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The Influence of Advanced Preparation Program Transition Experiences on Students of Color

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The Influence of Advanced Preparation Program Transition Experiences

on Students of Color

by

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Abstract

This study looks at the impacts of the Advanced Preparation Program (APP) experiences on students of color at St. Cloud State University. Both Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model and Schlossberg's Theory (1981) were utilized to determine and understand what impact various environmental experiences had on student outcomes. Through the application of qualitative research methodologies, interviews were conducted to find recurring themes within the shared experiences. Six emerging themes were utilized to share the experiences of each student, pointing specifically to environmental experiences which impacted their ability to sustain academically. The themes reflected the importance of engagement during the transition process in order to gain a lasting and valuable impression from their experience. The findings from this study indicated that the majority of the participants were positively impacted by their experience in APP, which allowed them to experience continued academic success through their sophomore year. Astin's (1993) I-E-O model highlights the connection between each area and points to the importance of the connections made in order to reach the final outcome.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Throughout my academic career, which began in 2000 at a four-year institution located in the Midwest, I noticed that a number of my peers did not navigate through academia with the same ease as I did. Like me, the majority of my peers and colleagues also wanted to attend and complete their education at a four-year institution, yet many of them, for numerous reasons, did not reach their academic goals. I noticed that many of my peers who were successful had attended a transition program at their university or college. As I continued to further my education, I began to ask myself why my peers who attended transition programs were able to succeed at such a high rate while those without such experiences struggled or did not complete their degrees. I pondered this question as I embarked on my doctoral career.

Having made numerous informal observations and taking full advantage of the research opportunities both in and out of the classroom, I began focusing on students' transition to higher education, and saw a need to explore why students, particularly students of color, were not making the leap to the next level of academia from high school to a four-year institution with relative ease. Moreover, having faced a few of my own academic hurdles, I thought it befitting to explore why some students make it through to degree attainment and what role transition programs play.

My desire to explore this topic and related issues in academia is linked to my appreciation and belief in education, as well as my desire to understand what is behind the success of these particular students. As I embark on this case study, I hope to come to a thorough understanding about the transition to higher education and what allows for

successful outcomes for students of color attending four-year institutions. This research area may pave new paths for how transition programs are viewed and decisions are made. Ultimately, it will work to increase the importance of the topic on many levels and for many people—specifically, policy makers and higher education leaders.

I contacted potential participants of this study as I worked to select those who met the criteria. The hope was that the participants chosen would provide results that allowed the study to serve as a model for research at other four-year institutions with transition programs. The study attempted not only to address the idea that there is a paradox facing students of color, but also to direct the attention of other researchers, policymakers, and educators to the impact such programs have on students of color. Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, and Leonard (2007) mentioned that many studies have provided a myriad of information that seemed useful in theory, but exploring a way to put these same results into practice appeared unattainable. Therefore, I designed a study that was two-fold in its impact in findings: one that (a) would allow students to understand what elements of such programs could be most beneficial to them and (b) would provide an opportunity for administrators to do the same as students but make the necessary changes to accommodate and facilitate a successful transition experience for this population of students.

Today's higher education administrators and faculty are challenged with the task of providing the preparation and support their students need to succeed in higher education (HIED). The concept of transition is one that has grown over the past several decades and continues to gain support from higher education leaders. With growth both in the number of participants and the extent of transition programs, such programs have been able to create

increased opportunities for students of color (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Leticia, 2008). The

changes have allowed transition programs to provide more accurate and meaningful services

to fill the needs of the students. Now, the challenges these students face can be attributed to

the transition they have to make from high school to college (Locks et al., 2008). Because the

changes that come with entering higher education bring on numerous pressures, this transition

can be dramatic and traumatic. Consistently, research concludes that students of color report

having higher educational expectations than their peers, yet they continue to have lower rates

of degree attainment. Adjusting to higher education can be very overwhelming; thus, most

students of color may find themselves failing almost as soon as they begin (Goldsmith, 2004).

Students of color often do not have much knowledge of what it means to be prepared

for college academically or the need for social integration as they no longer have the

specialized support systems that were maintained in high school (American Association of

College & Universities [AAC&U], 2007). Most students may not have the necessary abilities

needed to communicate with college faculty and other higher education personnel or even the

management skills necessary to complete college coursework (Seidman, 2006). The failure to

sustain support systems may be overwhelming to students of color who may have a difficult

time establishing new support networks at their university or college.

Beginning in the 1960s, federal college preparation programs, such as Upward Bound

and Talent Search and Student Support services, were added as part of the 1965 Higher

Education Act (Swail & Perna, 2002). The most recent federal college preparation program is

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), which

was created as part of the Higher Education Act's 1998 reauthorization (Swail & Perna,

2000). GEAR UP consists of partnerships between K-12 schools and higher education institutions. Federal programs play an important role in the college preparation program landscape; however, because they have specific target populations, they fall short of providing access to information and preparation for the vast majority of students (Swail & Perna, 2002). In light of this shortfall, a number of non-governmental programs created within institutions have emerged to bridge the gap.

Examples of non-governmental programs located in the Midwest include the Advanced Preparation Program (APP), established by Multicultural Student Services at St. Cloud State University (St. Cloud State University, 2012), and the College Access Program (CAP), established by Minnesota State University Mankato administration in the 1980s (Minnesota State University Mankato, 2013). Nationwide, growth of other programs similar to those represented in the Midwest has been imminent. Such programs include the following:

- High School Puente was established in California with the goal to increase the four-year college enrollment of students, particularly Latinos (Puente, 2014);

- Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) was developed in 1981 and targets financially middle range students who do not qualify for federal or merit-based college preparation programs (AVID, 2012); and

- "I Have a Dream" program (IHAD) was founded by Eugene Lang and is now funded by the "I Have a Dream" Foundation and Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI). It is a partnership between the University of Southern California

and Los Angeles high schools, which serve predominantly students of color (IHAD, 2010).

Numerous similar programs exist, but these aforementioned programs are among the most notable and widely recognized programs committed to preparing students for college in their regions. Most of these programs incorporate early interventions such as academic counseling, mentoring, and academic preparation for college. Some include funding incentives, scholarships, and other sources of support once students enter the higher education environment (Bailey, 2005). Many programs promote the development of supportive peer and family networks to assist students in planning for and attaining their educational goals. Most non-governmental programs receive funding from private foundations as well as government entities, such as the TRIO programs and the National Science Foundation. These programs serve thousands of students across the United States; however, it is clear from the research on college choice that their efforts have not alleviated the stratification in higher education (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

State programs and policies have also joined the effort to increase the enrollment of a range of students in higher education. State programs often emphasize financial support. A notable one is Georgia's Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) program, a merit-based aid program that covers the cost of tuition, fees, and books if a student attends a public state institution or pays $3,000 toward an in-state private college education. Similar programs exist in a number of states (Technical College System of Georgia, 2005). Other state initiatives emphasize a K-16 approach to education, attempting to ease the transition between high school and college. For example, the Stanford Bridge Project was established to provide

a better understanding of programs embracing the K-16 approach; it focuses on three areas in its assessment of such programs: postsecondary admissions policies, college placement and advising policies in both two and four-year institutions, and state-level policies focused on K–12 and higher education (Kirst & Bracco, 2004). The Stanford researchers evaluated programs in several states and found mixed results regarding their effectiveness.

It has also been stated by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) that in seeking a complete transition experience it is very important for the participant to form relationships. This idea of building community is one that has been proven to be a major player in higher education to date. It is becoming understood that more and more students are becoming dependent on their established peer groups for support. This is especially known of first generation students who sometimes need a little more confirmation that they belong in higher education and handle the academic rigor. Because the transition from high school to college is a difficult one, transition programs are becoming more prevalent on campus (Braxton & McClendon, 2002). The development of transition programs has allowed higher education institutions to accommodate their constantly changing populations through their ability to provide resourceful services.

Due to this growth of transition programs on college campuses, many programs are beginning to take shape and are being influenced to accommodate the many regions they occupy. The common characteristics shared by transition programs across the country are having students reside together on campus, sharing academic experiences, having accessibility to a variety of campus resources, and being able to partake in activities that reinforce the transition program theme (Association of College & University Housing

Officers International, 2004). This study will focus specifically on a transition program that also provides the residential component, for which there is limited research.

The Advanced Preparation Program (APP) is a transition program offered at St. Cloud State University (SCSU), a four-year public institution located in the state of Minnesota and represented within the Minnesota State College and Universities (MnSCU) system. The APP was founded in 1988 as a means of addressing transition issues and college success strategies for all students. While open to all students, the APP operates through the Multicultural Student Services, allowing the program to cater to the large number of students of color who participate. It is designed to acclimate first-year students to the academic, social, and environmental life at St. Cloud State University, as well the St. Cloud community. Students are enrolled in college classes, work directly with a faculty mentor, attend information seminars, and are exposed to campus life (St. Cloud State University, 2012).

The program takes place the summer before the students begin their freshmen year at SCSU and lasts 5 weeks. Students are required to live on campus in dorms and have access to and the support of a trained APP Counselor. Students are enrolled in two general education courses for 6 credit hours: English 184–Introduction to Literature and Community Studies 111–Race in America. There are financial benefits to participating in the APP program. The program cost is $500 and includes tuition and fees for 6 credits, housing and meals, books, and other activities. The typical cost of the aforementioned items would be approximately $2521, resulting in a $2,021 savings. In addition to the credit courses, students are required to attend daily academic support programs and discussions with faculty, staff, and other members of the university. Academic performance is supplemented with daily tutorial

assistance and study table sessions. Academic excellence is stressed during APP, but social needs are just as important. The program provides social experiences in a group setting through weekend field trips and entertainment (St. Cloud State University, 2012).

St. Cloud State University has seen an increase in the population of students of color, which can be directly attributed to the general admissions process and the addition of a division of general studies (St. Cloud State University, 2012). There is and will be a growing need for programs such as the APP, to provide students of color with information about how to survive in higher education. Thus, it is important to provide prospective students of color with a college preparation program to assist them in the transition process.

The Advanced Preparation Program (APP) and many similar transition programs are being developed to assist institutions in growing and supporting the enrollment of diverse populations in higher education. With differing populations including those with diverse cultural, educational, and social class backgrounds, it has become evident that most institutions are committed to meet the needs of their ever changing student population (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). With this shift taking place in higher education, it is becoming alarmingly important that higher education leaders take the initiative and work to make sure that their programs are prepared to provide to the needs of various populations.

Theoretical Framework

For this case study there were three theoretical perspectives that informed the inquiry regarding the impact of the Advanced Preparation Program transition experience on students of color: (a) Astin's (1993) Student Involvement Theory, (b) Critical Race Theory (CRT), and (c) Schlossberg's (1981) and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) Transition Theory.

Within Astin's (1993) Student Involvement Theory was the Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) model. This was also expanded on by Berger and Malaney's (2003) study, which incorporated Astin's model in examining the experiences of transfer students from a two-year to a four-year institution. Critical Race Theory developed the lens that was utilized by the researcher to view the experiences of students of color. This speaks to the power and oppression that is found in our higher education institutions. Schlossberg's (1981) theory was expanded on to be utilized to understand the transition to college life for various student populations. Astin's (1993) Student Involvement Theory and Critical Race Theory will serve as the backdrop highlighting findings as they relate to the impact of APP transition experiences on students of color. The final theory, Schlossbergs (1981) Transition Theory, was utilized in the final chapter as the researcher worked to answer the three primary questions for this study.

Student Involvement Theory

Astin's model (1985) of student involvement is important to the study of students of color and their transition experiences for two reasons. First, Astin's model has served as a foundation upon which institutions of higher education have developed student retention interventions (Seidman, 2006). Second, Astin's model (1985) conceptually refers to "vigilance or time on task" (p. 518) and is important to the study of transition experiences, as these terms are often associated with habits of self-directed learners.

Astin built upon research in student involvement and persistence and developed the Inputs-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) Model as a framework for assessment in higher education (Astin, 1993). The premise of the I-E-O Model (Figure 1) is that educational

(outcomes) are evaluated in terms of the characteristics of students (inputs) in the broad context of the university setting (environment). This model suggests that students are not just actively developed by faculty and university programs, but also passively developed through interactions within the institutional environment (Astin, 1984).
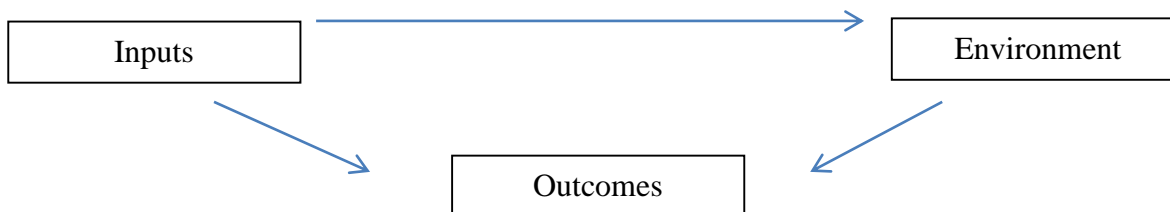
Figure 1. Inputs–Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) Model (Astin, 1985)

The environment component of Astin's model is of particular interest for this study. The single most important environmental factor, according to Astin, is student community (Astin, 1993). Astin stated "the lack of student community has stronger direct effects on student satisfaction with overall college experience than any other environmental measure" (Astin, 1993, p. 351). In order to foster a sense of community for students of color in transition, institutions have developed residential summer bridge programs (Kezar, 2000). According to Hicks (2003), a significant component of student success is how well minority students connect with the institution and its student body. This emphasizes the importance of the environmental component of Astin's to the current study of students of color and their transition experiences.

Critical Race Theory

One of the basic principles of CRT is that race and racism are common and stable in society and education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRT offers perspectives and methodologies that guide researchers efforts to analyze,

transform and identify the cultural and structural characteristics of education that uphold

racial positions that are subordinate and dominant in and out of the classroom. In addition,

CRT "challenges White privilege, rejects notions of 'neutral' research or 'objective'

researchers, and exposes misinformed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of

people of color" (Solórzano & Yosso, p. 26).

Critical Race Theory is based on five prominent tenets: (a) counter-storytelling, (b) the

permanence of racism, (c) whiteness as property, (d) interest convergence, and (e) the critique

of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). For the purposes of this study, counter-storytelling

and the permanence of racism are the tenets of CRT that are the most critical for gaining a

better understanding of the experiences of students of color in regard to transition programs.

Counter-stories are defined as stories that are passed over, overlooked, or frankly not

brought up because they do not align with social norms (Lopez, 2003). Ladson-Billings

(1998) informs scholars that "the 'voice' component [counter-storytelling] of CRT provides a

way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed" (p. 14). In short, counter-

storytelling communicates how the experiences of marginalized groups may differ from those

of Whites or the accepted norm or standard. In this study, students of color qualify as the

marginalized group. In addition, the permanence of racism tenet suggests that racism is a

permanent component of American society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Transition Theory

This study also utilizes Schlossberg's (1981) and the updated Schlossberg et al.'s

(1995) Transition Theory as a theoretical framework. This theory has been used in other

studies to understand the transition to college life for international students, college freshmen,

and nontraditional students. It has also been used to illustrate how students decide on a major. This theory was reviewed and played a role in the development of my research questions and interview questions. After the study's themes emerge, I will return to Schlossberg's theory to reflect on it in order to determine whether the data was connected.

Schlossberg established a theory based on research on adults discussing how the adults coped during transitions. A transition model was developed demonstrating the numerous ways in which adults handle these adjustments (Braxton, 2003). Although Schlossberg's theory was not originally intended to explain college student development and is classified under adult development, several factors of this theory are applicable to college students and their experiences (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Braxton (2003) clarified that the theory is relevant to college student development because "life events and how individuals cope with them affect college students' persistence and departure decisions" (p. 324). Schlossberg's work is important for providing a look into influences that impact the individual, the environment and the transition during a specific transition time in an adult's life (Evans et al., 1998).

Schlossberg (1981) discusses differences in transition as being an event or a nonevent. Examples of events could include things such as graduating or beginning a new job and nonevents could be the loss of an academic goal one hoped to attain or an expected promotion that one was not given. A transition can be positive or negative, but in either scenario, the outcome of the transition is most influenced by the individual's perception of the change. Schlossberg focuses her work around the content of development and the variety of important issues that people face through their lives.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) discusses four key sets of factors influencing an individual's ability to cope with a transition. These are defined as the situation variable, the self-variable, the support variable and the strategies variable. They are called the "4 S's" and are used to describe the coping differences that individuals use when going through changes and transitions. These factors help to distinguish between assets and liabilities. This is important when attempting to understand and clarify why people have different reactions to the same transition as well as why the same individual can have different reactions at different times. The four factors are explained in depth:

1. Situation discusses what transition is taking place. For example the transition into married life is different than the transition to beginning college (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Important factors within the situation include what prompted the transition, when the transition takes place and for how long, who is controlling the change, whether a role change takes place, whether the individual has stressors present or has had a similar transition, and how the individual's behavior is impacted by the transition (Evans et al., 1998).

2. Self describes the person to whom is experiencing the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Self takes each person's personal characteristics including their socioeconomic status, gender, age, ethnicity, level of health, and stage of life (Evans et al., 1998). The individual's psychological resources, self-efficacy, and values are also important.

3. Support for each individual is different and answers the question of what help is available and what types of support systems (Schlossberg et al., 1995)

The person's types of social support are looked at in this factor. Social supports include family, significant other community and social networks. Affirmations and honest feedback as well as stable or unstable supports are considered functions of social support (Evans et al., 1998,).

4. Strategies are crucial to how a person copes with their transition. Each individual manages transitions in different ways (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Coping responses factor in identifying the meaning of the problem, if the individual changes the situation and how that individual manages the stress of the transition. It is also important to understand the coping mode used such as informing others, seeking, directing or the lack of directing action, or how this is processed in the person's mind (Evans et al., 1998).

The following outline introduces the "4 S's," giving sample questions that determine how an individual's transition process unfolds. These sample questions helped me to identify the study's research questions and influenced the interview questions.

The Four S's of Transitioning

1. *Situation*

    a. How prepared was the individual for college?

    b. What triggered the transition?

2. *Self*

    a. What role does one's gender, diversity, or family's level of education play in the transition?

    b. How do the individual's outlooks and values affect the transition?

3. *Support*

    a. Are there friends who can provide support?

    b. Do those supports provide genuine advice or affirmation to the individual?

    c. Do those sources of support provide stable and consistent support?

4. *Strategies (for coping)*

    a. How does one react to the transition?

    b. What about their experiences allow each individual to sustain academic success?

Statement of Problem

Transition services for students of color have not always been a priority for public higher education institutions. This is important to note because retaining students of color through transition programs has been identified as impacting individuals, society, and institutions (Baum & Ma, 2007). The high school to college transition experience has been identified as an important experience in retaining students of color as they progress through their years in college (Hunter, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Roe Clark, 2005). This kind of experience differs for different types of students at various types of institutions (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006; Fischer, 2007; Hunter, 2006; Terenzini et al., 1994; Tinto, 1993). Perna (2002) concludes that college preparation programs can have considerable influence on the academic preparation and college enrollment of students from groups that have been underrepresented in higher education.

Various models have been utilized to understand the transition to college and this study will apply these three theoretical frameworks Astin's (1993) Student Involvement

Theory, Delgado's (2002) Critical Race Theory and Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory.

The frameworks provide useful models for understanding the experiences of students of color

in transition and take into account the transition, the individual, and the environment equally.

Students of color have become a population of interest for researchers, administrators,

faculty, and parents. This interest is due to the issues facing higher education with regards to

minority student access and retention (Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007).

Increased efforts have been placed on establishing support programs, which have allowed for

these students' access and transition into higher education, whereas they may not have

otherwise been able to attend college. Still, students of color tend to enroll in and complete

higher education at a relatively low rate (Bergin, Cooks, & Bergin, 2007).

Despite the increased attention to college preparation programs, the literature has

overlooked the importance of gaining a thorough understanding of the transition experience of

students of color. The transition experience is one that can be quite stressful, and stress can be

particularly challenging for students of color (Yazedijain et al., 2007). This situation is a

concern for students of color, their faculty, and administrators, primarily because we now

know that placing these students in a stressful climate does not foster and enable success in an

academic environment (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). The problem of this

study is to examine the APP through transition experiences of students of color. College

preparation programs such as APP have seldom been thoroughly analyzed through the shared

experiences of participating students. This study will fill a void in the literature related the

impact of transition experiences on students of color.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative case study of the Advanced Preparation Program (APP) at St. Cloud State University. This method will enable the researcher to gather information that speaks to the experiences of students of color and determine how much of an impact such programs have on the sustained academic success. The study will cover issues on two levels. First and foremost, it will work to guide the future development of such programs through identifying the experiences of students of color. Second, decision makers will obtain an understanding of the program services that are most beneficial to students of color who are just entering higher education and will gain the information necessary to make improvements essential to the continual development of such programs.

