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The journey from high school to college: Do collaborative connections improve student transition?

Billie A. Unger

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The Journey from High School to College:
Do Collaborative Connections Improve Student Transition?

Billie A. Unger

Dissertation submitted to the College of Human Resources and Education
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership Studies

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ABSTRACT

The Journey from High School to College: Do Collaborative Connections Improve Student Transition?

Billie A. Unger

Each year, thousands of students enter postsecondary education unprepared for the many academic, social, and emotional challenges they will face. Collaborative programs between secondary and postsecondary institutions have therefore developed as one way to address these issues. Although numerous studies have focused on quantitative evaluation of collaborative programs, few have included qualitative analysis of the opinions and ideas of those students who were involved in the efforts. The purpose of this study was to gauge the effect of student participation in pre-college collaborative experiences on students' transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Within the context of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, the study attempted to determine the impact of participation in two specific types of collaborative programs, academic alliance and motivational/compensatory, on student awareness of, adjustment to, and commitment to college. Focusing on the four key factors of Schlossberg's Transition Theory—situation, self, support, and strategies—the study employed face-to-face, semi structured interviews with 27 college students who were alumni of the two programs, College Summit and the Writing Coalition, to determine student perceptions of their pre-college and college transition experiences. The qualitative data analysis revealed that all students perceived their collaborative experiences as beneficial and positive, and the majority of the students reported that they were very committed to completing a college education. Finally, study participants candidly shared their suggestions for developing even more successful collaborative programs.

Dedication

What is success if, when you're standing at the top, having achieved everything you wanted to achieve, you have no one to share it with? Make love your number one aim. Love is your greatest possibility in the one life you live.

Anonymous

This dissertation is dedicated to my family—the people whose love and support have made it possible. First of all, I want to thank my parents, George “Bill” and Clara “Snooks” Swink, who brought me into this world and instilled in me their incredible work ethic. Second, I must thank those who have put up with me every day throughout these busy three and a half years: my sons, Cullen and Alec Unger, who have become master chefs and have endured endless days and nights of Mom with her face stuck in a book or computer; my dog, Tux, who has snuggled by my side and supported me with his loving presence; and my devoted husband, Dana Peters, who has “picked up the slack” at home and given me hugs of encouragement when I truly wanted to quit. Finally, I want to thank my stepchildren—Jamie, Jodi, and Dustin Peters, who have understood that their “wicked stepmother” was way too busy to cook those delicious Sunday dinners she used to cook. I love and thank each and every one of you.

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CHAPTER 1

Problem Statement

Prior to the 1950's in the United States, a K-12 education was sufficient preparation for attaining gainful employment. Today, however, the demands of the new millennium require more advanced skills and knowledge provided by an education beyond those 13 years. Thus, increasing numbers of students enroll in college not only to advance their skills and improve their chances for productive employment but also to expand their knowledge base. "Census data show that today about 70% of all young people want to get a bachelor's degree or higher, as contrasted with only 39% who had the same desire in the year 1982" (Nunley & Gemberling, 1999a, p. 61). A postsecondary education is often a necessity in today's fast-paced, technologically advanced workplace. "Business and industry state that in this Information Age, 80% of high school graduates will need some postsecondary education to be employable" (McCabe, 1997, p. 4). This pressure to advance one's education, along with the birth of various federal student aid programs designed to increase student access to higher education, has resulted in a steady increase in college enrollment over the past few decades. From 1990 to 2000, the proportion of 18 to 24 year-old high school graduates attending college increased from 39.1 to 43.3 percent (*Chronicle*, 2002-3, p. 24). The number of 18 to 24 year olds enrolled in college increased from 8.1 million in 1991 to 8.8 million in 1999, and projections indicate that from 1999-2011, the number of 18 to 24 year-olds will increase to 10.8 million (NCES, 2001).

This influx of college freshmen coupled with open access to education has certainly changed the profile of the typical college student. Today's student body is a

mixture of cultures, ages, and aptitudes. Dougherty (1997, p. 69) acknowledges, “Many able students who previously were barred by poverty from going to college” may now enroll, yet concedes that many students who are not prepared for college will also enter. As a result, the number of students requiring remediation upon college entry is escalating. According to the United States Department of Education (1997), 29% of entering college freshmen enroll in one or more developmental courses. In other words, nearly one third of all entering college freshmen are not prepared for college level studies. Data concerning participation in remedial education available from The National Center of Education Statistics (2001) indicates that from 1980-1993, 63 percent of students attending only a community college and 64 percent of students attending both a community and four-year college took at least one remedial course. Of students attending only a four-year college, 40 percent enrolled in at least one remedial course. Clearly, whether entering community colleges, four-year institutions, or both, large numbers of students are academically unprepared in at least one academic area. Boylan insists, “It may be fair to state that we have yet to make the investment or establish the requirements necessary to prepare all high school graduates for entry into college” (p. 4). Thus, the need for remediation continues to be a controversial issue.

According to Chenoweth, “The issue of remediation and developmental education has become one of the most rancorous in higher education” (1997, p. 8). Some administrators question the hiring of so many faculty to teach developmental courses, students dislike the stigma associated with developmental work, and taxpayers balk at the tuition spent to acquire skills they feel should have been mastered by students during high school. Although Saxon and Boylan (2001, p.6) argue that the amount of money being

spent on developmental education is marginal, they do concede, “[The public’s] main criticism lies in the use of federal and state funds, whatever the amount, for college remediation.” Thus, developmental education programs designed to bridge the gap between public school and higher education are under attack.

Despite the serious concerns about developmental education, many states realize that it is a necessity in these times of universal access. Tinto (1998) confirms, noting that approximately 90% of all colleges and universities –even the “elite” schools– offer some form of developmental education. Nevertheless, members of the educational community are searching for ways not only to better prepare students for college level work and lower the number of students needing developmental courses but also to ease their transition from high school into college.

Such concerns have prompted educators to reflect upon the experiences of incoming students before entry into college. Why do so many students come to college unprepared? There are various answers to this question. McCabe (1997, p. 4) contends, “Nowhere in America is there a match between the requirements to graduate high school and the requirements to begin college work.” In other words, there is a substantial gap in the curricular requirements of high school and college. Boylan (1999, p. 3) concurs, adding, “Only 43% of America’s high school students complete a college preparatory curriculum, ...while 65% go on to college.” He further acknowledges that of those students who do participate in a college preparatory program, more than half do not take all of the recommended prerequisite courses. Certainly, this disparity in course requirements and completions widens the gap that accounts for many of the students who enroll in college developmental courses each semester.

The increased student enrollment in developmental coursework is a legitimate concern. Equally problematic, however, is high school students' lack of awareness about the educational opportunities available to them upon graduation from high school. If students are unaware of the possibility of furthering their educations, how can they prepare themselves for the academic, social, and emotional changes associated with college attendance? Perhaps if more students viewed college as a viable option, they would better prepare themselves for the transition from high school to college.

Stress is also an important factor in student transition and adjustment to college. Lafreniere and Ledgerwood (1997, ¶ 9) state, "Compared to the more structured environment of high school, university is likely to involve more ambiguous expectations and demands on students." Although the researchers originally hypothesized that family support and proximity would be the primary factor in students' ability to cope with the stress involved in beginning college, they actually found a significant difference in reaction to stress according to gender. A different study by Reisberg (2000) found that 30 percent of students who entered college in the fall of 1999 reported feeling frequently "overwhelmed by all [they] have to do." Interestingly, according to the study, women were almost two times as likely as men to report feeling overwhelmed. Other studies measuring stress during a life transition such as college entry are needed to further probe this issue.

As a response to concerns about students' academic, social, and emotional preparation, colleges and universities are attempting to bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary education and therefore ease student transition into college by forging relationships with public high schools. Van Patten and Dennison (1987, ¶ 4) believe that

the most effective types of relationships involve improved curricular coordination between public school and higher education. They do, however, concede that these collaborations may be the most difficult to initiate and maintain. Such partnerships focus on attempts to create a seamless curriculum from public school through higher education. Greenberg (1992) cites additional catalysts for the initiation of such collaborative efforts, such as increased competition for student enrollment, a necessity for improved teacher training, and the realization that preparing students for higher education must be a combined community effort. Ascher and Schwartz (1989, p.3) add, “By helping to prepare students for college before they enroll, colleges can [also] help ensure larger, more ethnically and racially diverse incoming classes, who are academically ready for college work.”

Undoubtedly, there are a myriad of benefits for both high school students and college personnel involved in collaborative efforts. Many educators insist that interventions should not be limited to those students who are obviously already on a college-bound track and caution that a “one size fits all” structure of collaborative programs is not feasible (Jun & Tierney, 1999). Likewise, students who are not even considering a college education can benefit from early intervention programs. Such programs for “at risk” students appear to be effective in encouraging college enrollment. Kezar (2001, p. 57) alludes to one study’s finding that “students who are at risk who participate in high school early intervention programs are nearly twice as likely to enroll in a four-year college as those who do not participate in these programs.” Although this finding is encouraging, what happens once those students get to college is not exactly

clear. Kezar (2001) argues, therefore, “Although some research currently exists, further research on the effect of early intervention programs is needed” (p. 59).

As colleges and universities forge closer ties with local public schools in an effort to better prepare high school graduates for the potential challenges of college, various implementation models have emerged: dual enrollment programs; academic alliances and other faculty-to-faculty arrangements; compensatory, motivational, and enrichment approaches; mentoring and/or tutoring programs; school improvement and reform efforts, collaborative research, and pre-service teacher education (Greenberg, 1992). Although some research has been conducted concerning collaborative programs, very little input has been obtained from the college students who were actually involved in such programs.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

A primary goal of public school/higher education collaborative programs is to better prepare high school students for the academic rigor of college and to help students realize that college is a realistic option. Participation in special collaborative programs may also lead to more effective transition into college by alleviating some of the stress involved as students leave high school and enter postsecondary education. There has been a great deal of literature touting the rewards of collaborative efforts in this era of school reform; however, very little research has been conducted in which college students share their personal perspectives concerning their pre-college experiences. Ironically, the voices of the so-called benefactors of systemic school-wide reform efforts have generally been silent in most of the literature to date.

