU 2919. Sixteen (34%) also reported financial aid information would be helpful in EIU 2919. Eleven (23%) participants reported health and wellness information would be helpful in EIU 2919. Almost half, 23 (48.9%) participants reported career services (e.g. resume production, job searches, mock interviews) would be helpful in EIU 2919. Eighteen (38.3%) reported student life information (e.g. clubs, leadership opportunities, athletics, Greek organizations, entertainment) would be helpful in EIU 2919. A low number of participants, seven (14.9%) reported no other topics would be helpful in EIU 2919. Three (6.4%) reported more time spent on study skills and time management would be helpful in EIU 2919.

Participants were asked to indicate activities they have enjoyed or excelled in since arriving at EIU (item 63). Seventeen (36.2%) reported they have enjoyed or excelled in activities with leadership characteristics. Thirteen (27.7%) reported they enjoyed or excelled in activities that involved the exploration of ideas. Fifteen (31.9%) participants reported enjoying or excelling at community service activities. Seventeen participants (36.2%), reported enjoying or excelling in intramural sports. Eleven participants (23.4 %) reported there were no activities they have enjoyed or excelled at since arriving at EIU. While three participants (6.4%), reported they enjoyed or excelled at other activities including clubs, marching band, and sororities since arriving at EIU.

Participants were asked what motivated them to improve their grades in college (item 64). The majority of participants, 35 (74.5%), reported family has motivated them to improve their grades. Nearly half of participants, 22 (46.8%), reported financial means as a motivator of improving their grades in college. The majority of participants, 34 (72.3%), reported being placed on academic warning as a motivator of improving their grades in college. Twenty (42.6%) reported embarrassment at receiving poor grades was a motivator to improve their grades in college. All participants reported they have had some sort of motivation to improve their grades in college. Eight participants (17 %) reported other reasons as motivation to improving their grades in college, including disappointment in themselves, trying to get into a certain degree program, leaving EIU, loss of financial aid, my life, and two other responses that could not be interpreted.

Participants were asked what some activities or programs have helped them succeed in college (item 65). Nearly half, 21 (44.7%), reported study tables have helped them succeed in college. Nine participants (19.1%) reported that workshops have helped them succeed in college. Seventeen (36.2%) participants reported that student help centers have helped them succeed in college. Thirteen (27.7%) reported no activities to have helped them succeed in college.

Participants were asked what EIU could have done to involve them more at the beginning of their college careers. Twelve participants (25.5%) reported required participation in meet and greets would have helped involve them in the college experience at the beginning of their college career. Ten (21.3%) reported required participation in clubs and organizations would have helped involve them in the college experience at the beginning of their college career. Nearly half, 22 (46.8%), of all

participants reported providing mentoring would have helped involve them in the college experience at the beginning of their college career. Twelve (25.5%) participants reported nothing would have helped involve them in the college experience at the beginning of their college career. Four (8.5%) participants reported other experiences would have helped involve them in the college experience at the beginning of their college career. Topics included a senior mentor for each freshman, class partners, and two others that cannot be interpreted.

## CHAPTER V

## Limitations, Discussion, &amp; Recommendations

The purpose of the present study was to determine what academic support would benefit students when first enrolled at Eastern Illinois University, what components of EIU 2919 did students identify as being beneficial to their academic success, and what self-reported impact has EIU 2919 had on student engagement in the college experience. Factors studied included a list of pre-post EIU 2919 beliefs and behaviors, EIU 2919 course topics covered, and a miscellaneous list of participant behaviors and attitudes. Using the 47 completed questionnaire, frequency tables, means, and standard deviations were used to provide descriptive elements of EIU 2919. This chapter includes limitations of the study, a discussion, and recommendations for future research.

