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THE EFFECT OF A STUDENT SUCCESS SEMINAR
ON STUDENT RETENTION AT A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

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

By
Cindy Clemson

August 2015

THE EFFECT OF A STUDENT SUCCESS SEMINAR ON STUDENT RETENTION
AT A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

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This work is dedicated to my husband, Chris, who motivated me to never give up and always do my best. His support through this journey kept me going through the many long months of writing. My children, Matthew, Sean and Lauren, all successful and compassionate individuals, inspired me to continue my education in order to help others learn. They, too, are a special part of this dedication. An extra-special dedication goes to my grandson, Max, whose insatiable wonder for learning makes it even more important for me to continue to study the reasons how we as teachers, professors, and parents can help all students to be successful learners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Randy Capps, for his support during the last three years. He constantly challenged me and helped me to move out of my comfort zone and to look for other opportunities to grow as a person and a leader. In addition, I want to thank the other two members of my committee, Dr. Tony Norman and Dr. Renae Duncan, who also took time from their own very busy schedules to support me on this incredible journey. Their patience and guidance have made a lasting impact on me and encouraged me to continue to keep learning. A special thank you goes to Bob Cobb, the research methodologist at the WKU EDLD program, for his tireless efforts to help me understand the statistical analysis methodology used in my study.

A special acknowledgment goes to the many outstanding staff members at my university with whom I have had the sincere pleasure to work, including the Vice-President of Student Affairs, Dr. Don Robertson, whose guidance inspires all of us to be better administrators. A heartfelt thank you goes to my colleagues in Cohort VIII at WKU. I am proud to be part of such a special group who truly make a difference in the lives of so many others.

I also wish to thank my mother-in-law, Donna, for her editorial help. To my amazing family, Matt, Elizabeth, Max, Sean, Stephanie, Lauren, and Trevor, who provided me with encouragement every step of the way, I am truly thankful. To my sister, Kelly, who always told me how proud she was of me and that she was sure that our parents were too, thank you! Last, my sincere gratitude goes to the love of my life, Chris, whom I could always count on to be there for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Context	3
Development of a New Student Success Seminar	5
Theoretical Framework	6
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions	8
Significance of the Study	10
Limitations	11
Definition of Terms	12
Summary	13
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Academic and Social Integration.....	14
Expectations	20
Support	21
Assessment and feedback	24
Involvement	25
Student Engagement	27

First-year Seminars	31
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	36
Purpose and Central Research Question	36
Research Design	37
Research Context	38
Participants	39
Intervention	40
Data Sources and Instrumentation	41
Existing Student Data	41
Survey	42
Procedures	44
Data Analysis	45
Ethical Considerations	46
Summary	47
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	48
Quantitative Results	49
Qualitative Results	60
Summary of Results	66
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	68
Implications of Findings	72
Limitations of Study	76
Recommendations	77
Recommendations for Future Study	79

Conclusion	80
REFERENCES	82
APPENDIX A: Institutional Integration Scale Survey	91
APPENDIX B: WKU Institutional Review Board Letter	98

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure	16
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LIST OF TABLES

1. Retention Rates from Fall 2014- Spring 2015 by Group	50
2. First-semester GPA by Group	51
3. Completion of Credit Hours by Group	52
4. Pass Rates of 100T Class by Group	53
5. T-Test for Act Scores by Group	54
6. T-Test for Institutional Integration Scores by Group	57
7. T-Test for Campus Services Scores by Group	59
8. Participation in Student Activities, Clubs and Organizations by Group	60
9. Confidence Levels by Group	63
10. Academic Areas In Which Most Confidence Was Indicated	65

THE EFFECT OF A STUDENT SUCCESS SEMINAR ON STUDENT RETENTION
AT A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

Cindy Clemson

August 2015

99 Pages

Directed by: Randy Capps, Tony Norman, and Renae Duncan

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Western Kentucky University

With approximately half of all students who enter colleges and universities graduating, the problem of student attrition continues to challenge higher education officials. Decades of research studies have been completed on the causes of student persistence and retention, but significant changes have not occurred to increase those numbers.

This study attempted to integrate current research with a practical application to increase retention of first-year students. A first-year seminar, known as a student success seminar, was created at the university to teach advanced academic behaviors to incoming freshmen. This study involved a program evaluation of the new seminar as the independent variable and examined the results of those who participated in the seminar (SSS) and those who did not (No SSS).

The design compared the two groups of students on five quantitative and two qualitative questions. The quantitative research included second semester retention, grade point average, completion of credit hours, pass rate of a freshmen transitions course, and academic and social integration to campus. The social and academic integration of the students was measured using the Institutional Integration Scale (IIS). The qualitative research included determining whether the students who participated in the seminar had a more positive perception of their overall college experience and an increased confidence in their ability to do well at the university.

The study found: (a) no statistically significant difference between the two groups in second semester retention, mean grade point average, credit hours completed, and social integration to the campus. An inverse relationship was found regarding the pass rate of the freshmen transitions course, in which the No SSS students passed at a higher rate than the SSS students. In the area of academic integration, the SSS group showed a statistically significant difference in academic integration to campus, including visiting the library and the multicultural center more often. Additionally, the SSS group indicated a more positive perception of their overall college experience and possessed an increased confidence in their ability to do well in college.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statistics have indicated that only approximately one-half of all students who enroll in higher education actually complete a bachelor's degree in six years (Cambiano, Denny, & DeVore, 2000; Fain, 2014). Despite a recent report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2013) indicating that 56.1% of students who entered college in 2007 graduated by the spring of 2013, the trend of low graduation rates has not changed significantly in the 40 years of research examining this issue. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, the research arm of the National Student Clearinghouse, is charged with tracking and reporting the persistence and retention rates for each cohort year of entering freshmen. The principal findings of their latest report indicated that conventional approaches to understanding college effectiveness and student success are complex and require additional study (Fain, 2014).

Currently, the graduation rates are similar for the entire state of Kentucky and for the comprehensive institution in the study, located in western Kentucky. According to Bob King (2013), President of the Kentucky Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE), the 2012-2013 six-year graduation rate for a student enrolled in a Kentucky institution of higher education was 48.8%. The current six-year graduation rate of the university in this study was slightly higher at 54.2% (Murray State University [MSU], 2013).

This trend of low graduation and retention rates has become a major concern for postsecondary institutions across the country, and much has been written regarding the necessity of changing this pattern. The lost income for universities, coupled with smaller numbers of students graduating from high school, has made the retention of current college students critical. In addition, as the workforce changes and the economy

becomes more global, it is crucial that students leave institutions of higher education prepared to succeed in this new marketplace. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2006), it is imperative to have a college-educated workforce in order for the nation to remain competitive. The United States was once among the world's leaders in the percentage of the population between the ages of 24 and 35 holding a college degree; however, this is no longer the case (Tierney, 2006). For this reason, a change must be made or the United States risks falling farther behind.

Baum, Ma, and Payea (2013) provided supporting evidence that as the level of education increases, the earned income increases as well for those who complete a bachelor's degree. Their study indicated that those who finish college earn over one million dollars more during their lifetime than those who do not attend college. Not only do college graduates earn substantially more money than those who do not complete college, there also is evidence that other outcomes increase for college graduates. The benefits of a college-educated population are seen in a variety of issues: health, unemployment, poverty, rates of incarceration, school readiness of children, and civic engagements such as voting and volunteerism (Carnevale & Rose, 2011).

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Graduation Rate Outcomes Study conducted in 2005, elite colleges and universities historically have been allowed to become more selective to maintain their high retention and graduation rates. However, "the people's universities" (AASCU, 2005, p. 3), which include most of Kentucky's universities, "are bound by our mission and demographics to educate a student population that has increased in diversity with respect to race/ethnicity, age and social class" (AASCU, 2005, p. 3). Thus, the "people's

universities” are unable to become more selective to increase their retention and graduation rates.

The U. S. Congress has also begun to focus on graduation rates as a “measure of institutional effectiveness” (AASCU, 2005, p. 5). In addition, many state departments of higher education (including Kentucky’s CPE) have made it mandatory for their institutions of higher education to put into place new policies and procedures for increasing student graduation and retention rates, or they risk losing some of their state funding. Due to this demand for accountability, many institutions of higher education -- including the university in this study -- have been charged with making student retention a priority. In 2011, the president of this university created a presidential task force to examine the university’s graduation and retention statistics and to suggest new policies and procedures to increase both of these rates.

Statement of the Problem

Context

To supplement individual institutions’ efforts, the Kentucky CPE began hosting a yearly Student Success Summit to assist the state’s colleges and universities in meeting the new mandate of higher retention rates. The summit, which began in 2012, featured the most successful national and statewide practices for increasing student success in college. The second summit, held in April 2013, featured Dr. Joe Cuseo, whose research focused on the use of a student success seminar as a high impact strategy for increasing retention. His approach was based on over 30 plus years of research by the National Resource Center at the University of South Carolina and integrated academic affairs (faculty) and student affairs staff members in a collaborative approach to teaching a first-

year transitions course. Another featured guest at the summit was Dr. Vincent Tinto, a Distinguished University Professor Emeritus at Syracuse University, who has written over 50 publications on student success in higher education. Tinto's theory and viewpoint on student success is considered the benchmark in this area.

Each institution at the 2013 summit was charged with developing a plan in which both student affairs professionals and faculty work collaboratively to address the retention problem at their respective institutions. The 12-member university contingent, which included an equal number of professional staff and faculty, explored the implementation of a student success seminar for incoming freshmen. Those present decided that the course would combine a student affairs professional with the faculty member who teaches the freshmen transitions course in each major. This collaboration would create a freshmen transitions class to educate the whole student. The professional staff members, many of whom were senior student affairs staff, would be responsible for teaching self-efficacy skills and advanced academic behaviors to the students, in addition to helping them locate appropriate campus resources, while the professor would continue to teach the academic component of the class.

The 12 faculty and staff members present at the summit became part of a larger committee that had already begun to review changes in the existing freshmen transitions classes. The current structure of the transitions course was a one-credit hour class in each major, whereby a faculty member met with the new freshmen on a weekly basis. The course was designed as an academic orientation to each specific major on campus, although the faculty had recently begun to recognize that the students needed to learn additional skills to help them fully integrate to the university. Upon returning to campus,

the group members who attended the summit (which included the associate provost for undergraduate education, the associate vice-president for student affairs and the coordinator of the Center for Academic Success) became the catalyst to finding a means for implementing the new collaborative idea for the 2013-2014 academic year.

Development of a New Student Success Seminar

As the summit was held near the end of the spring 2013 semester, insufficient time was available to establish a new course for the fall 2013 semester. However, the committee implemented a pilot program for the spring 2014 semester. This program included a student success seminar for each of the two sections of the College of Business freshmen transitions course (entitled FTR 100T). Two professional staff members who attended the summit were asked to work collaboratively with the faculty member teaching the FTR 100T course. The coordinator of the Academic Success Center was the teacher of one of the student success seminars, and the associate director of Student Disability Services was the instructor for the second section of the FTR 100T course. The pilot program consisted of 50 students, with approximately 25 in each section.

The design of the course included meeting with the students two days per week for the first eight weeks. The FTR 100T instructor taught the students on Monday, and the student success teacher taught the course on Wednesdays at the same time. The FTR 100T instructor continued to meet the students on Mondays for the remainder of the 16-week semester; however, the student success seminar ended after eight weeks. Results from a survey given to the students at the midterm and the end of the eight-week seminar

indicated that more than 75% felt the seminar helped with the transition to their first semester on campus.

These results were shared with the committee, and plans continued for implementation of the course for the fall 2014 semester. Initially the committee desired that all freshmen transitions classes would incorporate the student success seminar into their classes. However, by the end of the spring 2014 semester, approximately half of the freshmen transitions professors indicated a desire to add the student success seminar to their classes for the fall 2014 semester. When the fall 2014 semester began, 27 sections of transitions classes included a student success seminar in their class, and 27 sections did not include the seminar.

The focus of this study was to complete a program evaluation of the new student success seminar to determine whether a statistically significant difference exists in the retention of first-semester freshmen who had the student success seminar in conjunction with their transitions course for their major vs. those who had only the transitions course focused on their academic major.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993) provided the theoretical framework for this study. Tinto (1993) stated that his model was "primarily sociological in character" (p. 113) and was an "interactive model of student departure" (p. 112). Tinto's theory was adapted from social theorist Emile Durkheim's (1951) Theory of Suicide and incorporated the work of Spady (1970), stating that, when viewing student retention, the role of the environment, in particular the institution, is part of the student's decision to remain or leave. The interaction between the student and the impact of the

institution on the student make his theory more explicit than previous models that sought to explain the reasons students left college. Tinto's model suggested that students enter college with a variety of patterns of personal and family traits and academic skills and abilities, which also include a student's initial disposition toward college attendance and personal goals. These intentions are subsequently modified through an interactive and longitudinal series of interactions between the student and the members of the academic and social systems of the university. Tinto's research, first published in his 1975 article in *Review of Educational Research*, delineated his theory. Tinto wrote that, in order for retention to be effective, students must possess a strong sense of educational and social inclusiveness on campus. He expanded on the theory in the first edition of his book, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, which was published in 1983 and modified in the second edition of the book published in 1993 (Tinto, 2012).