Specifically, this study will analyze the experiences of students of color who attended the Advanced Preparation Program (APP). This analysis will be done through fully acknowledging and understanding their individual experiences. In particular, identifying which services were useful to each student. The analysis will be based on an interview protocol distributed to second-year St. Cloud State University students and former APP participants.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study focus on the individual experiences of students of color and their formed perceptions of the Advanced Preparation Program (APP) and its services. Specifically, the study will examine student's sense of belonging and will explore student reflections of how they were supported to the completion of their first or second year

at a four-year university. The following set of research questions will assess what, in participants' experience, was influential in sustaining academic success through their sophomore year. Analysis will focus on these questions:

1. How do students of color perceive their transition to college?

2. How, as students of color, did their encounters with students, faculty, and staff of color play a role in their experience?

3. What about their transition experiences sustained them through their sophomore year in college?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it will provide information that could shape the continuous development of the Advanced Preparation Program (APP). In the last 4 years, there has been a notable increase in the number of students of color participating in the APP due to a concerted effort to increase access to students of color. This initiative was pushed forward by Multicultural Student Services and St. Cloud State University to help assist with the growing population of Somalian students in the state of Minnesota. The institution is very receptive to the work being done through Multicultural Student Services and the APP. As numbers continue to increase, the program continues to receive more support and resources. Each year, a brief evaluation is administered to the student participants as well as the college student leaders and the program committee members. The evaluations utilized, however, are not designed to focus on the perceptions of participants and what is obtained through the experience, rather the participants' satisfaction with program content for the year they attended (St. Cloud State University, 2012).

As a fee-based program open to a wide range of students, including students of color, the APP should be accountable to all those individuals it has served and to all those the program looks to serve in the future. The goals and mission of this program should fit within the framework of the institution's mission as the institution strives to give opportunity to all to obtain the goal of graduation. Advanced Preparation Program must continue to work in maintaining the same standards for the students of color who are recruited as all other students in the program. The program must also strive for continuous improvement and effective programs and services. A thorough examination will provide feedback to assist in (a) enhancing program accountability, (b) determining effective resource use, (c) focusing goals and specific objectives, and (d) enhancing decision-making.

Assumptions

The assumptions of the study are as follows:

1. Students of color face challenges that many other students do not.

2. The researcher assumed that participants would answer questions in the interview candidly and completely.

3. Directors would select individuals they felt best meet the studies' needs.

4. Changes in academic climate may impact each participant's experience.

Delimitations

As with any research project, this study had several delimitations:

1. The first was related to the sample:

   a. Students took part in the APP program at St. Cloud State University, a MnSCU institution.

b. Scope of the study was delimitated to a four-year baccalaureate degree granting institution.

c. Only students who participated in the transition program were included in this study.

d. This study only considered those APP students of color who had concluded their sophomore year.

e. Students attended the transition program the same year.

f. The sample pool was limited because the timing of the student interviews had to take place within a specific time frame.

2. Gender is not variable in this study.

Definition of Terms

Students of color: The total population of students who self-identified in the following racial/ethnic backgrounds: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Black or African.

Students of Color: A student identified as an Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian American, Black (African-American), Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander.

College preparation program: Program put in place to prepare students for academics and environments at the college level.

College transition: The time during which a student begins their college career. It can be described as a time with many new personal challenges including new stressors and demands put onto the students (Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston, & Brower, 1987).

Successful: This study classifies successful as a student having completed college through their sophomore year. It has been discussed that students who have completed their freshman year of college and are beginning their sophomore year are likely to continue on to obtain their undergraduate degree (Herndon & Hirt, 2004).

College: A postsecondary institution of higher education granting students a minimum of an associate degree.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): A scholarly discipline that places emphasis on the utilization of critical theory, allowing critical assessment of social and cultural norms, as it pertains to race, law and power.

Advanced Preparation Program (APP): Transition/Bridge program offered through St. Cloud State University Multicultural Student Services and open to all students.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU): Higher education system comprised of 31 colleges and universities, including 24 two-year colleges and seven state universities.

Transition: The process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.

Traditional students: Those who enroll in college immediately after graduation from high school, pursue their studies on a full-time basis, and complete their bachelor's degrees in 4-5 years.

Nontraditional students: A term referring to a category of students at educational institutions who may attend part-time, commuter, age of student, online courses, etc.

First-generation student: A student whose parents/ legal guardians have not completed a bachelor's degree at a four-year college or university, meaning that the student is the first in his/her family to attend a four-year college/university to earn a bachelor's degree.

Summary

As higher education institutions continue to grow into diversified service providers, they are faced with various challenges. One of the many challenges for higher education includes their efforts to create transition services for students of color. These challenges have led the focus of this study to seeking out some interesting answers in identifying some of the experiences attributed to APP at SCSU, a public higher education institution in the Midwest.

The study will be comprised of an interview session, which will ask specific questions to those students of color who have participated in the APP and have completed their second year at SCSU. Using the information gathered from the interview sessions, an attempt will be made to interpret the impact of the APP and its services on the students' overall experience. This interpretation will be done through the analysis of individual experiences and the success that has been encountered through each student's path to his/her sophomore year. The recruitment of students of color into college preparation programs such as the APP is becoming a more common trend in higher education. As we continue moving towards a more diversified working world, it is even more important (Perna, 2002).

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine the Advanced Preparation Programs (APP) transition experiences of students of color and determine how much of an impact such experiences have on their sustained academic success. In addition, the study utilized Astin's Student Involvement Theory, specifically the I-E-O model to shed light on evolving themes and their connection to the outcomes. The literature review was conducted using search engines such as ERIC, Educational full text, and Academic Search Premier (EBSCO). Key search terms include: students of color in transition, transition programs, I-E-O, Input-Environment-Output, CRT and transition programs in higher education.

The retention of students in higher education is a concern for administrators, parents, and students. *Retention* is identified by the percentage number of students who return to an institution for their second year (Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999). Every year, millions of students enter higher education institutions across the country and many of them do not graduate. The experience students have when transitioning to higher education is said to play a major role in their decision to continue moving towards the path of graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Academic preparedness can also be directly attributed to students' retention rates. Student success increases when institutions are able to pinpoint and address these needs (Nunez, 2005). This is still evident today as we observe higher education institutions utilizing varying college transition programs.

College transition programs like the one discussed in this study have proven to be a key determinant in increasing the retention and graduation rates for students of color. Seidman (2006) suggests that institutions have the ability to direct their admission standards

to seek and accept certain types of students. This includes those students who may be better prepared to handle college. While doing this, they may miss the opportunity to prepare their campus environment for all types of students. It would be beneficial for these institutions to work to ensure that the needs of all students admitted are met. Their retention and graduation rates can be controlled through creating programs to serve students with differing backgrounds in attempts to manage these environments (Levitz et al., 1999).

When discussing issues that pertain to students of color and their retention, the idea of college transition programs is a topic that deserves continued attention and research. It has become progressively more competitive as institutions are working to increase enrollment numbers and then retain those students, as a direct measure of the success of their student populations (Seidman, 2006). With the number of students of color enrolling into higher education, it has become increasingly important that college preparation programs provide more specific services. Individuals, institutions, and society stand to benefit when students of color are retained and continue on to graduation.

The main idea behind college transition programs such as the Advanced Preparation Program is to support students of color in a successful transition from high school to college. Preparation for the program provides the outline for the workshops and activities made available through the program. This chapter provides a synthesis of literature linked to the transition of students of color to higher education and is structured as follows: Astin's Student Involvement Theory, Critical Race Theory, transition programs and models, students of color transitioning into higher education, higher education leaders and transition, student

populations in transition, support and the transition experience, students' transition

expectations and strategies, and institutional efforts.

<div align="center">**Astin's Student Involvement Theory**</div>

Students of color experience a significant transition as they progress from a high

school setting to a four year institution. Astin's (1984, 1993) Student Involvement Theory

research discusses students' college experiences and how those experiences play a role in

changing and developing the student over time. With numerous factors influencing academic

achievement and social involvement through these experiences, Astin used the key elements

of student inputs (I), the educational environment (E), and student outcomes (O) to create a

model to identify such variables. Astin's I-E-O model (1993) serves as a framework for

developing a more complete educational assessment by looking at students' characteristics

and perceptions upon entry into the program, student involvement during enrollment in the

transition program, the transition process to the institution, and student outcomes of likely

sustained success. For the purpose of this study, the inputs for the conceptual framework

identify characteristics of the students upon entry in the Advanced Preparation Program

(APP). The environment incorporates the student's experiences during their time in APP, as

they transitioned from high school to college. Ultimately, the outcome of the conceptual

framework includes discussion of the student's overall improvement as a student, their

satisfaction and being on track to graduate on time.

The first component of the conceptual framework, *Student Entry Characteristics*,

addresses the inputs of the I-E-O Model. Inputs refer to qualities and characteristics that each

individual student brings to the educational program (Astin, 1993). Student's grades, study

habits and motivations to attend such programs serve as a measure of what each individual is bringing to the program. The student's level of involvement in high school and their motivation for participating in the APP, provide information about the students upon entry into the program. Inclusion of input findings when using I-E-O model is imperative because inputs directly influence both the environment and outcomes (Astin, 1993).

The second component of the conceptual framework, *Transition Experiences,* serves to present a picture of the Advanced Preparation Program transition to college environment. Much has been said about how student engagement is an important part of student learning and success in higher education (Kuh, 2006). Therefore, this component of the conceptual framework includes indicators of student engagement such as the students' involvement in co-curricular activities and the quality of relationships with faculty and peers. Moreover, the transition experience is viewed in terms of satisfaction with the student sustaining academic achievement through to their sophomore year. Berger and Malaney (2003) incorporated Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model to examine the experiences of transfer students and based on this, they suggest "patterns of academic and social involvement shift as students move from a two-year college setting to a four-year university" (2003, p. 1). To assess how well students perceive their own adjustment to a university, Berger and Malaney (2003) suggest ascertaining students' levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the academic and social environments on campus.

The final component of the conceptual framework, *Outcomes,* seeks to describe the outputs of the transition experience and satisfaction with the program. Outcomes "refer to the 'talents we are trying to develop in our educational program" (Astin, 1993, p. 18). Outcomes

will include measures of academic success in terms of university GPAs and improvements in the type of student they have become and staying on track to graduate with their class.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been applied to the study of racial stratification in higher education to challenge dominant paradigms and to place the educational experiences of students of color in broader social, institutional, legal, and historical contexts (Delgado, 1995). Solorzano (1998) suggests that "critical race theory in education challenges the traditional claims of the educational system and its institutions to objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity" (p. 122). CRT has been extremely useful for the critique of deficit thinking, the framing of racial inequities as a result of individual deficiencies by providing alternative methodologies through which scholars and students can "unlearn" stereotypical thinking about race (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). This concept is very important for the study of students of color, given the degree to which stereotypes and assumptions may play an influential role in this study. Therefore, understanding of the educational experiences of students of color can be learned through CRT by acknowledging the unique radicalized status of students of color, as well as their social, political, and structural positions in society.

Conceptually, Critical Race Theory in education challenges the ways in which the theoretical framing of race in education policy and practice implications for the student-of-color population. CRT challenges the notion that normative framing is an effective lens through which to examine educational equity issues. Fundamentally, normative framing is typically invoked to identify how different racial groups are unevenly distributed across a

particular outcome (e.g., participation or graduation) (Stovall, 2006). Otherwise, CRT perspectives focus on the needs of marginalized populations, which are often overlooked, as opposed to the agenda served by normative frameworks. Thus, CRT can be an effective lens for examining and challenging the norm, which define mainstream policy discourse and determine appropriate concerns for education research.

Normative frameworks position the experiences and outcomes of students of color relative to Whites, which often results in the conclusion that problems related to race in the American society are dichotomous, with Blacks and Latinos at one end of the racial spectrum and Whites on the other (Chang, Witt, Jones, & Hakuta, 2003). The pervasiveness of this Black-White paradigm has contributed to precarious positioning of the educational experience for students of color (Iverson, 2007).

Critical Race Theory in Higher Education Research

Critical Race Theory can inform the assessment of policies and programs aimed at addressing racial inequities. Using a CRT lens can yield outcomes that better address the true needs of the beneficiaries of such policies and programs within higher education (i.e., faculty and students). Specifically, Gillborn (2005) emphasizes CRT's utility in understanding the drivers of the policy, the beneficiaries as a result of the policy, and the short- and long-term effects of the policy.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in this study was used to make suggestions for future policies and programs that might better address the student-of-color population in higher education (Iverson, 2007). The focus is mainly on the three tenets of CRT as particularly effective conceptual tools for understanding how students of color are positioned within and

affected by research, policies, and practices in higher education: (a) taking account of the voices of students of color, which often go unheard and remain in the margins in America's equity agenda; (b) the issue of interest convergence, which suggests that equality is pursued when the interests of the majority are furthered; and (c) an emphasis on social justice as a central theme in the purpose of higher education (Dixon, & Rousseau, 2006).

Critical Race Theory encourages the story-telling of people of color to better understand their individual experiences, which contribute to understanding a more holistic reality (Stoval, 2006). Qualitative scholars use CRT to highlight individual experiences and the voices through which these experiences are told by providing descriptions of students' stories related to campus environments and college experiences (Patton, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Solórzano et al. (2000), for example, used CRT to understand African American experiences with racial micro-aggression and campus racial climates, while Patton (2006) used it to understand students' perceptions of Black culture centers on campus.

Another element of Critical Race Theory (CRT), interest convergence, suggests that equality and equity are pursued when the interests of people of color converge with the interests of Whites (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). For example, Bell (1980) considered the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education through an interest convergence framework. Specifically, Bell argued that the much-celebrated Brown decision was a result of the government's desire to improve its international image around issues of race. Interest convergence has been used to analyze educational issues and is useful for examining the underlying presumptions and reasoning behind policies and decision-making. As a result, the implicit beneficial or harmful effects of policies and decision-making

processes on disparate populations, which often remain unquestioned and unchallenged, are revealed.

Higher education scholars, who use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a framework to analyze students' experiences and postsecondary education policies, illuminate a social justice component of CRT (Smith et al, 2007). Inherent in their approaches is the call to identify elements of the U.S. educational system that are perceived to be oppressive to students and families of color (Stovall, 2006). To facilitate processes of policy, program, practice development, or elimination on college campuses, shareholders might be well served by engaging in conversations that challenge dominant institutional discourses and the charged assumptions that are foundational to these discourses (Iverson, 2007).

Observing and analyzing the experiences of students of color through the lens of critical race theory suggest several major gaps in policy and practice within higher education. First, most of the student development theories ignore the role of race in the student experience. Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple identities has been given attention to racial identity development theories and race as one social identity. Outside of these, little consideration has been given to theories incorporating race in this area. Racial climates on campus for students of color and the impact of this typically are unseen or disregarded (Delgado, 1995). The studies that are being done have a tendency to focus on areas that do not highlight the issues that affect students of color (Anicis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). Finally, although students of color are reporting high levels of need when it comes to such programs as APP, complete research on how and why the experience would be valuable is lacking. The

lack of adequate research on the experiences of students of color results in the development of policies and practices that do not fully reflect the needs of this population.

Student Development Theories

Many central student development theories that today's practitioners use overlook potential differences in student development processes by race and ethnicity. Patton, McEwen, Rendón, and Howard-Hamilton (2007) argue that these theories are "race-less" because they do not incorporate race or the impact of race on student identity and experiences, and they may even contain some inherent levels of racism (p. 41). Instead, such theories assume that the experiences and development of students are similar, regardless of their race or ethnicity. However, race can play a substantial role in the student experience, especially for students of color. Because the voices of minority students, such as those represented within this population, are not reflected in them (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002), these theories may not be useful for developing policies and programs for students of color.

There are three student development theories that should be examined briefly due to the fact that they overlook race and racism. When Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised Chickering's 1969 model, they made no reference to race and racism and its impact with the seven vectors of their theory and the development of students (Hardiman, 2002). The second theory was by Baxter Magolda (1992) whose research contributed greatly to the area of student development, but designated that out of the 101 participants in her study only three of the participants were identified as being from an under-represented population. Lastly, Kohlberg (1975) is acknowledged for his work developing the theory of moral development and reasoning. In his theory, individuals move in the direction of a universal level of moral

reasoning through six stages. While discussing moral development, Kohlberg's theory recognized the key values of justice and autonomy, but failed to account for racial or cultural experiences of students of color. These three theories, although very influential in directing student development in higher education, unfortunately do not take into account the changing landscape of American higher education and the importance of including various populations of students on college campuses.

In the literature by Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2003), the authors suggest that alternative student development theories, based on the specific experiences and development of students of color themselves, should be used to understand those students' experiences. They propose more revised models of diverse identity development theories that incorporate the racial identity and external influences and suggest that students of color will reach higher levels of development if they understand themselves in relation to their families, their communities, and the larger society. Most contemporary models lack direct attention to these types of relationships. "Theoretical Frameworks of Diverse Identity Development Theories: A View Through a Different Lens" also suggests that taking into account the experiences of students of color in relation to their families and cultures will help them draw on their strengths and values, rather than viewing themselves deficient in relation to dominant society ideals (Torres et al., 2003, p. 35).

Campus racial climates can also shape the experiences of students along with their perceptions, attitudes, and expectations (Torres et al., 2003). An understanding of campus racial climates incorporates theories of race and racism in order to better understand the student's experiences. Unfortunately, the impact of racial climates on students of color is

often ignored. Most of today's research focuses mainly on the experiences of White and Black students, although there has been a recent growth in the study of the experiences of Latinos. For example, Hall, Cabrera, and Milem (2011) suggest that students of color are overlooked in the research on the impact of racial climate on students' experiences because of a binary Black-White conceptualization of race. When specific minority groups outside of the aforementioned groups are discussed in the literature, it is often only in comparison to other groups rather than as unique groups themselves.

Transition Programs and Models

From the beginning, transition programs have focused on easing the transition and accelerating the passage of students through the educational system into college. The earliest transition program to be documented was the 1972 Project Advance at Syracuse University, a program developed when local high school principals and superintendents collaborated with university staff to challenge high school seniors. These innovators recognized that many of the students had completed their requirements for graduation by the end of their junior year and that they were prepared for higher education. Project Advance served as a model for similar programs in following years (Syracuse University, 2005).

Known as credit-based transition programs, the cooperative programs enabled students to courses at the college level and earn credits meanwhile still completing high school (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Advocates explained that when a transition program is designed properly and supervised closely, there can be a reduction in senior-year boredom. Students tend to have an ongoing enthusiasm for learning. There are other positive impacts seen as suggested by Wilber and LaFray (1978). The programs can serve to eliminate redundant courses as well as

college course remediation. Students are given a glimpse of college before making large

financial commitments in addition to being able to earn college credits. Finally, this allows

high schools and colleges to make adjustments to their curriculum, which in turn increases a

smooth transition between the two educational systems (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

Although the literature shows no direct links between the community college system

and the early creation of transition programs, community colleges were originally established

to meet similar student needs, including the following: (a) offer a postsecondary option,

(b) become the initial access point for postsecondary education, and (c) educate or service

greater numbers of freshman and sophomore students preparing to attend colleges or

universities (Helfgot, 2001). Students attended community colleges for two additional years

of training to acquire occupational skills not offered in high school. Moreover, remedial

education became a focus at community colleges as a response to a perceived decline in basic

secondary academic skills (Herr & Cramer, 1995). The community college system continues

to serve multiple missions that include improving students' positions in society, focusing on

students' basic skills and career development, and preparation for transition to four-year

colleges and universities (Pluviose, 2008).

Although the earliest documented transition programs began at four-year universities,

there are many community college programs that are noteworthy in the history of transition

programs. One such program is the College Now Program, created in the fall of 1984 at

Kingsborough Community College at the City University of New York. This program

initially sought students who were moderate achievers and students who had cumulative high

school averages ranging between 65% and 80%, or C and B students (Lords, 2000). They

provided different, flexible course options as well as accelerated scheduling, which proved to be successful attributes in creating success for this class of young prospects. Notable improvements in regular attendance, academic achievement, and facilitation of college admission after high school graduation were all positive signs of a program improving the scope of the educational system. This success continues today: "Kingsborough offers a number of programs…including College Now a unique partnership with area high schools" (Kingsborough Community College, 2008, para. 4).

Transition programs offer a wide range of structure in terms of content, location, instructors, student characteristics, and the granting and earning of college credit (Wilbur & Lambert, 1995). The literature divides transition programs into three broad categories: (a) singleton programs that are separate college-level courses, (b) comprehensive programs that include most academic experiences, and (c) enhanced comprehensive programs that offer college courses to high school students as well as a support system to ensure success in postsecondary education (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

Singleton Programs

Singleton programs typically offer college-level work to high school students as electives. The primary objective of this type of program is enrichment of the high school curriculum, while the secondary goal allows students to earn college credits. This gives students a jump start towards graduation (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Advanced Placement (AP) classes are the most common type of singleton program (College Board, 2005), and many dual credit programs also follow the AP model (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Galloway, 1994).

