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Differences of Freshman Experience Between
Local students and Non-local students

By
Wenyan Glotzbach

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
University Honors Scholars Program
Honors College
and the
College of Arts and Science
East Tennessee State University

Dedication

I am thankful to my Thesis/Career Mentor **Dr. Richards (Professor, Dept. Of Media and Communication)** College of Arts and Science, for her valuable guidance, encouragement, and co-operation during the course of writing this thesis and its presentation.

I am also thankful to **Dr. Karen Kornweibel (Director of Honors and Midway Scholars, the Honors College Associate Professor, English)** Honors College, who provided me answers and support helping me complete the thesis and its presentation more smoothly and successfully.

I am very grateful to **Dr. Mike Hoff (Associate VP and Chief Planning Officer)**, for his providing me the data set and be my reader.

I dedicate my dissertation work to my parents. Thank you, **mom** and **dad**, for supporting me during my whole learning career and loving me unconditionally since I was born. I love seeing the proudness in your eyes when you see my achievements. You also are not afraid to tell me that it is ok to fail, just try to learn from it and not to make the same mistakes repeatedly. We do not say “love you” much to each other, it is a cultural thing. However, I want to tell you that I hear it loud and clear every time I look into your eyes, every time you prepare me a meal, every time we have a conversation, I want to tell you: I LOVE YOU!

Background

From a university point of view, just like what Dr. Melanie Richards said in one of her conference presentations that in the business world, it is well-known that customer experience is increasingly critical for success. Many big companies such as Apple, Google and Marriott are really focusing on customer experience. This concept does not just apply in the business world, it is also true for colleges and universities. The difference is that freshmen experience is the answer to universities instead of customer experience. For businesses, revenue, and employee satisfaction are ways of measuring success. In this case, student retention would be a good measurement for college and university success.

From a student perspective, it is hard for high school graduates to find well-paid jobs with the job market we have today. It is often challenging even for college graduates. Not surprisingly, people are seeking higher and higher education in order to find preferable jobs. According to Michigan State University, the expected lifetime earnings for someone without a high school degree is \$973,000; with a high school diploma, \$1.3 million; with a bachelor's degree, \$2.3 million; with a master's degree, \$2.7 million; and with a doctoral, \$3.3 million (PhD Salaries and Lifetime Earnings, n.d.). The data shows that it is important to pursue and complete a college education if higher earnings are desired. However, according to the Center for the Study of College Student Retention, nearly 50% of students entering higher education will not earn a degree (Walker, Tietjen-Smith, 2009). So, it becomes crucial to increase students' retention for higher education institutions.

At East Tennessee State University, Dr. Melanie Richards from Department of Media and Communication and Dr. Mike Hoff, Chief Planning Officer for ETSU are trying to find answers on how to increase the retention rate as well. Their research topic is The Freshman Student Experience and Impact on Retention. So, an online survey was designed by Dr. Melanie Richards and Dr. Mike Hoff and then distributed to all first-time freshman at ETSU in order to collect enough data to better understand the relationship between freshman experience and retention. The collection of the survey data was completed successfully by the end of spring semester 2018.

Review of Pertinent Literature

Since the 1970s, colleges and universities had increasingly recognized declining rates of student retention as a critical issue (Strommer, 1993). Student retention, especially in the first and second years of study, has become a challenging problem for higher education institutions. It is also a major concern for all postsecondary institutions (Tinton, 1993). Studies show that approximately 57% of all college dropouts left college before the beginning of the second year (Townsend, 2007). More than one-half of the students who drop out of college do so in their first year (Cox, Schmitt, Bobrowski, and Graham, 2005). This is why it is important to pay close attention to freshman experience.

Student attrition is costly for both the university and the student. First of all, universities lose tuition dollars, and also the cost of the time and energy they have already invested in recruiting, teaching, counseling, housing, and record keeping for the students. Students lose not only their immediate out of pocket expenses, but also future earnings potential as well as psychological health (Mangum, Baugher, Winch, and Varanelli, 2005). It is even worse for students who had to get student loans in order to be able to pay the tuition. Trying to pay off the student loans is hard enough even for college graduates who make relatively better money than students who did not earn a college degree. It is only imaginable how hard it would be for students who quit college with a student loan. Psychologically, they would suffer more because of the financial situation they are in.

We have established that retention is important for colleges and universities. What are some of the factors that affect the retention? Many studies have shown that retention rate is highly

related with freshmen entering characteristics, such as race, gender, first-generation college student, etc. Some studies have shown that Asian students are more likely to re-enroll the second year (83%) than white students (66%) (Nora, Barlow & Crisp, 2005). Only 11% of first-generation college students complete their degrees while 50% of students whose parents finished college do. 61% of female students finish college while 56% of male students do (Aud et al., 2013). Transfer students are less likely to complete college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Full-time students are more likely to finish school compared to part-time students (Marti, 2008).