According to Tinto (1975), positive encounters between the academic and social systems within the university and the student lead to a greater integration to the college and, thus, increased persistence. Negative interactions and experiences between the student and the academic and social systems of the institution hinder integration and ultimately lead to withdrawal. Additional research by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) indicated that integration into either aspect of the campus can be helpful to the student, although they are more likely to persist if they are integrated both socially and academically. Tinto's (1975) initial research stated that the most important time for these types of integrations is during the student's first year of college. As nearly half of the students who depart do so prior to the start of their second year, integration clearly needs

to occur during the freshman year and, more importantly, during the first semester (Tinto, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

According to Tinto (2012) once a college or university admits a student, it has an obligation to do what is necessary to help the student persist to graduation. The collaboration of student affairs staff members, who are invested in the social growth of students, and faculty members, who typically are more interested in the academic growth of students, suggests an effective strategy to address the high attrition rate of first-semester freshmen. Thus, as mentioned previously, the purpose of this study involved a program review of a new initiative to increase the first to second semester retention of first-time freshmen at the university. The root of the evaluation is the question regarding whether the added contact of student affairs staff, who emphasize aspects of college known to be more social in nature, with the faculty who teach their freshmen transitions course can produce the desired results in helping new students successfully transition to college.

Research Questions

The central research question of this study was to determine the effect of a student success seminar on freshmen retention. In addition, the following seven research questions guided this evaluation using both quantitative and qualitative measures:

Quantitative:

1. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher retention rate from their first to their second semester than those who did not participate in the course?

2. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher first semester GPA than those who did not participate in the course?
3. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar complete more credit hours at the end of the first semester than those who did not participate in the course?
4. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher pass rate for their freshmen transitions course than those who did not participate in the course?
5. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar feel more integrated academically and socially into the campus, as measured by peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, academic and intellectual development, commitment, use of service, participation in student activities, and participation in clubs and organizations, than those who did not participate in the course?

Qualitative:

6. Do the first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a more positive perception about their overall college experience compared to those who did not participate in the course?
7. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar indicate more confidence about their ability to succeed in college than those who did not participate in the course?

The alternate hypothesis for the five quantitative questions was: Participation in the student success seminar has a positive effect on student persistence, as measured by first to second semester retention, academic performance as measured by first semester grade point average (GPA), completion of more credit hours, pass rate of their transitions course, and campus and academic integration, as measured by peer group interactions, interactions with faculty, academic and intellectual development, commitment, use of service, participation in student activities, and participation in clubs and organizations, as compared to those who did not have the course. The alternate hypothesis for qualitative questions 6 and 7 was: Participation in the student success seminar has a positive impact on the students' perceptions of their overall college experience and indicates more confidence in their ability to succeed in college, as compared to those who did not take the course. The qualitative data also will help the university's Center for Academic Success to better understand the influence of the student success seminar on the students' confidence to be successful in college and the specific skills that helped them.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the literature on student retention by examining a new model of a first-year experience course that combined a student affairs professional teaching with an academic professor. This collaboration appeared to incorporate both the academic and social integration necessary for students to be retained at the university. According to Tinto (2012), students are more likely to persist when they are both academically and socially integrated to their campus.

Previous first-year experience courses at the university have been taught by academic faculty in the form of a freshmen transitions course for each academic major on

campus. However, students who were considered to be at risk due to their “conditional” admission status were in a first-year experience course taught by the coordinator of the Academic Success Center. Additionally, students who had other risk factors, such as being a first-generation or low-income college student, a member of a minority population, or having a disability, had special sections of a transitions course.

Specifically, this study provides a program evaluation of a new student success seminar that was incorporated into the freshmen transitions course to determine its effectiveness on student retention. ACT (2010) and other educational foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2015) and the Lumina Foundation (2015), have stated that it is essential for colleges and universities to focus on student success and to determine the programs and policies needed to increase the retention of college students.

Limitations

Several support programs on campus for specific categories of first-year students may affect the results of this study, e.g., support programs for first-generation college students, students with disabilities, student athletes, and minority students. These programs provide intensely focused support for their students and may contribute to the overall success of certain groups.

An additional limitation to the qualitative portion of the study was that no focus groups were used. Therefore, when replicating this study, an additional suggestion would be to include focus groups in the plan.

Definition of Terms

Prior to a review of the research in the area of student success, a definition of relevant terms used in this study is important. The definition of retention and persistence has been used interchangeably, although they do not necessarily have the same meaning. Some terms are utilized from a student perspective; although they may mean the same thing, different terms are used from an institutional perspective. In his book, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*, Tinto (2012) provided the following definitions for the terms associated with student success in college. When students progress at an institution, from a student perspective, the term is *persistence*; from an institutional perspective, the term is *retention*. *Completion* refers to the rate at which students continue in higher education until eventual completion of their degree, regardless of the institution at which they finish. However, from an institutional perspective, *graduation* refers to the rate at which an institution graduates students who enter college or university as a first-time freshman. Tinto noted that the difference between the two may seem minute; however, many students do not persist until graduation at the college or university they first entered. Due to this difference, particularly with transfer students, the terms *student persistence* and *student completion* are the synonymous with *system retention* and *system completion*.

Compounding the problem of different terms for the same event, recent statistics have shown that many students who once dropped out of college later re-enter an institution of higher education, although it may not be the original institution. Thus, new terms to describe this phenomenon are necessary for those who study student persistence. The students who temporarily suspend college attendance, sometimes for many years, are

now considered to have *stopped out*, rather than *dropped out* (Tinto, 2012). This has resulted in a larger challenge for researchers and administrators as it is difficult to determine whether a student dropped out or stopped out. If the students eventually return to their original institution, the term is *discontinuous institutional retention*. However, if they eventually enroll in another college or university, the term is *delayed transfer* or *discontinuous student persistence* (Tinto, 2012).

Although nine years generally is considered by institutions to be dropout status, graduation time limits also are changing, as many students do not enroll full time or are inconsistent in their enrollment patterns. Additionally, as more students are enrolling part time and transferring (which causes them to lose some credits), the average time to complete a four-year degree is now more than five years (Tinto, 2012). Currently, most states use a six-year graduation rate for four-year colleges and three years for community colleges.

Summary

The challenge is complex relative to increasing retention and graduation rates for colleges and universities and requires multi-dimensional approaches to finding answers. In order to determine the programs and policies that are effective in raising these rates, colleges and universities must continuously evaluate their programs to assess their effectiveness and develop new plans when necessary. A review of current research in the area of student retention is discussed in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Decades of studies investigating the reasons students are successful in college have advanced many theories about student persistence. Due to the proliferation of research in the student success area, this study focused on the most current and relevant information on the first-year student population at a regional comprehensive university. In order to assist the institution in its quest to answer this question, three important aspects of student success required a thorough review of the literature. The first examined the theoretical framework for this study and considered the importance of academic and social integration in enhancing student involvement. The second examined the significance of student engagement to the persistence of first-year college students. The third examined the role of first-year experience courses to increase first-year persistence.

Academic and Social Integration

Creating institutions that are perceived by students as inclusive and high quality and encouraged them to become academically and socially integrated to their campuses is extremely important for student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010). Therefore, it is important to explore theories concerning the environmental conditions experienced by college students. A considerable number of colleges purport to have high quality learning environments for their students; however, Kuh et al. (2010) argued that many are the result of chance. Therefore, it is critical for colleges and universities to determine the specific aspects of the college environment that lead to an increase in student success.

Astin's (1970a, 1970b, 1991) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model and Theory of Involvement were the first to address the impact of college environment on college students. Astin based the model on his research regarding the way in which students change or develop. He believed that students learn by becoming involved, and the environment of the institution plays a critical role. His model proposed that college outcomes are a result of three sets of variables. Inputs include the demographic characteristics, family backgrounds, and academic and social experiences that all students bring to college. Environment refers to the full range of programs, policies, individuals, cultures, and experiences that students encounter in college, whether on or off campus. Outcomes are the skills, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of the students after completion of college. While many researchers agreed with Astin, the main criticism of his model was that it failed to constitute a theory, as no method determined the variables that would predict the phenomenon of student involvement (Kerlinger, 1986).

Similar to Astin's model regarding the impact of an institution on college students, yet more explicit and longitudinal, was Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. Tinto (1975, 1993) specifically sought to explain the college student's departure process and described his model as an adaptation of Durkheim's (1951) Theory of Suicide. He further stated that "it is an interactive model" (1993, p. 112) indicating that various factors can influence student departure from college. The work of Durkheim, who is considered the founding father of the field of sociology, attempted to demonstrate the way in which an understanding of the characteristics of a social environment explained the reason suicide rates were different between societies. In adapting Durkheim's work to college student persistence, Tinto's concepts did not imply that withdrawing from

college leads to suicide; however, he proposed that students need to be integrated into the college environment as everyone needs to be integrated into society in order to feel included. Tinto (1975) added that students who fail to integrate into the college society and choose to withdraw are analogous to those who fail to integrate into society and withdraw completely. In addition, Tinto incorporated the work of Spady (1970), who first applied Durkheim's Theory of Suicide to the study of student persistence. Spady found that, when considering student retention, the role of the environment, in particular the institution, is a major factor in a student's decision to remain or leave. The interaction between the student and the impact of the institution make Tinto's theory more explicit than the model proposed by Astin (1970). Figure 1 is an illustration of Tinto's longitudinal model.

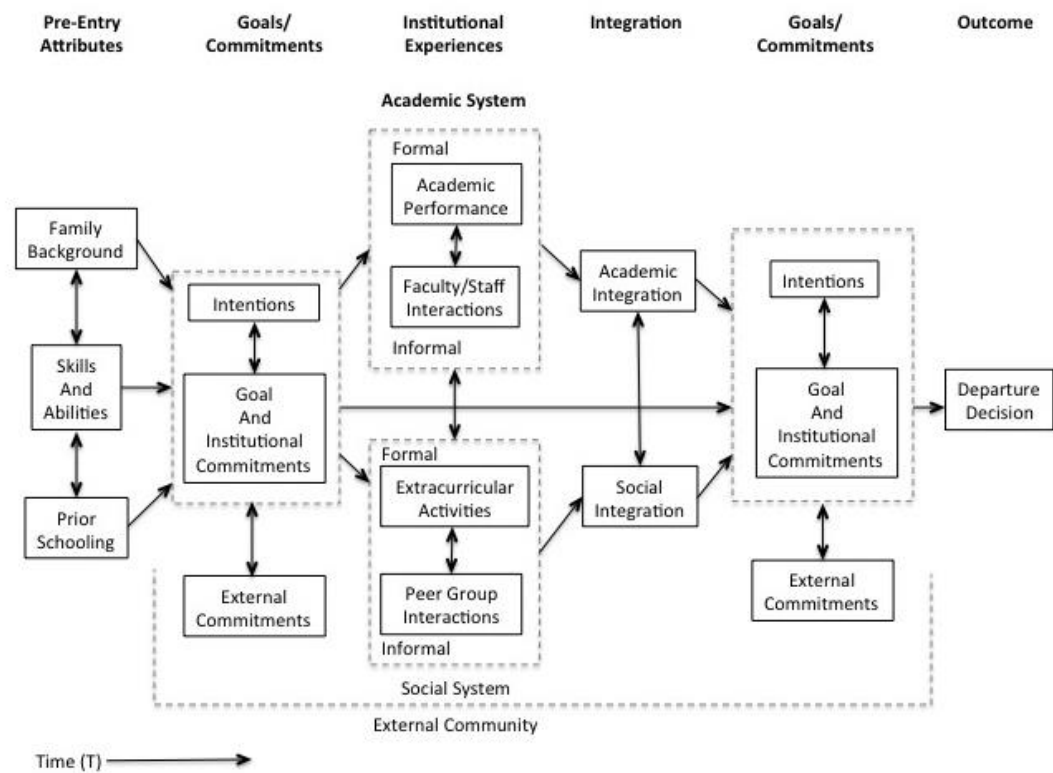


Figure 1. Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure.

