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Investigating Student Perceptions of the Effectiveness of a First-Year Experience Online
Program on Student Retention

by

Jennifer P. Bowman-Wilson

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University

2020

Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Jennifer P. Bowman Wilson under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

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Jennifer P. Bowman Wilson

Name

May 31, 2019

Date

Abstract

Investigating Student Perceptions of the Effectiveness of a First-year Experience Online Program on Student Retention. Jennifer P. Bowman Wilson, 2020: Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: first-year experience, distance learning, retention, attrition

This applied dissertation is a mixed-methods study designed to collect student perspectives of an online First-Year Experience (FE) course and to determine the overall value of the FE course. The researcher sought to identify what is the value of the FE course to the students enrolled in this online course. In the study's survey, students will be asked a series of questions designed to determine the overall value of the FE course. For this study, the online FE course survey addressed the following theme areas: Course Content, Overall Satisfaction, Transfer Perceptions, and the participants are the new incoming students (first-year and transfer status) that were enrolled and have completed the online FE course. The researcher collected demographic data and analyzed Likert-like scale questions from survey responses. The survey contained open-ended questions inviting the students to express their "lived" experiences, having completed the online FE course based on perceived value. The transcribed open-ended questions were sorted into common themes that indicate the students' perceptions of their "lived" experiences while taking this online FE course. The research that has been undertaken for this study has highlighted how retention rates and first-year student perceptions are essential when implementing an FE course at a university and that further research would be beneficial. The researcher would recommend expanding this survey at multiple universities to diversify the findings of demographical and retention data, as well as the perceptions of first-year students in varied FE course programs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Understanding incoming students can be challenging for multiple stakeholders of a university. Faculty and advisors tend to interact the most with students and have perceptions of how newly enrolled students will perform. Paramore (2007) found that research indicated that many students enter college underprepared (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003). Faculty can sometimes assume newly enrolled students are academically disengaged, unmotivated, have a limited attention span, and have an expectation of instant gratification. Johnson (2001) discussed that American colleges had experienced an increased enrollment of academically underprepared students recently. However, many faculty members fail to understand the students' creativity, work ethic, family values, tolerance, openness, and technological skills. There has been a significant change among the incoming college students of today from the time the present faculty once were undergraduates. Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2003) found the development of a "sense of belonging" can help the administration evaluate the "effectiveness of retention programs" (p. 228).

Tinto, 2012 stated among the current generation of college students; there appears to be an extreme lack of an institution fit, which implied that numerous institutions are adapting their ways to improving academic achievement and students' satisfaction during the student's first year of college. For over three decades, hundreds of programs designed to address the first-year retention have been developed. These programs' primary purpose was to increase the rate of retention, thus meeting one of the institution's desired outcomes (Noel & Levitz, 2015).

Hotchkiss, Moore, and Potts (2006) focused on analyzing undergraduate students' experiences that correlate with student success. The researchers identified the following objectives from their studies that help in designing program initiatives that impact student success. First-year courses are intended to address the following five areas: to increase interaction among peers and faculty as well; to increase student involvement; to bridge the gap between co-curriculum and curriculum; to define academic expectations and engagement; and to assist students who exhibit less than proficient college success skills (Hotchkiss et al., 2006). Noel and Levitz (2015) research indicated that first-year enrollments and retention rates are crucial institutional factors, particularly for administrators who are responsible for maintaining, revising, and justifying such programs.

Despite the implementation of the above objectives designed to improve first-year students' academic skills, other factors can make the first-year experience difficult for both institutions and students. Such initiatives are often created for first-year students and are popular among students and then vanish due to budgetary issues or a shift of importance within the institution. Another unresolved issue is the first-year instruction nature within various disciplines. In increasing part-time and community student numbers, the first-year experience (FYE) incapacitated to what takes place in the standard classes. Clarke, Kift, and Nelson's (2010) study found it continues to be the case of the "piecemeal" approach rather than the "whole-of-institution" approach when FYE initiatives descriptors reported both "nationally and internationally." Institutions still struggle with cross-institutional integration, coordination, and coherence, in the shadow of concerning evidence suggesting the quality of the student experience varies more

within and institutions than between competing institutions (Kuh, 2007). Tinto (2006-2007) observed there are "substantial gains in student retention have been hard to come by, and we have not yet translated our research and theory into effective practice" (p. 2), which some find evident in regards to the efforts made to assure a consistent and coordinated institution-wide first-year experience for all students. As it is essential to retain students, the principal collegiate objective is to develop learning strategies in which students can learn both inside and outside of the classroom. Implementing a culture of institutional assessment is not an easy task.

Statement of the Problem

Many key stakeholders in education are disappointed and frustrated with the ever-escalating rates of student dropout during their first and second years (Jamelske, 2009). The transition from high school to a higher education institution is never an easy process. The newfound freedom and independence it offers is an exciting experience in the student's first year on campus. To ensure the students admitted to the university are retained and succeed in their academic programs, it is crucial that these students do well during their first-year (Corwin & Cintrón, 2011). A student's first-year study at any university is the most formative in various areas yet the most satisfactory when it comes to concepts, pedagogy, and curriculum (Cox, Elizabeth, Bobrowski, & Graham, 2005). The researchers noted the first-year is the most critical period in the student's university life. The general problem was over half of the dropouts happen during the student's first year of enrollment, often in the first semester. The specific problem was that University "Y" was losing students between the fall semester and spring semester of these students'

first year and addressed this concern by creating a required online first-year experience course to determine if this course would improve student retention.

Background and Justification. Whether they are called seminars, surveys, or extended orientations, first-year experience courses have a long history. Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) find that similar first-year experience courses developed throughout a range of schools, from well-established institutions to the small, liberal arts colleges. Interest in these first-year experience courses waned until a new, more diverse group of first-generation students arrived on college campuses in the 1970s. Faculty could no longer depend on a consistent level of background knowledge and congruous skill set among the changing student population. The idea of the “first-year course” model was reborn at the University of South Carolina, mainly under the direction of John N. Gardener (Gardner, 1997, p. 6). There are currently two dominant models of implementation: orientation and research. The majority of programs are geared more toward the former orientation model. However, many research institutions are moving more toward the later research model. Thompson, Orr, Thompson, and Grover (2007) noted: “the first-year experience is a philosophy of providing the need for an educational reform and a response to a set of structural problems within the overall organization of the collegiate first-year; which can impact the learning, success, satisfaction, and retention of first-year students” (Gardner, 1997, p. 5).

First-year experience courses are implemented either as orientation or as a research and survey model. Historically, as reported by Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015), University “Y” has a 23-year (1992-2015) evolving curriculum of an extended orientation model course, which is consistent with the following benchmarked

universities: Syracuse, The University of South Carolina, and Vanderbilt. Orientation courses offer information about the first-year of college, provide resources for choosing majors and careers, and include more in-depth introductions to university facilities and resources. Comparable universities, such as Duke, Emory, and The University of Southern California, practice the research model where students engage in intellectual inquiry, compose seminar papers, and participate in group projects and presentations under the close supervision of university faculty (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) reported the First-Year Experience (FEX) course began at University “Y” in 1992 in the College of Arts & Sciences as FEX 101, derived from Psychology 104. The Honors Program subsumed FEX in 1993. Initially, the course was grounded in developmental theory and was consistent with the University of South Carolina model, where student retention remained the focus. In 1997, the course objective, for the then-titled FEX, was that of “aiding students in their adjustment to college life” (p. 6). Throughout its evolution, FEX encountered questions concerning academic rigor, grade inflation, credit, duration, and tension related to integrating orientation content and academic content. In 2003, Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) reported the course name morphed from the First-Year Experience (FEX) to First-Year Experience (FE). The question of whether the FE course should remain an orientation model or become more of a research/academic model hybrid was under debate. The traditional face-to-face FE model was more consistent with an orientation design where specific information related to the area of study is presented to new students by either program advisors or administrators. Few of the university faculties were interested in teaching the course since FE does not

contribute to the requirements of maintaining a tenure track position. In 2010, FE was coded as FE 100, with subtitles for specific majors rather than one model fits all (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

The University “Y”’s traditional First-Year Experience (FE), recorded by Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015), had enrolled between 16% and 20 % of the first-year man class over the last decade when this course was voluntary and only marketed to new students during the registration period and throughout orientation. In 2012, University “Y” piloted an online FE course. Until the fall of 2012, the course description for the traditional course recorded by Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) as the following: The First-year Experience (FE 100) is a comprehensive course specifically designed to assist the first-year student in making a successful transition from high school to University “Y.” In the fall of 2012, the online FE piloted course description became: The University of “Y”’s First-Year Experience (FE 100) is a comprehensive course specifically designed to assist the incoming students (first-year or transfer) in making a successful transition to the university (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) explained that the new online FE course still followed the orientation model, but is strictly self-paced and only offered online. This online version of the course accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools but was no longer a credit-earning course. For the university to have a full enrollment of all new students in the course, the administration had to change the course credits (one credit to zero credits), so the course did not interfere with any financial assistance or scholarships. This change also assisted with the credit

requirements for graduation by each of the schools/colleges. Fall 2013 was the first academic year the FE course was offered to new students during the fall and spring semesters enabling 100% of the new students to be enrolled in the course (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

The original purpose of the traditional FE course at University “Y” was to ease the transition from high school to college for students considered at risk or seeking more help navigating college life, reported by Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015). With the new online FE course, the primary goal of the course shifted to provide the same information about university resources, in the same format to all new, incoming University “Y” students. The intention is that by providing an extended orientation period, where students have access to individuals knowledgeable about University “Y,” students will make this transition successfully (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

The issue of student dropout is a significant concern to all stakeholders in the education sector. Consequently, findings from this study will contribute to helping policymakers, parents, institutions of higher learning, and the state create effective programs that will promote higher retention rates. From this research, the researcher will identify ways to make the program more responsive to the needs of the students while providing opportunities for networking with peers and faculty. The researcher will identify areas in the program that are not popular with the students and tailor them in a way that meets students’ needs. The senior administration at University “Y” has selected the online FE course as an essential and mandatory requirement for all new students (first-year and transfer status).

Deficiencies in the Evidence. Several issues can cause lower retention rates in higher institutions of learning. Cox, Elizabeth, Bobrowski, and Graham (2005) found that public universities having open admission standards experience a higher attrition rate than private universities. Historically, some reasons identified for students at risk of dropping out include low Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, low high school averages, unfulfilled financial obligations, and low household income (Reason, 2003). DeBarard, Spielmans, and Julka (2004) observed that psychological and health issues such as smoking, drinking, poor coping strategies, were linked to reduced retention.

Upon entering a university, students come face-to-face with challenging academic work, and for those students in private universities who choose to pursue a specific program of studies, find the courses harder than they expected (Reason, 2003). Often this scenario of difficulty results from the fact that private universities, in contrast to public universities, do not follow the same open admission standards when admitting students. Because of the difference in the admissions standards of private universities, a student will choose a program he/she wishes to pursue without the critical prerequisite standards needed from his/her high school background. Consequently, upon sitting for his/her first exam, a student is likely to fail (Reason, 2003). During their first year in university, students are faced with challenges of academic and social integration. These challenges can identify the essential factors for student retention, as students who fail to get integrated into the system, are more likely to drop out (Cox, Elizabeth, Bobrowski, & Graham, 2005). Jamelske (2009) indicated that at-risk first-year students are usually disengaged in academics, lack motivation, have a low attention span, and most of them expect instant gratification.

Universities and colleges are exploring efficient and innovative strategies to connect with students and retain them. This exploration is of particular importance for students in their first year. Although students begin school to graduate, dropout levels are alarmingly high.

Jamelske (2009) discussed that the average retention rates in all American higher institutions of learning from the first year of study to the second year were 68.7%. He further observed retention rates were slightly higher in 4-year private institutions than public institutions. Following the allocation of more resources to the first-year experience, Jamelske (2009) also found by enrolling a student in a First-year Experience (FYE) course increases his or her chances of being retained after the first year by 6%. He also found enrolling a student in an FYE course led to an increase in the student's Grade Point Average (GPA) by 0.101 points.

The problem before the online FE course at the researcher's university was that incoming students were not mandated to take the first-year experience course. Students were not always informed about the FE course offered at the university. The choice of not having to take another class overrode the value of the FE course offered at University "Y." Before the online FE course, Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) disclosed only 20 to 25% of the incoming students enrolled and completed the FE course. Currently, 99% of all new students (first-year students and first semester transfers) are registered in the online FE course. There are still some advisors who did not enroll students in the online FE course or do not inform new students the online FE course is mandatory, which places those students at a disadvantage (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

The university has determined attendance within the online FE course has improved retention. The problem for the online FE course can be divided into two parts. Part one of the overall problem of the FE course is there are some administrators not directing all new students to the online FE course. These administrators are not supporting the online FE course's value to retention rates. The second part of the overall problem is getting the students to complete and submit the FE course survey. Survey feedback is necessary to provide student insight on how to improve the current online FE course format, based on the perceptions of students who have completed the current online FE course.

Audience. The students at University "Y" who are enrolled in the online FE course are affected. The students who complete the online FE course are not only affected by the experience but are most likely going to benefit from the experience. University "Y" will benefit from the enrolled students who complete the course persist to graduation. University "Y" will be affected and will benefit if the online FE course shows how it affects retention rates. Other universities can also benefit from this study if they are benchmarking the retention rate of students related to online FE courses.

Definition of Terms

Attrition. The term in the study refers to attrition as the decrease of a school's student population as a result of transfers or dropouts (Education.com 2013). Attrition is the diminution in numbers of students resulting from lower student retention (Hagedorn, 2005). Attrition is "a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during a person's experiences in those

systems...continually modifies goals and institutional commitments that lead to persistence and to drop out” (Tinto 1975, p. 94).

Learning Community. The term in the study refers to two or more academic courses that are cross-sectional to the campus curriculum for purposes of achieving high levels of positive interaction between students, as well as other outcomes. Learning communities can be defined as a group of individuals who share universal emotions and values and are actively engaged in learning together and by co-habitation (Goodyear, De Laat, & Lally 2006). These types of communities have become the template for a cohort-based, interdisciplinary approach to higher education, based on an advanced kind of educational or pedagogical design (Goodyear et al., 2006).

Linking Curriculum. The term in the study refers to the concept of all students’ class activities should be linked. These in and out of class activities help create synergies that promote the learning of the student. Strategies such as teach communities, first-year seminars, and “living-learning” residential hall programs have been proven successful in achieving the coherence needed. Learning communities have curriculum models that link courses to reinforce curricular connections, maximize collaboration opportunities with faculty, and provide interpersonal support. Learning communities now appear throughout the curriculum and are created to build communities of learners, and provide infrastructure to promote interdisciplinary study and integration (Huggett, Smith, & Conrad, 2013).

Retention. The term in the study refers to the student’s ability to remain in the university throughout the years of study. Retention defines whether a student leaves

college on terms considered successful (Etorpy.com, 2013). Retention is the percentage of first-year undergraduate students who continue at that college the next year (Fafsa.ed.gov, 2016).

Seminar. The term in the study refers to a small group of university students who meet under the guidance of a member of their faculty and are involved in discussions and sharing of information. A seminar can be defined as a small group of students that are engaged in original research under a faculty member, which meets regularly with the group of students to exchange information and hold discussions (Dictionary.com 2013). Small groups of students studying the same course may participate in a seminar that is designed for students to talk about topics in the course reading or lectures in detail, so then students must take an active part in the course discussion (*Brightknowledge.org, 2016*).

Student Engagement. This term in the study refers to the main focus of the first-year program initiative, which is to ensure activities during class time and outside of class time will increase engagement for students on campus — this aids in their involvement in programs and activities sanctioned or organized by the learning institution. However, there exist many challenges in achieving this objective despite their positive outcomes. For instance, the majority of students are taking their courses online, while other students commute daily. For online or commuter students, it can be challenging to understand the actual meaning of involvement. As such, that faculty who facilitate first-year courses have incorporated involvement requirements in the course syllabus to boost student interaction. The phrase “student engagement” has referred to how involved or interested

students appear to be in their learning, as well as how students connect to their classes, their institutions, and each other (Flick & Axelson, 2011).

Student-Faculty Interaction. This term in the study refers to the social and academic interaction between faculty and students. Student-Faculty Interaction refers to direct contact (formal or informal) between students and faculty inside and outside of classrooms, participating in both academic and non-academic activities (Wang, BrckaLorenz, & Chiang 2015). The more interaction students have with their faculty, and they are more likely to learn efficiently and persist toward academic goals. Additionally, the personal interaction with faculty members strengthens students' connections to the college and helps students focus on their academic success (The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2013). Students working with a faculty member on a project or participating in a committee with a faculty member allows students to witness how faculty identify and solve practical problems. These interactions with students allow faculty members the opportunity to become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning (The Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2013).

Student-Student Interaction. This term refers to colleges, universities, and learning communities, a primary curriculum organization that has significantly changed and resulted in improved student-student interaction. The student-to-student interaction is defined as the communication, exchange, and support among students about the course content, information, documents, and assignments (Kolloff, 2011). Successful cooperative learning tasks are intellectually demanding, creative, open-ended, and involve higher-order thinking tasks (Parker & Brown, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed study was to describe student perspectives and results of the online First-Year Experience (FE) course at University “Y” to determine the value of the course. The university administration wants to determine if successful completion of the online FE course affects students’ retention rates from the fall semester to the spring semester. Students who have completed the online FE course will be surveyed to determine the value of the online FE course from their perspective. The researcher also seeks to identify what is the value of this course to the student population at University “Y” while addressing the challenges they face during their first year in the university community. In the survey, the students will be asked a series of questions designed to determine how the online FE course could be improved. The findings generated from the study will be used to make course curriculum changes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A search of the literature on first-year experience courses, seminars, and classes was conducted. Research on the impact of first-year experience course models and learning communities on student retention and grade point average was reviewed and considered a piece of necessary background information for future programming decisions. Additionally, other areas researched to determine the effectiveness of the online FE course included distance learning, faculty perceptions, and student perceptions. A review of specific theoretical models was researched for further application to the current online FE course being evaluated by this study.