Many studies state that student precollege cognitive measures such as high school GPA and test scores (ACT, SAT) have a certain predictive value in student retention. Students with above-average high school grades and higher income students showed significantly higher degrees of initial commitment to their institutions (Roos, 2012).

Types of the university is another factor that affects retention rate. 65% students complete degrees in private non-profit 4-year institutions; 57% students complete in public 4-year institutions; 42% students complete in for-profit 4-year institutions; 31% students complete in 2-year institutions (Aud et al., 2013). The same study also states that the more selective these institutions, the higher their retention rate is. Statistics shown that among full-time undergraduate students who enrolled for the first time in 2010, 79% of students at four-year institutions enrolled the following year at that same institution, while 60% of students at two-year institutions did so (Aud et al., 2013).

However, some of the researches state that students' experiences while in college (Community Service Learning, full-time enrollment, and academic performance) have a stronger

effect on the likelihood of re-enrollment than students' entering characteristics (age, gender, and race) (Reed, 2015). What are the aspects that make up the freshmen experience? They are academics, economics, and involvement/activities, there are several supplemental aspects under involvement/activities such as peer connections, faculty connections, and family relationships. In addition, advisement is also a big part of the experience (Reinhart, 2000).

Lots of factors that affect the retention rate are not controllable by colleges and universities such as entering characteristics or students' high school GPA. What colleges and universities can help improve is freshman's first-year experience. And that is what Dr. Richards and Dr. Hoff's study is focusing on: the relationship between freshmen experience and retention.

Research Question

With the data set that Dr. Melanie Richards and Dr. Mike Hoff have provided, I want to focus on the experience part of the study. The research question for my study is: **what are the differences of freshman experience between local students and non-local students?** In this study, **Local Students (LS)** are defined as students who lived within two hours' drive from East Tennessee State University's Main Campus (1276 Gilbreath Dr, Johnson City, TN 37614) before they started their education at ETSU. **Non-Local Students (NLS)** are defined as students who lived further than two hours' drive from ETSU Main Campus (1276 Gilbreath Dr, Johnson City, TN 37614) before they started their education at ETSU.

My hypothesis is that LS have a better freshman experience than NLS. The data set from Dr. Richards and Dr. Hoff is used for the analysis to test if my hypothesis is going to be accepted or rejected. There are different aspects of the freshman experiences that are going to be compared.

Methods

This research is IRB approved. I am assigned to the study as a research assistant for the purpose of this analysis on October 2018. An online survey was designed by Dr. Richards and Dr. Mike Hoff. The survey contains various types of questions, such as open-end questions (describe your freshman experience), multi-answered questions (what are some of the service/programs that you have used during your freshman year?), and scaled questions. (based on your recollection of the orientation, how would you rate this function at ETSU. 1=very poor to 10=very good)

The strategy of the survey designing is to get as many different perspectives of freshman experiences as possible so that the university can have a better understanding of what they can possibly do in all aspects to improve freshman experience which would lead to higher retention. As seen in the completed survey sample in the Appendices, a wide range of questions was asked in the survey.

The questions include services and programs the students have used during their freshman year, format of the classes they took, organizations/activities students have participated, sense of community, orientation experience, academic performance, faculty interactions, class registration process, financial aid process, residential experience, extracurricular activities, is it easy or difficult to make connections, and support from the university to student success.

The survey was programmed in Qualtrics by the Applied Sociological Research Laboratory at ETSU and distributed to all first-time freshman students of ETSU (2050 students received the survey). Then a data set was prepared for analysis after the surveys were completed online. My

study is focusing on data analysis, the tool that is used for data analysis purpose is IBM SPSS—a software package that provides users with statistical analysis, modeling, predictive, and survey research tools used in many of research activities (Research Resources: SPSS, n.d.).

Some of the data preparation methods that are used in this study are data cleaning, date recoding to remove variables that are not necessary for the purpose of this study. Data regrouping is also a required method by this study. Some of the variables are regrouped into different segments to show the different outcomes for each segment. In this study, I grouped students into 2 segments by the living distance, LS (Group 1) is coded as 1.00, NLS (Group 2) is coded as 2.00.

For analysis, frequency analysis is used to help users analyze the results and draw conclusions, it is a descriptive statistical method that shows the number of occurrences of each response chosen by the respondents. When using such function, SPSS can also calculate the mean, median, and mode to further help the users (Research Resources: SPSS, n.d.).

Multiple T-tests are also used in this study. The T-test is a hypothesis testing tool that allows testing of an assumption applicable to a population, it is a type of statistic which is used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups (Seth, 2018). See table 1 below.

In this study, T-tests are used when wish to compare scores of a series of survey questions of LS (students who lived within two hours' drive from ETSU Main Campus before they started their education at ETSU) and NLS. (students who lived further than two hours' drive from ETSU Main Campus) With T-test, you will have one independent variable and one dependent variable.