*Limitations*

*Response Rate.* The response rate for the survey was only 6.7 percent (47 of 706). Due to the low response rate, the present study was best framed as an exploratory study. The low response rate did not allow for the application of standard statistical methods of analysis, such as the Pearson chi-square test, since expected cell frequencies compared to observed cell frequencies must include “5 or more where the number of degree of freedom is greater than 1 (more than two categories)” (Hays, 1963, p. 584). Potential causes for the low response rate included the following possibilities: minimum incentives for participants; potential participants were contacted via their EIU e-mail accounts, and many students only infrequently access their campus account; some potential participants may no longer be enrolled at EIU; some potential participants did not complete the course; and EIU 2919 is a required course that results in some negative attitudes toward

the course, thus resulting in little or no interest to participate in a survey assessing course impact. The incentive available to participants included the opportunity to win one \$50 gift certificate to a local gas outlet. No extra credit opportunities were made available to the fall 2008 cohort since students had not completed the course and could not accurately complete the entire questionnaire when the survey was first distributed via the course electronic distribution list. Participants would not have had all of the material of the course presented to them at this time, nor could they answer post EIU 2919 items.

The survey request was sent via potential participant EIU email accounts. Some students do not use this email account as their primary account or at all, thus not checking it often. Of the potential participants sent the survey request, some may no longer attend EIU, thus not using the email account anymore. All students who fall on academic warning for the first time and automatically enrolled in the course were sent the survey request. Of this pool of students, some did not complete the course and thus were unable to complete the survey. A final cause for limited response could be because students are required to take EIU 2919, and they hold a negative attitude towards it. This is a course that may cause negative emotions in students because as the data show, 53.2% experienced frustration, 14.9 % experienced anger, and 68.1% experienced embarrassment, all emotions that participants may not want to experience again (Table 1).

Only 521 of these potential participants actually were enrolled in EIU 2919. The remaining 185 for unknown reasons did not return to EIU following their placement on Academic Warning. Students who did not return to EIU were sent the survey because a separate electronic distribution list was not available to the researcher, and students still



have access to their e-mail accounts for a short period of time. It is possible that participants of the survey were from the population of students who did not return to the university.

*Participants.* Of those who participated in the present study, only two (4.2%) reported having received a D or F in the course. Of the entire population, 26.5% received a D or F in the course (Figure 2). A much higher percentage of students overall received a D or F in the course than those who participated in the study. The data collected for the purposes of the present study thus excluded perceptions and behaviors of students who were unsuccessful in the course and, conversely, included mostly those who were successful and likely to report more positive reactions to the assessment instrument. Of those who participated in the present study, only 1 (2.1%) was a freshmen, while of the entire population of those who took the course 54% were freshman (Figure 1). This representation is not consistent with the overall enrollment in the course which is majority freshmen and thus data may be skewed. Of those who participated in the present study, the majority were female (31; 66.0%). The data then may represent an uneven perception according to gender.

Of those who participated, 13 were from the fall 2007 cohort, 19 from the spring 2008 cohort, and 15 from the fall 2008 cohort. Participants from the fall 2007 cohort had not been enrolled in the course for a year when they completed the survey. Participants from the spring 2008 cohort had not been enrolled in the course for at least six months. The time lapse between their enrollment in EIU 2919 and their participation in the present study could have resulted in forgetting the nature of course topics.

EIU 2919 is a mandatory course for all students who fall to Academic Warning for the first time at EIU. Students are unable to withdraw from the course, therefore completing the course either successfully or unsuccessfully. Some participants may have not attended the course and/or be unfamiliar with course material.

*Items*--There were also limitations in the present study with regard to items used in the questionnaire. There were no existing instruments available for the present research topic because the course is unique to EIU. Items for the survey were developed by the researcher through his belief as to item content relevance for answering research questions. Items were then approved by the thesis committee, but there was no opportunity to pre-test the survey on a small group of students prior to its formal administration to determine how well persons like those in the participant pool understood item content. Neither were items checked for clarity and usefulness with other EIU 2919 instructors, who also might have offered their expertise in terms of item content. Ten different instructors taught 36 sections of EIU 2919 during the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 semesters. It is likely that instructors covered topics differently within the course. Instructors are also likely to have emphasized different topics or not covered a topic at all.

