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# The Impact Of A First Year Seminar On The College Success Of African American Males At Eastern Illinois University

Brandon L. Thompson

*Eastern Illinois University*

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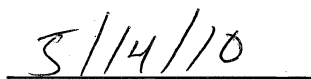
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The Impact of a First Year Seminar on the College Success  
of African American Males at Eastern Illinois University

(TITLE)

BY

Brandon L. Thompson

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

Spring 2010

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father Barry Thompson who passed away in December of 2008. My father taught me that I could achieve anything that I put my mind to. There is not one day that goes by when I don't think about him. I am extremely blessed to have been able to have a loving father for 23 years of my life. Although he isn't here on Earth, I know that he is with me.

Dad, to you I say thank you for everything that you have done for me. I miss you dearly, but I know that we will be together again. I am keeping up my promise and looking after Mom and Kacey. I want you to know that without you none of this would be possible. Thank you for having such a strong presence in my life and inspiring me to achieve.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank God for all the many blessings that I have received in my life and for providing me with the necessary resources to complete this project.

Thank you Mom for your constant encouragement, even when you did not agree with me. I know that you have been through a lot in the past couple years, but I admire the strength and determination that you have. I appreciate all that you have done for me as a child and as an adult. You have been my biggest fan all of these years. I can honestly say that I have an amazing mother; I love you.

To my sister Kacey, although we don't always see eye to eye, you have been an amazing friend and resource over the past two years. You have been there to support every decision I have made regarding my education and future employment. I want you to remember that although we may be 15 hours apart in the fall, I'm just a phone call away.

To Mr. Bogart, the best dog in the world, thank you for always being there to brighten up my day.

I would like to thank you Dr. Wallace, Dr. Eberly, Lou, and Dr. Roberts for all of the support that you have given me over the past two years.

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Thank you to the staff of New Student Programs; the place I called home for the past two years. You have challenged me to become a well-trained professional and have provided me with the tools to be successful in Student Affairs.

## ABSTRACT

This mixed method study was designed to understand the impact of a first-year seminar on the college success of African American males at Eastern Illinois University. The primary researcher conducted one on one interviews with nine African American males. Three participants enrolled in EIU 1111 (first year seminar) by choice, three enrolled in EIU 1111 by conscription, and three did not enroll in EIU 1111. The interviews were transcribed and themes were identified. The results from the interviews indicated that peer support and faculty and staff interaction outside of the classroom influenced college success.

The quantitative data (e.g. ACT score, GPA, EIU 1111 enrollment, year of entry) were examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistic tests were run to determine a difference in students that enrolled in EIU 1111 and students that did not enroll in EIU 1111. Their results indicated there was no statistical significance with any test run.

The results to the present study were followed by discussion based on the research questions. Conclusions were drawn from the present study and recommendations made for future researchers.

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Impact of a First Year Seminar on the College Success of African-American Males

At Eastern Illinois University

Brandon L. Thompson

Eastern Illinois University

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Since the Supreme Court rulings in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS* (1954 & 1955), African American students have been a part of the student body on predominately white college and university campuses in significant numbers (Pearson & Christensen, 1996). Currently, the number of African American students enrolled at predominantly white campuses has remained at less than five percent of the entire student body. Despite the fact that African Americans have continued to enroll at these institutions for more than 50 years, students continue to describe these campuses as hostile, isolating, and difficult places to feel welcome. The transition into any college environment may be difficult, but this appears to be especially so for African American males. Brooks and DuBois (1995) stated that distance from home, social support, and exposure to stressful events can have a significant impact on how students adapt during their first year of college.

It is extremely important for an African American male to find some way to relate to his institutional environment at a predominately white college or university. A major factor in the influence of undergraduate academic achievement and personal development is peer groups (Astin, 1993). Without finding some way to relate to the institution or to peers in a positive way, the transition for African American men may be a difficult one.

A difficult transition has led to lower persistence rates for African American males. Allen (1992) stated that African American men have lower persistence rates, lower academic achievement levels, and lower enrollment in advance degree programs than their white counterparts. Cuyjet (1997) called these shortcomings “underpreparedness” for African American males. According to Gordon (1994), Black men are perceived by society to have poor

academic socialization and low expectations for their academic achievement. In addition, Hood (1992) believes that African American males are less likely to seek out assistance from faculty regarding their course work or personal issues.

In order to confront the initial issues of transition, several colleges and universities use a first year seminar which can typically be placed in one of four categories: transition, special academic theme, discipline theme, and mixed format (Porter & Swing, 2006).

Universities offer different forms of support to first year students, but a first year seminar's main purpose is to acclimate students to university policies and familiarize them with their peers.

The first year seminar at Eastern Illinois University is EIU 1111 is also commonly known as University Foundations. EIU 1111 is an optional course offered to first-year freshman students during the fall semester; the course is worth two credit hours and runs for 16 weeks. Although the course is optional for most students, it is mandatory for those who are admitted through Gateway or BOOST (alternative admission programs). EIU 1111 has both objectives for the course and learning objectives for students. Those objectives are as follows:

#### Course Objectives

University Foundations is a writing-active course with four main objectives:

- To familiarize you with the expectations, policies, resources, and traditions of Eastern Illinois University
- To develop your critical thinking, learning and communication skills
- To enrich your perspectives on personal, academic, and moral issues in higher education
- To engage you in the educational and social life of the university

#### Student Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the course, you will be able to:

- Describe classroom norms, university policies/procedures, and faculty expectations
- Explain the purposes of higher education
- Use the resources and services provided by Eastern Illinois University
- Identify common problems and pressures facing today's college students
- Formulate educational and life goals
- Communicate more effectively (orally and in writing) with professors and peers
- Analyze, criticize, and construct arguments on university life using critical thinking skills

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present study is to determine the impact of EIU 1111, a first year seminar at Eastern Illinois University, on the success (e.g., retention behavior and academic performance) of African American males. EIU 1111 is open to all first year students entering in the fall semester. If a student is admitted through an alternative admissions program (Gateway or BOOST), they are required to enroll in the course. A review of the academic performance of African American males enrolled in the course dating back to 2004 will be used to determine which students have successfully met the academic requirements for first semester students. In addition, the significance of the present study will be its ability to identify (and possibly justify) EIU 1111 as a factor in the persistence of African American male students. It is anticipated that the findings from the present study will be used by the university to determine whether required participation by African American males may have positive effects on their overall persistence (e.g., development of study skills; engagement in campus social life; becoming familiar with institutional customs and traditions; development of communication

skills; enriched perspectives on personal and moral issues in higher education, etc.) and ultimate success in degree attainment.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the present study.

- Why do African American males choose to attend Eastern Illinois University?
- What is the most common reason for enrolling in EIU 1111 for African American males?
- What factors influence persistence behavior of African American males at EIU?
- What similarities exist between African American males who are successful at EIU?
- What are the differences between African American males who enrolled in EIU 1111 and those who did not?

### Limitations of the Study

There are a few limitations that affect the results of this study. First, the EIU 1111 course is only offered during the first semester of a student's freshman year. Therefore, older students may have forgotten information pertaining to their EIU 1111 class. Second, the interviewer knew some of the participants, which may have influenced their responses during the individual interviews.

### Definition of Terms

1. First Year Seminar - A course offered by Eastern Illinois University as well as other institutions. These courses are designed to assist in the college transition of first-year students. At EIU, the first-year seminar is EIU 1111. EIU 1111 is a 16-week course offered during the fall semester of freshman year.

2. Gateway and BOOST Students- The Gateway and BOOST programs are alternative admission programs for students who do not meet the regular admission requirements for Eastern Illinois University. The Gateway students meet with advisors on a regular basis and have mandatory monitored study hours. Gateway students must also enroll in a study skills course, EIU 1111, and GST 1100 (a career seminar).

### Overview of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I contains the introduction to the thesis. Chapter II contains a review of literature which focuses on retention, first year seminars, and peer interactions. Chapter III consists of the research design of the present study and how the data were gathered and analyzed. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V consists of the summary and conclusion of the findings along with recommendations for future research involving African American males. Located in the appendices are the following documents: Appendix A contains IRB Approval; Appendix B contains Enrollment Statistics; Appendix C contains the Letter of Introduction of the research project to potential participants; Appendix D contains Interview Protocols; and Appendix E contains the Statement of Informed Consent.



## Chapter II

### Review of Related Literature

In 2005 the U.S. Census Bureau reported there were 39 million African Americans in the United States. Over the past 30 years, the representation of African-Americans on college campuses has continuously increased (Allen, 1992). Currently, 37% of black males who graduate high school go on to college; whereas 20 years ago, this number was only 30%. Of this 37%, less than 40% graduate with a college degree within a 6-year period, which is lower than the 6-year graduation rate of any other ethnic group (Alexander, 2004).