Clearly, student adjustment to college involves many academic, social, and emotional factors. Like any change in life circumstances, entry into college signifies a period of transition. Thus, referring to transition theory as a framework for identifying experiences helpful to students in transition is warranted. This research study will therefore utilize the main tenets of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (*self, situation, support, and strategies*) to gauge the effect of particular program components and pre-college experiences on student adjustment to college.

Focusing on two of the most effective and frequent types of collaborative programs according to the literature –academic alliances and motivational/compensatory programs– the purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the basic program components involved in each of the collaborations, and to determine, from the viewpoint of the college student, whether or not participation in one of these pre-college high school/higher education collaborations affected student ease of transition into postsecondary education. The population under study is currently enrolled college students (preferably freshmen) who participated in a specific Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)-funded academic alliance or motivational/compensatory collaborative program while in high school.

A secondary purpose of the study is to provide information concerning particular aspects of the academic alliance and motivational/compensatory collaborative programs identified by students as having been most beneficial during their high school-college transition. This study also attempts to explicate additional components that students recommend to further enhance preparation for postsecondary education and determine those pre-college activities and experiences that students suggest could have assisted

them in their adjustment to college. Such information can inform policy makers as well as high school and higher education faculty and administrators who embark upon similar alliances so that limited resources can be utilized most effectively. The following questions will guide this research study:

Research Questions

1. What are the primary components of the two collaborative programs under study: academic alliance and motivational?
2. What are students' perceptions of their experiences in the collaborative program?
 - a. Within each of the two types, what collaborative program components do students identify as most helpful in easing their transition into college?
 - b. Within each of the two types, what collaborative program components do students identify as least helpful during their transition to college?
 - c. Within each of the two types, what additional program components do students suggest would be helpful in easing their transition to college?
3. Did participation in the pre-college collaboration programs affect student's awareness that college was a viable option? If so, how?
4. What are students' perceptions of the factors that mediated their transition to college?
 - a. How do students perceive their current situation as a college student?
 - b. What personal characteristics influenced students' adaptation to college?
 - c. To what extent did social support facilitate student transition to college?
 - d. What sources of stress did students experience during their transition to college, and what strategies did students use to overcome them?
5. What is the impact of collaborative experiences on student commitment to completing college?

Definition of Key Terms and Concepts

Operational Definitions

- Student perceptions- students' ideas, attitudes, and beliefs.

- Transition to college- the passage of students from pre-college to college education.
- Pre-college experiences- activities (academic, extracurricular) in which students have engaged prior to enrolling in college.
- Collaboration- “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989, p. 5).
- Academic alliance programs- collaborative programs and “other kinds of teacher-to-teacher partnerships through which high school and college faculty jointly discuss a variety of subject-areas and concerns” (Greenberg, 1992, ¶ 8). These alliances may include additional components in which students are involved.
- Motivational/Compensatory programs- collaborative programs in which students “who are at risk (urban and rural poor and academically under-prepared, for example), underrepresented (women in science and minority group members) or traditionally not well served through conventional programs (such as gifted or talented students)” are served (Greenberg, 1992, ¶ 6).
- Program components- activities and experiences designed to meet the stated goals of collaborative programs.
- Schlossberg’s Transition Theory- student development theory originally developed in 1981 (as a model) and later revised by Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995). The purpose of the theory is to frame and provide understanding of and intervention for adults in transition.
 1. Situation- current condition including student consideration of trigger, timing, control, duration, other stress, previous experience
 2. Self-personal and demographic characteristics (gender, socioeconomic status, stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, and age) as well as psychological resources (ego development, optimism, commitment, values)
 3. Support- assistance from intimate relationships, family members, friends, institutions, and communities.
 4. Strategies- coping mechanisms (direct action, information seeking, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior) used by people in transition.

(Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995)

Proposal Structure

This proposal included a literature review, a concept map highlighting the theoretical framework to be employed in the study, an explanation of the research design of the study including limitations of the study, a detailed chronology of the research methods employed, a brief conclusion, a reference section of cited sources, and an appendix of all documents related to the study.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

This literature review examines how collaborations between public schools and higher education institutions are attempting to bridge the gap between high school and college. The first section presents a brief historical perspective of higher education in the United States, the call for better student preparation and closer ties between secondary and postsecondary education, and a history of the collaboration movement in the United States. Section two includes a discussion of the various definitions of collaboration, contemporary models of collaborative projects, and criteria for successful collaborations. Finally, this review examines the current literature concerning student transition to college, highlights the primary tenets of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, provides the conceptual framework guiding the study, and defines key terms and concepts.

Historical Perspective

Prior to the mid 1900s, attending college was a reality for only an elite few. This scenario changed, however, during the second half of the 20th century when the GI Bill and other federal student aid programs provided greater access to higher education. Between 1950 and 1995, total student enrollment rose more than 500% from approximately 2.3 million to 14.3 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996, Table 3). As access to higher education burgeoned, so did the demand for education above and beyond high school. Employers became much more selective in their hiring, further increasing enrollments on college campuses nationwide. Gladieux and Swail (2000, ¶ 3) caution, "There are no guarantees in life, with or without a college diploma. But the odds are increasingly stacked against those with the least education and training."

Thus, ever-increasing numbers of high school graduates make the leap from high school to college each year. “Nearly 3 out of 4 high school graduates now go on to some form of college, many more than a generation ago” (Savoye, 2000, ¶ 7).

Some students perceive the acquisition of a higher education as a natural progression from high school to college. Others, however, need help in order to make a successful transition as they face new social, emotional, and academic challenges. Smith (1997, pp. 8-12) proposes that high school students experience high levels of stress and anxiety as they move through the process of taking the ACT or SAT, applying to colleges, applying for financial aid, worrying about acceptance or rejection, and maintaining the high school grades necessary for college acceptance. These responsibilities, she argues, create a great deal of psychological stress that affects students’ attitudes about whether or not to attend college. Those who do choose to enroll continue to grapple with these issues. Socially and emotionally, college freshmen must navigate rites of passage as they separate from old peer groups and family members, begin to interact with members of a new social group, and develop relationships that deem them accepted members of the new group (Tinto, 1993).

In addition to these social and emotional stressors, students often lack the basic academic skills necessary for successful college level coursework. Remedial or developmental education, which generally includes programs and/or courses designed to improve students’ skills in the basic areas of English composition, reading, and mathematics, is therefore becoming increasingly important. Tomlinson (1989, ¶ 8) lauds such programs as follows:

Postsecondary developmental programs have helped fulfill the mission of providing equal educational opportunity in a democratic society. These programs have provided a “last chance” for many individuals to obtain worthwhile experiences in higher education that will enable them to find meaningful participation in employment and community life.

Not everyone shares Tomlinson’s enthusiasm for developmental education; college governing boards and parents in particular are alarmed by the escalating number of students enrolled in developmental college courses each year. According to Kleiman (2001, ¶ 3), “Some 30 percent of college students arrive at college campuses in need of remedial (developmental) education...and hundreds of thousands [of entering college freshmen] are failing out or bailing out because they are utterly unprepared when they arrive.” Although developmental programs are not new to higher education, the ranks of developmental students are rapidly increasing. “In only 15 years, our public schools have almost tripled the number of high school graduates taking college preparatory courses (Boylan, 1999, p. 2).

Alarming statistics such as these, a public outcry about the prevalence and cost of developmental education at the college level, and concerns about the difficulty students have in acclimating themselves to higher education have forced the educational community to take a closer look at students’ experiences in high school and even earlier. Believing that our educational system should not wait until the college level to intervene, many states are answering the call to get more involved in the pre-college curriculum. Schmidt (2000, p.2) argues that higher education must better meet its responsibility to K-12 education. This is a responsibility that, according to Timpane and White (1998), has

been virtually neglected in the past. They state, "...Higher education has been a minor player and a missing voice, but a lurking presence nevertheless—the 'dog that did not bark'" (p. 3). The perception that postsecondary educators place the blame for students' lack of academic preparation solely on public school educators yet fail to offer their assistance and expertise perpetuates assertions such as those made by Timpane and White.

Proponents of public school/higher education collaboration insist that it is time for higher education to change this perception and make its voice heard as the two systems start working together for the benefit of students and society at large. McCabe (2001) argues his position:

Today's education system works as separate parts with little coordination between academic levels or long-range planning. To meet today's challenges, America must create a radically different system. Such a system must be seamless from kindergarten (preferably preschool) through post secondary education. (p. 4)

As long as postsecondary institutions rely on placement measures such as the SAT and ACT with little regard for their lack of connection to the high school curriculum, such a seamless curriculum seems unlikely. An additional problem is the fact that separate policy boards govern these two levels of education, making meaningful changes even more difficult.

Despite the challenges, McCabe's idea is not a new one. Following World War I, Clark (1986) traces a steady increase in the realization that secondary and post secondary schools must create linkages in an attempt to improve American education. The concept of collaboration was also addressed in school reform documents in the early 1980s.

Boyer (1983) specifically refers to collaborative programs as a way to promote excellence in education. Similarly, the Holmes Group (1990), a consortium of 100 American research universities studying teacher education reform, called for the creation of incentives for both public school and higher education faculty to help “strengthen the relationship and the broader political, social, and economic communities in which they reside” (p. 2). Perhaps Hodgkinson (1985) articulates this frame of mind most succinctly: “It is assumed that if people can begin to SEE [*sic*] the educational system as a single entity through which people move, they may begin to behave as if all of education were related. It seems self-evident that such perception is good” (p. 1).