AP courses and examinations, developed in 1955, use single standardized tests to determine a student's proficiency in certain subject areas. Students scoring a 4 or 5 out of 5 on the AP exam earn credit for introductory college courses; however, currently, a score of 3 is considered a passing score by some postsecondary institutions, where college credit is offered in specific subjects. These AP courses and examinations were the first organized national effort to aid students in the transition from high school to college (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008; College Board, 2005).

Comprehensive Programs

Comprehensive programs are transition programs that usually necessitate that students should take many and sometimes all of their courses under its sponsorship. This typically takes place during the last year or two of high school and can be an articulated series of courses happening over several semesters or as their entire curriculum (Bailey & Karp, 2003). The literature identified several well-recognized comprehensive programs.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is offered by a nonprofit organization with courses of study for high school students around the world. It was organized in 1968, shortly after the Advanced Placement program, and it has continued to offer a more comprehensive curriculum than the AP program. IB is based on a positive and flexible concept of education in which students and teachers are motivated to participate in international cooperative projects, ultimately measuring themselves against international competition (Peterson, 2003).

The Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program, located in Minnesota, is a credit-based transition program that allows high school students to enroll in postsecondary

courses. In this program students have the option of attendance either on a part-time or a full-time basis and can earn both high school and college credit. High- and low-achieving students alike can take advantage of this credit-based transition program by meeting the admissions criteria of the upper-class rank or by exhibiting readiness and ability to perform college-level work (Galloway, 1994).

Enhanced Comprehensive Programs

Another type of transition program focuses on preparing students with low- or mid-level achievement for postsecondary education through academic and support programs based on college campuses. The extensive support system, which delineates this transition program from others, includes counseling, application assistance, and mentoring. One example of an enhanced comprehensive program is Middle College High School, developed for underserved and underprepared students (American Youth Policy Forum, 2008; Bailey & Karp, 2003). The College Now Program in New York, for example, is a Middle College High School that includes enrichment and remediation courses (Kleiman, 2001; Middle College National Consortium, 2008). The LaGuardia Middle College High School in New York has a program called Excel, in which most of those admitted are ethnically diverse students from low-income, single-parent households who begin a specialized curriculum in the 11th grade. Born (2006) reported that students apply to the program for three reasons: (a) ability to save money and time, (b) increased flexibility in course requirements, and (c) more one-on-one contact with the personnel.

Over 20 years ago, the Maricopa Community Colleges in Arizona initiated Achieving a College Education (ACE), a collaborative program designed to reduce dropouts and

improve transitions into college. This enhanced comprehensive program was first offered at South Mountain Community College; years later, the same program, than called ACE Plus, began at Glendale Community College with the Glendale Union High School District (Maricopa Community Colleges, 2006). Fowler (2007) reported that student retention, student graduation, and postsecondary enrollment data were significantly higher for ACE Plus students compared to similar students who did not participate in the partnership program.

Students of Color Transitioning into Higher Education

In the past 30 years, staff and faculty at higher education institutions of all types have put in place efforts to improve the transition experiences of students (Hunter, 2006). The majority of students who drop out do so in their first year, making the college transition and first-year experience very important (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). Moreover, the transition experience is one complex phenomenon in which students in their first year of college need in order to become socially and academically integrated if they are to continue to the second year (Roe Clark, 2005). Terenzini et al. (1994) suggest that if a student's transition from high school to college occurs successfully, that student is likely to demonstrate change, educational growth and persistence.

Because transition experiences are closely related to retention, it is important to recognize how students experience transition and what creates a successful transition. Efforts to understand students in transition can be complicated (Laanan, 2006). Hunter (2006) suggests that students' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences are not fixed. Every student is different in what he/she brings into an educational environment through his/her lived

experiences. In working to better understand transition, it is important to recognize the experiences of students of color, and specifically their ability to handle such change.

There has been research examining the ways in which different populations of students transition into higher education, including traditional students (Terenzini et al., 1994), first-generation students (Nunez, 2005), and adult students (Compton et al., 2006). Students of color have been another focus of transition research, including the experience of Mexican Americans (Attinasi, 1989), Hispanic students (Yazedijian & Toews, 2006), and minority students majoring in science (Hurtado et al., 2007).

Although there is plenty of research in the area of transition programs that look at specific student groups, including students of color, which is the group that will be discussed within this study, the research tends to overlook the impact of each service provided on participating students of color within a transition program. Pre-collegiate academic and social development programs attempt to provide the most consistent learning opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students and countering the "hidden curriculum" of public schools. This propels a message to students that conforming will lead to success while individuals who look or act differently will have much less desirable outcomes such as simply being tolerated, or even being ignored or discarded (George & Aronson, 2003).

In addition to experiencing lower rates of enrollment, students of color are less likely to complete a degree if they do enroll in higher education. Amongst those students who started higher education in 1995, 5five years later, 27.8% of the White students had completed a bachelor's degree compared to 14.5% of Black students and 15.2% of Hispanic students (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002).

Traditional theories have been utilized to understand the transition experience of students from high school to college, including Tinto (1987, 1993) and Astin (1984). The transition from high school to higher education is an important time for students as they either become integrated into the college environment or fail to become integrated. During this time of transition and integration is where the most cases of early departure are accounted for (Laanan, 2006).

Research that examines transition and environment focuses on students of color and their particular influence on campus climate. A perception of a negative racial climate has a negative impact on the academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment to college, as well as a sense of attachment to the institution (Hurtado et al., 2007). For example, Latino students who report experiences with discrimination are less attached to the institution (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Additionally, perceptions of a hostile campus racial climate can have a negative impact on the sense of belonging for both White and African American students (Mounts, 2004). College size is significant for social adjustment and attachment among students of color. Students at large institutions report high social adjustment and attachment when other measures are controlled (Hurtado et al., 2007). For students of color, the college environment influences transition to college more than students' background characteristics (e.g., gender, academic ability).

It has been made apparent by Hurtado et al. (2007) that the choice of college has a direct negative impact on transition—the more selective the institution is, the more difficult the transition experience can be. However, students of color at private colleges report a greater ease with transition, and those attending campuses with higher minority populations

also have an easier time making the academic adjustment. If students have a difficult transition, they are more likely to report a perception of a hostile campus climate (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). There are four key features of African American students' social adjustment to college that fall under two broad categories: institutional climate and relationships with faculty.

In relation to institutional climates, African American students have a sense of feeling underrepresented and direct perceptions of racism (Schwitzer et al., 1999, p. 77). Students report isolation and alienation as well as feeling less supported than they did in high school. They also report segregation among racial groups. They describe their campus as less friendly and warm than they had expected and report they had experienced situations, statements, or actions that were perceived as non-inclusive (Schwitzer et al., 1999).

Problems in students' relationships with faculty include the hurdle of approaching faculty. What students describe is their hesitation to take the initiative to interact with faculty. Some students express concern that, if they ask for help, faculty will think they needed help because they are students of color. The final factor is the effect of faculty familiarity; students are more likely to approach faculty who seem more familiar to them, either by race or gender or with whom they are familiar through their major or previous classes (Schwitzer et al., 1999).

Along with the factor of faculty familiarity, the dominant discourse within higher education promotes the independent learner, but this discourse denies the need for student-staff communication (Smith et al., 2007), which can facilitate support in response to individual needs. Regarding students' ability to engage with practices within the institution, it

is crucial to remember that students might not have the cultural capital to support their transition (Iannelli, 2007). This point affirms Ridley's (2004) supposition that "conversations and relationships" are the key to student success, and other research suggests the need for "faculty mentorship" within the first semester (Keup, 2007).

Higher Education Leaders and Transition

Research has revealed that transition programs help high school students make successful transitions to college. These programs can bridge the gap between high school and college by ensuring that students are prepared for the rigors of college-level work and do not unnecessarily repeat high school coursework during their first years of college. Studies have argued that transition policies help motivate high school students to use their senior year productively (South Regional Education Board, 2002). The majority of students in transition programs indicated that participation had a positive influence on both their decision and their motivation to attend college (Allen, 1999; Bruno, 1990; Burns & Lewis, 2000; Hudson Valley Community College, 1998; South Regional Educational Board, 2002).

Boswell (2001) noted that transition programs provided challenging educational opportunities, improved college preparation, promoted a trained competitive workforce, accelerated educational progress with significant financial savings, and fostered collaboration amongst high schools and colleges. In respect to the benefits of transition programs, results of a 2008 survey conducted by Phi Delta Kappa and Gallup indicated Americans agree that high school students should have the opportunity to receive a healthy transition experience as they enter college/university levels ("PDK/Gallup Polls," 2008).

Student Populations in Transition

One of the first studies to examine how different populations of students experience the transition to college involved focus groups with 132 diverse students at four different types of institutions: urban community college, residential liberal arts college, urban commuter state university, and residential research university (Terenzini et al., 1994). Students experience the transition process, including academic and social integration, in very different ways. Notably, the experiences of traditional students and first-generation students are different.

Traditional students are those aged 18-19 years old who enter college directly after high school. Most traditional students are Caucasian and have family members who attended college. The transition to college is somewhat easier for these students because it is an expected transition, the next step after high school. For many traditional students, not attending college was never an option. Most traditional students are concerned with integrating into the social environment and making friends (Terenzini et al., 1994).

First-generation students typically have a more difficult transition to college than their peers. These students come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. They have to manage all the stresses related to the academic and social transitions that other students' experience, and first-generation students also usually have to deal with a substantial cultural transition. Specifically, they have to adapt to new cultural, academic, and social systems (Terenzini et al., 1994). First-generation students feel they have to gain control of their academics before focusing on the social aspects of college (Nunez, 2005). However, first-generation students who are more focused on academics and avoid becoming involved in

campus social life are not as likely to have a successful social transition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Family dynamics can change because first-generation students are beginning a new family tradition. Those with younger siblings have the added pressure to serve as role models for brothers and sisters (Nunez, 2005). For first-generation women, parents are generally very supportive, but the students also feel some pressure since they are the first in their families to attend college. Students do not see their relationship with their parents as one of separation but rather a renegotiation in which some of the family roles they have fulfilled are dropped but new roles are adopted (Nunez, 2005, p. 99). For example, Nunez (2005) stated that first-generation women may not need to fully separate from past ties as Tinto (1993) suggested but instead may be able to renegotiate ties with family to incorporate themselves into the college community.

For first-generation women, one issue is how they handle the size of the campus. Finding campus buildings, attending large classes, managing time, distant relationships with faculty, and academic rigor are challenges for many of them (Nunez, 2005). They have to gain knowledge of how to navigate the official procedure associated with course enrollment, selection of classes and majors, information on-campus resources, and understanding course material. Students gain this information from their peer counselors, staff counselors, tutors, and in transition programs. Meeting people, making friends, living with roommates, and trusting others are some of the social challenges for first-generation women (Nunez, 2005). Once they become more involved and integrated, they begin to view college as a second

home. Friends, extended family members, and local communities offer support and role modeling to first-generation women.

With the increase in students transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions, researchers have started to examine the unique transition experiences of transfer students (Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 2006). Most two-year-to-four-year transfer students are older, female, and Caucasian, but they can vary by geographic region (Lester, 2006). Like first-generation students, transfer students typically are in more demanding lifestyles with work or family responsibilities. Specific transitional needs of this transfer population include academic concerns, financial concerns, grades, and ethnic differences (Lester, 2006).

Transfer students recognize that the campus environment is different and that academic standards are higher at a four-year institution than they are at community colleges (Flaga, 2006). They know that the teachers are more focused on research rather than on teaching as faculty at the community college had been (Flaga, 2006). Similar to first-generation students, transfer students are more concerned about academics than their social lives (Lester, 2006). They formally use the tools of orientation, faculty, student affairs professionals, and advisors and informally use family, friends, and alumni as learning resources to gain information about the campus environment and academic system (Flaga, 2006). Academic connections are made through group projects, visiting faculty during office hours, getting to know instructors in class, and participating in class discussions. Transfer students connect socially with current students that they already knew prior to transfer and by becoming more involved in activities, and they connect to the physical environment by spending time on campus before and after class (Flaga, 2006). As transfer students become better adjusted to the differences in class size

and the research focus of the faculty and as they develop strategies to be successful in the academic, social, and physical environment, they become integrated in the campus environment and consider themselves students, not transfer students (Flaga, 2006).

The term *nontraditional student* has included adult students, but generally adult students are not only nontraditional-aged students, but are usually pursuing a program leading to a vocational degree, have focused educational goals, and consider themselves workers first, not students (Compton et al., 2006). They also experience an additional transition because adult students typically return to college as a result of another major life transition, such as a divorce, widowhood, or a career change (Compton et al., 2006).

First-year college students who were homeschooled prior to enrolling present an interesting population in terms of transition (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007). Similar to other students from homogenous backgrounds, homeschooled students have not been exposed to many people who are different from them. At college, they are exposed to students who have different worldviews and values than they had been exposed to while being homeschooled (Bolle et al., 2007). Like many first-year students, homeschoolers suffer from loneliness, and some have a difficult time leaving home. They also experience the positive effects of having greater independence (Bolle et al., 2007). As homeschooled students become involved in a variety of co-curricular activities, they begin to develop a greater sense of confidence. Some homeschooled students find it easy to make friends, connecting with peers in their residence halls or during orientation, while others report that it takes initiative to make friends (Bolle et al., 2007). Homeschooled students have difficulty explaining homeschooling

to other students, and some encounter negative stereotypes. Academically, however, homeschooled students report feeling prepared for college work (Bolle et al., 2007).

Ethnic minority students also experience the transition to college in different ways than other groups of students (Attinasi, 1989; Fischer, 2007). The transition is not the same for all minority students because, like all students, they come from diverse cultures, educational backgrounds, and life experiences. The research has concluded that minority students may experience a more difficult transition as they try to become socially and academically integrated (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). This difficult transition means that ethnic minority students are more likely to have problems and dropout prior to graduation (Fisher, 2007). One early study of ethnic minority students and transition was conducted by Attinasi (1989). She looked at Mexican American students at a large public southwestern university. Mexican American students referred to the campus as "big." This was not just in relation to physical geography but also included the social geography and the academic geography of the campus. Students not able to deal with these new and different geographies often felt lost (Attinasi, 1989).

The Hispanic student population is another group of minority students that has been studied in relation to transition. Self-esteem, acculturation, and ethnic identity are the strongest predictors of adjustment for Hispanic students (Yazedijian & Toews, 2006). Hispanics who are both acculturated and have a strong sense of their ethnic group membership are better adjusted to college. Those with a strong sense of ethnic identity have a psychological resource that helps them adjust to the demands of college. Interpersonal factors

do not have a significant impact on adjustment but are related to Hispanic students' self-esteem, which helps with adjustment (Yazedijian & Toews, 2006).

A look into the unique experiences of African American students attending a four-year institution deserves attention. African Americans have "historically been underrepresented in American higher education and continue to be so today" (Herndon & Hirt, 2004, p. 489). Recruitment efforts for Black students to attend a college or university began on a large scale in the 1960s, following national desegregation policies (Fleming, 1984). Despite this advancement in civil rights, many higher education institutions failed to provide adequate academic and support services to assist Black students in their transition to four-year institutions (Fleming, 1984).

Today's institutions continue to struggle to attain these goals. African American students are still facing obstacles in achieving academic success. The college-going rates between Whites and Blacks continue to show disproportionately lower enrollment rates for Blacks (Herdon & Hirt, 2004). The review of literature on African American students who attend college shows a continued rise in these students attendance of college. However, these African American students continue to have lower rates of achievement and graduation when compared to their White peers at predominately white institutions (Davis et al., 2004). The U.S. Census's *School Enrollment* brief reported that a total of 1,024,774 African Americans between the ages of 18-24 were attending college, compared to 6,756,030 White students in the same age group. The college attendance rate for all African Americans in college was 27% compared to 38% of all non-Hispanic Whites (Day & Jamieson, 2003, p. 9). The American Association of College and University (2007) reported that out of all African

Americans in college, 64% are female and 36% are male (p. 16). The percentages suggest a need for further study of African Americans and their experiences with transition through graduation.

Family and finances are two key transition factors for underrepresented minority students aspiring to careers in biomedical and behavioral science (Hurtado et al., 2007). Family support is important in developing students' sense of belonging, particularly for minority non-science majors and White and Asian science majors. Families can have a negative impact on the student's academic adjustment and sense of belonging when family responsibilities interfere with college. Paying for college and finances in general are another distraction for underrepresented minority science students.

Students with high self-esteem, an ability to communicate with faculty, and strong time management skills are more likely to successfully manage the academic environment in the first year. These same students take advantage of the academic and social systems of the college. For example, students who utilize teaching assistants and academic advising and who seek advice from junior and senior students have greater first-year success (Hurtado et al., 2007). A second area of study related to the individual involves factors that influence how individuals experience the college transition. This body of work includes studies about students' expectations and how those expectations impact transition as well as strategies that students develop to manage the transition to college.

Support and the Transition Experience

One major source of support is parents. Parental support is often provided in the form of financial and emotional support. Students appreciate their parents' sending letters and

packages because they feel that this gesture indicates that parents are thinking of the students while they are away at school (Yazedijian et al., 2007). Students who have limited access to parents move toward independence more quickly. Parents promote students' integration by encouraging their children to live on campus, get involved, and stay in school (Mounts, 2004). For some, parental involvement hinders students' social integration. For example, some parents who live close to the universities that the students attend require their student to live at home. Other parents want their children to transfer to an institution closer to home. Students who plan to transfer to be closer to home decrease their motivation to engage in the activities that increase social integration (Mounts, 2004).

Peers provide both social and academic support (Yazedijian et al., 2007). The social support increases students' sense of attachment to the institution and helps with their adjustment to the university. Classmates provide academic support by sharing the same academic mindset and by supporting and encouraging one another's academic achievements. Lack of connections makes the adjustment more difficult; this is most evident with students who do not have peers from high school at their college. High school classmates provide early support and students who do not have these connections experience more loneliness and isolation during the early stages of the college transition. Establishing friendships with others in the residence hall alleviates some of this isolation. Early on, these friendships at least provide someone for the student to study with. They also lay the foundation for new relationships. For some students, high school relationships were a limiting factor when they tried to develop new friendships (Yazedijian et al., 2007). Likewise, positive changes in

friendship quality are linked with lower problem behaviors (stress, depression, anxiety) (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

The relationships formed and developed through a transition program play a significant role in the success of first-year students. Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2006) state the case more persistently: "Few college experiences are more strongly linked to student learning and persistence than student's interactions with those they establish relationships with early on." These interactions impact changes in the cognitive, psychosocial, and attitudinal areas of student lives as well as their persistence and degree completion (Kuh, 2006). Reason et al. (2006) suggested that students who felt they were more engaged were more likely to experience higher gains in academic performance compared to other students. In harmony with concepts from Reason et al. (2006) is Kuh's (2006) concept of engagement that posits students are more likely to persist if faculty interact with them and challenge them to higher levels of performance.

Support from institutional personnel is also a factor in the transition to college. Supportive relationships with university personnel (professors, teaching assistants, advisors) as well as a generally supportive campus atmosphere assist transition. Even on a large campus, students feel that a friendly atmosphere makes the campus feel much smaller (Yazedijian et al., 2007).

Students Transition Expectations and Strategies

When first-year students' expectations of college match the reality of college life, the students are more likely to have a successful transition experience. Students' expectations focus on interpersonal interactions and relationships while living in the residence hall,

studying, and partying (Braxton & McClendon, 2002). The students expect high school relationships to fade as they develop new college relationships. Most expect to have to limit their extracurricular involvement and focus on adjusting to their new environment. They also anticipate that college will be a time of exploration and personal development including much more independence. The students also expect more freedom in relation to personal choices and social relationships and not in relation to academics (Keup, 2007).

Most students experience a change in their relationships with their families. A student's relationship with his/her parents may move from one that was dictatorial to one that is more democratic (Keup, 2007). Students usually develop more meaningful friendships, but the process takes longer than they had expected. Once they develop a meaningful network of friends on campus, they consider it one of their greatest transition successes (Keup, 2007, p. 19). As their new relationships form, they end relationships with high school friends. However, roommates are often disappointments for students. They expect that roommates will serve as a support system during their transition, but negative experiences with their roommates have a negative impact on the level of satisfaction with their first year (Keup, 2007).

Student's expectations about personal growth and achieving greater independence are generally met. They learn that their new freedom means more responsibility for their academics than they experienced in high school (Keup, 2007). Balancing social life and academics is an ongoing adjustment. Students are less involved in co-curricular activities than they were in high school. Most do not commit to specific clubs but are involved in general campus events (Braxton, & McClendon, 2002). They express that they need to concentrate on

their academics. Even though some expectations are not met, most students usually feel well-adjusted in college (Keup, 2007).