The independent variable, in this case, can only have two levels (local students and non-local students). The dependent variable would be average scores of each survey questions.

The test statistic that t-test produces is called t-value. T-value represents how many standard units the means of the two groups are apart. In this study, the difference of the mean scores to certain survey question between LS and NLS that you might find in the sample might have occurred by chance, or it might exist in the population. So, if the t-value is less or equal to .01, the likelihood of getting the difference you found by chance would be less or equal than 1 in 100 times. You would say that it is unlikely that the results occurred by chance and the difference you found in the sample exists in the sample population that was drawn (T-Test, n.d.).

Another method that we used in this study is Correlation Analysis. Correlation Analysis compares two (sometimes more) variables to see if they are related to each other. The correlation coefficient (r) is a measure of linear association between two variables. R is always between -1 and +1. Another term that needs to be introduced is the significance of the relationship (p) (Week 2: Judicial Review & Limited Government, n.d.). We consider the relationship significant when p -level is smaller than .05. If $r > 0$ and p -level is less than .05, we say there is a positive correlation. With a positive correlation, one variable goes up, the other one goes up as well.

If $r < 0$ and p -level is smaller than .05, we say there is a negative correlation. With a negative correlation, one variable goes up, the other one goes down. $r = +1$ indicates that two variables are perfectly related in a positive linear sense, $r = -1$ indicates that two variables are perfectly related in a negative linear sense, and $r = 0$ indicates that there is no linear relationship between the two variables (Ptolemy, n.d.). More often, we would get a correlation coefficient that is between -1

and +1. The larger the correlation coefficient, the stronger the relationship. Different from R-value, the smaller the p-level, the more significant the relationship.

Results

After running multiple T-test, results are shown below in Table 1. Question 6, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29 are all scaled questions, students were asked to give answers based on a scale of 1-10 for these questions:

- Q6-how likely would you be to recommend ETSU to a high school senior? (1=not at all likely and 10=extremely likely)
- Q16-how would you rate the orientation experience? (1=very poor to 10=excellence) Q18-how would you rate their overall academic experience at ETSU?
- Q19-how would you rate their class-related faculty interactions at ETSU?
- Q20-how would you rate the process to register for courses at ETSU?
- Q21-How would you rate ETSU's support in the Financial Aid process?
- Q22-how would you rate the residential experience provided at ETSU?
- Q23-how would you rate the extracurricular activities provided at ETSU?
- Q24-how easy or difficult has it been for you to make new connections with others in the University community at ETSU? 1=very difficult to 10=very easy)
- Q25-how would you rate the support provided by ETSU for students from your area?
- Q26-how would you rate the overall support for student success provided by ETSU? 1=very poor to 10=excellent)
- Q27-what is your overall satisfaction with ETSU? (1=very dissatisfied to 10=very satisfied)
- Q28-to what extent has ETSU met your expectations? (1=falls short to 10=exceeds)

- Q29-how well does ETSU compare to the ideal college experience? (1=not very close to 10=very close) Of course, the higher the scores are, the better the experiences the respondents have.

Table 1 is populated by IBM SPSS Statistics according to the data set, we have the results of compared means for 1.00 (LS) and 2.00 (NLS). It is shown that the mean score for 1.00 (LS) is always higher than (NLS) except Q24. This really had me thinking, “why is that? What is the question again?” The question is “How easy or difficult has it been for you to make new connections with others in the University community at ETSU? 1=very difficult to 10=very easy” if my hypothesis is correct, LS should have a better score on this question especially than NLS, it should be easier for them to make new connections since they are from the area, share the same culture and customs. What is the problem then?

As I was looking more closely to question 24, I have formed a hypothesis of the reason that LS have a lower score than NLS. My hypothesis is that students might have gotten confused by the wording of this question. Here is why: at the beginning of the question, it says, “how EASY or DIFFICULT has it...” and at the end of the question, it says “1=very DIFFICULT to 10=very EASY”. The key is the order of EASY and DIFFICULT. DIFFICULT appeared after EASY at the beginning of the question, however, then it appeared in front of EASY at the end of the question. I can see how students might have given the wrong data because of such issue.

Besides Q24, every other question follows the same pattern which is that LS have a better score than NLS. What it means is that LS has better freshman experiences than NLS in all these described areas such as academic performance, faculty relationships, and university support, etc.

However, did this result occur by chance, or it might exist in the population? As shown in the second part of table 1, it shows that Q6, Q22, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q28 all have significant differences, the results for these questions did not occur by chance, it might exist in the population.