Although collaborative efforts have existed in the past, Goodlad (1988) classifies such collaborations as recent initiatives since 80% of the secondary/postsecondary collaborative programs began after 1980, and over one-third began after 1984. Initial linkages focused primarily on teacher preparation and curricular alignment. Timpane and White (1998, p. 6) report, however, that “the instances of effective collaboration are increasing, ever more rapidly, in recent years, and are becoming more ambitious and comprehensive.” Specific projects sponsored by the College Board and the American Association for Higher Education have brought together not only colleges and public schools, but also local communities, in an effort to create a seamless education for students (Timpane & White, 1998, p. 6). What exactly, then, constitutes a collaboration?

Collaboration Defined

There is some disagreement concerning the appropriate term to describe arranged interactions between public schools and colleges. Such interactions generally involve some type of cooperation, yet Hord (1986, p. 22) contends that there is a distinct

difference between cooperation and collaboration based on the unique input requirements and yielded outputs of each. Intriligator (1986) similarly distinguishes among cooperation, coordination, and collaboration on the basis of seven variables (objective, policies, structure, personnel roles, resources, power and influence, and interagency relationships) and argues that collaboration is by far the most difficult type of interaction to establish and maintain.

Other educators utilize the term *partnership* to refer to public school/higher education interactions. Goodlad (1991, pp. 58-61), for example, notes that such partnerships include four components: concept, purpose, agenda, and structure while Uhlik (1995, p. 14) defines a partnership as “an ongoing relationship between two or more parties, based upon satisfying specifically identified, mutual needs.” Carriuolo and Associates (1996, p. 11) also use the term *partnership*, defining it as follows: “The term school-college partnership ideally signifies a long-term, reciprocal relationship forged between pre-collegiate schools and local postsecondary or higher education institutions, and often interested others such as local business or community groups.”

Some educators use the terms *partnership* and *collaboration* interchangeably, yet O’Dell and James (1999, ¶ 3-6) argue that there is a discrete difference between the two, highlighting the importance of the stakeholders involved in the effort and the role of the convener who locates and connects the various stakeholders. The most important distinction between the two concepts, O’Dell and James assert, is that while the goals of a partnership are fully understood by all the stakeholders, the goals of a collaboration are not defined and must remain flexible throughout the entire process.

Still others distinguish between collaboration and the collaboration process. Whetten (1981, p. 14) believes that although the structure of an alliance may create the context for a collaboration, it does not necessarily fully represent the process itself. Gray (1989, p. 227) concurs, arguing that the process of collaboration is paramount to understanding its definition, and proposes that “past studies [of interorganizational relations] have discounted how coalitions of stakeholders are formed and changed amid a dynamic interorganizational field, how diverse interests are forged into collective action, and the temporary character of many interorganizational alliances.”

Because public schools and higher education institutions have the same goal – student success– yet different perspectives about attaining that goal, the most appropriate definition for use in this study is the following: “Collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989, p. 5).

Goals of Collaborative Programs

Collaborative programs are as varied as the stakeholders from which they are formed. Some involve only students, some involve only faculty, and some involve a mixture of the two. Others connect parents and even local businesses. Whether or not a collaboration is mandated, grant-supported, or locally initiated, Ascher and Swartz (1989, ¶ 3-5) claim that the most common goals for school/college collaboration are student development and school improvement. Specifically, they assert that student development programs originate as ways to improve the college preparedness of high school students, support student completion of high school, increase the college-going rate, and increase

the likelihood that students will complete a college education. School improvement programs, on the other hand, serve as a means to meet mandated school reform requirements, improve high school facilities and equipment, provide additional services to at-risk students, and increase the curricular connection between K-12 and postsecondary education.

In addition to student development and school improvement, there are other common objectives for public school/ higher education collaboration. Greenberg (1992, ¶ 2) identifies the following as primary motivators: “the changing student population, democratization of higher education admissions policies, students’ frequent lack of skill preparedness, awareness of a need for new models of inservice staff development for high school teachers, and greater competition in college student recruitment.” He also insists that there are several additional factors:

[These include] increased awareness of the need for enhanced articulation between levels of institutions by administrators, parents, and state education department officials, and an awareness that the challenges confronting contemporary secondary education—particularly for at risk students, women, and minorities—require a community effort in which colleges have been asked to play a much larger role than previously reserved for them. (¶ 2)

Certainly the curricular chasm between public schools and post secondary education has prompted efforts aimed at better articulation. Kirst (1998) argues, “Unless they [educators and policymakers] can do a better job of coordinating reform initiatives at different levels within the educational system, the whole mission of better preparing more students for higher education could veer dangerously off course” (p. 76). Making

stronger, more frequent connections between public schools and colleges and universities is obviously a step in the right direction toward that goal.

Early efforts to connect public schools and higher education involved attempts to improve pre-service teacher preparation. In his comprehensive review of education reform and the relationship between higher education and public school, Timpane (1999, p. 4) argues, “Education reform demands a radical overhaul of both pre-service and in-service training, to dovetail with foregoing tenets.” He postulates that higher education must take a more direct role in improving the acquisition and education of future teachers by demanding attention and resources for teacher preparation programs because “in no other country is public, especially secondary, education so distant from higher education” (p. 8). Professional development programs are one avenue through which closer ties and systemic improvements can occur.

Professional development programs linking higher education and public school systems have therefore evolved in various states. These programs enjoy the support of organizations such as the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), whose current members are the chief executive officers serving 26 statewide and governing boards and 30 statewide coordinating boards of higher education. Zimpher’s (1999, p. 4) SHEEO policy brief “examine[s] state-level strategies aimed at incorporating quality teacher education and professional development programs as part of the new state K-16 [kindergarten through four years of college] or P-16 [preschool through four years of college] systems.” In analyzing programs in the states of Georgia, Maryland, and Ohio, Zimpher articulates common components inherent in all three initiatives that can serve as guidelines for other states’ attempts at successful education reform. In her conclusion,

Zimpher makes the following recommendations to states interested in developing successful professional development linkages: “Develop policies that support state-level joint councils or partnerships;...institutionalize partnerships at colleges, universities, and local schools; ...increase commitment to university-wide support for teacher education;...and align state policies on teacher quality with the needs and concerns of education constituency groups” (pp. 18-19).

These suggestions align well with findings by Teitel (1993) in a case study exploring a state board of education’s role in initiating and maintaining professional development school partnerships. Teitel concludes that there are both drawbacks and benefits derived from substantial state involvement in collaborative efforts and proposes “that a state department of education can be effective in promoting school-university collaboration,” yet cautions that how the department functions in such a role “is critical to the progress of the endeavor” (Conclusion section, ¶ 5). In a similar evaluative study, Magolda (2001, Conclusion section, ¶ 1)) argues that state encouragement (funding) of collaborative efforts is not enough and recommends that the process must include equipping those involved in the collaborative process with the “technical, political, and cultural frameworks to support these efforts.”

Collaborative teacher education programs such as those evaluated by Magolda pertain specifically to improvement in teacher education. Nevertheless, lessons learned by studying these endeavors may apply equally well to other types of collaborative alliances that do not necessarily target teacher education. While any program that improves the education system can certainly benefit all students (and education in general) in the long run, the focus of this literature review/study remains on those types

of collaborations that target public school students *before* they enter college, whether those students are primarily already college-bound or at risk as defined in the next section.

General Models of Collaboration

Despite the unique goals, catalysts, and student populations for public school/postsecondary collaborations, a number of general models have evolved. Greenberg (1992, ¶ 6-10) categorizes the various models focusing on high school students as follows: dual/concurrent enrollment; enrichment, compensatory, and motivational designs; academic alliances and other teacher-to-teacher approaches; mentoring/tutoring models; and school improvement and restructuring efforts. An extensive literature review revealed that although many programs begin with a specific purpose, such as academic alliance, they often develop into multi-faceted programs incorporating particular aspects of many of the different types of collaboration. Therefore, there is no clear-cut definition of each of the primary types of collaborative programs; nevertheless, there are general characteristics of dual enrollment, motivational/compensatory, and academic alliance programs.

Dual Enrollment Programs

Kezar (2001, ¶ 2) contends, “One of the most significant predictors of college enrollment and success is the completion of rigorous academic course work during middle and high school.” It is reasonable, then, to assume that enrichment programs that offer higher-level high school coursework, as well as dual enrollment programs in which students receive both high school and college credit, serve this purpose well.

College bound students, those who plan to enroll in college immediately after high school, generally enroll in high school coursework that is considered college preparatory. This coursework may include advanced English courses, higher-level math courses such as calculus and trigonometry, and lab sciences such as chemistry and physics. It may also include advanced placement courses, in which high school students enroll in college courses and earn college credits. According to Mabry (1988), “The most common form of [public school/higher education] collaboration is the joint or dual enrollment program, in which students enroll in college-level classes for both high school and college credit” (p. 49).

Orr (2002) identifies six components that define the dual or concurrent enrollment arrangement: course content, location, instructors, student mix, credits earned, and finance. She explains the meaning of each of these terms: the course content may consist of college courses already in place or courses designed specifically for dual credit; the location of such courses may be at the high school or the community college; the student body may be solely high school students or a mixture of both high school and college students; the college credits may be earned while still in high school or after the student enrolls in college; and states may reimburse both the college and the high school or only one of the two while students may pay for all or some of the costs for taking the course.