History of First-Year Experience Courses

First-year experience courses, whether they are called seminars, surveys, or extended orientations, have a long history. Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) find through the years, similar first-year experience courses developed throughout a range of schools, from well-established institutions to the small, liberal arts colleges. Interest in these first-year experience courses waned until a new, more diverse group of first-generation students arrived on college campuses in the 1970s. Faculty could no longer depend on a consistent level of background knowledge and congruous skill set among the changing student population. The idea of the “first-year course” model was reborn at the University of South Carolina, mainly under the direction of John N. Gardener (Gardner, 1997, p. 6). There are currently two dominant models of implementation: orientation and research. There are currently two dominant models of implementation: orientation and research. The majority of programs are geared more toward the former orientation

model. However, many research institutions are moving more toward the later research model.

First-year experience courses referred to as seminars, extended orientation, surveys, and experiences date back to 1882 at Lee College in Kentucky (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). According to Gardner (1986), Boston University and Iowa State were two of the earliest universities that initiated first-year orientation. Amherst College followed when a 1911 Carnegie Foundation mandate required the creation of a first-year seminar course for its 1913 first-year. Brown followed in 1915 (Gardner, 1986). By 1928, more than 100 institutions offered courses tailored to the needs of the first-year class (Fitts & Swift, 1928). By the late 1960s, the first-year courses began to disappear (Drake, 1966).

First-year courses were often designed by many intuitions to disseminate information. These types of courses first occurred in the 1970s when non-traditional, first-generation, minority students, arrived on many university campuses. These historical first-year course models led to a re-birth of the University 101 course (Gardner, 1986). John Gardner designed a course model for the University of South Carolina (USC) for the purpose of increasing student retention. The leader in the resurgence of the first-year experiences course concept is the University of South Carolina (USC). The USC first-year course model that facilitates instruction for the successful transition from high school to college. Many universities have emulated the first-year experience design as a way of easing the transition to university-level work. Based on new research, first-year success, as measured by student retention and GPA, is correlated to a positive first-year experience during the first year of college (Mendel & Evans, 2003).

The literature on the orientation model and the research/academic model suggested that first-year students who participated in a first-year course were more likely to return as well as have more success in the college experience and will graduate with higher grade point averages in comparison to the first-year students that did not participate in an orientation course. Students who participated in the first-year course tended to make better connections with their peers and the university community. Curley (2004) noted the studies represented by Astin (1964 and forward) and Tinto, whose research from 1975 to the present investigated such pedagogical issues as increasing retention through anticipating and meeting students' social and academic needs.

The faculty has more interactions, in and outside of the classroom environment, with students participating in the first-year course. Commander's (2009) study findings indicated students associated stronger student-professor connections, collaboration, engagement with the university or surrounding community, and lasting friendships through the first-year experience within a learning community program. Ideally, these students would utilize more campus resources and services available at their university. There was a higher involvement rate from the students enrolled in a first-year course participating in student activity programming. Overall satisfaction was also higher for the university and faculty from the students who enrolled in a first-year course. In conjunction with improving academic performance, Commander (2009) found students experience a lower risk of course withdrawal, increased cognitive skills and abilities, and higher overall satisfaction with college due to participating in the first-year experience within a learning community program.

The first-year course, as referenced by Tobolosky, Mamrick, and Cox (2005), captured the attention of these students and cultivated the student's desire to attend a university, participate in the campus community, and become engaged in their college learning experiences. First-year courses can heighten the college experience, as well as increase retention and graduation rates. Nationally, the degree to which these programs established goals varies, as does the duration, placement, credit, and entry requirements of the first-year programs (Tobolosky et al., 2005). Gardner suggested there are two models, each on different ends of the continuum: The "Orientation" and "Research" based models of first-year experience (1986). Since the research is unclear as to which model influences student retention and GPA to the most significant degree, many institutions support the model, the best serves their representative student population. The underlying philosophy of these two program types is the same: To ensure first-year students have the skills and knowledge base to continue their education and experience success. Tinto (2002) asserted that students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide good advising experiences while supporting the academic, social, and personal needs of the students.

Studies have shown the importance of a student's initial college experience as it affects success and retention (Astin, 1999) a student's experience during the first-year and particularly the first six weeks is critical for persistence to graduation (Gardner, 1986; Levitz & Noel, 1989). Students seem to solidify their relationship with their universities if they feel they are valued members of the institution. The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff between students is an independent predictor of student persistence.

Two basic formats have emerged for first-year experience courses across American universities. First, there are academic-based seminars, which focus on a faculty member's

particular area of scholarly interest or an interdisciplinary theme. The faculty tends to run the programs and focus on intellectual growth and development to expand student thinking based on the exploration of their interests, and most have a formal writing requirement.

Second, there are orientation-based seminars. These are considered introduction seminars within a department or professional school that introduce students to the expectations of an academic major or career. These orientation based seminars tend to be more activity and service curriculum centered. Orientation based seminars typically are facilitated by advisors, administrators, or staff members. Orientation based seminars focus more on the acclimation to college life. Orientation based seminars introduce the information the instructor deems relevant. The instructors will lean towards introducing necessary study skills and provide information on support services within the university. There may be a writing component for these seminars. The writing component requirements will most likely be very informal and are usually reflective.

Theoretical Frameworks

Walker (2008) described student development as both a theory base and philosophy about the purposes of higher education. It is a directional movement toward greater complexity and competence. Student development models should stimulate and support students as they progress through their unique developmental process, and the more the development can be individualized, the better. The following models assist with creating a foundation for the elaboration of a useful first-year experience course.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow (1943) introduced the idea that there are at least five sets of goals, referred to as basic needs in the following themes of

physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Also, Maslow (1943) described that individuals are motivated by “the desire to achieve the various conditions upon which these basic needs rest and by intellectual desires” (p. 396). Huitt (2007) indicated that Abraham Maslow attempted to synthesize a large body of research related to human motivation. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, as reported in EdPsyc Interactive (2015), discussed how researchers would focus separately on basic needs as biology, achievement, or power to explain what directs or sustains human behavior. EdPsyc Interactive (2015) continued to describe how Maslow discussed the hierarchy of human needs broken down into two themes: deficiency needs and growth needs. The deficiency to be explained how each lower need must be met before moving to the next higher level. Once each of these human needs is satisfied, and a deficiency is detected in the future, the individual will act to remove the gap (EdPsyc Interactive, 2015).

Waitley (2010) stated that Maslow’s model assumes we must meet our basic needs before we can turn our attention to the more complex ones. Humans seek to fulfill higher, more complex psychological needs, such as the need for esteem, only after an individual’s basic survival needs are satisfied. Maslow (1943) found primary goals are related to each other, “arranged in a hierarchy of prepotency with the most proponent goal maintaining consciousness and will organize the recruitment of the various capacities of the organism, while the fewer proponent needs are minimized, even forgotten or denied”(Maslow, 1943, p. 395). However, when a need is satisfied, the next higher need emerges, to dominate the conscious, which then is the center of organization of behavior. Still, such gratified needs are not powerful motivators.

McLeod (2014) noted that Maslow wanted to understand what motivates people. Maslow believed that people possess a set of motivation systems unrelated to rewards or unconscious desires. Applications of this theory in an academic setting can be evident to an instructor with the understanding that a student's cognitive needs, once met, fulfill their basic physiological needs. For example, a tired and hungry student will find it difficult to focus on learning. Students who feel safe (emotionally and physically) as well as accepted within the classroom will progress and reach their full potential (McLeod, 2014).

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. Erikson (1968) presented human growth from the conflicts, inner and outer, vital to personality, and can reemerge from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, good judgment, and an increase in the capacity “to do well” (p. 91-92). McLeod (2013) described this as follows: the ego developed, according to Erikson, as it successfully resolved distinctly social crises. These involve establishing a sense of trust in others, developing a sense of identity in society, and helping the next generation prepare for the future. Erikson was influenced by an extended upon Freudian thoughts, which focused on the adaptive and creative characteristics of the ego and expanded the notion of the stages of personality development to include the entire lifespan.

Cherry (2015) explained the Ego identity as a keen sense of self-developed through social interaction. According to Cherry (2015), Erikson explained that our ego identity is constantly changing due to new experiences and information acquired through daily interactions with others. At each new stage of development, humans face a new

challenge that can either help further develop or hinder the development of identity (Cherry, 2015). Erikson (1959) believed that the individual could not be understood apart from his or her social context. “Intricately woven, individual and society dynamically relates in continual change” (Erikson 1959, p. 114). McLeod (2013) stated Erikson proposed a lifespan model of development, through the five stages up to the age of 18-years old, as well as the three additional stages beyond, well into adulthood. Erikson suggested there was still plenty of room for continued growth and development throughout one’s life. Erikson emphasized on the adolescent period, feeling it was a crucial stage in developing a person’s identity.

Student Integration Model. Tinto’s (1975) student integration model and the Student Departure Model asserted the student’s pre-existing, individual attributes and commitments, are continuously modified once in college, based on interactions with members of the institution’s educational and social systems. Tinto additionally stated that with all other factors staying constant, the stronger the level of the student’s social and academic integration, the student’s institutional and graduation commitment (Tinto, 1993).

Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) indicated that Tinto’s student integration model had morphed over the 35 years from when the model was initially introduced. The more recent versions Tino’s model have included variables, as promoting motivation such as goal commitment. Over the last decade, multiple fields of study have applied motivational theories into practice through theoretical developments, and by exploring undergraduate retention.

Chickering Student Development Theory. Chickering (1969) emphasized developing interpersonal competence and accepting interdependence as an essential reality of living. Chickering's theory discusses how students progress through seven developmental vectors. "Referenced as the vectors of development because each seems to have direction expressed by a spiral other than by a straight line" (Chickering, p. 8).

Troup (2011) stated that students may be making significant progress on one vector but significantly lacking in another. Taking all seven vectors into consideration presents a snapshot to the advisor on the student's current state of being. Most of the vectors will require in-depth conversations to build trust between the advisor and the student, and most individuals working with students should not rush into a developmental assessment after only one meeting with the student.

Student Involvement Model. Astin (1984) developed the student involvement model indicated retention directly correlates to student involvement with the institution. Astin's model described participation as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin 1984, p. 297). Astin (1984) describes three essential forms of involvement; in academics, with faculty, and with peers. Further, those factors contributing to student's departure from college suggested a lack of participation. Student involvement refers to "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297).

The research findings suggested to Astin that factors contributing to student's persistence indicated their involvement in college. Further, those factors contributing to a student's departure from college suggested a lack of participation. "Student involvement

refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Astin (1984) intended for involvement to be behavioral in meaning and stated: “it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, and how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement” (Astin, 1984, p. 298).

Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) stated that Astin found that almost all forms of student-to-student interaction and academic involvement lead to positive outcomes. While Astin did not focus explicitly on the relationship between participation and satisfaction, his findings on the benefits of involvement indicated that it is linked to positive student outcomes, thus promoting further investigation regarding the potential relationship between participation and satisfaction.

Perry Scheme of Intellectual Development. According to The Perry Network (2015), this scheme reflects the intertwining of cognitive and affective perspectives at the center of a college education. Perry’s work underscores the notion of the learning that most faculty members want to see students reach a direct result of the experiences with courses that involve qualitative changes in the way students approach their learning and subject concentrations. The nine distinct stages, as Perry calls “positions.” As in positions from which to view the world, were discerned in the student’s current paths, although two, the first and the last, possibly are extensions of the empirical work, constructed for the sake of elegance and completeness.

The Perry Network (2015) elaborated by stating, “within the original conceptualization of the scheme, positions one through five describe the primarily intellectual portion: systematic, structural change toward increasing differentiation and

complexity” (p. 10). In positions six through nine, the focus of the journey now shifts to the ethical concerns referenced to as the issues of identity and the commitments in a relativistic world. (The Perry Network, 2015).

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Models of Human Development. Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) described Bronfenbrenner’s theory of human development as in a continual state of development until Bronfenbrenner died in 2005. The single most significant difference from his early writings was the next concern with the processes of human development.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) Ecological Model is composed of five socially organized subsystems that help support and guide human growth. The subsystems ranged from the microsystem, which refers to the relationship between a developing person and the immediate environment, to the macro system, such as the economy, customs, and bodies of knowledge. In the 1980’s Bronfenbrenner, Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) referred to “process” that might explain the connection between some aspect of the context (culture or social class) or some aspect of the individual (gender) and an outcome of interest. During the 1990s, processes defined as critical factors in human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1995, 1999; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) found that Bronfenbrenner reminded us that environments must be reviewed carefully and in tandem with individuals. Because of the interactive nature of the student/campus relationship, studies of student experience will not be complete if they examine merely one side of this partnership, such as student involvement. Preferably, an understanding of student experience must also include an

examination of environmental factors, such as perceptions of the quality of interpersonal interactions and other issues of campus climate. Bronfenbrenner's suggestion to focus on the interaction between students and their campus environments can bury the analyses of student/campus fit. Not only must students take active steps to become involved in their campuses, but campus communities need to embrace students in their diversity, particularity, and uniqueness.

Table 1 provides a summary of the seven theories discussed. As well, it provides an overview of each theory and the number of themes each theory holds. The theories explained tie into the different factors related to this study's online FE course.

Table 1

Theoretical Frameworks Comparison

Theory	Number of Themes	Summary
Maslow Hierarchy of Needs	Five basic needs	Individuals meet basic needs before attending to more complex needs (Waitley, 2010).
Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development	Eight stages	Each new stage of development, individuals, face a new challenge that can help further develop or hinder the development of identity (Cherry, 2015).
Student Integration Model	2 degrees of integration	The student's pre-existing, individual attributes and commitments, are continuously modified once in college, based on interactions with members of the institution's academic and social systems...with all other factors staying constant, the stronger level of the student's social and academic integration, the stronger the student's institutional and graduation commitment (Tinto, 1993).
Chickering Student Development Theory	Seven vectors	Students progress through seven developmental vectors because each seems to have direction expressed by a spiral other than by a straight line" (Chickering, 1969, p. 8).
Student Involvement Model	Five postulates	Retention correlates to student involvement with the institution, and involvement described as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin 1984, p. 297).
Perry Scheme of Intellectual Development	Nine stages, four categories	Positions one through five are of the intellectual portion. Positions six through nine are of ethical concerns. The most significant refinements in the evolution of the model are the sequence of nine positions of the scheme outlined into the following four categories: Dualism, Multiplicity, Contextual Relativism, and Commitment within Relativism (Knefelkamp, 1974; Knefelkamp & Slepitz, 1978; Moore, 1991, 1994).
Bronfenbrenner Ecological Models of Human Development	Five systems	Five socially organized subsystems that help support and guide human growth. The five systems are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Retention and Attrition

“Education, not retention, is the primary principle of effective retention” (Tinto, 1990, p. 38), and the primary function of the university is the education of its students. Retention is defined as completion of the first year of college, followed by subsequent re-enrollment in the second year (ACT, 2004). The first-to-second year rate is significant regarding the institution’s retention effort because the highest number of students who eventually leave do so before the second year (Tinto, 1987). Levitz, Noel, and Richter (1999) found that getting students started right on the path to graduation begins with anticipating and meeting the students’ transition needs as well as the students’ adjustment needs when they enter the institution. First-year students need a prevention plan. Institutions need to look as possible strategies that reach out to new first-year students before the new students experience feelings of failure, disappointment, and confusion during their first year (Levitz et al., 1999).

Barefoot (2004) stated there had been some programs (First-year seminars, learning communities, and supplemental instruction) implemented to improve retention, but retention rates remain disappointingly static. Hendel (2007) determined that students who enrolled in first-year seminars have experienced a greater sense of community during their first-year, one of the objectives for offering first-year seminars at the study institution. Students in first-year seminars were more likely to have participated in certain campus activities, such as attending special lectures, as well as to have taken courses with specific characteristics (i.e., international focus, online courses). Purdie and Rosser (2011) found the experiences that most powerfully influenced the first-year retention were: first-semester academic performance, interaction with faculty and peers, original

major declared, financial aid, time commitments, satisfaction, campus climate, first-year experience courses, and living-learning communities.

Some students choose to leave an institution if they did not have positive interactions with faculty and peers. Connections to people within the university will make a student feel connected to the institution. Some students will struggle academically or financially. These struggles can attribute to attrition. Students who participated in first-year courses or lived in learning communities have a higher rate of involvement in campus activities and programming offered, tend to have higher grade point averages, and take more advantage of campus resources. The students who feel more acclimated to the institution will find a way to stay and graduate. Lee Noel (1978) found through his college consulting experiences it had become apparent the importance of a “staying” environment relates to the faculty, as well as, students “make judgments about their academic experiences based on the quality of faculty interaction and involvement both inside and outside the classroom” (pp. 96-97).