A small minority can have an impact on how students perceive themselves and their capabilities. In previous research, Chung and Sedlacek (1999) examined self-appraisals among college males and found that African American males had a lower sense of their academic capabilities and of their abilities to communicate with others. These results indicate that a more supportive learning environment is necessary for African American students to succeed.

According to Hall and Rowan (2000), institutions of higher education are not fulfilling their dual purpose in regards to African American males. Hall and Rowan claimed that the attrition of African American males in higher education was not due to their not being capable of achieving, but rather due to the institution not providing them with the right tools to succeed. Expanding on this idea, Aries (2008) claimed that institutions ask students of color to adapt to the campus climate; when in reality, the campus needs to find ways to adapt to these students. The overall institutional climate has a large impact on a student's success and satisfaction with the institution they attend (Myers, 2003).

The research in this chapter will cover first year experience courses (seminars), retention, self-efficacy/esteem, and peer interactions.

### *First Year Experience Courses*

According to Porter and Swing (2006) more than 94% of institutions of higher education have first year seminars for freshman students. These seminars have the common goal of increasing academic performance and could be placed into one of four categories: transition theme, special academic theme, discipline theme, and mixed format. In their study, Porter and Swing wanted to determine how first year seminars affected a student's persistence to the second year. A survey was distributed to 61 institutions, yielding a sample size of 20,031 students. Although there were four categories for first year seminars to ensure homogeneity, only the transition format was used for this study. The dependent variable was the student's interest to persist, measured by using a 7 point Likert-type scale. The control variables were: academic preparation, finances, and demographics. The results of the survey indicated that there are five learning outcomes that are common in all transition themed first year seminars (study skills, health education, campus policies, campus engagement, peer connections). Of the five learning outcomes, only study skills/academic engagement and health education had an impact on a student's intention to persist to the second year.

Hendel (2007) set out to examine the efficacy of a first year seminar on student satisfaction and retention. Hendel conducted this study at a research intensive, urban and public land-grant university. There were two components to this study: a comparison between first year seminar participants and a random sample of non participants on the basis of satisfaction of first-year experiences; the second component examined the effects the seminar had on retention. A logistic regression model was used to determine if seminar participation increased the probability of retention.

At the institution surveyed there were 5,086 first year students enrolled for the fall semester of 1998. Of those students, 723 of them were enrolled in a first year seminar course. There were three different types of seminar courses offered: topical content (N=387), developmental focus (N=184), and living in residential college (N=152). The data for the study was collected from students enrolled in the first-year seminars and from a random sample of 1,600 students. Due to the fact that this study was connected to the annual undergraduate survey some of the students in the random sample were enrolled in a first-year seminar. The survey consisted of 92 questions that dealt with the topics: overall satisfaction levels and overall assessment of educational quality, evaluation of course, instructors, and advising and campus experiences. The surveys were completed by 54.9% of the random undergraduate students and 48% of the first year seminar students.

Although the first year seminar students had more positive responses, there was no difference in GPA or the number of credits completed for the two groups. Hendel concluded that first year seminars have no effect on retention into the second year.

Mamary (1992) established a first year seminar course just for women at a small liberal arts institution in the Northeastern region of the United States. She believed that the traditional seminar wasn't successful for women, because they did not speak the same "language" as men. Forty-seven women were enrolled in the all female section which was entitled [Grrl] Talk. Despite the fact that the section was only female, there was still a clear division with race. The minority females still did not connect with the literature of the course, since it did not discuss any issues that they might face. Race played a major issue during class discussions; some students acknowledged that they lived in a racist society, while others did not.

Miccer and Wajeah (1999) evaluated the outcomes of a First Year Experience course on its ability to ease the transition to college and enhance student retention at the University of South Florida. The course, like the majority of first year experience courses, set out to introduce students to the university, while enhancing their experience. There were two different methods used to assess the course. The first was an analysis of student course evaluations, and the second between group comparison of those who completed the course and those who did not enroll (control group) on various academic performance variables.

The sample for Miccer and Wajeah's (1999) study consisted of 540 students from 20 different first year experience class sections in the fall of 1998. There were another 237 students from the fall of 1997 and 41 from the spring of 1998. A survey distributed to the participants had nine close ended questions, and measured the achievement of course objectives. There were also 5 open ended questions that asked for feedback on class activities, guest speakers, the textbook, and the course experience. Miccer and Wajeah placed the responses to the questions in a table and concluded that students viewed the course positively.

The second method consisted of between group comparisons for six different groups of first time college students between the years 1990 and 1995. Graduation rates, total cumulative credit hours, GPAs and the mean hours enrolled were examined. The first year experience group had higher mean value percentages than the control group in every category. Retention to the spring semester was statistically significant for retention to the next fall. Despite those numbers, graduation rates were not significantly different for the first year experience group of students. There was no explanation given for there being no difference in the graduation rates.

The University of South Carolina-Columbia studied the effects of its first year seminar on students for 23 years. What the institution found is that in 15 of the 23 years examined, the first year seminar students were more likely to return for their sophomore year than students that did not enroll in the course (Jamelske, 2008).

### *Retention*

Research regarding student retention at the university level is significantly relevant, due to the fact that returning students are required for growth. Each year, universities spend thousands of dollars on the recruitment of new students, but it is essential for them to assist the students that are currently attending. In 2007, the average retention rate among all U.S. institutions of higher education from first year to second year was 68.7% (Jamelske, 2008).

Beginning in the 1970's, theories involving retention were developed. In 1974, Astin first announced his theory of involvement. This theory stated that students related learning and retention with being involved at an institution. To Astin, involvement meant investing time and energy into academic relationships and campus activities. Not only did Astin believe that students needed to be involved with their peers, he also found a link between student and faculty interaction. Students had a tendency to do better with faculty who were student-oriented, as opposed to research-oriented.

In 1987, Tinto took Astin's theory to another level, by developing the theory of student departure. Departure is a longitudinal process and there are a few factors that attribute to a student's decision to continue attending an institution; these factors include: individual attributes, family background, and pre-college schooling. Not only do these experiences influence a student's persistence, they also have an impact on the initial commitment of the student towards graduation (Tinto, 1987). Once a student has an initial commitment toward graduation, in order

to persist they must have both academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975). After reviewing retention programs at universities, Myers (2003) stated that the overall institutional climate has a large impact on a student's success and satisfaction with the institution they attend.

Retention has been a long concern for colleges and universities Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, (1999) set out to determine indicators of student retention. Their longitudinal quantitative study was conducted at Oregon State University between 1991 and 1996. Data for the study were obtained from the OSU Student Data Warehouse and involved a sample of 8,867 students. The students were first year freshmen and enrolled for the fall semester between 1991 and 1995. The database provided information on high school academics, involvement in on-campus programs, and demographics (ethnicity, race, sex), but did not have information on financial background, living arrangements and personal interactions between students and faculty. During the course of the study, 35% of the students whose enrollment was interrupted returned to the university within one year. The univariate analyses were examined using the Kaplan Meir method, which provided a nonparametric estimate of retention probability over time. The Cox proportional hazards regression model was used for a multiple variate analysis. At the end of the summer quarter of the fourth academic year, the retention probability was 59.3%, meaning that over a 4 year period OSU had an attrition rate of approximately 40%. Researchers found that retention was affected independently by age, residency, high school and first-quarter performance, ethnicity/race, and enrollment in the Freshman Orientation Course. Both African-American students and Hispanic students were more likely to withdraw than other races. The researchers suggested that their findings should be used to focus on recruiting promising students who show potential throughout high school. The results also indicated a need to identify and provide resources to the students at high risk for attrition.

Salintiri (2005) conducted a study that focused on mentoring programs and how they aided in the retention of first-year students. Salintiri used 128 students from the University of Windsor for the study. There were 56 students in the mentored group and 72 students in the non-mentored control group. Of the 56 mentored participants, 34 were mentored in their first year and 22 in the second year of the study. There were 50 faculty mentors for the program; the majority had a master's degree. The mentors assisted the students in getting acclimated to the campus and provided them with study skills. The results of the study showed that mentoring had an extremely high effect on the retention of students with low proficiency levels. In 2001, the first year of the experiment, 8.6% of the experimental group had to withdraw from the university, whereas 32.7% of the control group withdrew. In 2002, there were no experimental group students that were required to withdraw, but 26.9% of the control group was required to withdraw. The data from the study proved Tinto's belief in academic and social involvement playing a role in student retention (Salintiri, 2005).

