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The effects of Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) on student achievement, persistence, & integration

Pascal P. Barreau

College of William & Mary - School of Education

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**The Effects of *Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS)* on Student
Achievement, Persistence, & Integration**

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

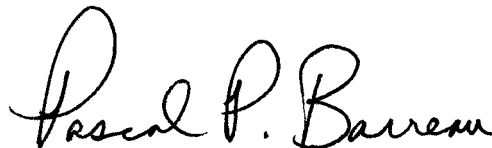
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Pascal P. Barreau
April 2008

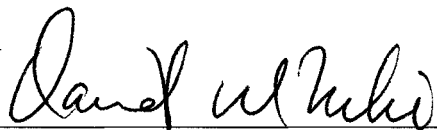
The Effects of *Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS)* on Student
Achievement, Persistence, & Integration

By

Pascal P. Barreau

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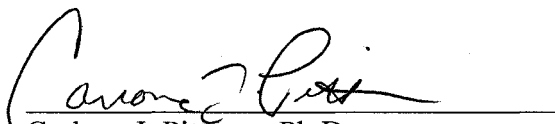
Approved April 2008 by

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David W. Leslie". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

David W. Leslie, Ed.D.
Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael F. DiPaola". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Michael F. DiPaola, Ed.D.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carlane J. Pittman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Carlane J. Pittman, Ph.D.

DEDICATION

To my lovely wife Stacia who has been my support and by my side throughout this entire process, and to my beautiful son Jean-Michel, who is my inspiration now and into the future, this text is respectfully dedicated.

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THE EFFECTS OF PREPARING FOR LIFE AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT (PLUS) ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, PERSISTENCE, AND INTEGRATION

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) transition program on student achievement, persistence, and integration. The mixed design study was conducted at a highly selective, coeducational, mid-sized university. Three cohort groups were combined as the treatment group and compared statistically to a closely matched sample of non-PLUS students. Focus groups with PLUS participants were also held.

Two research questions investigated whether there was a significant difference in academic achievement and persistence between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the first and second semesters. The remaining three research questions addressed PLUS participants' perceptions of the impacts of PLUS on integration patterns and of the impact of integration on academic achievement and persistence. Statistical analyses showed that there was a significant difference in mean GPAs after the second semester and a significant difference between mean numbers of credits earned after the first and second semesters. Analysis of focus group responses showed that participation in PLUS positively impacted academic and social integration. Furthermore, responses indicated that integration positively impacted achievement and participants' will to persist.

The results suggest that there are advantages to taking the course in PLUS. The results also suggest that strong peer and student-faculty relationships are crucial to

student success. Recommendations are made for further studies that analyze achievement and persistence rates beyond the first two semesters of matriculation. The researcher also suggests that future research designs should include comparative analyses of various summer transition programs.

PASCAL P. BARREAU
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PLANNING, AND LEADERSHIP – HIGHER
EDUCATION
THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA

**THE EFFECTS OF PREPARING FOR LIFE AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT
(PLUS) ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, PERSISTENCE, AND INTEGRATION**

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Issues of successful student transition from K-12 to higher education, support systems for incoming college freshmen, secondary student preparation for postsecondary education, and freshman entering characteristics, are topics that postsecondary institutions grapple with on a continual basis. It is not uncommon to find struggling within their first year of college students who were stellar academic achievers throughout their primary and secondary years of education. According to Tinto (1993), the academic difficulty that students experience in the first year is one indicator of why they depart from institutions. The attrition rates have been widespread with about 45% of enrolled students leaving four-year postsecondary institutions for various reasons. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). With persistence rates remaining about the same, higher education institutions have continued to invest time, effort, and funding into developing plans and strategies to help bolster student retention.

One of the more popular strategies aimed at the retention effort is the pre-freshman summer transition program. These programs target incoming college freshmen, in the summer immediately before matriculation, who have not quite met the minimal entering requirements of their respective postsecondary institutions. Pre-freshman summer transition programs serve to provide those identified incoming freshmen with a head-start and perhaps an advantage in being able to adjust to the new academic and social demands of postsecondary institutions before the remainder of the student body arrives.

First-year experience seminars, comprehensive advising programs, peer support programs, and offices of multicultural affairs are among the services provided by

postsecondary institutions to provide multiple safety nets for students, particularly those classified as “at-risk” of not completing their degree requirements. Increasing numbers of students have fallen into the category of “at-risk” as various populations have gained access to higher education institutions. Attaining a high institutional retention rate is what drives policy, planning, and leadership decisions in undergraduate higher education, at which level funding is tied to enrollment numbers.

Statement of the Problem

Increased access to higher education over the past several decades has resulted in an influx of different populations seeking a postsecondary education. Members of minority groups, women, and non-traditional populations, such as military personnel utilizing the GI Bill, have been among those new populations increasingly likely to seek a higher education. Clowes, Hinkle, and Smart (1986) asserted that “in the past twenty years, minorities, women, the economically disadvantaged, part-time attendees, and adults (students beyond today’s traditional college age of 18-22), have become well represented in the diverse student population” (p. 1). Tafel and Eberhart (1999) more recently affirmed this point by highlighting “census data that showed a tremendous growth of minority populations in specific regions of the country and in urban school districts” (p. 5).

Increased accountability has also driven educational institutions to take a serious look at how services are being provided to assist with the transition of these new populations in higher education settings. Language written into the “No Child Left Behind Act” and reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 forced institutions

both at the K-12 and postsecondary levels to consider retention issues and how students persist through graduation at an acceptable rate. The move toward accountability, driven by politicians and legislators, has fallen squarely on the shoulders of educational institutions, both secondary and postsecondary, to demonstrate progress and measure results toward closing identified achievement gaps.

Further, the numbers of students with aspirations of attending college and expecting to receive a higher education degree have been on the rise. “America’s high school students have higher educational aspirations than ever before...In many ways, students’ educational aspirations reveal the success of parents, teachers, and educational leaders in communicating to students the importance of college” (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003, p. 6). Personal aspirations have indeed played a considerable role in the rising numbers of students seeking a higher education. Not only have parents, teachers, and educational leaders been successful in communicating the importance of college, but students themselves have also become more aware at what it takes to be competent and contributing citizens upon graduation, and what it takes to succeed in a globalizing economy. In such a rapidly evolving global economy, students have realized that in order to be competitive, a higher education degree functions as the minimal educational requirement, as opposed to what was once viewed as a culminating educational experience. Access to higher education for many, regardless of background, is also now perceived as an entitlement rather than a privilege. The question remains, however, are all students who view themselves as “entitled” equipped with the tools needed to be successful in a postsecondary setting?

Increased access, accountability, and student aspirations have impacted the numbers of students attending higher education institutions. However, there has come a need for transition and support mechanisms that Kirst and Venezia (2001) have argued are traditionally not met. Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio (2003) contended that “most K-12 & postsecondary education systems have not met teenagers’ heightened aspirations with sufficient and well-targeted resources to help all students prepare well for college” (p. 7). Despite students’ high aspirations, Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio (2003) agree that not enough students are well-prepared (as evidenced by high college remediation rates), and not enough complete college as a result.

Kirst & Venezia (2001) stressed that today’s “lack of connection between K-12 and postsecondary education has been deeply rooted in the history of U.S. education policy. The country’s two separate systems of mass education, which they coined *The Great Divide* (between K-12 on one hand; universities and colleges on the other), rarely collaborated to establish consistent standards” (p. 92). Kirst et al. (2001) further contended that “historically, educational change has been isolated within either the K-12 or the higher education sector” (p. 92). While college-level coursework and corresponding remedial courses have been the domain of higher education institutions alone, K-12 entities have solely defined their own curricula and standards. There has been little to no movement toward aligning curricula from one level to the next. Educators at both levels might argue that they have different missions: K-12 educators may argue that their role would be to provide a basic foundation for the general populace that would enable students to be productive functioning citizens upon completion of the twelfth grade. Postsecondary educators would argue that their role is to provide a

foundation for more in-depth and advanced study of a given discipline, and that higher education should not be viewed as an entitlement for everyone. These are distinctly different missions of the two levels within their own rights. Unfortunately, students are caught between these divergent missions. To move from an educational environment where supports abound to an environment where the responsibility falls entirely on the student creates a daunting form of adjustment.

Added to the disconnect that students experience between K-12 and higher education are the issues of disorientation and isolation that students often experience once enrolled. For example, academic difficulties arise as a result of a lack of appropriate study skills needed to be successful. Social difficulties contribute to student uneasiness, isolation, and the feeling that there is a lack of support systems. Attinasi (1989) & Christie and Dinham (1991) agreed that “the academic difficulties, social isolation, and sheer sense of bewilderment which often accompanies the transition may pose real problems for the individual” (cited in Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) and Higgins (2003) addressed the difficulty with academic success that students transitioning to a postsecondary institution tend to have during their first semester, one of the main indicators for students departing higher education. Higgins (2003) noted that whether students are new to postsecondary education or are transfers new to the school, they can experience what he calls “*transitional stress.*” According to Attinasi (1989), Benjamin (1990), Christie and Dinham (1991), & Thompson and Fretz (1991), difficulty in making the transition to college arises from two distinct sources:

“a) the inability of individuals to separate themselves from past forms of association typically characteristic of the local high school, and

b) the individual's need to adjust to the new and often more challenging social and intellectual demands which college imposes upon students" (cited in Tinto, 1993).

This discussion supports the notion of bridging K-12 to postsecondary institutions for the purpose of providing a seamless transition between the two levels and providing the opportunity for incoming freshmen to matriculate successfully into a postsecondary institution in order to receive a higher education. Some postsecondary institutions have responded to this need by facilitating transition specifically through college pre-freshman summer transition programs, and addressing incoming freshman student issues. The development of these programs came about due to the "numbers of students who were unprepared and unexpectedly caught off guard by the expectations of colleges and universities, a phenomenon thus influencing policy changes toward a need for the support systems" (Clowes, Hinkle, and Smart, 1986).

Principal Proposition

Researchers have posed two sets of questions about the needs of entering college freshmen: a) Are the students who come to the postsecondary institution either as first-year entering college students or first-year transfers equipped with the tools necessary to persist successfully? If not, what do they lack and how can they achieve those skills? b) Do postsecondary institutions have the appropriate supports in place to allow students to matriculate, to persist, to achieve academically, and to integrate themselves fully into the educational environment?

There are students in all institutions, many of whom will enter their first year of college unprepared or under-prepared to face the intellectual, academic, and social demands of their postsecondary institutions, particularly students from minority and/or underprivileged populations. Further, there are institutions that employ a number of isolated strategies to assist in transition but that for many reasons do not reach all students who may potentially benefit from the programs. The intent of the current study then, is to analyze one strategy that has become a primary intervention for many institutions to assist in the successful transition of incoming freshman from high school to college: the college pre-freshman summer transition program concept. Specifically, the proposition is that the college pre-freshman summer transition program has positive effects on three independent variables: student academic performance, persistence of its students into their sophomore year, and integration of its students into the college community. A second proposition is that integration has a positive impact on student academic performance and persistence into the sophomore year. Integration with academic and social components of an institution can be major indicators of the success of pre-freshman summer transition programs when included as a goal of the program and when implemented successfully.

Purpose of the Study: Research Questions

This study will focus specifically on a pre-freshman summer transition program called *Preparation for Life as a University Student (PLUS)*, located at a highly selective, coeducational, mid-sized university, and its effects on the following three variables for students who have participated in the program: student academic achievement, student

persistence, and integration patterns. Student academic performance will be measured by an analysis of grade point averages after the first and second semesters of matriculation at the university. Student persistence data will be measured by an analysis of the numbers of credits earned obtained from university enrollment records. Focus groups will be conducted to address student perceptions of their own integration patterns. Through the focus group analysis, there will be an attempt to ascertain any perceived relationships between PLUS program participation and integration, as well as whether integration has an impact on student academic performance and persistence. Attention will also be drawn to other types of information presented within student responses.

The proposed study will address the following research questions:

- 1) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student academic achievement at the university after the first and second semesters of matriculation?
- 2) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student persistence rates at the university after the first and second semesters of matriculation?
- 3) What are PLUS student perceptions of the impact of participation in the PLUS program on integration patterns within the university?
- 4) What are PLUS student perceptions of the relationship between integration and academic achievement?
- 5) What are PLUS student perceptions of the relationship between integration and persistence?

Justification for the Study

Contextually, the university's PLUS program is moving into its fourth year of existence. The summer of 2007 marked the program's fourth entering freshman class. The PLUS program is a result of a year-long reconfiguration of the university's original pre-freshman program, which went by the name, Summer Transition Program (STP). The original Summer Transition Program came under intense review not due to any known recorded or measured ineffectiveness of the program's leadership or the program components itself, nor was there any known needs assessment done to determine whether or not it was a necessity at the time of its review. In fact, general sentiment was that the program was appreciated by the student participants, and exit interviews as well as anecdotal data showed that participants would recommend the program to those incoming students who followed them.

The program's demise was sparked by a student who authored an article criticizing the program for excluding non-minorities. This occurred "on the heels of a U.S. Supreme Court decision involving admissions policies at the University of Michigan that declared certain types of affirmative action illegal, including programs that are solely open to minorities" (Locher, p. 1, 2004). The controversy mushroomed into political and national media pressure on the university's administrators to audit the program and respond to these allegations. The administrators of the institution decided then to reconfigure and rename the summer transition program to become more inclusive.

The significance of this study is that first, there is no known comprehensive study of the university's original Summer Transition Program that assessed program effectiveness. All that exists are pre and post surveys of student expectations versus

realizations of the program. Since major policy revisions were made to the original STP program, expanding it to its current form, PLUS, and increasing availability of its services to a larger number of students, it is an opportune time to begin assessing the program in its revised format.

Second, a review of existing literature suggests a need for studying more of these types of programs to determine effectiveness and to determine if any overarching themes can be gleaned from studies about pre-freshman summer transition programs.

Researchers indicate that although bridge programs are aggressively funded, improvement in retention rates has been minimal. Furthermore, there are few specific studies about pre-freshman summer transition programs that assess effectiveness of these programs. Studies in the literature review include differences in samples, institution types, independent variables, and also the research questions asked by the researchers in conducting their respective studies. In essence, no two studies analyzed in this literature review could be considered replications of each other. The researchers asked questions that they felt were prevalent concerns of the institutions they were studying at the time. More studies of this type need to be done before any generalizations can begin to be made or before common themes can be deduced regarding pre-freshman summer transition programs like PLUS.

Limitations

One foreseen limitation of this study is the level of researcher bias that may be introduced into the qualitative design of the chapter. By the moderator, care has to be taken not to “provide cues about what types of responses are desirable” (Marczak and

Sewell, 2008). Creswell (1998, p. 55) cautioned that in phenomenological study, “bracketing, i.e. putting aside researcher preconceived ideas about an experience,” may be difficult for researchers to do. He advised that “the researcher needs to decide how and in what ways his or her personal experiences will be introduced into the study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55).

Also, the literature review will suggest that summer bridge programs have primarily targeted the needs of students from disadvantaged low-socioeconomic backgrounds, at-risk populations, or first-generation college students primarily from ethnic minority groups. Due to the reconfiguration of the former STP program and policy shifts toward inclusion, PLUS no longer targets any of the aforementioned sub-groups. The program is open to any student who has been accepted and has paid his or her deposit to attend the university. Therefore, unlike what is suggested in the literature review, this study will not address the impact of the program on disadvantaged students.

A third limitation is with sample selection. The researcher will attempt to select a control group to match the treatment group of PLUS participants based on a certain number of background characteristics. However, due to the relatively small population at the university, it will be difficult to find a closely matched sample of students based on a large number of background characteristics. Therefore, the researcher will decrease the number of controlled background characteristics to ensure a higher probability of matches.

Chapter Summary

Policy shifts toward enabling access since the early 1900s and increased student aspirations have led to higher levels of student enrollment at postsecondary institutions. The populations entering the institutions have been more diverse demographically. That is, various ethnic minority groups, more women, and also non-traditional populations have been given the ability to pursue a higher education. However throughout history, the various groups often coming from economically underprivileged, academically under-prepared, and at-risk backgrounds found the new postsecondary environments to be unwelcoming and hostile.

The postsecondary institutions, however, also had difficulty in meeting the needs of these particular students. A recent accountability movement at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels has raised the stakes and has forced educational institutions to look at the organizational procedures in place to address the influx of the new populations and to address retention concerns. In recent decades, postsecondary institutions have invested much time and resources to implement summer transition programs geared toward addressing the lack of academic preparation, feelings of isolation, and lack of knowledge about how to navigate a postsecondary institution, all of which struggling entering college freshmen have brought to the table.

This study proposes to assess the effectiveness of the pre-freshman summer transition program on student academic performance and persistence into the second year. The study also proposes, through qualitative methods, to gain insight into PLUS participant perceptions of the program's impact on integration and the relationship between integration and the other variables; academic achievement and persistence.

These variables have tended to constitute the focus of bridge programs that have purported the general goals of assuring that students transition smoothly into their freshman year of college, achieve academically, and become acclimated to the college landscape. The hypotheses based on the first two research questions is that the pre-freshman summer transition program has significant impacts on a) academic performance and b) persistence, for students who participate in the program versus those students who do not. The mixed method design will then shift from a quantitative to a qualitative method by collecting data in the form of focus groups to address research questions three through five. The intent of the focus groups is to obtain data that will address the level to which students feel integrated and whether the integration impacts their academic achievement and persistence. The design presents the opportunity to collect data in a way that will provide valuable information about the effective components of pre-freshman summer transition programs.

Definition of Terms

The dependent and independent variables are defined as follows:

College Pre-freshman Summer Transition Program – residential intensive programs targeting incoming college freshmen and addressing a variety of transitional issues (i.e. remediation, study skills, adaptation to college life and campus living, etc.) that are dependent upon the goals of the institution. (Programs can be as long as 4-6 weeks in duration prior to the fall of the freshman year).

Academic Performance – for the purpose of this study, academic performance will correspond to and be measured by grade point average at the end of the students' first year of completion.

Persistence – the successful academic progression and enrollment of a student from first year (freshman) status to second year (sophomore) status.

Student Integration – adapted from Tinto (2003); involvement of students in the academic (classroom) and social, service, spiritual, and/or athletic (extracurricular or co-curricular) facets of the college environment (sometimes used interchangeably with student *engagement*).

Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

Introduction

The numbers of underrepresented students aspiring to attend postsecondary institutions have increased with aspirations having been “grounded in an economic reality. The economic reality faced by students and their parents is the understanding that a college education greatly improves an individual’s opportunities for economic security in today’s marketplace” (Venezia, et. al 2003, p.6). However, students themselves have found that upon enrolling in postsecondary institutions, they have not been prepared for the rigors of the academic setting. Institutions that are termed “[broad access] institutions such as state universities and community colleges that enroll about eighty percent of the nation's students, demand that entering freshmen have solid academic skills to qualify for college level classes -- a fact that has caught many first-year students [off-guard]” (Trei, 2003, p. 1).

Postsecondary administrators have found themselves having to embrace the fact that “seventy percent of all high school graduates go on to some level of postsecondary education” (Boswell, 2000, p. 3). Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) of the Stanford University Bridge Project, and Boswell (2000) asserted that “America’s high school students have higher educational aspirations than ever before. Eighty-eight percent of 8th graders expect to participate in some form of postsecondary education, and approximately seventy percent of all of high school graduates actually do go to college within two years of graduating high school” (p. 6). This statistic “cuts across racial and ethnic lines where, for example, 80 percent of African American and Hispanic students

surveyed intend to pursue some form of postsecondary education” (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003, p.6).

However, researchers would suggest that the high aspirations of African-American students are offset by a reluctance to borrow financial aid due to their low perceptions of their ability to pay for college (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). Also, concern arises from U.S. Census (2006) data showing that African-Americans and Hispanics continue to trail Asians and Non-Hispanic whites as groups with the lowest percentage of earned bachelor’s degrees. While Asians, (49.4%), and Non-Hispanic Whites, (30.6%), lead with the higher percentages of the population obtaining bachelor’s degrees, African-Americans and Hispanics continue to fall behind with (17.6%) and (12.1%), respectively, earning bachelor’s degrees. Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) attributed this phenomenon in part to low student preparedness for postsecondary coursework despite the high student aspirations.

Implicit in the high levels of college remediation and increased efforts in retention programs is the notion that once the underrepresented student enrolls in a college, he or she becomes startled to learn that admissions to a postsecondary institution does not pose as much of a challenge as actually persisting toward a degree. “Completing a degree, or even enrolling in college-level courses, requires higher levels of academic preparation. In short, simply graduating from high school does not ensure that a student will be ready for college level courses” (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003, p.7). There is a noticeable discrepancy between what the student perceives postsecondary education to be and what he or she truly knows about the postsecondary experience that would make him or her successful.

To address the retention and persistence issues of the K-12 to higher education pipeline, postsecondary institutions have invested much time and resources in programs aimed at helping students to navigate successfully the K-12 to higher education transition. The range of programs have included AP credit articulation agreements; federal TRIO programs such as Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, and Student Support Services; dual enrollment; bridge programs, which occur during any summer while the student is still in high school; and the college pre-freshman summer transition program, which takes place during the summer immediately before entering one's freshman year of college.

College pre-freshman summer transition programs are an early form of intervention intended to promote acclimatization, academic success, and persistence among at-risk students. These programs have different goals than conventional summer orientation or bridge programs and are usually longer (several weeks versus a day or two), as well as more programmatically focused. Institutional summer transition programs vary both in content and structure, but they typically target high school graduates who have been admitted to a postsecondary institution starting in the fall semester. These programs usually bring students to campus during the summer for intensive academic and residential experiences, including courses or workshops designed to help the students “develop time management and study skills, form peer networks, develop academic and career plans, familiarize themselves with the campus, and meet with faculty, other students, and academic support staff” (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 404). Although they caution that fewer studies have looked at college pre-freshman summer transition programs than at longer developmental studies programs offered

during an academic year, the findings are generally consistent in suggesting that “[transition] program participants are more likely than non-participants to persist into their second year” (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 404).

However, even with the large investment in these programs, U.S. Census data along with data from the National Center for Educational Statistics continue to report achievement gaps along ethnic lines, particularly between Whites/Asians and Blacks/Hispanics. The current study intends to address the college pre-freshman summer transition program and its effectiveness as an intervention.

This literature review will begin with a discussion of the historical context in which various subgroups have attained access to postsecondary education and how these subgroups have grown. Historical events, policies, and issues underlying the development and implementation of general bridge programs will be highlighted. The chapter will then progress into a discussion of which of these subgroups have been and continue to be unsuccessful and the reasons for the subgroups continuing to have difficulty. The literature review will then move forward into a discussion of the initiatives that have been instituted to address the lack of success that students face within the K-12 to higher education pipeline and summarize research findings of studies conducted on the success of certain bridge programs. Finally, the literature review will transition into a discussion of student academic performance, persistence, and student integration literature, variables that will be measured in this study for the purpose of understanding whether participation in a college pre-freshman summer transition program is a major predictor of success.

Historical Context for Summer Transition Programs

A number of historical events have preceded the growth of the numbers of existing college pre-freshman summer transition programs. Clowes, et al. (1986) and Kezar (2000) noted that increased access to higher education has historically resulted from major social changes and governmental policy shifts. This was true particularly during the mid 1800s through the 1900s, when various non-traditional populations gained access to postsecondary institutions. Increased access to postsecondary institutions was one of the driving factors that led to the growth of college pre-freshman summer transition programs. Both students and the postsecondary institutions were faced with unfamiliar challenges, in terms of the unprepared non-traditional students being forced to adjust to a new environment, while institutions were unequipped to accommodate different non-traditional populations with varying needs. Inevitably, postsecondary institutions had to address those needs.

Kezar (2000) also noted that, "...as in most historical times of expansion, remediation and academic support programs have been implemented to help new populations make the transition to college" (p. 1). Whereas higher education was initially aimed at the preparation of the elite, upper class white male, higher education institutions ultimately opened their doors to a second-class citizen, whom Kezar (2000) referred to as the "common man" (p.1).

A major historical legislation that began increasing levels of access was the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which provided land so that states could individually establish postsecondary institutions within their own jurisdictions. "These (Land Grant) institutions of higher education opened the university education (system) to a wide range

of students, mainly from a lower socioeconomic status, who did not have access to higher education previously” (Maples, 2002, p. 41). About 28 years later, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 extended the provisions of the original Morrill Act of 1862 to southern states, which permitted them to establish additional colleges for African-American male and female students, known today as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Another law, called the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, was signed on June 22, 1944 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, also known as the G.I. Bill, underscored the need to help World War II veterans matriculate into colleges to pursue the education and training that would ease their transition into the workforce. Socially, postwar America was facing an escalating unemployment rate. The G.I. Bill was a legislative response used to curtail the anticipated postwar problems (http://www.uvsc.edu/grad_tran/veterans/history.html, 2006). Although, there were concerns about the initial costs of the G.I. Bill and veteran students possibly lowering the standards in education, the G.I. Bill became the primary means of financial access to higher education for WWII veterans returning to or beginning postsecondary studies as students of non-traditional age. Had it not been for the G.I. Bill, transition to the workforce would have been otherwise difficult for veterans to accomplish. As war veterans began taking advantage of the G.I. Bill, higher education institutions were faced with yet another unfamiliar population for which postsecondary transition services were needed.

Arguably the most critical time period for access to higher education (as well as K-12) was the mid 1950s through the mid 1970s. The legal ruling of *Brown vs. Board of*

Education (1954) made the “separate but equal” public school structure illegal. Later, “The Civil Rights Act of 1964 along with the Higher Education Act of 1965 significantly opened the doors of higher education across the country to a more diverse student body than ever before” (Maples, 2002, p. 41). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race within any public institution receiving federal funds.

In the postsecondary sector, during this highly volatile social and political time period, it was not enough simply to accept that African-Americans had HBCUs to attend as an alternative. Many of the southern white postsecondary institutions were forced to integrate their student bodies by opening their doors and allowing African-Americans to enroll. Reluctantly, some of these postsecondary institutions did so by way of court order, whether they were prepared to or not. One of many such court rulings came out of the North Carolina *Adams v. Richardson* case of 1972, 1973, a Title VI case during which the judge ruled that the Office of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) was in violation of enforcing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 at the higher education level. “This case has become extremely important regarding the issue of equal opportunity for access of students, faculty, and administrators. In essence, the ruling affected all states that had been operating dual systems of higher education, which meant the existence of historically separate institutions for whites and blacks. All such states were ordered to dismantle those systems...” (Malaney, 1987, p. 17). Transition programs for African-American students were needed not only because their previously segregated schools did not adequately prepare them academically, but also because their initially small numbers and hostile campus environments made it important to provide social support networks.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 further appropriated funds for colleges and universities that addressed community issues such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, etc., through the development of educational programs, activities, services, and continuing education. The programs, and particularly continuing education, began addressing the needs of a non-traditionally aged population (students beyond the age of 22) by providing an avenue to acquire skills needed to pursue further education. Later amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 made the law more comprehensive, including appropriations for a vast number of programs to include federal financial aid and work-study programs, federal TRIO programs, institutional aid to HBCUs, and alternative education programs such as “Education for the Deaf” and programs to help incarcerated youth offenders to transition to the workforce, just to name a few.

When looking at the gender distribution in recent decades, although the numbers of males and females who enrolled in college following high school have increased, the numbers of females have outpaced the numbers of males. In a report from the National Center for Educational Statistics, “the proportion of undergraduates who were female increased from the minority to the majority of students between 1970 to 2000: 42% of undergraduates were female in 1970 versus 56% of undergraduates who were female in 2000” (NCES, 2004). One probable cause of this rise in the proportion of females is due to their personal aspirations. “Female high school seniors were more likely than their male peers to report that they definitely planned to graduate from a 4-year college: 62% females vs. 51% males in 2001” (NCES, 2004).