Table 1

	Grouped Distance newer	
	1.00 Mean	2.00 Mean
Q6	8.32	7.94
Q16	7.54	7.45
Q18	7.95	7.69
Q19	7.89	7.61
Q20	7.51	7.21
Q21	6.98	6.78
Q22	7.48	6.57
Q23	8.08	7.81
Q24	6.83	7.16
Q25	7.80	7.14
Q26	7.94	7.43
Q27	8.35	7.95
Q28	7.77	7.37
Q29	7.60	7.32

Comparisons of Column Means^a

	Grouped Distance newer	
	1.00 (A)	2.00 (B)
Q6	B	
Q16		
Q18		
Q19		
Q20		
Q21		
Q22	B	
Q23		
Q24		
Q25	B	
Q26	B	
Q27	B	
Q28	B	
Q29		

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.
Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): .10

The results are good, it supports my hypothesis. How can I have a stronger argument about my finding? Dr. Richards suggested running some correlations analysis to see if there are some correlation between these survey questions. This will help us understand the relationship between different aspects of freshman experience. How can one experience affect the other?

Several correlation tests were run. It is found that most of the question are significantly correlated with each other (with a significant level of less than .001). How can we benefit from such finding? The strategy is to identify the independent variable and dependent variable, which factor leads the other. For example, question 6(likelihood of recommending ETSU to high school seniors) and question 27(overall satisfaction rate) are chosen to be paired for correlations (results are shown in table 3 below), as well as question 21(residential experience) and question 27(overall satisfaction rate). (results are shown in table 4 below)

In table 3, which one is the independent variable, and which one is the dependent variable? Q6 would be the dependent variable and Q27 would be the independent variable. In other words, changes of the score of Q27 will result in changes in the score of Q6. In table 4, Q27 then would become the dependent variable while Q21 is the independent variable. Changes of Q21 then leads to the changes in the score of Q27.

Table 3 and table 4 state that there are strong positive correlations between these two pairs of questions. Like mentioned in the method section that the bigger the correlation coefficient (r value, Pearson Correlation), the stronger the relationship is. Table 4 suggests that the correlation between question 6 and question 27 is stronger. (Pearson Correlation: .758) A strong positive correlation question 21 and question 27 means that the better residential experience students have more satisfied they are going to be with the university; a strong positive correlation between question 27 and question 6, means that if students are more satisfied with the university, they are more than likely to recommend ETSU to high school seniors.

Table 2

		Correlations	
		Q27	Q21
Q27	Pearson Correlation	1	.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	479	471
Q21	Pearson Correlation	.431**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	471	473

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3

		Correlations	
		Q6	Q27
Q6	Pearson Correlation	1	.758**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	478	476
Q27	Pearson Correlation	.758**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	476	479

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The next step is to do more correlation analysis and implement the distance variable as well. For this purpose, table 4 (see below) is populated. From an overall view of the sample population, table 4 states that question 21, 22, and 26 all have a strong positive correlation with question 27. Question 27 and question 6 have an even stronger positive correlation. What does all of this mean? It means that the better they feel about the Financial Aid process, residential experience, and the support from the university for students' success, the more satisfied they are with the overall experience with ETSU, which would make them highly likely to recommend ETSU to high school seniors.

What does this mean when we add the new variable DISTANCE (named as NEWSTDISTANCE in the table above) to the mix? Table 5 suggests that Q22 and Q26 have a negative correlation with such variable (NEWSTDISTANCE) which means the smaller the distance is, the better they feel about the residential experience, and the support from the university

for students' success, the more satisfied they are with the overall experience with ETSU, which would make them highly likely to recommend ETSU to high school seniors.

With the negative correlation coefficient, the closer it is to -1, the stronger the relationship is. Question 22 (related to students' residential experiences) has the strongest negative relationship with the distance variable (r-value/Pearson Correlation=-.0213). It suggests that the closer (smaller distance) the students lived before they started their education at ETSU, the better they rated their residential experiences on campus. It is also the most significant negative relationship (p-level/sig. level=.002).

The next most significant and correlated negative relationship is between Q26 and the distance variable which is the relationship between support from the university for students success and NEWSTDISTANCE (r value=-.131, p value=.011). It means that the closer the respondents lived, they feel the better support they received from the University for their Successes.

All the findings suggest that for improving freshman experience for NLS (students who lived further than 2 hours away before they started their education at East Tennessee State University), **residential experience** and **university support for student success** are two most significant aspects of freshman experience ETSU should pay most attention to.