Tinto (1975, 1993) believed that students enter college with certain attributes that have developed prior to their entrance to college. These “Pre-Entry Attributes” include a variety of personal and family characteristics, academic characteristics and skills, and the students’ personal goals and initial intentions regarding college attendance. These variables are seen on the left side of the model. Students’ goals and commitments are continuously modified and revised based on their interactions with the academic and social structures of the institution. Both their academic and social institutional experiences include formal and informal involvement. Formal academic experiences include classroom activities, while Tinto viewed informal academic experiences as interactions with faculty and staff. Formal social interactions include planned extra-curricular activities, and informal social interactions occur with one’s peers.

The formal and informal academic and social interactions of students at an institution lead to a continuous revision of their goals and commitments regarding the institution. If students have positive encounters with the formal and informal academic and social areas on campus, Tinto (1975, 1993) asserted that this would lead to greater integration to their school. Tinto defined integration as the extent to which the individual shares the norms and values of peers and faculty at the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in the college or university. Greater integration increases student persistence in college and results in higher retention and graduation rates. Negative experiences in any of the formal or informal academic or social areas hinder the integration of the student. This decreases their commitment to their goals and to the institution and, thus, increases the likelihood of their departure.

Therefore, it is imperative that colleges and universities understand their responsibilities to enhance both types of campus integration.

Tinto's (1975, 1993) model is described as longitudinal as he acknowledged that this integration should begin during the student's transition to the institution. Likelihood for success at the institution increases when they integrate into the social and academic areas at the earliest possible arrival on campus. Tinto stated that those students who depart from campus have not integrated. In addition, that which students perceive about the campus is vital during this early transition phase. The most important element of integration is students' perceptions of themselves as members of the institution. While Tinto acknowledged that it is possible for a student to persist if he/she is integrated into either the social or academic area of campus, it is more helpful when students are integrated into both areas.

In his 2012 book, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*, Tinto provided a meta-analysis of research regarding effective institutional actions that can be taken by colleges and universities to increase the social and academic integration of their students. He cited the works of many researchers as assisting in his efforts to publish a book of the practical implications of the specific programs that work (e.g., Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, Goodsell, & Russo, 1993; Tinto & Russo, 1994). Tinto's book also sought to reply to a long held criticism of his initial theory that the research included only white traditional students. Tinto (2012) stated that his involvement with the Council for Opportunity in Education and the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education assisted in his most recent work being more reflective

of the current students represented on college campuses. The book highlighted the increase of women, African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and first-generation and low-income students and addressed some of the research on their retention.

After spending many years compiling research on effective institutional action, Tinto (2012) stated:

I have come to understand in a way not possible before that when institutions and those who work in them seem unable to enhance the success of their students, it is less for lack of good intentions than for lack of knowledge about the appropriate types of actions, practices and policies that they should adopt. (p. vii-viii)

Consequently, Tinto's work is not only for those researchers trying to solidify a theory of the reasons students are successful, but it also seeks to translate this theory into action. His "framework for action" (Tinto, 2012, p. viii) attempted to provide institutional administrators, faculty, and staff with recommendations for increasing student retention that can be adapted for each campus and their respective student populations. Tinto (2012) believed that knowledge of the causes of student departure from institutions does not always translate into useful programs to increase student retention.

Based on his research, Tinto (2012) argued that once an institution admits a student, it has an obligation to do what is necessary to help the student persist and graduate, whether he/she has remedial needs, is a first-generation student, is a member of a minority population, or is a student with a disability. In order to help students persist and ultimately graduate, Tinto (2012) suggested that institutions must first begin by examining their own behavior and then creating conditions on their campuses that

promote student success in a variety of ways. Additionally, these conditions must adapt to and meet the needs of diverse learners.

While it could be argued that admitting students who are more likely to persist (i.e., have higher ACT scores) will increase retention and graduation rates, this often is beyond the control of most institutions (AASCU, 2005). According to the AASCU Graduation Rate Outcomes Study conducted in 2005, elite colleges and universities historically have been allowed to become more selective to maintain their high retention and graduation rates. However, “the people’s universities” (p. 3), which include most of the states’ colleges and universities, “are bound by our mission and demographics to educate a student population that has increased in diversity with respect to race/ethnicity, age and social class” (p. 3).

Tinto’s (2012) meta-analysis of recent research on student retention is vital to college administrators, faculty, and staff. His review of current research showed that four conditions are associated with an increase in student success: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement. Each condition included in his framework has various suggestions for implementation and can be adapted to the individual needs of a college or university.

Expectations

High expectations are a major factor for student success. As Tinto (2012) so fittingly stated, “no one rises to low expectations” (p. 7). When high expectations are conveyed to students clearly and consistently, student success follows. In addition, these expectations must be inherent in the institution and be established by all faculty members in every class. Kuh et al. (2010) found it especially important for faculty to understand

that actions speak as loud as words. In addition, their work showed that grading decisions and patterns of behavior are better understood than ideal belief statements on a faculty member's written syllabus.

In order to shape students' expectations about college, Tinto (2012) states that all members of the institution must collaborate to provide a "roadmap to success" (p. 9). One strategy that has been shown to be helpful is the use of an integrated first-year seminar as a means to help students acquire necessary academic information and develop social affiliations (Barefoot, 2005).

Support

Once high expectations have been conveyed to all students in every area of the institution, support must be available to help them reach those goals. This support is particularly important to students who enter college academically underprepared. According to the United States Department of Education, at least 28% of all beginning college students in 2000 were enrolled in at least one basic skills or remedial course in reading, writing, or mathematics (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003, p. 17). A study by Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2006) on 6,687 full-time and part-time first-year students who were enrolled at 34 different college campuses across the country found that, when students perceived their institutions were supportive of their academic, social, and personal needs, they displayed more academic success during their first year. Research by Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) found it critical to make the academic support available during the first year of college, particularly during the first semester and the first few weeks of the

semester. According to Tinto (2012), early success increases the likelihood of future success, and, conversely, early failure increases the likelihood of future failure.

In addition to academic support, Tinto's (2012) research found that social and financial support must be available. A study of 107 community colleges in California conducted by Bahr (2008) indicated that the support of academic advisors is critical to student retention, particularly for underprepared and minority students. Crisp and Cruz (2009) reviewed over 50 studies on mentoring, providing a historical context for the use of mentoring in higher education. They concluded that mentoring produces a positive impact on indicators of student success and is vital for low-income, first-generation college students. Research by Hurtado and Carter (1997) also indicated that perceptions of a hostile racial climate have direct negative effects on a sense of belonging for Latino students. However, positive first-year experiences had a strong effect on their sense of belonging.

Gansermer-Topf and Schuh (2005) found that greater amounts of financial aid appear to be associated with higher rates of retention, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds. Their study examined the relationship between the manner in which institutions granted their financial aid and the relation to retention and graduation over a 10-year period. In his study, St. John (2001) pointed out that more of the financial aid from institutions has changed from need-based to merit-based and, thus, moved from low-income students to those from more affluent backgrounds. In addition, his research showed a substantial decline in persistence when a reduction of state grants and an increase in tuition occurred. Heller's report (as cited in Tinto, 2012) to the Advisory Council on Student Financial Assistance in 2010 stated that an estimated 54% of the

\$10.2 billion awarded in financial aid by U.S. institutions to full-time students during the 2003-2004 academic year was in the form of *merit-based* aid, and 60% of that was given to students whose parents made over \$60,176 per year. In stark contrast, only 20% was given to students whose families earned \$33,346 or less. Additionally approximately 21% of the *need-based* financial aid went to this group of students. Tinto (2012) also reported that institutional policies regarding the distribution of financial aid at times cause some students to start classes without their books and supplies until the institutional financial aid office clears their grants, thus putting them at risk of falling behind with the demands of their classroom work.

Tinto (2012) discovered a variety of successful support programs to assist college and university administrators, faculty, and staff in their quest to increase the retention of first-year students. These include summer bridge programs, the first-year seminar, supplemental instruction, learning communities, embedded academic support, social support, and financial support programs. Summer bridge programs assist new students in making a more successful transition to college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). They typically begin before the semester to acquaint students with their new academic and social environment. First-year seminars are designed to promote academic performance, persistence, and degree completion of first-year students (Barefoot, 2002). As the use of first-year seminars was determined to be a major part of this study, they will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. Supplemental instruction provides support, usually in the form of a study group, for a specific course and is typically used for foundational courses that have high failure rates. Congos' (2003) study found that the

addition of supplemental instruction to courses with high failure rates at his university reduced the number of students who failed.

In the area of support it is important for individual colleges and universities to determine where they must focus to assist their student populations. Tinto (2012) concluded his remarks regarding support by reiterating the conclusions of many studies indicating that any and all academic support for students is critical. Additionally, Tinto pointed out that in order to make support effective, it must go beyond merely having programs in place; each program must be embedded in the very fabric of the institution.

Assessment and Feedback

Research has shown that students are more likely to succeed when their performance is assessed frequently and they are provided with regular feedback (Huba & Freed, 2000). The book by Huba and Freed (2000), *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning*, suggested that faculty and staff must provide this feedback in order that students can adjust their behaviors to become more successful; and more frequent assessment and feedback is imperative to students during their first year. In addition, their research found that frequent assessment and feedback are at the core of the academic classroom for students to improve their learning. Tinto (2012) reported that the most commonly used practices by colleges and universities to assess students include: during their entry into college, during classroom assessments to monitor the progress of the students, and providing an early warning system for students who are having course difficulties.

Assessment at entry is vital for students whose score on a standardized exam, such as the ACT or SAT, is below the cutoff score set by institutions for students needing

remedial classes. Many institutions have developed their own readiness for college exams that appear to find the best placement for first-year students who may need to improve their academic skills. Numerous strategies have been developed that provide instantaneous feedback for faculty to determine whether their students are learning. These include the “one-minute” paper described by Angelo and Cross (1993), in which students write for one minute about what they learned on a specific topic. Early warning systems also are becoming more common on college campuses. These systems employ a variety of techniques that provide faculty and support staff with information about the students who are having difficulty early in the semester.

Involvement

Involvement is the most important condition for student success (Tinto, 2012). Tinto’s (1975, 1993) research showed that as students become more involved academically and socially with faculty, staff, and their peers, they are more likely to remain in college. During the first year, involvement appears to be the foundation upon which additional social and academic relationships are established (Kuh et al., 2010). The term *involvement* has been more recently referred to as *engagement*. As student engagement has been determined to be an important aspect of this study, it will be discussed in more detail in the next section of the literature review. Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993) emphasized that student involvement serves as the foundation for social and academic integration; and, as students become more involved, the likelihood increases that they will remain and will graduate. In addition, Kuh et al. (2010) found this to be true for all students, majority and minority, even when controlling for background attributes.

The literature heretofore has summarized the academic and historical foundation on which this study is based. Additional studies underscoring the importance of ensuring college students' academic and social integration have provided university administrators, faculty, and staff with information to increase student retention. One significant study by Fischer (2007) used data from The National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen. Fischer completed face-to-face interviews with approximately 4,000 students over a series of visits during their first year through their junior year in order to determine the way in which various forms of engagement affected their satisfaction, academic achievement, and retention to college their second year. The results revealed that those students with the highest interactions with faculty and a larger number of formal and informal social connections with faculty, staff, and peers were the most satisfied and had the highest retention. This was particularly true for minority students. Additionally, the work of Hurtado and Carter (1997) found similar results and indicated that involvement on campus leads to a sense of belonging, and students' decisions to remain or leave are based on feeling they are valued. They argued that this is especially important for minority students on a predominately white campus.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have shown that both cooperative and collaborative learning positively impact student success, as they create a higher academic engagement in addition to social relationships with peers. Additionally, learning communities encourage student interaction as the same group registers for two or more courses that form a built-in study team. The learning communities often include a first-year seminar for students as one of the linked courses. Service learning is an additional means to engage students by linking learning with required service activities either on or

off campus. Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000) found that the impact of service learning is both immediate and long term. Their study examined longitudinal data from 22,236 college students and found that approximately 30% had participated in a service learning course in college. Their study, which included both the longitudinal quantitative data and qualitative data (interviews with students on three different campuses), revealed that students who had service participation had more positive academic outcomes and were more likely to pursue careers in this area.

According to Tinto (2012), despite clear evidence of increasing student success, the aforementioned three pedagogies of engagement are not used as widely as expected. He believed this is because most university faculty, unlike most elementary and secondary teachers whose entire curriculum is focused on ways to best educate students, are not trained in pedagogy. Thus, he advocated that faculty development must play a key role in each institution's plan of action to enhance student success and, thereby, increasing retention.