Orr outlines benefits for both the community colleges and the secondary schools involved in dual enrollment programs. Benefits for the colleges include the creation of a new service market, the increase in the number of academically capable students enrolled at the respective college, an improvement in the public image of the college, and a possible increase in the number of academically capable students available to enroll in

traditional degree programs. Dual enrollment programs appear to be equally beneficial to the secondary schools. Orr believes that such programs provide a cost-effective way for high schools to offer challenging courses to the student body, enable high schools to capitalize on other educational opportunities for their students, help students become more motivated to learn, and increase the possibility that graduates will decide to enroll in college. Even though dual enrollment programs can potentially benefit both high schools and colleges, Kleiman (2001), Director of the Center for an Urban Future, cautions that issues of quality and evaluation must be explored. Equally relevant considerations are the social, political, and economic implications involved in the establishment and maintenance of such programs.

Motivational/Compensatory Programs

Dual enrollment programs provide rigorous coursework to those students capable of succeeding; motivational or compensatory programs, on the other hand, answer the call to improve “at risk” students’ skills in the basic areas of mathematics, composition, reading, and study skills *before* they get to college and/or to increase the likelihood that students will both prepare for and eventually attend college. Frequently, such programs include mentoring or tutoring programs in which high school students interact with college students or faculty on a regular basis.

At-risk students include first generation, academically under-prepared, low income, minority, and female students. Tierney and Hagedorn (2002, p. 27) report that about two-thirds (62 percent) of all early intervention programs target students with certain characteristics, about three-fourths of these (80 percent) target low-income students, and more than one-third (39 percent) target students with high academic ability.

Although all types of students may face challenges as they transition from high school to college, Hsiao (1992, p. 1) believes that first generation students “face unique challenges in their quest for a degree [and that] conflicting obligations, false expectations, and lack of preparation or support are among the factors that may hinder their success.” She positions such students “on the margin of two cultures—that of their friends and that of their college community” and argues that first generation students must learn to “renegotiate relationships” since members of their family have little or no knowledge about the intricacies and demands of college life.

Oesterreich (2000, ¶ 4) agrees with Hsiao’s assertion and further recommends that college preparation programs for minority and/or low-income groups must “attend to the cultural norms of the community, . . . begin as early as possible, focus on readiness rather than remediation, [and] provide multiple services over an extended period of time.” These criteria relate equally well to any type of student on whom a collaborative program focuses.

Academic Alliances

Other discipline-specific motivational/compensatory programs often begin as or develop into alliances between particular academic departments, such as English, math, or science. Academic alliances often develop as the result of the actions of a single faculty member or small group of faculty members. Van Patten and Dennison (1987, ¶ 4) claim, “While [academic alliances may be] the most difficult to establish and maintain, agreements which improve curricular coordination are among the most important for ensuring continuity in learning.” Carriuolo and Associates (1996, p. 12) also believe that academic alliances are the “most effective vehicles for revitalization of faculty because

they bring together an exciting mixture of experienced and inexperienced local faculty who teach students from elementary school through college.”

Although many academic alliances originate as local initiatives, some states and regional organizations have earmarked seed money to encourage the establishment of academic alliances. States such as Massachusetts and West Virginia and organizations such as the Southern Regional Education Board and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges are examples (Carriuolo & Associates, 1996, pp. 12-13). Like most collaborative efforts, the structure and design of the programs vary substantially. The one consistency in all academic alliances is the sustained interaction between public school and higher education faculty and/or students in a specific common discipline.

Criteria for/Characteristics of Successful Collaboration

Regardless of the initial purpose or type of public school/higher education collaboration, researchers have identified a list of characteristics that either add to or detract from a collaborative program’s success. Some researchers, such as O’Dell and James (1999, ¶ 6-10), synthesize important concepts gleaned from the literature including a list of necessary preconditions for the formation of both partnerships and collaborations.

Preconditions include the belief of all stakeholders that the stakes are high and that the interdependence between stakeholders is strong. In addition, an understanding of the motivating forces behind the formation of a collaboration can aid in the both the birth and continuance of a project. O’Dell and James also note that it is possible that different stakeholders in one collaboration may have entirely different motivations; this, they argue, can be quite a challenge to the success of the alliance.

Finally, O'Dell and James use the term *convener* and argue that such a coordinator is necessary to locate and connect various stakeholders. They state, "The authority with which the convener has to do this can come through mandate, persuasion, legitimation, or facilitation" (p. 41). O'Dell and James profess that the convener's authority differs based on whether his or her influence is formal or informal and on whether the original catalyst for the collaboration was the convener or the stakeholders themselves.

Along with necessary preconditions, educators clarify various characteristics and patterns that must be present for collaborations to be successful. Although Essex (2001, ¶ 6-15) declares the six characteristics of effective *partnerships*, his ideas are equally applicable to collaborations. In addition, Parnell (1984) endorses several reoccurring patterns in successful high school/community college collaboration. According to Essex (2001, ¶ 7), "An effective partnership [collaboration] has a clearly defined purpose and direction." He proposes that those involved must support and work toward the intended purpose in order for it to succeed. Likewise, Parnell insists, "Early in the discussions, agreement should be reached on priorities for action so that the institutions' goals are achievable." He also suggests that the duties of all the participants in the effort should be clearly defined. These safeguards provide assurances to all stakeholders that everyone is working together for a common purpose.

Essex also emphasizes, "An effective partnership [collaboration] is enthusiastically endowed by top-level leaders in schools and colleges" (¶ 8). Similarly, Parnell maintains that "school boards and trustees must support program coordination and articulation in policy and practice." Support may be in the form of stipends, release

time, or promotion. Parnell claims not only that academic leaders support the project, but also that “the chief executive officers of the college and the school system must take full responsibility for initiating dialogue and maintaining communication.”

Ongoing communication is certainly a necessity for successful collaboration, and Essex argues that an effective alliance involves open communication. For a collaboration to flourish, stakeholders must feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns. There are many ways to keep the lines of communication open. Parnell suggests that one individual be assigned as director of the project and be responsible for “build[ing] agendas, call[ing] meetings, maintain[ing] timelines, and prepar[ing] and edit[ing] reports.” Having one person responsible for the chain of communication is an effective way to assure that stakeholders constantly interact in ways that promote both trust and mutual respect, characteristics also lauded by Essex as essential to effective partnerships/collaborations.

Although Parnell does not specifically mention trust, he does advocate the creation of a written program-articulation agreement available to all stakeholders. He also declares, “All agreements should be reviewed annually.” This suggestion parallels Essex’s final criterion that “effective partnerships [collaborations] have mechanisms to assess progress and measure outcomes” (§ 15). Ongoing assessment gives all stakeholders a chance to reevaluate the goals of the collaboration, measure the degree to which the collaboration is meeting those goals, and make any necessary changes or adjustments to both the goals and the program itself.

A final recommendation made by both Essex and Parnell is that the stakeholders involved should receive recognition for their efforts. Essex believes, “Special

recognition in the presence of their (public school partners) peers can be very fulfilling.” He also adds, “Conversely, college partners should be provided quality time away from their regular duties to work with the partnership” and be given “resources to attend conferences, present papers, and visit other progressive partnerships that are working in other locations” (§ 16). Parnell echoes the sentiments of Essex, stating, “Faculty and staff participants in articulation development should receive recognition and reward, including reduced workloads.” No matter how intrinsically motivated participants may be, there is no question that extrinsic reward or recognition can increase stakeholder buy-in into the program and thus increase the chances of its longevity and success.

While Essex and Parnell address the importance of ongoing assessment to determine the success of a collaborative effort, there is little discussion of the appropriate form of assessment to be implemented. Since the goals of particular collaborative programs are often diverse and fluid, it is difficult to identify one specific, effective form of assessment that will suffice for all programs. Often, the only consideration involving students is college course placement, standardized test scores, college going rates, and other quantitative measures. These statistics paint only part of the picture. Tierney and Hagedorn (2002) argue that both quantitative and qualitative techniques should be employed in evaluating pre-college collaborative efforts and insist that the particular interventions provided are not as influential as the underlying mental and behavioral process in which students engage as they make use of the interventions. They propose, “It is the behavior, attitudes, perceptions, and cognitive skills that are affected by a specific teaching or mentoring approach and ultimately have an impact on student outcomes” (p. 68). Consequently, numerous variables affect a student’s decision to

consider, enroll in, and remain in college. This study attempts to illuminate those variables and determine the effect, if any, that participation in a collaborative program has on student transition to college.

Student Transition to College

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) indicate that most students begin considering the possibility of attending college as early as eighth or ninth grade. This, in effect, marks their initial psychological transition into college. In their nine year longitudinal quantitative/qualitative study of eight high school students, Hossler et. al. identify several factors that influence students' decisions about attending college during the stages of "predisposition, search, and choice": parental encouragement, peer influences, student aspirations, academic and social achievements in high school, teachers, counselors, and college marketing activities. Although common themes emerge, the researchers insist that "no single path through these decisions exists" and argue that for some students, decisions about attending college are "linear and predictable" while for others they are "idiosyncratic and unpredicable" (Hossler et. al, 1999, p. 2). For those students who do, in fact, attend college, the ensuing transition may be just as puzzling.

Levine and Cureton (1998) conclude that today's college students are members of a transitional generation who, although optimistic about the future, are equally afraid that they may not be able to fulfill their dreams. Analyzing today's college students in the areas of current events, campus politics, multiculturalism, personal life, and academics, Levine and Cureton support their assertion that because today's undergraduates are unique, they require a specialized curriculum and delivery quite different from the past.

Despite the varied backgrounds of today's undergraduates and their tenuous place in an ever-changing world, several common themes emerge in the authors' research. No matter what their ideological background, all students feel the need for change in many facets of their own lives as well as in many aspects of the nation. They are torn between the idealistic and the realistic, what Levine and Cureton (1998) term as "doing well or doing good" (p. 138). Such a dilemma underlies the ongoing challenge that today's undergraduates must face: how to develop intellectually and ethically in a way that promotes appropriate decision-making.