The most significant student attrition rate happens during the first-year year at a university or a college (Noel, Levitz, Saluri, & Assoc., 1985). With increases in students, universities have explored methods to foster strong faculty relationships with students (Tinto, 1990, 1993). Upper-level students became role models, and students took on responsibility for their peers. All of these factors contributed to the formation of thriving learning communities, and the various theories posit that if students make connections with a focused faculty grouping, then they are more likely to parley their connection to a sense of belonging to the institution as a whole. Teamwork and other opportunities for

faculty and student interaction both within and without the classroom permeate these models.

As the issue of student retention first appeared in higher educational radar, student attrition typically viewed through the lens of psychology. Student retention rates illustrate the reflection of individual attributes, skills, and motivations. Students who dropped out or who did not remain enrolled were perceived not to be academically ready, less motivated than their successful peers, and did not value the benefits of college graduation. The basic concept was that student failed, not the institutions. Levitz et al. (1999) indicated the success of an institution and its students are the same. Institutions, who commit to this credo seriously, the institution, as well as every individual in it, will assist with radical and permanent change.

As the broader view of the relationship between society and individuals changed, student retention studies became ascendant (Tinto 1975, 1987). The notion that institutions somehow failed students replaced the concept that students had failed institutions (Tinto, 2006). This shift forced the idea of integration and patterned interaction, which influenced students during their transition year and led them to decide to remain or to leave. Studies revealed that not only does student involvement matter, but it matters most during the time that students begin college; the first few weeks and days are crucial to retention.

In the past, when administrators addressed new students, they stressed that college-level work was different from the prior schooling students had encountered. These administrators insisted that focus and perseverance were required and that not everyone had what it took to be successful in college. There was a sense of elitism

among the highly educated (Bonfiglio, 2006). However, after World War II, this elitist nature of higher education was transformed by the demographic and social changes occurring in the United States. Moreover, higher education became more accessible and a vital component of the “American Dream” (Bonfiglio, 2006). As a result, mass enrollments in institutions of higher learning and retention became a top priority. In addition to a focus on retention, colleges and universities became interested in the process of making the transition to college and began creating “first-year experience” programs (Bonfiglio, 2006). These programs aimed at helping students transition into college and changed the way that institutions built relationships with their new students. The first-year experience movement began in the late 1970s, and the first-year seminar launched in 1972 at the University of South Carolina (Hunter, 2007).

During the 1990s, technological advances helped with the growth of the first-year experience movement. The first-year seminar experiences allowed student affairs professionals to interact with students in a classroom setting while also helping them understand the basics of college life, including time management, getting involved, study skills, and orienting students to their new educational setting (Hunter, 2007).

According to Rausch and Hamilton (2006), of the 2.2 million students enrolled at U.S. universities, between 25-30% did not return to their institution for the second year of college (Brinkworth, 2009). Brinkworth (2009) found student responses to a survey on their transition to college indicated that a successful transition was not solely based on academic ability, but also on the capacity to make adjustments to a learning environment which required more autonomy and responsibility than previously experienced. Brinkworth (2009) found the researchers suggested implementing transition programs at

institutions to meet the needs of first-year students, educate students on the realities of university life, and facilitate the transition from secondary to tertiary education. In particular, the researchers recommended courses that would identify and address current social, cultural, and academic transition issues and one that would be customizable and deliverable to non-subject specific academic cohorts (Brinkworth, 2009).

The reasons the best students sometimes leave their institutions may be due to boredom, lack of academic challenge, poor ‘institutional fit’ (Tinto, 1990), failure to connect to campus social systems, financial problems, and general dissatisfaction (Barefoot, 2004). By implementing programs such as first-year seminars, learning communities, and supplemental instruction helped to address the needs of students and improve retention (Barefoot, 2004). Currently, over 90% of American colleges and universities offer some form of the first-year seminar, with the common goal being to help students in their social and academic integration, thereby improving student retention (Barefoot, 2004). First-year seminars should be small in size (15-20 students) and characterized by high levels of interaction to be considered effective.

The “first-year experience” (FYE) in higher education can share research-based objectives, which can include peer interaction, faculty-to-student interaction, and increasing campus involvement, which links the in-classroom curriculum to involvement. According to a study conducted by Jamelske (2007) in which researchers examined the connection between participating in a first-year seminar and student grade point average, although there was no positive FYE effect on retention, the average FYE students earned higher GPAs than non-FYE students.

Results from the Student Experiences Survey showed participation in a first-year seminar affected specific dimensions of satisfaction of first-year students. Still, they did not influence the overall satisfaction or retention in their second-year (Hendel, 2007). However, students who enrolled in first-year seminars experienced a greater sense of community during their first-year and were more likely to have participated in certain campus activities and taken courses with specific characteristics (Hendel, 2007). Additionally, Schrader (2008) provided a student evaluation of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors (KAB), showing first-year experience programs are capable of increasing knowledge and that these programs impacted attitudes associated with academic and life skills. The researchers also mentioned the first-year experience could help with study skills, time management skills, institutional awareness, and appropriate interpersonal behavior (Schrader, 2008).

One transitional challenge for first-year students is related to managing their time and developing effective study habits. The Readiness and Expectations Questionnaire (REQ) measures expectations and readiness in a range of fields derived from research on the first-year experience (Van Der Meer, 2010). Results of a study conducted by Van Der Meer (2010) revealed students had realistic expectations about the time to spend on their study and also felt ready for more independent study before they arrived at their university. Nevertheless, the reality at their institution was much different for them. These students seemed to struggle with time management and had a lack of understanding of how to organize their study. Teaching and other support staff played an active role in helping students make sense of their expectations related to time management and self-study (Van Der Meer, 2010). Moreover, virtual learning

environments, such as Blackboard, offered great opportunities to support students in their journey in the first year at university.

Studies conducted in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s asserted that dropout rates for participants in a formal first-year seminar program are significantly lower than non-participants. Involvement in such seminars results in increased knowledge about campus services and activities. These studies also suggested a link between participation in a first-year seminar and higher final grade point averages. Students enrolled in a first-year seminar course earn higher grade point averages than do non-participants. Also, faculty reported that grades earned in a required first-year seminar course were better predictors of academic achievement and persistence than high school rank and SAT scores.

Global Perspective on Retention and Attrition

Retention and attrition are a global concern in higher education. Institutions globally have to review their first-year courses, general academic support programs, and student resources. These are key factors that keep students on the path to graduation or to leave the university they are attending. Yorke and Longden's (2004) book entitled, *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education*, discussed retention rates and graduation rates are necessary measures of the performance of institutions of higher education. Understanding the causes of student non-completion is vital for an institution seeking to increase student success. The early chapters of this book discussed retention and student success is discussed from a public policy perspective. The later chapters concentrated on theory and research evidence on how these can inform institutional practices designed to enhance retention and success. A valuable within higher education institutions responsible for student success. Yorke and Longden's (2004) book entitled,

Retention and Student Success in Higher Education, is a valuable resource for administrators within higher education institutions responsible for student success.

Butrymowicz (2014, May 7) stated that the Obama Administration has called for the U.S. to lead in global college graduation rates by 2020.

Australia. In Australia, Butrymowicz (2014, May 7) noted that each university was required to sign a compact with the government detailing how its targets and plans contribute to the government's goals of higher education. Krause (2005) stated that in Australia, student attrition had received much attention in recent years. To monitor changes in the first-year experience of undergraduate students in Australian universities, a series of three national studies have taken place. The federal government has funded these studies conducted by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne. These studies carried out in three different years (1994, 1999, and 2004) have provided a national database that assists in monitoring the quality of education provided by Australian universities.

Butrymowicz (2014, May 7) indicated Australia is doing a better job than the U.S. at graduating first-generation and low-income students. The Australian government invested hundreds of millions of dollars into programs to reach low-income, first-generation, and rural students, and their parents. Australia is one of the leaders of developed countries in social mobility according to statistics from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Anyone who wants to go to university can do so through some alternative pathways. Butrymowicz (2014, May 7) noted that 40% of Australians whose parents did not earn a college degree have a college

degree themselves compared to the U.S., where 14% of those comparable first-generation students graduate from college with a degree (OECD).

Olsen, Spain, and Wright (2008) conducted a study of retention and attrition of Australian and international students in cooperation with The Australian Universities International Directors' Forum (AUIDF). This study of 485,983 students in 32 Australian universities was undertaken in 2006. The overall outcomes of the study found that the retention figure was 89.5%; the attrition figure was 10.5%. Eighty-nine and one-half percent of students stayed the course, while 10.5% dropped out. Butrymowicz (2014, May 7) discussed that Australia also has more success with low-income students (30%). According to Butrymowicz (2014, May 7), nearly a fifth of this group will earn a degree. By contrast, just 20% of low-income students who start college in the U.S. will stick with it through graduation according to research conducted by Iowa-based Postsecondary Education Opportunity.

Canada. Fretwell (2014) discussed that undergraduate enrollment in Canada has more than doubled between 1980 and 2012. The number of full-time undergraduate students increased from a half-million in 1995 to 793,000 in 2012. Grayson (1998) found that Canadian and American universities share some common problems; the fact that scores of students who enter first-year never graduate. In the United States, this issue is complicated by ethnic considerations. Researchers have determined the first-year retention rate of Black and Hispanic students be lower than that of Whites and students of Asian origin.

Fretwell (2014) stated that Canada is likely to see a decline in the 18 to 21 year-old population in the coming years. Increased university attendance rates may somewhat offset this decrease, but Canadian institutions will be contending with a smaller pool of potential students like their U.S. college counterparts. This smaller pool of potential students will create an internal competition from other Canadian institutions in addition to American institutions that may become aggressive in pursuing Canadian students to aid in filling the demographic holes in the U.S. college-going population (Fretwell (2014). Grayson and Grayson (2003) stated that the amount of published data on attrition in Canadian universities and colleges is limited.

Overall, the United States and Canada are dealing with similar retention and attrition issues. Grayson and Grayson (2003) concluded that the United States and Canada have first-year average attrition rates of about 20% to 25%, while completion rates are about 60% of entering cohorts in both countries.

South Africa. In the last 15 years, the Council of Higher Education (2010, March) indicated that the South African higher education system had expanded the size of its enrollments considerably. In 1994, the total student enrollment in the system was 425,000 students, while in 2007, the total enrollment had grown to 761,000 students. The proportion of African student enrollments has also grown considerably, from 43% in 1998 to 67% in 2007. The distribution of enrollments across gender indicated that women are entering higher education in more significant numbers, and this is consistent with the proportion of women in the country's population.

Mtshali (2013) found that the graduation rate among undergraduate students in South Africa's 23 public universities is 15%. Nicolene Murdoch, the executive director of

teaching and quality at Monash, South Africa, said the graduation rates have ranged from 15% to 20% for several years now. These low rates attribute to financial constraints, where students enroll in courses but do not have funding to see them through, a lack of academic preparedness, and students not getting enough support from their universities (Mtshali, 2013). Letseka and Maile (2008) found South Africa's university graduation rate, which is about 15%, is one of the lowest in the world. South Africa's low university graduation rate also reflects broader inequalities; Black students in South Africa are under-represented at universities that are a demographic reality (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

Overall, the Council of Higher Education (2010, March) found the higher education system highlights the issues surrounding participation by race and socioeconomic status, especially when it comes to the students finish their degrees on time and with good marks. Moreover, the quality of the degrees offered is still uneven, and it is not guaranteed that employers are always satisfied with the range of knowledge, skills, and competencies shown by higher education graduates. Steep university fees, as discussed by Letseka and Maile (2008), contributed to the under-representation of black students, which foreshadows racial inequality in higher education well into the future. Letseka and Maile (2008) noted white students made up a third of the student body at the University of the Witwatersrand, half of the student population at the University of Cape Town and three-quarters of students at Stellenbosch University. The government has tried to help the under-represented by setting up the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). However, each award averaged only a fraction of the cost of a university degree (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

The United Kingdom. The National Audit Office (2007, July 23) reported on the retention of students in higher education in the United Kingdom. The focus was on the extent to which the sector was continuing to improve its performance in retaining undergraduates in their higher education courses, in particular, whether the sector's performance on retention has improved since the last review. Krause (2005) stated that the UK Higher Education Funding Council included student retention as a lynchpin of its strategic plan (2003–08) (HEFCE, 2005a). It funds activities designed to support and retain students who are under-represented in and less well-prepared for higher education (HEFCE, 2005b). Nevertheless, in a 2002 analysis of the sector, Gibbs (2003) noted an inadequate focus on student retention in many UK institutions.

Thomas, L., Quinn, J., Slack, K., and Casey, L. (2002) stated that the United Kingdom has the second-highest rate of retention after Japan (McGaw, 2002). The goal of maintaining current high levels of persistence in higher education, and improving them in some institutions, is primarily centered on efficiency concerns. The performance indicators of retention and completion developed to facilitate this process, which encourages institutions, especially those with completion rates lower than their benchmarks, to improve their performance. The performance indicators demonstrated that institutions vary considerably regarding their retention and completion rates. Johnes and McNabb's (2004) study presented the impact of the staff-student ratio on attrition is found to be complicated. In essence, a high staff-student ratio reduces the propensity to drop out voluntarily but raises the incidence of academic failure.

Compared internationally, the National Audit Office (2007, July 23) found higher education in England achieves high levels of student retention. The gap between higher

education institutions with the highest and lowest levels of retention and a minority of institutions' worsening continuation rates indicate there is the potential for some further improvements in retention. The types of actions that institutions can take to improve retention need not be expensive. They can also improve the student experience and contribute to better quality education, leading to better value for students and the use of public funds.

Johnes and McNabb's (2004) study presented findings suggested broad similarities between the determinants of student attrition in Britain and the US. One crucial difference, however, concerns the impact of factors explicitly associated with the institution. Recent US research suggested the latter has only a small effect on the likelihood of non-completion. In contrast, the Johnes and McNabb (2004) study identified some institutional factors that affect attrition. These factors are that universities that have high standards of quality in learning and teaching have lower dropout rates than others that do not achieve the same criteria. Also, students were likely to complete their degrees at research institutions (Johnes & McNabb, 2004).

Learning Communities

Within first-year experience programs, the literature review identified that learning communities are a critical component. Learning communities are a critical structural innovation—a structure designed to link courses across the curriculum (Barefoot, 2004). Commander (2009) stated that learning communities typically involve enrolling small groups of students in two or more classes together during their first semester to create a community and promote academic and social involvement. Hunter and Murray (2007) found that residential and curricular learning communities were a

growing entry point for student affairs professionals to get involved in classroom teaching.

According to Hunter and Murray (2007), learning communities can take a variety of forms, including linked courses, themed courses, and living and learning together as a community. Student affairs professionals are often involved in these initiatives by helping create a connection between the faculty and staff. First-year programming can incorporate learning communities to make a more enriched experience in and out of the classroom. In Commander's (2009) study, the findings indicated students associated four particularly strong, enduring qualities with the learning community experience. These were: student-professor connections, collaboration, engagement with the university or surrounding community, and lasting friendships. In conjunction with improving academic performance, Commander (2009) found learning communities have other positive effects on students: lower risk of course withdrawal, increased cognitive skills and abilities, and higher overall satisfaction with college.

Supplemental Instruction

Supplemental Instruction (SI), as defined by the International Center for Supplemental Instruction (2015), utilizes peer-assisted study sessions within an academic program. SI sessions regularly scheduled as peer review sessions. Students learn how to combine course content and study skills through peer collaboration (International Center for Supplemental Instruction, 2015). Blanc, DeBuhr, and Marin (1983) defined supplemental instruction as a way to assist students in mastering course concepts while increasing student competency in reading, reasoning, and study skills.

McGuire (2006) stated that supplemental instruction could play a significant role in both the teaching students how to learn and in motivating them to want to learn. Supplemental instruction introduces students to the learning process while engaging them in collaborative learning activities and providing an environment that increases motivation to engage learning. In the area of tutoring, Habley and McClanahan (2004) identified tutoring as one of the critical factors in increasing student academic success and course retention. Tutoring refers to one-on-one or small-group sessions, while supplemental instruction is a more formal arrangement with a regularly scheduled time and “taught by the class instructor or a trained assistant” (A Matter of Degrees, 2014, p. 4).

Arendale (1994) found that supplemental instruction enables students to master course content while they develop and integrate active learning and study strategies. SI collaborative sessions capitalize on an opportunity to apply the learning strategies to the course material (Arendale, 1994). Hurley, Jacobs, and Gilbert (2006) indicated that supplemental instruction worked because the sessions were proactive and participatory rather than reactive and passive. Supplemental instruction strived to break the dependency cycle or learned helplessness. The dependency cycle is a pattern of learned behavior that allows students to be dependent solely on the instructor or tutor for learning (Hurley et al., 2006). Tinto and Pusser (2006) discussed the availability of academic support in courses, tutoring, study groups, and supplemental instruction as an essential condition for a student’s successful continuation in a university. Also needed is the availability of social support in the form of counseling, mentoring, and ethnic student centers. Such centers provide much-needed support for the individual. For new students,

these centers can serve as secure, knowable ports of entry that enable students safely to navigate the unfamiliar terrain of the university (London, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994). Tinto and Pusser (2006) indicated supplemental instruction programs appear to be particularly useful because academic support is provided to students in a specific course, thereby allowing students to apply immediately the support given to succeed in a particular course.

Student and Faculty Perceptions

How students and faculty alike perceive the first-year experience program can affect the success of the overall program and the success of the student enrolled at the institution. Holliday (2014) discussed that students' perceptions could also be necessary for academic departments that offer different models of FYE coursework. The success of academic programs will assist with the institution's goal of retention from first to the second year. Thompson, Orr, Thompson, and Grover's (2007) study indicated that the perceptions of first-year students are of particular importance for student recruitment and retention. Attention to student recruitment and retention is due to the fluctuating number of college applicants and the decreased level of funding for higher education institutions (Braunstein & McGrath, 1997).