Table 4

		Correlations					
		Q6	Q22	Q26	Q27	NEWESTDISTANCE	Q21
Q6	Pearson Correlation	1	.469**	.563**	.758**	-.097	.353**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.062	.000
	N	478	279	474	476	376	470
Q22	Pearson Correlation	.469**	1	.438**	.546**	-.213**	.346**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.002	.000
	N	279	281	278	280	207	276
Q26	Pearson Correlation	.563**	.438**	1	.689**	-.131*	.507**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.011	.000
	N	474	278	477	476	374	470
Q27	Pearson Correlation	.758**	.546**	.689**	1	-.114*	.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.027	.000
	N	476	280	476	479	376	471
NEWESTDISTANCE	Pearson Correlation	-.097	-.213**	-.131*	-.114*	1	-.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.062	.002	.011	.027		.458
	N	376	207	374	376	377	373
Q21	Pearson Correlation	.353**	.346**	.507**	.431**	-.039	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.458	
	N	470	276	470	471	373	473

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

With the findings of the analysis, how can we apply them to define the important aspects of the freshman experiences, and what the university can do with the information to help students improve their freshman experience especially NLS? From the analysis, we can say that the residential experience and university's support for students' success is two big variables that affect the freshman experience between LS and NLS.

When students are in residence on a college campus, their learning extends far beyond the classroom. They learn to appreciate the “other.” They encounter new perspectives and beliefs through living with students representing different races, cultures, and lifestyles, and they develop a fuller understanding of diversity as a result. And they form deep friendships that will last throughout life (Randall, 2013). Improving students’ residential experience is not just important to universities retention, it is more like a valuable lesson that will be beneficial for a lifetime.

We learned from the analysis findings that it is more difficult for NLS to have an excellent residential experience. It is crucial for universities to find out what they could do to improve such experience. There could be different aspects of the residential experience that is affecting the overall residential experience, therefore, a survey needed to be designed and distributed to all the students who live on campus for further study. A few convenient samples could be interviewed in order to gain some insightful information about the freshman residential experience for NLS.

The other factor that affects the freshman experience between LS and NLS is universities’ support for students’ success. According to Forbes, the Association of Public and Land-Grant

Universities (APLU) launched a major initiative called “Powered By Publics: Scaling Student Success”. The project involves a national collaboration comprised of 130 public institutions that have committed to improving college access, closing student achievement gaps and dramatically increasing the number of undergraduate degrees that are awarded over the next decade” (Nietzel, 2018). ETSU could join such project or trying to apply some of the strategies that APLU is using to operate such a huge project.

Recommendations

How can the university improve the residential experience with NLS? I have interviewed a few convenient samples, and here are some of their quotes to give us a better understanding of the freshman residential experience for NLS.

One student says: “I wish the maintenance wouldn’t come to my door at 7:30 every time.” I recommend that there could be some kind of communication between RA and student residents. They could have built a maintenance schedule according to students' preference. For example, some students have early morning classes, so they would not mind having their stuff fixed in the early morning. Then the maintenance workers will also have time in the later of the day to work on other dorms where the timing would work better for the residents.

Another student says: “My heating was broken, and it took them forever to fix it! I wish there is a better communication with the RA and the student residents.” This is another communication problem. I suggest that there should be an instant message system to help to build a more efficient communication between RA and the residents.

“It is really cramped. Parking is really bad for most of the buildings, but they won’t tell you that in advance.” Another student says. The parking problem should be pointed out during the tour and providing the possible solution to such problem instead of avoiding the problem. Building more parking space will be a bigger project and require more time planning and funds, however, it is highly recommended. It is going to be beneficial in many ways.

Another problem that has been mentioned in the interviews is related to dining. One student states: “the meal is 1718 per semester for a 7-day plan, not many dietary options, they do have a dietary office, but you can hardly get hold of them.” The dining experience is an important part of the residential experience. Many studies have shown that happiness and food are highly connected (Happiness and Food, n.d.). The pleasure of eating changes the brain chemistry, better food makes people more satisfied. Eating is one of the great sensual pleasures in life, so a greater focus with on-campus dining experience should be necessary for improving students' residential experience. As mentioned by the student, there are students who are vegetarians or vegans, a variety of the food offered should be considered as well.

It does seem like they have some struggles with their residence on campus. Many actions could be taken to improve some of their residential experience. It seems like many problems they had was related to communication. So, better communication might be the key to success.

As mentioned in the Discussion above, I have designed a sample survey for gaining more information about students' residential experience. (see Appendices) A 2015 survey result from the University of South Florida Housing & Residential Education department is referenced for this survey designing (University of South Florida, n.d.). This survey is focusing on students' dining experience, (the marketplace) students' attitude towards the safety of the residential hall, does the residential experience enhance their time management and social skills, the feeling of acceptance, etc. More specific tactics should be made according to the survey results.

How can the university improve the level of support for NLS' success? According to Forbes, these are the four strategies that APLU is going to implement: 1, each institution will form a

campus team that is big enough to sustain the development, implementation, and evaluation of student success interventions. 2, universities will be expected to use and share data to monitor student performance and then make decisions about improving outcomes based on those data. 3, participants will focus on restructuring financial aid and increasing the financial literacy of students. 4, a stronger emphasis will be placed on career advising, beginning with the early years (could start freshman year) of students' college experience (Nietzel, 2018). For NLS advising sessions could take place more often since they are further away from home, they might feel less support (especially emotionally). More university support hopefully would balance it out.