Savoie (2000, ¶ 4) acknowledges, "Many young people are still arriving at college without the requisite skills to succeed, putting a severe strain on college resources and prompting more-marginal students to drop out." These requisite skills are not limited to the academic arena; they also include social and emotional coping skills necessary for students to adapt to the college environment. Goodman (2002, College Students Today section, ¶ 5) reports that the stress levels experienced by college students have increased significantly since 1985. Students feel intense pressure to choose a major, select a career, and map out their entire future as they simultaneously attempt to adjust to new responsibilities in social and academic situations. Many of them are not equipped to successfully navigate the transition.

Surprisingly, focus group research concerning the prevalence of college developmental coursework conducted by Nunley and Gemberling (1999) indicates that the majority of students do not blame others for their lack of academic readiness. Assuming responsibility for their lack of academic preparedness, students admit that their primary focus in high school was often socializing, not learning; therefore, they did not

complete challenging high school coursework. Several “expressed a desire to return to their high schools to share their ‘educational mistakes’ with friends so that they might help other people to take high-school preparation more seriously” (¶ 10). Focus group students did, however, complain that high school teachers spent too much time on discipline and held rather low expectations for their students.

Lack of academic preparedness is undoubtedly a concern during student transition to college. Equally problematic, however, are affective issues such as the loss of friendship and social support. Paul and Brier (2001, ¶ 4) assert that most studies of student transition focus on upcoming college experiences but ignore “new college students’ ‘glances back’ to precollege [*sic*] experiences” and argue that the bulk of college transition research focuses on investment strategies while ignoring divestment concerns. In their quantitative study of 70 first-year college students, Paul and Brier (2000) determined that more than “half of the participants experienced moderate to high friendsickness,” which hampered their adjustment to college (Results section, ¶ 1). The researchers suggest that one important aspect of college adjustment and transition is the sudden upheaval of a student’s social network of friends.

Clearly, numerous factors affect a student’s transition from high school to college, and each student’s transition is influenced by a complicated interplay of awareness, academic preparedness, and social and emotional coping skills. Collaborative programs that connect public schools and colleges are one avenue through which to address these factors and provide students with the learning tools and coping skills necessary for an easier, less stressful transition.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Transition theory, originally developed by Nancy K. Schlossberg in 1981 and revised by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman in 1995, was developed for the counseling and guidance professions to conceptualize the transition process and provide appropriate interventions to adults in transition. The theory is based upon the concept of transition, defined as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg et. al., 1995, p. 27). Undoubtedly, entering college students are experiencing changes in these areas of their lives, and Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998, p. 108) insist, “The theory is also relevant to traditionally-aged college students.” Understanding the transition theory and its postulates can provide educators and counselors with insight into the transition process for entering college freshmen and their ability to cope with the often dramatic changes they are experiencing as they adjust to college life.

The theory distinguishes among anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevents, anticipated being those transitions that are predicted, unanticipated being those that are not predicted, and nonevents being those that were expected but did not occur. Nonevents are classified as personal (related to individual aspirations), ripple (felt due to the nonevent of someone else), resultant (caused by an event), or delayed (still anticipated). Regardless of the type of transition or nature of the nonevent, perception plays a predominant role throughout the process in that an experience is only considered a transition if it is perceived as such by the person involved.

According to the theory, perception is related to aspects of context, impact, and time. The context refers to an individual's relationship to the transition; the impact is

determined by the degree to which a transition alters the person's daily life; and the time refers to the amount of time it takes a person to move in, move through, and move out of a transitional event.

Central to the theory are four major sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a particular transition. These four components-- *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies*-- are known as the four S's, and Schlossberg et. al assert that a person's "assets and liabilities" in each of these areas determine how well he or she will cope with the transition. Thus, although all entering college freshman appear to be experiencing the same transition, each student's experience is different based on his or her perception, the context, the impact, the time the student needs to move through the process, and the individual student's specific set of assets and liabilities in each of the four S's. This interpretation explains why different individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person may react differently at different times.

Perception plays an important role during the *situation* phase when a person reviews the experience. According to the theory, each individual's experience is affected by the trigger (what was the catalyst for the event?), timing (did it occur during a good or bad time in the person's life?), control (what aspects of the situation are under the person's control?), role change (has the person's role changed for the better or worse?), duration (is the transition short-lived, permanent, or unknown?), concurrent stress (what other stress is the person experiencing concurrently?), previous experience with a similar transition (did the person experience a similar transition; how did he/she cope?), and assessment of the situation (who is responsible for the transition; how does this affect behavior?). The answers to these questions determine an individual's appraisal of the

situation in which he is involved and account for the unique responses of various individuals involved in what others may perceive as an identical experience.

The second S, *self*, encompasses the individual's personal and demographic characteristics as well as psychological resources. Personal and demographic characteristics include gender, socioeconomic status, stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, and age. In the context of this theory, however, age is not viewed from a chronological viewpoint; instead, age is determined by a person's functional, social, and psychological age. Psychological resources include coping tools, such as ego development, outlook (specifically optimism and self-efficacy), commitment, and values. Although some of these characteristics are discrete, others are again influenced by the particular person's perceptions.

The third important S in the theory, *support*, includes intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. The transition theory claims that supports are categorized by individuals into stable supports, those that are role dependent, and changeable supports, those that will most likely change. The theorists believe that, in addition to the functions of affect, affirmation, and aid espoused by other theorists, honest feedback is an important function of support. Specifically, outsiders' positive or negative reactions to another individual's transition affect that person's ability to cope with the situation.

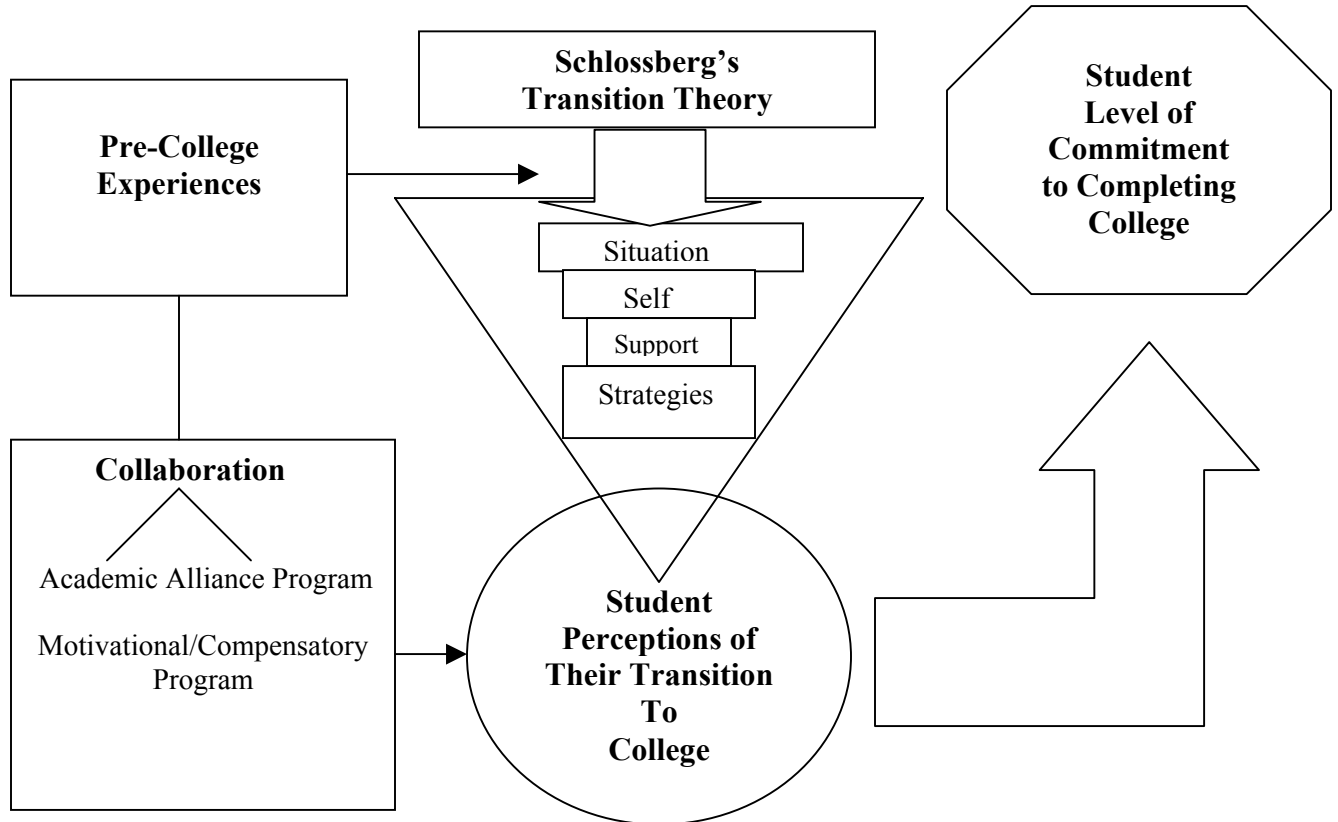
The final S, *strategies*, involves a person's unique coping skills. There are three main categories for coping with transition: responses that change a situation, responses that control the meaning of the problem, and responses that manage stress in the aftermath. "Whether individuals want to change their situation or reduce their distress,

they can choose from four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior" (Schlossberg et. al, 1995, p. 74). According to the theory, then, individuals can choose to take action, remain inactive, or resort to intrapsychic behaviors, defined by the theory as mindsets that individuals use to cope with situations, including denial, wishful thinking, and distortion.