Brownlee, Walker, Lennox, Exley, and Pearce (2009) explained the first-year could be a valuable time for promoting changes in thinking and the understanding refers to the process of making links between the "new" and the "old" and requires the learner to take on an active role in learning. This active role means that students become engaged in learning by asking questions, seeking clarification, collaborating with others, remaining open to new possibilities, and critiquing knowledge claims of "expert

authorities''. The underlying values and commitments of the institution indicated a student-centered focus found in the attitudes of all those working there is an essential component for student retention (Tinto, 1990). Ng, Shirley, Willis, Lewis, and Lincoln's (2015) study noted that it is vital to capture student perceptions of newly developed widening participation schemes (FYE courses). The perceptions gained may enable modification of the plan to maximize its success. Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) indicated that students' relationship perceptions with academic staff are an essential part of their integration into academic life (McGivney, 1996; Tinto, 2002).

Faculty and staff have to buy into the large-scale goals of the institution and the defined first-year experience programs to assist the students enrolled. The author, Cuseo (2015), also found representatives of different institutions who attend First-Year Experience conferences report that faculty on their campus claim the perceptions of beginning students seem "better prepared" to meet college expectations and "behave more like college students" after they have participated in the first-year seminar (Cuseo, pp. 2-3). Cuseo (2015), found student life professionals report that students have a greater appreciation of, and interest in, co-curricular activities as a result of their participation in the course.

Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, and Nordstrom's (2009) study found student responses indicated a successful transition is not just the academic ability but also depends on the capacity to adjust to a learning environment, which creates autonomy and individual responsibility than students expect upon commencement. The transition is now more about navigating the resources available at the university instead of just being prepared for the college experience and workload. Students need to become acclimated

to their institutions to be successful in and out of the classroom. Holliday's (2014) study found that students were more likely to perceive their FYE course exposed them to learning strategies that were important to achieve social and academic success for the remainder of their undergraduate college experience. Holliday (2014) also reported students believed their course taught them about useful campus resources (e.g., tutoring, internships, counseling center) or help-seeking skills (i.e., asking friends or faculty for help).

With a disjunction between student expectations and their experiences, Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, and Nordstrom (2009) stated their findings highlighted a call for non-specialized transition programs to meet the needs of first-year students, by providing them of the realities of university life, and assistance in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Thompson, Orr, Thompson, and Grover (2007) noted student perceptions of the college experience would influence their grades, graduation, and overall satisfaction (Gilbert, Chapman, Dietsche, Grayson, & Gardner, 1997). Thompson et al., 2007 found many of the factors that can affect student perceptions include housing, money, family support, campus environment, and campus involvement.

Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone's (2003) research found student perceptions of developing 'interpersonal ties' based on the ability to provide students with a sense of being cared for, which assisted with their coping capacity and increased their comfort around social and academic matters. Cuseo (2015) discussed the Montana State University-Bozeman faculty who taught the FYE seminar reported the experience led them to perceive first-year students more positively, particularly on their critical thinking skills and intellectual potential (cited in Barefoot et al., 1998). The findings of

another institutional research study suggested faculty who teach the seminar report they become more “student-centered” (Reeve, 1993), and their knowledge or understanding of students is enhanced (DeFrain, 1993). Evidence that these perceptions may be due to actual changes in the behavior of students resulting from their participation in the seminar suggested by institutional research reported at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Blowers (2005) discussed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found higher percentages of first-year seminar participants reported that students were spending more time preparing for class and attending class with completed reading or assignments.

Collaboration

Another idea generated in the 1990s was that of collaborative learning, the idea that learning is a typical social act in which the participants talk among themselves. Saunders and Werner (2002) identified collaborative learning as one of the most effective learning environments, second in importance to problem-solving. As noted above, researchers found in collaborative classrooms, lecturing, listening, and the note-taking process might not disappear entirely but is parallel to other processes where students discuss and actively work with the course material. With collaborative learning, the goal is to shift learning from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model. There are many opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration in university learning environments, yet it seems that a surprisingly large proportion of students do not take advantage of them. A recent national trend study of first-year students in Australian universities found over two-thirds of students hardly or never work with other students on areas of study

where they have problems. At the same time, fewer than half (40%) regularly spend time discussing subject-related issues with peers (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005).

Zhao and Kuh (2004) indicated that learning communities incorporate collaborative learning activities and promote involvement in activities that extend beyond the classroom. These approaches linked with behaviors such as increased academic effort and outcomes like promoting openness to diversity and designed to promote student interactions (Whitt et al., 2001). Also, students who actively participate in out-of-class activities are more likely to connect with peers, which is vital for student retention, success, and personal development (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993).

Student Engagement With the University Community

Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) indicated that overall research has demonstrated that, in general, student involvement is related strongly to student success. Zhao and Kuh (2004), stated learning communities are linked by interacting with faculty members, engaging in diversity-related activities, and having classes that emphasize higher-order thinking skills. Students, according to Zhao and Kuh (2004), in learning communities were more positive about the quality of academic advising and that their campus was supportive of their academic and social needs, and more satisfied with their college experience.

Carini, Kuh, and Klein's (2006) study found what many other researchers had found student engagement links to learning outcomes such as critical thinking and grades. Additionally, learning outcomes stem from a variety of sources of which student

engagement is only one. Indeed, the positive relationships between engagement and the results described in this paper are relatively small in magnitude (Carini et al., 2006).

The study conducted by Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) generated two conclusions on student engagement. First, student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by retention from the first and second year of college. Second, engagement has a compensatory effect on reinforcing exposure to effective educational practices, which benefits all students (Kuh et al., 2008). Moreover, these findings indicated further support to Outcalt and Skewes-Cox's (2002) theory regarding the importance of mutual engagement or the notion that student involvement and campus environmental conditions coexist in a mutually shaping relationship, to support student success at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's). Because students benefit most from early interventions and sustained attention at crucial transition points, faculty and staff should clarify institutional values and expectations early and often to prospective and matriculating students (Kuh et al., 2008).

Zhao and Kuh's (2004) study found the effects of student engagement remain relatively strong into the senior year, suggesting that introducing students early to purposeful programming integrated into a learning community could encourage students to continue these activities throughout college. These findings corroborate previous research and conceptual work in this area, indicating that participation in some form of a learning community is positively related to student success, mainly, stronger for first-year students (Zho & Kuh 2004).

Lasting Friendships

A study conducted by Wilcox, Winn, and Evvie-Gauld (2005) indicated during the transitional phase of college, and students need to belong, identify with others, and negotiate their new identities as university students while making initial contacts, which may or may not develop into friendships. As students made contacts at university, their developing friendships begin to replace their reliance on support with family and friends at home. In this way, initial feelings of anxiety and loneliness are overcome for most students and create a balance between contact with home (old life) and university (new life). Over time it becomes imperative to make good friends, whom students describe as their 'new family' (Wilcox et al., 2005).

Dodge and Kendall (2004) found that students enrolled in a learning community form friendships and become part of a group. Walking to class together, working on projects that overlap course boundaries, and establishing an identity in the context of a synergic whole, students feel supported and validated. Thomas (2012) found that friends and peer relations could have a range of positive impacts on student experience, but only recognized by some students and staff. Some individuals find it harder to make friends. Facilitating social integration in the academic sphere is of particular importance as it develops cohorts to identify and belonging to the program, which is a great value as well, some students who do not have opportunities to develop friendships in other spheres. Academic staff can promote social integration through induction activities, collaborative learning and teaching, field trips, opt-out peer mentoring, and staff-organized social events.

The findings of the Wilcox et al., 2005, study indicated the importance of students' integration into the university through making friends, and the researchers illustrated some of the processes by which social and academic integration is achievable. In the first few days at university, emotional support from family and friends at home provides a buffer against the stressful experience of being alone in a new situation. Still, as students develop social networks at university, these become their primary source of social support during term-time. Emotional support from friends provides a sense of belonging and can also help students when they face problems. The type of support that students receive from friends and tutors in their course work is different from those provided by the friends in their accommodation, and it is more likely to be instrumental and appraisal support.

Online Learning

Davis and Dykman (2008) presented a series of articles titled "The Shift Toward Online Education," which examined the importance of online pedagogy as it related to educational practices through the Journal of Information Systems Technology's "Online Education Forum." Davis and Dykman (2008) addressed the themes of economics, competition, new paradigms for learning, access, and advanced technologies. The first article focused on the shift toward online education and why such a transition has occurred. Davis and Dykman (2008a) acknowledged it could be hard-pressed to find evidence that online courses are an effective and efficient form of education. The concept of distance learning as a paradigm for the future of higher education is predictable on the fact that universities can compete for students and resources on a local and international level while increasing the enrollment of students without having to

expand and restructure a campus (Davis & Dykman, 2008a). Additionally, distance learning continues to popularize within the field of higher education due to technological advances, cultural changes, increased competition within the educational system, and budget constraints (Davis & Dykman, 2008a). Due to the ever-changing job market, distance learning allows students and faculty alike to adapt to change with technology in an academic setting.

As universities develop and change campus-wide structures, policies, and programs, accessibility to community knowledge is vital. Coursework, essential information, and supplemental notices are readily available in real-time, with the ability to quickly update information online (Davis & Dykman, 2008a). Online courses allow students to independently work at their own pace while being able to access pertinent information or updates from their faculty and university community. Moreover, at any college, a structured online educational program can influence how other student support services address the needs of non-traditional students (Casey-Powell & Floyd, 2004). Online programs allow for all students, traditional and non-traditional, to learn the same information in the same format while working at their pace.

The process of providing quality programs and courses will increase student enrollment for online courses. The focus on equal accessibility and user-friendly interfaces for online programs should continue to improve and provide non-traditional students with a fully online educational experience (Casey-Powell & Floyd, 2004). Faculty and support staff need to continue to learn new advances in the learning platforms utilized at their institutions through training exercises to keep themselves engaged in the online learning process. Being current with the learning platforms will

allow the faculty and staff to maintain students as interactive participants in the online programs offered.

In “Online Learning in Higher Education: Necessary and Sufficient Conditions,” Cher Ping Lim (2005) discussed how a paradigm shift to online education is based primarily on conditions, resources, and institutional and cultural commitment. Online education terms and resources can shape the curriculum, the transmission of knowledge, and how both faculty and students respond to this alternative format of learning (Lim, 2005). Students tend to adapt to online interfaces quicker than faculty. Faculty needs to buy into the shift of traditional courses to online courses or even a hybrid course, which is a blending of conventional and online learning practices.

Support of the faculty and critical stakeholder administrators is as crucial as having secure university networks and foundational infrastructure in place for online programming. Davis and Dykman (2008b) would further agree that institutions often run into issues because they lack the understanding of how to achieve quality in an online program. It is vital for faculty and administration involved in creating an online program to understand how issues of an online course can significantly affect students enrolled. Being able to reuse course materials, course designs, and have consistent content for all students enrolled in an online program, helps create an efficient online environment that is easy for faculty to manage (Davis & Dykman, 2008b).

Successful online programs are user-friendly and are easy to navigate. Online programs with the same format and easily accessible information allow online users to learn the curriculum content instead of how to find information within the course structure. Course components, such as student profiles, discussion forums, regular

instructor communications, syllabus clarity, and timely feedback, keep students engaged in the course (Davis & Dykman, 2008b). Lim (2005) noted how the initial course development and training could be consuming, which can sometimes deter the support of faculty of the online university programs, who may not be as inclined to teach online. Davis and Dykman (2008b) believed that when there are minimal interaction and feedback from the online course instructor, the students will not exert maximum effort and motivation within the online learning environment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed study was to describe student perspectives and results of the online First-Year Experience (FE) course at University “Y” to determine the value of the course. The university administration wanted to determine the successful completion of the online FE course affects students’ retention rates from the fall semester to the spring semester. Students who have completed the online FE course will be surveyed to determine the value of the online FE course from their perspective. The researcher also sought to identify what is the value of this course to the student population at University “Y” while addressing the challenges they face during their first year in the university community. In this survey, the students will be asked a series of questions designed to determine how the online FE course could be improved. The findings generated from the study will be used to make course curriculum changes.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What were the demographics of the students that attended and completed the online FE course?
2. What were the components of the curriculum of the online FE course did the student population identify as most valuable?
3. What were the components of the curriculum of the online FE course did the student population identify as least valuable?
4. What were the elements of the online FE course did the student population recommend for the university to create face-to-face interactions within the online FE course curriculum?
5. What was the overall perception of the student population on the value of the online FE course?
6. From the students' perspective, how and in what ways, has successful completion of this online FE course influenced retention rates as measured from fall to fall?

In Chapter 3, entitled Methodology, the principal investigator will discuss the students who participated in the online course, the instrument used (overall development of the survey, the survey question design process, and each section within the survey) and the design and data analysis used. As well, the limitations of the study will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the researcher, director of the program, campus learning specialists, and the head administrator for the Planning & Institutional Research Office collaborated in the creation of the FE online course and the assessment of the effectiveness of the program.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 will provide the reader with detailed descriptions of the participants, survey instrument, data collection analysis, and the limitations of this study. This quantitative study with a qualitative component will be discussed in this chapter. Descriptive statistics generated from this quantitative study with a qualitative component will be collected through the University “Y” Office of Planning and Institutional Research of the new students that have completed the online FE course. A series of statistical tests will analyze the enrolled first-year students taking the online FE orientation course to determine the effectiveness of the online FE course, as perceived by the first-year students who completed the online FE course. The qualitative component will ask the students a series of open-ended questions to gain the students’ perception of the value of the online FE course.

Participants

For this study, the participants were all incoming first-year and transfer students that completed the online FE course offered at University “Y.” Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) reported that the online FE course started as a pilot in the fall of 2012. The pilot online FE course enrolled 136 participants, as indicated by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research at University “Y.” After the pilot had ended and the online FE course survey results were analyzed, the administration at University “Y” decided that all new incoming students (first-year and transfers) would be enrolled in the online FE course. For this study, the researcher invited voluntary participation in the study’s survey of fresh first-year students who completed the online FE course during the fall of 2015. For this study, the 2,205 freshmen enrolled out of the 2,890 total new

students enrolled in the online FE course for the fall 2015 semester at University “Y” were emailed the study’s survey.

Instruments

The instrument designed for this study is a result of the collaboration of the researcher, along with a few key players within University “Y” that are involved in the overall online FE program. The study’s survey is accessible through a platform software Qualtrics by participants being able to click on an online link to the survey. The Qualtrics software program allowed the researcher to send an anonymous link to all new first-year students who enrolled in the online FE course offered at University “Y” during the fall 2015 semester. Qualtrics has a built-in logic code that only allows a participant to take the survey once, which ensures the validity of the data collected. The questions are both reflective in a descriptive quantitative style with a qualitative component.

The online FE course survey that was utilized from the pilot during the fall 2012 semester until the spring 2015 semester (Appendix A) addressed the following theme areas: Course Content, Course Technology, Course Presentation, Overall Satisfaction, and Transfer Perceptions. The enrolled new students notified of the survey available for them to provide feedback on the online FE course through the University “Y” email and the announcement functions of the Blackboard platform the online FE course utilizes at University “Y.” Since the fall 2012 pilot, the online FE course survey notification has been the same format. A link to access the survey is accessible to the students who completed the online FE course. The survey is available for three weeks to all students who completed the course.

For this study, the online FE course survey was modified (Appendix B) and addressed the following theme areas: Course Content, Overall Satisfaction, and Transfer Perceptions. The notification of the survey associated with the study and how to access the survey was delivered to the University “Y” email addresses of the enrolled new first-year students who completed the online FE course in the fall 2015 semester. Only the enrolled new first-year students who have completed the online FE course in the fall 2015 semester were able to access this study’s survey. This study’s survey was available to the participants for three weeks.

Procedures

Design. To offer a comprehensive evaluation of the online FE course related to both retention and GPA, an analysis of various aspects of the course was conducted. This quantitative design utilized basic research principles by Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2003). The survey questions incorporated the guidelines for framing issues, uncovering program theory, studying implementation, and designing impact assessments as outlined by Rossi et al. (2003). A quantitative research design was chosen over a qualitative design because of the size of the sample population (2,205 students). The researcher developed a series of open-ended questions in each section of the survey to try to capture the lived experience of the survey participants.

The researcher defined the online FE course as more of an extended orientation model, and students' participation materializes into a final grade. The course curriculum consisted of twelve modules. Within each of the twelve modules, there were multiple departments or offices presenting information on their resources or support services. Additionally, the researcher’s role as the instructor had built-in announcements, a campus

contact directory, and postings of student programs, as well as student job opportunities that are available at University “Y.” The overall scores of the twelve module quizzes within the online FE course generated the participants’ final grade. These module quizzes were designed by the researcher to help students retain essential information about various campus resources and support systems highlighted within the online FE course curriculum. The researcher did not develop the online FE course for academic rigor, but for acclamation to University “Y” and the university’s resources available to all students to assist in promoting a sense of belonging while providing essential information to the new students enrolled.

This study addressed the following theme areas: Course Content, Overall Satisfaction, and Perceptions.

Data collection procedures. The students who completed the online FE course received an FE 100: The University of Y Experience Study Survey to determine their perspective regarding the online FE course that, when completed, was forwarded to the Office of Institutional Research anonymously for data analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected. Students who participated in the survey will not be identified by name or student number; thus will be anonymous. The researcher will uphold the ethical standards of the university related to students.