For items asking for the level of course topic helpfulness (25 - 57), the order of the potential item response categories could have been confusing to respondents. The order in which the responses were labeled in the instrument was “not helpful”, “slightly helpful”, “neutral”, “helpful”, and “very helpful.” The responses “slightly helpful” and “neutral” might have been less confusing to respondents if they were switched in order. The term “slightly helpful” still implies that the topic is helpful, whereas “neutral”

implies the topic is neither helpful nor unhelpful. The order used gives a higher value to “neutral” than to “slightly helpful,” whereas the item response weight should increase with the level of helpfulness as it does for the remaining responses.

*Unconsidered Factors.* Positive results from the pre-post items (7 - 24) could have been a result of factors outside the purview of EIU 2919. Although data show a correlation between participants taking EIU and a positive increase in engagement in the college experience, it is impossible to consider all factors that also could have played a role in the resulting data. The respondent sample was not representative of the study population based on several criteria such as class standing (Figure 1) and final grade (Figure 2). Since the respondent sample is not representative of the study population, the potential for bias in the results is strong.

### *Discussion*

Despite the initial feelings reported by the majority of participants being negative (frustration and embarrassment) about being required to take EIU 2919 (Table 1), participants self-reported the course had many positive post-course effects. Survey results show levels of helpfulness of EIU 2919 topics, self-reported attitude and behavior improvement from participants following their completion of EIU 2919, and ideas for further engaging students in the college experience.

Research question I asked what components of EIU 2919 do students identify as being beneficial to their overall academic success. Survey items 25 - 57 addressed topics from EIU 2919 and their level of helpfulness. The survey results showed a high level of agreement among participants that topics such as committing to goals, the use of calendars, and the identification of learning styles had a high level of helpfulness. Several

EIU 2919 topics showed general agreement and some agreement among participants in terms of helpfulness. A college introductory course covering topics such as developing and committing to goals, time management and the use of calendars, study skills, note-taking, the identification of students' preferred learning styles, and others presented in the present study may be beneficial in preventing students from struggling academically.

Other topics that participants reported would be beneficial if incorporated into EIU 2919 included how to deal with interpersonal issues, financial aid information, information on health and wellness, career service services (e.g. resume production, job searches, mock interviews), and information on student life and participation in campus activities (item 61). The implementation of these and other topics into new student programming and the University Foundations (EIU 1111) may help prevent students from ending up on academic warning, academic probation, or eventual dismissal from the university.

The present data showed that many participants reported that required study table attendance could be beneficial to many students when they first enroll in the university (item 65). This result shows that some participants have available time to study, but lack the discipline to do so. The requirement of attending study tables for students enrolled in EIU 2919 may result in better time-management and self-discipline skills.

Research question II asked what impact EIU 2919 had on student perceptions of their engagement in the college experience. Items 7 - 24, 58, and 59 addressed pre and post EIU 2919 participant attitudes and behaviors. All items showed positive results in student attitudes and behaviors after completing EIU 2919. Results showed that participants tended to be more likely to be attending college for reasons other than obtaining a diploma, participants were more likely attending college to gain an education,

participants were enjoying college more, were meeting more friends on campus, were less likely to cut class, were more likely to create class schedules that allow for their success, were more likely to complete a full load of classes ( $\geq 12$  hours), and were spending more time studying.

According to Kuh (2007) and The Milwaukee Idea (UWM, 2005), undergraduate involvement in co-curricular activities increases motivation, engagement, and achievement levels. The present study showed that participants were more likely to voluntarily attend university-sponsored programs that are not required and spend more time on campus in the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc. Thus, students who complete EIU 2919 could be more likely to have higher levels of motivation, engagement and achievement levels.

Participants were asked questions to discover how they can become further engaged in their college experience. They reported that requiring participation in meet and greets, organizations, clubs, mentoring, and class partners would help engage them in the college experience (item 62). Participants reported enjoying or excelling in leadership, exploration of ideas, community service activities, and intramurals (item 63). Results suggest that university requirements of these activities could further engage students and make them more likely to be successful in college, remain in college, and finish a degree program.