The main premise of the transition theory is that the balance of an individual's assets and liabilities in each of the four S's determines how well or poorly he or she will cope with a transition. While the theory originally targeted the counseling professions and actually integrated the 1993 Cormier and Hackney Counseling Model for use in individual and group therapy, it has potential applications in other areas. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) argue that use of the theory is appropriate for resident assistants, student leaders, and student affairs personnel involved in developing freshmen orientation programs as well as graduating senior programs. This researcher proposes that the theory is equally helpful for educators trying to assist students in their transition from high school to college. Evans et. al. also assert that Schlossberg's incorporation of the theory into a questioning framework in her 1989 book, *Overwhelmed*, can serve as a self-help tool for individuals involved in almost any type of life transition. These sets of assessment questions aligned with the four S's of the transition theory significantly influenced the design of the interview protocol for this study.

Conceptual Framework

**Pre-College Collaboration, Student Transition to College, and
Commitment to College Completion**



This conceptual framework applies the concepts of Schlossberg's Transition Theory to the study of student transition from high school to college by identifying particular aspects of students' pre-college experiences (specifically academic alliances and motivational/compensatory programs) that affected their assessment of self, situation, support, and strategies and therefore influenced their transition to college and their level of commitment to completing college. Operational definitions appear at the end of Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 17) define qualitative research as research about “people’s lives, stories, and behavior, but also about organization functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships.” Certainly, collaboration between two distinctly different educational entities is ripe for the study of not only people but also of organizational functions, social movements, and interactional relationships. Creswell similarly proposes, “Qualitative inquiry is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem (1998, p. 15). The chasm between public school and higher education epitomizes a problem that is both social and human. Likewise, Crowson maintains, “The working hypotheses [of qualitative inquiry] are ‘grounded’ in the individual case and are both time- and context-bound and thus are not to be confused with data-based generalizations” (1987, p. 8). The focus of this research study and the research questions outlined in Chapter 2 aligned well with these characteristics; therefore, the study warranted a qualitative or interpretivist design.

Within the interpretivist paradigm, various types of research design exist. Creswell (1998, pp. 36-37) identifies case study as one of the “five traditions” that includes identification of the case, a bounded system, multiple sources of information, and description of the setting or context of the case. The purpose of this study was consistent with a case study design and utilized a multiple case-study design involving two particular “cases” of public school/higher education collaboration. Each case was a “bounded system,” the researcher had access to multiple sources of information, and the

researcher spent time describing the context and setting of each collaboration so that she could present an in-depth picture of each case.

According to Merriam (1988, p. 57), “The qualitative case study has been widely used... in the service of constructing theory.” Such studies “that are undertaken to build theory use an inductive rather than a deductive mode of thinking about the problem and analyzing the data.” Qualitative case study researchers believe that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds and are interested in understanding how people make sense of their world and experiences (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Thus, a qualitative approach to researching students’ perceptions about participation in one of two particular types of collaboration and its impact on their subsequent transition to college was applicable. The literature identifies several general models of public school-higher education collaboration that focus on student development, three of the most common types being dual enrollment, motivational/compensatory, and academic alliance programs. Because the primary components of dual enrollment programs are self-explanatory and fairly consistent in structure, further study of their relationship to high school-postsecondary transition beyond the academic realm was not warranted. Motivational/compensatory programs and academic alliances, on the other hand, because of their prevalence, potential impact on students, and variability in design, were appropriate for further, in-depth study.

Limitations

Quantitative researchers claim that lack of generalizability is a weakness of qualitative research. Merriam (1998, p. 210) argues, however, “The general lies in the particular; that is, what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to

similar situations subsequently encountered.” This study may have been limited by the case study population selected – two FIPSE funded high school/higher education collaborative programs. Because the researcher collected data from only 27 collaborative program alumni in two programs from two specific higher education institutions, generalizability of results to other institutions is difficult due to the unique institutional context of each program. Additionally, results may be only cautiously generalized to students with the same characteristics as those on whom each of the collaborative programs focuses. It is also possible that the participants may not have been representative of other students who may enter the same institution at a different time. For example, the Tidewater Community College students were younger than the national average age of community college students, which is 24. Finally, the researcher’s experience as both a public school teacher and a developmental educator may have indicated a bias toward the topic under study. The researcher attempted to improve the generalizability of this study, however, by employing the following strategies as suggested by Merriam (1998, pp. 211-212): “thick, rich description; typicality or modal category, and multisite design.”

Research Methods

In an effort to conceptualize the phenomenon of public school/postsecondary collaboration, the researcher conducted a preliminary literature review, which comprises Chapter 1. The literature review revealed that there are several types of collaboration, and using professional and informed judgment, the researcher narrowed the focus of this study to academic alliance programs and motivational/compensatory programs. Merriam (1988) distinguishes between the researcher who uses the literature to find a problem and

the researcher who uses the literature to see if the problem has been studied. She characterizes another researcher who is somewhere in the middle and “has some notion about what he or she wants to research and consults the literature for help in focusing the problem” (p. 63). Because this researcher was “somewhere in the middle,” she consulted the literature, which provided some direction by identifying the three primary types of student development-focused public school/postsecondary collaborative programs and the basic components of each type. This led the researcher to the next stage of research, selection of the sites and identification of the population and sample to be studied.

Site Selection

Because this study sought to learn more about pre-college collaborations and determine their impact on student transition to college, the sites selected consisted of two types of pre-college collaborative programs (academic alliance and motivational) that had received the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) Grant administered through the United States Department of Education. This method insured that the selected collaborative programs met standards of excellence deemed necessary for funding by FIPSE. FIPSE identifies the following general guidelines:

FIPSE has asked applicants to identify problems of national significance—problems that are commonly felt at postsecondary institutions across the country—and to create solutions to those problems that can be transferred to many additional settings. These solutions should be new strategies that improve upon what others in the field are already doing—or, they should translate existing strategies into different settings. Either way, an ideal FIPSE project creates new

knowledge and practices. It sometimes challenges conventional thinking, perhaps even takes significant risks. But its most prominent feature is that it adds something new to the array of strategies educators can draw from to improve student access and achievement. (*FIPSE Comprehensive Application Materials*, 2002)

FIPSE categorizes expectations for grantees into the following selection criteria: the importance of innovation, the importance of collaboration, the importance of evaluation, the importance of dissemination, and education reform in the context of a changing world. All FIPSE proposals are vigorously reviewed by both internal and external professionals, and only proposals receiving strong or high evaluations receive FIPSE funding. Thus, because the two sites chosen for this study had been awarded the FIPSE grant, they met the criteria for excellence as identified by FIPSE and therefore represented models for future collaborative programs.

Sampling Procedures/Access

Utilizing a purposive sampling procedure based on the researcher's knowledge of the population and the purpose of the research study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 114), sampling procedures commenced with the researcher's review of the online FIPSE Grant Database. Since the researcher anticipated the possibility of some programs' refusing to participate yet hoped to get permission from two sites, she contacted three collaborative programs for each of the two types on which this study focuses: academic alliance and motivational/compensatory programs. The researcher initially emailed the higher education program contact person as identified in the online abstract of each grant

recipient to request information about various components of the specific program and to determine if pertinent data and respondents were available.

Data collection began with a review of these grant documents supplied by the FIPSE Grant contact person at the college or university. The next step in data collection included the researcher's contacting the appropriate higher education personnel as identified by the FIPSE contact person, requesting permission to complete the study, and seeking identification of currently enrolled students who had participated in the specific collaborative program of study. A follow-up letter was sent to each contact person (See Appendix A). A sample permission letter was included in the mailing (See Appendix B).

Once this initial sample was identified, the next step in the purposive sampling was the selection of students who were representative of the population involved in the case. The researcher mailed letters to 50 potential Central University participants and 160 Tidewater Community College participants (See Appendix C). Using email addresses accessed on the Central University website, the researcher also sent follow-up emails to potential participants. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to access the email addresses of potential Tidewater Community College participants.

Although the researcher attempted to assure that the sample to be studied closely resembled the initial sample population in relation to demographic data, this was not possible. However, unlike quantitative research that requires an exact specification of sample size, qualitative case study research enabled the researcher to determine the sample size based on the amount of information gathered until no new information emerged. Nevertheless, Patton (1999) advises that qualitative researchers specify a minimum sample size "based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon" (p.

186). Because this researcher hoped to interview a minimum of 15 students for each of the two cases, the initial sample size/interview schedule included 22 students from each FIPSE-funded program (or a total of 44 students). This number allowed for the possibility of no-shows when the interviews were scheduled. Prior to the actual videotaped interviews, participants read and signed a consent form developed by the researcher (See Appendix D). As an incentive to potential respondents, the researcher provided \$10.00 Pizza Hut coupons. The researcher was able to interview 15 students from the College Summit Program and 12 students from The Writing Coalition Program.

Method of Data Collection

Once the sample was identified, the researcher determined the most appropriate method of data collection. Crowson (1987) argues, “The demands of qualitative research require a flexible and opportunistic mixture of data collection strategies” (p. 38). Qualitative researchers have at their disposal various forms of data collection including observation, interviewing, and document review. The design of this research study demanded that a preliminary document review be conducted to identify the particular components of each of the two cases.

Document Review

Merriam (1988, pp. 104-106) asserts that documents can be used in a manner similar to data from interviews and observations. Glesne (1999, p. 59) agrees and states, “Documents and other unobtrusive measures provide both historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews.” Merriam (1998, pp. 120-122) argues that finding relevant documents is the first step in the process and cautions that the next step is determining the authenticity of documents once they are located. This, she argues,

can be accomplished by learning as much as possible about each document by determining its origin, purpose, author, and context. Merriam also distinguishes between documents already present in the research setting and those that are generated by the researcher or for the researcher by participants once the study has begun (1998, p, 119). The researcher incorporated both types of documents into her review by first requesting pre-existing FIPSE grant documents supplied by the contact person for each of the two FIPSE programs. Once these documents were reviewed, the researcher asked each of the FIPSE contacts to produce or locate documents outlining components of the program for specific use in the current research project. Such documents assisted the researcher in incorporating the unique components of each of the programs into the interview protocol and in describing each case in detail. Several email correspondences also included the sharing of valuable program information. As the research continued, other available documents such as grant reports and program materials surfaced and were therefore included in an effort to help further ground the study and verify preliminary findings during the interview process of data collection.