Data analysis procedures. The researcher evaluated whether the online FE course was deemed of value for the enrolled new freshmen students who participated and completed the online FE course to address the dependability of the course (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2000). The researcher questioned whether the results of the fall 2015 semester were holistically consistent among responses by the previous semesters of 2012-2014 and whether fall 2015 semester responses fell

within similar parameters. Dependability, which is parallel to the reliability, will be used to show the process of inquiry was logical, traceable, and documented (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

For data analysis, the researcher sorted formulated meanings of open-ended questions into groups representing themes emerging from the analysis of the responses of enrolled students from the fall 2015 semester. The preservation of the verbatim transcripts served as another determinant of dependability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher collected demographic data and analyzed Likert-like scale questions from the fall 2015-semester participants' survey responses. The survey contained open-ended questions inviting the students to express their "lived" experiences, having completed the online FE course based on perceived value. The researcher transcribed the open-ended questions verbatim. Once the researcher transcribed the responses to these open-ended questions, the researcher looked for common themes that indicate the students' perceptions of their "lived" experiences while taking this online FE course.

Credibility, or truth-value, as defined by Maxwell (1996), is the correctness of description, conclusion, explanation, or interpretation. Credibility is parallel to internal validity and provides assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their experiences and the researcher's reconstructions and representation of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To enhance credibility, the researcher will include low interference descriptors as an element of survey questioning that might disconfirm expectations and attempted to maintain self-awareness of biases (Johnson, 1999). In other words, to ensure credibility, the survey allowed for Likert-like Scale responses and commented sections within the survey.

For the FE 100: The University of Y Experience Study Survey, each section had questions based on the mixed-method approach. The survey contained fifteen questions, with an option for transfer students to answer another four questions related to that population. Each section of the study's survey contained a Likert-like Scale, One Choice, Multiple Choice, and open-ended response questions. These questions were validated through the online survey software, and developed with the university's Office of Planning and Institutional Research, in collaboration with the course staff.

Within the first section of the survey (Course Content), there were ten questions. These ten questions provided information on the course modules and the most valuable parts of the course curriculum as perceived by the students. Four questions within the survey were on a four-point Likert-like Scale rating response. Another four questions were a one choice selection response, and the last two questions for this section of the survey were open-ended based response questions. The responses to these open-ended questions' were then categorized by like themes and reported by percentage.

The second section of the survey (Overall Satisfaction) has a total of five questions. These five questions provided information on the overall course and value of the resources presented value to the curriculum as perceived by the students. Four questions within the survey required a five-point Likert-like Scale rating response. The one open-ended question for this section of the survey asked for the overall value of the course. The open-ended question responses were then categorized by like themes and reported by percentage.

The third section (Transfer Perceptions) was available to the online FE course survey participants defined as a transfer student status and contained four additional

questions. Three of the questions were one choice of response questions. The fourth and final question was open-ended and the transcribed student comments regarding the online FE course content. Participant responses were then categorized by like themes and reported by percentage.

The study's online FE course survey responses were imputed into a statistical software package (Qualtrics) and analyzed. The researcher was not only able to review the study's survey of the students who had taken the online FE course for the fall 2015 semester but also to compare the 2012-2014 survey responses for the same sections to see the themes of student perceptions of the online FE course. The survey provided opportunities for students to provide feedback on the most useful and least useful modules and then providing an opportunity for why it was either most or least useful (survey questions 4 – 7). Survey questions 23 – 25, asked about overall satisfaction through a Likert scale. The university administration was interested in determining if the online FE course at University "Y" impacted fall to fall retention.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study was participation in the study's survey due to a large population of subjects who could choose or not choose to participate. Therefore, a collection of data may only reflect a small percentage of the total subject pool. Efforts to assure all participants that their information would remain confidential; however, some may have provided false information while others could refuse to complete the study's survey. As well, the researcher's bias is always an issue, but the use of a Likert-like survey instrument minimized this concern.

Additionally, the responses could have shown that students wanted to change the course structure. However, the student's participants stated they did not want to change the course structure. Another limitation of this survey was the difficulty of matching student responses to students continuing in the spring semester. However, the Office of Institutional Advancement assisted the researcher in determining the percentage of students that passed the online FE course and registered in the spring semester. Retention rates at University "Y" examine the fall a student enters the university until the fall of a student's second year (referred to as fall-to-fall retention rates). This data was not available for the fall of 2015 until the fall of 2016. Thus, the study findings enabled the researcher to review the retention rates of the online FE course participants from the fall of 2012 and 2014.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Many key stakeholders in education are disappointed and frustrated with the ever-escalating rates of student dropout during their first and second years (Jamelske, 2009). To ensure the students admitted to the university are retained, as well as succeed in their academic programs, these newly admitted students must do well during their first-year (Corwin & Cintrón, 2011). A student's first-year of study at any university is the most formative in various areas yet the most satisfactory when it comes to concepts, pedagogy, and curriculum (Cox, Elizabeth, Bobrowski, & Graham, 2005). The researchers noted the first-year is the most critical period in the student's university life. The general problem was over half of the dropouts happen during the students' first year of enrollment, often in the first semester. The specific issue was that University "Y" was losing students between the fall semester and spring semester of these students' first year and addressed this concern by creating a required online first-year experience course.

Students who have completed the online FE course were surveyed to determine the value of the online FE course from their perspective. The researcher also sought to identify what was the value of this course to the student population at University "Y" while addressing the challenges they faced during their first year in the university community. The purpose of this mixed study was to describe student perspectives and results of the online First-Year Experience (FE) course at University "Y" to determine the value of the course. The following figures and tables provide a visual representation of the results of the student survey responses. Students who participated in the course survey each fall semester of 2012-2015 only represent 11% of the overall total enrolled

students in the online FE course (N=488 student survey responses; N= 4,585 total enrolled first-year students).

Quantitative Data

Results for Research Question 1. What were the demographics of the students that attended and completed the online FE course? Figures 1 through Figure 3, as well as, Table 2 and Table 3 provide the demographics of the students enrolled in the FE course by ethnic origin, gender, housing, reported Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, and high school grade point average (GPA) scores.

Figure 1 provides the percentages of the ethnic origin of the students enrolled in the FE course for the fall of 2012 until the fall of 2015. As illustrated in Figure 1, the ethnic breakdown was consistent through the data collecting period of the fall of 2012 through the fall of 2015. White students were the predominate group each year of the study. However, Hispanic or Latino students showed a modest increase resulting in 25% of the Hispanic or Latino student population being enrolled in the fall of 2015. Black or African American students showed a significant drop in 22% for the fall of 2012 to 8% for the fall of 2015. This drop is based on the enrollments of Black or African American students being enrolled in the university (Fall 2015 Fact Book, 2015) from the fall of 2012 (N=188) to the fall of 2015 (N=156). All other ethnic groups who participated in the study showed consistent enrollment throughout the four years of the study.

Figure 2 presents the percentage breakdown of male and female students enrolled in the FE course for the fall of 2012 until the fall of 2015. Figure 2 reflects that from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015, the FE course student population had a higher number of

female students enrolled than male students enrolled each year of the study. The most significant difference between the two groups occurred in the fall of 2012, with 54% of the course population being female. The number of female and male students enrolled showed little change between the fall of 2013 and the fall of 2015. The percentages of female to male ration between the fall of 2013 and the fall of 2015 respectively was 51%, 49%; 52%, 48%; and 51%, 49%.

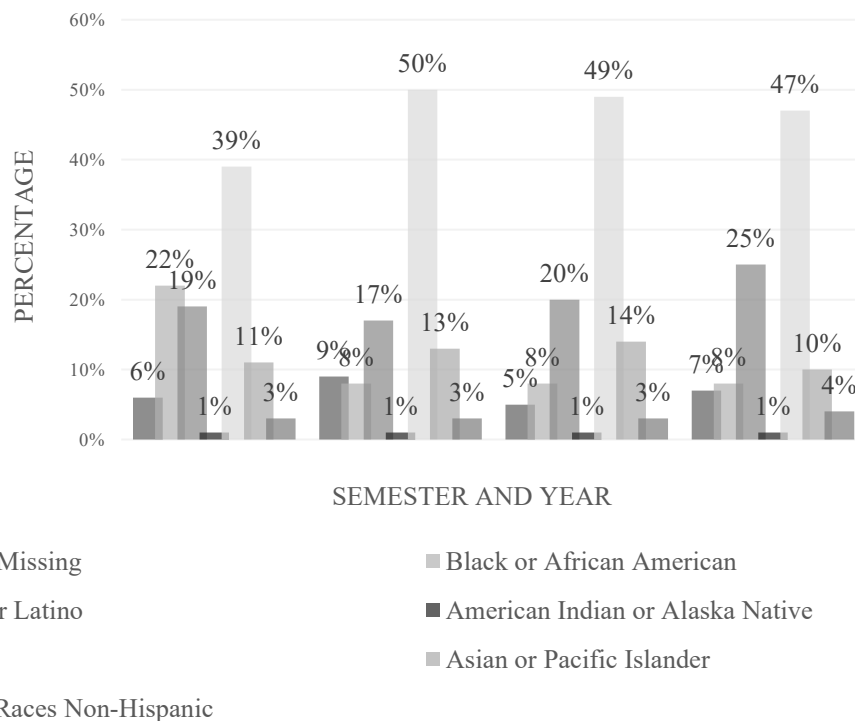
Figure 3 provides the percentage breakdown of students enrolled in the FE course for the fall of 2012 until the fall of 2015 based if they lived on or off-campus. Figure 3 illustrates that the FE course was designed for both freshman (first time in college, FTIC) and transfer students. The percentage breakdown of those who lived on campus and off campus changed from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015. The percentage of students enrolled in the FE course and living on campus ranged from 89% in the fall of 2012 to 77% in the fall of 2015. This change reflected the increase of transfer student who did not reside on campus. The percentage of students enrolled in the FE course and living off campus ranged from 11% in the fall of 2012 to 23% in the fall of 2015.

Table 2 provides the reported SAT scores of students enrolled in the FE course for the fall of 2012 through the fall of 2015. Shown by Table 2, although the numbers significantly increased from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015, the percentage of students that had a reported SAT score between 1100 and 1499 remained mostly consistent. In the fall of 2012, the number of students that had a reported SAT score between 1100 and 1499 averaged 86.93%; whereas the scores in the fall of 2013 through the fall of 2015 the number of students that had a reported SAT score between 1100 and 1499 averaged 91.08%, 90.99% and 88.96% respectively. From the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015, the

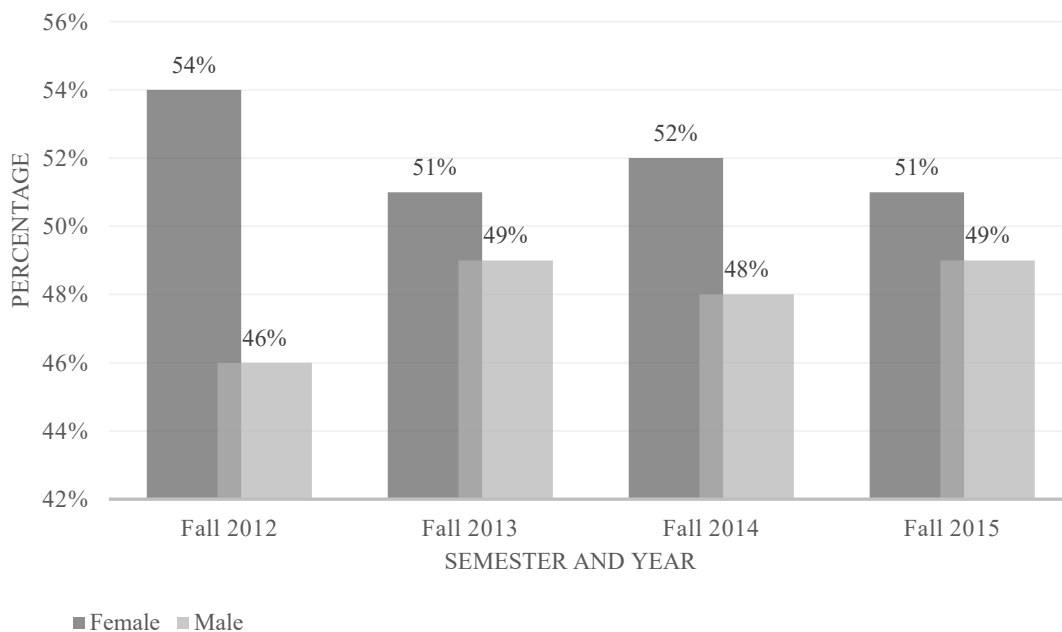
students that had a reported SAT score between 1100 and 1499 was 90.18% overall. Based on these reported SAT scores, the majority of the students enrolled in the FE course, which had a reported SAT score between 1100 and 1499, should have success in college.

Table 3 presents the reported high school grade point average scores of students enrolled in the FE course for the fall of 2012 through the fall of 2015. In Table 3, the percentage of students that had a reported High School GPA between 2.5 to 4.0 was inconsistent from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015. In the fall of 2012, the number of students that had a reported High School GPA between 2.5 to 4.0 averaged 46.80%; whereas the scores in the fall of 2013 through the fall of 2015 the number of students that had a reported High School GPA between 2.5 to 4.0 averaged 38.36%, 37.93% and 29.47% respectively. From the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015, the students that had a reported High School GPA between 2.5 to 4.0 was 46.18% overall.

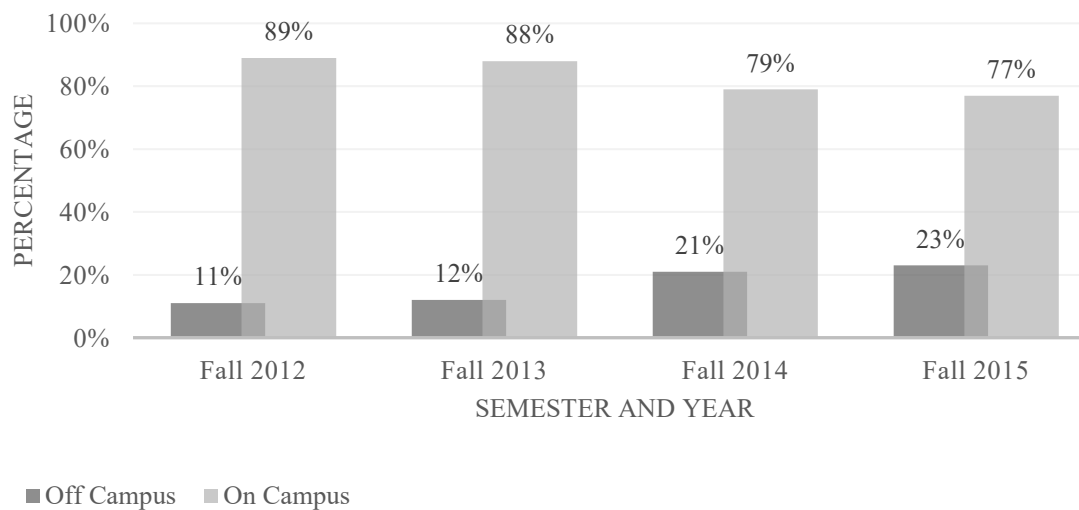
Conversely, the percentage of students that had a reported High School GPA above 4.0 increased from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2014 and dropped in the fall of 2015. In the fall of 2012, the number of students that had a reported High School GPA above 4.0 averaged 53.19%; whereas the scores in the fall of 2013 through the fall of 2014 the number of students that had a reported High School GPA above 4.0 averaged 61.63% and 62.06% respectively. For the fall of 201 the number of students that had a reported High School GPA above 4.0 averaged 39.62%. From the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015, the students that had a reported High School GPA above 4.0 was 53.81% overall.



Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.
 Figure 1. Demographics by Ethnic Origin.



Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.
 Figure 2. Demographics by Gender.



Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.
 Figure 3. Demographics by Housing.

Table 2

FE Course Students Reported SAT Scores

SAT Combined Scores (Official Report)	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
Missing	197	1077	1075	1227
800-899	8	3	4	4
900-999	5	8	11	12
1000-1099	10	30	36	30
1100-1199	20	97	84	115
1200-1299	43	263	203	241
1300-1399	69	383	335	276
1400-1499	31	177	171	126
1500-1600	13	82	67	48

Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.