Item 64 asked students what motivated them to improve their grades in college. Participants reported family involvement, financial implications, the placement on academic warning, a feeling of embarrassment, the threat of having to leave EIU, and the desire to be accepted into a particular degree program as reasons. EIU could create a

mandatory workshop or classroom presentation series for freshmen students that give examples of how a student who does poorly academically can fall into financial troubles. These presentations could include actual student accounts of their feelings of embarrassment and how they had the threat of leaving EIU and other options available if this were to occur. If a university were able to educate students about these effects of doing poorly academically, many students may have more immediate desire to do well.

Data suggest that after completing EIU 2919, participants are more likely engaged in the college experience because they are attending more non-required university sponsored programs, more likely to be attending college to gain an education rather than just a diploma, enjoying college more, spending more time on campus, meeting more friends on campus, less likely to cut class, and more likely to complete a full course load. Thus, according to Kuh (2007), students fulfilling these criteria are more likely to be academically successful and continue towards graduation.

Kuh (2007) developed six steps that institutions can take to further engage students to help them become as successful as possible. Each of these steps are addressed by the SSC and EIU 2919. (1) Teach students how to use college resources as early as possible. The SSC is a support service at EIU that provides programs and services that connects students to resources that empower them to achieve academic and personal goals (Student Success Center, 2007, <http://www.eiu.edu/~success/>). Students can obtain many resources from the SSC such as tutor schedules, time-management, and study skills resources, as well as be directed to other specialized offices such as the writing center, career services, and the office of disability services. (2) Make the classroom the center of the community. EIU 2919 is a course where students are able to discuss their experiences

freely and develop solutions within their classroom community. (3) Develop networks and early-warning systems to support students. The SSC and EIU 2919 were developed as part of a system to support students who are struggling academically. When students fall to Academic Warning for the first time, they are required to take EIU 2919. (4) Connect every student in a meaningful way with some activity or positive role model. Not only are students connected to their instructors and the rest of the SSC staff through EIU 2919, they are also encouraged to develop other interpersonal relationships on campus with individuals such as faculty and advisors. (5) If a program works, make it available to everyone. EIU 2919 has shown high success rates and is available for any undergraduate student at EIU to enroll in. (6) Remove obstacles to student engagement and success. With the implementation of EIU 2919, students are assisted in identifying obstacles that are detrimental to their academic success. Students identify their personal barriers and develop strategies to overcome them.

Remedial courses allow students to remedy deficiencies they have by preparing them for regular academic courses (State of Washington's State Administrative and Accounting Manual, 2009). Data have shown academic improvements in students who have completed EIU 2919 (Evaluation of EIU 2919, 2008). The course seems to be improving students' weak academic skills. Attewell, et al., (2006) concluded that remedial courses are beneficial for many students in working towards graduation. Retention and GPA improvements of students who complete EIU 2919 reinforce their conclusion. Attewell, et al., (2006) also concluded that most students would not have been able to continue towards graduation without such classes. Adelman (1999; 2004) reported that remedial courses allow students to improve academic skills and eventually

graduate despite academic weak spots they may possess. These statements are supported by the assumptions that without the intervention of EIU 2919, many students would not have continued at the university, may have continued to struggle academically, and not move towards graduation.

Athletic competition provides an opportunity for many student-athletes to come to college who otherwise may not have done so. Maloney and McCormick (1993) concluded that overall athletes do not perform as well in college as non-athletes. They also concluded that athletes tend to be less prepared for college and have lower SAT scores. EIU 2919 provides an opportunity for students, who may or may not be athletes, to strengthen their otherwise weak academic skills. Students who have weak academic skills are able to correct these deficiencies, continue at EIU, and eventually graduate (Evaluation Analysis of EIU 2919, 2008). Students who have weak academic skills and successfully complete EIU 2919 may be more likely to graduate. The influence of EIU 2919 on students' retention to graduation can not be determined until the current registrants are included in an overall analysis of EIU's retention to graduation across their six-year cohort group (Eastern Illinois University, 2009) (<http://www.ciu.edu/~planning/institutional/retention.php>).