Student aspirations for college attendance have begun to play an integral role in their decision to pursue a postsecondary education, and “aspirations are positively related to actual college attendance” (Milton, Schmidlein, Mintrop, MacLellan, and Pitre, 2000, p. 49). Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003, p. 6) asserted that “America’s high school students have higher educational aspirations than ever before,” which has been influenced in large part by the parents, teachers, and educational leaders’ ability to communicate to students the importance of college. High school students who complete their high school degrees have viewed a postsecondary degree as more of a “need” in order to achieve success and a better lifestyle. However, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006, Indicator 31, Educational Attainment), of the 86% of high school seniors who expected to attain a bachelor’s degree in 2005, for example, only approximately 29% actually went on to receive one. Broken down further into ethnic/racial groups, there were discrepancies such as Hispanics falling behind Whites and African-Americans in the percentage of those completing a degree. However, this fact illustrates that although the aspirations were present, a myriad of factors may have presented obstacles for subgroups of students persisting toward the completion of postsecondary degree requirements.

Present Context for Transition Programs

Whereas historical legislation opened the doors to higher education for diverse groups, more recent legislation has served to raise the bar in terms of what institutions are now doing to ensure student retention and academic success. Various federal level policy shifts stemming from the national standards and accountability movement have directly

and indirectly influenced the growth of college pre-freshman summer transition programs. Pressure from federal legislators for educational reform has caused educators at the K-12 and postsecondary levels to refocus and alter priorities. Educators have had to rethink and revamp their curriculum and delivery methods to assure that the needs of all students are being met.

At the K-12 level, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is an example of a law that has shaped K-12 policy and educational planning considerably in the last several years. Former U.S. Education Secretary, Rod Paige, broadly yet symbolically delineated legislative expectations of K-12 learning outcomes when he proclaimed that, “with NCLB we will strive to provide every [student] in America with a high quality education regardless of his or her income, ability, or background” (Apple Computer Inc., 2003, pg. 2). In recent years, this mandate has translated into a ratcheted level of articulated standards and competencies that each student must master, skills and credentials that educators must possess, and professional development and training that K-12 administrators must provide for front-line teachers. These K-12 standards were established to prepare graduating high school seniors to compete in an increasingly global economy.

Although many postsecondary institutions are periodically certified through accrediting organizations, the level of scrutiny experienced at the K-12 level in terms of expectations of supports for student achievement has not quite reached the postsecondary level. Nevertheless, there is much discussion in this area, particularly in light of the large percentages of underprivileged students who seek postsecondary degrees but are not persisting successfully through graduation. In the postsecondary field, scholars have

begun to argue that higher education institutions should also be obligated and held accountable for assuring that students have the supports in place for successful academic achievement and matriculation. Tafel and Eberhart, (1999), affirmed this argument, stating that “colleges and universities have an obligation to support the educational success of all students that they enroll. The commitment of higher education to adopt standards that identify and define what students should know and be able to do upon completion of their academic program significantly lags behind the K-12 standards-based reform movements” (pg. 6). The speculation is that change may not be far behind, as colleges and universities should soon be facing demands for institutions to be accountable for student achievement in various disciplines. The accountability discussion, once solely a K-12 issue, has migrated to the higher education level.

Who Doesn't Succeed and Why?

Several authors as well as census data have confirmed that in the past years a larger number of high school graduates developed aspirations of attending postsecondary institutions. Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) pointed out that in the most recent decades, approximately 70 percent of African-American and Hispanic students were among those who shared the postsecondary aspirations and eventually enrolled in some form of postsecondary coursework within two years of graduating from college. However, many of those students found the transition to the postsecondary environments a challenge. They found upon matriculating that campus environments were in many cases less than inviting, and in some, non-supportive.

Fleming (1988) conducted a number of comparative studies between African-American and white students at both predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and historically black colleges & universities (HBCUs). She found that although there were some difficulties that all students generally faced, African-American students attending predominantly black institutions fared well because they did not have racial stressors attached to being part of “the minority.” She found that white students attending predominantly white institutions had the same experience. Fleming, however, also presented pertinent findings based on her studies of African-American students at predominantly white institutions. Her sample came from small numbers of African-American students attending a spectrum of PWIs in various regions. In the early 1900s, very few predominantly white institutions in the northeastern and midwestern states had become integrated, allowing small numbers of African-Americans to enroll as part of their student bodies. The southern institutions, however, only opened their doors to African-Americans in the late 1960s to early 1970s. Fleming’s (1988) studies confirmed that regardless of when African-American students were permitted into the predominantly white institutions, they undoubtedly felt the harsh effects of this “recent” phenomenon of being in a completely new educational setting.

Fleming (1988) reported that African-American students showed “evidence of poor or thwarted intellectual development in predominantly white colleges, and in some cases intellectual deterioration” (p. 65). Fleming suggests that the lack of intellectual development exhibited by African-American students was attributed in part to a phenomenon called *alienation*. The term “alienation” was used in her studies to describe the students’ inability to feel as if they belonged at the institution, or perhaps at that level

of education. The African-American students were unable to feel as if they were “a part of the whole...which seemed to correlate with the absence of intellectual gain and a drop in the level of career aspirations” (Fleming, 1988, p. 65). The context that Fleming presents along with this finding is that the respective postsecondary institution was predominantly white with an enrollment of 2,600. Of the 2,600 students, only 50 were African-American. Fleming pointed out that with such a small number of African-Americans, the feelings of isolation and “disconnectedness” within this population were inevitable, which further translated into “disengagement from academic involvement and futile attempts to find ways of asserting themselves” (1988, p. 66).

Based on studies conducted at a mid-sized predominantly white institution with enrollment at approximately 9,000, and a large predominantly white institution with enrollment at 20,000, Fleming’s findings were similar in terms of African-Americans experiencing intellectual deterioration. At the mid-sized institutions, subjective assessments showed that students perceived that there was a level of “racial conflict” (Fleming, 1988, p.67). In essence the African-American student felt isolated and anxious due to a lack of feeling important and “recognized” in the academic landscape. In an environment where academic prowess and competition was more valued, the result was stagnation in the area of intellectual development, and what resulted subsequently was what Fleming termed “defensive extracurricular involvement” (p. 67). The defensive extracurricular involvement meant that the African-American students sought leadership opportunities and acceptance among their peers in cultural, political, social, and perhaps athletic activities because of less than desirable experiences in the academic landscape.

Findings at the large institution showed that African-American students complained about poor teaching methods and didn't feel that fair grading methods were used. Fleming noted that "along with the academic and personal sources of stress, the harsh environment seemed to have motivated [African-American] students to learn to cope and survive under less than optimal conditions" (1988, p. 70).

Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) research on the *institutional racial-ethnic composition* factor and how it affects college students confirmed Fleming's findings. The research clearly showed, according to Pascarella and Terenzini, that African-Americans at predominantly white institutions confront significantly more social isolation, alienation, dissatisfaction, and overt racism than their counterparts at historically black colleges and universities" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 393). For the African-American student, these feelings of isolation and intellectual inferiority detract from the level of confidence that the student would need to perform academically. In comparison, African-American counterparts at historically black institutions fared better in terms of academic performance and the likelihood of persisting toward a bachelor's degree.

Kirst (2004, p. 51), introduced another reason why students of color (i.e. African-American and Latino) are not as successful as their Asian and white counterparts. In his discussion of the disconnect between high schools and colleges, he suggested that African-American and Latino students are graduating from high school with a lower level of academic skills than their counterparts. Subsequently, he contended that they respectively earn postsecondary degrees at a lower rate than whites and Asians. Kirst pointed to a startling statistic that shows how "African American and Latino 12th graders

across the United States read and do math at the same levels as white 8th graders, on average” (Kahlenberg, as cited in Kirst, 2004).

Kirst drove home the point that African-American and Latino students have traditionally operated in an academic deficit in the secondary years, which has carried over to the postsecondary level. Not enough has been done to remediate these students at the secondary level to meet the basic requirements of colleges. There also has not been enough dialogue between the two levels to communicate further the expectations of the postsecondary institutions. Students going to college traditionally have been unaware of what to expect in terms of the academic culture at the postsecondary level, while the high schools traditionally have been unable to prepare students for the expectations that they will face.

When looking at first-generation poor and working class students who attend college, they are at an additional disadvantage. They bring with them to the postsecondary level a lack of experience and exposure to what postsecondary education is all about. Oldfield (2007) suggested that these students who have been accepted do enroll with the ability to do the work demanded of them. However, they fall prey to their “estrangement in their new surroundings” (Oldfield, 2007, p. 3). First-generation poor and working class students may not be adept at first with understanding the expectations of academia at the postsecondary level. Oldfield (2007) explained that for this population of students, “surviving the social challenges of this [foreign culture] can be at least as demanding as achieving a high grade point average...and that it is vital that their chosen schools offer them an adequate social support system throughout their stay” (p. 3).

What have we done?

Recognizing the difficulties that transition from high school to college have posed for underrepresented and/or disadvantaged entering college freshmen, “(secondary) School to College alliances” have been developed to address what both colleges and high schools have begun to view as a common problem: “helping disadvantaged students get the education they need to join an increasingly sophisticated labor force” (Ascher and Schwartz, 1989, pg.1). School-College Alliances, coined by Ascher and Schwartz, (1989) refer to the various types of collaborative arrangements, such as AP/college level/dual enrollment classes offered on college campuses, tutoring or mentoring provided by college faculty, summer remedial programs, K-12 to postsecondary curriculum alignments, and the various forms of bridge programs designed to redirect student attention and develop student skills toward a successful transition to college. Although the design and components of bridge programs have varied widely, the U.S. Department of Education NCES (2004) outlined four typical components of a comprehensive college transition program:

- Curriculum enhancement that includes tutoring, summer school, after-school programs, and extra coursework;
- Information sharing to educate students and parents about college options, testing and admission requirements, financial aid procedures, and campus life;
- Mentoring by a peer or adult that provides educational and social support; and
- Social enrichment activities that provide students with the opportunity to learn leadership skills, set goals, visit college campuses, and explore the arts.

Ideally, both collaborating institutions benefit from these partnerships. The high school resources would be greatly enhanced by virtue of providing their students with access to college equipment, classes, labs, and postsecondary professionals, while the partnership facilitates more of a vertical alignment for transition. The colleges would, in

turn, “help to create a pipeline with a more diverse population that is academically prepared for college-level work” (Ascher and Schwartz, 1989).

Kirst & Venezia (2001) called this approach “bridging the great divide between secondary schools and postsecondary education” (p. 92). Kirst and Venezia (2001) engaged in extensive research that addresses the need for K-16 collaboration. The impetus behind K-16 collaboration stems first from noticeable gaps in the preparation of entering freshmen for college level work. This lack of preparation spurs the need for remedial courses that postsecondary educators argue is not the role of postsecondary institutions. Second, due to a lack of consistent communication between postsecondary admissions offices and secondary administrators, students and secondary educators have been misinformed about the appropriate skills needed for successful transition into postsecondary education. Kirst and Venezia (2001) found in their research that “few teachers, counselors, and administrators have much knowledge of college admissions and placement policies” (p. 94).

Third, while K-12 standards and statewide assessments place emphasis on student mastery of the statewide curriculum and what students know, admissions and placement decisions are based primarily on assessments like the SAT. The SAT measures the aptitude of students and is used by colleges as a predictor of how well the student will perform at a given postsecondary institution. The SAT not only measures what a student knows but how well a student can critically think, synthesize information, and apply the information to solve a problem, according to CollegeBoard.com (2007). SAT results are used for decisions such as admissions, college course selection, and placement.

This example demonstrates that a disconnect exists between the levels of expectations at the K-12 level and at the postsecondary levels. Students learn throughout their high school years to master the skill of rote memorization and regurgitation, while postsecondary institutions expect a higher order level of synthesis and application. This disconnect confuses students attempting to make the transition to college who are ill-equipped to handle the rigors of postsecondary coursework.

Fourth, the issues of isolation, alienation, and low levels of confidence discussed in the previous section, all of which many African-American students experience at unfamiliar educational institutions, further underscore two points. 1) There is a gap between K-12 and postsecondary educators that profoundly affects how a student may adjust and perform within his or her new environment. 2) A smoother transition is needed for those students, which can be met, for example, through the provisions of multiple supports for incoming students. “All students deserve our best efforts to create campus environments in which they can flourish” (Oldfield, 2007).

Although K-12 and higher education systems fall under separate governance systems, they are arguably interdependent when addressing the problems that students face when transitioning from secondary education to postsecondary education. Policymakers now have the challenge of addressing concerns of both K-12 and postsecondary institutions. Haycock and Huang (2001) contended that K-12 and postsecondary systems are “intertwined in so many places that neither can solve its own problems without the other’s cooperation...working together, a coherent K-16 system will make sure that our youth at the crossroads will be well-prepared for their journey, regardless of which route they choose” (p. 17).

There are several developing K-12/postsecondary partnerships across the country. K-12/postsecondary partnerships or alliances are good faith efforts of like-minded educators coming together to provide a fluid and seamless continuum in the educational process. This continuity is accomplished through any combination of programs and curricular enhancements. “There are few levers in place, such as K-16 accountability systems or funding mechanisms that cross the sectors, to encourage higher education to change” as a whole (Kirst and Venezia, 2001, p. 93). Nonetheless, politicians have attempted to affect change toward bridging the educational gap between K-12 and postsecondary education.

Mandates vs. Incentives

A paradigm shift has had to occur on the part of postsecondary institutions to begin helping individuals seeking a postsecondary education to successfully achieve one. A similar paradigm shift has taken place on the K-12 level because of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, whereby supports are mandated to help guide all children toward achievement, regardless of background. Tafel and Eberhart (1999) contended that “colleges and universities, as well, have since felt the obligation to support the educational success of all students that they enroll,” like K-12 (p. 5). However, it is apparent that ideas and policies developed to meet the needs of students are not the same on both levels. “Postsecondary institutions are not held to the same accountability levels as schools in the K-12 sector” (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). The differences between the levels of support that are found in K-12 versus postsecondary education can

be explained by pointing out that K-12 systems are governed by mandates, while postsecondary institutions typically respond to a system of incentives.

NCLB has mandated standards for achievement in the K-12 sector, a task not as easily accomplished at the postsecondary level. As part of NCLB, legislators articulated a focus on states to define “adequate yearly progress” and to require that local schools reach the adequate yearly progress benchmarks on an annual basis. In most instances, adequate yearly progress in schools has been measured by the percentages of students in the NCLB ethnic subcategories that have achieved the local academic benchmarks. While states have encouraged postsecondary state institutions to employ the use of bridge programs, postsecondary institutions have not come under the close scrutiny to ensure student achievement that K-12 institutions have. Instead, state governments, foundations, and in some cases federal legislation have utilized incentives that support initiatives on the part of postsecondary institutions to bridge the transition.

Through such acts as the proposed NSF Bill and Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorizations, postsecondary institutions have been given incentives to propose programs that address the needs of disadvantaged students. Incentives have been the preferred method of encouraging postsecondary institutions to recognize the utility of such interventions as summer bridge programs. Each institution, with its own distinct mission, is difficult to place within a “one-size-fits-all” standards-driven model like K-12. The goals of a college pre-freshman summer transition program at one school may vary from the goals of another and thus make it impossible to mandate standards that all higher education institutions should follow in providing supports for the preparation, matriculation, and persistence of students through graduation. However, the proposed

Higher Education Act reauthorization included language requiring colleges and universities to report degree completion rates, according to Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Assoc. (2005, p. 7). Other examples of specific Higher Education Act reauthorizations have included the following:

- Section 108 of the HEA Reauthorization requires states to maintain or increase their level of funding for public Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) or become ineligible for the Act's new grants to expand college access and increase college persistence under the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership program.
- Section 303 of the HEA Reauthorization established a new program awarding formula grants to “Predominantly Black Institutions” to: (1) enhance their capacity to serve more low- and middle-income Black American students; (2) expand higher education opportunities for students eligible for student assistance under title IV of the HEA by encouraging such students to prepare for college and persist in secondary and postsecondary education; and (3) strengthen their financial ability to serve the academic needs of such students. It defines predominantly black institutions as accredited institutions serving at least 1,000 undergraduate students: (1) 50% of whom are pursuing a bachelor's or associate's degree; (2) 40% of whom are Black Americans; and (3) 50% of whom are low-income or first-generation college students. (Library of Congress, 2007).

At the very least, these sections constitute a legislative move toward accountability for higher education.

A provision of the NSF Reauthorization Bill (H.R. 4664), a five-year reauthorization from 2002-2007, has increased the NSF funding from \$4.79 billion in fiscal year 2002 to \$9.84 billion in fiscal year 2007. In turn, a funding incentive was to be directed toward postsecondary institutions to compete for grants to enhance previously implemented reforms in the areas of undergraduate science, mathematics, engineering, and technology. Upon authorizing the NSF Director to award the merit-based grants to institutions of higher education, “the undergraduate programs were to have demonstrated that they were successful in increasing the number and quality of students working towards completing a degree in these subject areas” (American Institute of Physics, 2002, para 9).

Similarly, also as a result of the proposed Higher Education Act reauthorization, “Funding [had] increased significantly for programs that aim to expand access and encourage first-generation, low-income, college students to attend and complete college” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education (2005) reported that in fiscal year 2002, the Federal TRIO programs (Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services) were funded at \$803 million, an increase of 52 percent from 1998. TRIO has served more than 850,000 at-risk students by providing outreach and support services, as well as information about postsecondary opportunities. The most recent HEA reauthorizations for TRIO were addressed in Section 402, which has “reauthorized appropriations for TRIO programs (of grants and contracts designed to identify qualified individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and help prepare them for a program of postsecondary education) for FY2009-FY2013. It extends the duration of

TRIO grants to five years and sets the minimum grant at \$200,000” (Library of Congress, 2007).

Likewise, a similar reauthorization for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, (GEAR UP), has extended appropriations for FY2009-FY2013. It allows the Secretary to award seven-year GEARUP grants (Library of Congress, 2007). GEAR UP, funded at \$285 million in fiscal year 2002 while serving more than 1.2 million students, has grown significantly since its inception in 1998. “Taken together, these programs represent more than \$1 billion each year in annual funding and provide services to 2.1 million students from low-income families to help them enter and complete postsecondary education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Some examples of state-level incentives have been in the form of developed accountability systems that tie institutional budgets to performance and increases in student retention. States have also employed the use of incentive grants to “encourage the development of innovative programs aimed at increasing student retention and serving the needs of disadvantaged students” (Tinto, 2003, p. 8). Tinto (2003) affirmed that “until recently, states have been willing to grant universities and colleges a great deal of autonomy, at least in regards to student retention and graduation. But, that has clearly begun to change” (p. 8).

What Has Worked or Not Worked?: Review of Research

This section reviews studies of the effectiveness of Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services, three of the nation’s largest bridge programs

funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Talent Search identifies promising students in grades six through twelve and focuses on exposing students to aspects of postsecondary education of which they would otherwise have little knowledge. For example, participants receive counseling, information about college admission requirements, scholarships, and various student financial aid programs.

Upward Bound has devoted its program goals toward facilitating the transition from high school to college, and provides supplemental academic instruction, tutoring, and mentoring to its participants typically on college campuses after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer. The program goal is to prepare students for the transition and demands of higher education. The services of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. were retained to conduct rigorous longitudinal studies of Talent Search and Upward Bound for the U.S. Department of Education. This information provides us with pertinent information on the effectiveness of these bridge programs.

A national longitudinal study of Student Support Services was conducted by Westat, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Education. Student Support Services (SSS) was designed to address issues of postsecondary retention for disadvantaged students enrolled in college. Like Upward Bound, SSS participants receive tutoring, counseling, remedial instruction, and study skills development, strategies that help students persist through college graduation. Additionally, Thayer (2000) published a review of successful SSS programs at different postsecondary institutions that adopted a “learning community” approach to combat concerns about student retention and persistence.

Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services provide a continuum of services that support the early exposure of students to higher education, a successful

transition to postsecondary institutions, and persistence of enrolled postsecondary students towards a baccalaureate degree. It is worth noting that the TRIO umbrella has grown to include *Upward Bound Math/Science* to address specific participation of disadvantaged students in the respective core subjects, *Educational Opportunity Centers* that provide support to displaced or underemployed workers, and the *Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program*, which encourages disadvantaged students to pursue graduate and doctoral level degrees. For the purposes of this paper, only Talent Search, Upward Bound, and SSS studies will be reviewed from the TRIO cluster of programs. Finally, the Talent Search, Upward Bound, and SSS studies address the program effects on the dependent variables that are researched in this paper, student academic performance, persistence, and student integration into the postsecondary institution.

Other studies that were selected for this literature review were chosen because of their specific focuses on the college pre-freshman summer transition program that facilitates the transition from 12th grade to the freshman year in college and provides incoming freshmen with a head-start. The studies contained in this review specifically addressed college pre-freshman summer transition programs and their impact on various aspects of student matriculation. For the purpose of this paper, the term “transition program” refers specifically to programs designed for entering college freshmen in the summer prior to the first semester off college enrollment, whereas the term “bridge programs” is more inclusive of different types of programs. One exception to the studies, however, focused on a unique academic program that included a comprehensive writing component delivered through a sequence of three semester-long courses. This program,

called the Community Educator Project, was not classified as a summer transition program, but included students from the respective institution's pre-freshman summer transition program. This program was considered the treatment in the study, whereas the remaining studies used existing college pre-freshman summer transition programs as their treatments.

Talent Search: One of the major national TRIO studies included an analysis of the effectiveness of the Talent Search program in three states: Florida, Indiana and Texas. By virtue of the criteria for program selection, the study participants were from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds. Analysis was based on secondary school records, postsecondary school and enrollment records, Talent Search Project records, and federal financial aid application records which were compiled by states "in order to assess outcomes related to the Talent Search program goals: high school completion, application for financial aid, and college enrollment" (Constantine, Seftor, Martin, Silva, and Myers, 2006). In the state of Indiana, a secondary school experiences questionnaire was instrumental in collecting demographic and background information of the participants.

Within the quasi-experimental design, Talent Search projects were randomly selected, and the cohorts within those programs were compared to control groups of participants with similar backgrounds to determine effectiveness of the program as a treatment. With about 60% of all Talent Search programs in Florida, Indiana, and Texas reporting data, the findings of the study showed that Talent Search participants were significantly more likely than non-participants to apply for federal aid and to enroll in postsecondary institutions in Florida, Indiana, and Texas. As the Talent Search

participants consisted of a cohort of students who were in the 9th grade in 1995-1996, the researchers were able to track the participants, finding that they were significantly more likely than non-participants to enroll in a public college or university in their state by the 1999-2000 school year. The types of postsecondary institutions attended (i.e. 2-year vs. 4-year) tended to be linked with the types of postsecondary institutions hosting the Talent Search program. (Constantine, Seftor, Martin, Silva, and Myers, 2006). The findings indicated that within the three states, Talent Search Programs were successful in meeting one of its main goals; college enrollment of its participants.

Upward Bound: Sixty-seven Upward Bound Programs were randomly selected for the Upward Bound National Study. After the 67 Upward Bound projects were selected, eligible applicants were placed in a participant group receiving Upward Bound services versus a similar group of non-participants who did not receive Upward Bound services. These placements were made in such a way as to maintain the integrity of the Upward Bound application process. “Eligible applicants were defined (within the study) as students the projects had recruited who met both the federal requirements concerning income or first-generation status, as well as any project-specific criteria for participation” (Myers and Schirm, 1999, p. 7). A “Follow-Up” data collection period of the Upward Bound program was conducted in 2004, which showed the following:

- Enrollment: Seventy four percent of students in the treatment group versus seventy-one percent of students in the control group enrolled in some type of postsecondary institution, a non-significant difference.

- Persistence: Treatment students versus control students earned on average 37 vs. 36 credits respectively. Again, the difference was not statistically significant.
- Subgroups defined by educational expectations: “Upward Bound more than doubles the likelihood that students with lower educational expectations attend a four-year college or university, raising the enrollment rate from 18 percent to 38 percent” (Myers, Olsen, Seftor, Young, and Tuttle, 2004, p. 35).

Student Support Services: Like the guidelines followed by Talent Search and Upward Bound, Student Support Services serves a population of disadvantaged college students as determined by family income below the poverty line. SSS participants can also qualify if neither parent had completed college or the participant was disabled. In this particular study, “SSS targeted the most disadvantaged students compared to the total undergraduate population, who were older and more likely to be members of a minority group, more likely to have had lower levels of academic achievement before college, and more likely to have had dependent children” (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, and Rak, 1997, p. 61). Based on the National Study of Student Support Services conducted by Westat, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Education, a cohort group of SSS participants were compared to a similar group of non-participants, which showed the following:

- “SSS increased credits earned by a mean of 1.25 in the first year, 0.79 in the second year, 0.71 in the third year, and 2.25 in the three years combined.

- SSS students also stayed at the same institution at a 7% higher rate in the second year and a 9% rate in the third year” (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, and Rak, 1997, p. 61).

The findings reported for the Student Support Services programs were statistically significant.

Thayer (2000) went into more of the value-added components of Student Support Service projects at various colleges. He contended that these colleges ran successful SSS programs that employ “learning communities” as a strategy to bolster student retention for a population that least tended to persist through graduation. Thayer pointed to four institutions: Skagit Valley College, Drexel University, Colorado State University, and Michigan State University. These institutions had in common one component where participants registered for certain classes together, which in some instances were only open to the SSS cohort. This component provided a built-in network of support for those students and direct access to the instructors for any additional assistance they may have needed. A second component involved participation in activities such as peer mentoring, faculty advising, orientations, study groups, enriched feedback and a number of other activities that created a bond and comfort level within the participants and a support network to help them to succeed. In two of the institutions, the cohort resided together in a particular section of residential halls. Thayer (2000) suggested that the learning community strategy “enhanced the student learning experience and impacted student persistence by increasing student connectedness to the college experience” (p. 7).

The Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services longitudinal studies were conducted over several years in an effort to track cohort participants versus

similar non-participants through high school grades and into a postsecondary education setting. The findings of the Talent Search and Student Support Services programs were statistically significant versus the findings of Upward Bound that were not. Talent Search and Student Support Services programs had positive impacts on their participants' achievement of program goals. Although Upward Bound did not have an impact statistically on the participants' academic achievement, postsecondary enrollment, and persistence through postsecondary completion for program participants, based on the national study, higher percentages of its participants achieved program goals than non-participants. The Student Support Services review, conducted by Thayer (2000), also implicated "learning communities" practices that helped the cohort participants to be successful. Overall, these studies indicate that TRIO programs are successful at achieving the intended outcomes of the cluster programs.

Additional Studies: Ackermann (1991) and Santa Rita & Bacote (1996) indicated that university summer bridge programs were becoming more established as a part of the effort to "recruit, retain, and graduate a population of high risk students in higher education" (p. 4). These scholars acknowledged, however, that research and evaluation of these programs had not been as abundant compared to the large amounts of capital and human resources that postsecondary institutions have committed to ensure high participation and success. Various non-traditional populations throughout history gained access to higher education institutions without the benefit of supports in place. As postsecondary institutions moved toward meeting the need for support systems for the various groups, assessments of these interventions were slow to follow. Even today, postsecondary institutions pour resources into the implementation of summer bridge

programs without substantial information on whether the programs are effective. Federal and state policy shifts have been the catalysts behind administrative decisions to implement bridge programs. However, at the institutional level, we have not consistently measured the extent to which bridge programs impact the many variables they propose to address, such as academic achievement, persistence and retention, or student engagement.