Table 3

FE Course Students Reported High School GPA

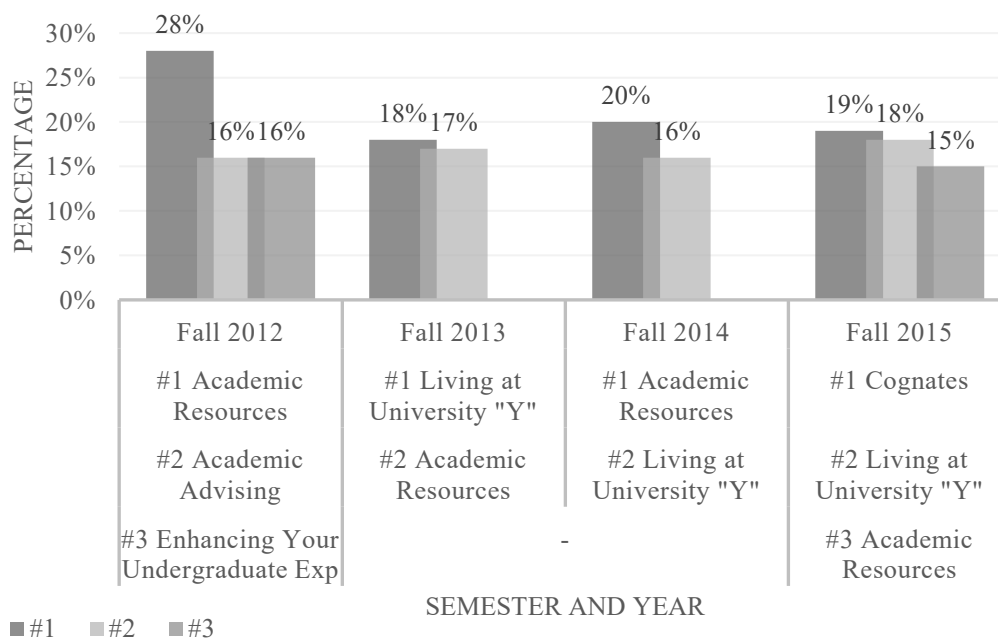
High School GPA (Official Report)	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
Missing	64	358	628	315
2.0 – 2.49	4	2	3	17
2.5 – 2.99	16	17	10	65
3.0 – 3.49	42	156	108	296
3.5 – 4.00	96	503	396	692
> 4.00	175	1086	841	691

Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.

Results for Research Question 2. What were the components of the curriculum of the online FE course did the student population identify as most valuable? Figure 4 provides the percentage of the most valued components of the course by the fall semester, as reported by the first time in college (FTIC) students who responded to the survey. The top components are numbered 1, 2, or 3 for each fall semester based on the percentages for ranking order. The Academic Resources component was the top response for the fall of 2012 (28%) and the fall of 2014 (20%). The Living at University “Y” component was the top response for the fall of 2013 (18%). The Cognates component was the top response for the fall of 2015 (19%)

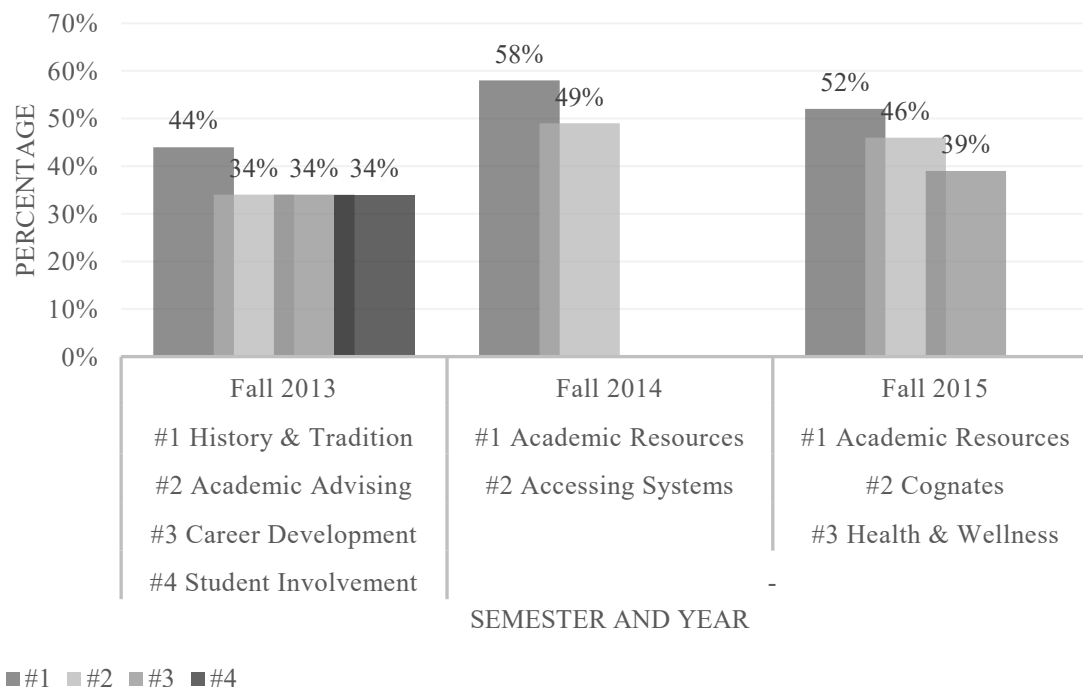
Figure 5 provides the percentage of the most valued components of the course by the fall semester, as reported by the transfer students who responded to the survey. The components are numbered 1, 2, or 3 for each fall semester based on the percentages for ranking order. For the fall of 2013, 44% of the responses found History and Tradition as

the most valued component. The Academic Resources component was most valued for the fall of 2014 (58%) and the fall of 2015 (52%)



Source: FE Course Study Survey

Figure 4. FTIC Students: Most Valuable Components of Curriculum.

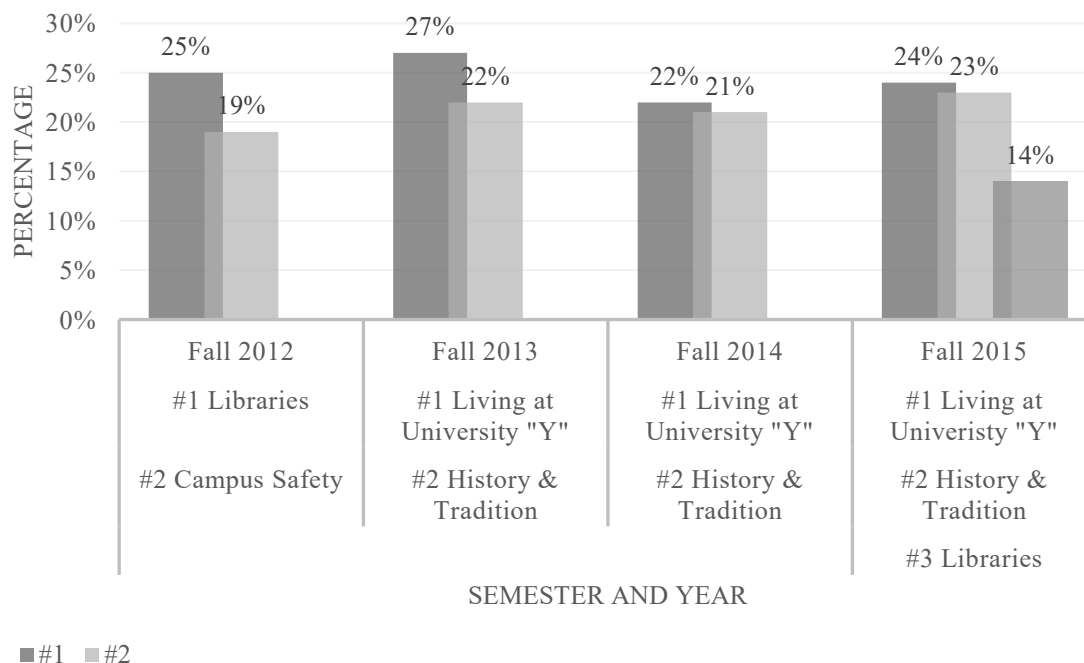


Source: FE Course Study Survey

Figure 5. Transfer Students: Most Valuable Components of Curriculum.

Results for Research Question 3. What were the components of the curriculum of the online FE course did the student population identify as least valuable? Figure 6 provides the reported least valued components of the FE course by the FTIC students.

Figure 6 presents the percentage of the least valued components of the course by the fall semester, as reported by the FTIC students who responded to the survey. The components are numbered 1, 2, or 3 for each fall semester based on the percentages for ranking order. *Of the responses, 25% least valued the Libraries component for the fall of 2012. The Living at University “Y” component was least valued for the fall of 2013 through the fall of 2015, respectively 27%, 22%, and 24%*



Source: FE Course Study Survey.

Figure 6. FTIC Students: Least Valuable Components of Curriculum.

Results for Research Question 5. What was the overall perception of the student population on the value of the online FE course? Table 4 provides the breakdown of responses for the fall of 2012 until the fall of 2015 based on the students' overall satisfaction and value of the course. For the fall of 2015, 66% of the students who responded to the FE course survey found the course valuable. The overall percentage of students who responded to the FE course survey from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015 found the course helpful was 51.43%. The percentage of the responses that rated the course somewhat helpful and very helpful were 72%, 46%, 51%, and 53% respectively from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015.

Table 4

Overall Perception of Satisfaction and Value of the FE Course

Question	Fall 2012			Fall 2013			Fall 2014			Fall 2015		
	N	#	%	N	#	%	N	#	%	N	#	%
	Course Satisfaction = Very High and High											
Overall?	32	29	91	136	83	61	182	86	47	138	78	57
Academic Experiences?	32	28	88	136	94	69	182	97	53	138	64	46
Student Activities?	32	28	88	136	77	57	182	93	51	138	61	44
	Course Value = Somewhat Helpful and Very Helpful											
	32	23	72	136	63	46	182	92	51	138	73	53
	Course Value = Yes											
	32	NA	NA	136	NA	NA	182	NA	NA	138	91	66

Source: FE Course Study Survey.

Results for Research Question 6. From the students' perspective, how and in what ways, has successful completion of this online FE course influenced retention rates as measured from fall to fall? Table 5 through Table 8 provide the retention rates for the FTIC students enrolled in the FE course.

Table 5 presents the overall retention rates for the students enrolled from fall 2012 through fall 2015. Students overall retained for University "Y" from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015 was consistent, respectively 91%, 93%, and 92%. Students who were enrolled in the FE course from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015 was slightly higher than the students who did not enroll in the FE course. For the fall of 2012, 94% of the students enrolled in the FE course were retained compared to the 90% of the students who were not enrolled in the FE course. For the fall of 2013, 93% of the students enrolled in the FE course were retained compared to the 87% of the students who were not

enrolled in the FE course. For the fall of 2014, 92% of the students were retained regardless of being enrolled in the FE course or not.

Table 6 provides the retention rates for the students enrolled from fall 2012. For the fall of 2012, the retention rates were statistically significant difference between students who took the FE course, 94% verses those who did not, 90%. Table 7 presents the retention rates for the students enrolled from fall 2013. For the fall of 2013, the retention rates show a difference between students who took the FE course, 93% verses those who did not, 87%. Table 8 provides the retention rates for the students enrolled from fall 2014. For the fall of 2014, the retention rates do not reflect a difference between students who took the FE course and those who did not, as both retention rates are 92%.

Table 9 provides the retention rates of students in the fall of 2014 based on reported grades in the FE course. Of the students who completed the FE course in the fall of 2014 and returned to University “Y” in the fall of 2015, 92.6% received an A in the course. The same percentage of the students who completed the FE course in the fall of 2014 and returned to University “Y” in the fall of 2015, and received a B or C in the course, 85.70% respectively. The percentage of the students who completed the FE course in the fall of 2014 and returned to University “Y” in the fall of 2015 and received an I (incomplete) was 54.80%.

Table 5

FE course	2012-2013*		2013-2014		2014-2015	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	459	94	2,099	93	1,980	92

No	1,528	90	15	87	72	92
Total	1,987	91	2,114	93	2,052	92

Fall 2012-Fall 2014 Full-Time New Freshman Retention Rates

*Statistically significant difference between students who took FE courses and those who did not. A follow-up analysis found that the retention rates for the 66 New Freshmen in the online version of FE was 98%, compared with 94% for the 393 New Freshmen who took the FE course in a traditional classroom environment. Note: N is the total number in the first fall cohort; % is the percent returned/graduated adjusted for deceased. Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.

Table 6

Fall 2012 Full-Time New Freshman Retention Rates

FE Course	2008-2009		2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013*		Change	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	1 Yr.%	4 Yr.%
Yes	489	91	463	89	512	90	487	90	459	94	4.40	3.10
No	1,495	89	1,442	90	1,594	91	1,652	92	1,528	90	-1.50	1.30
Total	1,984	90	1,905	90	2,106	91	2,139	91	1,987	91	-0.10	1.70

* Statistically significant difference between students who took FE courses and those who did not. A follow-up analysis found that the retention rates for the 66 New Freshmen in the online version of FE was 98%, compared with 94% for the 393 New Freshmen who took the FE course in a traditional classroom environment. Note: N is the total number in the first fall cohort; % is the percent returned/graduated adjusted for deceased. Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.

Table 7

Fall 2013 Full-Time New Freshman Retention Rates

FE Course	2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013*		2013-2014		Change	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	1 Yr.%	4 Yr.%
Yes	463	89	512	90	487	90	459	94	2,099	93	-1.30	3.60
No	1,442	90	1,594	91	1,652	92	1,528	90	15	87	-3.40	2.70
Total	1,905	90	2,106	91	2,139	91	1,987	91	2,114	93	1.70	3.30

* Statistically significant difference between students who took FE courses and those who did not. Note: N is the total number in the first fall cohort; % is the percent returned/graduated adjusted for deceased. Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.

Table 8

Fall 2014 Full-Time New Freshman Retention Rates

FE Course	2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013*		2013-2014		2014-2015		Change	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	1 Yr.%	4 Yr.%
Yes	51	90	487	90	459	94	2,099	93	1,980	92	-.90	2.60
No	1,594	91	1,652	92	1,528	90	15	87	72	92	4.70	0.40
Total	2,106	91	2,139	91	1,987	91	2,114	93	2,052	92	-.90	1.20

* Statistically significant difference between students who took FE courses and those who did not. Note: N is the total number in the first fall cohort; % is the percent returned/graduated adjusted for deceased. Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.

Table 9

Retention by Official Grade in FE Course: Fall 2014 to Fall 2015

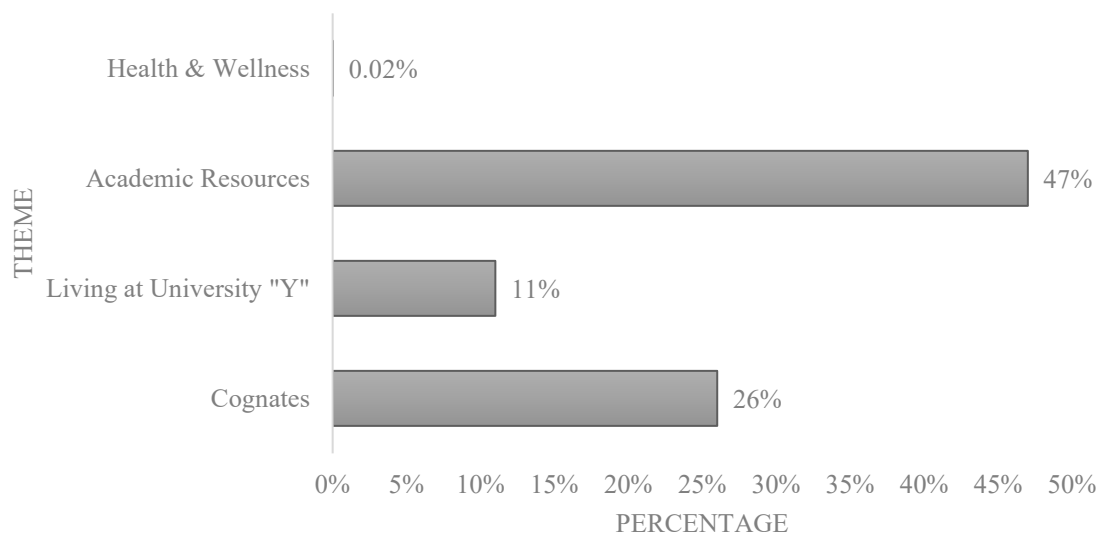
Grade	Retention Status				
	Did Not Return		Returned		N
	#	%	#	%	
A	178	7.40	2,216	92.60	2,394

B	8	14.30	48	85.70	56
C	2	14.30	12	85.70	14
I	14	45.20	17	54.80	31
W	14	93.30	1	6.70	15

Source: Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases.

Qualitative Data

Results for Research Question 2. What were the components of the curriculum of the online FE course did the student population identify as most valuable? Figure 7 provides the percentage of the most valued components of the course by the fall semester, as reported by the students who responded to the survey. The components represented are based on the top themes in Figure 4 and Figure 5 for the fall of 2015. Of the student responses, the following were the top themes by percentage respectively as the most valued component, 47% Academic Resources, 26% Cognates, and 11% Living at University “Y”.

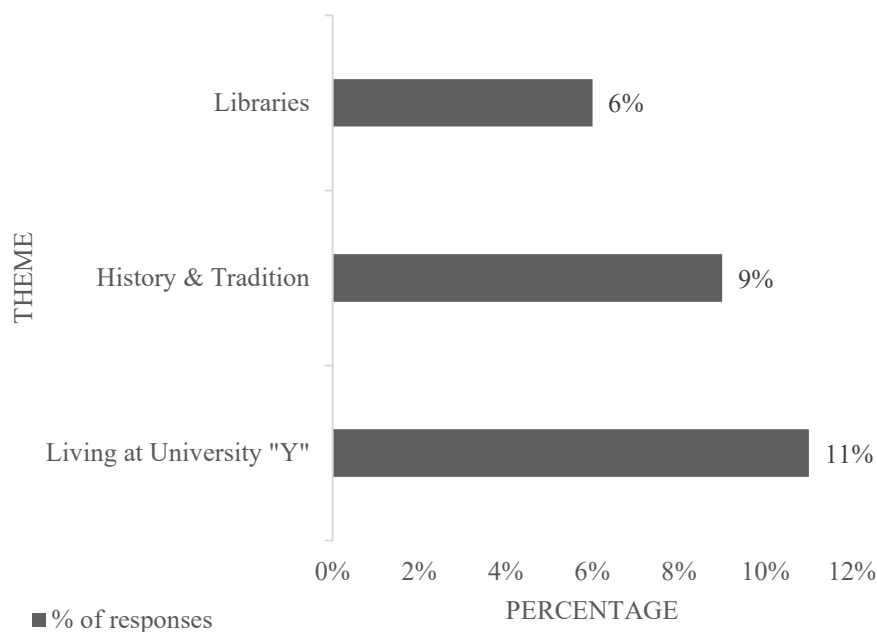


■ % of responses

Source: FE Course Study Survey.