Conclusion

In conclusion, freshman experience is fairly important for college and university retention which is why this research is significant. Then the question is: what is the difference of freshman between Local Students and Non-Local Students? The hypothesis is yes, LS have a better freshman experience than NLS. With a series of data analysis, it is shown that there is consistent evidence supporting the hypothesis. Therefore, in this study, I would say that my hypothesis is accepted.

Furthermore, we have found that Residential experience on campus and University support for student success are the two most significant aspects of the freshman experience set the two group apart. It means that ETSU should really focus on these two areas for improving NLS' freshman experience.

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Appendices

Appendix A..... Freshman Experience Fall 2017

Appendix B.....Residential Experience Fall 2018

Appendix A

Freshman Experience Fall 2017

Start of Block: Consent Statement

Intro Thank you for your interest in the ETSU Freshman Experience survey. Before you start the survey, there are a few things we would like you to know.

The study is officially called the Freshman Student Experience and Impact on Retention study. Since this study deals with your experiences as a Freshman the risks are minimal, though some stress could be caused if you recall and provide information about stressful experiences. However, you may also feel better after you have had the chance to express yourself about these experiences. This study may benefit you or others by enabling ETSU to improve Freshman experiences at the University going forward.

Your confidentiality will be protected as best we can. Since we are using technology no guarantees can be made about the interception of data sent over the Internet by any third parties, just like with emails. Qualtrics has security features that will be used- for example, IP addresses will not be collected. Although your rights and privacy will be protected, the East Tennessee State University (ETSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and people working on this research (myself and Dr. Michael Hoff in Institutional Research) can view the study records. At the end of the survey, you will also be asked if you approve of your responses being connected to your student record to better improve Freshman experiences at ETSU. We will be looking to understand how experience affects future enrollment status and student success (specifically, by connecting your survey responses to your enrollment status from your student record). You can approve or refuse this option.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to take part in this study. You can quit at any time. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer or you can exit the online survey form if you want to stop completely.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact Melanie Richards, at richardsmb@etsu.edu. Also, you may call the chairperson of the IRB at ETSU at (423) 439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone who is not with the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439-6002.

Clicking the AGREE button below indicates

- I have read the above information
- I agree to volunteer^[SEP]
- I am at least 18 years old

****NOTE: Unseen questions by respondent are coded as (-997). Seen, but unanswered questions by respondent are coded as (-99).**

Consent

- I AGREE (1)
- I DO NOT AGREE (2)

End of Block: Consent Statement

Start of Block: Block 2

Info1

Thank you for participating in our survey! We are hoping to learn more about your experiences as a Freshman at ETSU in order to improve the student experience for you and others going forward. This survey should only take 5-10 minutes of your time.

Q5

Briefly, how would you describe your first-year experience thus far at ETSU?

Q6

How likely would you be to recommend ETSU to a high school senior evaluating college options?

(0=Not at all likely and 10=Extremely likely)

- 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7
 - 8
 - 9
 - 10
-

Q7

What format of classes did you take at ETSU?

- Online only (1)
- On campus only (Kingsport and/or ETSU) (2)
- Both on campus and online (3)

Q8 is broken up into 11 variables (listed below). A (1) in these variables indicates that it was selected.

Please select any services/programs that you have used while at ETSU. (check all that apply).

- Q8_1 Adult Commuter & Transfer Services (1)
- Q8_2 Career Center (career counseling) (1)
- Q8_3 Counseling Center (mental health) (1)
- Q8_4 Center for Academic Achievement (tutoring) (1)
- Q8_5 Center for Physical Activity (CPA) (1)
- Q8_6 Disability Services (1)
- Q8_7 Financial Aid (1)
- Q8_8 Health Clinic (1)
- Q8_9 Multi-cultural Affairs (1)
- Q8_10 On-campus Support Groups (1)
- Q8_11 I did not use any of the above services (1)

Q9 is broken up into 12 variables (listed below). A (1) in these variables indicates that it was selected. Q9_12_text is the "Other" text entry box.

In which of the following organizations/activities have you participated this Fall, if any?

(Check all that apply.)

- Q9_1 Honor Society (1)
- Q9_2 Fraternity/Sorority (1)
- Q9_3 Intramural, club, or University recreational athletics (1)
- Q9_4 Intercollegiate athletics (1)
- Q9_5 Music/theater/art (1)
- Q9_6 Community service (1)
- Q9_7 Religious organizations (1)
- Q9_8 Professional or career related organizations (1)
- Q9_9 Academic clubs (1)
- Q9_10 Ethnic and/or cultural centers or events (1)
- Q9_11 Student media (newspaper, radio, TV or yearbook) (1)
- Q9_12 Other : (1)
- Q9_12_Text _____(Text Entry)_____

Q10

Which statement best describes your feelings on the sense of community at ETSU?