Person (1996) conducted a study at a small, private institution in the northeast to determine how comfortable African-American students felt in their academic and social surroundings. Fewer than 50% of the African American students felt comfortable with the faculty members. The institution had a very large Greek population, but when asked, only 29% of the African American students felt comfortable at Greek letter organization sponsored events. Astin (1974) stated that both social and faculty involvement were essential to student retention.

There is currently a gap between ethnic minority students and ethnic majority students in the attainment of higher education degrees (Carter, 2006). According to Carter, the gap that exists between minority students and majority students has a negative impact on long-term social mobility. Carter points out a 1983 study by Bynum and Thompson in which it was determined

that minorities of any race on a campus are more likely to drop out prior to graduation over those who are in the racial majority. In their article entitled *A Theory of Minority Students' Survival in College*, Nagasawa and Wong (1999) noted the decrease in the recruitment of minority students and the increase in attrition. Wong and Nagasawa pointed out how campuses attempt to address the issues of racial conflicts and discrimination, but do not pay much attention to how these issues affect minority students.

Furr and Elling (2002) administered a campus climate survey to 183 African-American males during their first semester at a Southeastern comprehensive university. Retention for the participants was measured through their third year at the institution. Furr and Elling (2002) found that students who did not have knowledge about campus programs and were disconnected from the campus were less likely to persist. Students who embraced the environment and immersed themselves in multicultural experiences were also more likely to persist. Identifying these patterns early on will aid in the retention of African-American males (Furr, & Elling, 2002).

#### *Self Esteem and Self Efficacy*

In his book *African American Men in College*, Cuyjet states that self-esteem is linked to academic resilience. The resilient students have the ability to develop positive behaviors that will improve their chances of being successful in school despite being part of an at-risk group (Finn, & Rock, 1997). Even the resilient students may face threats from their institutional environments. These threats are known as stereotype threats (Steele, 1997). Steele believes that these threats can affect any member of the group; thus, this can have an impact on African-American males inside of the classroom. Osborne (1999) believes that African American males may fear answering a question wrong in class because it will not only have an impact on their personal self-esteem, but will also confirm negative group stereotypes.



Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the belief in one's ability to perform a task and to execute that task successfully. Davenport and Lane (2006) believe that self-efficacy is influenced by information from four main sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and the control of negative emotions. In their study, Davenport and Lane (2006) administered a questionnaire to 131 first year sports degree students. The results of the study indicate that there is a link between effective coping skills and self-efficacy. The results also indicate that social interactions have an influence on developing self-efficacy.

Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) set out to determine the relationship between academic self-efficacy and stress and the relative effects of self-efficacy and stress on academic outcomes. The participants for the study were 107 first-semester freshmen who were enrolled during the spring semester of 1998 at one of the City University of New York campuses. There was a two part questionnaire administered to the participants, one for demographic information and the other to measure self-efficacy and stress. The student's academic records were taken in order to pull their academic records at a future date. Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade (2005) found a negative correlation between academic self-efficacy and stress.

According to Hughs and Demo (1989), African American males tend to have a lower self-efficacy than their female counterparts and lower than white individuals. Pajares and Miller (1994) noticed a correlation between self-efficacy and academics. They concluded there are, however, ways to increase the academic self-efficacy of African American males. Okech and Harrington (2002) believed that faculty and staff need to focus on the academic potential and achievement of African American males rather than the negative White stereotypes. According to Harper (2006), these negative stereotypes can cause African American males to have internalized racism. African American students will begin to devalue education and believe that

they cannot achieve at a high level (Harper, 2006). Jones (2003) indicates that internalized racism makes certain behaviors normative, such as encouraging athleticism over academics. If African American males are constantly being told that they cannot achieve academically, they will start to believe it.

### *Peer Interactions*

Fries-Britt and Turner (1998) found that many gifted African American students enter college with very few relationships with other high-achieving African American students. These students were primarily in class with white students in gifted or honors classes. After time, these African American students become aware that they come from an underrepresented group and become accustomed to not expecting other African Americans to do well (Fries-Britt & Turner 2002). Due to the fact that high achieving African American males in college do not have a large group of support, Harper (2006) set out to discover their experiences as students.

Harper conducted his study at six large, public research universities in the Midwest: University of Illinois, Indiana University, Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, The Ohio State University and Purdue University. The mean graduation rate for African American male undergraduates at these institutions was 50.75%, in comparison to 74.2% for white males. The sample for the study consisted of 32 African American undergraduate men with at least a 3.0 grade point average, campus leaders, and involved in many organizations. Harper used face-to-face interviews for the study. The results indicated that peer support was the main factor in high academic success as most students stated that their African American peers kept them motivated. One student stated, "The Black community is happy to see someone doing something positive, so that's why they've been so supportive." (pg 352) Although many of these

students did not have peer interactions inside of the classroom, they were able to find them through the different organizations they joined.

Pierce, Sarason, and Sarason (1996) found social support to be a valuable resource and a coping response. They suggested that social support comes in the forms of guidance, tangible help, and emotional support. As a coping response, social support comes in the form of seeking and receiving support from others. Newby-Fraser and Schlebusch (1997) stated that students who do not have or perceive that they do not have support are more likely to be stressed and have lower academic performance.

Peer interactions can also have a negative effect. According to Harper (2006), African American males are taught to devalue education by their peers. Popular images on TV, celebrities that never got more than a high school diploma fuel the thoughts about not receiving an education.

## Chapter III

### Research Questions

Research questions that guided the present study were developed from the suggestions of prior research, the university committee on retention efforts, and as a result of the experiences of the primary researcher who himself was a student in EIU 1111.

- 1: Why do African American males choose to attend Eastern Illinois University?
- 2: What is the most common reason for enrolling in EIU 1111 for African American males?
- 3: What factors influence persistence behavior of African American males at EIU?
- 4: What similarities exist between African American males who are successful at EIU?
- 5: What are the differences between African American males who enrolled in EIU 1111 and those who did not?

### Methodologies

#### Mixed Method

First, a mixed method design for data collection and analysis was utilized to permit the primary researcher to obtain sufficient data necessary to answer each of the aforementioned research questions. Quantitative data were obtained from the Center for Academic Support and Achievement. These data date back to 2006 and included all African American males who enrolled at EIU. The data also contained class enrolled status (i.e., voluntarily or as an involuntary requirement for participation in either the Boost or Gateway programs, or voluntary non-enrollment). Qualitative data were collected through the use of individual interviews.

#### Participants

Invitations to participate in the current research project were extended to 252 students who met the following criteria: African American male with sophomore through senior class

standing; voluntary enrollment in EIU 1111, non-voluntary enrollment in EIU 1111, or voluntary non-enrollment in EIU 1111. Entry for these students was first-time freshman at the time of their initial enrollment at the university. Qualitative data were obtained from a sample of participants consisting of nine African American males who enrolled in EIU 1111 beginning in fall 2006 and ending in fall 2009. Of the nine students who met the requirements for inclusion in the present study, three were mandated to enroll in EIU 1111 due to admission through the Gateway program, three were not mandated to enroll in EIU 1111 but elected to take the course by choice, and three were neither mandated nor did they voluntarily enroll in EIU 1111. Each of these nine participants has been given a pseudonym for identification in the present study.

The quantitative data were tabulated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences to ascertain correlations between GPA, EIU 1111 enrollment, academic standing, and enrollment in the Gateway or Boost programs. Data from one-on-one interviews were transcribed and evaluated to determine any common themes by the researcher. Follow up interviews were conducted to obtain greater detail about the responses given.

#### Instrumentation

Qualitative interview protocols were developed by the researcher for the purpose of ascertaining information on the impact of EIU 1111 on the retention behavior and academic performance. The 18 interview protocols (students that did enroll in EIU 1111) and 17 interview protocols (students that did not enroll in EIU 1111) were comprised of open-ended questions and three demographic items. Open-ended questions addressed the following items: knowledge of institutional resources, involvement in recognized student organizations, attitudes toward university diversity initiatives, reasons for selecting EIU, happiness with decision to enroll at EIU and perceptions of interpersonal social skills. The demographic items addressed 1<sup>st</sup>

generation status, semester enrolled in EIU1111, and ranking of EIU among college selection choices. Quantitative data for the present study included the following: grade point averages, majors, current academic standing, and record of continuous enrollment / retention behavior. Permission to interview the students and have access to their academic records was granted by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Illinois University and with the assistance of the Center for Academic Support and Achievement (CASA).

#### Site Description

The site for the present study was Eastern Illinois University, a mid-size comprehensive institution with an enrollment of 12,100 students.