Cooperative learning is a teaching technique often used in EIU 2919. Walker (1996) concluded that cooperative learning improves the student experience. Johnson and Johnson (1999) generated a list of positive outcomes of cooperative learning that included higher achievement, greater productivity, higher levels of reasoning, more frequent generation of ideas and solutions, greater transfer of information from one situation to another, higher commitment and persistence, and the development of



interpersonal relationships among students. The present research data have shown an increase in the level of enjoyment and engagement of students in the college experience. Although it cannot be determined how much what other factors may have led to this result, students who successfully complete EIU 2919 may be more likely to be engaged and report positive outcomes.

Students are encouraged to develop relationships with each other as well as other resources on campus that include, but are not limited to online resources, tutors, and study groups. These types of learning resources are also known as supplemental instruction. Bowles, et al., (2008) concluded that supplemental instruction increases student probability of graduation; while Lazari and Simons (2003) and Hodges, et al., (2001) concluded that supplemental instruction leads to a higher level of student academic success. The present research has shown that students are spending more time and using more resources while studying. Although other factors may have contributed to these increases, students who complete EIU 2919 may be more likely to develop positive academic relationships and use more study resources.

EIU 2919 encourages students to become involved in extra-curricular activities to provide them with some sort of incentive to motivate them to succeed academically. The present data have shown an increase in student participation in university-sponsored activities following their completion of EIU 2919. Simons and Van Rheenen (2000) and Windhalm (2007) concluded that student-athletes actually do better in season because they have an extra incentive to do so. Students who successfully complete EIU 2919 may be more likely to engage themselves in university-sponsored activities and thus have more of an incentive to succeed academically.

Simons and Van Reenen (2000) also concluded that a structured, organized schedule has a positive impact on student success. Time and self-management are topics presented in EIU 2919 that encourage students to develop a structured, organized schedule through the use of time management tools and strategies such as tracking forms and calendars. The present data show students are exercising better time management skills by studying more often. Although it cannot be determined what other outside factors may have affected these results, students who complete EIU 2919 may be more likely to have better time management skills.

EIU 2919 encourages students to attend all of their classes. Participation is a large portion of EIU 2919 final grades (Course Syllabus, 2007). Devadoss and Foltz (1996) found a positive correlation between class attendance and high academic performance. Gump (2005) found a strong correlation between students cutting class and poor final grades. Prior to EIU 2919, students were receiving poor grades, thus being placed on Academic Warning and subsequently enrolled in EIU 2919. Data have shown grade improvements and a decrease in cutting class by a majority of those who completed EIU 2919. Although it is impossible to determine outside factors that may have influenced class attendance as well, students who previously cut class who have successfully completed EIU 2919 may be less likely to do so in the future.

EIU 2919 student-instructor meetings are encouraged and appointments are available upon request (Course Syllabus, 2007). Pascarella (1980) concluded that student-faculty informal contact creates a positive impact on students' educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, academic achievement, intellectual and personal development, and institutional persistence. The present data suggest that students have a better attitude

toward college in that they reported enjoying their college experience more, higher achievement, increased intellectual and personal development, and institutional persistence after completing EIU 2919.

EIU 2919 creates a positive academic environment where students can discuss their academic experiences freely with the support of their instructor and fellow classmates. Present study data suggest that EIU 2919 has led to an increase in student academic success and engagement. This supports Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes Model (1993) that concluded students' environments help determine their levels of success. According to Astin, students who are placed in an academically supportive environment are more likely to have a positive academic outcome. Students who are required to take EIU 2919 are placed in an environment that encourages academic achievement and provides support for students. There is no single system of resources and experiences that an institution can require of its students that will create the perfect college experience for all, but the availability of diverse programs, activities and organizations can contribute to furthering student success in college.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

The researcher was unable to use inferential statistics in the present study because of the low response rate (Hays, 1963). To avoid such a low response rate in subsequent research, future researchers should create an end of the semester evaluation that includes all topics covered within EIU 2919 as to their level of helpfulness. This approach to program evaluation would significantly add to the number of participants in the study. Future researchers should create more incentive for participation which could include an offer of extra credit in the course.