Finally, Tinto reminded administrators, faculty, and staff that student success does not happen by chance. In order to make substantial changes that result in an increase in retention and graduation rates among its students, institutions must establish programs that are the result of intentional, structured, and proactive actions and policies. These programs must provide a clear plan for everyone at the institution. from administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

Student Engagement

Kuh et al. (2010), in their most recent book, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, reviewed the institutional practices that were the most effective

to student success following a model used in Collins' 2001 book, *From Good to Great*. Collins (2001), a former faculty member at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, is one of the most influential contemporary management consultants. Collins' book examined 28 companies over a period of 15 years to determine what made the good ones great. In addition to determining superior performing companies, he also identified policies that led to the superior performance. He believed that *great* companies needed to understand the factors that distinguish them from other *good* companies, in order to maintain that advantage.

Kuh et al. (2010) began their study with the same premise. They identified 20 colleges and universities, both public and private, of varying sizes that were performing at a higher level than expected. Kuh et al. visited those institutions to Document Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) regarding student engagement and graduation rates. The researchers found that certain institutional practices have a direct impact on the students and lead to higher levels of student engagement. One of their basic findings was that student engagement is more important to persistence than *who* the students are or *where* they go to college; i.e., *what* students do while they are in college matters the most to their success.

The authors stated that various researchers have shown "that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development" (p. 8). The concept of student engagement includes two essential elements that contribute to student success (Kuh et al., 2010). Their research revealed that the strongest indicator of student success is the amount of time and effort that students commit to their studies and other campus activities. The second

element is the *quality* of the services and other organized learning opportunities provided by institutions, which help students connect with their faculty and peers and leads to student success. In addition, their research indicated that students develop holistically, and the sources of influence are in both social and academic areas of development. The implications from their studies concluded that collaboration between student affairs professionals and academic affairs administrators is imperative for student growth.

Additional reports have indicated that effective institutions help to direct their students toward appropriate activities that engage them at high levels (Education Commission of the States, 1995). Consequently, universities and colleges must adopt institutional practices that encourage the engagement of their students. One of the best-known examples of institutional practices regarding student engagement was an article written by Chickering and Gamson in 1987. This article remains the benchmark for institutions that are seeking ways to improve their undergraduate education. According to the authors, their “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” were based on 50 years of research about the ways in which instructors teach and students learn. The authors convened a task force in 1986 of the nation’s top scholars who had conducted research in this area. Although most of them were aware of the other researchers, they had not previously met to create a plan to improve undergraduate education. Their task was to produce a statement of principles that would be practical and applicable for a variety of institutions. That historic meeting produced the document that Chickering and Gamson presented in the March 1987 *AAHE Bulletin*. Their premise stated that, if faculty and university administrators arrange the college experience to include the seven principles, students will put forth more effort.

These seven principles included student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. The first principle stated that frequent faculty contact in and out of class is most important in motivating students. A specific example that has shown positive results includes a freshman seminar to establish an early connection between students and faculty and other “resource members” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Principle No. 2 stated that student learning is enhanced when it is collaborative and social, rather than competitive and isolated. Learning communities and peer tutoring have been popular methods utilized to encourage students to work together. Principle No. 3 asserted that learning must be active. Active learning encourages students to apply what they learned in the classroom to experiences outside the classroom and includes internships, independent study, and cooperative job programs. Principle No. 4 included giving prompt feedback to students. Frequent assessment and timely feedback allow students to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to learn, and the way in which to assess themselves. Principle No. 5 emphasized time on task. It is critical for students to learn to use their time well, and institutions must assist them in learning effective time management. Principle No. 6 stressed the importance of colleges and universities to communicate high expectations to students. According to the authors, when faculty expect more from students, they receive more in return from them. This principle applies, not only to the most prepared students, but also to underprepared and unmotivated students. The last principle found to cause change is to respect diverse talents and ways of learning. All students need opportunities to show their talents and to learn in ways that work for them. According to Chickering and Gamson, when university

administrators work to implement these seven principles, student engagement and success in college occur.

This very broad perspective by Kuh et al. (2010) of the conditions that create student engagement presented provides university administrators with general overall themes necessary to initiate change at their institutions. However, also necessary to implement change is information on more specific ideas relating to the college environment that have shown promise in promoting student success. First-year seminars have been introduced in this literature as one possible way of increasing retention. Research on their effectiveness will be presented in the next section.

First-year Seminars

First introduced by John N. Gardener at the University of South Carolina in 1972 as “University 101,” first-year seminars have been adopted and adapted by many colleges and universities (Barefoot, 2002). According to Gardner (1996), the first-year experience is based on the idea that success in a student’s first year provides a strong foundation for the remainder of their college experience. First-year seminars have assisted in a successful transition of students to college in their first year. In the book, *How College Affects Students*, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) examined more than 2,600 selected postsecondary studies relating to the effect of college programs and experiences on students. Their extensive analysis of the information found consistent evidence that a first-semester, freshmen-year seminar is positively linked to both freshman-year persistence and degree completion. They concluded that, while the seminars vary across institutions, all have a goal of promoting academic success and increasing persistence and graduation rates.

Cuseo's (1991, 2005) research strongly agreed with Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) and maintained that the first year of college is a critical stage of development. Students experience perhaps the greatest growth in both learning and personal areas. However, they also experience the greatest challenges academically and socially. When institutions are not equipped to assist students with this major transition, they often drop out. Consequently, Cuseo (2005) advocated the importance of a first-year experience course designed to promote college success. He argued that the first-year seminar is a vehicle for providing three important messages to new freshmen: (1) assist in the transition to college, (2) reduce their risk of first-year attrition, and (3) maximize the positive impact of the college experience.

Initially first-year seminars were a form of extended orientation; while some still serve that purpose, a variety of types now exist (Upcraft et al., 2005). A number of first-year seminars consist of student success seminars and focus on study skills, time management, and other academic skills. Others are discipline related seminars intended for students who enter a particular field and are designed to prepare them for that profession. In addition, some seminars use a more academic context to help students address the intellectual transition to college. At some institutions only entering freshmen deemed to be at risk are required to take the course, while all students at other institutions can take the course. An increasing number of institutions require all students to take a first-year seminar (Upcraft et al., 2005).

Additionally, some first-year seminars are linked to participation in a learning community. Learning communities often include sections of linked courses where students work together to focus on establishing relationships and developing a sense of

community (Babbitt, 2007). Babbitt's research compared a freshmen cohort of students at the University of New Mexico who participated in a learning community seminar linked with a large lecture style class. The results indicated that students who participated in the linked first-year seminar, in addition to the lecture class, had higher third-semester retention rates and first-semester grade point averages, compared to those who were not in the seminar.

The most longitudinal evidence for the positive effects of first-year seminars linked to increased freshmen retention originated from studies tracking the persistence rates of each new freshmen cohort at the University of South Carolina from 1973 to 1996 (Fidler, 1999). Fidler's (1999) research found that students who participated in the course were more likely to persist to their second year than those who did not take the course. The data indicated that, for the 23 years of the study, the persistence rates were higher for the group who took the course, and for 15 of the 23 years the differences between the groups were significant. The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, located at the University of South Carolina, found that the two most frequently assessed outcomes have been the impact of the seminar on retention and academic performance. Most of the studies have been quasi-experimental, using a matched pair design to compare the outcomes of students who signed up for the course, with other first-year students who did not enroll in the course, while controlling for variables such as high school GPA or rank, standardized college admission test scores, residential status, gender, and ethnicity (National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2000).

To address the possible confounding effect of the self-selection into the course, students who took the course at the University of South Carolina also participated in a survey to assess their reported levels of motivation. Fidler (1991) found that, when comparing the survey responses of the course participants and non-participants, no differences were seen in the motivational levels between the two groups. During their freshmen English class, students in the study were administered a survey designed to measure motivation. The sample included students who had the seminar and those who did not. The results indicated that the positive outcomes by the course participants were not due to their higher levels of motivation to succeed in college.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), only one published study has been conducted that utilized a true experimental design. This occurred at the University of Maryland, whereby students were randomly assigned to either take the course or not take the course (Strumpf & Hunt, 1993). The results revealed that students who took the course had significantly higher levels of retention over their first four semesters on campus (13 percentage points higher) than those who did not. Although the number of participants was small (147) the random assignment of the groups helped to increase the confidence in the results.

The more than 30 years of research on the success of first-year seminars has led to their distinction as a “high impact” activity identified in the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ 2007 report, *College Learning for the New Global Century* (Kuh, 2008). As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, Kuh et al. (2010) began the search on student success in college subsequent to reading Jim Collins’ (2001) book, *Good to Great*, which examined and identified the practices of businesses considered to

be great companies. Their research documented the effectiveness of first-year seminars on student retention. The more than three decades of research have consistently demonstrated that first-year seminars are one of the highest impact practices affecting student retention. Chapter III discusses the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The present study determined whether a recently developed program for assisting in the successful transition of new freshmen to the campus environment had an impact. The course was a collaborative redesign of the discipline-specific transitions course for incoming freshmen and included a student success seminar. Significant emphasis on increasing the graduation rates of students has mandated that university programs be developed that play a critical role in retaining students. Retention was made a top priority at the university in 2011; since that time, new programs have been implemented. This chapter provides the specific details of the methodology used for this program evaluation.

Purpose and Central Research Question

The central research question for this study was to determine whether the university's newly developed student success seminar had an impact on freshmen retention.

The following seven research questions guided this investigation, with the first five being assessed using quantitative measures:

1. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher retention rate from their first to their second semester than those who did not participate in the course?
2. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher first semester GPA than those who did not participate in the course?

3. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar complete more credit hours at the end of the first semester than those who did not participate in the course?
4. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher pass rate for their freshmen transitions course than those who did not participate in the course?
5. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar feel more integrated academically and socially into the campus, as measured by peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, academic and intellectual development, commitment, use of service, participation in student activities, and participation in clubs and organizations than those who did not participate in the course?

Additionally, two qualitative questions were addressed:

6. Do the first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a more positive perception about their overall college experience compared to those who did not participate in the course?
7. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar indicate more confidence about their ability to succeed in college than those who did not participate in the course?

Research Design

As this study was an evaluation of a new program aimed at increasing retention, namely, the use of a student success seminar, it utilized a naturally occurring or causal-comparative design. A mixed methods design was chosen, using both quantitative

(existing data and survey data) and qualitative methods (open-ended survey items).

Combining the methods is a form of triangulating the findings, which helps to increase confidence in the results (Slavin, 2007). Creswell (2002) also recommended using a mixed methods approach to complement, develop, and expand the results of one method. Thus, the use of both methods yielded more comprehensive and specific results.

Relying only on quantitative data would have given the university an understanding of the distinct outcomes of the student success seminar, but it would not have provided the overall picture of other factors that contributed to student departure from the university. In addition, using both methodologies provided additional reasons why students do not persist and provided more detailed information to specifically target these issues. This strategy also will ensure that the university is fiscally responsible in implementing new programs that have increased retention, rather than expend funds on new programs that may not work.

Research Context

The initiation of the student success seminar occurred during the fall of 2014 at the university. The current classification system of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2015) designates the university as a M4/HR: Medium four-year, highly residential university. This indicates that during the last designation period, the enrollment data show a Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) enrollment of 3,000-9,999 degree-seeking students at a bachelor's degree granting institution, with at least half of the undergraduates living on campus and at least 80% attending full time. The university offers 155 bachelor's degrees, 63 master's and specialist's degrees, and four doctoral degrees (MSU, 2013).

The university is one of eight regional comprehensive public universities in Kentucky and is comprised of four academic colleges, a school of agriculture, and a school of nursing and health sciences. The campus student population is 60% female and 40% male (MSU, 2013). Additional institutional statistics indicate that African Americans compose 7% of the student body, and students come from 45 different states. A total of 752 international students from 57 foreign countries study at the university. Of the 1,581 first-time freshmen, 95% are traditional, with an average age of 18, and 90% live in one of the eight residential colleges on campus.

Participants

The student population for this study included 1,368 first-time freshmen enrolled in a freshmen transitions course (100T) during the fall 2014 semester. The university requires that all first-semester freshmen register for a 100T course their first semester on campus based on their declared major. If students have not declared a major, they are encouraged to enroll in IDC 100T (interdisciplinary transitions). During the fall 2014 semester, there were 54 sections of the 100T course, with 27 sections participating in the student success seminar.

Although this number represents exactly half of the sections, the number of students in each group was not equal. A total of 456 freshmen participated in the success seminar in addition to their freshmen transitions course, and 912 students participated in their freshmen transitions course only, for a total of 1,368 students. The number of students who participated in the student success seminar represented approximately 33% of all new freshmen enrolled in the 100T classes.

The students were largely traditional, i.e., they entered college directly from high school. They were enrolled on a full-time basis, took a minimum of 12 credit hours, and the majority of new freshmen lived on campus in one of the eight residential colleges at the university.