Institution Types - The schools represented in this section of the review included the University of California - Los Angeles, Syracuse University, Bronx Community College, Hampton University, the University of Nevada – Reno, and the University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign. All of the schools are major research institutions, with the exception of Hampton University and Bronx Community College, a two-year community college. Hampton University and Syracuse University were the only privately funded institutions in the review. The remaining institutions were publicly funded or received public assistance. Hampton University is also the sole historically black college of this group. All of the institutions are considered large universities in terms of enrollment, with the exception of Hampton University and Bronx Community College. Hampton University had the smallest enrollment, with approximately 6,000 students, followed by Bronx Community College, with approximately 8,500 students. The remaining institutions had enrollments of 16,000 or above.

The make-up of each school implies populations of students from distinctly different socioeconomic, cultural, demographic backgrounds, and also varied levels of preparedness if the tuition rates, racial composition, location, and background characteristics needed for admission into the respective colleges and universities are taken into account. In a comparison of two studies that were conducted at the same

institution, the populations were different, with one study addressing first-year undergraduate students and the other addressing transfer students.

Focus of studies – All researchers, except for one, sought to determine the effects of a college pre-freshman summer transition program on academic achievement. Three of the studies focused on measuring retention rates in addition to academic achievement, while another two studies focused on the outcomes of the student experience rather than retention. One researcher stated clearly that her study was not for the purpose of determining the effects of the program on academic achievement and retention. Instead, she sought primarily to gain insight on how the students developed through the varied program experiences. She stressed that her particular study was, “a study of the process rather than a study of the product” (Irizarry, 2000, p. 3). Also, while many of the college pre-freshman summer bridge programs in the studies were described as having components aimed at helping students to develop personally and socially, only one researcher specifically sought to determine the program effects on academic as well as personal and social development.

Throughout this review, it is important to note that researchers designed their respective studies based on the needs, goals, and the purposes of the programs at their respective institutions. For example, in one study, one of the independent variables evaluated was “cost effectiveness” of the pre-college summer bridge program, while no other researcher studied this variable. While it is important not to generalize cost effectiveness of bridge programs based on this one study, there were several common variables used in the study designs that might help us to infer the impact of transition programs. Among them were academic achievement, retention, persistence, and student

engagement, which align with the variables in the current study. Reviewing the outcomes of these studies might provide us with insight to the effectiveness of pre-college summer bridge programs specifically.

Sample Characteristics – As bridge programs typically target underprivileged, “at-risk,” underrepresented, and low-socioeconomic populations, the samples in this review tended to include this population of students. The underrepresented subjects were typically minority students of color, (i.e. African-American, Asian, or Hispanic). In one study, the term “at-risk” was used instead of “underrepresented” to define students who were expected to struggle academically as a result of certain background characteristics like low socioeconomic status, poor high school performance, low parent income, etc. Whereas the predominantly white colleges and universities were looking to provide supports for their “at-risk” populations, which tended to be minority underperforming students, Hampton University, a historically black college, simply sought to help those students across the board who were borderline academic performers, according to Hampton University standards. This researcher specifically sought to determine the impacts of the Hampton University Summer Bridge program on the achievements of participants versus regular admit students. Researchers generally hypothesized positive outcomes of higher academic achievement and higher retention/persistence rates for underrepresented students who participated in pre-freshman summer transition programs at their respective institutions.

Research Summary - Study designs varied. Studies included a range of quantitative data collection of institutional data to quasi-experimental designs that utilized institutional data as well as Likert Scale questionnaires. One case study

methodology utilized questionnaires, interviews, observations, and focus groups to collect qualitative data only. In the case of the qualitative study, themes arose that supported the concepts of student integration into the college environment, appropriate student supports, and student self-efficacy (students' own perceived ability to succeed in the postsecondary environment).

Some of the studies controlled for different background or entering characteristics in the samples studied, whereas others did not. Researchers attempted to control for a number of background characteristics in the samples that were compared, such as disadvantaged and low economic backgrounds, affirmative action candidates vs. non affirmative action candidates, gender representation, ethnic representation, high school GPA, and SAT/ACT test scores. Other researchers, however, did not use background characteristics as part of their conceptual framework to determine what factors, for example, might affect college persistence. In those cases, attention was focused on whether social integration was a key factor in persistence as opposed to entering characteristics.

Three of the studies reviewed were developed with research designs that included control groups that did not go through the summer transition program as a treatment in the study. A quandary in summer transition program studies examining the effects of a program is to determine just what the experimental group is being compared. When a study has a comparison group, more definitive arguments can be made for the effectiveness of the program given the appropriate controls.

Results of Studies – The studies reviewed for this section indicate that the summer transition programs had generally significant impacts on retention, persistence, and

academic achievement. A study of the University of California-Los Angeles Community Educator Project (CEP) and the University of Nevada-Reno Summer Bridge Program showed better rates of retention for participants versus non-participants in those programs. The Syracuse University study showed an impact on persistence measured by students' intent to return the following semester. The UCLA-CEP study also showed a positive impact on academic achievement, while researchers studying transition programs at UCLA, Bronx Community College, and Hampton University suggested that proper participation in their programs could facilitate transition and improve retention, academic performance and good standing, and persistence. Qualitative data collected from four Pre-College Academic Support Program participants at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign showed that students persevered through a stressful program, but with peer and administrative supports they believed that despite their backgrounds, they were ready to be college students at Illinois and that they could be successful. Overall, the results of the studies indicated that participation in college pre-freshman summer transition programs would facilitate the move from K-12 to higher education and that it does positively impact retention, persistence, and academic achievement. Additionally, UCLA, Illinois, and Syracuse Universities indicated that student social integration and adjustment contributed to higher retention and persistence rates.

Research Summary

In brief summary of the studies in this section, a review was conducted on the outcomes of the three national TRIO studies to discuss the impact of these nationally established, government-supported bridge programs on the areas of student achievement,

transition, and persistence. Then a review was conducted on a number of institution-level program studies that reflected the type of program studied in this paper. Institutions differed in Carnegie classification, size, population, and even funding base (for example, there was a large public comprehensive research and predominantly white institution versus small private liberal arts historically black institution versus public community college (2 yr.) versus large private predominantly white institution, etc.). This variety indicated a wide range in the makeup of the student bodies of these postsecondary institutions, as well as differences among the missions of the institutions. The studies done at these institutions to assess college pre-freshman summer transition programs focused on the general goals that many of these programs have in common: academic achievement, retention, persistence, and student integration.

Researchers, by virtue of the target populations served by bridge programs, studied samples with the characteristics of underrepresented/underprivileged, low-socioeconomic students of color: African-American, Asian, and Latino. Researchers generally hypothesized positive outcomes of higher academic achievement, retention, and persistence rates. These outcome variables, however, were measured differently as a function of the varied research designs. For, example some studies measured persistence only into the sophomore year, whereas other studies measured persistence through graduation. Furthermore, few studies measured the effects of the college pre-freshman summer transition treatment against a control group of study participants who had not participated in the treatment.

Finally, results of these studies indicated that the summer bridge programs had generally positive and significant impacts on retention, persistence, and academic

achievement. Also, some of the studies found a positive relationship between student social integration and adjustment, on one hand, and higher retention and persistence rates, on the other.

Institutions, based on their institutional priorities, have different needs for their students and have designed bridge programs accordingly. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates (2005) captured this notion by pointing out that “different groups of students need different types of academic or social support” (p. 253). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) affirmed that:

“programmatic interventions, such as developmental studies and other special programs are visible manifestations of college and university efforts to enhance the academic performance and persistence of underprepared students. These interventions vary considerably in content, structure, and duration making synthesis of the research on their effectiveness difficult. The heterogeneity of these studies with respect to the specific interventions, sample sizes, and research and analytical designs further complicates synthesis and review” (p. 398).

A major outcome of the current study, therefore, will be to study program impacts on certain outcome variables, rather than to generalize result findings. The variance among the studies reviewed were attributed to what the researchers felt were prevalent concerns of the institutions, the convenience of samples that were or were not available to them, the research questions asked, and what they felt were the best designs to test their particular hypotheses. This variance implies a need for more studies that are replicated at one school or many schools, assuring that the study designs are identical. More individual studies, such as the one here proposed, can help to establish a baseline for

meta-analytic reviews. If the findings of the current study support the findings in the literature review, then the current findings will continue to build a case for trying the positive strategies at other institutions.

Literature Review in Relation to Academic Performance, Persistence, Student Integration

The studies reviewed in the earlier sections, through incorporating varied design methodologies, addressed student academic performance, persistence, and student integration as separate outcome variables within the context of bridge programs. The current study will analyze the impact of the *Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS)* Program on the same variables. These particular variables in some cases may have interrelated effects, as noted from some of the studies reviewed in this chapter. Therefore, it is pertinent to move into discussions about what may impact the separate independent variables.

Academic Performance - Grade point averages (GPAs) are consistently used as data in studies to determine levels of effectiveness of college pre-freshman summer transition programs. However, in much the same way that a student's needs vary from institution to institution, so to does the meaning of grades from university to university and even between academic departments within an institution. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) agreed that "although the concept of grades is familiar to all, the method of their calculation and the standards applied can vary enormously both within and across academic departments and institutions, muddying the meaning of a grade or grade-point average" (p. 396). However, the reason why they are used is that GPAs are the single

most universal measurement to indicate the performance level of students, as well as mastery and effective matriculation. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also asserted that:

“grade point averages are the lingua franca of the academic instructional world, the keys to students’ standing and continued enrollment...Even given their limitations, college grades may well be the single best predictors of student persistence, degree completion, and graduate school enrollment” (p. 396). Furthermore, “the positive and statistically significant effects of grades on persistence and degree completion are evident whether the studies track persistence from the first to the second semester, to the second year, or over longer periods of time in a two-year institution or into the second year or over longer periods in four-year colleges or universities. As one might expect, given the magnitude of its net effect, causal models of the process indicate that the influence of first-year academic performance on persistence into the second year is both strong and direct” (p. 397).

Unquestionably, the grade point average is easily accessible data to ascertain, particularly when looking at the academic performance of students at one particular institution. It is defined equally for all students across the board. Pascarella and Terenzini’s argument for using grade point averages supports its use for the current study.

Persistence - The literature consistently suggests that there are relationships among student persistence, academic achievement, and student integration. “At the very outset, persistence in college requires individuals to adjust both socially and intellectually, to the new and sometimes quite strange world of the college. Most persons, even the most able and socially mature, experience some difficulty in making

that adjustment” (Tinto, 1993, p. 45). Tinto suggested quite clearly that the more difficulty students have in making the adjustment to the new postsecondary setting, the less likely that those students will persist and remain at the institution. Arguably, there are students who persist out of sheer will power even though they struggle. They simply reject the possibility of accepting failure, even though they do not receive or do not take advantage of the opportunities for support that the institution provides. But for those who do find themselves participating in college pre-freshman summer transition programs, Tinto’s argument ties directly into the need for transition programs that help to facilitate the social and intellectual transition.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 396) conducted a synthesis of the literature from the 1990s that supports the correlation between persistence and academic support programs. Many college pre-freshman summer transition programs incorporate the academic support feature, which remediates student academic skills, prepares students for academic expectations, and/or challenges students to produce accelerated work. These outcomes depend, of course, on the focus of the programs. For the current study, the focus will remain on the PLUS program’s impact on student persistence, which did include an academic component as well as a social component.

Student Integration – Research overwhelmingly indicates that student integration in academic and social aspects of the college experience have a direct positive relationship with academic performance and persistence. Student integration is a worthwhile variable because one of the goals of the college pre-freshman summer transition program is to acclimate students to the various aspects of the institution. The higher the level of belongingness that a student feels toward his or her institution, such as

comfort level with faculty and familiarity with student affairs offices and personnel, the higher the possibility that the student will feel supported and thus persist at the institution. Simply stated, “levels of academic and social integration ultimately enhance a student’s overall college experience” (Ishitani, Davis, Lyzogub, & Snider, 2001, p. 1).

Tinto (2003) asserted that “the more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely are they to persist and graduate” (pp. 4-5). He confirmed that a number of studies in a variety of settings and for a range of students indicated that frequency of student engagement with faculty, staff, and their peers, more than likely has a positive impact on persistence through graduation. Stated quite frankly, “Involvement matters” (Tinto, 2003, pp. 4-5).

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt and Associates (2005) indicated that student engagement that contributes to student success is as much about the effort that students put into their studies and other activities as is the investment of institutional resources that go into services to induce students to participate. Meanwhile, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found “little evidence in the literature of the 1990s to contradict their earlier findings that student contact with faculty members outside the classroom appears consistently to promote student persistence...and degree completion” (p. 417). The current study will assess the relationship between participation in the college pre-freshman summer transition program and student inclination to be more involved in the institutional academic and/or social level. Furthermore, the study will address the relationship between student integration and academic performance and persistence.

What Don't We Know

Researchers indicate that there is a gap in the literature that includes “little empirical research of existing college pre-freshman summer transition programs” (Kezar, 2001), and that “fewer studies have looked at these programs than at the longer developmental studies programs offered during an academic year” (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 404). According to a U.S. Department of Education issue paper (2007), “national data on the number of students involved in college transition programs in the U.S. is limited, due in part to a wide range of programs and sponsors.” Therefore, national data tend to focus and exist more for the federally sponsored TRIO programs. This fact suggests that study designs need to incorporate a deeper look into what the local collegiate transition programs goals are, how they go about achieving the goals, and how successful they are in their implementation.

The proposed study will be conducted at a publicly funded, highly selective, predominantly white institution, consisting of approximately 5,000 undergraduate students. This is an institution type that was not prevalent in the review of studies. Many of the predominantly white institutions studied were large comprehensive research institutions, with enrollment figures of 16,000 and above. Furthermore, no studies to date were conducted at this university on the PLUS pre-freshman summer bridge program, which will be in its fourth year of existence.

The proposed design will incorporate the usage of focus groups as a look into student perceptions of the effectiveness of the PLUS program. The proposed study presents an opportunity to collect valuable information on the levels of student engagement and its relationship to student academic achievement and persistence. This

information is pertinent for addressing practices of university administrators in regards to the effectiveness and operations of the PLUS program and may have implications for implementation of other pre-freshman summer bridge programs in general.

Chapter Summary

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) stated that various “institutions provide guideposts to show students how to succeed in college. One of the key mechanisms for doing this is a set of transition experiences that intentionally acculturate first-year and transfer students to institutional values and academic expectations and introduces them to campus resources and opportunities” (p. 242). A number of colleges and universities, often with funding from state and federal programs, offer at-risk...students a broad array of services and programs, such as TRIO programs, intended to promote academic adjustment, persistence, and degree completion.

The literature review created a backdrop by reviewing the success of bridge programs on a broader level. There was a discussion of the historical context of summer bridge programs and how increased access through historical legislation and increased student aspirations created a need for supports for new student populations enrolling for the first time in postsecondary institutions. The discussion moved to a review of how college pre-freshman transition programs were among the bridge program interventions designed to address the need for successful student transition to the postsecondary setting. The review pointed to several types of bridge programs, including those created under the federal TRIO umbrella, such as Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services, and smaller transition programs implemented at various institutions.

“Research consistently indicates that such comprehensive programs have a statistically significant and positive effect on student persistence” (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 405). Transition programs, in most cases, are designed to address certain outcome variables. The outcome variables of academic performance, persistence, and integration are consistently and positively impacted by bridge programs.

There are gaps in the literature suggesting that few studies regarding the college pre-freshman summer bridge program and its effects on participant academic performance, persistence, and integration have been conducted at small to medium-sized highly selective predominantly white institutions. The current literature review suggests a need for more studies with designs that include treatment and control groups. This type of design is partially built into the proposed study alongside a qualitative portion that will delve into student perceptions of the effectiveness of PLUS. This literature review supports a study of the PLUS Program and its effects on academic performance, persistence, and student integration. The findings can potentially inform administrator practices in regards to pre-freshman summer bridge programs by addressing the importance of an appropriate balance of academic and social activities that will positively impact student achievement and persistence.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Procedures

Context

The study was conducted at a highly selective, coeducational, mid-sized university, generally regarded as one of the top-ranked research institutions in the United States, among those emphasizing a well-rounded liberal arts education. Approximately 5,500 undergraduates and 2,200 graduate students from 50 states and 82 foreign countries enroll at the university annually.

Office of Multicultural Affairs – Based on an unnamed source, to protect the confidentiality of the institution, the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the university was charged with coordinating and implementing the Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) program at the time of the study. The Office of Multicultural Affairs was a department within the university's student affairs division. The purpose of the Office of Multicultural Affairs office, explained in institutional literature, was to carry out the university student affairs mission by aiding in the development of a more pluralistic and inviting environment for all. Further, it was explained that the office was committed to providing support services and promoting cultural activities that created an awareness of and appreciation for racial and cultural diversity.

Specifically, the Office of Multicultural Affairs aimed to improve and enhance the overall quality of life for students on the campus by developing, implementing or sponsoring educational and cultural programs. Among its many roles, the Office of Multicultural Affairs served as an intermediate referral to such offices as Student Financial Aid, Career Services, Health Services, Academic Advising, and other areas of the university that served to meet the immediate needs of students from various

backgrounds and cultures who may not have been accustomed to these types of services. Informally, the Multicultural Affairs staff served as a support network to address the academic, social, and personal concerns of a variety of groups, including students of different cultural groups and backgrounds, at-risk students, and students of color, through counseling, supervision, periodic transcript audits, advising, and peer-mentor programs. The office provided guidance for student-driven programs and activities, which helped to benefit and enhance the experiences of students.

Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) Program – The following section will describe the components of the program so that the reader may gain an understanding of the experiences that PLUS participants have received. The description will outline the following PLUS program components as the “treatment” of the proposed study during the summers of 2004, 2005, and 2006: PLUS Designation, PLUS Selection, PLUS Academics, Writing Components, Study Skills Enrichment, Social Components, and Volunteerism. Data regarding student grade point averages and credits earned were obtained from these three cohorts and used to measure the PLUS program’s effects on student achievement and persistence.

In addition to more than thirty cultural, spiritual, and fraternal organizations for which the Multicultural Affairs office provided support, and the ten programs and services both sponsored and endorsed by Multicultural Affairs, the PLUS Program was one of its major initiatives geared toward promoting the successful transition of students into higher education. The PLUS program was a university sponsored and funded program seated within the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The purpose of the PLUS Program , explained in institutional literature, was to provide a summer experience

between high school and college life that included an opportunity to gain an academic course for credit through an intensive academic experience and weekends filled with cultural and social activities. The program was designed to increase the students' confidence and to help its participants to gain a head start in acclimating themselves to college life.

PLUS Designation – “Designation” in this context refers to the department from which the PLUS program was operated. Designation was of particular importance because it spoke to the vision and purpose assigned to the PLUS program by the university leaders. A conscious decision was made by university leaders in the summer of 2004 to operate the new PLUS program from within the department of Undergraduate Studies at the university, which was also responsible for programs such as freshmen seminars and academic advising. The former summer transition program (STP) was operated solely out of the Office of Multicultural Affairs within Student Affairs, with different funds from external grants and part of the Office of Multicultural Affairs budget. The former transition program was a marginalized program from an institutional perspective. Moving the program under the auspices of undergraduate studies served to institutionalize the university summer transition program when it became PLUS, and it became a priority of the institution as a whole as opposed to simply a Multicultural Affairs function.

In the summers of 2005 and 2006, the Undergraduate Studies office partnered directly with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The PLUS program remained an undergraduate studies program but was operated utilizing personnel from the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Although it was institutionalized, partnering with the Office of

Multicultural Affairs provided the students with contact to familiar faces that raised students' comfort levels. At the time of this study, the costs of the courses offered to participants were no longer billed to the Office of Multicultural Affairs, but rather offered as part of the larger institution under the guidelines of state funded programs.

PLUS Selection - For the three years of its existence, everyone who applied to the PLUS program was selected, in part due to the lower numbers. In the summer of 2004, there was little time between the approval of PLUS in its new form and the date of the opening with its first class. The university admissions office ran a query of any accepted student whose SAT scores were “alarmingly” low (i.e. below a 900 in the various sections of the assessment). Once this list was generated, letters were sent inviting those students to participate in PLUS. In the summers of 2005 – 2006, identifying factors such as low SES, 1st generation college student status, high school background, geographic region, race, adversity, and unusual circumstances were plugged into the student database to generate a list of accepted students who met at least two of the factors, paid their deposits, and were committed to attending the university. These students were considered at-risk as a result of meeting the background criteria. Letters were also sent inviting those students to participate.

Although letters were sent out inviting the “at-risk” students in 2004 – 2006, it is important to note that this process did not guarantee selection into the program or automatically place those students into PLUS. This correspondence was merely an attempt to reach out to those students whom research indicated would have a tendency to be at-risk of failing because of the background factors. Any student, as long as he or she was accepted and submitted his or her deposit to attend the university, was equally

considered for the PLUS program. This equity allowed the make-up of the program participants to be diverse and in compliance with equal opportunity laws, since the program was funded through state funds.

PLUS Academics - One of the main components of the PLUS Program was a course for credit that was counted toward the participants' General Education Requirements (GERs). The course was intended to help assist in a smooth transition from high school to college by providing an early opportunity for students to become accustomed to collegiate-level studies. It also provided participants with a chance to establish a high grade point average without the regular semester challenges and adjustments that many freshmen face. From year to year, the cohorts selected from one of the following four courses: Major American Writers, American Studies, Social Problems, or a rotating course from within the Black Studies Department.

Writing Component – In addition to the course component of PLUS, the participants were required to attend the writing center for tutoring and assistance with writing assignments. During the first year of the program, the no-credit writing component was separated from the writing assignments that were assigned in the course. This distinction meant that the participants were essentially assigned writing assignments for credit in classes while they were given non-credit writing assignments for the writing component.

This approach changed in the subsequent two years of PLUS as a result of feedback from the participants. As a recommendation from 2004 PLUS participants, program administrators decided to merge the efforts of the writing center with the coursework. Rather than have the participants produce different assignments, it was

determined that in 2005-2006, the PLUS participants would get the writing tutoring required using course assignments. Participants could now take their writing assignments from the course into the writing center to achieve the same purpose, more of a focus on quality than quantity of work.

Study Skills Enrichment – Study Skills was addressed in partnership with the Office of the Dean of Students. A staff member from the Office of the Dean at the university came in from 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. on Monday through Thursday for the duration of the program to present workshops on various study skills topics. Among the topics were test-taking, note-taking, textbook reading and comprehension strategies, dealing with test anxiety, how to meet professors, and procrastination. The syllabus for this workshop remained consistent from 2004-2006 and was an integral part in getting PLUS participants equipped to be academically successful.

Social Component - The PLUS program was a six-week residential program providing participants with a semblance of what it was like to be a full-time dormitory resident with a roommate. The PLUS participants lived in residence halls in close proximity to class locations. The program coordinator, residence hall monitors, and participants established rules for curfews, room visitation, and general behaviors. While it was necessary to allow participants to experience “college life,” program administrators believed that it was also important to set behavioral boundaries early to assist with the sudden transition from stringent high school rules to a more relaxed college environment.

At the beginning of the program, the participants were divided into teams, and a Photo Hunt activity was held to assist participants in familiarizing themselves with various offices, staff members, and each other. To complement the academic piece of the

PLUS experience, the group took various trips to Washington D.C., New York, Virginia Beach, and Busch Gardens for recreational, educational, and cultural purposes.

Volunteerism - A final piece of the PLUS program was volunteerism through a designated service project and through placement in various offices within the university. PLUS participants from year to year were placed in offices such as the Financial Aid Office, Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs, the School of Law, the Recreation Center, or the Campus Post Office, just to name a few. Of particular benefit to the participants was the fact that some volunteer positions became employment opportunities for students as they entered the Fall semester.

Overall, the articulated expected outcomes of the PLUS program included:

- Students learning what is involved in making the transition from high school to college, including its academic, social, and emotional components,
- Students gaining an increased level of efficacy in their own ability to successfully make the transition from high school to college,
- Students better understanding their own strengths as learners and identifying areas in which they needed to use new strategies and seek support, and
- Students fully being able to comprehend the academic work by learning how to preview, analyze tasks, access resources, self-monitor performance, and assess outcomes.

Methodology

The researcher conducted a mixed design study; part post hoc research and part phenomenological, involving the analysis of existing data as well as data that was collected from focus groups. The questions asked of the focus groups attempted to address participant perceptions of their own integration patterns. The following questions were addressed in the study:

- 1) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student academic achievement at the university after the first and second semesters of matriculation?
- 2) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student persistence rates at the university after the first and second semesters of matriculation?
- 3) What were PLUS students' perceptions of the impact of participation in the PLUS program on their own integration patterns within the university?
- 4) What were PLUS students' perceptions of the relationship between integration and academic achievement?
- 5) What were PLUS students' perceptions of the relationship between integration and persistence?

For research questions 1-2, comparisons were made between a treatment group and a closely matched control group. The treatment and control samples were matched as closely as statistically possible while controlling for certain background indicators. The following hypotheses were presented:

- Substantive hypothesis #1 stated that there was a significant difference in academic achievement between the students who participated in the PLUS program and the matched control group of non-PLUS students who did

not participate, after the first and second semesters of matriculation. The null hypothesis stated that there was no significant difference in academic achievement between PLUS participants non-PLUS students. Freshman student achievement was measured by collecting semester and cumulative data in the form of grade point averages of PLUS participants (treatment group) and non-PLUS students (control group) after the first and second semesters of matriculation respectively. In order to assess whether the differences between the means of the GPAs of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students were statistically significant, a two-tailed t-test was conducted. Two-tailed t-tests are typically used to determine significant differences between the means of two comparison groups. This data was retrieved from existing data sources provided by the university Institutional Research (IR) Department.

- Substantive hypothesis #2 stated that there was a significant difference in persistence rates between the students who participated in the PLUS program and the matched control group of non-PLUS students who did not participate, after the first and second semesters of matriculation. The null hypothesis stated that there was no significant difference in persistence rates between PLUS participants non-PLUS students. Freshman persistence rates were measured by collecting semester and cumulative data in the form of number of credits earned by PLUS participants (treatment group) and non-PLUS students (control group) after the first and second semesters of matriculation respectively. In order

to assess whether the differences between the means of the number of credits earned of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students were statistically significant, a two-tailed t-test was conducted. Again, two-tailed t-tests are typically used to determine significant differences between the means of two comparison groups. This data was retrieved from existing data sources provided by the university Institutional Research (IR) Department.

Research questions 3-5 were analyzed in the phenomenological part of the study through focus group responses. When trying to analyze integration, defined as “the intellectual and social experiences” of students, Tinto (1993, p. 217) cautioned about low response rates from surveys and argued that the student response patterns to surveys can be highly biased, causing the results to be skewed. Instead, he recommended the use of interviews and focus groups to try to elicit the essence of how students made sense out of their experiences.

In the tradition of phenomenological research, the focus group responses were classified into broad statements called “*horizontalization*” as a first step (Creswell, 1998). The next step included transforming the statements into “*clusters of meanings*” (Creswell, 1998). “Finally, these transformations [were] tied together to make a general description of the experience, the *textural description* of what was experienced and the *structural description* of how it was experienced” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55).