The college transition generates many challenges that students must learn to manage. Students often have to develop new strategies to adjust to college life, and they have to modify their understanding of what it will take to be successful in college and develop strategies to overcome personal and academic obstacles to their goals (Yazedijian, Toews, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008). For example, to overcome shyness (a personal obstacle), a student may decide to receive training to be a peer mentor (a strategy). Likewise, a student who is having trouble in math (an academic obstacle) may seek out a tutor (a strategy) (Roe Clark, 2005). Students also develop strategies to seize opportunities presented to them. For example, some students see extracurricular activities, such as becoming a peer mentor, as an opportunity to reach a desired goal. Students have to evaluate their courses and schedule to make sure they can accommodate involvement in these activities (Roe Clark, 2005). They also develop new strategies because college is so different than high school. These include dealing with professors' expectations, having a flexible class schedule, and commuting. One of the major changes is how students study in college compared to how they studied in high school. Students develop different techniques depending on the class or the type of work they have to do (Roe Clark, 2005), and setting and achieving goals involves different approaches.

Students have different strategies to obtain good grades from listening and using good grammar to saying what they think the professor wants to hear. Overall, students learn that what worked in high school does not work in college (Roe Clark, 2005). Minority students must develop strategies to become integrated into college because often they do not share the

same values as majority students (Attinasi, 1989). For example, Mexican American students, as noted above, develop strategies to navigate the physical, social, and academic environments. Two categories describe the strategies developed by Mexican American students: getting to know and scaling down (Attinasi, 1989).

One aspect of getting to know is mentoring, finding other students already at the university to serve as guides. A second strategy related to getting to know is peer knowledge sharing. This strategy involves sharing information with other new students to help them navigate the different geographies. Scaling down includes tactics that students use to make the campus seem smaller and to create their own physical, social, or academic circles that help them manage the larger majority campus environment. Attinasi (1989) noted that there was an organization for Hispanic business majors. This group scaled down the students' environment and provided the students with ways to get to know their academic environment. Mexican American students who are able to develop strategies have a better transition experience and persist to the sophomore year (Attinasi, 1989). Just as students have unique experiences based on demographic factors and individual characteristics, the campus environment influences the transition, meaning that different institutions and environmental factors impact the first-year transition experience.

Research on the college environment and transition, Tinto's (1993) model of college student departure, speculates that, once students matriculate, it is the social and academic environment of the institution that shapes their commitment to that institution. If students are not integrated and do not adopt the values of the environment, they will not develop the commitment needed to persist to graduation (Tinto, 1993). Most new students enter a campus

environment with little idea about what to expect and little understanding of how the collegiate environment can affect their lives. A transition can be very stressful. The greater the environmental fit is and the more similar the old environment is to the new environment, the greater the likelihood of student success (Banning, 1989). Studies about campus environments fall into three categories. The first set of studies looks at institutional efforts to create environments that assist in the transition process. The second group of studies looks at support provided by family, friends, and the institution. Finally, there is research on the ways in which the campus environment, or perceived campus environment, affects the transition of ethnic minority students.

Institutional Efforts

Administrators have created institutional programs and policies to increase the likelihood that students will settle in to the campus environment. Efforts include early socialization, bridge programs, living environments, and co-curricular opportunities. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) studied the successful transition programs at DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices project) institutions. These programs emphasize the importance of socializing students early on by creating a formalized way to incorporate students into their new environment. Successful transition programs introduce new students to the campus culture, institutional values, and educational and social environments of the institution. The socialization process begins with summer bridge and first-year experience programs. Minority students who participate in summer bridge programs have greater academic and social engagement over the first 2 years and higher rates of retention (Walpole et al., 2008).

Comprehensive socialization programs work with advising, residence halls, faculty, and campus resources (Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, Owen, & Johnson, 2006). DEEP programs also work with support programs for historically underserved students; commuter, adult, and transfer students; international students; and women and men at single sex institutions. Other DEEP institution transition programs include early warning systems to identify students at risk of dropping out, advising networks, mentoring, increasing accessibility of faculty, and creating networks for peers and residential environments to provide academic and social support (Kuh et al., 2005).

Different campus living environments can impact how students transition to college. Living-learning programs influence first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. First-generation students who participate in living-learning communities have statistically higher estimates of ease with the academic and social transition to college when compared to first-generation students who do not participate in living-learning programs (Inkelas et al., 2007).

The nature of living-learning communities increases social opportunities, which may assist first-generation students with their social transition. The frequency of classmate interactions is not as important as is the perception that the classmates are supportive (Inkelas et al., 2007). Students do not have to participate in a living-learning program; simply living on campus provides an environment that increases students' likelihood of a successful transition. Living in residence halls and participating in extracurricular activities have positive effects on social integration. For students who live on campus, there are increased opportunities for integration including (a) meeting other students, (b) developing student friendships,

(c) gaining information about social opportunities on campus, and (d) shifting away from high-school friends (Christie & Dinham, 1991, p. 419).

Whether students live on campus or off campus, involvement in co-curricular activities establishes social connections and creates a sense of attachment to the university (Yazedijian et al., 2008). Social engagement through extracurricular activities is just as important to personal development and academic persistence as activities in the classroom (Kuh et al., 2005). However, on large campuses where there are many possibilities for engagement, students sometimes find it difficult to make the decision about what to do (Yazedijian et al., 2008). Many of the institutional efforts to facilitate transition share a common thread increase the amount of support experienced by students during their transition. There are other forms of support for students in transition, however, including family, peers, and institutional personnel.

Summary

In summary, there is extensive research about how members of different demographic groups (Bolle et al., 2007; Compton et al., 2006; Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 2006; Lester, 2006; Nunez, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1994; Tinto, 1993) and ethnic minority students (Attinasi, 1989; Cabrera et al., 1999; Fischer, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2007; Yazedijian & Toews, 2006) transition to college. There is also research that examines how other personal characteristics, including expectations (Keup, 2007; Yazedijian et al., 2008) and strategies developed by individuals (Attinasi, 1989; Roe Clark, 2005), affect the transition to college.

There is also a body of work about how the environment impacts the college transition (Banning, 1989; Tinto, 1993). These environmental factor studies include institutional efforts

(Banning, 1989; Kuh et al., 2005; Walpole et al., 2008; Yazedijian et al., 2008) and the support family, friends, faculty, and administrators offer to students in transition (Christie & Dinham, 1991; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Yazedijian et al., 2007). Researchers have also explored how the perceived racial climate of a campus can impact first-year transition (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996; Mounts, 2004; Schwitzer et al., 1999).

Finally, the research related to students of color and their perceptions of transition programs is limited. There are studies that examine how students of color experience college (Attinasi, 1989; Cabrera et al., 1999; Fischer, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2007; Yazedijian & Toews, 2006) but not how they perceive transition programs they have been involved in. This study seeks to fill that gap in the literature by exploring the perceptions of students of color through their experiences in the Advanced Preparation Program at St. Cloud State University.

Chapter III: Methodology

This study examined the Advanced Preparation Program (APP) through the experiences of students of color. College preparation programs such as APP have seldom been thoroughly analyzed through the shared experience of participating students. Each student shared accounts served as a measurement of how impactful the program experiences were to the sustained academic success of the students. As students of color continue entering higher education with increasing numbers, higher education institutions must work diligently to prepare adequately to support and assist this population of students.

The importance of providing transition programs and services to students of color has continued to be recognized and been acted upon by administrators at higher education institutions. This has resulted in seeing more students of color attending four-year institutions and experiencing success. Kleiman (2001) suggests that the services offered in these transition programs are being delivered by a variety of individuals and methods through high school personnel and college transition service providers. The review of literature in Chapter II revealed that high school and higher education leaders understand the importance of the transition process and have knowledge of the skills and competencies necessary for transition planning. Conversely, despite this knowledge, the transition from high school to college may still be difficult for students of color (Kleiman, 2001). The Advanced Preparation Program was created at St. Cloud State University to assist with this transition and to allow students to experience college life.

Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory provided a role in the development of the research questions. The Transition Theory identifies "4 S's" of transition including

a) situation, b) self, c) support and d) strategies, which were incorporated into the research

questions. Additionally, both Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1984, 1993), which

discusses the way that college impacts undergraduate students and Critical Race Theory,

which places educational experiences of students of color in a much broader context

(Delgado, 1995) served as frameworks for this study as it pertained to the analysis of the

determined themes. This chapter is set up into the following sections discussing research

questions, research design, sampling procedures, pilot study, interview process, data analysis,

institutional review board, procedure and timeline, and summary.

Research Questions

This case study was directed by a set of overall guiding research questions sought to

explore the following questions:

1. How do students of color perceive their transition to college?

2. How, as students of color, did their encounters with students, faculty, and staff of
   color play a role in their experience?

3. What about their transition experiences sustained them through their sophomore
   year in college?

Research Design

A qualitative methodology was used for this study of the Advanced Preparation

Program (APP) at St. Cloud State University (SCSU) and its participants. Merriam (2009)

defines qualitative researchers as people concerned in understanding how individuals interpret

their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their

experiences. Qualitative research was used specifically to seek in-depth information regarding

the APP transition experience for those students of color who were identified as participants. An interview questionnaire was created to determine the impact of the APP transition experience on sophomore students of color. This study highlighted the importance of the information gathered regarding each student and their thoughts as it pertained to what transition meant to their sustained academic success. This is especially relevant when you consider Astin's (1993) Student Involvement Theory which states, the more engaged students are within their college environment the more probable it becomes for students to continue on to graduation. A key component of the Student Involvement Theory is the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model. To assist in guiding this study, the I-E-O model served as the framework to address the relationship between themes.

The I-E-O model is used in this study to analyze the impact that various environmental experiences (e.g., inside the classroom, APP support, importance of diversity, quality relationships, and positive interactions) had on students' outcomes (e.g., improvement in the type of student and positive experiences). This I-E-O model is supportive to this study because of its capability to uncover significant connections between the student input, educational environment, and student outcome variables within the APP environment (Astin, 1993; Pascrarella & Terenzini, 2005). Input is comprised of the entry characteristics students bring to the transition program (e.g., high school attended, parents highest level of education, motivation to attend, etc.); environment indicates the students' experiences during their time enrolled in the program (i.e., APP Environment); and outcomes are the goals of the transition program (i.e., sustained academic success). The I-E-O model is greatly respected and has been used in various studies to determine the impact of student involvement on student persistence,

thus making it well apt to assess the themes and questions of this study (Astin, 1993; Johnson, 2006).

Sampling Procedures

Qualitative research calls for samples to be purposefully selected to identify sites and participants that are most able to provide results to answer the research questions posed in a study (Creswell, 2003). The two initial components taken into consideration were locating a student transition program within an institution and selecting a group of participating students who took part in that transition program. The chosen institution was St. Cloud State University (SCSU). SCSU has a transition program known as the Advanced Preparation Program (APP). Purposive sampling was used to find a specific group of students from the APP taking into account gender and race. This institutional sample was important when addressing the research question regarding how students of color perceive their transition to the university.

Institution Selection

St. Cloud State University (SCSU) is part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU). SCSU is located within the geographic region of central Minnesota and is the largest institution within the MnSCU system with more than 17,000 students. There are two colleges and six schools as well as graduate schools at the chosen institution. SCSU offers 200 bachelor's degree programs and 60 masters and 2 doctoral degree programs. The student to faculty ratio is 21:1. The main campus houses more than 50 buildings and is located on more than 100 acres. More than 3,500 students live on campus (St. Cloud State University, 2013).

SCSU facilitates a transition program called the Advanced Preparation Program (APP). The program functions through the Multicultural Student Services department on campus. The services that are made available to APP participants are also available to the general student population. These services provide assistance to students as they transition to the university and include mentoring, tutoring, acclimation with the school environment, etc. Students who attend the transition program are given an in-depth tour of the services available on campus and how to go about obtaining them. This was relevant to the study as the literature points out the importance of such programs for students of color in obtaining access and transitioning to institutions, primarily those institutions in the Midwest (Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Yazedijian et al., 2007).

Participant Selection

The process to select individual participants from this campus was conducted through Multicultural Student Services and a purposive sampling method was utilized to obtain a list of viable candidates. After obtaining the pool of participants who had attended the APP program, the selection was narrowed to eliminate any students who were not identified as students of color. There were two areas that had to be met by the participants once they had been identified as potential candidates: (a) students must have graduated from high school and completed their sophomore year at SCSU and (b) students must be continuing their education at SCSU. The key elements of these criteria were to eliminate transfer and nontraditional students and to study traditional-aged students in their first two years after graduation from high school.

Contact was made with the directors of both the APP and Multicultural Student Services. Using the aforementioned criteria, the directors provided access to a number of potential student candidates. Finally, the sample pool was narrowed to 12 participants and an equal number of men and women were selected. Two of the 12 participants took part only in the pilot study, leaving five men and five women to participate in this qualitative study.

The director of the APP and the director of the Multicultural Student Services program served as primary contacts for the duration of this study. Both directors kept in contact with the participants and were St. Cloud State University (SCSU) staff members. Their ability to track students through their college careers played a large role in creating the sample selection pool. They keep many of the students as mentors, tutors and work-study employees, which made it easy for them to reach out and obtain their participation for this study. The established relationships between students and directors were beneficial in their ability to confirm completion of the program and overall participation within the program; ensuring potential respondents met the criteria. It is important in qualitative studies to select a sample that meets the criteria and is most likely to help the researcher gain insight into the phenomena being studied (Whitt, 1991).

The complete sample pool of two pilot study students and 10 qualitative study students of color (six male and six female) who had attended the APP at St. Cloud State University (SCSU), were contacted to participate in this study. The researcher made prescreening phone calls, ensuring that candidates had attended the program, were students of color, had completed their sophomore year and were returning to SCSU for their junior year. The purpose of these calls was two-fold. The first was to ensure the candidates met all of the

necessary criteria. The prescreening calls verified that all 12 candidates were viable for both the pilot and formal study. Secondly, the interviewer hoped to begin building a rapport with each participant. This allowed each participant to become comfortable with the interviewer and open up when the in-person interview took place. The participants were notified that there would not be incentives for their participation. They were still motivated to participate because they wanted their experiences to be shared.

Immediately following the prescreening phone call, participants were emailed a confirmation stating the time and date of the interview. The confirmation email also included an attachment of the informed consent form (see Appendix B), so that the participants could review the form prior to the interview. The in-person interviews were audio recorded for data collection purposes. The face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to delve deeper into each interview question and it also provided a level of comfort for the respondents, permitting them to go through the interview process in a more conversational manner.

The demographics of participants in the study provided insight into their profiles (i.e., age, gender, area of study, and parents' highest level of education). (See Table 2.) These demographic categories were of importance because they allowed the researcher the opportunity to gain a greater understanding for the participant group being studied. The number of male and female participants was even, in case any gender similarities or differences became apparent. The area of study at the university noted by participants varied widely with a total of nine different areas indicated. The participants' parents' highest level of education ranged from a high school diploma to an earned college degree. In the analysis of this demographic area there was nothing that stood out to be reported.

The following is an overview of the demographics of the participants in this study.
Specifically, age, gender, area of study, and parents' highest level of education are presented
in Table 1. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of
participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic

Participant	Age	Gender	Type of High School	Area of Study	Mother's Highest Level of Education	Father's Highest Level of Education
Emerson	19	Male	College/University Preparatory School	Biochemistry	Some College	Unknown
Crystal	20	Female	Charter School/Public High School	Marketing & Bus. Economics	Bachelor Degree	Some College
Jeremy	19	Male	Public High School	General Education	Some College	Unknown
Aisha	19	Female	Public High School	Community Psychology	High School Diploma	High School Diploma
Neil	19	Male	Public High School	Business	Some College	Some College
Jennifer	20	Female	Public High School	Mass Comm. & Photography	Associate Degree	High School Diploma
Ray	19	Male	Public High School	Sports Management	High School Diploma	High School Diploma
Alison	20	Female	Public High School	Political Science	Some College	Unknown
Delroy	20	Male	Public High School	Mass Comm.	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Sabrina	19	Female	Public High School	Education	Bachelors Degree	Bachelor's Degree

Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study following the methodology presented in this chapter. One male and one female were selected for the pilot study and an interview was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the interview protocol and functional process of this research. First, the pilot study participants were contacted through email or phone (Appendix A). A time to conduct a prescreening phone call was determined. During the prescreening phone call information was gathered from the prospective participant and if they met the criteria, an invitation to participate in the study was extended. At the conclusion of the prescreening phone call, an email confirming time and date of the interview was sent with an attached consent form. In the prescreening discussion it was made known to the participant that they needed to go through the consent form and return it signed on the day of the interview. On the day of the pilot study interviews, any questions the participants had were answered followed with a formal introduction to the study. Once comfortable, the interview process began. The researcher took notes while asking questions. With the findings, changes to the interview protocol were made to best suit answering the research questions. The researcher followed the process attempting to be thorough in the final decision of whether to make alterations to the entire study.

In the conclusion of the pilot studies, the researcher found that some of the questions were adequate and the interviewees were listened to actively confirming that the participants completely understood the questions and that the questions were answered thoroughly. The interviewer improved their interview skills and tweaked some of the questions by making the questions less academic. Some questions were removed as it became apparent during the pilot

interviews that they were repetitive. Other questions were shifted to ensure they elicited the responses that were needed for the purpose of this study.

Interview Process

Out of the 12 participants who met all criteria, two of those individuals were randomly selected to use in a pilot study. The remaining 10 individuals were interviewed as the primary participants of this study. All interviews were used to gather information into each students Advanced Preparation Program (APP) transition experience. Following the previously mentioned prescreening phone calls (see Appendix C), the in-person interviews were scheduled and completed. This allowed the researcher to ensure students met all of the criteria guidelines and to complete an informative questionnaire. Once the pre-screening phone interview was completed an email was sent to the participant confirming the interview, which included an attached consent form (see Appendix B and D).

Interviews were conducted using an interview protocol (see Appendix E) that consisted of 18 open-ended questions. The interview protocol was followed carefully to allow for questions to be worded and arranged with the intention of taking each participant through an identical sequence of questions with essentially the same words (Patton, 2006). The reason for this approach was to allow the researcher to enter into the other person's perspective (p. 341). The interviews lasted between 25-45 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded on a Panasonic S10 recorder, which provided a detailed record of all the interviews. Interviewer notes were also taken during the interview. The digital recordings of all the interviews were all converted into MP3 format on the computer and then played through iTunes and transcribed using Dragon Speech recognition software. Once the transcription was complete, a

copy was sent to each participant to have them look over their interview for any missed

quotes. Microsoft word was used to organize responses by cutting and pasting results under

the derived themes.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted as a method of collecting results with the purpose of

analyzing the responses to find recurring themes. According to Cresswell (2007) "data

analysis involves collecting open-ended data, based on asking general questions and

developing an analysis for the information supplied by participants" (p. 84). First the results

were prepared for analysis by conducting the following steps, (1) read through the responses

from the notes of all the interviews, (2) listened and transcribed the interviews from digital

audio recording, (3) sent a transcribed copy of each interview to the participants and once

confirmed, (4) read through the responses, coded them using pseudonyms and then entered

responses in their respective areas. At the completion of these steps, 10 files were developed

for each participant consisting of a printed copy of the email confirmation, the final

transcribed interview, phone pre-screening form and demographic questionnaire.

In order to discover the themes that were relevant to this study Astin's Input-

Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model from the Student Involvement Theory was evaluated

and determined that it was comprised of the necessary areas in which the emerging themes for

this study fit. The Student Involvement Theory places a great deal of attention on the

experience as a whole from beginning to end, suggesting that a participant's entry into the

program and more specifically entry characteristics have a distinct impact on the transition

experience. This subsequently resulted in the outcomes at the conclusion of the program for

each participant. This is important, as it was prevalent in the results gathered through the interview process.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was useful in creating the lens through which the researcher viewed and analyzed the data. Critical Race Theory allowed the researcher to maintain an understanding of the fact that students of color were being interviewed and more importantly the impact of this within higher education. This theory became extremely relevant, as it has been stated by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) that CRT can be utilized as the lens in which to view studies of higher education because it speaks to the power of oppression of structural institutions like schools. In this case we were discussing the empowerment of those same students within higher education. Critical Race Theory also placed an emphasis on race and kept the notion alive that most of the participants' experiences during transition, although not very specific, were impacted and or shaped by their encounters in a diverse setting. Furthermore CRT created the lens that allowed the researcher to discuss the importance of diversity on these students experiencing transition, and determine what that meant for them within their time spent in the program.

The final steps in the data analysis were to code the transcripts. Transcriptions were re-read several times in coding the text into the themes. A shorthand approach of coding the text into themes was used. For example (M#1) was used to identify the first male interviewed, and (EE) were used to identify their Enjoyed Encounters. During the process the researcher observed the similarities and differences in the participants' perceptions of their experiences as responses were organized by emerging themes.

Institutional Review Board Procedures

Before beginning this study, the researcher completed the mandated training by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix F), which concentrates on treating human subjects ethically. After completing the training with IRB, the researcher moved forward with the approval process. Once the study is designed, the required forms for IRB were completed electronically and submitted for approval. The IRB later filed a letter or approval (see Appendix) for this study, and the sample was then acquired.