Intervention

Research conducted for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) denoted first year seminars as one of the “high impact” educational practices for student success (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008). Writing for the AAC&U, Brownell and Swaner (2010) completed a literature review that identified first-year seminars as one of their top five “high impact” practices. This is consistent with the AACU report by Kuh in 2008, which identified first-year seminars as one of the 10 educationally effective practices. This information plus recommendations from the 12-member university committee that initially proposed the student success seminar led to an investigation of the specific topics that should be taught in the eight-week seminar.

Content chosen for the new student success seminar was selected from two sources of information: results from the freshmen MAP-Works (2015) survey and best practices for topics to be taught in first-year seminars (Cuseo, 2005). MAP-Works is a software system that identifies students who are at risk early in the semester to allow university administrators time to intervene before they drop out. Students take a MAP-Works survey at week four in the semester, and the software system uses this information, in addition to student data information such as ACT scores and high school GPA, to assign each a risk factor for leaving the university.

The MAP-Works data indicated that two areas were problematic for freshmen students at the university: time management and class attendance. The other topics covered in the eight-week seminar were selected from the research of Gardner (1996) and Cuseo (2005) that indicated certain skills and knowledge associated with success can be identified and taught. A compilation of the information led to the following topics being selected for inclusion in the seminar: self-motivation, goal setting, time management, learning styles, strategic learning, and critical thinking.

Data Sources and Instrumentation

Existing Student Data

The quantitative data for this study was gleaned from two data sources. The first source was the Registrar's Office at the university. Data were obtained at the conclusion of the fall 2014 semester to address the questions relative to the impact of the student success seminar, as measured by retention in the spring semester, first-semester grade point average, completion of credit hours, and pass rate of the freshmen transitions class. Retention was determined when a student in the 2014 fall cohort of first-time students returned for the spring 2015 semester. Credit hours completed consisted of the number of credits that a student passed during the fall semester, and the pass rate for each student's transition course was determined when they received a passing grade in their 100T course. Grade point averages were calculated on a 4.0 scale.

The two-group design compared the students who participated in a student success seminar as part of their transitions course during their first semester on campus and those who only had their transitions course. The fall 2014 cohort was composed of first-time freshmen with the independent variable being the student success seminar. The

dependent variables, as measured by the institutional data, were first to second semester retention, first-semester grade point average, number of credit hours completed, and pass rate of the transitions course.

Survey

A survey instrument entitled the Institutional Integration Scale (IIS; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) was utilized to answer the last quantitative question regarding the academic and social integration of the students. In addition, a qualitative section added to the end of the survey determined whether the student success seminar had an impact on the students' perceptions of their success in college. The qualitative data analysis sought to answer the final two research questions:

6. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a more positive perception about their overall college experience compared to those who did not participate in the course?
7. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar indicate more confidence about their ability to succeed in college than those who did not participate in the course?

Two additional open-ended questions were added to the Institutional Integration Scale, with permission from the author, to attempt to obtain a better understanding of whether the student success seminar increased the students' perceptions of their ability to succeed after their first semester of college. Adding these qualitative questions to the survey complemented and clarified the quantitative process and provided university officials with additional evidence to support the other findings (Creswell, 2002).

The Institutional Integration Scale was given to all first-time freshmen enrolled in a freshmen transitions course during the fall 2014 semester, including those who participated in the student success seminar and those who did not. According to Keup (1999), the 29-question scale measures both academic and social integration together as interactions with a student's peers and faculty are often both academic and social. The scale includes five subscales: Peer Group Interactions, Interactions with Faculty, Faculty Concern for Student Development and Teaching, Academic and Intellectual Development, and Institutional and Goal Commitment. Students are asked to respond to the questions using a five-point Likert scale with the following descriptors: agree strongly (SA), agree somewhat (A), not sure (N), disagree somewhat (D), and disagree strongly (SD). Appendix A includes the complete survey instrument. Section IV of the survey was added by the coordinator of the Academic Success Center but was not analyzed for this study.

Additionally, the survey asked students the number of times they visited certain campus resources, including: tutoring, library, health center, multicultural center, counseling and/or women's center, academic advisor, financial aid office, career services, residence hall staff, academic advisor, and faculty outside of class time. The first part of the quantitative portion of the survey queried the students' involvement in a campus club, organization, sorority, or fraternity, where they lived, if they were working full or part time, their gender, and whether they received financial aid.

The IIS is considered a nationally validated measure of social and academic integration to a campus culture and is related to Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (French & Oakes, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). French and Oakes (2004)

examined the psychometric properties of the scale and determined that their revision to the scale indicated adequate fit for the sample and resulted in higher internal consistency reliability, higher item discrimination, and higher correlations among the subscales and between the subscales and the total scale scores. However, they warned that additional studies should be completed with more samples, as their samples included only three campuses in a single institution. Thus, they cautioned against generalizing the findings for a larger population.

Procedures

During the spring of 2014, all professors who were scheduled to teach a 100T course in the fall 2014 semester were invited by the coordinator of the Academic Success Center to attend an information session about the student success seminar. The coordinator of the Center presented retention data indicating freshmen at the university needed instruction in appropriate academic behaviors, such as time management, study skills, and motivation. Professors were then asked whether they wanted to participate in the student success seminar, along with their 100T course for the fall semester.

Professors who chose to participate were matched with a student affairs professional who collaborated to teach the advanced academic behaviors selected for the seminar. Professors who chose not to participate cited the following reasons:

- There is insufficient time to cover all the information necessary to help the students learn about their major and to teach them study skills.
- My students already have high ACT scores, so there is no need for them to take a “study skills” course.

- Increasing pressure to keep or drop the number of credit hours needed to graduate to 120 means we can't add more seat time or credit hours to the students' curriculum.

The coordinator of the Center for Academic Success administered the Institutional Integration Scale at the end of the fall 2014 semester to all freshmen who were enrolled in a transitions course. A letter explaining the purpose of the survey and requesting the students' assistance was placed at the top of the survey questions, stating that all responses were anonymous and students could choose not to participate if they wished.

At the beginning of the spring 2015 semester, data from the 2014 cohort were obtained from the Registrar's Office. This information was collected from the institutional student information system, which is housed and maintained by the University Registrar. The data contained immense files of demographic and student data and were organized into spreadsheets for analysis. No identifying information was part of the data, as the central purpose of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the new program.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel software (2008, Version 12.3.0) and SAS software (Version 9.3, SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, 2015). Both are general-purpose statistical programs that can analyze several types of research data. To determine whether a significant difference exists between the intervention group (student success seminar participants) and the control group (non student success seminar participants), this study employed independent sample *t*-tests and Chi-square statistics. Chi-square was utilized to analyze the data from questions with the categorical values of

yes and no. This included Research Questions 1, 4, and a section of Question 5 on whether the students were participants in a club, organization, fraternity, or sorority on campus. As Research Questions 2, 3, and sections II and III of Research Question 5 had discrete or continuous variables, an independent samples *t* test was used to analyze these data.

A spreadsheet was compiled with the data from the survey and analyzed comparing the mean scores for integration and the use of campus services and activities. These scores were entered into SAS software (Version 9.3) to determine the level of integration for the student success seminar participants and the non-student success seminar participants. The open-ended questions were analyzed using selective coding techniques to detect specific patterns (Creswell, 1994). Based on the literature, the previously mentioned general hypotheses were that students who participated in the student success seminar would have more confidence about their ability to succeed in college and have more positive perceptions of their college experience after their first semester. These initial concepts helped in the analysis of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

The standard Institutional Review Board procedures at Western Kentucky University were followed regarding human subjects research. As the design of the study was a program evaluation, the university in the study did not require that any Institutional Review Board procedures be implemented. (See Appendix B). In both phases of the study, individual student identification and other identifiers were cleared from the data. Additionally, participants were not identified in any way during their completion of the

survey. Information on the purpose of the study and simple opt-out procedures were explained, both verbally and in writing, prior to the administration of the survey.

Summary

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were used to increase the confidence of the results (Slavin, 2007). The open-ended questions allowed the researcher and, thus, the university to go beyond the pure numbers to explore the individual experiences of the students' perceptions about their success and overall college experience in their first semester. This also served as a means for listening to the experiences of the students who participated in the student success seminar to determine whether it met the goals of assisting the students with their transition to college. In short, the information derived from this mixed methods approach helped to develop a cohesive framework to guide the university with actions that matter most and the way in which they should be organized and successfully implemented (Tinto, 2012).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a student success seminar initiated to provide first-semester freshmen with a more successful transition from high school to their first year of college. Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure stated that, as the level of students' academic and social integration to their college environment increases, their persistence increases as well. Additionally, increased academic and social integration results in higher retention and, ultimately, higher graduation rates (Tinto, 2012). Moreover, research conducted by the National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (2000) indicated that the use of a student success seminar is a high impact practice for increasing the retention and graduation rates of college students.

The student success seminar examined in this study was created through collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs professionals with the goal of enhancing the academic and social transition of first-time freshmen to the university. In addition to assessing whether the seminar was effective in increasing first to second semester retention rates, the study also evaluated the course's impact on six additional variables: first-semester grade point average (GPA), completion of credit hours, pass rate for freshmen transitions course, academic and social integration to the campus, perception of overall college experience, and confidence in ability to succeed in college.

To assess outcomes of the two groups in the study (those who participated in the student success seminar and those who did not), a mixed methods approach was utilized. The first four research questions compared the two groups on the following factors: first to second semester retention rate, first-semester GPA, completion of credit hours, and the

pass rate of the freshmen transitions course. The data used to analyze these four factors were determined by extracting fall 2014 data from the institution's student information system provided by the Registrar's Office during the spring 2015 semester. Research Question 5 compared the campus integration between the two groups and was measured using the results of the Institutional Integration Scale (IIS; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The IIS asks about students' social and academic experiences and the number of times they used various campus support services during their first semester. The survey was administered near the end of the students' first semester on campus during their freshmen transitions class. The data obtained from the survey and from the Registrar's Office provided the framework for the quantitative section of the study.

Two additional qualitative questions were added to the IIS survey to determine whether the student success seminar impacted students' perceptions of confidence in their ability to succeed in college and their perception of the overall college experience. As quantitative data alone cannot provide this information, the qualitative data were deemed essential to the study.

Quantitative Results

The first research question was: "Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher retention rate from their first to second semester than those who did not participate in the course?" Institutional data from the Registrar's Office was examined to determine the retention of the two groups from the first to the second semester. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of students who were retained from fall 2014 to spring 2015 in each group. Those who participated in the

student success seminar were denoted as SSS and those who did not participate were denoted as No SSS.

Table 1

Retention Rates from Fall 2014-Spring 2015 by Group

Group	Group Total	Number Retained	Retention Rate
SSS	456	392	85.96%
No SSS	912	803	88.05%
Total	1368	1195	87.35%

A Chi-square was then computed using SAS software (Version 9.3, SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, 2015) to determine whether a relationship exists between the students who were retained and those who participated in the student success seminar. The Chi-square (1, $N = 1368$) = 1.1944, $p = 0.2744$, indicated no relationship between retention rates and the students' participation in the success seminar; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Research Question 2 was: "Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher first-semester GPA than those who did not participate in the course?" The Registrar's Office provided the GPA data, which were analyzed using SAS. The minimum GPA for each group was 0.00, and the maximum GPA was 4.00. Table 2 provides the mean GPA and standard deviation for both groups of students.

Table 2

First-semester GPA by Group

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SSS	455	2.58	1.19
No SSS	912	2.65	1.15

To determine whether the null hypothesis was accepted or rejected, an Independent-Samples *t* test was conducted using SAS software. The results $t(1365) = 1.08$; $p = 0.28$, indicated no difference between the mean GPA of the group who participated in the student success seminar and those who did not. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted and indicated that the success seminar did not influence the GPA of the participating group.

The third quantitative research question was: “Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar complete more credit hours at the end of the first semester than those who did not participate in the course?” The number of credit hours completed by each student was compiled by the Registrar’s Office and then analyzed using SAS software to determine the mean hours completed by each group. The minimum number of credit hours earned at the end of the semester was 0 in both groups, while the maximum number of credit hours earned was 26 for the No SSS group and 24 for the students who participated in the student success seminar. The mean and standard deviation for each group is listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Completion of Credit Hours by Group

Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SSS	456	13.84	2.89
No SSS	912	13.93	3.27

To determine whether the two groups completed the same number of credit hours, or the alternate hypothesis was true that they completed different hours, an Independent-Sample *t* test was conducted using SAS software. The results $t(1016) = 0.54; p = 0.59$, revealed no significant difference between the number of credit hours completed by each group, thus, supporting the null hypothesis and indicating that the groups were very similar in this aspect.

The fourth quantitative research question was designed to determine whether students who participated in the success seminar passed their freshmen transitions course (100T) at a higher rate than those who did not participate. Previous statistics from the university indicated that 97% of students who failed their 100T course dropped out of college (MSU, 2013). It was believed that the collaboration between the 100T instructor and seminar instructor would provide more resources for the students during their transition to college and, thus, reduce the failure rate of the transitions courses. Table 4 shows the number of students who passed the 100T class per group.