#### Data Analysis

The data variables retrieved for the study include: ACT score, High School GPA, admittance through the Gateway or Boost program, current GPA, EIU 1111 grade (if they enrolled in the course), and enrollment for the Fall 2009 semester. All participants involved in the study had the same access to resources and facilities on-campus. Data analysis included the identification of recurring themes as expressed by participants in their responses to questions regarding satisfaction with their overall collegiate experience since enrolling at the university. In addition, comparisons were made between those who enrolled in EIU 1111 and those who did not enroll in EIU 1111 on the basis of participation in RSOs, use of campus resources, interaction with faculty and staff members, and leadership roles held on campus. Research participants were required to sign a statement of informed consent, and knew that they could withdraw from the study at any point and time without fear of penalties of any kind.

### Data Collection

The researcher conducted nine one-on-one participant interviews. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded for subsequent transcription by the primary researcher. After the interviews were transcribed, each participant was emailed a copy of their transcription and asked to add any additional comments or to confirm earlier statements, but no participants replied to the email. Once the participants confirmed their transcripts, common themes were identified for each group of students (those who enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice, those who were required to enroll in EIU 1111, and those who did not take EIU 1111).

## Chapter IV

### Findings

Contained within the following chapter are the voices of nine students who elected to participate in the present research project and provided qualitative data. Quantitative data for the total pool of 249 students who either (a) voluntarily enrolled in EIU1111, (b) were required to enroll in EIU 1111, or (c) chose not to enroll in EIU 1111 were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section contains the responses of the nine interview participants to each of the 17 protocol questions posed to those who did not enroll in EIU 1111 and an additional 18 protocol questions that were presented to those students who did enroll in EIU 1111. The second section of the present chapter is a presentation of themes that emerged from the participant interviews. The third section contains the quantitative data obtained from document analysis (e.g., year enrolled at EIU, enrollment in EIU 1111, current grade point average, and ACT score presented at the time of application).

From the first group of individual interview participants (i.e., students who were admitted through the Gateway Program are required to take EIU 1111), the following findings were obtained from their responses to interview protocols that addressed the five research questions.

The nine students who participated in the interview component of the present study represent the general population of 249 students as follows: three students, Ryan, Frank, and Marlon, represent the group of students who were required to enroll in EIU 1111 as part of their requirements as participants in the Gateway Program. Participants Martin, Greg and Eddie represent the group of students who voluntarily participated in EIU 1111. Study participants



Mitch, Keith and Jordan represent the group of students who did not enroll in EIU 1111 by choice.

#### Voices of Students who Enrolled in EIU1111 by Requirement

Ryan hailed from Maywood, IL, Frank from Richton Park, IL, and Marlon from Decatur, IL. Both Ryan and Frank had a calm demeanor, while Marlon was extremely outgoing.

With regard to research question 1 Why do African American males choose to attend EIU? participant responses to interview protocols 2 thru 4 were analyzed. Both Frank and Ryan commented on the costs of the institution and how it was lower than the costs of attending other institutions. Marlon's response fit his outgoing personality and reflected his perceptions of the university during a campus visit. "I liked the public [people encountered]. Everyone wanted to stop and talk to you." Both Ryan and Marlon indicated having weighed their options and applied to several institutions, while Frank only applied to EIU. When asked if EIU was their first choice, Frank and Marlon answered yes. Ryan giggled and simply said no. The affordability of the institution was a determining factor in the decision to attend EIU for each of these students.

Each participant in the Gateway group was a first generation student. The Gateway program extends itself to various underrepresented groups and first generation students are a part of the population. Frank was extremely proud to be the first male in his family to graduate from college. Neither Ryan nor Marlon seemed to feel being the first male in their families to attend college was something to be particularly proud of but more like an expectation. The primary theme for these three first generation students was that attending college was important but not absolutely essential to their status among members of their immediate families.

Research question 2 addressed reasons for enrolling in EIU 1111. Participant responses to interview questions 7 and 8 were utilized to address this component of the study. Responses to

interview question 7, Why did or did you not choose to enroll in EIU 1111? reflected having to take the course as a requirement. Due to the fact that Frank, Ryan, and Marlon were all admitted through the Gateway Program, they were required to take EIU 1111. Frank, however, did not include this in his answer. Yet, Frank's calm and steady tone revealed thoughts which were representative of all three: "I felt that the reason I choose to enroll in it [EIU 1111] was that I needed to see the whole experience as far as what resources I could use on campus or just what the class had to offer. That is the main reason why and it was a pretty good class." There was not one negative response associated with their being required to take the course. Marlon and Frank were enthusiastic and expressed how as time passed they were able to truly see how the course benefited and helped them understand the whole college experience.

Frank, Marlon and Ryan were asked what they perceived the purpose of EIU 1111 to be and they all responded that the purpose was to get students acquainted with the campus. Frank felt that the purpose was also to help incoming students deal with situations that they were not accustomed to handling. He also believed that the course really helped him make the transition from high school to college. A theme that emerged with the three participants is the belief that the purpose of EIU 1111 was to help students adapt to college life and EIU.

When asked about their most favorite and least favorite parts of EIU 1111, Frank did not say much. In fact, his physical demeanor suggested that he wanted to withdraw from the interview at this point. His verbal response was simple: "I liked the in-class discussions. I did not really have a least favorite part." With a smile on his face, Marlon talked ceaselessly about how he enjoyed giving speeches in class, although he did not enjoy the writing assignments. For the first time during his interview, Ryan showed excitement when he was asked this question. "My favorite part of the course was the group project that we did at the end of the semester together.

We created a Jeopardy game that I helped with. I was pretty much the main guy for the project. I helped create the template for it and the questions and the surveys that we handed out on campus.” After some contemplation, he said, “Uhm...Least favorite were some of the tours around campus. Like the day we visited the Tarble Arts building. I’ve never been in Tarble Arts besides that class session.” A theme that emerged with the participants was the fact that they enjoyed several components of the course more than others but none were problematic.

The participants were read a list of various components to EIU 1111 and asked to state which was most useful to them. The list consisted of in-class activities, textbooks, assignments, in class interactions, and out-of-class interactions with instructors or peers. Ryan was the only participant that mentioned assignments being the most useful: “Assignments weren’t tedious and they helped me learn the requirements of college level work.” Both Frank and Marlon were in agreement when responding to the list, stating that they felt both in-class interactions and out of class interactions were equally most beneficial. Each of these Gateway group members established friendships with students in their class. Ryan, Frank, and Marlon all noted that their sections of EIU 1111 had diverse groups of students. “It was very diverse. It was a mixture of African Americans, Caucasians and Latinos. There were four African Americans, one Hispanic and I want to say two Asians and the rest were Caucasian. It was... an evenly balanced class as far as race. Yeah, it was pretty evenly balanced and every time we had like a group activity, it was like every person in a group was from a different race. If you didn’t come up from an area that wasn’t diverse with different races, you had to work with them in this class.”

When the participants were asked about resources and how they were identified in EIU 1111, they stated that the instructors often spoke of campus resources during class. Frank felt that his professors were good at providing him with information and offered the following

response: “They told me where I could go as a Gateway student to study other than the library and provided me with the names and locations of where I can find a tutor. They were good at helping me out.” Ryan talked about how the instructors provided useful resources for different offices on campus, whereas Marlon discussed how he learned about MLA and APA style formatting through the course and how his class took a tour of the library. The main theme that became apparent with the three participants is that their EIU 1111 instructors provided them with necessary resources for freshman.

To obtain participant perceptions with regard to research questions 3 and 4, interview questions 9 – 17 were analyzed. Specifically, the participants were asked about their interactions with faculty and staff members outside of formal classroom settings. Calm and reserved Frank reported having had only minimal interactions, while Ryan and Marlon reported having significant interaction with faculty and staff outside their classroom settings. Ryan, who was currently a resident assistant, had the most interaction with faculty and staff due to the nature of his position and offered this response: “We have the Faculty Host program and House Calls (programs with faculty in the residence hall). Those are mandatory things that we have to do at least once a month. We also do Charleston Chews, which is where we [RAs] seek out faculty and invite them to dinner or lunch.” Marlon exhibited confidence when he stated that he currently has more interaction with faculty and staff than he did in the past: “I go to their offices and say “Hey, how are you?” I like to stay in touch with my professors because sooner or later you will need to use them for recommendations and if they know who you are they are more likely to say yes.” Faculty and staff interaction was an important component of the collegiate experience for these three interview participants.

The participants were asked about their involvement in registered student organizations (RSOs). All three were involved with RSOs at some point while attending EIU. In his senior year, Frank does not have as much time as he previously did for RSOs, but offered the following comment: "I'm still involved in one. I was enrolled in BSU and NAACP and it's my fault for no longer attending the meetings. I've just been so busy. I was a part of LASO too. I'd go to every meeting, but now that I have a job, I no longer have the time." Both Ryan and Marlon continue to be involved in a large number of organizations. To elaborate on their involvement in the co-curriculum, each participant was asked "Do you hold any leadership positions on campus?" The only participant that did not have a leadership role was Frank. Marlon and Ryan had been Resident Assistants and both currently held positions in their fraternities. Ryan smiled and said, "I am the current president of my fraternity." Marlon got excited and explained his duties as the Greek Week Chair for his fraternity. Having held student leadership positions in RSOs and as residence life staff members, their involvement in co-curricular activities was significant.