The point of this qualitative research was not to interview a large number of participants; rather, to focus on making meaning of their experiences in detail. This study was not meant to be a cross-racial research study due to the researcher self-identifying as person of color as well as participants self-identifying as people of color. The participants may share more information because of this aspect or may be hesitant to disclose as much. To overcome this challenge, participants were told that they did not have to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable and that the voice recorder could be turned off at any time. At the conclusion of each interview, the research asked the participants to identify any questions that were confusing or viewed as unrelated to the others so that the question could be reworded for clarity.

Procedure and Timeline

- **January, spring of 2014:** The completed dissertation proposal was submitted to the committee, with the hopes of also completing any revisions shortly after that and beginning the process to of approval of the appropriate ethics forms (IRB).

- **July 1, 2014:** After the conclusion of the proposal, the sample collection process was initiated.

  a. **Early July 2014:** This began by contacting the acting directors of the St. Cloud State University Advanced Preparation Program (APP) to discuss criterion for participants.

  b. Working closely with the directors, it was determined which former participating students of color met the described criteria:

     i. Attended the APP at St. Cloud State University and received a degree.

     ii. Students who identified as students of color.

     iii. Gender: five women and five men.

  c. **Mid-Late July 2014:** After the participants for this research study were chosen, the following timeline was followed:

     i. **July Summer 2014:** Within a week, the researcher reached out to those selected through a prescreening phone call, which was followed by an email.

        1. Prescreening phone calls included introductions, determining a level of student interest, location of student and answering any questions.

        2. A brief synopsis of the study was emailed to participants. A request was made for response regarding participation dates and times.

        3. Informed consents were emailed.

ii. **July 2014:** Once the participants agreed to participate, interview dates

and times were confirmed via phone calls. If a chosen participant was

not able to participate, the process began from step (b) to select another

qualified student.

- **July-End of August 2014:** The interviews took place in a location convenient for

the participant.

a. The interview length was determined by the breadth and depth of each

response from the participant.

b. The interview was audio recorded.

c. Once the interview was completed, the interviews were transcribed and coded

for data analysis within a two-week period.

- **August 2014:** Data analysis

a. For this process qualitative interviews were utilized. This allowed the

researcher to draw the results of this study from a narrative analysis approach.

b. The coded information was organized into areas of common trends,

similarities, and differences.

c. Units of analysis included the comments, a phrase, sentence, or a series of

phrases that reflected the same topic.

- **August–September 2014:** Coding process commenced.

- **September 2014:** Themes and categories were created to answer the research

questions posed in this study.

Summary

The researcher designed this study by determining specific research questions, study criteria and using a piloted interview protocol. Slight improvements to the research questions were made after the pilot study and the full qualitative study commenced. Data received from the participants' interviews was analyzed and coded to reflect dominant themes. The information gathered in the study was then restricted to highlight the themes. Chapter IV describes what was heard from the participants and how the participants respond to the interview protocol, along with a thorough analysis of the common trends that became apparent due to how each participant felt about their experiences. Institutional review board procedures were followed to ensure all human participants were treated ethically.

Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative case study of the Advanced

Preparation Program (APP) at St. Cloud State University. The study provided students of

color who participated with an opportunity to share their experiences. Specifically, this study

analyzed the experiences of these students through an interview process that allowed us to

learn more about each individual's experience as he/she recalled it. Data was collected using

an interview protocol designed specifically for this case study.

Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model was instrumental in shaping the

six major themes that emerged from this study. The qualitative information fell in line with

the prominent elements of Astin's model (see Table 2). The themes that arose were *Input*

(a) Influence of Background (b) Motivation to Attend APP; *Environment* (a) APP

Expectations (b) APP Environment; and *Outcomes* (a) Positive Experience & Satisfaction and

(b) Improvement in Type of Student.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) remained a major underpinning for this study. More

specifically, it guided this study in serving as a continual reminder for the researcher that race

issues and their impacts within society and education play a role in influencing students of

color in transition (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This portion of the results provided an

informative analysis of the information collected as it pertained to the importance of diversity

in the APP environment. Participants gave their own accounts of the experiences they had

regarding diversity. They spoke specifically to what they felt was important about having a

diverse group in making the transition to college. The responses received throughout this

section reinforced why it is important to have a complete understanding of the participant group and how race impacts that group as they transition.

This case study was directed by a set of overall guiding research questions sought to be explored through Astin's (1993) I-E-O model. Analysis focused on these three questions:

1. How do students of color perceive their transition to college?

2. How, as students of color, did their encounters with students, faculty, and staff of color play a role in their experience?

3. What about their transition experience sustained them through their sophomore year in college?

As this chapter is set up to shed light on the meanings of each participant's transition experience, discussion sections include Themes within Astin's I-E-O model, Inputs, Educational Environment, Outcomes, and summary.

Themes within Astin's I-E-O Model

The researcher examined the themes as they align with Astin's (1993) I-E-O model. Astin's model focuses on these three sections: inputs, environment, and outcomes. Employing the process outlined by Creswell (2008) for sorting results into categories, each interview was read and the transcripts were carefully analyzed to identify common themes across the findings. Subsequently, the research was coded and then interview transcripts categorized into major themes based on the sections of Astin's I-E-O model.

Regardless of the participants' individual backgrounds, each carried some concept of the importance of college and some possessed an outlook on what college life would entail. Participants also highlighted their perceptions and experiences by discussing their motivation

for enrolling and the impact of their experience. The conceptual framework, adapted from

Berger and Malaney (2003) and Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model,

helped to identify variables through the students' matriculation through their first couple of

years in higher education.
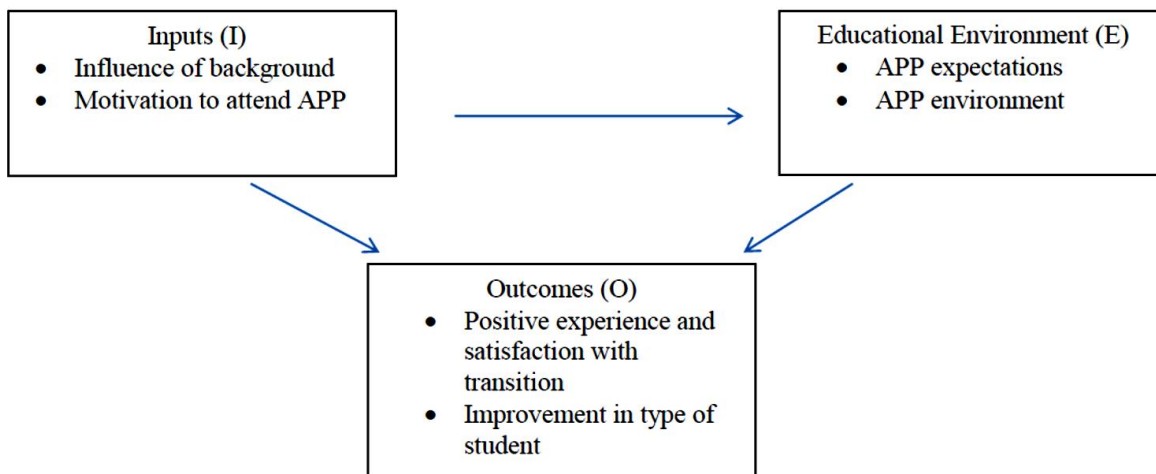
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Input

This portion of the I-E-O model played an important role in allowing the researcher to

take a closer look at what inputs each participant entered the APP with. Every individual

brings certain entry characteristics to transitions that influence and impact the way they

perceive their experiences (Astin, 1993). This research sought out the input of each

participant, which included learning about a student's background such as gender, age, where

they were from, the type of school they attended, the education level of their parents and their

intended area of study. Through the interview process, students shared their motivations for

attending the APP, their background story and their high school to college transition.

Influence of background

Environment Following careful review of the interview transcripts of each participant in this study, the researcher identified common experiences and perceptions of the participants while they were involved with the program. The majority of the participants enrolled in the APP because they believed it would position them to begin college as much more stable students. In addition, most of the participants wanted to get a head start on their college classes and wanted to sustain their academic success through graduation. Eight of the ten participants had attended a high school within the Minnesota school system and the remaining two participants attended high school in the Wisconsin school system. Interestingly enough, most participants did not initially plan on attending a transition program.

Emerson was a 19-year-old junior whose area of study at St. Cloud State University was biochemistry. He indicated that his mother had some college experience at a two-year institution and had obtained an associate degree, but he was unsure about his father's level of education. Emerson attended one of the top college preparatory high schools in Wisconsin. He enrolled with the hopes of becoming comfortable with his new home. Emerson affirmed:

> I went to Ruffis King High School, which was considered one of the best high schools in Wisconsin. It was actually in the top three when I came in as a freshman. I believe it was number one my senior year, international baccalaureate, which meant that we were on a college schedule. My junior and senior year I took pretty much all college courses, so my transition to college really wasn't as tough as some other students might have had it.

Emerson attributes his preparedness for the APP to the amazing college-like experience he encountered at his preparatory high school he attended. This allowed him to handle the transition experience to SCSU with ease.

Crystal a female was, 20 years old. Her area of study was marketing with a minor in business economics, and she was taking some courses in the summer before her junior year. Crystal indicated that her mother had earned a bachelor's degree and her father had some college. She attended a public school in Minnesota and was pleased with her experience. Crystal was driven to succeed in college and felt that enrolling was the first step in that direction. She reported:

> I first began thinking about pursuing a college degree the summer going into my senior year. I think it was my job at McDonalds that got me thinking about having a career and what it would take to get there. I saw all these people that depended on this job and it made me ask the question…is this what I want? Once I knew what I wanted, the rest was easy, and it was even easier when I found a program like APP. Choosing SCSU knowing all the support that was going to be given to get me started made the decision that much easier.

Having a transition program played a major role in Crystal's determining which institution she was going to attend because she was determined to start college with a good college experience.

Jeremy, a 19-year-old male, whose area of study at St. Cloud State University was general education. He was taking a summer class in preparation for his junior year. He indicated that his mother had some college, but he was unsure of the highest level of education attained by his father. Jeremy enrolled in APP once he knew it was an option for him. Jeremy stated, "I wanted to get college started right away and get ahead of other students in my graduating class." When asked whether it was important to him to attend an institution with some form of transition-based program, he stated, "Yes, I needed an institution that would provide me with a lot of support and guide me to success. It was a good choice for me."

Aisha, a female, who is 20 years old. Her area of study was community psychology, and she was prepared to begin the fall semester after a successful spring term. Aisha indicated that both of her parents had earned a high school diploma. She was motivated to attend the APP by the fact that she would be the first college graduate in her family. She confirmed that she had heard of and decided to attend an institution with a transition program midway through her junior year of high school:

> I first thought about APP going into my second semester my junior year because I had the opportunity to be the first graduate in my family. I thought it was kind of interesting and wanted to know how the program could help me obtain my goal. I did not always plan on attending SCSU. The only reason I attended was 'cause of the simple fact that the program met my needs and it was going to help me meet my goals.

Aisha had two major motivations for attending the program. The first was because she was career-oriented. The second motivation was to be the first in her family to attend college. During the interview she reiterated her strong belief that both were going to be accomplished because of her experience.

Neil is a 21-year-old male. He had a very strong spring semester and his area of study was business. Neil noted that both his parents had some college experience. He mentioned that going to a four-year institution was not something that he believed was in his cards right away. Neil indicated:

> It took me a while to be convinced that I could handle university level classes and once I started believing, it became all about finding the right institution, which meant I needed something like APP. I did not want to go through the testing and application process if I did not feel like my acceptance process was not going to be supported by the institution I chose. So I enrolled once my counselor had determined that there was a transition program at SCSU.

Neil believed this was the easiest route to earning his degree and expeditiously getting him caught up to handle the college environment.

Jennifer, a 20-year-old female, whose area of study at SCSU was mass communication and photography. She was taking one online class the summer following her sophomore year. She indicated that her mother had some college experience and that the highest level of education attained by her father was a high school diploma. Jennifer explained, "I began thinking about college my junior year of high school." When asked whether she had always planned on attending SCSU, she attributed her decision to the APP: "No, well my thoughts before I enrolled was I planned on going to a university, but I chose this school because of the APP and the work they do in preparing students."

Ray is a 21 year old male. His area of study was sports management. He took the summer off to prepare for another great fall term. Ray disclosed that both of his parents had earned a high school diploma. His motivation to enroll into the APP has to do with his knowledge of what such programs can do for him. He confirmed that he was not considering colleges without a transition program of some sort:

> It was probably about a year and half ago when I spoke with my sister and a couple of her friends who had attended a transition program before college. I made the decision at that point that I would like an institution with a transition program. I just had a good idea what I needed as a student.

Ray felt that the APP was extremely beneficial in that it assisted him in growing as a student the first two years of school. Ray had a strong understanding of himself as a student and knew that the APP would help establish good habits for himself and stressed the importance of involvement in your education.

Alison, a female who is 20 years old. Her area of study was political science and she was really excited to start more of her major classes in the fall. Alison indicated that her mother's highest level of education was some college and that she was unsure of her father's

highest level of education. She considered attending the APP due to having family members who had shared in the experiences she would have. In addition, she noted she did not consider any other institutions and conveyed, "I planned on going to SCSU regardless."

Delroy is a 20-year-old male. He was studying mass communication and was prepared to follow up his spring semester with a strong fall term. Delroy indicated that both his parents earned a college degree of some sort. Upon completion of his high school requirements, he began pursuing his college education. Delroy reported:

> Well, I started thinking about going to college when I first received my high school diploma. No, I did not always plan on attending SCSU. I first looked for different opportunities and found the APP. I wanted something that was going to have a major impact on me as a student. I didn't want to start small…I wanted to do big things. You know, maybe gain some different experiences…being around different people and cultures…

Delroy wanted to enter college and get started on the right path academically. He felt that the APP would greatly assist with that.

Sabrina, a 19-year-old female, whose area of study was education. She indicated that both her mother and father have earned a bachelor's degree. Sabrina enrolled in the APP once she determined that she had met the requirements. Sabrina mentioned, "The APP made me more comfortable with myself as a student." When asked how important the APP was in making her decision to attend SCSU, Sabrina stated, "very important looking back at it now…I would make the same decision now if I had to. At least knowing what I know about the program now."

In summary, the information gathered placed the students and their experiences within the input section of Astin's I-E-O model. Each student had an important story to tell and what he or she brought to the transition experience played an important role in impacting and

shaping the type of experience they had. Astin's (1993) theory suggests that each section in the I-E-O model impacts the other through to the outcome. This lead to the belief that all participants brought some form of entry characteristics (Input) to the transition experience. Understanding that most of the participants of this study shared both similarities and differences was also very important in because it was those same things that allow them to share in a successful experience.

Motivation to Attend Advanced Preparation Program

At one time or another, whether clear or not, each participant believed there was a benefit to enrolling in the APP. Each participant discussed various motivations that influenced their decision. Participants' motivations emerged into three categories: (a) family-related motivations, (b) career-related motivations, and (c) athletic-related motivations.

Family related motivation. Family members can be an influential motivation for individuals to enroll into programs such as the APP. Neil, Aisha, Ray, Jennifer, and Alison were all motivated by members of their respective families. Neil and Aisha were both motivated by setting an example for family members, while Ray, Jennifer, and Alison were motivated by family members or friends who had attended programs similar to the APP.

Neil was one of eight who indicated that one of his parents obtained a college degree or had some college experience. Aisha indicated she was motivated by the potential of being the first in her family to graduate from university. Aisha noted, "My motivation for enrolling into APP was to get a good start to college so I could be the first one to graduate from college in my family." Aisha acknowledged that her younger siblings were her motivation for attaining a college degree. She affirmed, "The benefit was to show my brothers and sisters

that anything you want to do it is possible because a lot of the universities have places you

can go and people you can talk to for help."

> Lastly, Ray elaborated on his motivations for enrolling into APP. He commented:

> I had an older sister that attended a transition program prior to college, and I saw the stuff she was doing. Just seeing other people's lives and hearing other people's stories about transition programs always motivated me to look into them. My sister just went for it and she got it, and now today she is doing well, being able to support her own family.

Ray sought out the APP for the type of transition experience and the lasting impact it had on

his family members. That alone led him to look closer at the impact that this transition

experience might have on his life.

> **Career related motivation**. In addition to studies that indicate college graduates have

higher probability of starting a career and staying employed than non-college graduates, many

individuals enroll in college because they believe a degree will have a positive impact on the

longevity of their career (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Three of the study participants were

motivated by what the program could do for them from a career standpoint; getting off to a

good start academically and hopefully sustaining them to graduation, opening the door to a

successful career. The future career benefits of earning a college degree were great in these

cases. Jeremy, Crystal, and Sabrina felt that the APP would ground them academically and

lead them to graduation, which would ultimately mean securing a better job. Jeremy

maintained:

> The time put into the APP was important to me as a student. If I could become the type of student I needed to be in the university environment, graduation would be a reality, and I could walk right into my career. This plan is one that needs me to stay focused on my goals, and APP helped me structure the tasks leading up to my goals.

Jeremey was very career oriented with his reason for attending the APP. This became very

apparent in his responses during his interview. Other participants shared this motivation such

as when Crystal asserted, "The benefit would probably be taking some of the things you

learned within APP and using them to complete college. Even being able to continue using

some of the things we learned once we start our careers." Sabrina proclaimed, "Being able to

start into the type of job I want, I know for a fact is not going to happen without an education

it is hard." Furthermore, Crystal revealed her motivation:

> I wanted to become a better student, to obtain a career so I would not have to struggle
> in life. I feel that was my whole reason for enrolling in APP and SCSU. I think earning
> a degree would keep me from ending up in a dead end job or something. I would be
> able to have a career and not just a job.

Though this motivation may not be unique amongst the participants, motivation for enrolling

was very distinct and powerful.

Athletic related motivation. For some college students, the belief was that college

athletics served as the gateway providing them with a scholarship to lessen the financial

strain. With more athletic programs leaning on transition programs, the ultimate goal was to

get athletes on campus sooner and have them academically prepared by National Collegiate

Athletic Association (NCAA) standards (I. Shoemacker, personal communication, July 15,

2012). It has definitely caused an arms race in that more transition programs are being utilized

for this reason (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Emerson and Delroy offered similar commentary

related to the motivation for enrolling into the APP. Both participants wanted to enroll early

and get ahead not just academically but athletically as well. In addition to being motivated by

his mother to enroll, Emerson confirmed:

It was a lot that motivated me to enroll into APP. Like I said, having a younger sister at home that looked up to me, and my mother pushing me. Even with all that, the number one reason for me was my coaches asking me to enroll, and at the end of the day that scholarship I was getting from the program. It had a lot of influence. It afforded me the opportunity to be here and my coaches wanted me on campus early enough to get familiar with the team's routines, and they felt APP would give me that opportunity.

Similarly, Delroy noted:

I enjoy participating in sports, and I wanted to be in a position to contribute right away. Joining the APP allowed me to get comfortable with things not just from an academic standpoint, but being here early, I was able to build a stronger relationship with coaches and other teammates of mine that were here over the summer.

Both Emerson and Delroy spoke to the role athletics played in motivating them to attend and allowing them to experience transition both within the athletic department and through the APP.

When identifying the input characteristics that students entered into the Advanced Preparation Program with, the researcher was able to pinpoint influences in each individual's background. Students had multiple reasons for deciding to attend and participate in the APP. The three main areas included being motivated by their family, by wanting a successful career or through their athletic ambitions. Regardless of the reason, all students appreciated the experiences and reported success as a result of the APP.

Educational Environment

Astin (1993) shares that the environment is important to set the tone for a successful transition. Students come into an environment with a set of expectations pertaining to how they will experience the transition including what types of support they will receive. Environmental factors have been found to influence students of color attrition rates, involvement within the university, and the quality of relationships with peers, staff and faculty

(Hurtado et al., 2007). Environment can include the physical spaces such as living quarters, classroom, resource centers, campus atmosphere, and even the community.

Advanced Preparation Program expectations

Though all the participants had one of the various motivations mentioned as their reason for attending the APP, something internal or external to the institution transpired that also impacted the participants' motivation and subsequent enrollment in the APP. While some students had no idea what to expect when they enrolled in a transition program, others had preconceived notions of what the experience would entail. Three participants, Emerson, Aisha, and Jennifer conveyed that they had clear expectations when they enrolled into the APP. For Emerson and Aisha it was stated that they had these clear expectations because of all the information they had received on the program before they arrived to campus. Emerson spoke to his own and Aisha's thoughts in mentioning, "All the information I received from my coaches and the staff within the program, gave me a clear understanding of what it was I was getting myself into." Jennifer's lack of different expectation was also based on the information she had gathered talking with counselors and mentors throughout high school. Jennifer purported:

> I think I did not have any expectations for the program because of my involvement in summer academic programs through high school. I felt like it would be the same…[How so?] we took classes and had different activities we were told to attend, so a lot of the responsibility was on us to be prepared to learn and work.