Figure 7. Fall 2015 Response Theme Summary of the Most Valued Component of the Curriculum.

Results for Research Question 3. What were the components of the curriculum of the online FE course did the student population identify as least valuable? Figure 8 provides the percentage of the least valued components of the course by the fall semester, as reported by the students who responded to the survey. The components represented are based on the top themes in Figure 6 for the fall of 2015. The following percentages reflect the components of the FE course that students found the least valuable: 11% Living at University “Y”, 9% History and Tradition, and 6% Libraries.



Source: FE Course Study Survey.

Figure 8. Fall 2015 Response Theme Summary of the Least Valued Component of the Curriculum.

Results for Research Question 4. What were the elements of the online FE course did the student population recommend for the university to create face-to-face interactions within the online FE course curriculum? Table 10 provides the student responses for the fall of 2015 by the theme of which components of the curriculum should be conducted face-to-face. Of the student responses, 39% did not want any component of the course conducted face-to-face. The top three components student responses of components that should be conducted face-to-face were: Cognates (17%), Study Abroad (16%), and Academic Advising/Scheduling (13%).

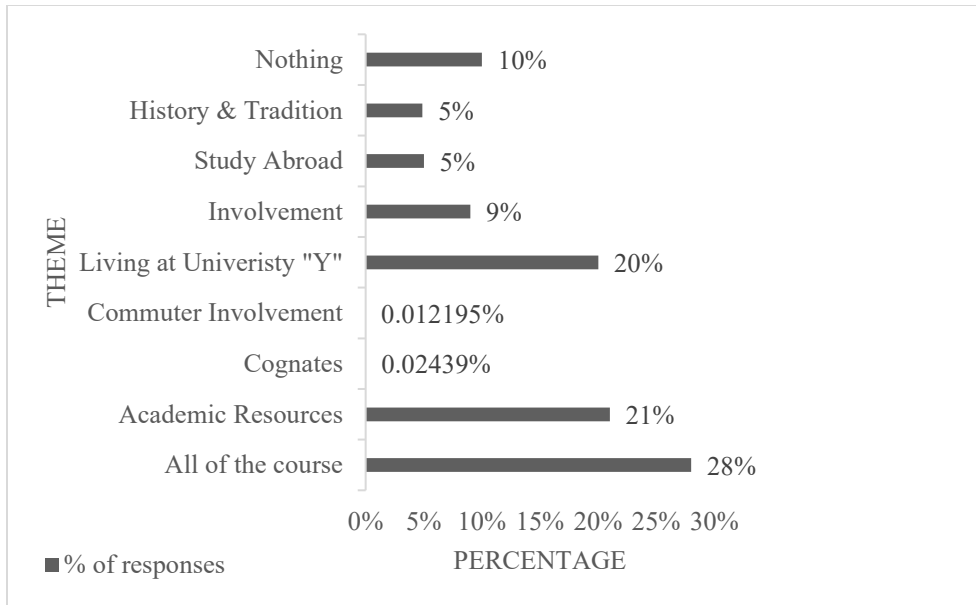
Table 10

Fall 2015 Recommended Face-to-Face Elements

Face-to-Face Elements	Fall 2015		
	N	#	%
Academic	64	8	13
Advising/Scheduling			
Cognates	64	11	17
Navigating Campus	64	6	9
Nothing	64	25	39
Student Organizations	64	4	6
Study Abroad	64	10	16

Source: FE Course Study Survey (total survey responses, N=138).

Results for Research Question 5: What was the overall perception of the student population on the value of the online FE course? Figure 9 provides the percentage breakdown of the overall response theme summary of what the students considered the most useful component of the curriculum for the fall of 2015. The responses found the following as the most useful component of the curriculum: All of the course components (28%), Academic Resources components (21%), and Living at University “Y” (20%). The overall percentage of students who responded to the FE course survey from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015, who responded to the overall satisfaction of the course was 56.55%. The percentage of the responses that rated their overall course satisfaction as very high and high were 91%, 61%, 47%, and 57% respectively from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2015.



Source: FE Course Study Survey.

Figure 9. Fall 2015 Response Theme Summary of the Overall Valued Component of the Curriculum.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Incoming students can be challenging for multiple stakeholders of a university. Sidle, and McReynolds' (1999) study results revealed students who completed a first-year course that lasted one semester had a higher return rate for the spring semester than for those students who did not complete the first-year course. The students who completed the first-year course also earned higher cumulative grade point averages. Despite the success achieved by some retention initiatives, there is still a significant dropout rate. University "Y" was attempting to address this current situation. The general problem was over half of the dropouts occurred during the students' first year of enrollment, often in the first semester. The purpose of this mixed study was to describe student perspectives and results of the online First-Year Experience (FE) course at University "Y" to determine the value of the course.

Dropout rates among first-year college students are not the only problem facing higher education institutions. Williford, Chapman, and Kahrig (2000-2001) reported that students who participated in a first-year seminar course had a higher return retention rate than those students who did not participate in a first-year seminar course. For example, Fidler and Moore (1996) discussed the University of North Carolina implemented a series of seminars for first-year students that were explicitly taught by a faculty that was tenured. The main aim of the first-year seminar was to offer multiple dimensions of academic topics to improve the interaction level between the senior faculty and first-year students (Fidler & Moore, 1996). First-year students will often participate in orientation

programs but are not always effective. Hotchkiss, Moore, and Potts (2006) focused on analyzing experiences of undergraduate students that correlate with student success.

Despite the implementation of a first-year online freshmen experience course, designed to improve the academic skills of first-year students, other factors can make the first-year experience difficult for both institutions and students. Often, such initiatives are created for first-year students and are popular among students and then vanish due to budgetary issues or a shift of importance within the institution. In increasing part-time and community student numbers, the first-year experience (FYE) incapacitated what took place in the standard classes. Clarke, Kift, and Nelson's (2010) study found it continues to be the case of the "piecemeal" approach rather than the "whole-of-institution" approach when FYE initiatives descriptors reported both "nationally and internationally."

Institutions still struggle with cross-institutional integration, coordination, and coherence, in the shadow of concerning evidence suggesting the quality of the student experience varies more within institutions than between competing institutions which some find evident in regards to the efforts made to assure a consistent and coordinated institution-wide first-year experience for all students (Kuh, 2007). Even though it is essential to retain students, the principal collegiate objective is to come up with learning strategies in which students can learn from both inside and outside of the classroom.

The University "Y" has a 23 (1992-2015) year history of offering a first-year experience course based on an extended orientation model. Orientation courses offered information about the first year of college, provided resources for choosing majors and careers, and included more in-depth introductions to university facilities and resources.

Other comparable universities, such as Duke, Emory, and USC (Southern California), practiced the research model where students engaged in intellectual inquiry, composed seminar papers, and participated in group projects and presentations under the close supervision of university faculty (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson 2014-2015).

The University “Y”’s First-Year Experience (FE), as reported by Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015), had only enrolled up to 20 % of the first-year class between the fall of 2002 until the fall of 2012, as this course was voluntary and only marketed to new students during the registration period and throughout orientation. The online course was piloted for the first time to new students during the fall and spring semesters during the 2012– 2013 academic year. Before the pilot, the course was not offered during spring semesters. By the fall of 2013, the online version eliminated the traditional lecture version of the FE course. Students who did not take the course were withdrawn only when they had departmental consent or had withdrawn from the university entirely (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

The primary purpose of the FE course, as explained by Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015), was to ease the transition from high school to college for students. With the new online version, the primary goal of the course is to provide the same information about university resources, in the same consistent format to all new University “Y” students. The intention was that by providing an extended orientation period, where students have access to individuals knowledgeable about the University “Y,” students would make the first-year students transition smoothly.

Student development models should stimulate and support students as they progress through their unique developmental process, and the more the development can be individualized, the better. The following models assist with creating a foundation for the elaboration of a useful first-year experience course.

Maslow (1943) introduced the idea that there are at least five sets of goals, referred to as basic needs in the following themes of physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Also, Maslow (1943) described that individuals are motivated by “the desire to achieve the various conditions upon which these basic needs rest and by intellectual desires” (p. 396). Applications of this theory in an academic setting can be evident to an instructor with the implied understanding that a student's cognitive needs, once met, fulfill their basic physiological needs. For example, a tired and hungry student will find it difficult to focus on learning. Students who feel safe (emotionally and physically) as well as accepted within the classroom will progress and reach their full potential (McLeod, 2014).

Tinto's (1975) student integration model and the Student Departure Model asserted the student's pre-existing, individual attributes and commitments, are continuously modified once in college, based on interactions with members of the institution's educational and social systems. Tinto additionally stated that with all other factors staying constant, the stronger the level of the student's social and academic integration, the student's institutional and graduation commitment (Tinto, 1993). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) indicated that Tinto's student integration model, specifically the more recent versions, Tino's model had included variables, as promoting motivation such as goal commitment. Over the last decade, multiple fields of

study have applied motivational theories into practice through theoretical developments, and by exploring undergraduate retention.

Astin (1984) developed the student involvement model indicated retention directly correlates to student involvement with the institution. Astin (1984) intended for involvement to be behavioral in meaning and stated: “it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, and how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement” (p. 298). Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) stated that Astin found that almost all forms of student-to-student interaction and academic involvement lead to positive outcomes. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to obtain a global perspective of the online FE course since its inception. Mangrum-Billups and Wilson (2014-2015) gathered and reported demographic data that was collected from students participating in the face-to-face FE course since 2001 and then compared the data to those first-year students not enrolled in the FE course. For the online version pilot course sections that started in the fall of 2012, the same demographic data was collected. Still, a new online survey was created and was utilized to collect data, as well as provide a platform to make changes suggested by students. The 30-item student survey was developed for all enrolled students. If a new student was in the transfer population, five additional questions needed to be answered (Mangrum-Billups & Wilson, 2014-2015).

Theoretical Frameworks Summary

Interest in these first-year experience courses waned until a new, more diverse group of first-generation students arrived on college campuses in the 1970s. First-year experience courses referred to as seminars, extended orientation, surveys, and

experiences date back to 1882 at Lee College in Kentucky (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). These historical first-year course models led to a re-birth of the University 101 course (Gardner, 1986). Based on new research, first-year success, as measured by student retention and GPA, is correlated to a positive first-year experience during the first year of college (Mendel & Evans, 2003). The literature on the orientation model and the research/academic model suggested that those freshmen are participating in a first-year course more likely to return as well as have more success in the college experience. These students graduate with higher grade point averages in comparison to the student's first-year course. There was a higher involvement rate from the students enrolled in a first-year course participating in student activity programming.

In conjunction with improving academic performance, Commander (2009) found students experience a lower risk of course withdrawal, increased cognitive skills and abilities, and higher overall satisfaction with college due to participating in the first-year experience within a learning community program. The first-year course, as referenced by Tobolosky, Mamrick, and Cox (2005), captured the attention of these students and cultivated the student's desire to attend a university, participate in the campus community, and become engaged in their college learning experiences. Since the research is unclear as to which model influences student retention and GPA to the most significant degree, many institutions support the model, the best serves their representative student population. Student development models should stimulate and support students as they progress through their unique developmental process, and the more the development can be individualized, the better.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Huitt (2007) indicated that Maslow attempted to synthesize a large body of research related to human motivation. Humans seek to fulfill higher, more complex psychological needs, such as the need for esteem, only after more basic survival needs satisfied. Applications of this theory in an academic setting can be evident to an instructor with the basic understanding that a student's cognitive needs, once met, fulfill their basic physiological needs.

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. Erikson was influenced by an extended upon Freudian thoughts, which focused on the adaptive and creative characteristics of the ego and expanded the notion of the stages of personality development to include the entire lifespan. Each new stage of development, humans face a new challenge that can either help further develop or hinder the development of identity (Cherry, 2015). McLeod (2013) stated Erikson proposed a lifespan model of development, five stages up to the age of 18-year stages beyond, well into adulthood.

Student Integration Model. Tinto additionally stated that with all other factors staying constant, the stronger the level of the student's social and academic integration, the students' institutional and graduation commitment (Tinto, 1993).

Chickering Student Development Theory. Chickering (1969) emphasized developing interpersonal competence and accepting interdependence as an essential reality of living. Chickering's students progressed through seven developmental vectors. "They are called vectors of development because each seems to have direction expressed by a spiral than by a straight line" (Chickering, p. 8). The vectors require in-depth conversations to build trust between the advisor and the student, and individuals working with students, into a developmental assessment after only one meeting.

Student Involvement Model. Astin (1984) developed the student involvement model indicated retention correlates to student involvement with the institution. While Astin did not focus explicitly on the relationship between participation and satisfaction, his findings on the benefits of involvement indicate that involvement links directly to positive student outcomes, thus further investigate the potential relationship between participation and satisfaction. Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) stated that Astin found that almost all forms of student-to-student interaction and academic involvement lead to positive outcomes.

Perry Scheme of Intellectual Development. According to The Perry Network (2015), this scheme reflects the intertwining of cognitive and affective perspectives of a college education. Perry's work underscores the notion the learning most want to see students result in experiences with involve qualitative changes in the way approach their learning and. Nine distinct stages, as Perry calls "positions," As in positions from which to view the world, were discerned in the student's current paths, although two, the first and the last, possibly are extensions of the empirical work, constructed for the sake of elegance and completeness. The Perry Network (2015) elaborated by stating, "within the original conceptualization of the scheme, positions one through five describe the primarily intellectual portion: systematic, structural change toward increasing differentiation and complexity" (p. 10).

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Models of Human Development. Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) described Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development as in a continual state of development until Bronfenbrenner died in 2005. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Model is composed of five socially organized

subsystems that help support and guide human growth. Ranged from the microsystem, which refers to the relationship between a developing person and the immediate environment, to the macro system, such as the economy, customs, and bodies of knowledge. In the 1980's Bronfenbrenner, Tudge et al., 2009, referred to "process" that explains the connection between some aspect of the context (culture or social class) or some aspect of the individual (gender) and an outcome of interest. Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) found that Bronfenbrenner reminded us that environments must be reviewed carefully and in tandem with individuals. Because of the interactive nature of the student/campus relationship, studies of student experience will not be complete if they examine merely one side of this partnership, such as student involvement.

Results

Quantitative Results

Descriptive statistics were collected through the University "Y" Office of Planning and Institutional Research, for students completing the FE course and students who did not complete the FE course. A series of statistical tests were performed to compare first-year students taking the FE course with first-year students not taking the FE course (by the fall of 2013 was very few overall). FE course surveys were imputed into a statistical software package and analyzed using Qualtrics.

Results for Research Question 1. The enrolled first-year students for the fall of 2015 identified as the following ethnic origin breakdown: 47% white, 25% Hispanic or Latino, 10% Asian or Pacific Islander, 8% Black or African American, 7% unknown or missing, 4% as two or more races, and >1% American Indian or Alaska Native. These percentages were within the same range since the fall of 2012 except students identifying

as Black or African American. In the fall of 2012, there were 22% of the enrolled students who identified as Black or African American, and that percentage dropped to 8% in the fall of 2013. More female students enrolled in the FE course versus male students. Female enrollment ranged from 51% to 54% since the fall of 2012. Male enrollment reached comparatively at 46% to 49% since the fall of 2012. The majority of the students enrolled in the FE course lived on campus. Since the fall of 2012, 77% to 89% of the students enrolled were living on campus as traditional students. The course enrollment captured 11% to 23% of the students residing off-campus. Students for the fall of 2015 had a reported SAT score of 1100 or higher and an incoming high school grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher.

Results for Research Question 2. From the fall of 2012 through the fall of 2014, First Time in College (FTIC) students who responded to the survey identified that the Academic Resources module as one of the topmost valued components of the course. In the fall of 2015, FTIC students valued the Cognates module as one of the topmost valued components of the course. FTIC students valued the Living at University “Y” module from the fall of 2013 to the fall of 2015 modules as one of the most valued components of the course.

From the fall of 2014 through the fall of 2015, transfer students who responded to the survey identified that the Academic Resources module as the topmost valued component of the course. In the fall of 2013, transfer students valued the History and Tradition module as the most valued component of the course.

Results for Research Question 3. From the fall of 2013 through the fall of 2015, First Time in College (FTIC) students who responded to the survey identified that the

Living at University “Y” module as the least valued component of the course. From the fall of 2013 through the fall of 2015, First Time in College (FTIC) students who responded to the survey identified that the History & Tradition module as the second least valued component of the course. Conversely, in the fall of 2013, transfer students valued the History and Tradition module as the most valued component of the course.

Results for Research Question 5. In the fall of 2015, 57% of the students who responded to the survey identified as being satisfied with the course overall. Of these same students, 53% of the students reported this course as being helpful. From the fall of 2013 through the fall of 2015, the overall satisfaction of the course was between 47%-61%. During this same timeframe, 46% to 53% of the students found this course helpful.

Results for Research Question 6. The students enrolled at University “Y” and were enrolled in the online FE course had a 92% to 94% fall to fall retention rate. The students who were enrolled in this course were retained at the same or higher percentage of the overall retained students for the university. During the fall of 2012, the pilot for this course showed that the students who enrolled in the online version of FE were retained at 98%, compared with 94% for the students enrolled in the FE course in a traditional classroom environment.