When asked "What has been the most difficult aspect / biggest challenge of your college experience?" each participant responded differently. Frank had been a popular star football player in high school and never really had to work hard which made the transition to college a difficult one. "I had to work hard because I did not have teachers just passing me because I was in a sport or because I was a popular guy. They [teachers] weren't trying to hunt me down and tell me what I needed to do. So when I came to school [college] a big struggle was time management, because coming to school and trying to play football was crazy, it had me stressed out. So I would have to say time management was my biggest struggle. But now, I have it under control and I am looking forward to graduating shortly."

Ryan, when asked this same question, made solid eye contact and with his calm demeanor said, "Umm? I would say searching to find friends. Finding that one group that you fit into without changing who you are or having your morals and values challenged by drugs, alcohol, and the party scene." Marlon gave this question serious thought before he began to answer. "Umm? The biggest challenge I would say is?....That is a good question. I think life is a challenge. If it's good or bad, it's life. It's easy to ask yourself "Why is this happening?" It's important to realize that everything happens for a reason. There is another plan that is waiting. Accept the negative and turn something into a positive."

#### Voices of Students who Enrolled in EIU 1111 by Choice

The group of interview participants that enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice included Eddie from East St. Louis, IL, Greg from Oak Park, IL, and Martin from Casey, IL. Eddie seemed to be a shy individual and did not make much eye contact throughout the interview. Martin is a well known and popular student on the EIU campus and spoke very confidently. Greg was also very confident and gave well-reasoned responses during the interview.

With regard to question 1 "Why do African American males choose to attend Eastern Illinois University?" participant responses to interview protocols two through four were analyzed. When asked about choosing EIU for college, Eddie spoke about the price of the institution and stated that he found out about it when an admission representative came to his high school. Greg, who was a high school track star, had been to EIU for the IHSA State Track Meet on two separate occasions which increased his interest in the institution. Martin, on the other hand, was recruited to participate as a member of the track and field team for EIU. When asked if EIU was their first choice for college, only Eddie said that it was. Eddie was also the only participant that did not apply to any other schools. Martin applied to four institutions,

while Greg applied to three institutions (University of Illinois, Northern Illinois University, Michigan State). When the participants were asked “Are you still happy with your decision to attend EIU?” each participant said yes. Greg took a pause to gather his thoughts before saying that he is still satisfied with his decision to attend EIU and offered the following response: “I don’t regret anything. I believe that everything that happened was supposed to happen for a reason. The opportunity that I was given to go here [EIU] was not only a privilege, but a blessing. Anytime you have the opportunity to get a four year degree, it doesn’t really matter where it comes from as long as you graduate.” The primary theme that emerged with these participants was that they are all still satisfied with their decision to attend EIU.

Each participant was asked if their parents attended a four year college or university. Both Greg and Martin stated that both of their parents attended a four year college or university, while Eddie said that only his mother had done so.

To address research question 2: What is the most common reason for enrolling in EIU 1111 for African American males? participants were asked interview questions seven and eight. Both Greg and Eddie were told by their advisor to take the course. Martin was enrolled in the course when he came for his Debut (summer orientation). Before Greg opened his mouth, his facial expression indicated the negative comment to follow. “Honestly, when I came here my advisor wasn’t all that helpful. He just said, “Here’s an easy class if you want to take an easy class.”

The participants were asked what they thought was the purpose of EIU 1111. Both Eddie and Martin mentioned how the course was meant to transition new students to college, while Gary felt that the course was primarily intended to provide information on EIU in general. His expectations of the course did not align with the actual course content, therefore he offered this

response: “I did not learn too much about the campus. per say. I met Adam Due, the chief of police. He’s real cool and I still talk to him. Debbie Kidwell always sends me emails about job opportunities. But for us, the class [EIU 1111] that I had with Rob [classmate] focused on communication and team building exercises.”

To get a better feel for the section of EIU 1111 the participants enrolled in, each was asked if their section was taught by two faculty or staff members or a peer leader and a faculty or staff member. Each indicated their section was taught by two faculty or staff members. They were also asked to identify their favorite and least favorite parts of EIU1111. Neither Eddie, Greg nor Martin had many negative comments about the course. Eddie said that he did not like the homework assignments and Greg laughed during his response because the one thing he did not like was the long walk to his class. Martin did not have anything negative to say about the course. Eddie’s favorite part of the course was learning about EIU. Greg really enjoyed meeting a future fraternity brother, while Martin just enjoyed the course overall.

The three participants were given a list of choices (i.e., in-class activities, textbook(s), assignments, in-class interactions, or out-of-class interactions with instructor(s) or peers) and asked to say what was most useful to them with regard to enrollment in EIU 1111. All three indicated that in-class interactions were most useful. Eddie, Greg, and Martin all made friends in their EIU 1111 class and when asked, each affirmed that they are still in touch with at least one of the friends they made. To gather more information on the section of EIU 1111 that the participants choose to enroll in, they were asked about the diversity in their class. Both Eddie and Martin felt that they were enrolled in diverse sections of EIU 1111; but Gary said, “It was pretty much me and Rob. [We were] the only black people and the rest were Caucasian.”



One of the learning objectives for EIU 1111 is to familiarize students with campus resources. Eddie began to really show interest in the interview when he was asked, "In what ways did EIU 1111 provide information on different resources available to students?" Eddie felt that his instructors did a good job providing them with resources that they can use, offering the following statement: "Our instructors took us on a tour of the library. The tour allowed us to see firsthand the different sections of the library. Our instructors also took us to career services and talked to us about how we can benefit from utilizing the facility. And then we had a scavenger hunt and they gave us clues and we would have to go figure it out where to go on campus." Greg also felt that the instructors did a good job of providing them with information regarding what was happening within the EIU community. "During the semester they kept us updated with emails about what was going on around campus and they left it up to us to decide exactly what we wanted to be involved in." Martin described a trip to the library just as Eddie had done. At this point Martin was still calm and collected and offered: "Well, I know one week we took a trip to the library. I remember doing that and they gave us a tour and showed us where you can find certain materials in the library. We had different people come in from health services and then we talked about a pregnancy center and crisis center." The most important theme that emerged for the three participants was that EIU 1111 instructors provided useful information about campus resources.

To answer research question 3 and 4, respectively, the researcher asked interview questions 9 thru 14 and 18 thru 20, regarding out of class experiences at EIU.

The three participants who voluntarily enrolled in EIU 1111 were asked, "Do you interact with faculty and staff outside of class?" Each participant stated that they did interact with faculty and staff outside of the classroom. Martin, who was a student athlete, mentioned the interactions

that he still had with professors from his first two years at EIU. He also spoke about his interactions as an athlete. "As an athlete, we have an academic advisor that we are always in contact with. My coach is also staff and I come in contact with him every day."

Each participant was also asked if they belonged to any registered student organizations. Both Eddie and Greg are members of Phi Rho Eta Fraternity, Incorporated. Eddie is also a member of Alpha Phi Omega, a service fraternity. While at EIU, Greg has also been a member of the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), and the Asian Cinema Organization. Martin offered this response: "I've been involved with Black Student Union and I've been involved with the Minority Teacher Education Association and that might be it." Each participant in this group has also held leadership positions on campus. When asked, both Eddie and Greg were extremely proud and spoke highly of the positions they held in their fraternity. Martin has served as the president of the Minority Teacher Education Association and also served as Prowl Leader (transition orientation leader) for New Student Programs at EIU. A primary theme that emerged among these interview participants was campus involvement and serving as leaders in organizations.

The final question these participants were asked was "What has been the most difficult aspect/biggest challenge of your college experience?" Eddie, Greg and Martin all mentioned how time management was their greatest struggle. Being a student athlete Martin already has a busy schedule, the response he offered reflects his feelings on not having enough time as a student-athlete. "Sometimes finding enough time being involved in all the activities and organizations that I want to be in and still get the work done that I need to get done, because there are a lot of other things that I would like to do. I have been involved in two organizations, but I wouldn't mind getting involved in more."