- There is a strong sense of community, I feel like I belong. (1)
- There is a strong sense of community, but I don't feel like I belong. (2)
- There is not a strong sense of community at ETSU, but I still feel like I belong. (3)
- There is not a strong sense of community, and I do not feel like I belong. (4)

Q11

Did you live in an ETSU residence this Fall semester (dorms, ETSU student apartments, etc)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q12

Where did you live prior to attending ETSU?

- I did not live in the United States (2)
- Alabama (3)
- Alaska (4)
- Arizona (5)

- Arkansas (6)
- California (7)
- Colorado (8)
- Connecticut (9)
- Delaware (10)
- Florida (11)
- Georgia (12)
- Hawaii (13)
- Idaho (14)
- Illinois (15)
- Indiana (16)
- Iowa (17)
- Kansas (18)
- Kentucky (19)
- Louisiana (20)
- Maine (21)
- Maryland (22)
- Massachusetts (23)
- Michigan (24)
- Minnesota (25)

- Mississippi (26)
- Missouri (27)
- Montana (28)
- Nebraska (29)
- Nevada (30)
- New Hampshire (31)
- New Jersey (32)
- New Mexico (33)
- New York (34)
- North Carolina (35)
- North Dakota (36)
- Ohio (37)
- Oklahoma (38)
- Oregon (39)
- Pennsylvania (40)
- Rhode Island (41)
- South Carolina (42)
- South Dakota (43)
- Tennessee (44)
- Texas (45)

- Utah (46)
- Vermont (47)
- Virginia (48)
- Washington (49)
- West Virginia (50)
- Wisconsin (51)
- Wyoming (52)

Display This Question:

If Where did you live prior to attending ETSU? = I did not live in the United States

Q13

Where did you live?

Display This Question:

If Where did you live prior to attending ETSU? = Tennessee

Q14 is broken up into 2 variables (listed below). The numbers in these variables indicates how many minutes or hours.

Approximately how far away did you live from ETSU?

Q14_1 _____ Hours

Q14_2 _____ Minutes

DistanceFinal_REC is a variable that I created for total distance measured by hour. For example: 1hr and 30min becomes 1.5hr in this variable.

Q15

Did you attend freshman orientation?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Display This Question:

If Did you attend freshman orientation? = Yes

Q16

Based on your recollection of orientation, how would you rate this function at ETSU? (1 = Very poor to 10 = Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Orientation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Display This Question:
If Did you attend freshman orientation? = Yes

Q17

What could have improved orientation in your opinion?

Q18

How would you rate your overall academic experience at ETSU this Fall? (This question is related to perceived quality of the education you have received and includes perception of courses, professors, classroom environment, etc.) (1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall Academic Experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19

More specifically, how would you rate your class-related faculty interactions at ETSU this Fall? (1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Class-related Faculty Interactions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20

How would you rate the process to register for courses at ETSU? (1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Registration process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21

How would you rate ETSU's support in the Financial Aid process? (1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Financial Aid process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Display This Question:

If Did you live in an ETSU residence this Fall semester (dorms, ETSU student apartments, etc)? =

Yes

Q22

How would you rate the residential experience provided at ETSU? (1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Residential Experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Display This Question:

If In which of the following organizations/activities have you participated in this Fall, if any?

SelectedChoicesCount Is Greater Than or Equal to 1

Q23

Generally, how would you rate the extracurricular activities provided at ETSU?

(1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Extracurricular Activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q24

How easy or difficult has it been for you to make new connections with others in the University community at ETSU? (1=Very difficult to 10=Very easy)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Making new connections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q25

How would you rate the support provided by ETSU for students from your area?

(1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Support for students from your area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q26

How would you rate the overall support for student success provided by ETSU?

(1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Support for student success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q27

What is your overall satisfaction with ETSU? (1=Very dissatisfied to 10=Very satisfied)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall Satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q28

To what extent has ETSU met your expectations? (1=Falls short to 10=Exceeds)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Meets your expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q29

How well does ETSU compare to the ideal college experience? (1=Not very close to 10=Very close)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ideal college experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q30

Think about all the different areas that make up your ETSU experience. Please provide feedback on any areas of your ETSU experience that could be improved in the box below.

Q31

Do you plan to return to ETSU in the Spring?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Undecided (3)

Display This Question:

If Do you plan to return to ETSU in the Spring? = Yes

Q32

What experiences led to your decision to return to ETSU?

Display This Question:

If Do you plan to return to ETSU in the Spring? = No

Q33

What experiences led to your decision to not return to ETSU?

Display This Question:

If Do you plan to return to ETSU in the Spring? = No

Q34

Do you plan to attend another institution in the Spring?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If Do you plan to attend another institution in the Spring? = Yes

Q35

What institution do you plan to attend in the Spring?