The remaining participants' expectations were grouped into three categories: (a) high school to college transition expectations, (b) academic expectations, and (c) institutional support expectations.

High school to college transition expectations. University provides an opportunity for teenagers to make a transition into young adulthood. The independence associated with college life can aid in the maturation of freshman college students. Thus, the Advanced Preparation Program (APP) structure and maturity of students within the program had an impact on the participants' perceptions. Many of the participants asserted that initially the institution felt as if it was an extension of high school. Crystal commented:

> I thought that the program and the courses were very structured. You know, going into APP I anticipated an extension of high school in certain situations. I thought, because it had a different structure than what I had anticipated, it ended up being a lot more interesting and different in many ways.

> Similarly, Jennifer remarked that she had flashbacks of high school when walking the

hallways of the college but those quickly diminished. She stated:

> Well, outside of the classroom I quickly realized how different this setting is from high school setting. Some of the students in my high school would skip classes and presentations, where it seemed that was not an option with APP.

Moreover, Alison continued to express her views of high school as it related to the efforts of some of her instructors. She reported:

> In high school you would have your teachers telling you to do your work and make you do your work, and with the college professors they would not tell you to do it. They would just point out what needed to be done, which I feel is what should happen when you are in college.

Aisha proclaimed:

> The hard thing about going to college is you have to be very focused and can't let yourself be distracted. For me, going to college with people I was previously in high school with and grammar school with, people I have not seen for years, there were always distractions around me. But APP taught me to be self-disciplined in the decisions I made regarding my academics and that has carried me a long way.

Alison explained that she wanted to be part of a program that enabled her to blend in with other students and not have to deal with high school clique issues. Through her observation, she was able to see that the high school mentality was nonexistent among the students. She recalled some of the encounters and one thing that stood out was the level of maturity in how everyone dealt with their issues. Alison reported:

> I think seeing the maturity level of those that were accepted in to the program…this definitely meant to me that I was past that high school friendship stage of my life. There were no cliques. Everyone spoke with each other, and it made it easier to communicate your feelings and thoughts because of that. It was amazing to have conversation with people that I would have never talked to otherwise but also to have meaningful conversations with those people.

Jeremy did not feel the environment was that much of a distraction. His statement was similar to most participants. Jeremy conveyed, "It was all right. It was definitely different, you know. Basically, it was like a step up from high school. It was not too much confusion like I said."

Aisha wondered how well she would integrate among other students. She declared, "I never seen these people before. How would they accept me? Would I be alienated by my peers or disliked by others?" Even with her initial apprehension, Aisha conveyed:

> Well, at first I thought it was a lot more like high school, but it came off to me as just an adult version of high school. I mean it is not a bad thing, I felt it was very different from high school.

Delroy also indicated that the environment outside of the classroom was not a distraction. He stated that he was more involved with extracurricular activities because those he was involved with were mature and had the same goals he had within the program. He reported, "Outside the classroom, I enjoyed participating in everything outside of the classroom. It was just knowing that I was with people that were good for me and were going

to support me making the right decisions." Delroy went on to say, "I was so involved because a lot of what we did grabbed my interest and left me wanting to participate because it was all new to me."

Ray affirmed, "Outside of the classroom was enjoyable and could have been a lot for some but for me I needed it." He remarked that he was observant when he first got to college, but it was different once he got comfortable: "Once I really got settled in and got comfortable, it was easy for me to identify the difference between high school and college." In a high school setting, students tend skip classes for many reasons. Ray also provided a glimpse into what it was like when students skipped classes in college. He explained:

> When I missed one of the classes during APP, I felt behind and completely lost, especially when no one else is doing it, and it's like you know you're going to be all over the place with the homework that day. At the same time no one says anything to you, but you feel bad because everyone else is doing what they need to do, and you're not.

In summary, all of the participants in the study felt that the atmosphere created by the APP was one that allowed for little distraction and much focus on leaving high school behind and becoming a college student. The environment inside and outside of classroom combined with the experiences encountered through faculty and staff can be detrimental to students' ability to experience a quality transition to college. It became evident that students who socialized excessively as opposed to limiting their interactions with others seemed to feel the environment was conducive to their future success.

Academic and institutional support expectations. New college students expect the coursework to be challenging and to require a higher level of input on their part to be successful. The majority of the study participants expressed their beliefs that, although the

academic rigor was apparent, the coursework and expectations were reasonable. Emerson,

Jeremy, and Alison expressed similar thoughts as they conveyed their belief that the

coursework would be tougher. Emerson asserted:

> I thought the English course would be harder. I felt like the level of English that I took at my college preparatory school prepared me for the academic rigor in the intro English course they had us take. The work was easy for me. I expected more of a challenge.

Jeremy offered a similar assessment of the coursework that he encountered while enrolled in

the APP. Jeremy confirmed, "I actually thought it was going to be harder than it was

academic-wise, but the APP staff did a solid job of prepping us." Alison also gave thought to

her feelings on what she expected prior to enrolling into the APP. She stated:

> Before I enrolled in the APP, I was a little nervous about the coursework and the projects expected from us at first. But once I got into the program, we were given a structure of telling us what time study tables were and where to go to get extra help on campus. This for me made things a lot easier once we got into our classes. I found that it was very helpful for me to follow the APP structure. It kept me on task academically and really gave me an understanding for what I was to expect, which eased my nerves about the whole college thing.

While the APP affords students certain freedoms and flexibility, students expect APP

to also have a certain level of structure that they did not experience in high school. Crystal

discussed the implementation of the program structure and its impact on her. She conveyed, "I

would say the program structure was very well put together, always keeping us engaged with

staff." She also reported, "Right off the bat, they explained the structure and what their

expectations were for us. I thought it was cool that they also pointed out to us expectations

that we should have for the staff". Some participants expressed their expectations of a more

serious collegiate environment. Jennifer stated succinctly, "I went into it thinking it was more

of a stuck up, serious environment and it wasn't. I stopped thinking that like after the first

week." She also noted, "I thought it would be a little more laid back but it was very

structured." Ray expressed his previous feelings about the APP and what he expected when he

got to college. He proclaimed:

> I really hated the idea of having to be in school during my summer. I hated school. I looked forward to the freedom of college, but when I got here, there was not a lot of freedom in my opinion. It's just when I got that freedom; if you want to go [to class], you go; if you don't, your mother and father are not there to push. So the program definitely holds you accountable.

What was evident is the majority of the participants were really impressed with how

the APP staff was able to tailor the program's academics to challenge each student in ways

that allowed them to develop and enhance their academic weaknesses.

One participant expressed an eagerness to earn a college degree and explained that he

did not feel that it was possible for him to handle college, but he was re-enthused about the

idea once he had his experience in the APP. Neil conveyed:

> My thoughts about college…I was not as interested as I should have been. My thoughts now after being a part of the APP…I feel more confident just knowing all the support systems on campus and also knowing I can lean on those people I met through the program.

Neil also discussed his expectations of faculty members: "I also looked to gain confidence in

myself as a student from my professors' challenging me and pushing me too."

Ray offered a distinct perspective. He contrasted his expectations against what he

believed it would be like at other institutions. He noted,

> When I told my sister about some of the things we did here, she said that our program was a lot more hands on with us than some of the other programs she had looked into, which makes it a very seamless thing I think. You go in and you leave with nothing really changing I feel.

Sabrina explained the type of institutional support she expected to receive from the APP staff. She expected to receive motivation from individuals within the institution. Sabrina affirmed, "I expected to find people who could motivate me, you know, push me push myself further to that point to really want to go further."

The Advanced Preparation Program sets clear and high expectations for students to prepare them as they transition to the college environment. Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes, meet with their assigned mentors and tutors, attend mandated study tables, and utilize resources that are available to them for academic support. There are high expectations for the level of student maturity demonstrated through responsibility and respect towards their peers, professors, their academics and their environments (St. Cloud State, 2012).

Advanced Preparation Program Environments

Transition programs not only have a mission to provide a gateway to higher education for those who may not be able to pursue a college degree, but also provide access and support to individuals of color who live in surrounding communities. The opportunity for students to attend the same college with people who may have similar differences may improve social integration and may also create a climate that is conducive to learning. All but three of the participants resided in the state Minnesota. The majority of participants believed it was the most convenient university for them to attend. Several participants mentioned knowing other students at the university from high school or their neighborhoods.

Participants were asked to describe their experiences within the APP and provide thorough insight into what they observed and how it impacted their academic experience

through to sophomore year. Participant's responses centered on three major areas: (1) APP support, (2) Inside of the Classroom and (3) Importance of Diversity.

Advanced preparation program support. Study participants asserted that faculty and staff support was incredible during their enrollment in the program. Faculty and staff support were essential to the success of college students. It was especially imperative to students of color, who have such a high attrition rate. Participants discussed their feelings about the level of support received through the program. The majority of participants perceived their interactions with the staff to be extremely positive.

Positive interactions with institutional staff can have a positive impact on students and ultimately their decision to persist. Interactions with an institution's academic system will influence students' attitudes toward themselves and the institution (Kim & Sam, 2009). Some participants pointed to the affective guidance, while others highlighted the sheer support.

Emerson revealed that he received quality guidance form the mentors and staff associated with the program. He asserted:

> My mentor was very involved with me. I was able to establish a good relationship with my mentor. The staff were very proactive introducing us to those individuals that would provide us with the right information about the resources on campus. A lot of these individuals I needed to know because they assisted me in getting a job on campus. And when it came time to picking courses, it was good just to know that I had already established the type of relationships where I felt that those questions could be answered. Even now, I still talk to my mentor about finding tutors for different courses that I might be in or even find out how to fully utilize certain resources provided here at school.

Sabrina, Emerson and Crystal made similar comments related to the APP and staff support. Sabrina asserted, "As far as staff, everything was very well communicated to me and as a result I was able to accomplish what ever was being asked of me." Emerson stated, "And

every time I went to meet with them, they would tell me exactly what I needed to do next

instead of sending me off without any answers to my questions." Crystal reported:

> …we felt accepted by the staff right away. So I felt good knowing that our first encounter with staff was one that presented them as being supportive of what we came to accomplish. Also knowing that we could trust them with our goals was huge; like we could tell them what we were interested in majoring in and they believed that we could do it without hesitation. And so right there, I think that left me with a good feeling about getting a degree and being sent down the right path.
> Aisha described what she felt was an immense showing of support from virtually

every department involved with the program. She provided detailed accounts of her

encounters with APP staff:

> You get the support you need from the staff that they put together to help you, like the guidance to utilize the Write Place, Math Center, or the tutors in the Greenhouse. I have used all of those services because I am the type of person that realizes when I don't completely understand something and I need to seek out help. I have met all the individuals in these resource centers, and I have gotten a positive response from them all.

Neil conveyed that he also did encounter positive interactions with the staff members that

were supportive, and had a vested interest in the students:

> Yeah, the staff were very supportive there. You could tell that they were real genuine in what they did, and it was evident the passion that went into their work with us. It wasn't just all about collecting a paycheck, and they weren't there to come in and do what they got to do every day and leave. I mean they do really care about the advancement of the students.

Similarly, Ray stated, "The staff, the faculty, and things like that in the program, like I said,

all of them care. When everyone cares it makes things easy." Aisha proclaimed, "As a

student, it was amazing to be around individuals that were so committed to our success as

student and supporting us in becoming better students." While most participants discussed the

overwhelming presence of support in general, others were specific in identifying particular

resource centers and staff.

Most of the participants were extremely vocal about the experiences they had with tutors and resource staff. Jeremey expressed his relief in having tutors to help him:

> I am about just getting help with schoolwork. It was very simple. The process amazed me and mainly how well we were received going in to get help by the staff of tutors. The one thing they asked of us is that we were prepared and knew what it was that we wanted to accomplish when we met with tutors. This was same when we used the resource staff. To me, it seemed like it was a little work to benefit us a great deal. The fact that we were sent to the right people instead of running around trying to figure out who could help me, not having to be sent all over the place I think was a great relief.

Sabrina discussed the potential ramifications of not having the tutors and resource centers to her disposal once her APP experience was over:

> Without the tutors that were available to us while in the APP, I don't know that I would have had the success in that program and continue to have because of the work they do. Finding a tutor was a positive experience for me, and it was easy to get the assistance we need and now with any class I have issues with, I can always find help. It was such a positive experience especially when they say things like "I know this stuff, this is really easy to understand." That is the attitude of the tutors I have encountered.

All the participants expressed positive and somewhat similar comments related to the support received from the institution's staff.

Inside of the classroom. The classroom is the most basic and traditional platform for student learning. However, if the class time is not structured and controlled, learning may be inhibited (Tinto, 1997). Many of the participants revealed that the classroom environment within the APP courses was productive as it related to learning. Tinto (1997) states that negative experiences can cause students to distance themselves, potentially resulting in withdrawal from classes. Participants of the study provided details related to the behavior of the students, the role of faculty, faculty control, pedagogy, and other faculty behaviors.

Participants discussed the type of learning that occurred due to the level of structure and the academic expectations set forth by the APP faculty and staff. Emerson and Sabrina described their similar experiences inside the classroom with their classmates. Sabrina asserted:

> I would say the inside of the classroom was great. Everyone was there because they wanted to be. They wanted to learn and they did want to succeed and no one acted up. Everyone got along and I think they also understood what was expected of them.

The participants echoed the same sentiments consistently stating how much they felt it was beneficial to them to be introduced into an environment in the manner that was presented to them during the APP.

The role of faculty within the APP is not limited to student engagement and the exchange of knowledge; it also entails maintaining an environment that is conducive to learning. When faculty members fail to engage students and maintain an environment conducive to learning, the learning experience can be irreparably damaged. Participants discussed the emphasis on student-faculty engagement in the classroom. Crystal felt as if her success resided in structure and her ability to engage with her professors. She stated:

> The classes were easy to adapt to because the professors were accessible to us and down to earth with us. All of the faculty associated with the program were easy to talk to even about life things. And as a result it made it easier to approach those professors no matter what.

When addressing interactions with his professors, Emerson revealed:

> I believe the success I have had to this point is due to some of the interactions I had with professors in the APP. Some of the profs really pushing me while I was in the program allowed me to grow and understand the importance of that process in placing you in a position to engage in dialogue with future profs.

In relation to faculty engagement with students, Neil simply pointed out, "The teachers were very helpful but also kept things very professional."

The presence of student engagement and classroom structure was extremely positive for some participants. Crystal expressed:

> The structure and the type of person I am, if I grasp and completely understand something, it holds my interest and I will continue with it. The classes through APP and those I had after I grasped and had success. This I felt was because I could approach faculty and faculty continued to reach out to me and encouraging me.

Ray explained that all of his experiences with faculty within APP were positive, partly because he felt they kept him engaged. He emphasized, "The professors I encountered were really active participants during my time. It was great to know and feel that someone aside from myself cared to see me succeed." This was very important to the participants, as most voiced that the positive experiences with faculty really allowed them to acknowledge their satisfaction within the environment.

When professors minimize classroom disruptions, it creates a great learning environment for those who want to learn. Furthermore, if faculty members can maintain a controlled environment in the classroom, they may gain the respect of students. Ray and Jeremy expressed their perceptions of a controlled classroom environment. Ray indicated that he realized that he was not in high school anymore. He stated, "The faculty did an amazing job keeping the students focused and on task and they would not let us lose focus." Jeremy expanded by describing that fear was not something that was utilized by faculty. He explained, "I feel like the professors we met through APP did not have to place fear in the equation for them to have control. They were very professional and respectful to the students and we showed respect back." Participants pointed to the organization they experienced in the

classroom teachings as to what kept learning on task. The structure implemented was done in such way that students felt they were always occupied with class work and discussions and as a result they had no time to lose focus.

Crystal and Ray outlined the faculty's patience with the students and their ability to provide guidance related to the experience of higher education. Crystal contended that some faculty expected students to know things and showed patience with the students who did not quite understand and needed more detailed explanations. Ray reported:

> Most of the staff and faculty were flexible with us, giving us extra help with our work in the areas that we were not familiar with. The staff were always giving us ideas and keeping us thinking about the decisions we needed to make. I mean out of all the staff, I had a mentor that was extremely supportive and I liked. Most of the students that worked with my mentor I realized liked him as well, partly for the same reasons I did.

Ray was very straightforward in suggesting that his mentor relationship was something he was very grateful to have established during his time in APP. More importantly, he realized what it meant to becoming the type of student they expected him to be.

Crystal expressed her feelings about the support she received from the staff as well. She declared, "It makes you want to work hard to succeed when you have the type of support that is given, with people that are attentive to your needs or have sense of urgency to your needs." The narrative was that most of the participants felt very well supported and understood as students. This was evident in how each staff member and professor approached their working relationship with the participants. As a result it was suggested in the interviews by each participant how important it was to have a good support system and the impact it had in shaping the type of experiences that each student had.

Academic integration is essential to the retention and ultimate success of college students. One participant, Sabrina, specifically discussed her ability to integrate academically explaining that other students possessed comparable goals. She discussed her relationship with a select group of students with whom she interacted. Sabrina conveyed:

> All of the students, regardless where they were from, their age, gender or what it may have been. All of my classmates were there with the same goal as me as far as taking classes and passing. So I would have to say that the APP set it up so that my integration or interaction with other students was great. All of us working hard held each other accountable; no one wanted to be the one missing classes or not getting assignments done.

In the discussion of academic integration Sabrina was very much aligned with her peers. Most also mentioned the positive effect of having others within the program they could relate to from an academic standpoint.

Importance of diversity. Students were asked whether diversity had an impact on their enrolling in the APP and on the type of experience they had. All of the participants expressed that diversity within the program was important to them for various reasons. Seven participants indicated that diversity was important to them for comfort and experience reasons, while the remaining three said it was needed but was not something that they relied on for a great experience. Interestingly, all seven participants who stated that diversity was important to them went to relatively well-diverse high schools, and the other three participants declared that their high schools were not as diverse. In addition to discussing why diversity in the program was important to the environment, students offered suggestions about why it was important to their individual experiences.

Aisha commented that she felt that diversity was important to her in order to have individuals she could relate to:

I wanted to be able to step into an environment that made me feel comfortable and part of that was having other people like me. I mean it did not matter to me where you are from or what color you were. It was really none of that. I just wanted to be around people that understood my differences.

Delroy, Ray, and Neil expressed similar sentiments as they conveyed that being part of the program was important to them, but with that they wanted to be in an environment that was diverse and would give them the opportunity to transition with those they could relate to. Each agreed that diversity provided comfort as they embarked on this new academic journey. Delroy confirmed his feelings for having a diverse environment in his first weeks in college during his APP experience. Delroy noted:

My overall experience was amazing. I think it was amazing because I did not have to spend time to build relationships. I mean I can get along with anyone, but I think there was something easy about establishing friendships with people I grew up with or people that had a different skin color. It was like a brotherhood and sisterhood because we got each other right away. I would have had a hard [time]…if I was the only person of color in the program just because it not an environment that I came up in. I would have had success anyway, but I think it would have been a lot of new for me at once.

Ray shared similar remarks in being from a very diverse high school and community. He asserted:

The diverse environment I was exposed to through APP was really important. I needed to have other people of color around me that I could observe striving to do something as big as working towards a degree. It was easy to be supportive of one another because we all understood what it meant for us being people of color to be working towards a degree. So that is why it was important to me to have diversity that just motivated me.

Neil proclaimed the importance of diversity had a major impact in his staying enrolled in the APP. He confirmed, "If it was not for diverse environment in APP, I wouldn't have known what to expect, leaving the cities to come to the middle of Minnesota to go school." Ray and Delroy both agreed that diversity had an impact on their experiences. Delroy acknowledged,

"The diversity part of APP was very important to the whole experience." When asked in what way diversity played role in his experience, Ray agreed: "It helped me realize things about me that I did not completely understand."

Though Emerson cited that diversity was needed for the group of individuals to get along together in some instances but was not something he relied on to make his whole experience. He asserted, "Like I said…I get along with just about anybody and everybody, that just who I am." As a result, he declared:

> For me the diverse environment provided me with an opportunity to grow and learn some new things about myself around other people of color from different cultures. As a person, I was able to establish some strong relationships because I can get along and I can approach anyone. I mean I benefited from the relationships I had with my mentor, who was a person of color. That was great for me to have a senior who was willing to share his experiences with me. Again, for me, the diverse environment was good to me from the standpoint that I felt that we were able to learn from one another.

Though Emerson wished that he had a closer relationship with those who went through the program with him, when asked why he does not feel strength in the relationships that he formed in the APP, he replied, "Again, diversity was important to me but I think my personality to continue to meet new people did not allow me to see color as having such a large impact on my overall experience."