Interviews/Videotaping

Glesne (1999, p. 69) suggests that one should “interview in search of opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward some topic.” In this case, that topic was collaboration between higher education and public schools and its possible effect on student transition to college. The interviewing method was appropriate for this study since it gave the researcher “the opportunity to learn about what [she could not] see and to explore alternative explanations of what [s]he [did] see” (Glesne, 1999, p. 69). Janesick (1998,

p. 29) concurs, lauding interviews for their ability to “provide such rich and substantive data for the researcher.”

Glesne (1999, p. 57) similarly supports the use of videotape rather than audiotape:

The density of data collected with videotape is greater than that of human observation or audio recording, and the nature of the record is permanent, in that it is possible to return to the observation repeatedly. For microanalysis, or focusing on one aspect of everyday interaction, videotaping is invaluable.

Because the researcher had audio taped interviews in a previous qualitative research project and believed that the process of transcription was difficult and time-consuming, she decided to follow Glesne’s advice and utilize videotaping during the pilot study for this research project. Determining that viewing videotapes did, in fact, allow for repeated viewing of the data and a more efficient process of transcription, the researcher decided to employ videotaping during the interview phase of this research study.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000, p. 509) structured and semi-structured interviews are beneficial when the researcher wants to compare and contrast responses of participants. Merriam (1998, p. 74) contends however, that “interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured” because such formats “assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways.” Therefore, to increase the likelihood that participant responses could be compared and contrasted, the researcher conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with students from each of the two cases, yet purposely devised some of the questions to be open-ended to allow for individual responses. Various types of interview questions outlined by Janesick (1998, p.

31) were included: basic descriptive questions, follow-up questions, experience/example questions, simple clarification questions, structural/paradigmatic questions, and comparison/contrast questions. Interview questions (IQ) were purposely aligned with both the conceptual framework and the research questions (RQ) included in this study.

Table 1 *Alignment of Research and Interview Questions*

RQ → IQ ↓	RQ 1	RQ 2a	RQ 2b	RQ 2c	RQ 3	RQ 4a	RQ 4b	RQ 4c	RQ 4d	RQ 5
Dem/gen. information							✓			
IQ 1					✓					
IQ 2		✓	✓							
IQ 3					✓		✓	✓	✓	
IQ 4		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
IQ 5						✓	✓	✓	✓	
IQ 6						✓	✓	✓	✓	
IQ 7	✓	✓	✓							
IQ 8		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
IQ 9				✓						
IQ 10										✓
IQ 11										✓
IQ 12										✓
IQ 13			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
IQ 14			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	

The next decision point in the research was to determine the appropriate method of data analysis. Utilizing Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative analysis, the researcher included the following stages: comparing incidents and establishing tentative categories; comparing incidents to other incidents as well as to the tentatively established categories; narrowing down categories to a few broad ones, proposing a hypothesis and then coding data; and finally writing the theory. Next, the researcher transcribed the interviews and searched for common categories or themes.

Insuring Trustworthiness

Merriam (1998, p. 198) proposes that judging the trustworthiness of qualitative research begins with questions of ethics. Although many qualitative researchers argue that validity and reliability do not apply in the interpretivist paradigm, others argue that internal validity is actually enhanced through qualitative methods such as interviews and direct observations since such methods provide data that is closer to reality than that gathered through quantitative methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 288) prefer the term *dependability* or *consistency* rather than *reliability* when judging the trustworthiness of qualitative findings. They argue that the nature of qualitative research makes it impossible for studies to be replicated; therefore, results should be judged based on their consistency with the data collected by the researcher.

Despite the disagreement concerning such terms, qualitative researchers agree that triangulation and rich description are essential elements in an effective study of this type. "The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects attempts to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). Specific issues of triangulation related to the case study research design. Stake (1995, pp. 110-

111) proposes that qualitative case study researchers attempt to “present a substantial body of uncontestable description” and argues that the amount of detail included depends on the contestability of the issue. In other words, the need for triangulation increases as the contestability of the data increases. Cognizant of this assertion, the researcher made special efforts to triangulate the important and potentially contested data as the analysis proceeded by providing rich description as frequently as possible. In addition, the researcher practiced “methodological triangulation” by supplementing data collected in interviews with data gleaned from document review. Such multiple data sources (two different cases and grant documents) were consulted in order to confirm or refute findings.

Furthermore, member checking was used to “triangulate the researcher’s observations and findings” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). Member checking afforded participants the opportunity to review any written drafts that highlighted their responses or actions. In this manner, individual participants confirmed the researcher’s interpretations or identified discrepancies that needed to be corrected in the final report. Thus, copies of the initial draft of the findings were sent to participants for verification and/or revision before the final report was written.

Other methods of insuring trustworthiness and increasing validity included disclosure of both of the researcher’s subjectivity and explanation of the theoretical framework, both of which were included in the prospectus. The researcher also conducted a pilot study in an effort to improve the content and organization of the interviews and to assure that the questions were clear and logical. Information gleaned from the pilot study formed the basis for several improvements in the interview protocol.

Pilot Study

The main objective of the pilot study was to gain insight into how subjects would respond prior to conducting the complete study so that the researcher could revise accordingly. Glesne (1999, p. 38) argues, “The idea is not to get data per se, but to learn about your research process, interview questions, observation techniques, and yourself.” The purpose of the pilot study was to gauge student reaction to both the cover letter and interview protocol in an effort to improve the content, flow, and presentation of the letter and the interview questions.

Participants

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000, p. 505) maintain, “In almost all qualitative research, the sample is a purposive sample...[since] the researcher wants to ensure that he or she obtains a sample that is uniquely suited to the intent of the study.” The target population for the full research study was current college freshmen or sophomores who, as high school seniors, participated in a pre-college collaborative program. Therefore, all pilot study participants were college freshmen or sophomores who had participated in a collaborative program while seniors in high school.

Because the purpose of the pilot study was to obtain student reactions to the cover letter and interview protocol, a qualitative approach to data collection was utilized. Glesne (1999, p. 5) proposes, “To understand the nature of constructed realities [in the interpretivist design], qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions.” Clearly, the most appropriate way to garner student perceptions about the design and methods of the research study was to utilize techniques that mirrored the full study. The primary method of data collection in this pilot study, therefore, was face-

to-face interviews. Glesne (1999, p. 69) suggests that one should “interview in search of opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward some topic.” In this case, that topic was the clarity, appropriateness, sequence, and inclusiveness of the cover letter, interview protocol, and data collection methods.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000, p. 509) structured and semi-structured interviews are beneficial when the researcher wants to compare and contrast responses of participants. Consequently, to increase the likelihood that participant responses could be compared and contrasted, the pilot study researcher distributed the cover letter (see Appendix C) and used the interview protocol to conduct semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the four participants. Although the demographic questions included in the pilot study interview protocol were objective, most of the remaining questions were open-ended to allow for individual responses (see Appendix E). Likewise, as suggested by Janesick (1998), the content and format questions devised solely for the pilot study participants included a combination of objective and open-ended questions (see Appendix F).

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000, p. 540) further contend that one way to lessen the problem of a researcher’s inability to accurately and completely observe and document participant responses is to video or audiotape the interview sessions. Although some disadvantages to videotaping exist (technological problems, expense, participant inhibition), there are several advantages:

The tapes can be replayed several times for continued study and analysis; experts can ... hear and/or see what the researcher observed and offer their insights

accordingly, and a permanent record of certain kinds of behavior is obtained for comparison with later or different samples.

(Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 540).

Because videotaping allowed the interviewer to see the participant and interpret nonverbal cues, this researcher chose to video rather than simply audiotape the interviews, thus acquiring both a visual and audio documentation of the participants' responses.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis involves organizing what [the researcher] has seen, heard, and read so that [he/she] can make sense of what [he/she] has learned” (Glesne, 1999, p. 130).

This researcher approached data analysis from an interpretivistic paradigm and followed Glesne's advice of “writing memos, making analytic files, and developing preliminary coding schemes” (p. 134) throughout the data collection process. This lessened the potential for data overload at the end of data collection. To determine any significant problems with the cover letter or interview protocol, the researcher utilized Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative analysis by viewing the videotapes, compiling field notes, comparing responses, and establishing tentative categories in need of revision.

Results

No common themes concerning changes in the content, presentation, and style of the original cover letter emerged. All four of the participants stated that the cover letter clearly explained the purpose of the research in a manner that was easy to understand. One student, however, did mention that he was slightly confused about whether or not the

researcher was attempting to interview high school or college students. All participants agreed that the cover letter was complete (with the exception of the aforementioned clarification) and required no additional information.

Although there were few suggestions offered concerning the cover letter, several suggestions emerged concerning the clarity of specific questions. Various suggestions concerning interview protocol question five were made. Two of the four participants reported that question five was unclear in that respondents were not sure what time period to which the question referred (senior year, summer between high school and college, or college freshmen year). One participant suggested dividing question five into two different questions (one concerning high school and the summer before entering college and one concerning the college freshman year) and placing them in the interview protocol accordingly. Two students further noted that the probe, “leaving my friends,” implied that the respondent is the only one leaving when, in reality, friends scatter in various directions upon completion of high school. Both offered a revised probe such as “adapting to the scattering of high school friends.” Finally, one participant also remarked that the term “college advisor” in the probe for question five should be replaced with “college academic advisor” because that is the term with which college students are more familiar.