### Voices of Students Who Did Not Enroll in EIU 1111

The third group of interview participants consisted of students that did not take EIU 1111. Their interview protocol was slightly different and their responses to specific interview questions can be found below. The group of three participants who did not enroll in EIU 1111 consisted of Keith, Jordan, and Mitch. Keith and Mitch are both from Chicago, IL and Jordan is from Rockford, IL. Keith was shy and removed for majority of the interview. Jordan felt extremely comfortable during the interview and offered elaborate responses to the interview protocol. The final participant Mitch was extremely passionate and his responses to the interview protocols reflected the passion that he possessed.

With regard to research question 1, these three participants were also asked interview questions two thru four. The reasons they choose EIU for college similar for both Keith and Mitch and dissimilar for Jordan. Whereas Keith and Mitch mentioned the costs of the institution in their response, Jordan recalled experiences as a high school student that prompted him to choose EIU. In high school, Jordan participated in the Boys State program, which uses EIU as their camp host site during the summer: "I was down here [EIU] for Boys State and while I was here I really got used to the campus and the way that people act, very friendly, very kind and I just liked everything about that. I probably would have gone to a community college the first couple of years except the Director of Admissions kind of hounded me until I came down here."

Participants in this group stressed the importance of having an affordable education. When asked if EIU was their first choice, only Jordan said it was his first choice. Mitch commented on how it was the first institution that he actually liked after visiting the campus. Keith mentioned how his plans changed as he got older and needed to pick a school that was the best fit for him: "When I was younger I wanted to go to the U of Illinois. But when I got older,

things got a little more realistic and I realized that tuition here is much more reasonable, so I decided to attend EIU instead.”

Each participant in the present group applied to multiple institutions. When asked to reflect on their decision to attend EIU, only Keith wasn't satisfied with his decision to attend EIU. Unlike with the group of Gateway students, Mitch is the only first generation student of the three participants that did not enroll in EIU 1111. Mitch is, in fact, the only male in his entire family to attend college.

Two main themes emerged with these participants: satisfaction with EIU and having parents that have been through college who understood the transition of a first year student.

The three participants were asked why they did not choose to enroll in EIU. Each offered a different response. Keith in a very calm and shy tone said, “I did not feel the need to.” Mitch, who did not believe that the course would fit into his schedule, offered this response: “I did not choose to enroll because at the time I came in [freshman year] I wanted to take other courses.” Jordan had a smile on his face as he began to state his case as to why he did not enroll in EIU 1111: “I did not choose to enroll in that program because I already came in with quite a few credits that cleared a lot of my freshman courses. Um, I had already been on campus a few times, so I had gotten used to where the buildings were. I had met some of the faculty members already and so I did not really feel like there was a lot that I could have gained from taking the course.”

When asked what they thought the purpose of EIU 1111 was, Keith continued to provide short and direct answers: “A class where students can learn about the university.” Jordan and Mitch both believed that the course allowed students “to get to know EIU”. Jordan took a pause to gather his thoughts before saying that he believed the course served several purposes: “For one, it helps new students get acclimated to campus and it shows them where the different

resources are located. It also teaches them study skills and things they will need to be a successful college student. Um, but then it also helps network them with other freshman and other people who are new to the university, because you know being in those classes [EIU 1111] they will have the same assignments, talk to each other and it will help them find other people who are going through the same things they are.” Despite the benefits that the participants knew the course had, when asked, not one participant would change their mind about not enrolling in the course.

Questions 15 through 21 were asked to ascertain data related to research questions 3 and 4. When asked about their transition to EIU, both Keith and Jordan said it was a smooth transition, but Mitch did not feel the same way. Mitch took a second to process his thoughts and began to explain the rough start he had as a new student: “It was very rocky, because I had just left home and this was my first time being away from home. It was very difficult because I had to depend on new sets of friends. I had to, well I wouldn’t say let go of my old ones, but I had to make new friends. I talked to my family less and just being away was difficult. I couldn’t just go back every weekend because I did not have the money. So it was definitely more of a social transition, if anything.”

Participants were asked to describe what resources they used while at EIU. Keith did not use many resources and seemed unsure of himself when he responded: “I used the advisement place in McAfee by the CATS lab, or the Student Success Center, yeah. I also used the Writing Center. I haven’t used a lot of resources.” Jordan and Mitch took advantage of a large number of resources available to students. Keith found out about the writing lab and the Student Success Center by a professor telling him to go there. Jordan and Mitch also found out about resources by word of mouth. Due to the fact that the participants were not enrolled in EIU 1111, they had to

find out from their peers and helpful faculty members about many of the resources that were available to them.

Just as with the other two groups of participants, those who chose to not enroll in EIU 1111 were asked about their contact with faculty and staff outside of the classroom. Keith is the only participant who reported having no contact with faculty or staff. Jordan helps out with faculty at conferences and likes to just drop by their offices and chat. Mitch, on the other hand, has taken advantage of one of the mentor programs and was excited to offer his response: “Yes, I do have contact with faculty and staff. It is this program called STRONG mentoring. I get to interact with the faculty that are involved with the program and talk to them like every week. It’s [STRONG] is a program where we can see advisors, staff and professors, outside of a classroom setting. The program allows us [students] to get to know them [staff and faculty].”

When asked if they were involved with any registered organizations, only Keith stated that he has not ever been involved with any RSOs. He glanced down when he offered his response, possibly showing shame. Both Mitch and Jordan hold executive positions in organizations and were proud of their accomplishment. Jordan, however, indicated he was less invested in performing in leadership roles than was Mitch.

Each participant in this group was asked about his most difficult challenge or aspect of his college experience and each offered a different response to the question. Keith, for example, presented his situation as follows: “As far as campus involvement goes, I knew it [campus involvement] would look good on my resume and stuff, but I just did not feel the need to go and participate or join registered student organizations. Like right now, I’m a fourth year student. Not that it’s too late, but I just don’t feel encouraged to go join one [organization] right now.”

Jordan, reasoned that as a RA the most challenging aspect of college life for him was being pulled in three or four directions at the same time. "You know, I carried a job that was part time because I was a RA, but at the same time I had housing and their commitments and they wanted bulletin boards done here and door decorations done. And, [it was often asked] how is your floor's GPA and all that crap. In the meantime, I'm supposed to maintain my own GPA and you know even amidst all that I still had friends that wanted to spend time with me and I couldn't. It taught me time management and that sometimes you have to let things go for better or for worse." Mitch, on the other hand, explained his predicament thusly: "Oh, I'm glad you asked this question! I'm itching to say this because I think it's a big issue. Knowing how to depend on somebody else was my biggest issue. It was knowing when and how to depend on the next man or woman because that's a part of team work. When I couldn't do it on my own, I took it personally. It dawned on me that I cannot do this [college] by myself; I cannot get through college on my own. This college walk, it wasn't designed for me to go on my own. The different resources here on this campus are all here for me. You know, the financial aid, the student affairs center, minority affairs, Trio department, the library....you know it's all here for me. I have friends here who are going through the same struggles I am. We have a certain unity about it, because that's the way we are gonna make it. We are not gonna finish college alone, we just cannot do it on our own. We don't have the money. We don't have the time. You know it's just certain things that we don't have, and that's why we have to stick together."

### Themes

The following themes were identified from the data collected during individual interviews and are listed in reference to the five research questions. Themes identified include faculty and staff interaction, involvement in student organizations, no regrets with the

participant's choice to enroll or not to enroll in EIU 1111, knowledge and use of campus resources, participants choose to attend EIU based on cost, all Gateway students were first generation students, and those who enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice were encouraged by their academic advisors to do so.

Research Question 1: Why do African American Males choose to attend Eastern Illinois University?

Alexander (2004) stated that only 37% of African American males who graduate high school go on to college. With thousands of institutions to choose from, it was important to understand why the participants choose EIU. A theme that carried throughout all three groups of participants (those who enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice, those who were required to enroll in EIU 1111 and those who choose not to enroll in EIU 1111) was the cost of education at EIU. The State of Illinois has a guaranteed tuition rate plan which maintains the tuition rate for four continuous years (eiu.edu, retrieved April 2010). The guaranteed tuition rate is appealing to many students who have to pay for college themselves and to parents who will be helping their sons and daughters pay for school. EIU also rents textbooks to students, instead of having students purchase them. The textbook rental service may also appeal to many students because it saves them money. Although the Gateway participants were all first generation college students, only one participant saw that status as significant. Two participants in the group of students that enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice found out about EIU as a result of competing in track meets held on campus.

Research Question 2: What is the most common reason for enrolling in EIU 1111 for African American males?