Future researchers may want to explore the use of a mixed methods design including qualitative research. With a qualitative study component, the researcher can probe participants for further detail about their experiences. Many times quantitative studies do not allow participants to explain their answers fully. Another reason for future researchers to explore the use of a qualitative study is that the researcher can clarify to the participant what the question is attempting to ask if there is confusion. It can be difficult to create items on a survey that all participants interpret in the same manner. At the same time, it can be difficult for the researcher to clearly interpret quantitative participant answers in the way respondents intended. Future researchers may also want to add an item asking for post completion feelings for EIU 2919. This item could more clearly interpret student feelings as to how beneficial the course was overall. Future researchers may also want to ask for student recommendations for the course that could help it be more beneficial to those who are required to take it.

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## APPENDIX A

*EIU 2919 Student Survey*

**For questions 1-6, indicate the best response by clicking the circle to the left of that response:**

1. Gender:            Male            Female
2. Class:        Freshmen        Sophomore            Junior        Senior
3. Live on campus:            Yes            No
4. Full or part time student:    full time (12+ hours)    part time (11 or less hours)
5. Identify the semester enrolled in EIU 2919:  
                     Fall 2007                      Spring 2008                      Fall 2008
6. Identify your grade in EIU 2919:  
                     A        B        C        D        F

**Use the scale below to identify the level at which you agree with the following statements by clicking the circle identifying the response:**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

7. *Prior to EIU 2919, I attended university-sponsored programs that were not required.*

1        2        3        4        5

8. *Prior to EIU 2919, my main reason for attending college was obtaining a diploma.*

1        2        3        4        5

9. *Prior to EIU 2919, my main reason for attending college was earning an education.*

1        2        3        4        5

10. *Prior to EIU 2919, I enjoyed being at college.*

1        2        3        4        5

11. *Prior to EIU 2919*, I spent time on campus in the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc.

1      2      3      4      5

12. *Prior to EIU 2919*, most of my friends at college I met through being on campus other than in the residence halls.

1      2      3      4      5

13. *Prior to EIU 2919*, I cut class.

1      2      3      4      5

14. *Prior to EIU 2919*, I had a full time student course load of at least 12 hours each semester.

1      2      3      4      5

15. *Prior to EIU 2919*, I **COMPLETED** a course load of at least 12 hours each semester.

1      2      3      4      5

16. *After completing EIU 2919*, I attend university-sponsored programs that are not required.

1      2      3      4      5

17. *After completing EIU 2919*, my main reason for attending college is obtaining a diploma.

1      2      3      4      5

18. *After completing EIU 2919*, my main reason for attending college is earning an education.

1      2      3      4      5

19. *After completing EIU 2919*, I enjoy being at college.

1      2      3      4      5

20. *After completing EIU 2919*, I spend time on campus at the library, participating in clubs, workshops, etc.

1      2      3      4      5

21. *After completing EIU 2919, most of my friends were met on campus other than in the residence halls.*

1      2      3      4      5

22. *After completing EIU 2919, I cut class.*

1      2      3      4      5

23. *After completing EIU 2919, I have a full time course load of at least 12 hours each semester.*

1      2      3      4      5

24. *After completing EIU 2919, I complete a course load of at least 12 hours each semester.*

1      2      3      4      5

**Using the scale below, indicate the level of helpfulness of the following topics from EIU 2919 by clicking the circle identifying the response:**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Not Helpful</b>	<b>Slightly Helpful</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Helpful</b>	<b>Very Helpful</b>

Accepting personal responsibility

25. Creator role	1	2	3	4	5
26. Wise choice process	1	2	3	4	5
27. Disputing irrational beliefs	1	2	3	4	5

Discovering self-motivation and developing goals and dreams

28. Designing a life plan	1	2	3	4	5
29. Committing to goals	1	2	3	4	5
30. Visualization	1	2	3	4	5
31. Personal affirmations	1	2	3	4	5