Q36

Is there anything else that you would like for us to know about your first semester here at ETSU?

IR_Consent

In order for your survey response to have the most impact it might be necessary to understand more about your student record at ETSU in order to gain a better understanding of your responses. With your permission, can the Office of Institutional Research at ETSU connect information from your student record to these results in order to better understand responses and actions completed as a result of your experience? The responses will be confidential and will not be used beyond the scope of improving the first-year experience for students at ETSU.

- Yes, they can. (1)
- No, they cannot. (2)

DistanceHours_REC is a variable that I created in order to make the **DistanceFinal_REC** variable. This variable converts the **Q14_1** variable into minutes so that it can be added to **Q14_2** to get total minutes.

Appendix B

Residential Experience Fall 2018

Start of Block: Consent Statement

Intro Thank you for your interest in the ETSU Residential Experience survey. Before you start the survey, there are a few things we would like you to know.

The study is officially called the Student Residential Experience and Impact on Overall Freshman Experience study. Since this study deals with your experiences as a ETSU Resident the risks are minimal, though some stress could be caused if you recall and provide information about stressful experiences. However, you may also feel better after you have had the chance to express yourself about these experiences. This study may benefit you or others by enabling ETSU to improve Residential experiences at the University going forward.

Your confidentiality will be protected as best we can. Since we are using technology no guarantees can be made about the interception of data sent over the Internet by any third parties, just like with emails. Qualtrics has security features that will be used- for example, IP addresses will not be collected. Although your rights and privacy will be protected, the East Tennessee State University (ETSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and people working on this research (myself and Dr. Michael Hoff in Institutional Research) can view the study records. At the end of the survey, you will also be asked if you approve of your responses being connected to your student record to better improve Freshman experiences at ETSU. We will be looking to understand how experience affects future enrollment status and student success (specifically, by connecting your survey responses to your enrollment status from your student record). You can approve or refuse this option.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to take part in this study. You can quit at any time. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer or you can exit the online survey form if you want to stop completely.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact Wenyan Glotzbach, at glotzbachw@etsu.edu. Also, you may call the chairperson of the IRB at ETSU at (423) 439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone who is not with the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439-6002.

Clicking the AGREE button below indicates

- I have read the above information
- I agree to volunteer^[SEP]
- I am at least 18 years old

Consent

I AGREE (1)

I DO NOT AGREE (2)

Info1

Thank you for participating in our survey! We are hoping to learn more about your experiences as a Resident at ETSU in order to improve the student experience for you and others going forward. This survey should only take 5-10 minutes of your time.

Q5

Briefly, how would you describe your residential experience thus far at ETSU?

Q6

How likely would you be to recommend ETSU Residential Hall to other students? (0=Not at all likely and 10=Extremely likely)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Recommend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7

Which statement best describes your feelings on the sense of community at ETSU?

- There is a strong sense of community, I feel like I belong. (1)
- There is a strong sense of community, but I don't feel like I belong. (2)
- There is not a strong sense of community at ETSU, but I still feel like I belong. (3)
- There is not a strong sense of community, and I do not feel like I belong. (4)

Q8

How far away did you live prior to attending ETSU?

- Within 2 hours of drive
 - Without 2 hours of drive
 - International students
-

Approximately how far away did you live from ETSU?

Q8_1 _____ Hours

Q8_2 _____ Minutes

DistanceFinal_REC is a variable that I created for total distance measured by hour. For example: 1hr and 30min becomes 1.5hr in this variable.

Q9 Rate the residential hall safety. (1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10

How likely do you think that ETSU residential experience enhanced your time management skills? (1=not helpful at all to 10=extremely helpful)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Time Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11

How would you rate the residential experience provided at ETSU? (1=Very poor to 10=Excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Residential Experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12

How easy has it been for you to make new connections with others in the Residential Hall at ETSU? (1=not easy at all to 10=extremely easy)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Making new connections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q13

Do you agree that the residential experience has helped you become a better problem solver?

(1=extremely disagree to 10=extremely agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Become better problem solver	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14

How do you rate your feelings of acceptance by others in the residential community?

(1=not accepted to 10=highly accepted)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Acceptance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15

Would you extend your residential experience at ETSU for another year?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Q16

How likely would you recommend ETSU Residential Hall to other students? (1=Not very likely to 10=Very likely)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ideal college experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

IR_Consent

In order for your survey response to have the most impact it might be necessary to understand more about your student record at ETSU in order to gain a better understanding of your responses. With your permission, can the Office of Institutional Research at ETSU connect information from your student record to these results in order to

better understand responses and actions completed as a result of your experience? The responses will be confidential and will not be used beyond the scope of improving the first-year experience for students at ETSU.

- Yes, they can. (1)
- No, they cannot. (2)