The treatment group was selected from the university student population and included 2004 (N=25), 2005 (N=21), and 2006 (N=25) cohorts of PLUS participants. The sample consisted of rising seniors, juniors, and sophomores, respectively, who were

full-time students. The closest statistically matched sample groups from the entering classes of 2004, 2005, and 2006 who did not participate in the PLUS program were selected to participate in control groups for the study. Although the samples were from three cohorts, the GPA achievement data and credits earned persistence data collected were based on the first year of enrollment.

The researcher cautioned that responses to the focus group question could be impacted by current classification (i.e. whether the student is a sophomore, junior, or senior). For example, a senior would have had more opportunities to participate in various activities, whether curricular or extra-curricular. To match the treatment and control groups, the researcher controlled for the following background variables to ensure to the greatest extent similarity in the comparison groups: SAT scores, gender, domicile, and financial aid status. Race, high school GPA, freshman major, and athletic status were eliminated as background control factors in order to maximize the probability of finding a non-PLUS match.

Before the focus group sessions began, the rights of the study participants to leave at any point during the study was explained to them. After the formal focus group session ended, the participants were debriefed with the purpose of the study and clarification of research terms. The participants were debriefed with this information after the focus group session so that their responses were minimally influenced by listening to the purpose of the study. The participants were asked if they had any questions as points of clarification. The first focus group was conducted solely for the purpose of “piloting” the focus group questions. However, due to the richness of the responses, the researcher decided to use the pilot focus group responses as part of the

formal data. The subsequent focus group sessions were conducted for the purpose of collecting the essential data as well. The focus groups were generally asked the following line of questions, along with further clarification questions:

Focus Group Questions

- 1) Please take a moment to talk about your high school background experiences.
- 2) Talk about your current major and why you chose it? Talk about your current activities at the university.
- 3) What factors got you involved in your current activities?
- 4) Discuss on a general level any positive or negative experiences you have had at the university.
- 5) Let's talk about PLUS. Since you've talked about this on some specific levels, what impact has PLUS had on a general level? (What did you take away from PLUS)?
- 6) Tell me how you feel PLUS has impacted your overall experience, whether academically or socially?

Focus group questions sought to provide information on the integration patterns of participants currently enrolled at the university. As a part of the convenience of the study design, the focus groups did not include the students who had already left the university due to attrition, early graduation, or other miscellaneous reasons.

Ethical Treatment of Human Subjects

The guidelines for the ethical treatment of human subjects were fully adhered to. Approval was sought from the College of William and Mary Protection of Human

Subjects Committee, as human subjects were surveyed during a portion of the study.

Approval was granted by the College of William and Mary Protection of Human Subjects Committee and was found to comply with appropriate ethical standards.

Letters

A “Request for Participation” letter was given in advance to human subjects participating in the study to inform participants of the nature of the study and its guidelines. Human subjects were informed of the appropriate clearances as well as their rights to withdraw or refuse participation without penalty. Letters requesting PLUS information from the Office of Multicultural Affairs and data from the office of Institutional Research was given to the appropriate parties. Copies of the letters were included in the appendices.

Chapter 4 – Analysis of Results

Post Hoc Research Methodology

The study was conducted in two segments using two forms of research: a) post hoc research using existing institutional data and b) phenomenological research obtained through focus group interviews. The post hoc research in the first segment of the study was the methodology chosen to address the following research questions:

- 1) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student academic achievement at the university after the first and second semesters of matriculation?
- 2) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student persistence rates at the university after the first and second semesters of matriculation?

First and second semester GPA and credits earned data was acquired from the university Office of Institutional Research for a total of 71 PLUS participants and 71 closely matched non-PLUS students (N=71) who were enrolled as full-time students in their respective freshmen years of matriculation. Separated by classification, data was received for 25 PLUS 2004 participants and 25 matching non-PLUS 2004 students (N=25); 21 PLUS 2005 participants and 21 matching non-PLUS 2005 students (N=21); and 25 PLUS 2006 participants and 25 matching non-PLUS 2006 students (N=25). PLUS participants in their respective years of PLUS participation were matched with non-PLUS students by controlling for the following background factors:

- a) Gender,
- b) Financial Aid Status - whether or not they were financial aid recipients,
- c) Residency - whether or not they were classified as in-state or out-of-state,
- d) SAT Scores – in the same designated range of scores, and

e) Year of Freshman Matriculation (default).

Treatment and control groups were identically matched across all background factors with the exception of three individual treatment and control matches. In these three cases, in which the SAT scores could not be matched within the same range, the next closest match was selected by moving to the next highest range of SAT scores obtained by three control group subjects. All other background characteristics remained identically matched.

The substantive hypothesis (H_a) for the first semester portion of question #1 stated that there was a significant difference in GPAs between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the first semester. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there was no significant difference in GPAs between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the first semester of matriculation. The substantive hypothesis (H_a) for the second semester portion of question #1 stated that there was a significant difference in GPAs between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the second semester. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there was no significant difference in GPAs between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the second semester of matriculation.

After collecting first semester and second semester cumulative GPA (4.0 scale) data of PLUS participants (treatment group) and non-PLUS students (control group), a two-tailed t-test was conducted to compare the means of first semester GPAs of the collective sample ($N=71$) of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students. The mean GPA of the control group was (2.63), with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.62, while the mean GPA of the treatment group was (2.56), with a standard deviation of 0.61. With a p-value of 0.51 and t-value of -0.67, the substantive hypothesis was rejected and the null

hypothesis retained. There was no significant difference in achievement measured by the mean GPA of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students after the first semester of matriculation at the .05 significance level.

Table 1

Mean First Semester GPAs for PLUS and non-PLUS students: 2004 – 2006 Combined

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
PLUS	71	2.56	0.61		
Non-PLUS	71	2.63	0.62	-0.67	0.51

A two-tailed t-test was conducted to compare the means of second semester cumulative GPAs of the collective sample (N=71) of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students. The mean GPA of the control group was (2.71), with a standard deviation of 0.54, while the mean GPA of the treatment group was (2.50), with a standard deviation of 0.57. With a p-value of 0.02 and t-value of -2.29, the null hypothesis was rejected and the substantive hypothesis retained. There was a significant difference in achievement measured by the mean GPA of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students after the second semester of matriculation at the .05 significance level.

Table 2

Mean Second Semester GPAs for PLUS and non-PLUS students: 2004 – 2006 Combined

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
PLUS	71	2.50	0.57		
Non-PLUS	71	2.71	0.54	-2.29	0.02

The substantive hypothesis (H_a) for the first semester portion of research question #2 stated that there was a significant difference in credits earned between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the first semester. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there was no significant difference in credits earned between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the first semester of matriculation. The substantive hypothesis (H_a) for the second semester portion of research question #2 stated that there was a significant difference in credits earned between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the second semester. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there was no significant difference in credits earned between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students after the second semester of matriculation.

After collecting first semester and second semester credits earned data of PLUS participants (treatment group) and non-PLUS students (control group), a two-tailed t-test was conducted to compare the mean numbers of first semester credits earned of the collective sample ($N=71$) of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students. The mean number of credits earned by the treatment group was (16.27), with a standard deviation of 1.38, while the mean number of credits earned by the control group was (13.36), with a standard deviation of 0.92. With a p-value of $<.001$ and t-value of 14.67, the null hypothesis was rejected and the substantive hypothesis retained. There was a significant difference in persistence rates measured by the mean number of credits earned by PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students after the first semester at the .05 significance level.

Table 3

Mean 1st Semester Credits for PLUS and non-PLUS students: 2004 – 2006 Combined

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
PLUS	71	16.27	1.38		
Non-PLUS	71	13.36	0.92	14.67	<.001

A two-tailed t-test was conducted to compare the mean numbers of second semester credits earned of the collective sample (N=71) of PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students. The mean number of credits earned by the treatment group was (30.04), with a standard deviation of 3.11, while the mean number of credits earned by the control group was (27.91), with a standard deviation of 1.78. With a p-value of <.001 and t-value of 4.99, the null hypothesis was rejected and the substantive hypothesis retained. There was a significant difference in persistence rates measured by the mean number of credits earned by PLUS participants versus non-PLUS students after the second semester, at the .05 significance level.

Table 4

Mean 2nd Semester Credits for PLUS and non-PLUS students: 2004 – 2006 Combined

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
PLUS	71	30.04	3.11		
Non-PLUS	71	27.91	1.78	4.99	<.001

A further level of analysis was done for achievement and persistence rates by comparing the mean GPAs and mean credits earned by classification. Separate statistical

analyses were conducted of the data focusing on the individual 2004, 2005 and 2006 cohorts. The analysis concluded that within each cohort the statistical outcome was no different than when the analysis was done collectively for both student achievement and persistence rates after the first and second semesters of the respective years.

Focus Group Methodology

The methodology used in the next part of the study was for the purpose of gaining an understanding of students' perceptions of the impact of their participation in the PLUS program on their university experiences. In this part of the study, six focus groups were conducted. The following three research questions were the basis behind the focus group methodology:

- a) What were PLUS students' perceptions of the impact of participation in the PLUS program on their own integration patterns within the university?
- b) What were PLUS students' perceptions of the relationship between integration and academic achievement?
- c) What were PLUS students' perceptions of the relationship between integration and persistence?

The original intent of the researcher was to conduct three focus groups. However, in an effort to be accommodating to focus group participants' schedules, two of the three original groups were scheduled between two dates, creating an additional two groups. In addition, it was decided that the pilot focus group, originally intended as the preliminary focus group to help refine the researcher questions, provided valuable information that

also needed to be included in the research with the subsequent focus group data. This decision brought the total number of focus groups interviewed for this study to six.

Purposefully, through the researcher requests for participants, five of the six PLUS focus groups were uniform in terms of student classification. One focus group consisted of eight sophomores while two other focus groups consisted of two juniors in each group. Two additional focus groups consisted of three seniors and two seniors respectively. Finally, the pilot focus group, which was intended to be a mixed group of classes, ultimately became uniform, consisting of three seniors as well. All focus group participants had participated in the PLUS 2004, PLUS 2005, or PLUS 2006 program windows. Combined, the total number of participants who volunteered for the focus group sessions amounted to 20 (N = 20).

Focus Group Responses

Horizontalization, (Creswell, 1998), is the process in which focus group responses are classified into broad statements. Based on this process, the responses to each individual question were tallied across all focus groups to determine common versus uncommon responses. The first focus group prompt asked participants to address high school background experiences:

1) *Please take a moment to talk about your high school background experiences.*

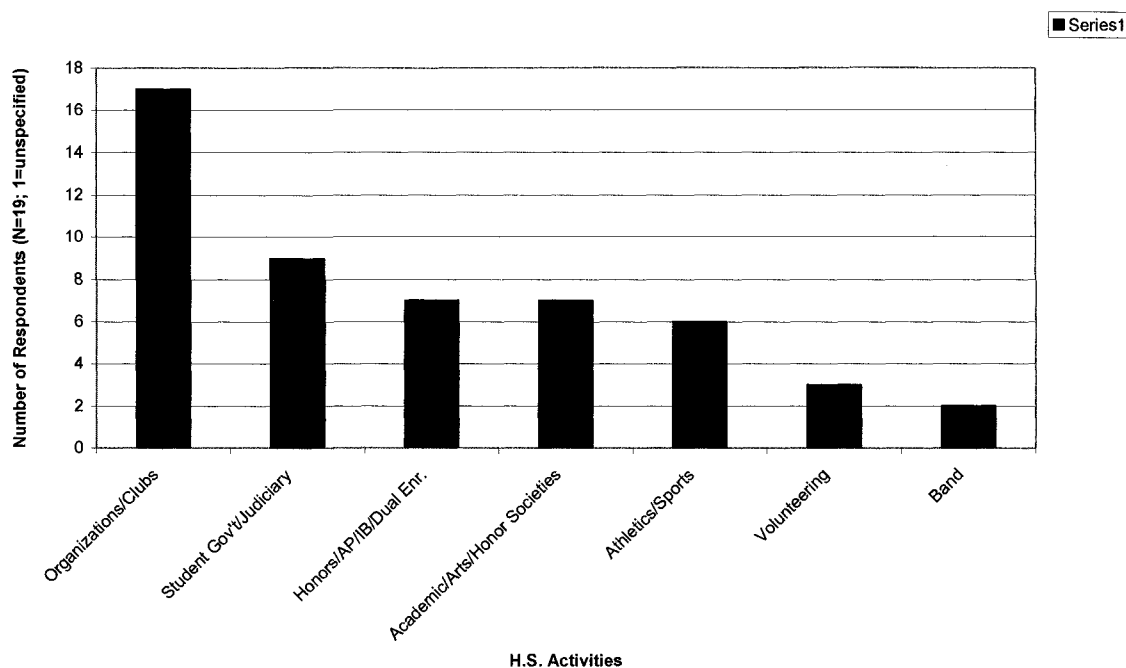
Across the six focus groups, a total of 19 participants responded to this prompt, as the twentieth participant had not yet arrived in time for the first question to be asked in the respective focus group session. The following responses were tallied:

- Seventeen respondents participated in student-run organizations or clubs.

- Nine respondents said that they participated in some type of student government or student judiciary council.
- Seven respondents enrolled in honors level courses, advanced placement courses, dual enrollment courses, or international baccalaureate programs.
- Seven respondents said that they were members or inducted into an academic or arts honor fraternity or honor society.
- Six respondents indicated that they participated in organized athletics while in high school.
- Three respondents said that they were involved in community service or activities where they volunteered to help their school or community.
- Two respondents said that they participated in marching or performance band.

This information can be viewed in bar graph form (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Actual Number of Respondents Involved by High School Activity

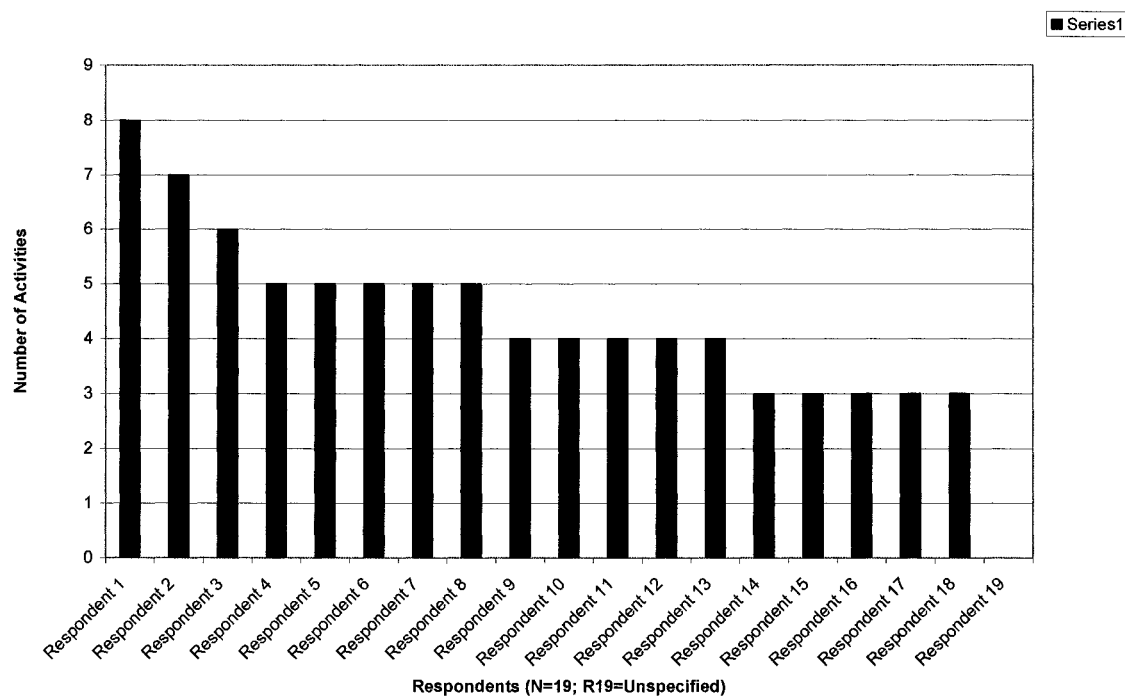


The responses recorded in Figure 1 only show how many respondents participated in an activity and only highlight the actual activities in which respondents were involved. In some cases where they indicated participation in more than one type of activity, they received a tally for each type of activity named. Thus the total number of responses exceeds the actual number of respondents.

A second graph (Figure 2) depicts the frequency with which respondents were involved. For example, in Figure 1, a respondent received credit for simply having been involved in athletics, but Figure 2 depicts not only whether the respondent was involved, but also the number of sports in which the respondent participated. In a review of the 19 participants who responded to the background experience prompt, all 19 respondents said that they were involved in activities. 18 of the 19 respondents affirmed that they were involved in at least three activities. However, the 19th respondent did not provide a

specific number except to say that s/he was involved in “a lot”. This respondent was designated as an “unspecified” number of activities. (See Figure 2):

Figure 2 - Actual Frequency of High School Activities by Respondent



Specifically three respondents indicated involvement in eight, seven, and six activities respectively. Five respondents indicated being involved in five activities in high school. Five other respondents said that they were involved in four activities in high school, and another five respondents said that they were involved in three activities. Respondent #19 was unspecified. In two cases, respondents were involved in an activity such as key club which could satisfy either the “organizations and clubs” category or the “volunteer” category. Only one of those categories received a tally.

The categories selected for the background experiences focus group prompt, (Figure 1): a) Organizations/Clubs, b) Student Government/Judiciary, c) Honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment, d) Academics, Arts, Honor Fraternities/Societies, e) Athletics/Sports, f) Volunteer, and g) Band,

represented the plethora of activities that the respondents listed. These responses to the prompt demonstrated that the respondents came from highly active backgrounds. They were involved not only in a wide variety of activities, but also involved in activities over a long span of time. Typical responses included being involved in many activities, after which students would list activities they could remember:

Response: a)“In high school, I did just about everything ...I was in drama, chorus, band; ...editor of my literary magazine. I was an honors student in the dual enrollment program.”

Response: b)“...As far as involvement, I guess I took the advanced courses and graduated with the advanced degree, and I was also active in after school programs: senior class president, yearbook, SCA, Students Taking a Stand Against Drugs (STSAD), there’s too many to list actually...”

Response: c)“Sports...I played them all...honor council, yearbook staff...any kind of activities that [were] presented, I was involved in it.”

Response: d)“In high school, I guess I was involved in like...everything, from marching band to concert band to National Honor Society to even out of school...”

Response: e)“High school-wise, I was involved in a lot of extra-curricular activities, a little bit more than I should have been. I was a swimmer, soccer player, SCA President, etc.”

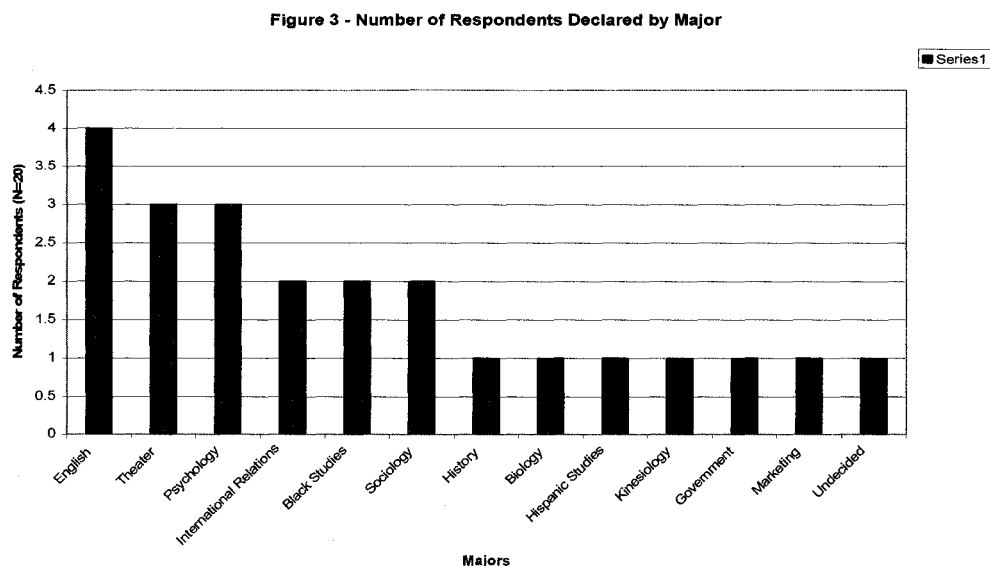
The responses illustrate PLUS focus group respondents with heavy involvement in high school extra curricular, academic, social, and service activities.

The second question addressed current experiences at W&M. It was a two-part first question and a second question.

2) Talk about your current major and why you chose it? Talk about your current activities the university.

All 20 focus group participants responded to this question, and the following responses were tallied: English was declared as a major by four respondents. Theater and

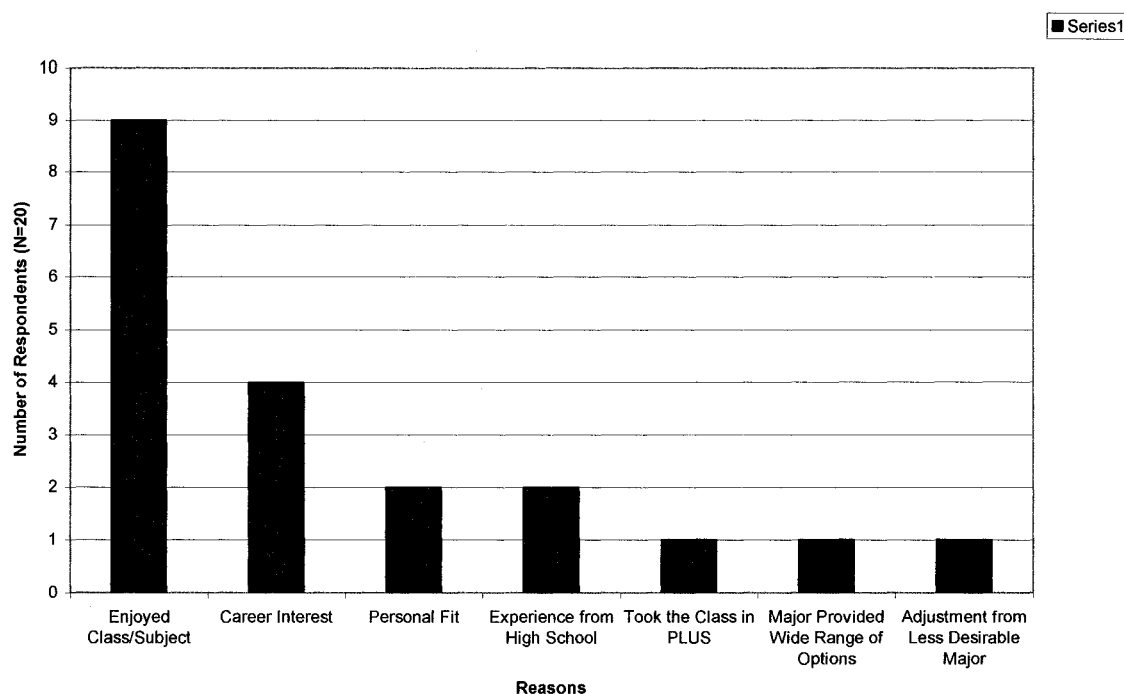
Psychology were each declared by three respondents. International Relations, Black Studies, and Sociology were each declared as majors by two respondents. History, Biology, Hispanic Studies, Kinesiology, Government, and Marketing were each declared by one respondent. The remaining respondent was undecided but indicated possible career interests in Chemistry and Education. No minor subject declarations were taken into account in the responses. However, this tally accounted for two respondents who were double majors. (See Figure 3):



When asked why they chose their majors, the respondents gave the following information: Nine respondents indicated that they declared the major because they enjoyed the subject matter and classes in the field. Four respondents explained that their choices in majors were a result of specific future career interests. Two respondents said that their choice was a matter of “personal fit” since the courses suited their personal interests, while two other respondents indicated that a positive experience in high school directed them toward wanting to major in that subject area. One respondent attributed the choice in majors to a positive experience with a course taken in the PLUS program. One

respondent indicated that the major would provide a wide range of choices in terms of possible careers, and finally another respondent selected a major as an option against a less desirable major. (See Figure 4):

Figure 4 - Respondent Reasons for Selecting Majors by Number of Respondents



The following statements represented the categories selected, in terms of why the majors were chosen:

Responses a-e: Enjoyed Class/Subject – a)“My major is theater and I chose it because I feel very passionately about theater and I wanted to continue studying theater.”

b)“My major is theater and I chose it because I enjoy theater in all of its many, many forms...”

c)“I wanted to be a theater major because I really like acting.”

d)“The reason I chose English is because I’ve always enjoyed writing. I’ve been writing since the 7th grade; poems and short stories.”

e)“...And so I took my first Intro to African American History course when I was a sophomore and after I took that, I really enjoyed what I learned because it was all good to me to learn about my history in that great of detail. I kind of started late with taking classes for my major but after that, I definitely wanted to learn as much as I could about whatever Black Studies had to offer.”

Response: Career Interest – a)“I’m an English major and chose it because when I came to the university, wanted to be a broadcast journalist and there wasn’t a journalism or communications major here so I thought the best route to that would be through English.”

b)“I’m majoring in Kinesiology because I want to be a personal trainer.”

Response: Personal Fit – “...I was going to be a Biology major and follow the whole pre-med track...when I actually took the MCAT class to get ready for med school, I decided that [it] wasn’t really for me. So I stuck with just Psychology and I’m actually a Black Studies minor, which is an interesting fit for me in the classes I was in.”

Responses a-b: Positive Experience from H.S. – a)“What actually really interested me in becoming a biology major was my experiences in seventh grade bio. I had a really cool bio teacher in 7th grade. I remember dissecting this squid and that just kind of turned it ‘on’ for me.”

b) I remembered that in high school I started to actually like history and so I decided to be a history major, and what a better place to be a history major than in [this town].”

Response: Took Class in PLUS – “I’m actually in Black Studies b/c I really liked the class that I took in PLUS, which was Intro to Black Studies.”

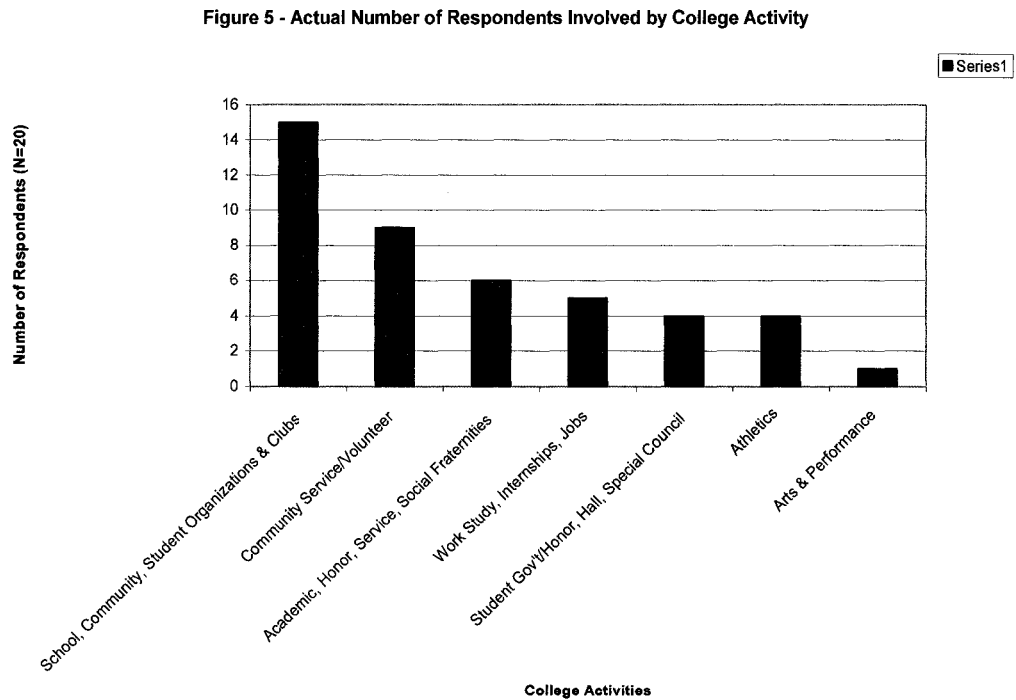
Response: Provided Range of Options – “...a lot of people [ask] what are you going to do with a sociology major? And my response is I can do whatever I want to do with a sociology major because it is so broad and it exposes you to different aspects of the sociology of education, of religion, of medicine, anything...So... this is something I could take an go into like, anything.”