First year seminars are common on many campuses, in fact, 94% of accredited four-year colleges and universities in the United States offer first year seminars (Policy Center on the First Year of College, 2002). EIU 1111 is an optional first year seminar for the majority of students at Eastern Illinois University. If a student is admitted through the Gateway or Boost programs (alternative admissions) they are required to enroll in EIU 1111. Three of the interview participants for this study were admitted to EIU through the Gateway program, which meant they were required to enroll in a section of EIU 1111. Many studies have examined the efficacy and benefits of a first year seminar but have not examined why students enroll in the course. A common theme with the three students that enrolled in EIU1111 by choice was the fact that their advisors or another EIU staff member told them to take the course. For example, Martin's statement was typical: "Honestly, when I came here, my advisor wasn't all that helpful. He just said, "Here's an easy class if you want to take an easy class". So I said "okay" and I ended up taking EIU foundations, which was fine with me."

Research Question 3: What factors influence persistence behavior of African American males at EIU?

A major theme that occurred within all 3 groups of interview participants was campus involvement. With the exception of Keith who chose to not enroll in EIU 1111, every interviewee had been involved with multiple registered student organizations. A second theme identified with research question 3 was staff and faculty interaction. Only one interviewee had not interacted with faculty or staff on a regular basis. Another theme derived from participant responses to question addressing researching question 3 was knowledge of campus resources. Each participant in this study utilized campus resources to help them succeed. Participants that enrolled in EIU 1111 were often told about resources available at EIU by their instructors;

whereas those who did not enroll in EIU 1111 heard about campus resources from their peers or other faculty members.

Research Question 4: What similarities exist between African American males who are successful at EIU?

Each interview participant in this study was in good academic standing with Eastern Illinois University (2.0 G.P.A. or higher) at the time of their interview. The same themes that were identified with research question 3 (i.e., campus involvement, faculty and staff interaction, utilization of campus resources) were also present in participant responses to interview questions that were designed to ascertain information relevant to research question 4. Similar to Harper's (2006) finding that peer support was a major factor in high academic success for African American students, the participants from each group in the qualitative portion of this study relied on their peers. Mitch, who choose not to enroll in EIU 1111, stressed the importance of relying on his peers: "It dawned on me that I cannot do this [college] by myself; I cannot get through college on my own. This college walk, it wasn't designed for me to go on my own. The different resources here on this campus are all here for me. You know, the financial aid, the student affairs center, minority affairs, Trio department, and the library. You know, it's all here for me. I have friends here who are going through the same struggles I am. We have a certain unity about it, because that's the way we are gonna make it. We are not gonna finish college alone. We just cannot do it on our own."

Research Question 5: What are the differences between African American males who enrolled in EIU 1111 and those who did not?

Among the two groups of interview participants that enrolled in EIU 1111 (Gateway students and those who enrolled by choice), each participant stated that they had created lasting

friendships with their classmates. The students that enrolled in EIU 1111 also learned about resources from their course instructors.

There was only one interview participant in this study that was not involved with any registered student organizations and did not have interaction with faculty and staff. This student was among the group of participants that did not enroll in EIU 1111.

### Quantitative Findings

The second section of the present chapter outlines the quantitative data for 249 individuals which were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The findings were used to address research questions 3, 4, and 5.

A T-test was used to determine the difference in grade point average (GPA) of those who had taken EIU 1111 and those who had not taken EIU 1111. There were 72 students that did not enroll in EIU 1111 and 177 that did enroll in the course. The GPA of students that did not enroll in EIU 1111 was 2.12, which is higher than those who did enroll in EIU 1111 (2.08), but this finding (a difference of .04) was not statistically significant (Table 1).

To breakdown the differences in GPA further, a one-way Anova was used to examine GPA by group (those who did not enroll in EIU 1111, those who were Boost students, those who were Gateway students, and those who enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice). The group with the highest GPA was comprised of those who had not enrolled in EIU 1111 (Table 2). However, this finding was not statistically significant. A second one-way Anova was run to examine differences in GPA of those who did not enroll in EIU 1111 and those who were required to enroll in EIU1111 (combination of Gateway and Boost students). The GPA for the combination of Gateway and Boost students was 2.02, which was lower than the GPA for those who did not enroll in EIU 1111 (2.12). This difference was also not statistically significant (Table 3).

In regard to research question 3, a Chi Square test was run to examine the persistence of students that enrolled in EIU 1111 versus those who did not enroll in EIU 1111. Of the 177 students that enrolled in EIU 1111, 111 or 62.7% were still enrolled at the university for the fall 2009 semester (Table 4). Of the 72 individuals who did not enroll in EIU 1111 as first year students, 40 or 55.6% were still enrolled for the fall 2009 semester (Table 4). Although there is a difference of 7.1%, this number was not statistically significant.

A Factorial Logistic Regression was used to determine a difference, if any, with enrollment for the fall 2009 semester and the semester in which students enrolled in EIU 1111. There was no statistical significance with this test; the year students enrolled in EIU 1111 did not predict fall 2009 enrollment (Table 5).

The final statistical test was used to address question 5. The results of a T-test to determine the differences in ACT scores of those who enrolled in EIU 1111 and those who chose not to enroll in EIU 1111 resulted in no significant findings. The mean ACT score of students who did not enroll in EIU1111 was 21.2, while those who did enroll in EIU 1111 had a mean ACT score of 17.8. Although those who did not enroll in EIU1111 had a higher mean ACT score, the comparative findings were not statistically significant.

#### Summary

The findings of the present study reflect the perceptions of the research participants and of the quantitative data obtained from the Center for Academic Support and Achievement. A number of themes emerged from interview participant responses to the interview protocols. These themes helped the researcher draw the conclusions that appear in Chapter V. Analysis of the quantitative data revealed no statistically significant differences among student groups. The implications of these findings are presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter V

### Discussion/Conclusions/Recommendations

The purpose of the present study was to determine the impact of a first year seminar on African American males who attend Eastern Illinois University. The main focus of this study was to examine differences between students who enrolled in EIU1111 and students that did not enroll in EIU 1111. This chapter is divided into 3 sections: discussion, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

The quantitative data for the 249 African American male participants that was run through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences yielded no statistical significance.

#### Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine the impact of a first year seminar on African American males who attend Eastern Illinois University. According to Alexander (2004), less than 40% of African American males who enroll in college graduate within a 6 year period. The mixed method design of the present study allowed the researcher to examine five research questions. Conducting interviews with nine African American males, coming from 3 different groups of students (those who enrolled in EIU 1111, those who enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice, and those that choose not to enroll in EIU 1111), allowed the researcher to establish themes as they pertained to the research questions. College success for this study is defined as a student in good academic standing and campus involvement. A limitation to the study is the fact that EIU 1111 is only offered during the fall semester of a student's freshman year; the participants in this study all have either junior or senior standing and may not have recalled their entire EIU 1111 experience.

Several conclusions can be drawn about the impact that a first year seminar has on African American male from the individual interviews. There were several similarities that were revealed with the participants' responses to the interview protocol. The three groups of students who were interviewed (those who enrolled in EIU 1111, those who enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice, and those that choose not to enroll in EIU 1111) all had a few things in common; the first being that were all in good academic standing with the institution (2.0 G.P.A.).

Astin (1974) found that persistence in college is directly related to relationships with faculty and peers. The group of students who were admitted through the Gateway program consisted of all first generation students, which meant they may have needed more support. The Gateway Program provides support for its students by hosting mandatory weekly study tables, and having mandatory weekly intrusive advising with a Gateway Advisor. The group of students who enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice consisted of individuals who were heavily involved on campus and all held leadership positions in their organizations. They also established friendships in their first semester with their EIU 1111 classmates. The group of individuals that did not enroll in EIU 1111 had a lot in common with the participants that did enroll in the course. With the exception on one individual, the students that did not enroll in EIU 1111 still interacted with faculty and staff on a regular basis outside of the classroom and participated in registered student organizations.

Each group of interview participants had struggles with his transition to college only one participant described their transition as smooth. Pierce, Sarason, and Sarason (1996) believe that social support is a valuable resource for coping. Although the students that chose not to enroll in EIU 1111 did not have a formal transition program, two of them found the help that they needed.

Mitch found his support for transition through STRONG, a mentor program for African American males, while Jordan relied on the older students in his residence hall to help him out.

Of the participants that did not enroll in EIU 1111, not one of them would change their mind in hindsight about taking the course. The participants that enrolled in EIU 1111 by choice or by requirement for admittance through the Gateway program all had positive thoughts and feelings towards the course. The students found the course to be instrumental in assisting with their transition to EIU. It is important to note that with the exception of Keith (did not enroll in EIU 1111) each interview participant is still satisfied with their decision to attend EIU.