Table 4

Pass Rates of 100T Class by Group

Group	<i>N</i>	Number Passed	Pass Rate
SSS	456	342	75.00%
No SSS	912	788	86.40%
Total	1368	1130	82.60%

A Chi-square was computed using SAS software to determine whether a relationship exists between the students who passed their transitions course (100T) and those who participated in the success seminar. The Chi-square ($1, N = 1368$) = 27.508, $p < 0.001$, indicated that those who did not participate in the student success seminar passed their 100T course at a higher rate than those who participated in the student success seminar.

One variable that potentially affected the results of this study was the ability level of the students in each group when they entered college. Students enter college at various levels of preparation for the challenges they will encounter in postsecondary education. Additionally, College of Science, Engineering, and Technology professors who chose not to participate in the success seminar said they felt their students had higher ACT scores, thus indicating a greater ability to meet college challenges. Consequently, ACT scores were examined to determine whether any significant differences exist between the two groups of students prior to entering college.

Independent-Samples *t* Tests were used to determine whether significant differences exist between the ACT scores of the two groups prior to entering college.

Table 5 shows the results of the mean ACT scores for each subtest, the standard deviation and the *t* value for each group.

Table 5

T-Test for ACT Scores by Group

ACT score	Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> Value	Pr > <i>t</i>
English	SSS	428	23.47	5.04	0.56	0.575
	No SSS	875	23.64	4.95		
Math	SSS	428	21.63	4.06	3.10	0.002*
	No SSS	875	22.41	4.33		
Reading	SSS	428	24.09	5.21	1.46	0.145
	No SSS	875	24.55	5.32		
Science	SSS	428	22.81	3.97	3.03	0.003*
	No SSS	874	23.53	4.10		
Composite	SSS	428	22.69	3.94	2.22	0.027*
	No SSS	875	23.22	4.11		

* Indicates statistical significance

As shown in Table 5, no difference was found between the two groups on their English and reading ACT scores, thus the null hypothesis was accepted. However, the results revealed significant differences between the two groups' ACT scores in three areas: math, science, and overall composite. This finding rejected the null hypothesis that the ACT scores between the two groups are the same in math, science, and overall composite. This difference suggested that the group that did not participate in the student success seminar entered college more academically prepared than the group that participated in the seminar.

Question 5, the final quantitative question, was: "Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar feel more integrated academically and socially into the campus environment, as measured by peer-group interactions, interactions with

faculty, faculty concern for student development and teaching, academic and intellectual development, institutional and goal commitments, use of services, participation in student activities, and participation in clubs and organizations, than those who did not participate in the course?” To answer this question, the Institutional Integration Scale (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) was administered near the end of the fall 2014 semester to the students enrolled in the freshmen transitions courses (100T). This included those who participated in the success seminar and those who did not participate. In late October, all 100T professors were asked by the associate provost for undergraduate programs to allow the coordinator of the Academic Success Center to administer the paper survey during their 100T class. Computation of paper results was more time consuming than administering the survey via e-mail, which would have allowed the results to be processed quickly using a computer program such as Qualtrics. However, administering the survey in class provided a high participation rate, thus yielding more complete results.

Faculty members were very cooperative in allowing the coordinator of the Academic Success Center to administer the survey during the first two weeks of November. Participation rates were high in both the freshmen transitions courses that included the success seminar and those that did not. Of the 1,368 students who were enrolled in the 100T courses, 852 participated in the survey, for a 62.3% overall completion rate. Of the 467 students enrolled in the success seminar, 259 took the survey, for a completion rate of 55%. Similarly, 593 of the 912 students who did not participate completed the survey, for a completion rate of 65%. This large sample size provided both reliability and validity to the results and, thus, more accurately indicated both the academic and social integration of the freshmen to the campus.

The survey asked 29 questions relating to the campus integration of the freshmen in five areas: Peer-Group Interactions (six questions), Interactions with Faculty (five questions), Faculty Concerns for Student Development and Teaching (five questions), Academic and Intellectual Development (seven questions), and Institutional and Goal Commitments (six questions). The first three areas measured the students' perceived social (peer and faculty) integration to campus, while the questions regarding perceived academic and intellectual development were designed to assess their academic integration. Responses to the questions were formatted in a Likert scale, with a five-point value assigned to the highest level (strongly agree) of integration and a one-point value assigned to the answer with the lowest level (strongly disagree) of integration. Higher mean scores in a category indicated more integration in that area. The first question and the scoring are illustrated in the following:

1. Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
Value	5	4	3	2	1

In order to prevent response bias in which participants may have answered questions in a patterned behavior, approximately one third of the questions were “reverse worded.” In addition to reverse wording, 10 questions were reverse coded for statistical analysis.

Following is an example of a reverse worded and reverse coded question:

2. It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
Value	1	2	3	4	5

The total responses in each section were analyzed using SAS software, and the mean and standard deviation of each group were computed. In addition, in order to determine whether any of the scores were statistically significant, an Independent-Samples *t* Test was conducted. Table 6 provides the mean score, the range of scores possible for each subscale, the standard deviation, and the *t* score in each category of the IIS for both the students who participated in the student success seminar and those who did not.

Table 6

T-Test for Institutional Integration Scores by Group

IIS Category	Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	Possible Range	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> Value	Pr > <i>t</i>
Peer Group Interactions	SSS	253	22.41	6-30	4.24	1.29	0.20
	No SSS	585	21.98		4.49		
Interactions With Faculty	SSS	253	18.48	5-25	3.88	0.54	0.59
	No SSS	585	18.32		3.99		
Faculty Concern For Student Development & Teaching	SSS	253	17.19	5-25	3.62	1.60	0.11
	No SSS	584	16.76		3.57		
Academic & Intellectual Development	SSS	254	26.79	7-35	3.96	2.58	0.01*
	No SSS	583	26.00		4.12		
Institutional & Goal Commitments	SSS	254	27.34	6-30	3.34	1.18	0.24
	No SSS	583	26.93		3.53		

* Indicates statistical significance

As shown in Table 6, the group that participated in the student success seminar reported higher levels of Academic and Intellectual Development than their counterparts. No other differences were found. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted in the categories

of Peer-Group Interactions, Interactions with Faculty, Faculty Concern for Student Development and Teaching, and Institutional and Goal Commitment. However, in the category of Academic and Intellectual Development, the alternate hypothesis was supported that a difference exists between the two groups in their perceptions of their academic development.

Section III of the Institutional Integration Scale, entitled “Campus Services” asked students to indicate the number of times they used various campus services/resources during their first semester in college. Twelve campus resources were listed on the survey. An Independent-Samples *t* Test was utilized to determine whether a significant difference exists between the groups in the number of visits to campus services.

Table 7 reveals the results of the Independent-Samples *t* Test and indicates two areas of significance between the groups: the number of times students who participated in the student success seminar physically visited the library and the number of times students visited the multicultural center. This supported the alternate hypothesis of a difference between the groups in these areas.

Table 7

T-Test for Campus Services Scores by Group

Campus Service	Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> Value	Pr > <i>t</i>
Tutoring Services	SSS	248	0.82	3.53	-1.42	0.16
	No SSS	570	1.36	7.37		
Study Groups	SSS	245	2.23	4.93	1.64	0.11
	No SSS	559	1.67	3.16		
Library Service At Library	SSS	229	5.96	14.21	1.98	0.05*
	No SSS	519	3.99	7.57		
Library Service On Internet	SSS	229	5.08	11.58	0.66	0.51
	No SSS	533	4.50	10.12		
Health Services	SSS	248	0.93	3.39	0.97	0.33
	No SSS	579	0.72	1.18		
Multicultural Center	SSS	243	0.97	5.42	2.15	0.03*
	No SSS	567	0.22	0.98		
Counseling or Women's Center	SSS	246	0.28	2.66	0.40	0.69
	No SSS	579	0.21	0.99		
Academic Advisor	SSS	241	2.55	3.91	1.42	0.16
	No SSS	570	2.16	2.49		
Faculty outside Of Class	SSS	237	2.80	4.56	1.72	0.09
	No SSS	552	2.25	2.91		
Financial Aid Office	SSS	245	0.94	2.42	1.27	0.20
	No SSS	573	0.73	1.47		
Career Services	SSS	246	0.41	3.24	0.45	0.65
	No SSS	577	0.32	1.08		
Residence Hall Staff	SSS	229	3.15	6.83	1.15	0.25
	No SSS	535	2.57	6.28		

* Indicates statistical significance

The last part of Research Question 5 asked students to respond to the question, “Are you a member of a club, organization, sorority, or fraternity?” This information was obtained from the demographic area of Section I of the IIS survey. Table 8 represents the participation rate for each group of students.

Table 8

Participation in Student Activities, Clubs and Organizations by Group

Group	Group Total	Number in Clubs, Activities, & Organizations	Participation Rate
SSS	259	140	140/259 = 54.1%
No SSS	585	346	346/585 = 59.1%
Total	844	486	486/844 = 57.6%

The results indicated that more than 57% of the students participated in a club, organization, sorority, or fraternity during their first semester. A breakdown by group revealed that 54% of students who participated in the success seminar and 59% of those who did not were active in a club, organization, sorority, or fraternity.

A Chi-square was computed using SAS software to determine whether a relationship exists between each group’s participation in clubs, organizations, and sororities, or fraternities on campus. The Chi-square (1, $N = 844$) = 1.19051, $p = 0.1675$ indicated no relationship between membership in a club, organization, sorority, or fraternity and the students’ participation in the success seminar.

Qualitative Results

According to Slavin (2007), combining quantitative and qualitative methods helps researchers to obtain a fuller understanding of the problems being studied. The type of

mixed-methods approach utilized in this study first used quantitative methods, followed by adding several open-ended questions to the survey instrument. Creswell (1994) referred to this two-phase design as the dominant-less dominant design, whereby a single dominant paradigm with one small component of the overall study taken from the alternate paradigm. He stated that the advantage of this approach is that it presents a consistent picture of the whole study yet gathers specific limited information to “probe in detail one aspect of the study” (p. 177).

The qualitative aspect of this study was completed to determine whether certain aspects of the student success seminar assisted students in feeling confident about their first semester on campus, in addition to ascertaining those areas in which they felt least confident. According to Bean (1985), various critical factors other than student grades influence a student’s decision to not persist in college. These factors were identified as institutional fit, commitment to complete a degree, motivation to succeed, and influence of the three Fs: family, friends, and faculty. Therefore, this information was needed by university administrators in order to determine the factors, from the students’ perspectives, that helped them persist in college.

The qualitative responses were obtained through two open-ended questions added to the Institutional Integration Scale survey. Of the 852 students who completed the first two sections of the survey, 763 (89.6%) answered the two short questions regarding their confidence. Of the 259 students who participated in the success seminar, 231 completed the survey, for an 89.2% completion rate. Of the 593 who did not participate in the seminar, 532 completed the survey, for an 89.7% completion rate. This relatively high completion rate (89.6%) provided reliability to the responses.

The sixth and first qualitative question was: “Do the first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a more positive perception about their overall college experience compared to those who did not participate in the course?” The seventh and second qualitative question was “Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar indicate more confidence about their ability to succeed in college than those who did not participate in the course?” Two open-ended questions addressed these issues. The first asked: “What areas do you feel most confident about in college as a result of your first-semester experiences on campus?” The second asked: “What areas do you feel least confident about in college as a result of your first-semester experiences in college?”

As the first qualitative question did not directly ask if they had a positive perception about their first semester on campus, all survey results were coded as positive, neutral, or negative based on the following criteria:

- If students listed more positive than negative items in their answer, it was assigned a *plus sign*. One example was the student who said he/she was “most confident about my ability to do well in classes as well as my personal relationships with other students and faculty.” This student then replied, “ I am least confident about nothing.”
- If the student wrote an equal number of positive and negative items, then it was assigned a *neutral* designation. An example was the student who said he/she was “most confident in English and biology but least confident in psychology and science.”

- If the student wrote more items under the least confident question vs. the most confident question, it was assigned a *negative sign*. An example of this is the student who said he/she “did not feel confident at all, socially, academically, or emotionally.” In addition, he/she stated, “I am least confident in all areas.”

Great care was taken to understand the intent of each student’s answers, as some were not as clear as the previous examples. Surveys were read three times by the researcher to best interpret the students’ perceptions of their first-semester experiences on campus as positive, neutral, or negative. The numbers were then totaled in each response category as positive, neutral, or negative. Percentages were calculated for those who participated in the success seminar and those who did not. Results are listed in Table 9.