Response: Adjustment from Less Desirable Major – “Originally, I was an accounting major and I did an internship...and didn’t like the accounting work. I left the company and changed my major the next day...”

The PLUS focus group participants were asked about their current level of involvement in activities at the university. All 20 participants responded to provide the following information: The largest proportion of respondents, totaling 15, indicated that they were involved in school, community, or student organizations or clubs. Nine respondents shared that they were either involved in on-going community service or had done community service projects. Six respondents said that they were selected, inducted, or actively involved in academic, honor, service, or social fraternal organizations. Five

respondents stated that they held work-study positions, worked part-time positions off-campus, or had completed internships. Four respondents indicated involvement in student government or a specific type of honor council, hall council, or special council formed as an advisory group to school administrators. These students were particularly interested in being part of some form of a governing body whether it was for student body decision-making, school honor code, residence hall governance, or special ad hoc council. Four respondents indicated that they participated in club, intramural, or varsity athletics. Lastly, one respondent indicated that involvement came in the form of extra-curricular or co-curricular activities through the arts and performance arena.

(See Figure 5):

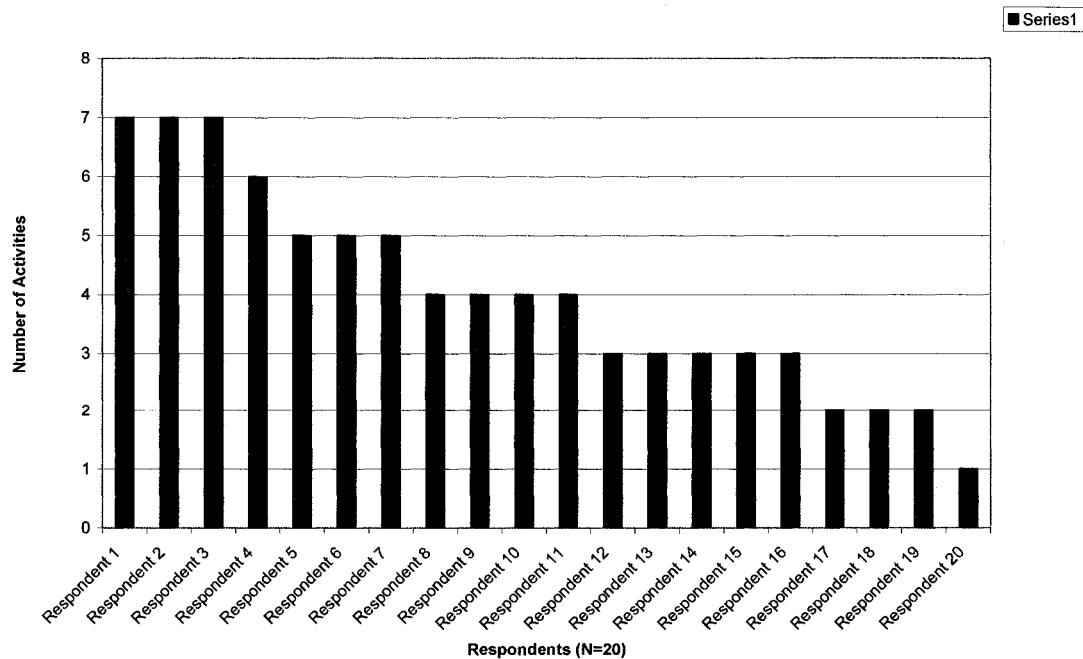


In Figure 5, the number of responses tallied exceeds the number of actual respondents because many expressed involvement in more than one type of activity.

A tally was done for current university activities which was similar to the questioning involving respondent activities in high school. Figure 5 shows the types of activities, and Figure 6 shows the number of activities or the frequency with which each respondent indicated being involved.

- In the highest rung, three respondents listed seven activities each in which they were involved.
- One respondent indicated involvement in six activities.
- Three respondents each said that they participated in five activities.
- Four respondents reported being engaging in four activities.
- Five respondents said that they were involved in three activities.
- Three respondents indicated that they were involved in two activities.
- Finally, one respondent indicated being involved in one activity. (See Figure 6).

Figure 6 - Actual Frequency of College Activities by Respondent



The major categories of activities listed in (Figure 5): a) School, Community, Student Organizations/Clubs, b) Community Service/ Volunteer, c) Academic, Honor, Service, Social Fraternities/Societies, d) Work-study, Internships, and Jobs, e) Student Government/Honor, Hall, Special Council, f) Athletics/Sports, and g) Arts & Performance represented almost every type of organization in which the respondents could engage. The responses to this question demonstrated the capacity of respondents to be highly engaged and involved in a multitude of activities. However, three of the respondents did preface their description of their levels of involvement with the following statements that noted concern about over-commitment as they progressed from their freshman year:

Response: a) “I started off with more things during freshman and sophomore year which kind of dwindled when I got to this point.”

Response: b) “When I came as a freshman, I was into everything; I was in any cultural organization you could think of. I just wanted to go out and see what was there but then you realize that as the workload gets tougher, you realize you have to make priorities.

Response: c) “Since freshman year, I actually limited myself to ___ because I thought I was going to be like high school taking like five different things...”

The third focus group question asked of the PLUS participants to talk about any influences pushing them toward their selected activities:

3) What factors got you involved in your current activities?

All 20 focus group participants responded to this question. The following response categories were generated based on their answers:

- Internal/Intrinsic Motivation
- Community Awareness
- Friends
- External/Extrinsic Motivation/Incentives

- Sought Employment
- PLUS Staff
- Activity was Related to their Major
- School Spirit
- Attended Event Held by Organization
- Attended School Activities Fair
- Received Unexpected Nomination/Invitation

Overwhelmingly, 15 respondents indicated that intrinsically, they simply had a general interest and wanted to participate or felt that they just needed to participate so that they were remaining active. The following statements represented this category:

Response: a) “I joined almost every organization that became interesting to me, so I was an active member of at least five different organizations on campus.”

Response: b) “I think it had a lot to do with me personally just because I enjoy being involved in things and taking an active role outside of just academics.”

Response: c) “I guess for me it would’ve been difficult for me to transition from high school to college without being involved in different organizations because it was something I was so used to doing.”

Response: d) “The reason I joined [the choir] is because I grew up in my church choir singing and I couldn’t come to college and seeing myself not be in the choir.”

Response: e) “I like running, so I run.”

Seven respondents said that they were driven to participate in community service projects or service organizations that conducted on-going service.

Response: a) “I chose to apply to HOPE because I was interested in helping my peers and I thought it was awesome how students were trying to teach other students...And when I got to be a part of it, I tried to start being a role model and just sort of doing...living according to the stuff that we try to teach other students about.”

Response: b) “The service Fraternity ___ ...I felt that would give me a way to...[well] you have community service hours you have to fulfill each semester, so I was like, ‘Now I have to do service.’”

Response: c) “As far as CPK, one of my reasons is that I wanted to use...what I have to better someone else, like help someone else. ...sometimes when you’re in college, you’re on a campus and all you see is college students and you just get stuck in this box. And I was like, I wanted to get off this campus and do something else, so that’s why I did that.”

Seven respondents said that their friends talked them into joining their respective organizations:

Response: a) “I guess what got me involved in BSO would be my friends kind of dragging me last year to the meetings...and so I started going because of that...”

Response: b) “For the most part I got into activities from talking to students whether it was through PLUS or other programs that the university had for multicultural students.”

Response: c) “I met a lot of people and kind of learned what they were involved with.”

Seven respondents noted that there were some extrinsic incentives they thought would help in a future goal that drove them to join or participate in the activity:

Response: a) “I’m the RHA (Resident Hall Assistant)...I liked the idea of leadership positions because it looks good on resumes and stuff.”

Response: b) “I kind of had to decide what was important, and now it’s basically down to career preparation. Going into the field of ____, you can never be too prepared. So that is something that is very important to me right now.

Response: c) “Track & Field, only because I’ve been doing that since 9th grade. They made me do it so...scholarship yeah!”

Response: d) “Well naturally the [Africa] service trip(s)...I like to travel...and this is a way to help and travel...”

Two respondents said that they sought employment for a variety of reasons:

Response: a) “I just work because it gives me something to do in Williamsburg.”

Response: b) “...And it was necessary that I worked while I was in school after my freshman year, so that took a lot of time with working between 15-20 hours a week.

Two respondents said that PLUS staff members spoke to them and influenced their decisions to join a particular activity:

Response: a) “...Honor Council, I don’t think I would’ve done it if it hadn’t been for one of our counselors...and he was actually a member of Undergraduate Honor Council, and I thought that was really neat...so he kind of helped me and pushed me along to go through the application process.”

Response: b) “...NAACP, actually ____ got me involved in that to be honest. There was a vacancy, and they needed some freshmen to come in, and ____ pulled me in the office and...said, ‘They’re looking for people to be involved in this

organization...’ ___ talked to me about the history and introduced me to ___ who was President at the time and then my second semester, freshmen year, I was there.”

One student responded that the activity he joined was related to or an extension of his current major:

Response: “I’m just involved in that because I’m doing something with that outside of the college involved in health careers; I am pre-med.”

One respondent demonstrated a high level of school spirit and wanted to give back to the school:

Response: “I’m a [University] Ambassador and trying to be a tour guide...[University] Ambassador is like working in the Admissions Office talking to kids before they go on tour, and obviously being a tour guide, you get to show the university. I really like being here at this school a lot, so anything to showcase my [University] Pride...”

One respondent had attended an event held by an organization which prompted the interest in joining:

Response: “I got involved in BSO because...well when I came to visit the beginning of my senior year, I came to the BSO stepshow, and I really liked the show they put on, and I really wanted to get involved.”

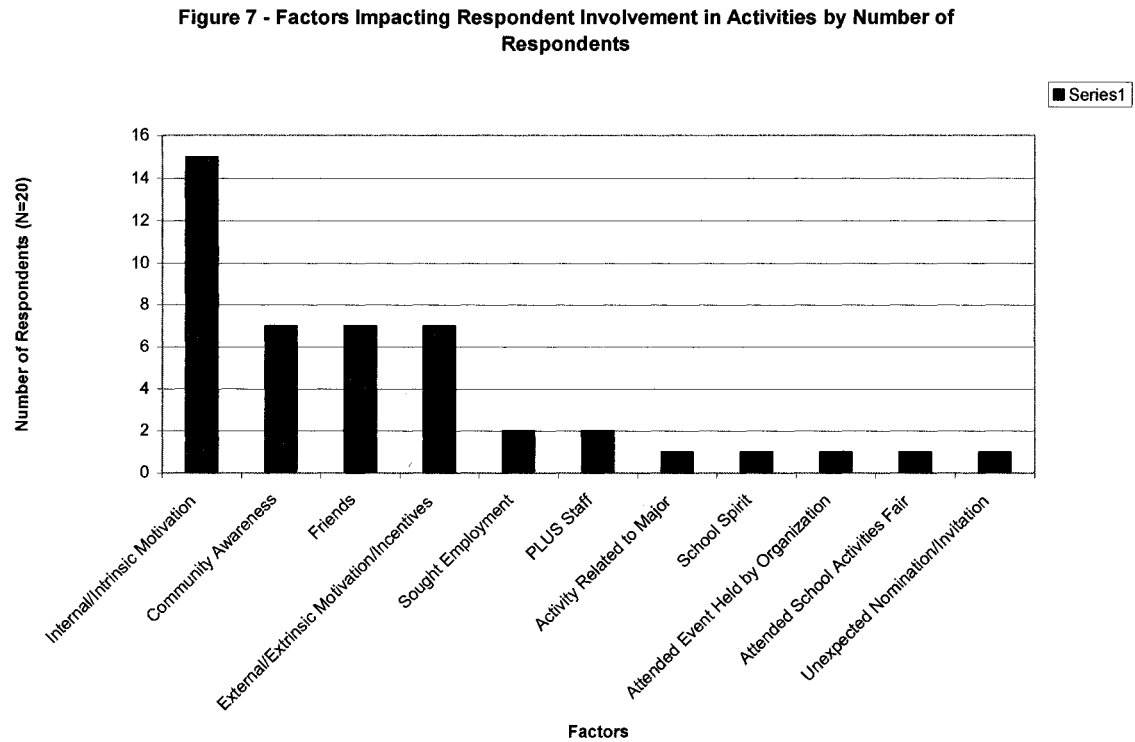
One respondent participated in an activity as a result of information gathered at the Activities Fair:

Response: “...definitely when I got here, the Activities fair that they hold at the beginning of the year got me interested in checking out a majority of the clubs.”

Finally, one respondent unexpectedly received a nomination from a friend and subsequently an invitation from the club to join:

Response: “I got involved in Hall Council because ___ basically put my name in without me knowing, and they asked me to come to the meeting. So I went, and I enjoyed it.”

Many of the respondents provided responses in more than one of the response categories for question three, and therefore the tally of factors exceeds the actual number of respondents. (See Figure 7):



The fourth focus group prompt asked the PLUS focus group participants to discuss any positive versus negative experiences they have experienced at the university if there were any on either side.

4) Discuss on a general level any positive or negative experiences you have had at the the university..

All 20 (N=20) participants responded, and the responses represented in two graphs:

Figure 8 represents the positive experiences that were tallied, and Figure 9 represents the negative experiences. Both graphs show several respondents who answered in more than

one response category. Therefore, this question will illustrate more experiences reported than actual respondents.

There were only three response categories for “positive experiences” that yielded common responses of more than one (1) respondent. The response categories were the following:

- a) Ten (10) respondents stated that through the PLUS experience, they were able to establish a solid network of friends.

Response: a) “I’ve had definitely more positive experiences here than negative, I mean, just by having a network of friends I’m able to foster, that’s awesome too.”

Response: b) “I think the only reason why I made it to this point where I am now is because I made really good friends starting at PLUS. We are like a family, and even if we don’t always keep in touch every day or every month or every semester, I can call every last one...”

Response: c) “I also feel like whenever you would get into the other stuff and you feel like you’re out of place, you always had your friends to go back and talk to. Like, I could call...all these PLUS members and I could talk to them about what I’m going through and they’d say, ‘Look, you’re going to make it!’ ...and stuff like that, and that was the positive about the people that kept me strong here at the university.”

Response: d) “I knew people going to the university before I entered, like the person I’m living with now was in PLUS...So I knew people coming in and that helps a lot.”

Response: e) “And the PLUS program just was wonderful in the sense that I got to know a certain number of students.”

Response: f) “The positive is because I have all of my friends...everyone in this room basically and others.”

Response: g) “What else...I have great friends!”

- b) Four (4) respondents said that due to PLUS, they were able to foster or more readily develop positive relationships with university and/or PLUS staff.

Response: a) “...my relationship with my advisor I think is really good too because I could talk to her about applying to law school or just other issues that are going on too. I think that also worked for me.”

Response: b) “_____ has been really helpful...just been so encouraging and just always looking out for you and just saying, ‘What are you doing, what are you up to?’ ... to have _____ always reach out, like if I have any question, I

can always go up to ____ and ask and [will] always have something wise to say which will push me to a decision which is different from one I would've chosen.”

- c) Three (3) respondents indicated that there were positive factors about the culture of the campus:

Response: a) “One negative that turned into a positive for me...People thought that, ‘I don’t personally say the “N” word’ but saying it in a song is still valid, and that turned into a positive in a way because it prompted at least a discussion and not people taking their views and opinions and just walking away from each other.....that’s one good thing about this school, people at least discuss stuff; maybe loud and shouting at first, but then it comes down to talking again...at least it’s discussed at one point because without that, it becomes ignorance just walking around.”

Response: b) “...moving on about the school and the positive influence it has on me is [the issue of being] globally aware. Community and service awareness: having that kind of awareness and they are about helping the community or just globally changing the world.”

There was only one respondent in each of the remaining response categories:

- The PLUS experience helped to facilitate a higher comfort level in the regular semester classes.

Response: “I like more of my classes now. I’m in a foreign policy class and History of South Africa [class], and so I think positives are that I can find classes that I actually enjoy.”

- The PLUS experience helped to facilitate the respondent getting more acclimated to the campus.

Response: “[I got to] learn the campus before I actually had to get here with everyone else.”

- The PLUS experience inspired a level of excitement about campus life in general.

Response: “We had thirteen days between PLUS program and Orientation...Countdown!...because [I] was ready to get back here and see...everybody I had met in the PLUS program and I wanted to get back on

campus and run around and go to class and roll around on the grass and all that good stuff.”

- The PLUS experience helped develop the respondent’s ability to prioritize.

Response: “I think just overall, the biggest positive is being able to learn how to juggle things before you get into your world.”

- The PLUS experience helped the respondent to learn about the campus before other students arrived for the beginning of the fall semester.

Response: “I like the fact that we learned pretty much all the rules and how to go about making sure you had enough classes, what to take and when...”

- Generally speaking, one respondent’s experience at the university helped them to learn more about himself.

Response: “I honestly feel that every experience here at [the university] has been a positive experience in one way or another; a lot of my experiences especially in just learning about myself and how I handle stress and how I handle pressure. But for the most part I think that my experiences have had a positive outcome.”

- Another respondent indicated that campus experiences helped him to learn more about functioning in a diverse environment.

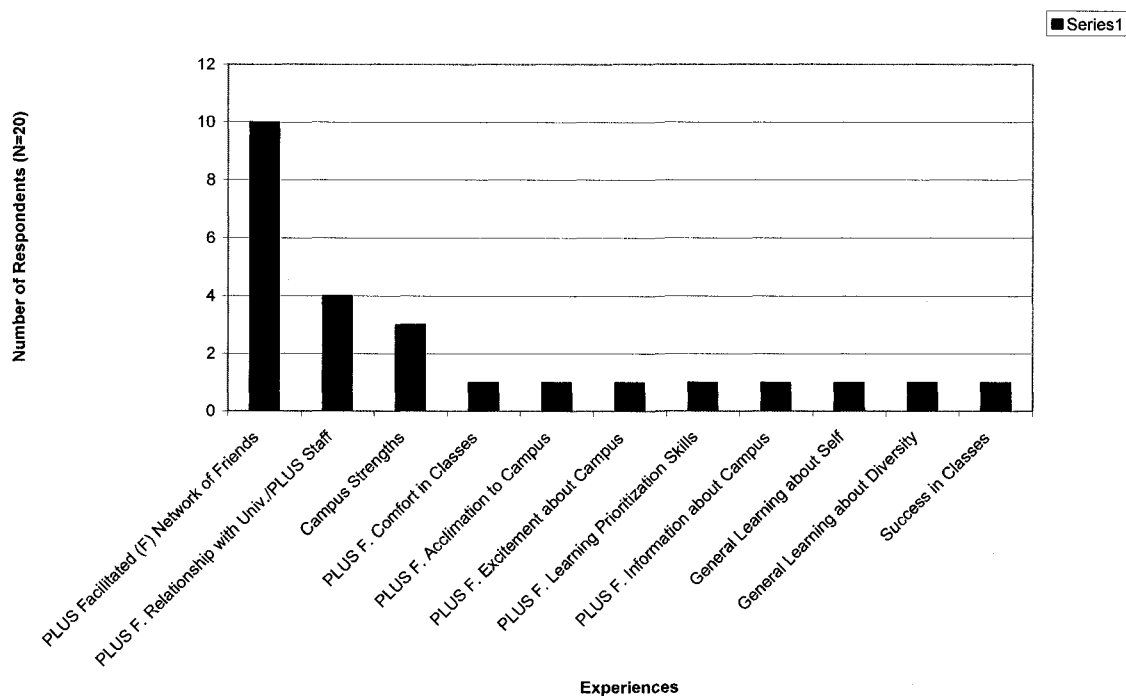
Response: “I just learned a lot about people and I guess coming from my high school where you’ve been in school with most of the people since elementary school and you had formed relationships where most people were the same, then you come here where the people are so diverse as far as their backgrounds and their beliefs and to have to mix with those and to realize that everyone doesn’t believe in the same things you believe in and also that they don’t have your best interest and concern all the time...(was an adjustment). I learned a lot.”

- Finally, one respondent stated that success in classes was the basis of the positive experience at the university.

Response: “...just being here at the university has been a positive experience for me because [city] Public Schools is looked at as one of the worse school systems in [state]. So just coming from that and being the only student from my high school that is still at a school like [this university]...another student

went to [another university] but dropped out...so just looking at the school that I came from, I'm at [this university] and I'm doing good and I'm still here, so that's just a positive experience within itself." (See Figure 8):

Figure 8 - General Positive Campus Experiences of Respondents



Question four, about positive or negative experiences, yielded nine response categories for negative experiences. Six of the nine response categories contained common responses of more than one respondent. The other three response categories contained responses from only one respondent. The following categories came out of the responses:

- General Student Perceived Campus Weaknesses

Nine respondents listed a number of personal dislikes about the campus in several areas, including cafeteria menu, infrastructure, and general campus interface with community members. These issues were perceived by respondents as daily

nuisances that were categorized as *general student perceived campus weaknesses*.

The following comments reflected these feelings about these issues:

Response: a) "...the smallness of the university can create a lot of problems (bad experiences too) with people talking about things and other issues that I dare not mention for now."

Response: b) "And I don't like the 25 mph speed limits either b/c you get pulled over for stupid things even when you don't try to speed, but it just happens ..."

Response: c) "The tourist activities are really distracting to the students too when you have them marching around campus all the time..."

Response: d) "The food sucks!"

Response: e) "I hate the fact that you can only check out DVDs ...for only three days...and you can't take the laptops out...you can't take the laptops out, but you can take out headphones though."

- Adversarial Students/Professors/Staff

Six respondents discussed adverse encounters between themselves and other students, staff, or professors or any combination of the three.

Response: a) "I had a similar one with a professor where I felt like she did not take me seriously...I got an A in the class and I know...I don't want to be like these other...students but I was neck and neck with this other girl in the class, and I knew we were at the top of the class. We always participated; when she called on us we knew what the answers were, we did our homework, and it was a summer school class too so you had people up in there slacking or trying to come up from slacking. So I knew I was on my game because I wasn't doing summer school for remedial purposes, I was doing it because I wanted to get ahead and I was here as an RA. And I wanted to know what had bumped me down and she said that my participation was bad because of homework. I asked was it a participation grade or a homework grade and we went back and forth on a couple of emails until she finally started ignoring my emails...I felt really blown off by her and I thought that [it] was very rude. I think that was one of the most rude situations that I've ever had to encounter here..."

Response: b) "Generally I can't really think of all the specific experiences but...students and in a sense...try to make me feel intimidated. Professors – it's because they could make somebody feel really stupid if they wanted to. I don't like that feeling that somebody is trying to belittle me in a sense."

Response: c) "My RA wasn't very responsive to student needs. It didn't matter what I told her. Sometimes, I would ask her questions...and she wouldn't even have the courtesy to get back to me."

- Futility of university orientation to PLUS Respondents

Five (5) respondents indicated that the PLUS experience created a feeling among them that the general university orientation was futile or unnecessary for their acclimation to the campus. The respondents already felt comfortable and saw little purpose in having to attend mandatory orientation activities for information they were already given during the PLUS experience.

Response: a) “As soon as I unpacked those boxes, the first person I called was (friend). I said, ‘Girl, where are you at? Let’s get together!’ They had all of those mixers and stuff. I said I already know this, this, & this about the college, I’ve got my friends, can I please go?”

Response: b) “Me and (friend) didn’t even go to freshman orientation activities, which is the thing that they do with your freshman hall and orientation aides and you hang out with them for like three days before school actually starts.”

Response: c) “...with orientation it did make the orientation experience lousy just because...”

Response: b) “...I was too scared to skip orientation, so I went and I was just like (sigh), another mixer on a hot day.”

- General Academic Struggles

Four (4) respondents talked about their frustrations with having to adjust to the academic pace, academic climate, or simply not having done as well as they would have liked to academically.

Response: a) “My classes...that’s a negative but that’s b/c I don’t know how to study.”

Response: b) “...you can get a lot of help getting into the college, but it still takes a lot of work to stay here and I think that’s different for anybody, blacks or whites. You realize when you get here...sure you might get into the college, but unless there’s special stipulations...you usually don’t get very much help coming in...but yeah it’s hard.”

Response: c) “The only thing I really hate about this school is that you have so much work, by the time you catch up to it, you’ve got a test to study for and you have to cram the night before the test, and you still don’t understand the work b/c you crammed the night before, you have [something in your eye], you can’t sleep that well, you’ve gotta take a test...and that’s what I hate about this school.”

- Racial Experiences

Three respondents talked about being involved in a racial incident they did not initiate or victims of racially motivated comments made by other students.

Response: a) “A couple of times at the Frat parties I’ve been hit up with some racial type stuff before, but other than that ...”

Response: b) “...also one time I ran into some people playing a game or something in a dorm and it was like...one guy was saying that, ‘Well you know what they say, (rapper) is the black man’s Messiah! And that really just like pissed me off...”

Response: c) “One example off the top of my head: a couple of us, well a lot of us go to church, but some of us go to [one] church, (church name) and we usually go eat breakfast afterwards, and we were standing in line and one boy looks at me, (person a), and (person b) who looks completely different from us and the boy says to (person b), ‘Oh so you’re here with your family?’ He didn’t want to assume that we were all students eating in the cafeteria with him. So you get instances like that where’s it’s just like, ignorance, but I don’t think that’s indicative to [this university]. I think you could get that anywhere.”

- High Academic Stress

Three (3) respondents stated that they felt the academic climate was stressful and competitive.

Response: a) “I guess the workload is hard but I think a lot of it is that the students here, the top of the top make it so competitive. Everyone’s so stressed out all the time, so if you feel like you’re not doing work, then you’re slacking.”

Response: b) “At times it’s too stressful of an environment...like it’s kind of sad because some days...you can tell when everything is going on because you go to the library and it’s just like packed! It’s kind of sad when your hang out spot is the library.”

Response: c) “Probably the worse part is the stressful atmosphere because I don’t get to see my friends as much as I want to.”

- Experience of Dissension within PLUS group

One (1) respondent talked about the moments of dissension experienced within the group. However, through the experience, not all was lost and some good was able to be salvaged from the difficult moments.

Response: "...we had our falling-outs but at the end of the day we were able to come back together and reunite and forgive each other. And I feel like there's some forgiveness that has happened even with the falling out between other PLUS people but I don't know, relationships are strange..."

- Gender Disparity in Student-Held Offices

One (1) respondent discussed her need to adjust to the dominance of males in leadership roles.