#### Conclusions

There was no statistical significance for any descriptive statistic test run. Although research has indicated that a freshman year seminar is beneficial for students, there is no evidence of a significant impact for African American males. Concomitantly, there were not many differences in responses to interview protocols between the interview participants in all three groups. Conclusions drawn from the present study are as follows:

1. It is extremely important for African American males to get involved in registered student organizations.
2. The participants that did not enroll in EIU 1111 were equally able to adapt to the academic demands of Eastern Illinois University and become as successful as their peers who did enroll in EIU111.
3. Faculty and staff interactions or mentor programs played a large role in the success of African American males at Eastern Illinois University.
4. Peer support is important for African American males on this predominately white college campus.

## Recommendations

### *Student Affairs Practitioners:*

1. With the exception of one participant from the individual interviews, all participants had interactions with faculty and staff outside of the classroom. It is important as student affairs practitioners to seek out opportunities to get involved with students (i.e., advise an organization, become a mentor). Student affairs administrators, as often as possible, should remove themselves from the podium or their desk to allow students to connect with them on more personal levels.
2. Work with Academic Affairs professionals to constantly adapt a first year seminar curriculum to meet the needs of the ever-changing student populations.
3. Conduct a focus group with African American males to determine what they need to be successful students.

### *Future Researchers*

1. The present study only examined African American males at Eastern Illinois University. Future researchers should examine African American males from multiple institutions.
2. The present study did not take into account any life experiences that the participants may have had prior to their freshman year of college. It is recommended that aspects of their lives prior to enrolling at the university be taken into account.
3. It may be beneficial to interview students in the second semester of their sophomore year regarding their experiences in EIU 1111. This will have given them time to adapt to a variety of aspects of the institution while their first year experiences are still fresh in their minds.



4. Examine family dynamics of African American males and the impact that family dynamics have on the college success of African American males.
5. This study examined differences in students that enrolled in EIU 1111 and those that did not enroll in EIU 1111. It would be beneficial to further examine the thoughts and perceptions of a larger sample of those that did enroll in this first year seminar.
6. This study did not take in account self perceptions of the participants. Future research should examine the self-efficacy, self-esteem, and sense of belonging of African American males on a predominately white campus.
7. Socioeconomic status was not taken into account for this study, but should be looked at in future research.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

January 20, 2010

Brandon Thompson

Counseling and Student Development

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, "Impact of First Year Seminar on the Success of African American Males Attending Eastern Illinois University" for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has Approved this research protocol following an Expedited Review procedure. IRB review has determined that the protocol involves no more than minimal risk to subjects and satisfies all of the criteria for approval of research.

This protocol has been given the IRB number 10-005. You may proceed with this study from 1/20/2010 to 1/19/2011. You must submit Form E, Continuation Request, to the IRB by 12/19/2010 if you wish to continue the project beyond the approval expiration date.

This approval is valid only for the research activities, timeline, and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any changes to this protocol be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board  
c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
Telephone: 581-8576  
Fax: 217-581-7181  
Email: [eiuirb@www.eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@www.eiu.edu)

Upon completion of your research project, please submit Form G, Completion of Research Activities, to the IRB, c/o the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

Thank you for your assistance, and the best of success with your research.

John Best, Chairperson  
Institutional Review Board  
Telephone: 581-6412  
Email: [jbbest@eiu.edu](mailto:jbbest@eiu.edu)

Appendix B

Tables

Table 1

*T-Test, Differences in GPA By Enrolling in EIU 1111 vs. Not Enrolling in EIU 1111*

	<u>GPA</u>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
EIU 1111 Enrollment	2.08 (.950)	.266	247
No EIU 1111 Enrollment	2.12 (.83)	.251	116.87

Table 2

*One-way Anova, GPA by EIU 1111 Classification*

	<u>GPA</u>	<i>F</i>	<i>n</i> <sup>2</sup>
No EIU 1111	2.12 (.95)		
Boost Student	1.91 (.82)		
Gateway Student	2.04 (.82)		
Voluntary EIU 1111 Enrollment	2.14 (.83)		

Table 3

*One-way Anova, GPA vs. EIU 1111 Status*

	GPA	F	n <sup>2</sup>
No EIU 1111	2.12 (.95)		
Gateway and Boost Students	2.02 (.82)		
Voluntary EIU 1111	2.13 (.83)		

Table 4

*Chi Square, Fall 2009 Registration Classified by EIU 1111 Enrollment*

Fall 2009 Enrollment	EIU 1111 Enrollment		X <sup>2</sup>
	Yes	No	
Yes	111	40	1.098
No	66	32	



Table 5

*Factorial Logistic Regression, Year of Entry and EIU 1111 As Predictors of Fall 2009 Enrollment*

Predictor	B	SE B	$e^B$
Academic Entry			
2006	-20.94	40201.27	.000
2007	-20.801	40201.27	.000
2008	-20.530	40201.27	.000
EIU 1111 Yes/No	-.271	.289	.762
Constant	21.023	40201.27	1.616E9
$\chi^2$	1.098		
df	1		

Table 6

*T-Test, EIU 1111 Enrollment by ACT Score*

	<u>ACT</u>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
EIU 1111 Enrollment	17.76 (2.21)	9.40	110.893
No EIU 1111 Enrollment	21.17 (2.73)	10.27	247

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction to Potential Participants

Email to potential participants

Hello,

My name is Brandon Thompson and I am a Graduate Student in the College Student Affairs Masters Program at EIU. This year I am conducting my master's thesis research and my subject deals with the impact of EIU 1111 on the college success of African American males. Dr. Karla Sanders from the Center of Academic Success and Achievement gave me your name and I am hoping you would be willing to arrange a time to do an interview with me about your college experiences. Please let me know if you are willing to be a participant in the study. Each participant will be given a coupon for a large pizza from Little Caesars and entered to win a \$20 Walmart gift card.

Thanks,

Brandon

Brandon Thompson  
Graduate Student  
College Student Affairs  
Eastern Illinois University

Appendix D  
Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

- I. Background/Precollege information
  1. Where town are you from?
  2. Why did you choose to attend EIU?
  3. Was EIU your first choice?
  4. How many other institutions did you apply to?
  5. Are you still happy with your decision to come here?
  6. Did your mother or father attend a 4-year college or university?
  
- II. Student Experiences
  - A. Class Experiences
    7. Why did or didn't you choose to enroll in EIU 1111?
    8. What do you feel the purpose of EIU 1111 is?
  
  - B. If the student took EIU 1111
    9. Was your EIU 1111 class taught by 2 instructors or a peer leader and an instructor?
    10. What was your favorite and least favorite aspect of EIU 1111?
    11. Tell me about your experiences with EIU 1111. Which of the following have been most useful so far?
      - a. in-class activities
      - b. textbook(s)
      - c. assignments
      - d. in-class interactions
      - e. out-of-class interactions with your instructor(s) or peers
    12. Did you create long term friendships with any of your EIU 1111 classmates?
    13. How diverse is/was your EIU 1111 class?
    14. In what ways did EIU 1111 provide information on different resources available to students?
  
  - C. If the student did not enroll in EIU 1111
    15. How would you describe your transition to EIU?
    16. What student resources have you used in your time here? How did you find out about them?
    17. In hindsight, would you change your mind about not enrolling in EIU 1111?
  
  - D. Out-of-Class Experiences
    18. Do you interact with faculty and staff outside of the classroom?
    19. What registered student organizations are you involved in?
    20. Do you hold any leadership positions on campus?
    21. What has been the most difficult aspect/biggest challenge of your college experience?

Appendix E  
Consent Form

Consent Form: College Success of African-American Males

I am conducting research on the college success of African American males. I am investigating this because African-American males have been identified as an "at risk" population on university campuses. In order to obtain data for my study, I am asking you and other African American males to participate. If you decide to do this, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview that will be audio recorded. The interview will last between thirty minutes sixty minutes.

There is no physical risk associated with participating in the interview. To keep your identity confidential, your name will be changed when the results are presented. In addition to myself, my thesis advisor Dr. James Wallace will have access to the data obtained from your interview.

By participating in this study you will not receive any direct benefit; however, each participant will receive incentives. If you take part in this project you will receive a free coupon for a large pizza from Little Caesars and be entered to win a \$20 gift card to Wal-Mart. Being a part of this study is entirely up to you. If at any point you wish to discontinue participation in the study you can do so without fear of penalty.

If you want to know more about this study, please contact me at [blthompson@eiu.edu](mailto:blthompson@eiu.edu); or my thesis advisor Dr. James Wallace in the department of Counseling and Student Development at [jawallace@eiu.edu](mailto:jawallace@eiu.edu).

This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Illinois University. If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write the Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL, 61920, Telephone: (217) 581-8576, Email: [eiuirb@www.eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@www.eiu.edu).

I would like to thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this research project. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Brandon Thompson, Graduate Student, Department of Counseling and Student Development

Consent Statement

I agree to participate in this project. I understand what I will have to do and that I can withdraw from participation at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date