Table 9

Confidence Levels by Group

Student Perception Of Confidence	SSS	No SSS
Positive (+)	114/231 = 49.4%	195/532 = 36.7%
Neutral	110/231 = 47.6%	275/532 = 51.7%
Negative (-)	7/231 = 3.0%	62/532 = 11.7%

Results of the responses indicated that almost half (49.4%) of the students who had the success seminar had a positive perception of their first-semester experiences on campus vs. slightly more than one third (36.7%) of those who did not. One additional surprising statistic was the low number of negative responses (seven) given by the students in the success seminar, indicating that only 3% of those who participated had a negative perception of their first semester. This was in contrast to the nearly 12% of

negative responses provided by students who did not participate in the student success seminar.

An additional means to examine responses to open-ended questions is to detect the themes that emerge from the answers. To determine the areas in which the freshmen felt confident about their ability to succeed in college, key words or themes were extracted from their responses to the final qualitative question: “Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar indicate more confidence about their ability to succeed in college than those who did not participate in the course?” Upon transcription of all responses, two major themes emerged: relationships with others (peers and faculty) and academic issues. Both groups of students had a positive perception about their ability to make friends. In addition, responses from both groups indicated they were happy with their social experiences since enrolling on campus.

Although this section of the study was not quantitative, it is important for context to describe the responses to the second qualitative question in terms of percentages. Both groups of students said that “making friends with other students” was the predominant experience about which they felt confident since entering college. Thirty students (12%) who had the student success seminar wrote that exact phrase. Eighty-eight students (14.8%) who did not have the student success seminar stated that this was the area in which they felt the most confident. In addition, students in both groups indicated they felt confident in their relationships with their professors. As one student in the No SSS group wrote, “I know my professor truly cares about whether I learn the material or not.” One student who had the student success seminar wrote, “I heard that college professors

did not help their students, however my professor has taken a lot of extra time to help me understand the material.”

Alternately, in the area of academic development, the two groups described two areas in which their levels of confidence differed. The first area was labeled “My academics” and consisted of responses centered on the importance of grades. This theme included the following responses: getting good grades, doing well in my classes, and my academics. The second area that was considered academic in nature was labeled as “Managing my time.” Again, several responses were combined that appeared to represent the students’ concerns about time management. These responses included getting my homework done on time and managing my time. Table 10 shows the results of the two groups.

Table 10

Academic Areas In Which Most Confidence Was Indicated

Academic Area	SSS	No SSS
My Academics	54 Students (20.8%)	100 Students (10.1%)
Managing My Time	31 Students (12.0%)	47 Students (4.8%)

The students who participated in the success seminar were found to have twice the amount of confidence in their ability to get good grades (20.8%) and manage their time (12.0%) than those who did not participate in the seminar (10.1% and 4.8% respectively). One student who was not a participant in the student success seminar appeared to recognize the importance of learning advanced academic behaviors by stating, “My time management has been my biggest problem. I feel that I could improve so quickly if I could learn how to balance my time between social, academic, and my

spiritual activities.” An interesting side note was that this student was in the Biology 100T class and Biology majors at the university are assumed to be some of the smartest students as most are pre-med majors.

Another response from a student who did not participate in the success seminar expressed his/her disappointment to “not feel welcome on this campus.” Although this was atypical of the responses from either group of students, it raised the question as to whether a student affairs professional in that 100T class might have helped the student to have a more positive transition to the university.

Eight of the students who participated in the success seminar appeared to internalize one major idea regarding the manner in which to be a successful student, as they wrote: “If you work hard, study hard, and get the work done, you will succeed.” Interestingly, this statement was the theme of week one of the student success seminar.

Summary of Results

This study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a student success seminar to increase student retention. It was found that no differences exist in the following areas between the group that participated in the seminar and the group that did not: first to second semester retention rates, first-semester GPA, and the number of credit hours that each group completed during their first semester. Research Question 4, which measured group differences in whether students passed or failed their 100T course, revealed that the students who did not participate in the success seminar passed their 100T courses at a higher rate than those who participated in the seminar.

Results from the IIS survey revealed no statistical significance between the groups regarding their academic and social integration into the campus environment in

four of the five subscales of the instrument: peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, faculty concern for student development and teaching, and institutional and goal commitments. However, in the subscale of academic and intellectual development, students who participated in the success seminar were better integrated to the university than those who did not. Additionally, results indicated that students who participated in the seminar used the library and the multicultural center at higher rates than those who did not take the seminar. No group difference was revealed between the students' participation in campus activities such as clubs, organizations, and sororities, and fraternities.

Results of the qualitative questions that assessed students' perceptions of their first semester on campus and their confidence in their first-semester abilities revealed that almost half (49.4%) who participated in the success seminar reported a more positive perception of their first-semester experiences on campus. Also, seminar participants felt more confident in their academics, as compared to those who did not participate.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In an age of evidence-based education, it is imperative for colleges and universities to improve their accountability to the public by providing solutions that increase the likelihood of graduation for their students. With only slightly more than half (56.1%) of students who enroll in higher education completing a degree, new strategies must be employed to assist incoming freshmen with their transition to college (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2013). In order to determine the programs and services that make a difference, it is incumbent upon each university to employ measures that have shown strong evidence of effectiveness, rather than acting on hunches (Slavin, 2007).

Volumes of research studies have indicated that first-year experience courses aid in the retention of first-semester freshmen; thus, the university sought to determine the effectiveness of a new first-year model initiated during the fall 2014 semester. This new model included collaboration between student affairs professionals and academic professors who created a student success seminar with a goal of teaching the whole student. In 27 of the 54 sections of freshmen transitions courses taught during the fall 2014 semester, a student affairs staff member partnered with an academic professor to provide additional support for the new freshmen. The student affairs staff member taught advanced academic behaviors such as time management, study strategies, motivation, and goal setting in an eight-week seminar as part of the transitions course.

This chapter provides an overview of the results of the study organized by research question and also presents the significance of the findings. Limitations of the study are discussed, as well as implications of the research findings for programmatic

changes in first-year transitions courses. Recommendations for future study also are suggested. Additionally, the recommendations offered at the end of this section may help other colleges and universities to examine their own practices and policies relating to student persistence. The results of this study can be summarized according to the findings from each research question.

1. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher retention rate from their first to their second semester than those who did not participate in the course?

No differences were found between the freshmen who participated in the student success seminar and those who did not in terms of first to second semester retention; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

2. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher first semester GPA than those who did not participate in the course?

The mean first-semester GPAs of the participants in the student success seminar were essentially identical to those who did not have the seminar.

3. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar complete more credit hours at the end of the first semester than those who did not participate in the course?

Students who participated in the success seminar and those who did not were found to complete essentially the same number of credit hours during their first semester (approximately 13.9), indicating that the two groups were fundamentally the same in this area.

4. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a higher pass rate for their freshmen transitions course than those who did not participate in the course?

Results revealed that the students who did not participate in the success seminar passed their 100T course at a higher rate than those who participated. This unexpected result could be explained by the fact that several of the professors who chose to participate in the seminar reported high failure rates in their 100T courses; thus, they were seeking strategies to help their freshmen persist and thought the success seminar may help. Additional pass/fail data from previous years' 100T courses is necessary to determine whether those who participated in the success seminar and passed their 100T course during the fall 2014 semester represented a higher pass rate than in previous semesters.

5. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar feel more integrated academically and socially into the campus, as measured by peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, faculty concern for student development and teaching, academic and intellectual development, commitment to goals and the university, use of service, participation in student activities, and participation in clubs and organizations, than those who did not participate in the course?

In the IIS categories of peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, faculty concern for student development and teaching, and commitment to goals and the university, no differences were found, indicating that both groups' perceptions of their integration in these areas were the same. Additional demographic data from the survey also found no difference between the groups who participated in student activities, clubs, and

organizations, with 54% of those who participated in the success seminar and 59% of those who did not reporting membership in a campus organization or club.

However, the group of students who participated in the success seminar perceived themselves as having more academic and intellectual integration than those who did not have the seminar. As one purpose of the student success seminar was to teach students advanced academic behaviors and self-efficacy skills that have been shown to increase student success in the first year, the seminar appeared to have made a difference in the way in which students perceived their skills in this area. Additionally, students who participated in the success seminar were more likely to visit the library and the multicultural center than those who did not.

6. Do the first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar have a more positive perception about their overall college experience compared to those who did not participate in the course?

Results compiled from the completed survey questions indicated that the students who participated in the success seminar had a more positive perception about their overall college experience during their first semester than those who did not. Of the students who participated, 49.4% had a positive perception of their first semester, compared to 36.7% of those who did not have the course. In addition, only 3.0% of the seminar participants had a negative perception of their first semester, as compared to 11.7% of those who did not participate.

7. Do first-semester freshmen who participated in a student success seminar indicate more confidence about their ability to succeed in college than those who did not participate in the course?

Both groups of students who completed the survey indicated increased confidence in their ability to interact positively with their peers since beginning college. The primary comment made by both groups involved increased confidence to make friends since enrolling at the university. Additionally, both groups mentioned confidence that their faculty cared about their success in college.

However, students who participated in the success seminar indicated more confidence in their academic skills than those who did not. Approximately 10% of the students who did not have the seminar indicated confidence in their academic skills, compared to more than 20% of seminar participants feeling confident about their grades and their ability to do well in their classes. Moreover, the students who participated in the seminar felt more confident about their ability to manage their time than those who did not participate, 12% to 4.8%, respectively.

A statistical significance was noted between the math, science, and composite ACT scores of those who participated in the success seminar and those who did not. Students who took the success seminar had a statistically significant lower ACT score in these areas. This result may suggest that those who participated in the seminar performed better, particularly in the areas of retention, GPA, and credit hours completed, than would be expected considering their high school preparation. In order to determine whether this difference was significant, additional data from the Registrar's Office could have been collected to control for the differences in the ACT scores.

Implications of Findings

As the purpose of this study was to determine whether the addition a student success seminar to the freshmen transitions course (100T) would help increase the

retention of first-year students at the university, the observed results provided implications for changes. According to Tinto (2012), increasing the social and academic integration of first-time freshmen leads to greater persistence in college. Of all data collected, the most notable findings indicated that the student success seminar can impact first-year college students' academic integration and the perception of their confidence to be successful in college.

The IIS survey was administered to two groups of students in order to determine whether the addition of a success seminar to the freshmen transitions course assisted in the academic and social integration of the students. The data revealed positive results in several areas, indicating that the seminar made a difference in the participants' academic integration. Specifically, the students who participated in the seminar felt more academically integrated into the campus than those who did not participate. In addition, survey data indicated that students who participated in the seminar visited the library and the multicultural center more often.

Both the university's library and the multicultural center have assumed leading roles in the university's efforts to assist students with their academic needs. The library's mission statement declared that it "serves as the intellectual commons of the university by providing traditional and evolving services, resources and information literacy instruction in a space conducive to diverse learning needs" (MSU, 2015). Recently, the library has become the area on campus that houses the free writing and communication centers for all students. The multicultural center also provides free tutoring several nights per week for minority students and, according to its website, "seeks to enhance the retention, success, and graduation rates for multicultural students at the university"

(MSU, 2015). Consequently, students who spend more time in the library and in the multicultural center may be expected to do better academically than those who do not use those resources as frequently. This information provided a promising way in which to address the academic challenges faced by new freshmen.

More positive news for the university was obtained from the results of the IIS. The data indicated that both groups of students felt socially integrated to their campus environment. This information indicated that recent campus initiatives encouraging faculty/student involvement outside the classroom appear to be making a difference. However, Tinto (2012) stated that students are more likely to persist if they are both socially and academically integrated to their campus. As social integration appeared to be high for both groups, the need to address the area of academic integration is warranted. Students enrolled in the seminar reported higher academic integration; therefore, it appeared that the success seminar could assist in increasing academic integration, resulting in increased persistence.

Additionally, qualitative data from the questions added to the IIS survey provided further insight into that which the freshmen perceived to be helpful during their transition semester. Students who participated in the success seminar clearly articulated their thoughts that the seminar helped with the transition process. They expressed a more positive perception of the university than those who did not have the seminar. They also indicated more confidence in managing their time and in making good grades than the students who did not participate. As the goal of the success seminar was to teach first-time freshmen the advanced academic skills necessary for success in college, the seminar appeared to increase the students' perceptions of their academic abilities. This indicated

success seminar can achieve some of the factors that Tinto (2012) reported to be linked to student retention.