Response: "As far as negative experiences I think my biggest shock here is how dominant the boys are on this campus. Seeing them in student assembly, I mean just everywhere; ...And I cannot understand it because there's more females here but there are more men, more boys in these important positions and that's something I had to get used to, something I had to adjust to; first thing being in class with them because I was in classes with girls for four years, but then to see how someone just came, they dominate, they say what they say, it was just like, 'Um!' "

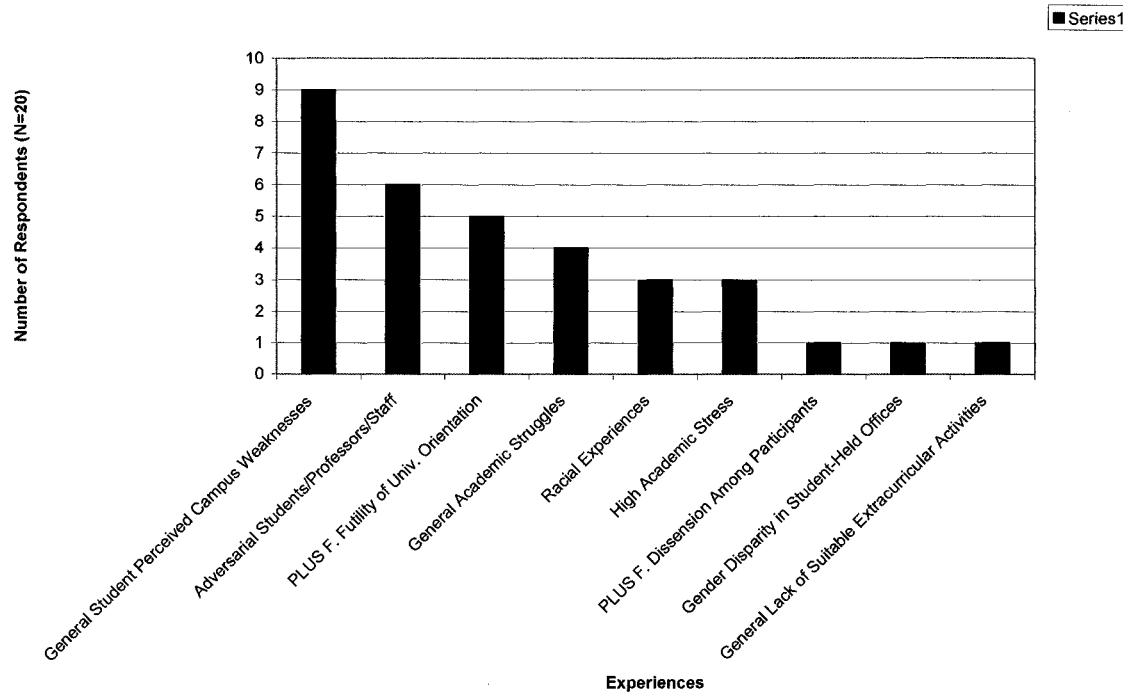
- General Lack of Suitable Extracurricular Activities

Finally, one (1) respondent merely indicated wishing that there were more activities geared toward some other unspecified interests.

Response: "Well, let's see...even though I'm in some groups, I kind of wish they weren't...I kind of feel the groups that I've been in, they're good and everything, but I wish there were some more geared toward other interests."

(See Figure 9):

Figure 9 - General Negative Campus Experiences of Respondents



Question four (4), which asked PLUS focus group participants to discuss their positive versus negative experiences at the university, elicited responses in all focus group sessions that were directly related to their PLUS experiences. No direct questions about PLUS were asked through question four (4), and so the responses related to PLUS were unsolicited. This was done deliberately to maintain genuineness of the responses. Leading questions might have led to rehearsed responses more indicative of what focus group participants may have wanted the researcher to hear than of actual circumstances. However, since I noticed during the research that the focus group participants offered information about their PLUS experiences, I seized the opportunity to explore the PLUS participant experience more deeply. The final two questions of the focus group session address PLUS experiences in a more direct fashion.

Question five (5) asked the following question of the PLUS focus group participants:

5) Let's talk about PLUS. Since you've talked about this on some specific levels, what impact has PLUS had on a general level? (What did you take away from PLUS?)

All 20 focus group participants responded to this question, and the responses were divided into positive impact and negative impact categories. The analysis identified nine positive impact categories and three negative impact categories. Respondents may have responded under more than one of the categories. Therefore, the number of actual responses is higher than the number of respondents on the positive impact side in Figure 10. However, because only one question was asked that yielded both positive and negative responses, the actual number of responses in Figure 11 appear less than the number of respondents. (See Figures 10 & 11):

Figure 10 - General Positive Impacts of PLUS by Number of Respondents

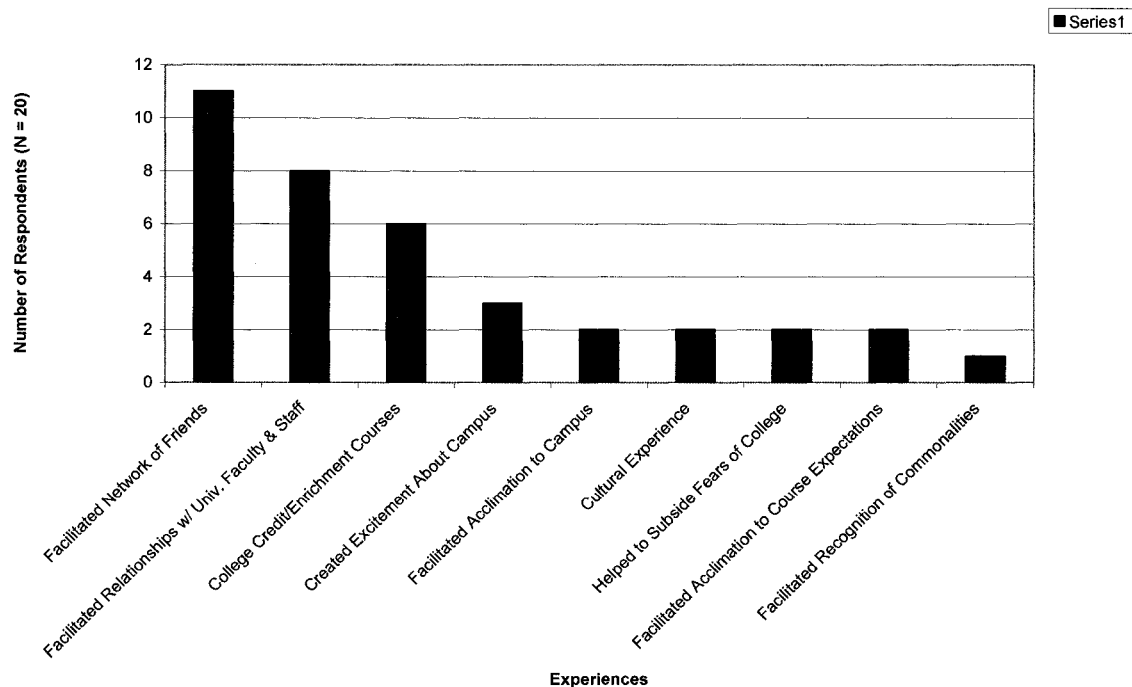
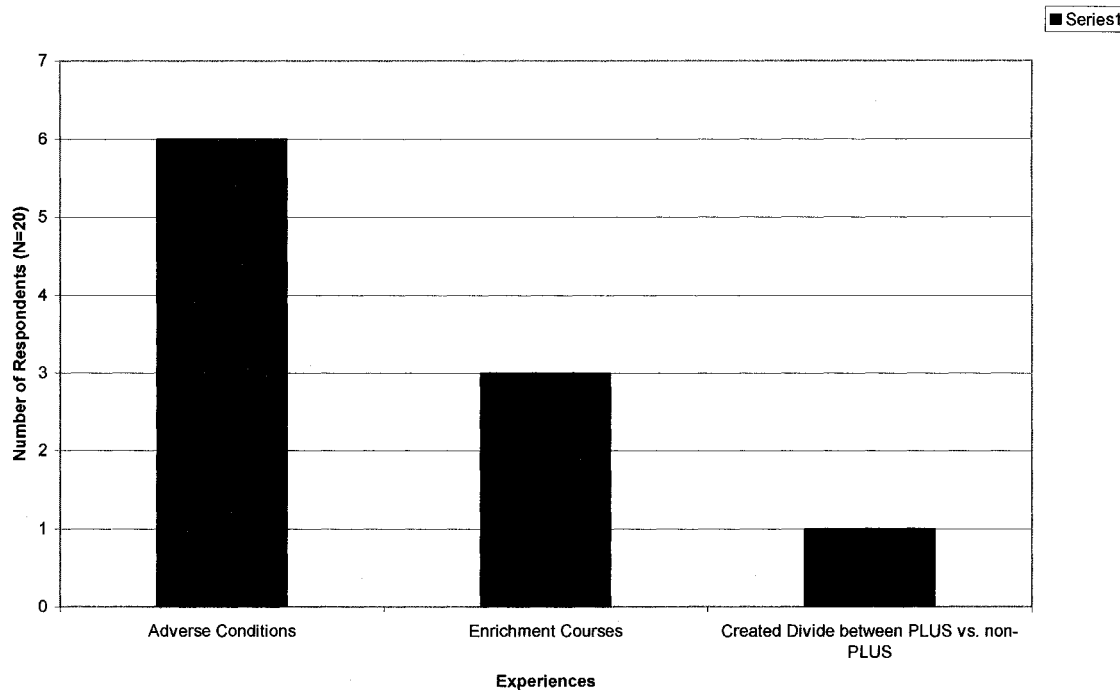


Figure 11 - General Negative Impacts of PLUS by Number of Respondents



The following positive impacts of PLUS on the general college experience, the following response categories were identified:

- Network of friends

Eleven (11) respondents said that regardless of any challenges or difficulties they faced either leaving home or coming to the university in their first year, it was comforting to know that they had already established friendships, creating a network of individuals to whom they felt comfortable going about anything.

Furthermore, throughout their college years, even when the PLUS focus group respondents were busy with their own individual academic worlds, they felt that at any time they could reconnect with anyone from the network. The following statements reflect this sentiment:

Response: a) "...you say hi or you just know these people and you know them not necessarily on a level that others know them but you have that bond

with them from the summer and that's basically all you had getting through the summer. So it's really helped to at least know that they're here and you really do want to see them succeed to even if you're not friends with them or you don't talk to them on a daily (basis)... you got in together, so you definitely want to make it through together."

Response: b) "I just felt so blessed; looking back retrospectively, I felt blessed that I had that because it was just something that I don't think could've been a better introduction to my college experience just kind of coming and having that support group, having people that I knew shared my background, that I could talk to about whatever; I could be like "mumble, mumble, mumble" and they knew exactly what I was saying..."

Response: c) "...and honestly if it wasn't for PLUS and I just came straight from [my town] to [this university] fall semester, the second day I called my mom saying, "Mom I'm transferring to [another college]..." But I said, no I have my friends here and I really want to like continue to grow with them and make it through because this is a challenge and I like challenges."

Response: d) "And when you see people it's like you don't even have to...it's not like "where have you been? I haven't seen you!" It's more like "How are you doing?" There's that understanding that you've been on your grind, I've been on my grind, and regardless of how long it has been since we talked there is that connection that cannot be erased... With the PLUS family you always come back to that because that's where you started."

Response: e) "The main thing that I took away from PLUS are the friendships that lasted."

Response: f) "So definitely knowing people made it easier to come to the college. Especially when you get here in August, things look a little bit different, there are more majority students on campus and it's really good to have that network already established of friends and people who you know have some kind of common bond."

Response: g) "We did get friends obviously..."

- Relationships with Faculty and Staff

Eight (8) respondents indicated that one benefit they received was a connection they maintained with either their former PLUS counselors or a staff member. Six of the eight respondents spoke highly of a staff member who went beyond what many respondents expected of a staff member. The staff member developed relationships with each student, remembered their names, and was an academic, social, career, cultural, and personal resource to the respondents and PLUS group. The following statements illustrate this phenomenon.

Response: a) “There were still enough counselors that bonded the rest of us and everything from the water-fight to pranking to studying to the night that everyone jumped on me (laughing). It was “The Real World” for real. It still bonded us, we joke about it now, but at the time it was very serious. But it was good, we still respect each other and we know that we all started here together and we all want to see each other succeed.”

Response: b) “Another thing that no one mentioned...for me, like... ___ was amazing and..., I don’t know, ...was always the person if something happened and if your whole world fell apart when you were here... ___ would somehow pick up the pieces and make it better and it was like that when we had drama during PLUS and it was like that when we were here when we came back so for me having ___ here is just... ___ always continues to take an active role in all of our lives and...just clings to everybody and...knows what we’re doing and I think that made a really big difference for me because you don’t find that at a lot of colleges...”

Response: c) “ ___ was definitely there during PLUS but just the fact that when we came back it was still: “Hello (name of student)! ___ knew everyone’s name plus people coming in, so it was never the distancing or something that could’ve happened... ___ was gonna look after you...just to make sure you were doing okay and that was really good especially freshmen year.”

Response: d) “I was also able to meet the staff of the Office of Multicultural Affairs office which is also good. Knowing ___ helped me to basically be integrated more into the community. ___ helped keep everybody abreast of what was going on in the community and that kind of thing, especially through the listserve...and knowing ___ is not like having a parent necessarily but like having an older sister or an aunt-type thing and you could depend on her when you needed something.

Response: e) “...I really appreciate ___ for doing that and I feel like our first year was so great because ___ was there...we just had a great time and...is that kind of person you can connect with...like ___ [is] always open to hear what’s going on with you and...doesn’t judge you...It’s just “You know I’m here to listen.” It didn’t stop after PLUS. We could always go and sit down and say “ ___ I have some things going on in my life” and ___ was open to listening and it’s helpful to have ___ especially when things can feel so overwhelming...at a college to have someone who can just listen to you and someone to understand the things you’re going through.”

Response: f) “I go to OMA every once in a blue moon, but I really don’t have that close relationship with ___. So I really don’t see ___ much to have that close bond... But every time I do see ___, s/he’s very open and friendly, encouraging and uplifting.”

Response: g) “...I just took the opportunity to get to know ___ b/c I knew ___ would be a big resource for like anything that I needed and any other students would say that ___ was very helpful on any questions...or just giving you people to talk to... ___ would give you directions to someone to talk to

with any problems you were facing or just anything. Just seeing others' reaction to ___ and what ___ done for them; ___ is just a positive role model.
Response: h) "and also the counselors were people I feel like if I hadn't met them in PLUS, then I would've...those are people who were [helpful]; who cared. We had great counselors!"

- Benefit of College Credit & Enrichment Courses

Six (6) respondents highlighted the benefit of the credit bearing courses and enrichment courses that helped them have a better academic experience as they started college. The following quotations reflect this point.

Response: a) "...and also the classes that they had us take in PLUS, like the supplemental classes you get. We had to do writing and we did a class with the dean ... where we had to do time management and they showed us how to manage our money. So I think this is something that really helped me especially when I look back and to see how other people struggled adjusting to these types of things while it was something that came natural when I came into my fall semester here."

Response: b) "In my H.S. one of the English teachers told me he had intended to come to W&M. Then he got to campus and saw students who were English majors taking bags of books from the bookstore and that made him not come here. And he was afraid of the English program being so hard, but in PLUS, I took an English class just to see how it would be and I found out that it wasn't impossible."

Response: c) "we did get a college class..."

Response: d) "I did think it was kind of stupid that we had to sit down and study for a block of time but on my part I think it helped b/c before I came to W&M, I never sat down for like a block of time and studied."

- Excitement Created about the Campus

Three (3) respondents talked about the excitement experienced and the confidence exuded as the group returned to the university after the summer PLUS session.

They were eager to be back among friends, as is indicated by the statement below.

Response: "It's definitely for our year, when we came back to campus, we came strong and hard...we were happy."

- Acclimation to Campus

Two (2) respondents touched on their acclimation to campus as a result of the PLUS experience, as is reflected below:

Response: a) "...knowledge of the campus before I got here and kind of like the low-down of what it would be like"

Response: b) "...we learned our way around campus..."

- Benefit of Cultural Experience

Two (2) respondents provided insight on the benefit of travel and cultural enrichment they received through the PLUS experience. Field trips provided opportunities for PLUS respondents and the larger PLUS group participants to attend and receive exposure that they would not have had otherwise. Two statements below illustrate this sentiment.

Response: a) "... also the trips that we had with PLUS were really good...That was my first time going to see...well I guess this play was off-Broadway. But that was my first time ever going to something in that area...so it was a new experience...I probably wouldn't have done it until now."

Response: b) "One of the things I really didn't hear a lot of people talk about that was significant was that with PLUS if you don't have certain cultural tools, I think PLUS helps with that. I mean well, how do I explain this, maybe economic? It wasn't until recently that I actually got to go to New York or Washington D.C. and it was kind of a situation of being at the right place at the right time. If you are going into PLUS and you are from an impoverished background...I'm not...but I could see how coming to this school and there's all these wealthy people with so many different experiences abroad, you could feel overwhelmed. And having those experiences under your belt I think helps, and it also helps because you may not necessarily have the opportunity to go to...all these other places, and so it helps culturally."

- Helped to Reduce Fears of College

Two (2) respondents discussed how the PLUS program was able to soften the blow of leaving home by providing a transitional experience, while in another

case, the PLUS network provided a buffer for a tough adjustment period. Two statements to this effect are below.

Response: a) “It was a long time ago, but I do remember that PLUS was a very good experience. I was desperately afraid of leaving home...so I felt like I needed it...going into a transition phase so it wouldn’t be so hard and so abrupt.”

Response: b) “Actually my birthday was the second day of school and I cried...I can’t believe how I cried... It was just difficult because it was the first time I was away from my family, but that night I was able to meet up with my family from PLUS and it just made it all the better.”

- Acclimation to Course Expectations

Two (2) respondents said that going through the process of registering and taking a course in the PLUS program helped them realize the standards of college-level work and what it would take to be successful at every step from registering to successfully developing a relationship with professors. The two following statements reflect this sentiment.

Response: a) “I would definitely say that it set up the foundation and kind of made at least for the Greek class that I took...I never experienced work like that...It was all guys because I thought “Women in Antiquities” would be all female and that ended up being the one class that just kicked me, and it kind of set the precedence for what other...classes were going to be like...it actually set the standard so if another class fell below it, I was just grateful.”

Response: b) “...it definitely helped academically just with whether you register so that you know how to apply [things] during classes, what information you have to apply to a class, and just getting to know a professor because that’s a big thing when you come here to get that one-on-one professor. Lots of students don’t do it and it’s something that you really should do.”

- Helped to Facilitate Recognition of Commonalities

One (1) respondent talked about how PLUS helped with navigating through the respondent’s own prejudices to find commonalities with peers. This is explained in the statement below.

Response: “To be honest with you though, when we first started the program I still felt like I couldn’t relate to the students that were there even though they looked like me, and it’s because they came from a more “fortunate background” and you really don’t know what it’s like to struggle, and that was just my ignorance coming into the program. There was another PLUS student in the program from [city] too, so we just grouped together first. We really weren’t open to the program but we eventually got out of it the friends that we made. We were ready to go back home.”

The following response categories were identified for negative impacts of the PLUS program:

- Adverse Conditions

Six (6) respondents talked about adverse conditions in PLUS, which created within them negative feelings that they carried into their freshman year. These included the structure of the program and some minor social issues that occurred during the program. The impact of these conditions had little to do with the true structure of college life once they were fully matriculated as freshmen, according to the respondents. The representative statements are listed below.

Response: a) “Favoritism was a really big issue.”

Response: b) “I really do feel like the rules were not fair.”

Response: c) “And just the fact that it was supposed to show us how to be college students and we were treated/sheltered like babies.”

Response: d) “We were told to act like adults, but then we got in trouble for standing in our doorways after 10:00 pm.”

Response: e) “If it was supposed to teach us about college life, I didn’t think it did an adequate job of reflecting our same experiences in college.”

- Adverse to Enrichment Courses

Three (3) respondents talked about enrichment courses that did not seem useful or practical. The statements are listed below.

Response: a) “Study Skills was not [good]; it was horrible!”

Response: b) “I wished the study skills course would’ve stopped and the writing skills course would’ve kept going. [In] study skills, she just taught us stuff we already knew. That was a waste of time.”

- Created Divide between PLUS and non-PLUS students

One (1) PLUS respondent recognized a separation that was created by the PLUS experience between PLUS participants and other students. This space was created by virtue of a common shared experience that PLUS participants had that non-PLUS students did not share, and by the confidence shown by PLUS group members that most first-day college freshmen did not have. This is expressed in the statement below.

Response: “The down side to that was that in the community, you had PLUS but then you had everybody else. That was kind of unfortunate because we were so excited about our coming out, our [being] united, that I think that we didn’t try to bring other people into that so much, so we were kind of lacking on that and it brought a little of a divide.”

Question six (6) asked the following of the PLUS focus group participants:

6) Tell me how you feel PLUS has impacted your overall experience whether academically or socially.

Only sixteen of the twenty total focus group participants responded to this question, and the responses were divided into a positive impact and negative impact category. In one focus group session, a participant left the session early due to a prior obligation. The first focus group to be interviewed, which included three more participants, was not asked this question because it was added later for the subsequent focus groups. The analysis identified twelve (12) positive impact categories and three (3) negative impact categories. Respondents may have responded under more than one of the categories. Therefore, the number of actual responses tallied reflects a higher number than the actual number of respondents on the positive impact side, Figure 12. However, because only one question

was asked that yielded both positive and negative responses, the number of responses tallied in Figure 13 is less than the number of respondents. (See Figures 12 & 13):

Figure 12 - Academic and Social Positive Impacts of PLUS by Number of Respondents

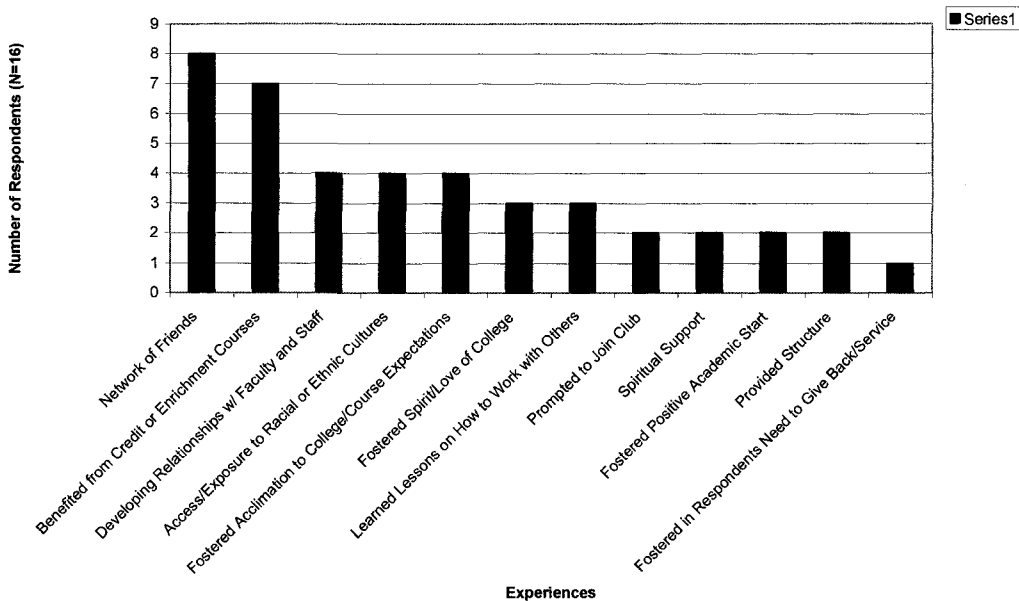
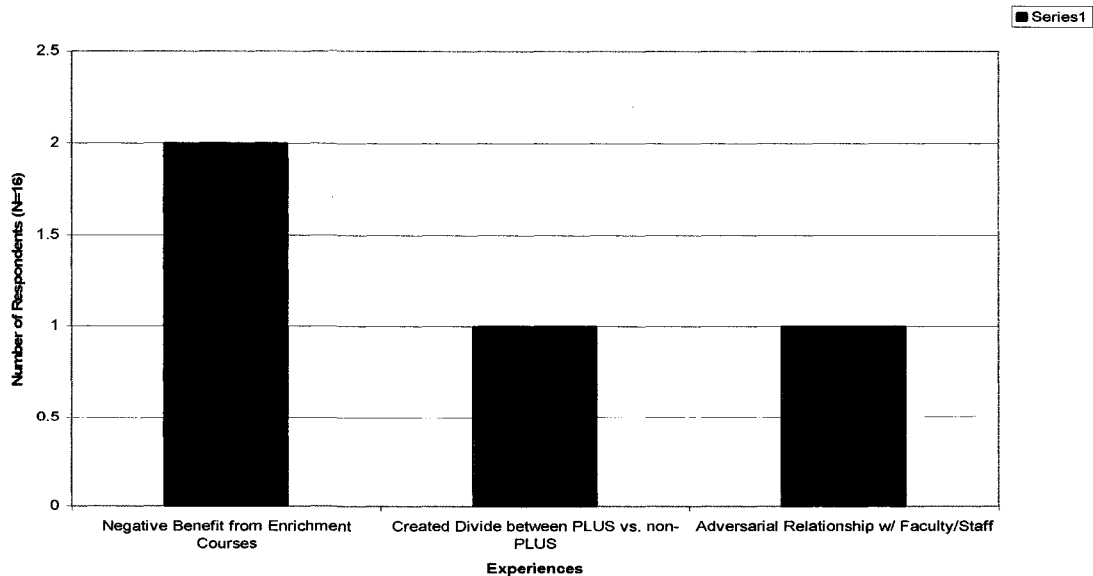


Figure 13 - Academic and Social Negative Impacts of PLUS by Number of Respondents



The following response categories were identified of positive impacts of PLUS on the general college experience:

- Network of Friends

Eight (8) respondents reiterated sentiments from focus group questions 4 and 5 that the comfort and strength they gained was from knowing that they had an established bond of friendship and a network of individuals they could seek out for companionship or help. Whether it was in passing or during a crisis, this network allowed the respondents to continue moving forward. The following statements reflect this sentiment:

Response: a) “As far as socially, like I said before, just being able to join organizations and to know that I have people upon which I could depend at most anytime even if it was just the smallest thing like, “Can you walk me to the store?” For the most part I could call anyone from PLUS and say can you give me a ride somewhere...and it’s funny just looking back on some of the things we experienced and how we just pulled together even if we may have had some bad times in the past, we still pulled together to have one another’s back.”

Response: b) “So to have that opportunity to already know people before you even came to school just gave you that good basis to continue forming a good foundation.”

Response: c) “Thanks to PLUS I have friends and I have my little net to keep me strong. ”

Response: d) “To sum it up in a nutshell, it created lifelong bonds of friendships I think for the most part...”

Response: e) “I formed a lot of good friendships, lasting friendships...”

- Benefit of College Credit & Enrichment Courses

Seven (7) respondents discussed the benefit of the credit bearing and enrichment courses that armed them with skills that they were able to use throughout their college courses. The following quotations reflect this point.

Response: a) “Academically...we did take a class that we got a grade for and we took some basic courses on time management, money management, just other skills...”

Response: b) “The workshops were really, really helpful because that’s why the Writing Resource Center, the Career Center and stuff like that; I kind of made use of it my Freshman year. I still go to the Career Center today to get help.”

Response: c) “I think that PLUS had a great impact on my [stay]...especially with the supplemental classes that we took that helped me to have access to a bunch of different resources that I’m not sure could’ve been covered during orientation when we [got] here in the fall. So in that respect we got help with time management; when we had a paper, it helped us to go through the process of writing at the college level. Just a bunch of things had a great impact on my success here.”