Mastering self/time-management

32. Calendars	1	2	3	4	5
33. Tracking forms	1	2	3	4	5
34. Commitment	1	2	3	4	5
35. Persistence	1	2	3	4	5
36. Self-discipline	1	2	3	4	5
37. Self-confidence	1	2	3	4	5

## Employing interdependence

38. Developing supportive relationships	1	2	3	4	5
39. Networking	1	2	3	4	5
40. Active listening	1	2	3	4	5
41. Being assertive	1	2	3	4	5

## Gaining self-awareness

42. Recognizing when you are off course	1	2	3	4	5
43. Writing scripts	1	2	3	4	5
44. Self-defeating habits	1	2	3	4	5

## Adopting lifelong learning

45. Active learning	1	2	3	4	5
46. Identifying learning styles	1	2	3	4	5
47. Developing self-respect	1	2	3	4	5

## Developing emotional intelligence

48. Stress reduction	1	2	3	4	5
49. Choosing your attitude	1	2	3	4	5
50. Creating flow	1	2	3	4	5
51. Self-love	1	2	3	4	5

## Learning assistance

52. Note-taking	1	2	3	4	5
53. Study skills	1	2	3	4	5
54. Test-taking strategies	1	2	3	4	5
55. Financial management strategies	1	2	3	4	5

## Other, please specify

56. _____	1	2	3	4	5
57. _____	1	2	3	4	5

**For questions 58-59, choose the ONE best descriptive response by clicking the corresponding circle**

58. *Prior to* EIU 2919, how many hours per week did you spend studying?

- a. None
- b. 1-4
- c. 5-10
- d. 11-15
- e. 16+

59. *After completing* EIU 2919, how many hours per week do you spend studying?

- a. None
- b. 1-4
- c. 5-10
- d. 11-15
- e. 16+

**For questions 60-65, choose *all that apply* by clicking on each corresponding circle:**

60. Which of the following terms best describes your initial feelings of being placed in EIU 2919?

- a. thankfulness
- b. excitement
- c. frustration
- d. anger
- e. embarrassment
- f. other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_



61. What other topics would you see as helpful in EIU 2919?

- a. interpersonal issues
- b. financial aid information
- c. health and wellness information
- d. career service (e.g. resume production, job searches, mock interviews)
- e. student life (e.g. clubs and organizations, leadership opportunities, athletics, Greek letter organizations, entertainment)
- f. none
- g. other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

62. What could the institution have done to involve you more at the beginning of your college career?

- a. required participation in meet and greets
- b. required participation in orientations
- c. required participation in clubs
- d. provided mentoring
- e. nothing
- f. other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

63. What are some characteristics of activities you have enjoyed or excelled in since arriving at EIU?

- b. leadership
- c. exploration of ideas
- d. community service
- e. intramurals
- f. none
- g. other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

64. What has motivated you to improve grades in college?

- a. family
- b. financial means
- c. placement on academic warning
- d. embarrassment
- e. nothing
- f. other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

65. What are some activities or programs that have helped you succeed in college?

- g. study tables
- h. workshops
- i. student help centers
- j. none
- k. other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B

*Informed Consent*

Dear Students:

This study is being conducted to determine what topics of EIU 2919 have been beneficial, what support would have been beneficial to students when first enrolling in college, and the relationships between them.

Data collection will be obtained by survey methodology. The survey will provide COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY to agreeing participants. Individuals are in no way required to participate in the study and no consequences of non-participation will be employed. If individuals agree to participate, they may at any time discontinue the survey or choose to not answer any question at any time. You must complete the survey in a single setting; you may not begin the survey to finish at a later date. The survey will likely take no longer than 10-15 minutes to complete.

In agreement to participate in the study, each student will have the opportunity to enter him or herself for the random drawing of a \$50 GIFT CERTIFICATE AT A LOCAL GAS OUTLET.

If you have already participated please do not re-submit the inventory and ignore this request.

TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK ON THE FOLLOWING LINK:

<http://www.eiu.edu/~cats/csd/bjgorman/survey.php>

Thank you,

Brian J. Gorman  
Principal Researcher

For questions or concerns, contact...

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