One aspect of the seminar that could not readily be measured by the current design of the study was whether the collaboration of both academic faculty and student affairs professionals made a difference to the students who took the course. However, recent research (Tinto, 2012) had suggested that colleges and universities should educate their students in a holistic manner and must acknowledge that multiple factors account for persistence. Thus, the collaboration, that was deemed necessary by the initial committee that planned the student success seminar appeared to be warranted. When asked whether the collaboration helped her students to be more successful, one 100T professor exclaimed, “ Absolutely! Several of the students in my 100T course had major problems with their financial aid but since the Director of the Financial Aid Office was in our class every week, these students were able to get the help they needed thus keeping them in school. Her presence was as important to them as mine was to other students ” (B. Cobb, personal communication, October 10, 2014).

Although all hypotheses were not supported, the students clearly understood and internalized the rewards they perceived from the success course. The positive perceptions of their first-year experience, which were conveyed in their responses to the qualitative questions, were an important finding. Their perceptions of an increase in their academic abilities and confidence to be successful provided additional implications for continued use of the seminar. Additionally, the study results indicated that the use of the seminar may be a proactive approach to increasing student persistence (Tinto, 2012).

Limitations of Study

The study provided both quantitative data and qualitative information about the influence of a seminar designed to teach strategies to first-time freshmen to aid in a successful transition to college. The advanced academic behaviors that were taught in the student success seminar were identified from research on best practices for academic preparation and from the university's Retention Office as being the major obstacles for freshmen at the university.

Despite the efforts of this researcher to use best practices, several limitations were noted in the current design of the study. The first was the length of time to measure the student retention data. A one-semester review of retention rates often does not provide the university with sufficient information. Thus, the data should be reexamined at the end of the students' first year to determine whether the seminar had an impact on the full year retention rate. A longer time frame, usually the first to the third semester, generally is the norm set by institutions of higher education and other researchers who have studied retention. Using only first to second semester enrollment as an indicator of retention does not allow time for a true assessment of student persistence. An examination of the same quantitative data obtained from the Registrar's Office at the beginning of the students' third semester (fall 2105) may provide additional information about the value of the student success seminar for increasing retention.

A second limitation was due to the sample of the students who completed the IIS survey. The number of freshmen enrolled in a 100T course at the beginning of the fall 2014 semester was 1,368 students. The number that completed the survey was 852, resulting in a 65% completion rate. This percentage normally is high enough to yield

valid results. It is difficult to know whether the reason the 516 students did not participate was due to their absence the day the survey was administered in their 100T class, or their 100T professor did not follow up with the coordinator of the Academic Success Center. This information may have provided the same results as the students who took the survey. However, the survey instrument has been shown to have high reliability and validity analytics; therefore, the responses from the students who took the survey should be interpreted as representative (French & Oakes, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

A third limitation was the lack of a true random sample to measure whether the success seminar was effective in increasing the retention rate for first-time freshmen. This could be helpful, specifically for the 100T courses that had high failure rates. A matched pair study in which students from these 100T courses are randomly assigned to participate in the success seminar may be the only means with which to determine whether the success seminar made an impact on the pass rate of the transitions course, in addition to increasing the overall retention rate of freshmen.

Recommendations

The focus on increasing student retention has required colleges and institutions to establish practices and policies that have a direct impact on students. Kuh et al. (2010) provided a meta-analysis of studies that examined the institutional practices most effective in increasing student success. Their book, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, documented their visits to 20 colleges and universities they had identified as performing at a higher than expected level. Their goal was to Document Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) that had a direct impact on students and led to

higher levels of student engagement. Their research found that student engagement is more important to student persistence than who the students are or where they go to college. One of their major recommendations urged higher education to institutionalize student success and to determine the institutional barriers that have hindered student persistence.

Additionally, Tinto (2005) recommended that institutions of higher education focus on student success rather than failure. His 2012 book, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action* was a meta-analysis of research to assist colleges and universities in designing programs to increase the social and academic integration of their students. The research found that students who are both socially and academically integrated into their campus environment are more likely to persist. He believed that, in order to make substantive changes that result in increased retention and graduation rates, colleges and universities must establish programs that are the result of intentional, structured, and proactive actions and policies. These actions must include a clear plan for involvement by everyone at the university.

This study's findings suggested that intentionally employing a proactive approach to teaching first-time freshmen the advanced academic skills necessary to be successful in college was helpful to their perceived academic integration to the campus. Based on these findings, the implementation of a student success seminar for all new freshmen appeared to be a strategy warranted to assist in the university's retention efforts. As university administrators currently have made *Student Success* a major strategic initiative, it is imperative to ensure that retention is not only a function of the retention office, but all university personnel play a role in helping students to persist. The collaborative approach

between academic professors and student affairs professionals in the seminar will ensure that these retention efforts are assigned to more than one area of campus.

Recommendations for Future Study

As previously mentioned, recent university initiatives to encourage faculty/student contact outside the classroom may have led to the perception by all freshmen who were surveyed that they felt socially integrated to the campus. This study's results indicated that the use of the student success seminar assisted in the perceived academic integration of the new students. The most appropriate way to determine whether the results from this year's survey revealed the social and academic integration of the students may be to administer the same survey next year to all freshmen enrolled in a freshmen transitions course.

In addition, in order to understand whether the survey was an adequate predictor of student persistence (predictive validity), a survey of next year's freshmen could include student ID numbers. Data from the institutional student system could then be examined to determine whether those students who persisted to the next year had higher levels of both social and academic integration to the university. This step was not included in the current study but could be easily added for future studies.

Additional studies should focus on ways in which to assist in the academic integration of freshmen. An evaluation should be conducted of other high-impact practices that have shown promise in increasing students' academic integration. The university should continue to use the information from MAP-Works surveys to determine the topics that should be selected to reflect the needs of freshmen. Although this study employed an eight-session format for teaching the advanced academic behaviors,

additional research could determine the possibility of a more appropriate approach to presenting the information. In addition, an on-line seminar could be developed for freshmen who take only on-line courses from the university.

Furthermore, a re-examination is needed on the results that fewer students who participated in the success seminar passed their 100T course than those who did not participate. This anomaly appeared to be counter-intuitive based on other results of the study. A comparison of the data from previous years for each 100T course could provide a different lens from which to view the results. Additionally, a further examination controlling for the difference in the ACT scores between the two groups could determine whether the statistics yield any additional results.

The need to approach the retention of students in a holistic manner is highly recommended. Thus, additional research focusing on ways to enhance the collaboration between academic faculty and student affairs professionals should remain foremost in order that an increase in retention is equally shared on the campus.

Conclusion

According to the literature, retention and student persistence have been the fundamental topic of research by colleges and universities over the last several decades (Reason, 2009). Due to the need for an educated workforce to meet the demands of a new global marketplace, federal and state governments also have joined in the discussion (Complete College America, 2011). Private foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation, have created programs targeting the goal of an increased percentage of college graduates (Fain, 2015).

Doug Shapiro, Executive Director of the National Student Clearinghouse, conveyed the importance of finding solutions for retaining students in college when he expressed the following, “Getting past the first year, either by staying put or by transferring to another institution is one of the most important milestones to a college degree. We need to find better solutions for keeping students on track to graduation, whether that means the student transfers or stays put” (Fain, 2014).

In an attempt to solve the college retention and completion issue, many stakeholders should be involved. First and foremost, colleges and universities must assume the lead in finding solutions. Many studies have been completed that provide administrators with reliable data on successful programs and policies. One such program that has received much attention is the use of a proactive seminar for first-year students.

This study involved a program evaluation of a new student success seminar offered at the university in the fall 2014 semester. The results indicated that the seminar showed a positive effect on the perceived academic integration of the students who participated in the course. Furthermore, proactively teaching students how to be successful clearly is more appropriate than reactively waiting until they begin to struggle and exit the university. When students are proactive, they are prepared to transition, adjust, persevere, and succeed in situations that extend beyond the classroom. By holistically teaching these skills, they are more prepared to be successful and to be contributing citizens in life. One of the most famous quotes of the influential medieval Jewish philosopher and physician, Maimonides, appears to be a perfect summary for this study: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” (Maimonides, 1996).

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Integration Scale Survey

November 17, 2014

Dear Student,

In order to assist Murray State University to better serve our students and enhance their academic success, please complete the following survey by reflecting on your experiences this fall at MSU. The purpose of the study is to determine what types of campus experiences may contribute to academic success.

This survey is completely confidential and you will not be identified individually in any of the reported data. It will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete and you may choose to not take it if you wish. It will not hurt your grade in this course in anyway.

If you have any questions or concerns about this request, please feel free to contact Peggy Whaley at 270-809-3588.

Thank you for your assistance.
Sincerely,

Peggy Whaley, Coordinator
Center for Academic Success

Following is a survey characterizing your academic and social experiences at MSU during your first semester. Your responses will remain absolutely confidential. There are four sections to the survey.

Section I: Student Characteristics

Are you a member of a club, organization, sorority, or fraternity? Yes No

Do you live in a campus residence hall? Yes No

How many credit hours are you enrolled in this semester? _____

Do you have a full-time or part-time job? Yes No

If yes, how many hours per week do you work? _____

What is your gender? Male Female Choose to not report

Are you receiving any financial aid? Yes No

Survey Continues On Next Page

Section II: Institutional Integration

In this section you are presented with a list of statements related to your academic and social experiences at MSU with which you may or may not agree. Use the following scale to indicate the extent you Agree or Disagree with each statement as it relates to your first semester at MSU. Circle only one response for each item.

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree N = Not Sure D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

Place An 'X' In The Column That Best Represents Your Opinion For Each Question.

<i>Academic and Social Experiences During Your First Semester At MSU.....</i>	S	A	N	D	S
	A	A	N	D	D
Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students.					
The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying.					
My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values					
It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students.					
Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem.					
Most of the students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own.					
My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.					
My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.					
My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.					
Since coming to this university I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member.					
I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members.					
Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally interested in students.					
Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally outstanding or superior teachers.					
Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students.					
Most of the faculty I have had contact with are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas.					
Most faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely interested in teaching.					

Survey Continues On Next Page

Section II: Institutional Integration (continued)

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree N = Not Sure D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

Place An 'X' In The Column That Best Represents Your Opinion For Each Question

<i>Academic and Social Experiences During Your First Semester At MSU.....</i>	SA	A	N	D	SD
I am satisfied with the extent of my intellectual development since enrolling in this university.					
My academic experience has had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.					
I am satisfied with my academic experience at this university.					
Few of my courses this year have been academically stimulating.					
My interest in ideas and intellectual matters has increased since coming to this university.					
I am more likely to attend a cultural event (for example, a concert, lecture, or art show) now than I was before coming to this university.					
I have performed academically as well as I anticipated I would.					
It is important for me to graduate from college.					
I am confident that I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university.					
It is likely that I will register at this university next semester.					
It is not important to me to graduate from this university.					
I have no idea at all what I want to major in.					
Getting good grades is not important to me.					

Survey Continues On Next Page

Section III: Campus Services

During your 1st Semester at MSU, approximately how many times did you use each of the following campus services?

Campus Service	Approximate Number Of Times Used
Tutoring Services	
Study Groups	
Library Services at Library	
Library Services on the Internet	
Health Services	
Multicultural Center	
Counseling and/or Women's Center	
Academic Advisor	
Faculty Member Outside of Class	
Financial Aid Office	
Career Services	
Residence Hall Staff	

Survey Continues On Next Page

Section IV: Institutional Integration (continued)

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree N = Not Sure D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

Place An 'X' In The Column That Best Represents Your Opinion For Each Question

<i>I have become more competent in the following skills we discussed in this course:</i>	SA	A	N	D	SD
a. Accepting personal responsibility					
b. Discovering self-motivation					
c. Mastering self-management					
d. Employing interdependence					
e. Gaining self-awareness					
f. Developing critical thinking skills					
g. Believing in myself					

Section V: College Opinions

What areas do you feel most confident about in college as a result of your first semester experiences on campus? _____

What areas do you feel least confident about in college as a result of your first semester experiences on campus? _____

Survey Continues On Next Page

What aspects of your freshmen transitions course were most helpful to you? _____

What aspects of your freshmen transitions course were least helpful to you? _____

What aspects of your Student Success Course were most helpful to you? _____

What aspects of your Student Success Course were least helpful to you? _____

APPENDIX B

WKU Institutional Review Board Letter



**Office of the Provost
and Vice President
for Academic Affairs**

333 Wells Hall
Murray, KY 42071-3318
270.809.3744
270.809.3565 fax

February 12, 2015

Paul Mooney
Western Kentucky University

Dr. Mooney,

This letter is to verify that the research Cindy Clemson is conducting for her dissertation is part of Murray State University's ongoing review of our first year experience course and the modifications we are making to the course to better ensure student success. Because this research is part of our program review process, IRB approval is not necessary. Cindy Clemson has permission to use data collected during our program review for her dissertation.

Please let me know if there is any additional information you need in order to have Cindy Clemson's submission unlocked.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Renae D. Duncan".

Renae D. Duncan, Ph.D.
Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education