Response: d) “The class that I took, I did well in, so it gave me a boost of confidence that, okay, maybe I can handle [this university]. And also the classes prepared me for what was to come.”

Response: e) “...you had this workshop about time management and study skills...that’s pretty much what I actually learned and I still use those skills today: time management and study skills, etc.”

- Developing Relationships with Faculty and Staff

Four (4) respondents talked about the strength and confidence that PLUS gave them to take the initiative in developing relationships with professors crucial to the students’ success in classes. One respondent talked about challenging professors in a scholarly way with a different perspective on a topic. The following statements illustrate this notion.

Response: a) “To this day, I’ll email a professor in a heartbeat, and [say] “I’m trying to get into your class, what do I need to do”? I’m not afraid to approach professors which I feel like is something that if I had been thrust into a 300 seat class as a freshman on the first day, I probably would not have gone about it the same way.”

Response: b) “...I came from a background where I really wasn’t prepared/taught how to approach adults in a sense where I’m questioning them and I’m challenging them and disagreeing with their opinion. So to be able to express myself 100% to my professor, it was very intimidating. I kind of had to get used to it because I saw the benefit in talking to professors and letting them know how you feel...”

- Access/Exposure to Racial/Ethnic Cultures

Four (4) respondents mentioned the opportunity to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds, having not had the opportunity as much in high school. The sentiment was indicated by the statement below.

Response: a) “It gave you access to different cultures...”

Response: b) “I know PLUS was like originally for multicultural students and they opened it up...and so even though I was basically surrounded by black people in high school and middle school, [PLUS] allowed me to interact even more.”

- Acclimation to Campus/Course Expectations

Four (4) respondents discussed their ability to be acclimated to campus norms. Respondents also talked about coming to understand course expectations and standards. The comments provided below illustrate this experience.

Response: a) “I guess PLUS was also helpful for when we had to register for classes, because we had upperclassmen to tell us which classes to take while the other students were just [at home].”

Response: b) “...I don’t think I would’ve felt as comfortable as a freshman coming here if I didn’t know the resources I could go to if I needed any help...”

Response: c) “...fresh out of high school...we are still in high school mode. Our high schools were so easy, we didn’t have to actually do work, we came out with A’s, we were top ten, it was just effortless, and we came to [this university] with that same attitude. I really didn’t know that much about [this university] and its standards in a sense. Then I realized I’m about to be in for a ride.”

- Fostered Spirit/Love of College

Three (3) respondents noted that the PLUS program fostered a sense of pride, spirit, and love for the university. Even during a break between PLUS and the fall semester, students relished the thought of returning to campus. The two following statements illustrate this sentiment.

Response: a) "...if you didn't love the campus before, it kind of fostered making you want to love the campus...because we were like talking with each other when we went home for the week and a half, [saying] 'We miss [the university] We want to go back!'" So it helped to really foster a love of [the university]."

Response: b) "We were excited about hanging out again and we did. That's all that mattered. We continued to keep our friendships together..."

- Lessons Learned on How to Work with Others

Three (3) respondents talked about working through the personality problems experienced within the PLUS program. However, the respondents explained it as a period of maturing and learning how to respect others and work with them despite having different thoughts or beliefs. The statements below illustrate this idea.

Response: a) "There was just some drama, I mean we were trying to find our own way, and people were talking about other people and it had not yet come to that point where it was okay to talk about other people and we were just trying to be grown-up young adults and people wanted to...[well] we just had to work that out for ourselves and we had to have a moment where we just came down together and said 'Hi I'm a young adult, you're a young adult, let's not disrespect each other like children'."

- PLUS Prompted Joining of Club

Two (2) respondents said that the PLUS experience was instrumental in causing them to join an organization. In one case, the student joined an organization that benefited incoming multicultural students in a way similar to PLUS. This is addressed in the statement below.

Response: a) "PLUS was the main reason I joined MAC, (Multicultural Ambassadors Council), because I fell in love...[with the experience]."

- Provided Opportunities for Spiritual Support

Two (2) respondents talked about how PLUS met the needs of certain participants by taking them to church, an activity students had gotten away from when they

left home for school. Respondents indicated that this helped them to stay grounded. This is explained in the following statement.

Response: a) “Religiously – It also helped b/c we went to [church]. I liked the church that we went to, it was fun. I liked that it was early in the morning and so we would sometimes get a ride over there...still I can’t get to it now because I don’t have a car on campus.”

Response: b) “I would say that PLUS in a way helped me stay grounded b/c in PLUS they would take us to church...”

- Fostered Positive Academic Start

Two (2) respondents stated that PLUS allowed them to get off to a positive start in their college careers. This is shown in the statements below.

Response: a) “...related to that....all of us got off to a good start...”

Response: b) “...a good start...a good thing...and we did get a head start...”

- Provided Structure

Two (2) respondents talked about how PLUS provided a structure similar to that which the participants had left at home. The structure helped the respondents to stay focused on school. This is explained below.

Response: “[PLUS] was just so structured it was kind of like at home, my mom and my dad staying on me. Did you do this? You have to do this and you have to do that...and so it’s like I didn’t lose that organization in my life and my structure even though my parents weren’t on campus. And so even today, just being structured, I’m not going out here doing all this crazy stuff...I’m just focused on my school work where I think people thought because my life was so structured in high school and growing up, that I was just going to be that loud girl at [school], but nope!”

- Fostered in Respondents Need to Give Back/Do Service

One (1) respondent said that PLUS prompted her to do volunteer work out of a need to repay a debt because of the benefit she received from participating in PLUS. This is explained in the following statement.

Response: “I think because I experienced PLUS, I think I felt more like I had something to give back...I needed to give something back to the university because I don’t know; I immediately went into volunteering. I just felt like I had some sort of debt to pay to be honest.”

The following response categories of negative impacts PLUS had on the general college experience were identified:

- Negative Benefit from Enrichment Courses

Two (2) PLUS respondents acknowledged that some of the enrichment courses in which they were required to participate dealt with material the respondents felt was rather rudimentary. Thus, they felt in some instances they were not learning anything new, or they were bored. This sentiment is illustrated below in the following statements.

Response: a) “There were some classes that I didn’t feel helped me that much.”

Response: b) “I learned how to do really good bubble letters in one night...(laughing)...it was just that boring.”

- Created Divide between PLUS and non-PLUS students

One (1) respondent talked about the divide that PLUS created between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students. The respondent indicated that PLUS participants tried to work around this phenomenon by bringing non-PLUS students into the fold. The representative statement is given below.

Response: “When we came in Freshman year it was like PLUS and everybody else (laughing)...it led to kind of a divide but we tried to work around that to bring other people into our fold.”

- Adversarial Relationship with Faculty or Staff

One (1) respondent discussed a level of belittlement from professors reflected in the manner in which they worked with and/or addressed the PLUS participants.

The representative statement is provided below.

Response: a) “I feel like some of the professors that because it was a ‘minority’ program kind of treated us like a minority program that summer and that was not helpful. Just because my skin is dark does not mean that I have trouble learning...”

Themes

Developing “*clusters of meanings*” according to Creswell, (1998) is the process in which the statements tallied in the first round of analysis are consolidated into themes. By virtue of the make-up of the questions, this step showed two categories of themes; background themes and PLUS themes. Questions 1-3 of the focus group sessions solicited background information about PLUS focus group participants. Questions 4-6 delved more into the perceptions participants had of their PLUS experiences. The following background themes were developed.

Predisposition to Involvement (Background Theme #1)

PLUS focus group respondents were predisposed to involvement in high school extracurricular activities. These activities largely included in-school extracurricular or co-curricular activities, as well as some activities that took place outside of the school setting, such as community volunteer work. There were respondents involved in areas of athletics, student government, volunteering, academic honor fraternal organizations or societies, and band activities. Some respondents were also involved in taking advanced placement, honors, international baccalaureate, or dual enrollment courses. The largest concentration of PLUS focus group respondents were involved in student organizations or themed clubs, such as Students Taking a Stand Against Drinking (STSAD), Key Club,

French Club, Yearbook, and Drama Club, for example. Seventeen of the nineteen PLUS focus group respondents indicated that they were involved in this category of activities.

With regard to the frequency with which students were involved (Figure 2), all respondents listed being involved in at least three or more activities. Five respondents listed three activities, five others listed four activities, while five more indicated that they participated in at least five activities. The final three respondents said that they participated in six, seven, and eight activities, respectively. PLUS group respondents were not only predisposed to involvement, each was involved in a multitude of activities.

Typical statements that justified this conclusion include the following:

“In high school, I did just about everything ...I was in drama, chorus, band; ...editor of my literary magazine. I was an honors student in the dual enrollment program.”

“...As far as involvement, I guess I took the advanced courses and graduated with the advanced degree, and I was also active in after school programs: senior class president, yearbook, SCA, Students Taking a Stand Against Drugs (STSAD), there's too many to list actually...”

The predisposition toward involvement continued into their college years.

Although focus group respondents indicated that they were at a period of time in their academic careers when they needed to prioritize and reduce the number of activities in which they engaged, their college involvement level remained generally similar to their level of involvement in high school. The focus group participant responses indicated that the types and frequency of activities in high school were very similar to the types and frequency of activities in college.

Fifteen respondents indicated involvement in community or student organizations and clubs, followed by nine who listed involvement in community service or volunteer activities. Respondents also noted college level involvement in student government,

varsity, intramural, or club athletics, academic, honor, service, social, or fraternal organizations, work-study or internships, and performing arts activities.

Based on soft data provided through anecdotal responses, 19 of the respondents participated in a total of 81 activities at the high school level, averaging 4.2 activities per respondent. At the university level, the twenty respondents participated in a total of 80 activities, averaging 4 activities per respondent. Also, sixteen of the twenty respondents listed that they participated in three or more activities, with the top three respondents listing seven activities apiece. PLUS focus group participants continue to exhibit a penchant for involvement in a multitude of extracurricular activities. The following statement explains this phenomenon at the university level:

“When I came as a freshman, I was into everything; I was in any cultural organization you could think of. I just wanted to go out and see what was there but then you realize that as the workload gets tougher, you realize you have to make priorities.”

The responses to the third focus group question further solidify the notion of PLUS respondent predisposition to extracurricular involvement. When asked about the factors that had an impact on their choices to committing to activities at the university, community awareness, friends, and extrinsic motivations/external incentives were tied behind the leading response with seven responses each. However, fifteen respondents overwhelmingly stated intrinsic reasons for wanting to participate. They were generally interested and wanted to participate or they stated that they needed to remain active and saw joining an activity as an outlet. Some respondents of that group stated that they could not come to college and see themselves discontinuing the activities in which they had always participated while growing up at home before college. The following statements summarize this notion:

“I think it had a lot to do with me personally just because I enjoy being involved in things and taking an active role outside of just academics.”

“I guess for me it would’ve been difficult for me to transition from high school to college without being involved in different organizations because it was something I was so used to doing.”

Preferred Major Selection (Background Theme #2)

PLUS respondent major declarations were dispersed across a range of thirteen liberal arts majors. The highest number of respondents, four, declared English as their major. When asked why the respondents selected their major, nine answered that they enjoyed the subject. Some noted that they had known they wanted to follow this course of study since earlier K-12 grades. Behind this response, four indicated that the major would help them to achieve a career interest. Only one respondent credited the PLUS experience with sparking an interest in their selection of a major. In fact, there were other respondents who related a high school experience, prior to their experience in PLUS, to their selection of a major. The statement(s) that capture this theme include the following:

“The reason I chose English is because I’ve always enjoyed writing. I’ve been writing since the 7th grade; poems and short stories.”

“...And so I took my first Intro to African American History course when I was a sophomore and after I took that, I really enjoyed what I learned because it was all good to me to learn about my history in that great of detail...”

Friendship Networks (PLUS Theme #1)

The leading recurring PLUS theme emanated from the last three focus group questions or prompts summarized below:

- a) Talk about positive and negative experiences;
- b) Discuss general impacts of plus; and

c) Discuss overall impacts of PLUS on academics and social experiences.

This theme was the established support network of friends that PLUS respondents said they acquired through the PLUS experience. 10 of 20 respondents for question (a) talked about friendship networks as a positive experience, 11 of 20 for question (b) referred to the friendship networks in terms of having the greatest impact and as being something that they were able to take away from the PLUS program in general, and 8 of 16 respondents of question (c) viewed the friendship networks as something that greatly enhanced and had a great impact on their social experience at the university.

Respondents viewed their PLUS cohort group members as people with whom lifelong bonds were formed. Despite adverse situations or conditions that some respondents experienced, PLUS respondents indicated that they were able to fall back on their friendships to pull them through crises. For example, even though individual respondents listed negative experiences such as struggles with acceptable academic performance, desires to want to leave the university, encounters with racism, adversarial encounters with students, professors, or both, constant undertones of academic competition and stress, dislikes regarding the campus, or the initial isolation from family members, PLUS respondents were able to find solace in this network of friends. These are a few statements that encapsulate the PLUS respondent sentiments of the friendship support networks:

“I think the only reason why I made it to this point where I am now is because I made really good friends starting at PLUS. We are like a family, and even if we don’t always keep in touch every day or every month or every semester, I can call every last one... That kind of made all the issues that did bother me about being here... because for me it was a culture shock, that in and of itself, I don’t want to say was negative, but just different.”

“I also feel like whenever you would get into the other stuff and you feel like you’re out of place, you always had your friends to go back and talk to. Like I could call...all these PLUS members and I could talk to them about what I’m going through and [they’d say] ‘Look you’re going to make it’ and stuff like that, and that was the positive about the people that kept me strong at [the university].”

“So definitely knowing people made it easier to come to [this university] especially when you get here in August, things look a little bit different, there are more majority students on campus and it’s really good to have that network already established of friends and people who you know have some kind of common bond.”

“Actually, my birthday was the second day of school and I cried...I can’t believe how I cried...It was just difficult because it was the first time I was away from my family, but that night I was able to meet up with my family from PLUS and it just made it all the better.”

“As far as socially...just being able to join organizations and to know that I have people upon which I could depend at most anytime even if it was the smallest thing like, ‘Can you walk me to the store?’...For the most part I could call anyone from PLUS and say can you give me a ride somewhere...and it’s funny just looking back on some of the things we experienced and how we just pulled together even if we may have had some bad times in the past, we still pulled together to have one another’s back.”

Positive Informal Relationships with Faculty and Staff (PLUS Theme #2)

Positive informal relationships with faculty or staff members emerged as the second recurring theme from PLUS responses. This was another theme that seemed to re-emerge when responding to focus group questions about positive or negative experiences or impacts on general college life or impacts on academics and social life. Respondents talked briefly about PLUS counselors who maintained contacts and came across as positive role models. However, overwhelmingly, sixteen PLUS respondents in the course of responding to the last three questions touted a specific PLUS staff member whom they saw performing several informal roles in addition to the staff member’s work responsibilities. This person served as a confidante, counselor, and general resource to all of the PLUS participants. The staff member was personable, friendly, and outgoing

according to the respondents and knew and addressed all students by their first names which made a profound impact. Further, this staff member had a gift of remembering specific facts about each student and in many cases served as a parent or family figure in the absence of the actual parents.

Above all, PLUS respondents continued to acknowledge that the staff member was simply present; available to the students at any time and particularly in times of need. This was true not just in the staff member's relationship with PLUS participants, but with all students with whom the staff member came in contact. This was the staff member's personality and approach toward working with all students throughout the year. The following statements illustrate the respondents' feelings toward this particular staff member:

“(The staff member) was definitely there during PLUS but just the fact that when we came back it was still: “Hello (name of student)! ___ knew everyone's name plus people coming in, so it was never the distancing or something that could've happened...___ was gonna look after you..just to make sure you were doing okay and that was really good especially freshmen year.”

“I was also able to meet the staff of the Office of Multicultural Affairs office which is also good. Knowing ___ helped me to basically be integrated more into the community. ___ helped keep everybody abreast of what was going on in the community and that kind of thing, especially through the listserve...and knowing ___ is not like having a parent necessarily but like having an older sister or an aunt-type thing and you could depend on her when you needed something.

“...I really appreciate ___ for doing that and I feel like our first year was so great because ___ was there...we just had a great time and...is that kind of person you can connect with...like ___ [is] always open to hear what's going on with you and...doesn't judge you...It's just “You know I'm here to listen.” It didn't stop after PLUS. We could always go and sit down and say “___ I have some things going on in my life” and ___ was open to listening and it's helpful to have ___ especially when things can feel so overwhelming...at a college to have someone who can just listen to you and someone to understand the things you're going through.”

Advantages of PLUS (PLUS Theme #3)

Individual PLUS respondents mentioned a variety of benefits that they gained from their PLUS experience. There were many differences in these responses. In fact, what one respondent may have viewed as a negative, another may have seen as positive. For example, two respondents may have viewed the stringent PLUS rules, such as curfew, as the negative aspect of the PLUS program. Viewing rules and curfew negatively, two respondents explained:

“And just the fact that it was supposed to show us how to be college students and we were treated/sheltered like babies.”

“We were told to act like adults, but then we got in trouble for standing in our doorways after 10:00 P.M.”

However, another respondent saw the rules as necessary to maintain structure such as that which students might have been used to at home and attending K-12 schools. One respondent, speaking positively about the structure said:

“[PLUS] was just so structured it was kind of like at home, my mom and my dad staying on me. Did you do this? You have to do this and you have to do that...and so it's like I didn't lose that organization in my life and my structure even though my parents weren't on campus. And so even today, just being structured, I'm not going out here doing all this crazy stuff...I'm just focused on my school work where I think people thought because my life was so structured in high school and growing up, that I was just going to be that loud girl at [school], but nope!”

The responses varied from respondent to respondent and were more personal in nature with regard to the types of benefits obtained from being in the PLUS program. However, collectively the responses suggest a theme of benefits that PLUS provided and students could take with them into the regular school year. Some of the responses addressed a level of acclimation to the campus for PLUS participants, so that they knew where things were before the rest of the freshmen arrived onto campus. Other benefits

mentioned by PLUS focus group respondents included information or tips about the campus, registering, and to whom to talk; developing a love/spirit for the campus; learning prioritization and time management skills; tips on how to navigate and develop relationships with professors to be successful in class; study skills; personal cultural enhancement through field trips; a course-for-credit that fulfilled the general education requirement (GER); learning about one's self or how to get along with others from diverse backgrounds; and spiritual support. The following statements addressed these responses:

“[I got to] learn the campus before I actually had to get here with everyone else.”

“We had thirteen days between PLUS program and Orientation...Countdown!...because [I] was ready to get back here and see...everybody I had met in the PLUS program and I wanted to get back on campus and run around and go to class and roll around on the grass and all that good stuff.”

“I think just overall, the biggest positive is being able to learn how to juggle things before you get into your world.”

“I like the fact that we learned pretty much all the rules and how to go about making sure you had enough classes, what to take and when...”

“One of the things I really didn't hear a lot of people talk about that was significant was that with PLUS if you don't have certain cultural tools, I think PLUS helps with that. I mean well, how do I explain this, maybe economic? It wasn't until recently that I actually got to go to New York or Washington D.C. and it was kind of a situation of being at the right place at the right time. If you are going into PLUS and you are from an impoverished background...I'm not...but I could see how coming to this school and there's all these wealthy people with so many different experiences abroad, you could feel overwhelmed. And having those experiences under your belt I think helps, and it also helps because you may not necessarily have the opportunity to go to...all these other places, and so it helps culturally.”

Minor Themes

There were two minor themes that emerged from PLUS focus group responses. One minor theme was that as a result of the PLUS experience, respondents tended to view themselves as a subgroup of individuals separate from the general population of students who arrived on campus for the first time in the fall. PLUS respondents described this phenomenon as a “PLUS vs. Non-PLUS Divide”. PLUS respondents indicated that their cohort would take extra measures to incorporate non-PLUS students into their circle and make them feel welcome, even creating informal auxiliary groups to the PLUS cohort. Conversely, other respondents indicated that they wanted to protect the bond that was created by the unique PLUS experience. The following statements illustrate these points:

“When we came in freshman year it was like PLUS and everybody else (laughing)...it led to kind of a divide but we tried to work around that to bring other people into our fold.”

“The down side to that was that in the community, you had PLUS but then you had everybody else...That was kind of unfortunate because we were so excited about our coming out, our [being] united, that I think that we didn’t try to bring other people into that so much, so we were kind of lacking on that and it brought a little of a divide.”

“...Some people would try to infiltrate the first week and we’d say, ‘No...’ so we had to create a new group of people we actually started liking.”

Some PLUS respondents, because of the unique experience they had gone through felt that the experience served to separate them from the rest of the community, rather than integrating them with it.

A second minor theme that emerged was the sentiment that because PLUS participants had become fully integrated and accustomed to the campus through the PLUS summer experience, they no longer felt the need to participate with fall university

orientation activities. The orientation meetings became redundant sources of information from individuals who had already met with the PLUS groups over the summer. Further, respondents indicated that there was a lot of information that they had acquired from PLUS that could never be covered in three days time. The following statements illustrate the sentiments:

“As soon as I unpacked those boxes, the first person I called was (friend). I said, ‘Girl, where are you at? Let’s get together!’ They had all of those mixers and stuff. I said I already know this, this, & this about the college, I’ve got my friends, can I please go?”

“Me and [friend] didn’t even go to freshman orientation activities, which is the thing that they do with your freshman hall and orientation aides and you hang out with them for like three days before school actually starts.”

“...with orientation it did make the orientation experience lousy just because...”

“...I was too scared to skip orientation, so I went and I was just like (sigh), another mixer on a hot day.”

Revisiting Research Questions - The focus group responses provided a great amount of useful anecdotal information that perhaps answer the following three research questions albeit indirectly:

- a) What were PLUS students’ perceptions of the impact of participation in the PLUS program on their own integration patterns within the university?
- b) What were PLUS students’ perceptions of the relationship between integration and academic achievement?
- c) What were PLUS students’ perceptions of the relationship between integration and persistence?

PLUS focus group respondents made various statements that left me, as the researcher, with latitude to make reasonable connections between the achievement, persistence, and integration, based on the theoretical definitions provided in earlier chapters. For example, a reasonable connection can be made between PLUS participation and integration when we broadly define PLUS participation by the relationships that PLUS focus group respondents have developed, and when we view integration as simply “involvement in activities or engagement”. The following comments explain this vantage point:

“For the most part, I got into activities from talking to other students whether it was through PLUS or other programs that the university had for multicultural students.”

“...when we were in PLUS, they had a ... community service fair and they came and told us about the different community service activities you could do on campus and basically what they offer.”

“NAACP, actually [PLUS Staff Member] got me involved in that to be honest. There was a vacancy and they needed some freshmen to come in and ___ pulled me in the office and...said ‘They’re looking for people to be involved in this organization.’ ___ talked about the history and introduced me to [the President] at the time and then my second semester freshmen year, I was there.”

“...Honor Council...I don’t think I would’ve done it if it hadn’t been for one of our counselors...[who] was our counselor for PLUS and he was actually a member...and I thought that was neat.”

“Knowing [PLUS Staff Member] helped me to basically be integrated more into the community. ___ helped keep everybody abreast of what was going on in the community and that kind of thing, especially through the listserve...”

Other statements made by focus group respondents alluded to integration as being the behaviors that would lead to higher academic achievement, i.e. academic integration in the form of building relationships with faculty and staff or feeling supported by faculty and staff, which is addressed in the second question:

“Like we said before, it [PLUS] definitely helped academically just with whether you register so that you know how to apply [things] during classes, what information you have to apply to a class, and just getting to know a professor because that’s a big thing when you come here to get that one-on-one professor.”

“I think that those sessions did help me though...like the class that gave me that professor/student relationship first-hand...it helped me understand that. To this day, I’ll email a professor in a heartbeat and [say], ‘I’m trying to get into your class, what do I need to do?’ I’m not afraid to approach professors, which I feel like is something that if I had been thrust into a 300 seat class as a freshman on the first day, I probably would not have gone about it the same.”

“I came from a background where I really wasn’t prepared [or] taught how to approach adults in a sense where I’m questioning them and I’m challenging and disagreeing with their opinion. So to be able to express myself 100% to my professor, it was very intimidating. I had to get used to it because I saw the benefit in talking to professors and letting them know how you feel...whether it’s how they conduct the course or whether they are leaving something out that is vital to your education.”

“I came in honestly kind of intimidated, because I didn’t think I was really prepared for college as other students that I was competing against, I came in intimidated like, ‘How am I going to succeed here?’ I may have had strong ethics but I don’t think I’m smart enough as these...I had those doubts in my mind floating around, but the support here has been really encouraging and those are the positive things that have allowed me to succeed compared to my standards...”

The third question addresses the relationship between integration and persistence.

This question is addressed through PLUS respondent statements that have touched on the topic of social integration and support. Social integration, more than anything else, according to the frequency of responses, has had an impact on PLUS respondents’ beliefs in their ability to persist.

“I think the only reason why I made it to this point where I am now is because I made really good friends starting at PLUS. We are like a family, and even if we don’t always keep in touch every day or every month or every semester, I can call every last one...That kind of made all the issues that did bother me about being here...because for me it was a culture shock, that in and of itself, I don’t want to say was negative, but just different...and just the type of high school that I came from...it did not prepare me for the rigorous academic load and just the type of social environment that’s here, but I made really good friends, so that kind of motivated me to want to stick around.”

“I also feel like whenever you would get into the other stuff and you feel like you’re out of place, you always had your friends to go back and talk to. Like I could call...all these PLUS members and I could talk to them about what I’m going through and [they’d say] ‘Look you’re going to make it’ and stuff like that, and that was the positive about the people that kept me strong at [the university].”

“So definitely knowing people made it easier to come to the college especially when you get here in August, things look a little bit different, there are more majority students on campus and it’s really good to have that network already established of friends and people who you know have some kind of common bond.”

Addressing the research questions has brought about a third level of PLUS focus group response analysis, which Creswell (1998) called the “textural description” of what was experienced and the “structural description” of how it was experienced. This analysis suggests a deeper level of themes within the context of the research questions, which included the concepts of engagement, academic integration, and social integration. Responses to the research questions drew connections to these themes in terms of what was experienced. However, to examine how these three notions were experienced, it is beneficial to discuss these responses within the entire context of the study along with the interpretations of the responses. This step is reserved for the final chapter along with conclusions and implications.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions

Introduction

Many pre-freshman summer bridge programs exist as part of America's colleges and universities' efforts to assist incoming college freshmen with a seamless transition from high school. Successful academic achievement, persistence toward graduation, and effective academic and social integration seem to be parallel goals of the programs. With these apparent goals, researchers must ask whether or not these summer bridge programs are worth the monetary investment that postsecondary institutions make in them, and whether or not they are achieving their goals. How these areas are measured, however, varies from institution to institution, and is driven by the design of the program and needs of the institution.

Summary of Findings

In this two-part post hoc and phenomenological study on the Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) summer bridge program, the methodology included an analysis of the differences in academic achievement and persistence rates between PLUS participants and non-PLUS students. Comparing the treatment and control groups involved answering these questions:

- 1) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student academic achievement after the first and second semesters of matriculation?
- 2) Was there a difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student persistence rates after the first and second semesters of matriculation?

After first year achievement and persistence data was collected in the form of GPAs and credits earned for both the PLUS treatment (N=71) and control (N=71) groups, mean figures were obtained and statistical tests showed that there was no significant difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student GPAs after the first semester. There was no statistical evidence that the mean GPA of the treatment PLUS group was greater than the mean GPA of the non-PLUS control group after the first semester. In this case the null hypothesis was retained. When the data were analyzed for the second semester, the statistical tests showed that there was a significant difference between PLUS participant and non-PLUS student GPAs after the second semester, and thus the null hypothesis was rejected. The mean GPA was higher for the non-PLUS students.