Crystal maintained diversity shed light on "who I am as person and those that I could relate to coming from a non-diverse high school experience." When asked how diversity impacted her experience with the APP, she responded, "For me it was more important to use the opportunity to learn about myself and understanding where I fit as it relates to diversity." She also affirmed that, "hanging out with my friends of color, it was crazy to see how they were treated in stores, being watched, and that created a realization for me, made me think

about how I may be viewed being Latino and quite fair skin." Alison remarked that "diversity

within the APP was extremely important to me, especially where I come from." When asked

how diversity was impactful to her experience, she declared:

> Again, being Somalian and having been raised in Minnesota in high school, it was always easy for me to talk with the other Somalian girls, and in the APP it was great because everyone had a diverse background and I could fit in. Being in a diverse environment in college was so different than my high school. Everyone wanted to learn about me, my culture, and that made it easy for me to make friends and just focus on school.

Alison felt that having peers from many different backgrounds afforded her the opportunity to

feel comfortable to share her culture in an open environment and allowed her to be herself

without judgement.

When Jeremy was asked how important diversity was to his experience in the APP, he

responded directly, "Very, it was very important in shaping the experience that I had." He

reiterated the people that "I met kept me going and our similarities and differences kept us

together." Jeremy also declared:

> I would say the support we had for one another I think can be credited to the fact that we were all students of color, and I thought that enabled us to be each other's biggest supporters when it came to pushing each other in the classroom and in different environments outside of the classroom. I mean, for the majority of us, we had never been asked to perform academically at such a high level, and we were able to stick with one another and make sure no one got left behind. Something that stood out to me was as group at the challenge course maybe like two of us had ever had such an experience, and we could all lean on each other to accomplish things because we had trust in each other.

Jeremy felt it was easy to be supportive while working with his peers because of the similar

shared experiences they had.

Sabrina conveyed that diversity to her was not something she thought about until she

came to the program and met the group of individuals she would be sharing the experience

with. She was asked whether the diversity impacted her experience in the APP and responded, "Yeah, particularly because I had such a dismissed attitude about it. I did not expect it and when I realized it was there, I loved it, having staff especially that could relate to me and the type of experience I was trying to have." Sabrina added that it "really stood out to me as an important part of my experience." Though Sabrina indicated her lack of expectation for diversity in the APP environment, she accepted ownership for her initial thoughts and made it work so that she benefited. She explained, "I like taking opportunities and this provided the opportunity to build relationships with my current employers and mentors."

Overall, the APP participants found great benefits from having peers of color in the program. They were able to relate to each other through shared diversity experiences and build friendships. Students also took interest in learning about each other's culture. The participants were motivated to strive forward when they had the support of peers both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

As students made the transition from high school to college, they brought with a set of expectations. Because these academic, institutional support and environmental expectations were met, they experienced success in the APP. Environments and climate play a large role in a student's ability to achieve and sustain academic success. Diversity was regarded as an important factor to the positive experience had by all participants.

Outcomes

While negative experiences can influence a student's ability to take on college, positive experiences can lead to better integration and ultimately student persistence (Astin, 1993). The majority of the participants described their Advanced Preparation Program

experience as extremely positive and impactful. The final element of the I-E-O model was outcomes. The outcome was a final culmination of the students' input and environment themes. This analysis of the APP resulted in positive experiences had by participants and satisfaction in the program. There were also declarations of students showing improvement in the type of students they became based on the structure and support put forth in the program.

Positive Experiences and Satisfaction

Through the responses gathered from each participant it became very evident to the researcher as determined through the themes that there were positive experiences and satisfaction garnered within every participants' experience.

Participants shared positive experiences across many variables of the APP including being pleased with the structure of the program, the classroom environment, personal growth as a student and the friendships that were formed. Emerson stated:

> My experience as a student in the APP was a very good one. It really unraveled into something I felt was extremely beneficial for me and I was very satisfied with it as a student. Inside the classroom, everyone wanted to work hard, and we helped each other learn. Not one student was there just to be there. I think. Because everyone was there to learn, it really kept the group accountable to one another, which was exciting to see.

Students, through their similar goals and experiences formed unique support systems with one another.

Delroy, Aisha, and Alison believed that the classroom experiences with staff and faculty were satisfactory and played a role in impacting them. Delroy noted, "Inside the classroom most of the classes were interesting. Like as far as the faculty, they were nice people, and I did feel a major difference between them and my high school teachers." Aisha maintained, "Inside the classroom the professors worked hard… I thought the faculty were

like really connecting with the students and tried their best to help them to pass their classes."

Participants also agreed that there was support outside of the classroom through the mentors and APP staff.

Another participant, Jeremy gave an incredible testimony to his appreciation of the APP program stating:

> It's probably the best decision of my life because just going there and experiencing all these different things, and networking, making community and diversity… It's growing as a person, and that's what I've done. I've grown as a person. I look back and I see that, but that's all because of APP. They pushed my barriers.

This speaks to the great benefits students have seen as a result of this program. For some, it was a life-changing experience.

Improvement in Type of Student

As a result of the support and structure in the Advanced Preparation Program, skills sets were developed including accessing resources, improvement in writing skills, math skills, and study skills, development of relationships with faculty and others. Students were encouraged and even required to participate in study tables and to access resource centers such as the Write Place and the Math Skills Center.

Delroy focused his response on the impact of thorough guidance and explanations regarding the Write Place and Math Skills Center:

> I feel like the process APP had in place in presenting to us some of the resources on campus was done extremely well within their plan because a lot of the students I met within my class outside of APP felt that they had to find out about the resources on their own, meaning that they also had to gain an understanding of what exactly some of the resources could do for them without the ability to build some trust with staff.

Crystal emphasized not only the availability of these places, but the quality of assistance at

the Write Place. She highlighted an incident she experienced as an APP student as she was

mandated to take her work to the Write Place. She asserted:

> The one thing I did not take serious when I first started was the Write Place, where we were told to take our papers in for editing. I came to believe in the things they were doing to improve my writing once I started seeing my grades change and noticed the impact it had on my writing. I just wasn't making the same mistake over and over again. I would walk in to Write Place and immediately find someone ready to assist me, and I would say "my professor has us doing this assignment and he wants it written this certain way," and they would be able jump into whatever I was doing and assist me in structuring my work. You know what I mean, and that was with like everyone I met when I went there.

Students quickly realized the benefits associated with these tools that were readily available to

them on campus.

When beginning the program, students were given higher expectations than they had

in high school. Along with the expectations, students were provided tools and support to

ensure their success. Emerson reported:

> The level of professionalism…we were made apparent of it right away through APP orientation. To me, just seeing that I knew I was out of high school. I just felt that the environment, the people just made the program more effective. My habits as a student changed, so I have to believe they changed for others. The profs cared about us all, and as a result we felt that we needed to respect that by working hard in the class room and trying to learn.

Additionally, Ray provided a specific example of what he felt was a complete showing of

support from APP staff members and faculty. He proclaimed:

> It's like, for instance, I was having a problem with writing a paper in our English class. I did not know how to put things together in this paper and I was getting frustrated. I did not believe that I was going to pass without being able to put together a great final paper. I received feedback and got the assistance from the staff and faculty and they sat down with me and went over things with me and things came together. They got me in with a tutor at the Write Place and I got the assistance there

that I expected. I just loved the fact that we had people that were attentive to my concern about learning. I got an A on the paper and it excited me about college.

All the students had the outcome of growth and improvement in the types of students they became from the beginning of the program through the time of the interviews which took place at the end of their second year of college. The skills gained were beneficial not only during the APP, but more importantly they transferred onto the rest of their college experience.

Summary

Six emerging themes were revealed during the analysis of the interviews and were presented through Astin's I-E-O model. These themes reflected the importance of students of color and their involvement and engagement during transition in order to see sustained academic success. In addition to sharing their background information, students were able to identify their motivation to attend the APP, their expectations of the experience and the environmental experiences. Specifically, the findings from this study indicated that the majority of the participants were positively impacted by their experiences in the APP, which allowed them to continue to experience improved academic success through their sophomore year. All of the participants believed that they had profound experiences and built strong relationships that have kept them working towards graduation.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study explored the experiences of students of color within the Advanced Preparation Program (APP) and the impact of those experiences on sustained success in higher education. A qualitative method of analysis was utilized to capture "the experience as perceived by the participants" (Merriam, 2009, p. 203). Accordingly, 10 students of color shared their perceptions on their experiences in the APP at St. Cloud State University (SCSU). All participants reported both positive and valuable experiences in their reflections of the APP.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) was instrumental in developing the research questions that directed this case study. There were four S's of transitioning within the theory (situation, self, support, and strategies) that provided the framework for the questions. The third and fourth "S" were combined to create a more succinct research question.

1 *Situation*: (1) How do students of color perceive their transition to college?

2 *Self*: (2) How, as students of color, did encounters with students, faculty, and staff of color play a role in their experience?

3 & 4. *Support and Strategies*: (3) What about their experiences sustained them through their sophomore year in university?

This chapter provides a conclusion, a brief summary of findings based upon the findings from the interviews of APP participants, a discussion of the findings, implications of theory, recommendations for policy and practice, recommendation for future research, limitations, and a summary.

Conclusion

Schlossberg's Transition Theory and its implications were summarized, answering the three research questions asked. It should be noted that the six major themes which were identified under Astin's I-E-O model also include a wealth of information that served to answer the research questions further.

Situation: How Students of Color Perceived their Transition to College

The transition to college is unique to each individual as every person brings distinctive characteristics as well as varying perceptions of the transition, levels of support, and coping strategies (Schlossberg, 1981). The situation looked at what was happening, the timing, whether a role change was involved, any stressors present, and how the person was affected (Evans et al., 1998).

For all of the participants, the same transition through the APP at St. Cloud State University took place. However, none of the participants had the exact same reaction to this transition: some were excited to start a new chapter in their lives, some were disappointed that they were attending school in the summer, and some were unsure what they needed to do to be successful in college. For all the participants, the timing of the APP transition was positive in that they had just graduated from high school and were progressing to college.

The students were changing roles. Each participant of color moved out of his/her family's home, into the residence halls and had a new sense of independence. The newfound freedom meant they were now college students, which came with a new set of academic responsibilities. Beginning college resulted in similar stressors for almost all of the participants including adjusting to the academic rigor, establishing new and comfortable

relationships, and becoming a part of the campus community. The stressors affected everyone in different ways. For example, coming into the APP, Crystal was concerned with whether she was going to be able to fit in with the diverse environment and find friendships. In the beginning she struggled and wondered whether she had made the right decision, which in turn made her studies difficult. Crystal revealed in her interview how much this situation affected her ability to focus on having a positive transition experience in the beginning even though she was a good student. On the other hand, Emerson felt unchallenged within his experience. He related to all of his peers and established what he believed were strong and long-lasting relationships, making his experience positive right from the beginning. All of the participants perceived their transition to college to be a positive one and felt their involvement in the APP program played an important role in this smooth (life change) shift.

Self: How, as Students of Color, did Encounters with Students, Faculty, and Staff of Color Play a role in Their Experience?

The researcher looked at how encounters with individuals of color played a role in the participants' transition experience. This question focused specifically on what it meant to the participants to have such encounters. Seven of the ten participants stated strongly that they believed that being in a diverse environment played a profound role in the experiences they had. With most coming from diverse homes, high schools, and communities, it became evident that the APP understood the dynamics that were present. Fundamentally, the APP and its faculty understood the importance of creating an environment with students of color having diverse peers, staff, and faculty.

Interacting with other students of color played a factor as it provided a level of comfort for the participants. This environment allowed for similarities among a group of students who were very different. In turn, these students identified self-growth and a deeper understanding of themselves as students of color at a predominately white institution. Alison compared her APP peers to a family, saying that, because they were different and were going through the program together with people who understood them and supported them, it made the transition easy for them. Ray discussed how joining such a racially and ethnically mixed group was "refreshing" because it was going to a new environment but still being surrounded by people with whom he felt he understood and who understood him. It was also stated in numerous interviews that, when someone struggled, it was incredible to see the amount of support because the students all wanted to see each other succeed and had some understanding of what it felt like to be students of color and to struggle to meet expectations.

Having APP staff, faculty, and peers of color at SCSU affected the participants' persistence, allowing them to establish meaningful relationships that later created a sense of belonging, similar to what they encountered in their own communities. The diverse environment played a role in the type of experiences participants had. Participants emphasized that they were positively impacted and had an appreciation for their peers of color, as well as faculty and staff of color they met and developed relationships with during their time in the APP program. The consensus was an increase in overall encouragement for student success.

Support and Strategies: **What About Their Experiences Sustained Them Through Their**

Sophomore Year in College?

Schlossberg (1981) separates sources of support and strategies (for coping); however,

the data in this study emerged with these qualities connected because the things found that

sustained the students were also the ways in which they coped. The strategies (for coping)

variable looks at how the person adapts to the situation, controls the meaning, and manages

stress in the aftermath (Evans et al., 1998, p. 114). All of the participants persisted through

their second year at St. Cloud State University (SCSU). The questions were posed to find out

how the APP and the campus environment involved the support variable. This variable

addresses the social support provided at the university, whether feedback and affirmations

were present, and whether support was changing or stable (Schlossberg, 1981).

The participants talked about their social support stemming from mentors and their

being involved in residential learning communities and racial and ethnic student groups.

Functions of social support (feedback, aid, and affirmation) were provided to all of the

participants through mentors. Participants valued the advice and comfort received from their

mentors. For Jeremey, his mentor was a professor he bonded with during the first day of class.

This professor has assisted Jeremey in obtaining his recent position on campus working in an

area of interest. For Aisha, her mentor was an upperclassman who calmed her when she fell

behind in her coursework and now serves as a very close friend. They also discussed their

positive interactions with professors, which all felt enhanced their social support. Aisha spoke

to this in stating:

> When I first arrived at APP I was scared of our directors, but once I got to know them
> the relationship we had was amazing. They helped me with everything then and they

still are involved with me now. They taught me the importance of communication and relationships in college. They were constantly letting me know that I belong in college and that nothing was too difficult for me kept me encouraged.

These experiences with mentors and university staff showed just how important relationships formed early in the college experience were.

The learning communities also were a source of support as they settled into their first semester outside of the APP. Crystal shared:

> … we had speaker sessions everyday where they would bring in the different people from all these different programs including the Write Place and tutoring centers and things like that… In the end it was super helpful. I can say it helped me a lot.

Eight of the 10 students continued to utilize and involve themselves with the learning community presented to them in the APP. All of the participants involved with the learning community otherwise appeared thankful to be in an environment that fostered friendship and high academic standards. The diverse environment promoted by the APP also had benefits such as providing a place for students to feel welcomed and a sense of solidarity among the students of color. They promoted academic success through recognition programs and partnering upperclassmen with freshmen for additional mentoring. Overall, the participants valued the opportunities to belong in the learning communities and student groups.

Not all of these support resources were viewed as stable. Schlossberg (1981) and Schlossberg et al. (1995) maintained that whether support is seen as stable or constantly changing affects the person in transition. The participants appeared to view their mentoring relationships, involvement in learning communities, and diverse environment as stable. However, their varying interactions with faculty were not as stable. A few of the participants stated that they cherished the encounters they had with their faculty of color but were

somewhat disappointed when the realization set in that they may never take another class from that professor again. In summary, the participants felt that the manner in which they were presented the support systems in place within the APP and SCSU has assisted in sustaining them through to their sophomore year in college.

Summary of Findings

As I expressed in my own story, individuals from my past acknowledged that they had positive experiences in the APP at SCSU. It was evident through the interviews of the 10 participants that they also described affirmative experiences while participating in the APP. This was due to a myriad of reasons but specifically, they spoke to the environment within the APP which was well structured, supportive, and diverse. Overall, I have been able to take from this study the understanding that students of color, coming from a variety of situations, can and do benefit from such transition programs. As the literature continues to point to the growth and attendance of students of color in higher education, (Kuh et al., 2005), the findings of this study validated the roles such programs play in sustaining these students to graduation.

Discussion of Findings

Astin's (1993) I-E-O model showed that student learning and development were directly impacted by the quantity and quality of student involvement. While participants had varying levels of academic and social involvement, all conveyed that this was due to the engaging environment that is set in place by the APP. Participants in the program were highly active socially and placed in a position for greater involvement academically while avoiding any setbacks due to the new environment. Moreover, the literature suggests that institutional

practices that initiate positive interactions and an institution's academic and social systems

will create the opportunity for better integration (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1987). Negative

experiences for students would have reverse results. All of the participants spoke highly of

their experiences during their enrollment in the APP, which leads to the conclusion that the

APP program provided the needed positive support system.

It is also believed that students who begin college with intentions related to earning a

college degree and those whose commitments were impacted on an ongoing basis by their

interactions with an institution's social and academic systems (Tinto, 1975) will have

sustained academic success. While all of the participants enrolled under the premise that a

college degree would benefit them in starting their careers after college, three of the

participants (Jeremy, Crystal, and Sabrina) believed that their motivation for attending APP

had as much to do with sustaining academic success to graduation as it did for the opportunity

at a career. Students' ability to seek out success in college increases when those students have

positive relationships with staff, classmates, and faculty members (Tinto, 1975). All of the

participants expressed positive and impactful interactions with staff, classmates, and faculty

during their experience in the APP.

Once a student enters college, his or her high school experiences, academic goals, and

level of family support govern his/her ability to integrate (Bean, 1980). Bean also believed

that factors external to the institution can impact students' beliefs. All of the participants

indicated that their families were supportive of their decision to enroll in the APP. In fact, five

of the 10 participants (Neil, Aisha, Ray, Jennifer, and Alison) were influenced one way or

another to attend the APP by their family members. Although it was not expected to the

researcher that athletics would play a role in motivating students to enroll, two participants

made this evident by stating that their motivation was strictly athletically related.

It has been suggested that students of color require interactions with other students of

color (Booker, 2007). Students of color are generally underrepresented, underprepared, or

lacking in support. With the exception of two participants (Emerson and Crystal), upon

enrollment, the students fit into more than one of the three areas mentioned in Astins model.

However, Emerson and Crystal were still very appreciative of the experiences, knowledge,

and support that were offered by APP and believed that, although they were prepared and

very much supported, everything they experienced was important to them. Pascarella and

Terenzini (1991) theorized that the frequency and content of students' interaction with faculty

members and other students will have a direct impact on the students' ability to sustain

success.

The frequency of interactions between participants and their classmates varied from

minimal to what some participants conveyed as considerable but positive. The design of the

program included many scheduled activities together as large groups. Participants who had

minimal interactions with classmates expressed that those interactions were limited to

discussions about coursework or certain programmed activities, while participants with more

frequent interactions socialized about non-academic topics. In addition, all participants

highlighted the high quality content and frequency of positive interactions with faculty

members.

Through the participants' perceived experiences, the following six themes emerged

within Astin's I-E-O model: *Input* (a) Influence of Background (b) Motivation to Attend APP;

Environment (a) APP Expectations (b) APP Environment; and *Outcomes* (a) Positive

Experience & Satisfaction and (b) Improvement in Type of Student.

Input

Each student brings their own unique characteristics to the transitions they experience.

There are many factors affecting this including their gender, their parental education levels,

the type of high school they attended including the level of diversity, and their interests in

area of study. This study factored for gender and allowed for an equal number of males and

females. Of these 10 students, two students had both parents with high school diplomas only.

There were two additional students whose parents had both earned either an associate's

degree or a bachelor's degree. Three of the students were unsure of their father's highest level

of education. The remaining students had parents with high school diplomas, some college

and one associate's degree. It was discovered that the level of degree obtained by the parents

did not have a direct impact on the students' success in the APP. In fact, parents with all

levels of degrees were described as encouraging their children to participate in the APP.

Of the 10 participants, eight attended public high schools. The remaining two attended

a charter school and a college preparatory school. The areas of study for these participants

included biochemistry, marketing and business economics, education, community

psychology, mass communications, sports management, and political science. All students

had been accepted to their major at the time of this interview. The majority of the participants

were from the state of Minnesota, so they had some familiarity with St. Cloud State

University (SCSU) and knew someone who was currently attending or had attended the

SCSU. That fact created an atmosphere of comfort with their choice to enroll in the APP.

Educational Environments

The literature on institutional characteristics, policies, practices, and students' sense of belonging in an institution's academic and social systems provided context for this case study (Astin, 1985; Bean, 1980; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975). Participants expressed that, during their enrollment in the Advanced Preparation Program (APP), they perceived the program as being very academically demanding and well structured. All of the participants stated that they were able to integrate into the social system of the institution because of the purported engaging environment, which is a component that emerged in the review of the literature. The environment created through the APP invoked students' desire to establish relationships with their classmates. All the participants of this study chose to immerse themselves in the institution's social and academic system because of the environment they encountered during the APP and experienced success as a result.

Participants discussed the classroom environment as well as the classroom management and organization of faculty they experienced in that environment. Students' involvement with classmates and faculty members, extracurricular activities, and classroom engagement all influenced their sense of belonging (Astin, 1984). Hausemann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2009) confirmed that students who reported higher levels of social involvement also indicated increased social integration, resulting in a commitment to academic success indirectly. In accordance with Hausmann et al. (2009), participants who were more socially involved integrated better. Thus, participants stated that, because of all the integration work done through APP, they have been able to experience success at SCSU. With such a high

level of emphasis placed on integration by APP, it appeared substantial enough for participants to point out its impact on the networking they had been able to achieve.