The overall retention of the students who were enrolled in the FE course in the fall of 2014 was 91.4% for the fall of 2015 compared to the 8.6% of students who did not return to the university. For the fall of 2014, the breakdown of final grades in the FE course and retention rates are reflected in Table 8. The students who received the grade of A in the course had a retention rate of 92.6 %. The students who received the grade of B or C in the course had a retention rate of 85.7%. Students who received a grade of I or

W in the course had a retention rate of 61.5%. The retention rates of the students enrolled in the fall of 2015 to the fall of 2016 were not available.

Qualitative Results

During analysis, to ensure trustworthiness, the researchers sorted formulated meanings into groups representing themes emerging from an analysis of the transcripts from the student responses to open-ended questions. To address the notion of dependability, which is an aspect of trustworthiness, the researchers evaluated whether the process of the study was consistent and reasonable overtime (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2000). In other words, the researchers queried whether the results were holistically consistent among groups and whether responses fell within similar parameters. Dependability, which is parallel to the reliability, was used to show that the process of inquiry was logical, traceable, and documented (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The preservation of the verbatim transcripts served as another determinant of dependability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Credibility, or truth-value, as defined by Maxwell (1996), is the correctness of description, conclusion, explanation, or interpretation. Credibility is parallel to internal validity and provides assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their experiences and the researchers' reconstructions and representation of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Results for Research Question 2. The responses for this question represented 69% (N=95 student responses) of the 138 students who submitted the survey. Based on the top components that were reported as the most valuable components of the curriculum for the fall of 2015 by FTIC and transfer students, 84% of the responses were

about the Cognate, Living at University “Y,” or Academic Resources modules. The overall theme summary of the comments for the Cognate module (N=25, 26%) stated: “this module provided helpful information and answered questions because cognates are difficult to understand.” The overall theme summary of the comments for the Living at University “Y” module (N=10, 11%) stated, “this module provided information and help prepare us for what it would be like to live on campus.” The overall theme summary of the comments for the Academic Resources module (N=45, 47%) stated: “I will be using this information the most and need to know where these resources are on campus.”

Results for Research Question 3. The responses for this question represented 68% (N=94 student responses) of the 138 students who submitted the survey. Based on the top components that were reported as the least valuable components of the curriculum for the fall of 2015 by FTIC and transfer students, 26% of the responses were about the Living at University “Y,” History & Tradition, or Libraries modules. The overall theme summary of the comments for the Living at University “Y” module (N=10, 11%) stated, “this module should be common sense, and you will learn as you move on,” or some students expressed that they do not live on campus. The overall theme summary of the comments for the History & Tradition module (N=8, 9%) stated “this information I already knew or learned at orientation,” and a few students felt this module should not be at the end of the course curriculum. The overall theme summary of the comments for the Libraries module (N=6, 6%) stated: “This module is not needed or should be explored on your own when it is time for a research paper.”

Results for Research Question 4. From the fall of 2015, 39% of the students who responded to the survey identified that there was nothing within the course that

needed to be face-to-face interaction. Some students did propose some of the components of the course have face-to-face interactions, as well as add some additional components to the course. For face-to-face interactions, students identified the current Cognates module (17%, N=11) and to add the following to the developed course modules: Academic Advising/Scheduling (13%, N=8), Navigating Campus (9%, N=6), Student Organizations (6%, N=4), and Study Abroad (16%, N=10).

Results for Research Question 5. The responses for this question represented 59% (N=82 student responses) of the 138 students who submitted the survey. Based on the student responses for the overall most valuable components of the curriculum for the fall of 2015 by FTIC and transfer students, 98% of the responses were about the theme summary in Figure 9. The most highly commented themes for these questions were reported as either the course as a whole (N=23, 28%), Academic Resources module (N=17, 21%), or Living at University “Y” module (N=16, 20%). The overall theme summary of the comments for the class stated: “the entire course is valuable because it really helps first-year and transfer students feel like a part of the university even before starting actual classes or can refer back to the content while in classes.” The overall theme summary of the comments for the Academic Resources module stated: “the information provided about academic resources and tutoring is helpful.” The overall theme summary of the comments for the Living at University “Y” module stated, “the first part of the course was helpful about living on campus and provided an idea of what it is like.”

The findings generated by the Quantitative and Qualitative Research Questions were supported in the literature review. Based on new research, first-year success, as

measured by student retention and GPA, is correlated to a positive first-year experience during the first year of college (Mendel & Evans, 2003). Overall satisfaction was also higher for the university and faculty from the students who enrolled in a first-year course. In conjunction with improving academic performance, Commander (2009) found students experience a lower risk of course withdrawal, increased cognitive skills and abilities, and higher overall satisfaction with college due to participating in the first-year experience within a learning community program. The first-year course, as referenced by Tobolosky, Mamrick, and Cox (2005), captured the attention of these students and cultivated the student's desire to attend a university, participate in the campus community, and become engaged in their college learning experiences. First-year courses can heighten the college experience, as well as increase retention and graduation rates. Nationally, the degree to which these programs established goals varies, as does the duration, placement, credit, and entry requirements of the first-year programs (Tobolosky et al., 2005).

Conclusions and Summaries

In the fall of 2012, there were 22% of the enrolled students who identified as Black or African American, and that percentage dropped to 8% in the fall of 2013. There were more female students enrolled in the FE course than male students. The course enrollment captures 11% to 23% of the students who reside off-campus.

From the fall of 2012 until the fall of 2014, FTIC students who responded to the survey identified that the Academic Resources module as one of the topmost valued components of the course. For face-to-face interactions, students identified the current

Cognates module (17%) and to add the following to the developed course modules: Academic Advising/Scheduling (13%), Navigating Campus (9%), Student Organizations (6%), and Study Abroad (16%).

In the fall of 2015, 57% of the students who responded to the survey identified as being satisfied with the course overall. During this same timeframe, 46% to 53% of the students found this course helpful.

The students who received the grade of A in the course had a retention rate of 92.6%. The students who received the grade of B or C in the course had a retention rate of 85.7%. The overall retention of the students who were enrolled in the FE course in the fall of 2014 was 91.4% for the fall of 2015 compared to the 8.6% of students who did not return to the university. The students enrolled at University “Y” and are enrolled in the online FE course have a 92% to 94% fall to fall retention rate. During the fall of 2012, the pilot for this course showed that the students who enrolled in the online version of FE were retained at 98%, compared with 94% for the students enrolled in the FE course in a traditional classroom environment.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is related to participation in the study’s survey due to a large population of subjects who did not participate. Students who participated in the course survey each fall semester of 2012-2015 only represent 11% of the overall total enrolled students in the online FE course (N=488 student survey responses; N= 4,585 total enrolled first-year students). Even though efforts were made to assure all participants that their information will remain confidential, there was low participation in

the survey. As the researcher's bias is always an issue, the use of a Likert-like survey instrument minimized this concern. Additionally, the fall 2015 responses to the questions of face-to-face interactions, the survey showed that 39% of the students who responded (N=64 responses to the question, N=138 total students who completed the survey) did not want to change the course structure.

Another limitation of this survey was the difficulty of matching student responses to students continuing in the spring semester. The Office of Institutional Advancement assisted the researcher in determining the percentage of students that passed the online FE course and registered in the spring semester. Retention rates at University "Y" will track the fall a student enters the university until the fall of a student's second year (referred to as fall-to-fall retention rates). This data was not available for the fall of 2015 until the fall of 2016. The retention rates of the online FE course participants from the fall of 2012 through the fall of 2014 were reflected within Tables 4 – 7 in Chapter 4. Based on the information provided by the Planning and Institutional Research Retention Rate Databases for the fall semesters of 2012 through 2014, the students who were enrolled in the FE course averaged a retention rate of 90% to 94% compared to those students who did not enroll in the FE course, who averaged a retention rate of 87% to 92%.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research that was undertaken for this study has highlighted how retention rates and first-year student perceptions are essential when implementing an FE course at a university and that further research would be beneficial. The study only represented one university's FE course and relied on voluntary responses from the students enrolled in the

course. The researcher would recommend expanding this survey to multiple universities, which could diversify the findings of demographical and retention data, as well as the perceptions of first-year students in varied FE course programs. The researcher would also recommend comparing the cumulative grade point average of students who completed the online FE course and the fall-to-fall retention rates to see if there is a significant difference when comparing higher grade point averages to higher retention rate percentages.

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Appendix A

FE 100: The University of Y Experience Current Survey

FE 100: The University of Y Experience Current Survey

Q 1 - 2 Section 1: FE 100 Content

Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Needs Less (1)	Right Amount (2)	Needs More (3)
How was the length of the module topics? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How appropriate was the level of detail of the information presented? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 3 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Not Effective (1)	Effective (2)	Very Effective (3)
How effective was the delivery of the information? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 4 What was the most useful module? Select only one:

- Module 1: Living at University Y (1)
- Module 2: Accessing IT Systems (2)
- Module 3: University Y History and Traditions (3)
- Module 4: Academic Resources (4)
- Module 5: Navigating University Y Libraries (5)
- Module 6: Academic Advising and Registration (6)
- Module 7: Enhancing Your Undergraduate Experience (7)
- Module 8: Cognates (8)
- Module 9: Career Development and Networking (9)
- Module 10: Student Involvement (10)
- Module 12: Student Health and Wellness (11)
- Module 11: University Y Policies and Procedures (12)

Q 5 Please explain why this is the most useful module in the course?

Q 6 What was the least useful module? Select only one:

- Module 1: Living at University Y (1)
- Module 2: Accessing IT Systems (2)
- Module 3: University Y History and Traditions (3)
- Module 4: Academic Resources (4)
- Module 5: Navigating University Y Libraries (5)
- Module 6: Academic Advising and Registration (6)
- Module 7: Enhancing Your Undergraduate Experience (7)
- Module 8: Cognates (8)
- Module 9: Career Development and Networking (9)
- Module 10: Student Involvement (10)
- Module 11: Student Health and Wellness (11)
- Module 12: University Y Policies and Procedures (12)

Q 7 Please explain why this is the least useful module in the course?

Q 8 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
The U Chat videos provided a student perspective on-campus involvement opportunities. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 9 Which U Chat was most engaging? (select only one):

- Service and Leadership Center (1)
- Programming Committee (2)
- University Y Museum (4)
- Student Government Association (5)

Q 10 How many times did you access the course a week? (select only one):

- 1 to 3 times a week (1)
- 3-6 times a week (2)
- 6 or more times a week (3)

Q 11 Is there any additional topic/information that you would like to see included in future FE100 courses that were not covered?

Q 12 Section 2: FE 100 Technology Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Not User-Friendly at All (1)	Somewhat User-Friendly (2)	User-Friendly (3)	Very User-Friendly (4)
The modules were (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 13 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Not Reliable (1)	Somewhat Reliable (2)	Reliable (3)	Very Reliable (4)
The technology was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 14 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Difficult (1)	Somewhat Easy (2)	Easy (3)	Very Easy (4)
The online navigation was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 15 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Not at all Accurate (1)	Somewhat Accurate (2)	Accurate (3)	Very Accurate (4)
The grade report was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 16 Section 3: FE 100 Course Presentation Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Very Disorganized (1)	Somewhat Disorganized (2)	Organized (3)	Somewhat Organized (4)	Very Organized (5)
The organization of the course was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 17 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Very Unpleasant (1)	Unpleasant (2)	Neutral (3)	Pleasant (4)	Very Pleasant (5)
The aesthetics of the online course material was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 18 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Very Poor (1)	Poor (2)	Neutral (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)
The video quality per module was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 19 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Too Long (1)	Right Length (2)	Too Short (3)
The video length per module was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 20 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Very Poor (1)	Poor (2)	Neutral (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)
The PowerPoint quality per module was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 21 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Too Long (1)	Right Length (2)	Too Short (3)
The PowerPoint length per module was (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 22 Please provide any additional suggestion for enhancing the presentation of the course (i.e., more images, larger font, different color scheme):

Q 23-25 Section 4: FE 100 Overall Satisfaction Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one): How would you rate your satisfaction with your FE 100 course experience?

	Very High (1)	High (2)	Low (3)	Very Low (4)
Overall (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic services and resources (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student services and resources (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 26 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Very Unhelpful (1)	Somewhat Unhelpful (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Helpful (4)	Very Helpful (5)
I found this course to be (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 27 What one thing about this course that was of the most value to you?

Q 28 Please select the course section of FE 100 you were enrolled in:

- Y (1)
- Y1 (2)
- Y2 (3)
- Y3 (4)
- Y4 (5)

Q 29 Please select your current student status:

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)

Q 30 Please select one of the following statements:

- I reside on campus. (1)
- I reside off-campus. (2)

Q 31 Did you start this semester as a transfer student?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip to Section 5: UMX 100 Transfer Student ...If No Is Selected, Then Skip to End of Survey

Q 32 Section 5: FE 100 Transfer Student Perspective Please select all of the responses that best describes your opinion: Which modules provided you with the most useful information (select all that apply)?

- Module 1: Living at University Y (1)
- Module 2: Accessing IT Systems (2)
- Module 3: University Y History and Traditions (3)
- Module 4: Academic Resources (4)
- Module 5: Navigating University Y Libraries (5)
- Module 6: Academic Advising and Registration (6)
- Module 7: Enhancing Your Undergraduate Experience (7)
- Module 8: Cognates (8)
- Module 9: Career Development and Networking (9)
- Module 10: Student Involvement (10)
- Module 11: Student Health and Wellness (11)
- Module 12: University Y Policies and Procedures (12)

Q 33 Once you were accepted to University Y, did you seek out any transfer student programs offered?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q 34 Did you know about the Transfer Assistance Program on campus?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q 35 What would you add to this course to improve it for future transfer students?

Appendix B

FE 100: The University of Y Experience Study Survey

FE 100: The University of Y Experience Study Survey

Q1-2Section 1: FE 100 Content

Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Needs Less (1)	Right Amount (2)	Needs More (3)
How was the length of the module topics? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How appropriate was the level of detail of the information presented? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 3 Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Not Effective (1)	Effective (2)	Very Effective (3)
How effective was the delivery of the information? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 4

What was the most useful module? Select only one:

- Module 1: Living at University Y (1)
- Module 2: Accessing IT Systems (2)
- Module 3: University Y History and Traditions (3)
- Module 4: Academic Resources (4)
- Module 5: Navigating University Y Libraries (5)
- Module 6: Academic Advising and Registration (6)
- Module 7: Enhancing Your Undergraduate Experience (7)
- Module 8: Cognates (8)
- Module 9: Career Development and Networking (9)
- Module 10: Student Involvement (10)
- Module 12: Student Health and Wellness (11)
- Module 11: University Y Policies and Procedures (12)

Q 5

Please explain why this is the most useful module in the course?

Q 6

What was the least useful module? Select only one:

- Module 1: Living at University Y (1)
- Module 2: Accessing IT Systems (2)
- Module 3: University Y History and Traditions (3)
- Module 4: Academic Resources (4)
- Module 5: Navigating University Y Libraries (5)
- Module 6: Academic Advising and Registration (6)
- Module 7: Enhancing Your Undergraduate Experience (7)
- Module 8: Cognates (8)
- Module 9: Career Development and Networking (9)
- Module 10: Student Involvement (10)
- Module 11: Student Health and Wellness (11)
- Module 12: University Y Policies and Procedures (12)

Q 7

Please explain why this is the least useful module in the course?

Q 8

Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)
The U Chat videos provided a student perspective on-campus involvement opportunities. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9

Which modules or topics within the FE course should be face-to-face interactions with campus department staff members?

Q10

How many times did you access the course for a week? (select only one):

- 1 to 3 times a week (1)
- 3-6 times a week (2)
- 6 or more times a week (3)

Q 11-13 Section 2: FE 100 Overall Satisfaction

Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

How would you rate your satisfaction with your FE 100 course experience?

	Very High (1)	High (2)	Neutral (3)	Low (4)	Very Low (5)
Overall course satisfaction (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The satisfaction of academic services and resources within the course (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The satisfaction of student services and resources within the course (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 14

Please select the response that best describes your opinion (select only one):

	Very Unhelpful (1)	Somewhat Unhelpful (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat Helpful (4)	Very Helpful (5)
I found this course to be (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 15

What one thing about this course that was of the most value to you?

Q 16

Please select your current student status:

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)

Q 17

Were transfer student status when you were enrolled in the FE 100 course?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip to Section 3: UMX 100 Transfer Student ...If No Is Selected, Then Skip to End of Survey

Q 18 Section 3: FE 100 Transfer Student Perspective

Please select all of the responses that best describes your opinion:

Which modules provided you with the most useful information (select all that apply)?

- Module 1: Living at University Y (1)
- Module 2: Accessing IT Systems (2)
- Module 3: University Y History and Traditions (3)
- Module 4: Academic Resources (4)
- Module 5: Navigating University Y Libraries (5)
- Module 6: Academic Advising and Registration (6)
- Module 7: Enhancing Your Undergraduate Experience (7)
- Module 8: Cognates (8)
- Module 9: Career Development and Networking (9)
- Module 10: Student Involvement (10)
- Module 11: Student Health and Wellness (11)
- Module 12: University Y Policies and Procedures (12)

Q 19

Once you were accepted to University Y, did you seek out any transfer student programs offered?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q 20

Did you know about the Transfer Assistance Program on campus?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q 21

What would you add to this course for future transfer students?