When the same statistical analyses were done with the credits earned data for the same two comparison samples, there was strong statistical evidence that the mean credit hours earned for the treatment (PLUS) group was greater than the mean credit hours earned for the control non-PLUS group after the first and second semesters. Therefore, the null hypotheses were rejected. This difference appeared to be attributable to the three semester hours earned by the PLUS students during the summer of their participation in PLUS.

In the phenomenological portion of the study, six focus groups were conducted, after which, three levels of analysis were done. The first level of analysis, horizontalization, included the listing of common and uncommon responses. The second level of analysis found clusters of meanings, from which themes were drawn. The third

level of analysis involved structural and textural descriptions, from which deeper themes were drawn and related back to the original research questions.

The second level of analysis began to reveal these initial themes:

- Predisposition to Involvement (Background Theme #1) – PLUS respondents both were involved in a wide array of activities as well as a wide frequency of activities. This phenomenon continued when they arrived to the university, although certain respondents indicated the necessity to prioritize or downsize their levels of college engagement.
- Preferred Major Selection (Background Theme #2) – The leading reason PLUS respondents selected their major was because of their enjoyment of the subject material.
- Friendship Networks (PLUS Theme #1) – PLUS respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the friendships they developed through the PLUS program was the leading factor in helping them to get through rough patches at the college. If PLUS respondents felt out of place or lost their focus, they were always able to fall back on the unconditional support of their PLUS peers.
- Positive Informal Relationships with Faculty and Staff (PLUS Theme #2) – Having a staff member who served as a role model, confidante, coach, mentor, and resource for PLUS respondents had a positive impact on their existence at the college. PLUS respondents found solace in the fact that the staff member was always available in times of personal crisis.
- Advantages of PLUS (PLUS Theme #3) – As a group, the PLUS respondents saw various benefits of the PLUS program, including acclimation to the

campus, learning prioritization skills, acquiring information about the campus prior to arrival of non-PLUS freshmen, learning study skills to apply in classrooms, and empowerment to develop relationships with professors.

There were two minor themes that emerged according to PLUS focus group responses as a result of the PLUS experience:

- PLUS vs. Non-PLUS Divide - PLUS respondents tended to view themselves as a separate subgroup of individuals from the general population of students.
- Aversion to Freshman Orientation - As PLUS respondents had become fully integrated and accustomed to the campus through the PLUS summer experience, they no longer felt the need to participate in fall university-wide orientation activities.

The third level of focus group response analysis yielded another level of themes within the context of the following research questions:

- a) What were PLUS student perceptions of the impact of participation in the PLUS program on integration patterns within the university?
- b) What were PLUS student perceptions of the relationship between integration and academic achievement?
- c) What were PLUS student perceptions of the relationship between integration and persistence?

The themes that emerged from this stage of analysis, which were related to PLUS respondent experiences within the general university culture and to their PLUS experiences, were:

- Engagement – PLUS respondent connections with faculty, staff, and peers through the PLUS program played a role in some of the activities in which they chose to engage. But in large part the PLUS respondents were already predisposed and in some cases conditioned toward getting involved and remaining active.
- Academic Integration – PLUS respondents viewed the necessity and their ability to contact, develop, and maintain one-on-one relationships with professors as one of the keys to achieving successfully in class.
- Social Integration – PLUS respondents perceived that the social networks that were developed through the PLUS program was instrumental in their ability to persist. Whenever PLUS respondents felt discouraged about crises in their lives, the social network provided comfort and allowed them to keep advancing at the college rather than dropping out.

Conclusions

There was no significant difference between the mean PLUS participant and mean non-PLUS student GPAs after the first semester, although there was a significant difference between the PLUS and non-PLUS mean GPAs after the second semester. The fact that there was no significant difference in GPAs after the first semester, regardless of participation in the PLUS program, may suggest that PLUS students were as academically competitive as non-PLUS students even before their PLUS experience. Conversely, the data also suggests that non-PLUS students were as competitive as PLUS participants even though PLUS participants had the benefit of the PLUS program and the

ability to take a class in isolation. Another argument for this outcome after the first semester may be that the PLUS group was equally subject to an adjustment period during the first semester, just as non-PLUS students were, even though they had participated in the PLUS program.

The second semester GPA analysis between the two groups showed a significant difference with the non-PLUS students earning the higher mean GPAs. A predictor of the second semester outcome could have been the SAT scores, even though actual SAT scores were not obtained. Although the treatment and control groups were matched by range of SAT score and not by actual SAT score, higher SAT scores of the non-PLUS students might have explained why non-PLUS students achieved significantly higher GPAs after the first semester. However, one could conclude that although the difference between the means of second semester GPAs was statistically significant, it was inconsequential. It was evident that the PLUS students also completed their freshman year with entirely acceptable passing GPAs like the non-PLUS students.

When the mean credits earned between PLUS and non-PLUS participants was analyzed, the results of the analysis showed a significant difference between the credits in favor of the treatment group after both the first and second semesters. A reasonable inference can be made that the difference in mean numbers of credits earned between PLUS and non-PLUS groups can be attributed to the three-credit course that the PLUS participants completed as part of the PLUS program requirements. Although this course did not provide an advantage for the PLUS student GPAs over the GPAs of the non-PLUS control group, it did provide PLUS participants with a head start and an advantage at staying ahead of the curve in terms of credits earned. There is also evidence from the

focus group data to suggest that the course was instrumental in promoting a level of academic integration. Respondents indicated that taking the required course provided them with tools, such as study skills, acclimation to the expectation of college course requirements, and the confidence to develop essential relationships with professors, that would help them to navigate the structure of a college course,. Because students were integrated academically, that is, actively engaged in their learning processes and increasingly more comfortable forming personal working relationships with their professors, they experienced success. They acquired skills that they could implement in future courses, and along with their experience of success, they felt they were more apt to persist and remain at the university.

I contend that the success of the program lies primarily in the qualities of the student experience that are known to correlate with achievement and persistence, which are involvement and integration. Bridge programs try to enhance the likelihood that at-risk students will persist to graduation. In order to succeed, bridge programs need to create conditions and experiences that are correlated with achievement and persistence. Those conditions and experiences have been found by Tinto (2003), Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), and Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Assoc. (2005), to include engagement (or involvement) and integration. The data from this study show that PLUS participants in the first two semesters do succeed equally well on measures of achievement as non-PLUS peers, and succeed just as well or better on measures of persistence. The data also provide evidence that PLUS students are involved and integrated.

PLUS focus group responses indicated that upon starting college, PLUS participants were integrated academically, socially, and in the extracurricular arena as a result of their PLUS experiences. Several focus group responses that included the following statements reinforced this sentiment:

“I think the only reason why I made it to this point where I am now is because I made really good friends starting at PLUS. We are like a family, and even if we don’t always keep in touch every day or every month or every semester, I can call every last one... That kind of made all the issues that did bother me about being here... because for me it was a culture shock, that in and of itself, I don’t want to say was negative, but just different.”

“I feel like whenever you would get into the other stuff and you feel like you’re out of place, you always had your friends to go back and talk to. Like I could call... all these PLUS members and I could talk to them about what I’m going through and [they’d say] ‘Look you’re going to make it’ and stuff like that, and that was the positive about the people that kept me strong at [this university].”

“As far as socially... just being able to join organizations and to know that I have people upon which I could depend at most anytime even if it was the smallest thing like, ‘Can you walk me to the store?’... For the most part I could call anyone from PLUS and say can you give me a ride somewhere... and it’s funny just looking back on some of the things we experienced and how we just pulled together even if we may have had some bad times in the past, we still pulled together to have one another’s back.”

“I think that those sessions did help me though... like the class that gave me that professor/student relationship first-hand... it helped me understand that. To this day, I’ll email a professor in a heartbeat and [say], ‘I’m trying to get into your class, what do I need to do?’ I’m not afraid to approach professors, which I feel like is something that if I had been thrust into a 300 seat class as a freshman on the first day, I probably would not have gone about it the same.”

“I came from a background where I really wasn’t prepared [or] taught how to approach adults in a sense where I’m questioning them and I’m challenging and disagreeing with their opinion. So to be able to express myself 100% to my professor, it was very intimidating. I had to get used to it because I saw the benefit in talking to professors and letting them know how you feel... whether it’s how they conduct the course or whether they are leaving something out that is vital to your education.”

“I was also able to meet the staff of the Office of Multicultural Affairs office which is also good. Knowing ___ helped me to basically be integrated more into

the community. ___ helped keep everybody abreast of what was going on in the community and that kind of thing, especially through the listserv...and knowing ___ is not like having a parent necessarily but like having an older sister or an aunt-type thing and you could depend on her when you needed something.

“NAACP, actually [PLUS Staff Member] got me involved in that to be honest. There was a vacancy and they needed some freshmen to come in and ___ pulled me in the office and...said ‘They’re looking for people to be involved in this organization.’ ___ talked about the history and introduced me to [the President] at the time and then my second semester freshmen year, I was there.”

“...Honor Council...I don’t think I would’ve done it if it hadn’t been for one of our counselors...[who] was our counselor for PLUS and he was actually a member...and I thought that was neat.”

These comments show that PLUS respondents were involved in a host of activities, that they were academically engaged with professors, and that they were engaged socially and personally with faculty as well as peers. Respondents felt they were a part of the university through their participation in such activities as student organizations, activities, and athletics, and also through their social and academic networks. This aligns with Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), who said that they found “...that student contact with faculty members outside the classroom appears consistently to promote student persistence...and degree completion” (p. 417), and Tinto (2003), who said, “the more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely are they to persist and graduate” (pp. 4-5). As stated in an earlier chapter, the higher the level of belonging that students feel toward their institution, experienced in such ways as comfort with faculty and familiarity with student affairs offices and personnel, the greater the possibility that the student will feel supported and thus persist at the institution.

Intense cultures of academic competitiveness, lack of familiarity with college level course expectations, adverse encounters with peers or faculty, homesickness or being away from home for the first time are conditions that could create what Fleming

(1988) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) called isolation, alienation, and defensive extracurricular involvement. Despite these conditions, which various PLUS respondents experienced, there were factors in PLUS that worked as effective support systems to strengthen respondents against these conditions. These support systems allowed PLUS respondents to persist and to find ways to achieve academically.

This is the role that PLUS friendship networks and the ability to develop relationships with faculty played in the lives of the PLUS respondents. Based on the comments of PLUS respondents, there is no doubt that PLUS was successful in helping to establish a network of support, whether through a peer friendship network, or through relationships with faculty and staff. PLUS focus group comments indicated clearly that the PLUS friendship support networks served as an alternate family that students could rely on in times of need. Respondents felt comforted knowing that the support was available. It made it easy to come to the campus upon their first semester of matriculation. In many cases, PLUS focus groups respondents were eager and excited about being on campus.

The availability of a staff member who served as an informal mentor, confidante, counselor, and, in some cases, something like an older sibling, was an invaluable resource for the PLUS students. It was an emotional and mental boost for PLUS respondents to have a staff member available to help them through hardships, provide advice, counsel against poor decision-making, and look out for them. Many respondents acknowledged that this presence added the adult personal touch and care that they needed to see them through their time at the university.

In addition, PLUS respondents felt an allegiance to the university after completing the program. They were more acclimated to the campus, more comfortable in classes, and were armed with skills and information. The skills and information they acquired enabled them to navigate through campus administrative processes, such as registration, and to determine what was needed to succeed in classes. PLUS respondents were able to get through difficult moments that can isolate students and cause them to feel that they must exist in a survival mode.

In reference to the research questions posed in this study, PLUS responses indicated that the relationships the students established through PLUS had some impact on their choices of activities, although the participants were highly motivated and inclined to be involved in a variety of activities. The academic integration PLUS students experienced with faculty had a strong perceived impact on their ability to succeed academically, and thus persist. Finally, social integration with peers and staff members had a strong impact on their desire to persist. Has PLUS, therefore, been able to achieve the goals that bridge programs have traditionally set? Based on the conclusions in this section, I would contend that PLUS has been successful in promoting academic achievement. I would contend as well that it has created opportunities for PLUS participants to be academically and socially integrated, which has translated to a strong desire in the PLUS participants to persist at the university. This has strong implications with regard to the components of the PLUS program that have been essential to its success.

Implications

Implications for this study are derived from the essential components that research has shown to be necessary ingredients for a successful bridge program. This study demonstrated that those essential components should include opportunities for academic integration, social integration, and involvement. First, PLUS student participation in a course-for-credit promoted academic integration, and there were strong implications for maintaining or including a component of a course-for-credit in pre-freshman summer transition programs. Transition program participants not only receive a significant incentive to get ahead in college credits earned, but there is anecdotal evidence from this study to suggest that participants gain a psychological advantage. For the first time, they realized that they have what it takes to succeed in a college level course due to the success they experienced. The course can provide transition students with an opportunity to gain insight on how to be successful in postsecondary-level courses through a clearer foundation of the expectations of college level work. Through the course, students learn to develop much needed relationships with professors, they become more at ease with asking questions and articulating their points of view, and they achieve higher in their classes academically. The success that transition students will experience will lead to their desire to persist.

A second implication of this study would be to consider the potential value of pairing faculty or administrative staff with students as informal mentors. This role for faculty and staff would go beyond the scope of the traditional responsibilities of professors or academic faculty advisors. Possible outcomes of this pairing could be the cultivation of informal relationships between students and staff outside of the classroom

that could include more just course selection advice, and ultimately, the cultivation of different avenues for academic and social integration. A different configuration of this idea might include joint student affairs and academic faculty advisor training. Having both student affairs and academic faculty to come together to review the focus group data, for example, could have strong implications toward developing and implementing a two-pronged approach for a combined and sustained academic and social integrative advisement model.

PLUS respondents clearly voiced a level of satisfaction and comfort with the informal mentoring relationship they enjoyed with one of the PLUS staff members. Respondents indicated that it was helpful for them to have someone at their disposal to speak to regarding personal issues, decisions, and advice as well as someone who was a resource and looked out for their overall well-being. This was a person who went above and beyond the scope of her responsibilities. Perhaps, a dual student affairs – academic mentor model could consistently fulfill the role that this person played in the lives of PLUS participants. In this model, administrative staff and academic faculty would be the person a student could go to in times of need. Combining the expertise of student affairs staff with faculty advisors who already have established meeting times for academic advisement could create the optimal opportunity for transition students to develop deeper relationships with a faculty and administrative staff mentor. Again, this has profound implications for addressing academic and social integration, which has a strong impact on student persistence and ultimately achievement, as research has shown and continues to show.

A third implication related to social integration is the maintenance of formal peer support systems or networks. It can reasonably be implied, based on PLUS participant responses, that the extent to which PLUS participants maintain social contacts with peers as they matriculate matters as much as knowing that the support is available.

Respondents also voiced the desire for more opportunities to interact with PLUS cohort peers as they follow the routines of their individual academic careers. Perhaps a way to enhance pre-freshman summer transition programs is to provide opportunities beyond the transition program and through the semesters to allow summer transition peers to continue to connect through a variety of planned activities. This ensures not only the existence of the network supports, but access to the network supports as well. The PLUS respondents repeatedly indicated that their peer supports helped them through the various personal challenges, obstacles, and periods of academic and social doubt, and it was the strength of the support that allowed them to persist.

The notion of formal peer support networks is a common theme that has surfaced from the analysis of the studies that were reviewed for this research project. In one of the studies reviewed, formal peer support systems were in place through a learning community model in which students lived together in designated housing, enrolled in certain courses together, and participated in a number of social activities through which student networks and bonds were formed. The pre-freshmen summer transition model, with its primary goal to acclimate students to the campus, does not lend itself totally to the learning community model. However, implementation of some or all of the learning community components such as common courses, common living arrangements, or perhaps periodic planned social activities could have strong implications for enhancing

social and academic integration and could be viable ways of maintaining formal peer support systems.

Last, an area of the PLUS program that I might point out as an area which may need improvement is the sentiment that the fall university orientation becomes futile to the PLUS participants. Having already received, through the PLUS experience, the pertinent information that is disseminated during freshman orientation activities, mandatory attendance of orientation has been judged by some PLUS participants as a redundant activity. Perhaps the organizers of orientation could use the new-found expertise of PLUS participants as a resource for new freshmen or facilitators of various orientation activities. This proactive opportunity for involvement along with other opportunities for PLUS participants to get involved in activities might help to further substantiate PLUS participant attendance at university freshman orientation activities and on a larger scale further integrate the PLUS participants into the fabric of the university.

Future Suggested Research

Research has shown that bridge programs have the potential to enhance achievement and persistence. This study confirms what the literature says, which is that when opportunities are provided for students to participate in academic and social integration, they achieve more. As transition students experience success, their desire to persist through graduation increases. However, the scope of this study was short-term, analyzing GPAs and credits earned within the first two semesters of matriculation only. Therefore, I would recommend for future studies that a study of this level of importance

be conducted longitudinally. For example, achievement data and persistence data could be measured over several years as opposed to just after the first and second semesters.

Additionally, I would recommend more comparative studies among different forms of bridge programs. For bridge programs that work, it would be worthwhile to assess the components of different programs that lend to their respective successes. Determining these components would serve to build upon the knowledge of what works with the support of data across several campuses. For example, since academic and social integration has been shown to be an effective way to help transition students succeed and persist, it would therefore be useful information to see how various programs implement opportunities for integration. Following the design of the current study, it would be useful to collect GPA data and credits earned across campuses. However, I would employ the phenomenological focus group design in order to extract common themes on a more widespread scale to possibly identify common components that would be included in a model for summer transition programs. This study made clear that it is the voice of the summer transition participants that sell the tangible and intangible benefits of pre-freshman summer transition bridge programs.

Another type of comparative study I would recommend is a study between two different populations. Because the PLUS program no longer identifies its summer transition participants as at-risk and is open to all accepted university students, no connections could be made about the program's impact on at-risk student success. In a future study, I would identify an at-risk sample and a non-at-risk sample to determine impacts of the program on general student success. With this proposed design, I would utilize the same pre-freshman transition program as the treatment for both comparison

groups, utilizing the phenomenological and quantitative methods as in the current study. The research has shown that the pre-freshman summer bridge programs are typically designed to address the needs of at-risk transitioning students who are classified as coming from low socioeconomic, minority, or first generation college backgrounds. However, a research design of this nature would address potential transition strategies that could work for all students including those who are identified as at-risk and those as not at-risk.

In closing, bridge programs are necessary and have been shown to be essential vehicles to provide a smooth transition from secondary to postsecondary levels of education. Bridge programs such as pre-freshmen summer transition programs have demonstrated that key components to student achievement should include student engagement in extracurricular activities as well as academic and social integration. This study, along with prior analyzed studies, has shown that there is a direct correlation between involvement and integration and student achievement and persistence. As postsecondary institutions continue to view pre-freshman summer transition programs as meeting a valuable need for the transitioning college freshman, it is important that assessment of these programs continue. Whether researchers are looking at the variables of achievement, persistence, or integration, strategies such as peer networks and faculty supports that have shown to enhance these variables should be replicated in student and academic affairs practice and studied closely so that students might benefit from institutions utilizing and maximizing these best and proven strategies.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

November 6, 2007

Dr. XXXXXXXXX
Dr. XXXXXXXXX
Office of Multicultural Affairs
State University

Re: Dissertation Data Requests

This is an official request to allow the researcher, Pascal Barreau, to secure the names and ID numbers of the 2004-2006 PLUS participants for research conducted through the William & Mary School of Education. The title of the study is, "The Effects of Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) on Student Achievement, Persistence, and Integration". The names of the PLUS participants will be used for the purposes of the study only, and will be kept CONFIDENTIAL. The names will be submitted by the researcher to [your institution's] Office of Institutional Research to acquire GPAs and credits earned data of those students. The GPA and credits earned data returned to the researcher, however, will not be attached to the names of the specific student for confidentiality purposes. The researcher will be unable to directly identify students and their corresponding GPAs or number of credits earned. Rather, the data will be produced as a general list of PLUS student GPAs and credits earned. At no other time will the list be given out to any other entity. When the study is complete, the PLUS student lists and GPA/credits earned data will be destroyed within a reasonable amount of time.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Pascal P. Barreau
W&M School of Education
Doctoral Candidate

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2007-10-22 AND EXPIRES ON 2008-10-22. If any issues arise, feel free to notify Dr. David Leslie, dissertation chair, at dwlesl@wm.edu. You may also notify Dr. Ward, chair of the EDIRC, at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC-L@wm.edu) and Dr. Deschenes, chair of the PHSC at 757-221-2778 (PHSC-L@wm.edu) if any issues arise during this study.

Appendix B

November 7, 2007

To: PLUS Participants

Re: Focus Group Requests

Dear PLUS Participant:

My name is Pascal Barreau and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education at the College of William and Mary in the Higher Education Department. I am looking for volunteers to participate in a study as a focus group member as part of my dissertation. The study is titled "*The Effects of Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) on Student Achievement, Persistence, & Integration*". You will be participating in a focus group with peers of your same classification [at your institution] (i.e. sophomore, junior, or senior class focus groups). I aim to conduct the focus groups on the following days for the respective PLUS cohorts:

- 1) *Pilot Focus Group: (Mixed Classification) – Monday, Nov. 26, –or- Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2007*
- 2) *PLUS 2006 (Class of 2010) – Wednesday, Nov. 28 –or- Tuesday, Dec. 4*
- 3) *PLUS 2005 (Class of 2009) – Thursday, Nov. 29 –or- Wednesday, Dec. 5*
- 4) *PLUS 2004 (Class of 2008) – Monday, Dec. 3 –or- Thursday, Dec. 6*

Please select either one(1) of the pilot focus group dates only –OR- one(1) of the dates listed next to your classification based on the convenience of your schedule. Please RSVP by no later than November 19th by calling me directly at (757)259-3701 or emailing me at (barreaup@wjcc.k12.va.us). You may also submit your name and contact information to the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Pizza and refreshments will be provided at the focus group meetings. All focus groups will be held in the xxxxx Center in the Activities Room (across the hall from the Office of Student Volunteer Services) on the days listed above at 6:00 P.M.

Please read the following statement and sign (can be signed when you attend focus group): The study titled "*The Effects of Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) on Student Achievement, Persistence, & Integration*" conducted by Pascal Barreau has been explained to me. I understand that I will be asked to participate in a focus group where I will be asked to respond to a number of questions. My participation in this study should take a total of about 30 minutes to 1 hour. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study. I know that I may refuse to answer any question asked and that I may discontinue participation at any time. I also understand that any gift received for participation will not be affected by my responses or by my exercising any of my rights. Potential risks resulting from my participation in this project have been described to me. I am aware that I may report dissatisfactions with any aspect of this experiment to the Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Michael Deschenes, 757-221-2778 or mrdesc@wm.edu. I am aware that I must be at least 18 years of age to

participate. My signature below signifies my voluntary participation in this project, and that I have received a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at 757-259-3701 or email me at barreaup@wjcc.k12.va.us. Thank you in advance for offering your time. I look forward to your participation in the study. If you would like to review the final report, please simply email me your request.

Participant Consent _____

Pascal P. Barreau
W&M School of Education
Doctoral Candidate

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2007-10-22 AND EXPIRES ON 2008-10-22.

Appendix C

November 8, 2007

Mr. XXXXXXXX
Director, Institutional Research
Office of Institutional Research (OIR)
XXXXXX University

Re: Dissertation Data Requests

This is an official request to allow the researcher, Pascal Barreau, to secure data at your convenience involving GPAs and credits earned for 2004-2006 PLUS participants for research conducted through the William & Mary School of Education. The title of the study is, "The Effects of Preparing for Life as a University Student (PLUS) on Student Achievement, Persistence, and Integration".

There are two questions I am trying to answer with data from OIR: whether there is a significant difference between PLUS participant vs. a comparable non-PLUS group's a)GPAs and b)number of credits earned after the first and second semesters of matriculation at [your institution]. Provided as additional attachments to this email are lists of the upper classmen (sophomore-senior) PLUS participants obtained from the Office of Multicultural Affairs along with corresponding ID numbers. I would like to secure from your office first semester and second semester cumulative (freshman year) GPAs of all students from the three lists as well as the number of credits earned after the 1st and second semesters. For comparative purposes, I would like to secure the same information for a closely matched sample of non-PLUS students, controlling for gender, domicile (in-state or out-of-state), athletic status (whether they are or are not athletes), race, SAT scores, high school GPA (within a close range), and financial aid status (whether they receive aid or not). I do NOT need separate lists by graduation year or to attach the names of those students to their own GPAs and credits earned. I simply will need for the requested semesters, lists of GPAs and credits earned for PLUS and non-PLUS students labeled as the PLUS lists and non-PLUS lists for confidentiality purposes.

This data will be used for the purposes of the study only, and will be kept CONFIDENTIAL and for the eyes of the researcher only. At no other time will the data be given out to any other entity. When the study is complete, the GPA and credits earned PLUS and non-PLUS data lists will be destroyed within a reasonable amount of time. If it is convenient for your office, you may email this data to me at barreaup@wjcc.k12.va.us or call me at (757)259-3701, and I will be happy to come to your office.

Thank you in advance for your assistance, and please feel free to contact me if you have any immediate questions regarding clarification of my requests.

Pascal P. Barreau

Pascal P. Barreau
W&M School of Education
Doctoral Candidate

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2007-10-22 AND EXPIRES ON 2008-10-22.

If any issues arise, feel free to notify Dr. David Leslie, dissertation chair, at

dwlesl@wm.edu. You may also notify Dr. Ward, chair of the EDIRC, at 757-221-2358

(EDIRC-L@wm.edu) and Dr. Deschenes, chair of the PHSC at 757-221-2778 ([\[L@wm.edu\]\(mailto:L@wm.edu\)\) if any issues arise during this study.](mailto:PHSC-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

- 1) Please take a moment to talk about your high school background experiences.
- 2) Talk about your current major and why you chose it? Talk about your current activities at the university.
- 3) What factors got you involved in your current activities?
- 4) Discuss on a general level any positive or negative experiences you have had at the university.
- 5) Let's talk about PLUS. Since you've talked about this on some specific levels, what impact has PLUS had on a general level? (What did you take away from PLUS)?
- 6) Tell me how you feel PLUS has impacted your overall experience, whether academically or socially?

Appendix E

Hello PLUS Focus Group Participants:

Again thank you for your participation in my study. I have completed the transcription of six separate focus group responses that you were a part of and will be included in the final write up of my dissertation. I am on schedule and looking to defend the study at or near the final week of March. As part of the process, I am required to give you an opportunity to read the transcript and offer any comments or corrections, but more importantly, to “certify” your responses. Using the tape recorder, I did my best to capture your responses verbatim. However, at times that was not always possible. In those cases, I tried to capture the essence of what was being said. Please take a moment to review your focus group’s transcript and simply respond by **February 22, 2008** with a return email with the following information:

Name

PLUS Year

The statement: I DO –or- DO NOT certify these responses.

Thanks for your additional assistance.

Sincerely,

Pascal Barreau

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VITA

Pascal P. Barreau

Birthdate: March 23, 1970

Birthplace: Brooklyn, New York

Education: 1999-2008 The College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia
Doctor of Education – Higher Education

1995-1997 Norfolk State University
Norfolk, Virginia
Master of Arts – Early Childhood Education

1988-1992 The University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia
Bachelor of Arts