Undoubtedly, university leaders should be concerned with student transition and success in higher education as it pertains to diversity. In alignment with the literature, the findings in this study indicated that students began the APP with certain expectations and that their experiences both during their transition and after had been directly impacted by the program's emphasis on diversity. More specifically, interactions within the diverse groups that the students are exposed to within the institution's academic and social systems influence their attitudes toward themselves and the institution (Bean, 1980). Accordingly, higher education leaders must focus their attention on maintaining, to the fullest extent possible, diverse transition programs such as the APP because of the benefits they offer.

All of the participants felt that their experiences were significantly impacted by the diversity they were exposed to during the APP. The predominantly cited reason was the fact they felt much more comfortable because they felt they knew other individuals of color they could relate to. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) argued that positive encounters and experiences with other students of color increase a student of color's integration into an institution's academic and social systems, causing the students to open themselves up and ultimately experience success in college. Based on the data, all of the participants were able to integrate socially and did so without any major issues. Emerson and Crystal both indicated that, although the APP served as less of a transition for them and diversity was not something that influenced their entire experience, they still benefited immensely from the diverse

community, as it provided them with the opportunity to make a very seamless assimilation socially.

Students expect college to be a safe place to learn, a place where they can feel free to express themselves and learn from one another (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Engstrom and Tinto (2008) believed that collaborative peer support was of significant importance in motivating students. Conversely, while only two students mentioned that diversity had less of an impact on their experience as whole, most discussed how much they learned from the diverse environment and how much it assisted them in having academic success within the program. The benefit of these environments can increase the effectiveness of an institution's learning environment.

As the literature review suggests, the success of students of color is be contingent upon institutions' capacity to engage these students, which includes ongoing academic support (Spanier, 2001). As a result of the findings, this study implies that students of color benefit from transition programs such as the APP, which maintain institutional support to improve their probability of success.

Outcomes

Institutional commitment plays an integral role in an institution's ability to create an environment that is supportive to its student body (Pascarealla & Chapman, 1983). Moreover, institutions have the opportunity and the responsibility to convey commitment to their students through the consistent communication of the high level of concern that exists for its students' well-being and development (Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008). This study

provides current information that proves students can be, and indeed are, impacted positively by the perceived level of support and commitment received during their transition experience.

The literature suggests that a student's ability to adapt to a college will greatly depend on his or her perception of the institution's level of commitment (Braxton, 2003). More than half of the participants emphatically contended that they were greatly impacted by the level of support that they felt while in the APP, and two of the participants expressed the fact that they liked the extra support from the staff but were not as greatly impacted as their counterparts. However, all participants articulated their great appreciation for the consistency in support throughout their APP experience and at the conclusion of the program.

While the participants were adamant about the presence of support received, some of them expressed perceptions of tutors and resource center staff members going above and beyond to help participants achieve success in the classroom. Though a few participants indicated that they were not greatly impacted by the extra support, all were clear that just knowing that there was someone available to lean on when they needed them was very much appreciated. Furthermore, participants discussed that learning about the support structures at SCSU was beneficial to their academic success. Some participants encountered challenges that may have needed to be addressed by a specific department or a combination of departments that had the information to take the necessary steps. These challenges, compounded with the high level of APP support, contributed to each participant's ability to achieve academic success.

Implications of Theory

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Alexander Astin's (1975) student involvement theory needs to be looked at because the research supporting this theory was based upon very different student populations. Astin (1984) defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experiences" (p. 134). Furthermore, in research conducted by Astin and other researchers, Astin (1993) refined his theory to include the I-E-O model. The "I" stands for inputs, or the background characteristics that a student had at the start of the program. The "E" stands for environment and included various environments and educational experiences students would encounter during the program. The "O" represented the outcomes that spoke to a student's experiences and satisfaction with the transition.

Astin (1993) adapted his theory to allow some flexibility in selecting the input variables allowing researchers to select variables that were more workable to an ever-changing student population. The change allowed researchers to alter their inputs to fit changes in student background characteristics. Despite this change in Astin's (1993) conceptual framework, many of the studies surrounding the student involvement theory have been conducted on traditional students attending four-year institutions. As it is mentioned in the literature, there has been an identifiable shift in what is considered the traditional or typical college student today and Astin's (1993) I-E-O model needs additional research focusing on students of color.

In regard to the studies conducted at four-year institutions, researchers should take into account the backgrounds of students of color and the current research before determining the

inputs in future studies. This study expanded on the work of Astin's (1993) by selecting inputs associated with APP participants' interpreted as themes of their experiences. It was found that Astin's (1993) student involvement theory still holds relevance in identifying environmental factors that continue to impact the transition experience for APP participants despite a change in today's student population.

Critical Race Theory

In this study, using critical race theory (CRT) the researcher acknowledges that students of color benefited from being exposed to a diverse community allowing their experiences to take shape and formulate and giving them some sustainability in their academic success. CRT created a lens for the researcher, allowing each experience shared to be understood from the perspective of the student. According to the literature students of color are utilizing transition programs at a greater rate. What is even more important to note is the manner in which the transition experience is administered (Solorzano, 1998). This being made known in the literature has implications on theory as researchers must now reevaluate the understanding of what it means to transition into college for a student of color, taking into account CRT, which emphasizes early involvement for students of color in higher education, and how this idea of diversity may impact the type of experience students of color may encounter.

As there has been an increase in students of color attending college, institutions have had to make major shifts to develop academic environments consisting of program and resources to accommodate this population shift (Solorzano, 1998). Researchers must consider the implications this development in higher education has on the importance of how transition

programs are administered to suit diverse populations. Many of the theories applied to transition studies must continue to be tested by researchers while taking into account the diverse nature of institutions to date. This is especially true when we speak of theories that were originally created when college populations were of similar ethnicity.

As I progressed through my study, Astin's and Schlossberg's theories became more prominent. Critical Race Theory was still important in creating a lens for the reader but became even more important and played a larger role in the lens it created for myself, the researcher. Going through the individual interviews with each student, I found myself relying on CRT to remind me of the position of the students of color within the higher education system. Although the interview questions did not specifically address racial issues, CRT was constantly present in my mind as I worked to uncover the complex layers of each student of color's experience in the transition program.

When institutions lack transition initiatives such as the APP at SCSU, it often translates to poor outcomes for students of color in higher education (St. Cloud State University, 2012). Such college preparation programs are often known as access intervention programs and are designed to address the issues that plague some racial, ethnic, and income groups who are underrepresented in higher education (Bergin et al., 2007). Although there are resources made available at both the high school and college level students in the form of accommodations, counseling, and mentoring, students of color often struggle to succeed in higher education. The APP provides participating students with many opportunities to develop academic competencies, cognitive and critical thinking skills, time management, and teamwork abilities (St. Cloud State University, 2012).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have implications related to policy and practice, as well as administrators at institutions who work diligently to serve students of color. Moreover, academic communities can use this information to facilitate discussion regarding students of color and their academic success through a wholesome transition experience. Driven by the findings of this study, the implications for policy and practice will revisit the following areas Input, Environment, and Outcomes. The following recommendations emerged from the research and are proposed by the researcher:

Input

In this area, a lot can be understood about students of color in regards to what influences and motivates them to attend a transition program.

1. Higher education leaders can work to recruit and retain these student populations more effectively by determining what background factors influence a student's ability to have ongoing success in higher education.

Educational Environment

The findings from this study are in accordance with the literature on the influence that institutional environments can have on students' decisions to persist (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Identification of positive areas within the transition experience are essential to cultivating innovative strategies to improve and sustain such programs for students of color and their academic success (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008). Accordingly, the implementation of specific remedies addressing positive influential environmental factors

could directly impact these students and the success they seek academically.

Recommendations in this area include:

1. Administrators must assess and minimize, if not eliminate, distractions for students inside and outside of the classroom.

2. Establishing and adhering to a very strict structure established through institutional policies can allow administrators and staff to really place a high demand and focus on academic achievement.

3. Administrators should work through policy to implement a diverse experience when dealing with students of color. Perhaps staffing individuals of color could accomplish this in those one-on-one encounters. Mentors and staff could have more intentional discussions with students of color to discuss concerns that affect their academic success.

4. Administrators should focus on building relationships with businesses and organizations both on campus and within the community to assist in teaching and solidifying potential work study and employment opportunities, with the emphasis being on personal and career development as they grow to understand the importance of maintaining professional relationships with people of color and those outside that status.

Outcomes

The literature provides a concrete framework for understanding that minority students, specifically students of color, require extensive institutional support. In order for students of color to be successful, transition programs must utilize concentrated guidance as a means to

keep these students focused and ultimately successful in their pursuit of a college degree.

Recommendations identified in this area included:

1. Administrators should ensure that staff members are consistently providing guidance through to the program's completion.

2. Mentors and resource center staff should encourage students to maintain contact with them in case they need further assistance anytime during their academic career and also to maintain and continue to develop college-level social and study skills and assist in maturing their decision-making skills.

3. Faculty within the program should work to sustain a high level of student engagement.

4. Faculty members within the program must create and maintain a welcoming but rigorous routine that subjects students to a healthy pattern of constructive criticism and maps a clear road for success. Faculty members should take measures to limit classroom distractions for students, which may ease the ability to keep students on task and focused on each classroom session.

5. Administrators could also implement an auditing process to ensure that faculty and staff are reinforcing their ability to support the students; this could be done through self-evaluation.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on APP participants and the impact their experiences had on not only their transition to college, but more importantly, their sustained academic success. Considering the delimitations and findings of the study, there are implications for future

research that may be considered by higher education scholars. Accordingly, gaining further insight into these suggestions would contribute to the literature regarding various students of color groups and their transition into higher education. Furthermore, the implication for future research would provide administrators with a framework to explore the transition elements that might suit differing student groups in yielding academic success. While this study identified emerging themes of students of color's experiences and perceptions, there remains a number of opportunities for future research.

First, this study yielded the results of the beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of students of color who attended St. Cloud State University, a four-year public institution located in the Midwest. It would be enlightening to replicate this study and compare students at another four-year institution in another region of the country. This comparison would provide insight to the beliefs and perceptions of transition experiences and also highlight what each institution is doing to be successful in its region.

Second, this study gathered information on parental educational attainment levels, type of high school, and gender. However, this information was solely used for demographic purposes. It would be informative to determine whether patterns or trends related to participants' parental educational attainment levels, type of high school, and gender emerge. These correlations may provide valuable information related to transition experiences and student success.

Finally, a study focusing on longitudinal transition experiences could be valuable. The study would focus on the perceptions and the experiences of students of color who completed their degree and graduated from the institution. More specifically, the study could be

conducted to solicit their experiences and perceptions comparatively to determine whether

there are any similarities to students who have withdrawn. In addition, if there are similarities,

a study could be conducted to determine what impacted their decision to persist.

Limitations

In addition to the delimitations associated with this study and outlined in chapter one.

Other limitations were revealed as the study progressed.

- During the interview process I determined that 45 minutes was not enough time to
  allow me to obtain deep thoughtful responses from my participants.

- Interview protocol (instrument) could have had a lot more leading questions.

- Allowing the students to choose location of interview created a challenge when in
  noisy or high traffic zones. This made the transcription process more challenging.

Regardless of limitations, the data gathered provided useful information in gaining an

understanding the experiences of students of color and how those experiences influence their

success academically within the a college setting.

Summary

This chapter began by reiterating Schlossberg's Transition Theory and the role of the

4 S's in influencing the development of the primary questions for this case study.

Schlossberg's view is very precise as it speaks to very specific areas of experience as an

individual makes a transition.

Historically, students of color have higher rates of attrition than white students. In

addition, access and attrition present a serious, long-term challenge for higher education

administrators who continue to deal with the dilemma of improving the transition experience

of these students (Keup, 2007). As a result, the findings from this study revealed information

on students of color at a university and delineated how they perceived those experiences. This study suggested that students of color indeed believe that their APP transition experience was impactful in creating sustainable academic success. This was demonstrated through Astin's I-E-O model in that students arrived to the APP with specific input characteristics, experienced the environment, and ended with a positive experience and improvement in the type of student they became. Moreover, through outlined experiences, this study provided insights to administrators who are attempting to understand what influence this transition experience has on students of color. Finally, this study provides information that should encourage administrators to continue funding and supporting these programs in implementing effective strategies that will continue to maintain and improve the transition experiences for students of color.

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Appendix A: Email to Prospective Study Participants

Thank you for volunteering in the study I am conducting to complete my doctoral studies at St. Cloud State University. As I shared with you, my research topic is "The Impact of Advanced Preparation Program transition experiences on St. Cloud State University Sophomore Students of Color."

I am looking forward to meeting with you on [Date] at [Time] in [Location]. The interview should last 30 minutes. Again, my name is Brian Sebera and I will be the one conducting the interview at the date and time stated in this email. Your participation is voluntary, and to confirm this there is a consent form you need to complete attached to this email. Please read through the form carefully, and return the form to me during the interview.

I appreciate your assistance and look forward to seeing you on Date. If you have any immediate questions, you may contact me at (252) 412-4523 or by email at bsebera@csbsju.edu, my Dissertation Director, Dr. McCullar at (320) 308-4727 or by email at slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu.

Brian Johanson Sebera
Doctoral Student
St. Cloud State University

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

The impact of Advanced Preparation Program transition experiences/services on St. Cloud State University sophomore students of color

Researcher:

Brian Sebera Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration program, SCSU   (252) 412-4523 (cell) bsebera@csbsju.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Steven McCullar, Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration, EB B250 720 Fourth Avenue, South St. Cloud, MN 56301, (320) 308-4727 slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu

Purpose of the study:

This case study was designed to examine students of color who have participated in the APP and how their experiences with this transition shaped their paths to academic success. Additionally, the study seeks to understand how these experiences may influence future development and sustainability of beneficial programs and services. Participating sophomore students at St. Cloud State University will be interviewed.

Procedures:

You have identified yourself as someone who may be interested in participating in this study. If so, you will participate in one 30-45 minute interview. You will be able to choose from several locations that are convenient for you. If you agree, your interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed so I am sure I accurately interpret your words.

Benefits:

As a participant, you may benefit only indirectly from this study. You may gain insight into your college transition experience. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. The findings of this study will provide information to other researchers and college administrators about college students of color and their transition experiences. This information may improve services provided to future students. You may contact the investigator at a later time for a summary of the research results.

Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality:

To maintain anonymity you will be identified by a pseudonym that you may select. Your identity will not be divulged to anyone. With this being the case I will be using direct quotes from language obtained during the interview process. Only my faculty advisor and I will have access to the data. All forms, printed transcripts, and digital voice files (on a hard drive) will be locked away. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.
Subject's Responsibilities:
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:
    participate in one 30-45 minute interview
    Review the transcript from my interview to ensure that it accurately   reflects what I
    said during the interview.

Subject's Permission
As a participant 18 years of age or older, I have read the Informed Consent Form and the
conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the
above and give my voluntary consent:

_____Participant's Signature

Date _____

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or research results, I may contact:

Brian Sebera, (252) 412-4523, bsebera@csbsju.edu
Dr. Steve McCullar (advisor), (320) 308-4727, slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu

Appendix C: Prescreening Telephone Script

Script for verbal consent:

Several years ago, you attended the *Advanced Preparation Program* (APP) held at St. Cloud State University (SCSU). The program continues to grow and flourish, and I have been afforded the opportunity to conduct a perceptions case study. The purpose of the study is to identify and assess the strengths of the *APP*. This case study will hopefully guide the future development of the program and identify areas that have allowed participants to sustain academic success through their sophomore year. Before we can begin I need to obtain your verbal consent to participate in the pre-screening process. I also need to ask a few questions to make sure that you meet the criteria to participate in this study. This should only take a couple of minutes. You can decide to stop at any time. After the pre-screening if you agree to continue your participation I will email you a confirmation and formal consent form that you will sign when we meet for the interview. Do I have your permission to conduct the pre-screening?

Name of participant_____

Major_____

Parent's highest level of education:
Mother _____
Father _____
Sex_____ Age_____
High school graduation date _____

Did you participate in the APP, and if so did you complete the program?
Did you continue to utilize the programs and services as a college student at SCSU?
Do you feel comfortable talking about your high school to college transition experiences?
Telephone_____ Email_____
Date of interview_____
Location of interview_____

Thank you once again.

Appendix D: Confirmation Email and Reminder

Hi,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Please feel free to contact me at any point in time regarding any questions you may prior to the interview. You have chosen to partake in a case study about Students of color and their perception of the APP. Again, my name is Brian Sebera and I will be the one conducting the interview at the date and time stated in this email. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. Your participation is voluntary, and to confirm this there is a consent form you need to complete attached to this email. Please read through the form carefully. Again, if you do have any question please contact me at any time. Please return the consent form to me during the interview.

Interview Confirmation:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Researcher Contact:
Brian Sebera (252) 412 4523

I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Name:_____ Pseudonym:_____ Time Started:_____

Year of Attendance (SCSU):_____ Male/Female _____

Script:
Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. As I explained in the email, the purpose of this study is to conduct a participant interview of the APP. I will be utilizing your shared experiences within APP to analyze the programs impact on your success to sophomore year. This research is part of the requirements for my doctorate work. I sent an informed consent by email and we can review that and I will answer any questions you have. Once you sign the form we will begin the interview. Review informed consent.

Information:
1. Tell me a little about yourself; focus on your educational background prior to college?
   a. *Where are you from?*
   b. *Type of student you were, did you receive good grades?*
   c. *Did your immediate family attend college?*
   d. *What did diversity look like at your high school?*
2. How did you learn about the APP at St. Cloud State University?
3. What was your motivation to attend the APP? (Friends, Family, Career, and Athletic…etc.)
4. What was your understanding of the APP program and its goals for you?
   a. *Is your understanding the same having gone through the program and having some academic success?(Yes/No Please explain)*
5. How did you make a decision to attend St. Cloud State University?
   a. *Was a transition program important in your decision? Yes/no please explain.*

Perception of their transition experience (1):
6. What did you expect from the transition experience <u>before</u> you attended the APP.
   a. *Were those expectations met?*
7. Describe a typical day in the APP program; what was the first through the last program related activity you might have been involved in each day?
   a. *What about this structure <u>appealed </u>to you?*
8. How did you feel about the transition experience as a whole?
9. Can you share a memorable moment from your transition experience?

Impact of relationships and encounters in APP (2):
10. Tell me about your experiences with the leaders, mentors and administrators you worked with; what stood out to you about those relationships?
    a. *Were they beneficial to your success throughout the program, if yes; in what way were they, if no, how could have they been more beneficial?*

11. Can you tell me about the encounters you had with other individuals of color associated with the program?
    a. Did you feel that it was needed and why?
12. Can you tell me what role your relationships with other students of color within the program played into your experience?
    a. Did it make a difference?
13. Were your experiences much more enjoyable having other students of color in the program, if yes/no why?

Sustaining success in Higher Education (3):
14. How did the APP program go about introducing you to all of the services provided on campus? (I.e. Tutors, Green house, writing place, math skills center...)
    a. Do you feel that it was affective, and can you elaborate on why?
15. How have the just mentioned services proven to be impactful in your academic life to date?
16. How did your experiences within APP program impact your transition to college; specifically, what elements (Camping, study table, mentorship…etc.) of the program would you point to?
17. Can you point out something's that the APP did which have allowed you to experience success academically in college?

Conclusion:
18. Anything else that you would like to share about you APP experience?

Time Ended: _____

Script:
Thank you for participating in this study. As I explained at the start of the interview, I will send you a transcript of your interview and ask that you review it and send any changes back to me by email.

Appendix F: Institutional Review Board

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND
SPONSORED PROGRAMS
ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY.

Administrative Services 210
Website: stcloudstate.edu/osp   Email: osp@stcloudstate.edu
Phone: 320-308-4932

Name: Brian Sebera

Address: 2408 Goettens Way

St. Cloud, MN 56301   USA

Email: bsebera@csbsju.edu

IRB Application Determination

Exempt

7/9/2014

Co-Investigators

Advisor: Steven McCullar

Project Title: The Impact of APP Transition experiences on sophmore students of color

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application to conduct research involving human subjects. We are pleased to inform you that your project has been APPROVED in full accordance with federal regulations. Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:
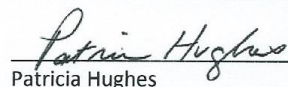
- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

- Exempt reviews only require the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

Good luck on your research. If you require further assistance, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 320-308-4932 or email lidonnay@stcloudstate.edu. All correspondence should include your SCSU IRB number as indicated on this letter.

For the Institutional Review Board:

Linda Donnay
IRB Administrator
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

For St. Cloud State University:

Patricia Hughes
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSUIRB#:	1326 - 1613	Approval Date:	7/9/2014
Type of Review:		Expiration Date:	7/8/2015