Similarly, all four participants had some difficulty answering questions 11, 12, and 13 of the interview protocol because they were not sure how to respond using the suggested scale; one student suggested revising the question by changing the response scale from a 10 to five point scale and assigning specific terms to the 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 selection so that respondents know exactly (rather than guess) what each choice denotes.

He suggested the following: “1-no plans to finish; 2-not sure; 3-somewhat committed; 4-very committed; 5-will complete no matter what happens.”

Revisions to the probe for interview protocol question 14, six, and eight were also suggested. All four participants, in responding to question 14, revealed that they would have studied harder while in high school yet conceded that nothing anyone could have done would have changed that. All therefore suggested that the question be reworded. Two participants felt that the terms “socially” and “emotionally” in the question six probe should be reworded so that they would be clearer to the interviewees. Possibilities for terminology included “making new friends, getting along with others, and coping with the demands of college life.” Likewise, one participant suggested that “pre and post tests” in the question eight probe should be changed to “ACT, SAT, or placement tests.”

One suggestion surfaced concerning questions three and four. Three of the four participants felt that the two questions should be combined into one since they seemed redundant. All four participants agreed that the probes were helpful in their articulation of responses. Because the researcher set up the tripod and video camera prior to the interviews, pilot study question nine was revised to read as follows: “Would the presence of another person in the room videotaping the interview have created any problems for you?” All four participants admitted that they would have felt uncomfortable with another person in the room and that although the taping itself made them slightly nervous, it did not inhibit their ability to answer the questions openly and honestly (as would the presence of an additional person in the room).

Each of the four participants had at least one suggestion for improving the protocol by requesting additional information through either demographic or open-ended

questions. One suggested that the demographic section include a question asking whether or not the student attended a two-year or a four-year school immediately after high school. Likewise, a different participant suggested that the protocol include a question concerning a student's enrollment status as far as the number of credit hours in which he/she was enrolled. The respondent felt that this would definitely affect a student's ability to adapt to the academic demands of college coursework.

Participant Three suggested the addition of a question determining whether or not students worked while attending college and clarifying the job status as part time or full time; he also believed that the protocol should ask specifically how many hours the student worked during the week because this could affect his ability to manage time. Another participant also proposed the addition of a question asking students if they are/were involved in any extracurricular activities since this would most likely affect a student's ability to meet new people and adjust socially. The following probes were offered for use with the new question: "athletics, music, drama, clubs, etc."

Perhaps the two most important changes were suggested by two pilot study participants: to change the sequence of questions so that those relating to high school appear first followed by those questions relating to college. Both also hinted that this change would eliminate the confusion about the specific time period considered the "transition period."

Implications

Only one student read the cover letter and misinterpreted the intent of the researcher to interview current college students—and not high school students; nevertheless, the researcher made a slight change in the wording of paragraph one, line

six. The revised cover letter read “when you were in high school” rather than “while still in high school.” This minor change in diction clarified the intent of the researcher to interview current college, not high school students. The free pizza offer was clarified to read “\$10.00 coupon,” and the restaurant was identified as Pizza Hut because the researcher learned that both case study sites were near a Pizza Hut restaurant. The researcher also had no choice but to make other revisions to the last paragraph because of unforeseen time constraints. Thus, the final paragraph of the revised cover letter requests an initial email or phone reply rather than a mailed response (see Appendix G).

Although the researcher made few changes to the cover letter, she made extensive changes to the interview protocol (see Appendix H). First of all, the sequence of the questions was revised so that the questions concerning high school appeared first and led chronologically to the questions concerning college. Following the suggestions of the pilot study participants, the researcher further revised several of the questions and/or probes in the interview protocol. First, question five was divided into two different questions: revised question seven became “What (if anything) was stressful during your senior year and the summer after your graduation? How did you overcome these obstacles?” Revised question 16 became “What (if anything) was stressful during your freshman year as a college student? How did you overcome these obstacles?” Furthermore, “leaving my friends” as a probe became “adapting to the scattering of high school friends.” The probes for revised question 17 (“academically, socially, emotionally”) were replaced by more succinct, understandable questions. As recommended, original questions three and four were combined into revised question 8. Original question eight became revised question two, and the word “more” was added to

distinguish its intent from revised question one. In addition, the probe “take pre and post tests” was changed to “take college entrance exams (ACT, SAT, placement tests).”

Original question nine became revised question five, and two new probes were included.

Although Participant Two had suggested the replacement of the 10 point scale with a five point scale, after consulting Suskie (1996), the researcher decided to use a modified Likert 3 point scale, one being not sure, 2 being somewhat committed, and 3 being very committed. This smaller scale helped the interviewees make a quick and easy determination of their levels of commitment for revised questions 19, 20, and 21.

Revised questions five and six were altered to distinguish between pre-college experiences related to participation in the collaboration and those related to general high school experiences.

At the advice of the pilot study participants, three new questions were added to the interview protocol: revised question 13 concerning the student’s working status, revised question 14 concerning the student’s participation in extracurricular activities, and revised question 24, eliciting suggestions for collaborative program design. Categories denoting two-year or four-year school were also added to revised question nine.

Pilot Study Conclusion

With the assistance of the pilot study participants, the researcher developed a more comprehensive, yet concise interview protocol. The questions were arranged in a more logical sequence, additional important topics were addressed, and the wording was more consistent with the diction of the target audience. As with any written product, it was wise to gain insight from a “different set of eyes.” In this instance, the researcher

was lucky to collect input from four very dedicated, insightful students who provided suggestions that truly enhanced the quality of the interview protocol.

Revisions gleaned from the pilot study aided the researcher in assuring that she was consistent in her questioning and recording of responses. Improvements to the interview protocol resulted in a consistent, standard interview protocol. Finally, just as the researcher videotaped the pilot study respondents, she also videotaped all research study participants (with permission) to verify results and interpretations.

The Researcher

The researcher's interest in this topic actually began long ago. Peshkin contends, "Subjectivity operates during the entire research process" (1988, p. 17). In this case, subjectivity influenced the researcher from the moment she began formulating the rationale for completing the study and even before. The researcher's educational background, life and work experiences, and sincere desire to help students succeed led to this topic of interest.

Being a former middle school language arts teacher, the researcher understood the unique challenges that public school teachers face every day in the classroom. As a current college developmental composition teacher as well as coordinator of a developmental writing program, the researcher also had a pronounced interest in the preparedness (or lack thereof) of entering college students. A serendipitous event also occurred in the personal life of the researcher during the time of this study. This event, the researcher's son going away to college, struggling with transition, and returning home to attend a local community college, afforded the researcher an opportunity to relate to the process of student transition on a more personal level.

In contemplating these possible “hidden agendas,” the researcher was reminded that Peshkin (1988, p. 17) believes, “Whatever the substance of one’s persuasions at a given point, one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed.” By opening a button or two of this researcher’s garment and revealing such “subjective I’s”— the Former Public School Teacher I, the Developmental Educator I, the Mother I— the researcher vowed to continue to monitor her own subjectivity as data was collected, analyzed, and reported.

This qualitative researcher subscribes to Glesne’s proposition that “subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise” (1999, p. 109). Just as an effective teacher must have a passion for her subject matter, this researcher also feels that an effective qualitative researcher must reveal, monitor, and capitalize on her passion for the topic under scrutiny. Glesne further contends that rapport can be affected positively or negatively by subjectivity. Certainly past experience as a public school teacher and current experiences as a developmental educator provided the researcher with insight into the struggles faced by freshmen as they transition from public school to postsecondary education. In this respect, subjectivity was a definite advantage.

These experiences further enabled the researcher to act comfortably in the role of observer-as-participant during which she “identifie[d] herself straight off as a researcher but [made] no pretense of actually being a member of the groups she [was] observing” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, pp. 536-537). Glesne proposes, “Through participant observation--through being a part of a social setting--you ...develop a quality of trust with your others that motivates them to tell you what otherwise they might not” (1999, p. 43). Experience as a teacher and mother allowed the researcher to interact with the

participants in a way that reflected mutual respect, trust, and sincere interest in students and their welfare. As Glesne argues, “What is best done is less a case of what is established as right than of what your judgment tells you is fitting” (1999, p. 45).

Timetable

November 22-29	Draft cover letter and interview instrument/pilot if necessary Email FIPSE grant directors Send permission to study letter to institutions Check institutions’ spring schedules (spring break dates?)
January 24, 2003	Apply for IRB approval (allow 2 weeks)
February 15, 2003	Pilot study to 6 respondents
February 25, 2003	Meet with pilot study respondents
March 8, 2003	Revise interview protocol if necessary
April 2003	Collect/organize data
May-June 2003	Analyze data
July 2003	Write results section
August 4, 2003	Send Chapter 4 & Revise
September 15, 2003	Send Chapter 5 & Revise
October 15, 2003	Send Chapters 6 & 7/Revise
November 10, 2003	Defend dissertation

Conclusion

Increased contact between public schools and higher education is one way to address the many problems that currently reduce the effectiveness of the American education system. It is logical to assume that attempts to provide a more seamless curriculum from kindergarten through grade 16, as well as increase student awareness of the nuances and demands of college life, could possibly increase the number of students

who go to college and reduce the number of those students who need remediation once they enter. Finally, collaborative efforts are one avenue through which educators can increase the likelihood that students will experience a successful transition into college and thus persist until graduation.

While numerous educators have proposed that the success of collaborations be gauged by determining the absence or presence of particular program components, few have included a discussion of the criteria for successful collaborations as identified by the students themselves. None to date have addressed the unique challenges and personal assessments identified by Schlossberg et. al. and applied them to an analysis of collaborative program effectiveness. This study will add to the literature by identifying the experiences that students believe to be most helpful in their transition to college as well as in their level of commitment to college completion. Such in-depth study of specific collaborations and their relationship to student transition and commitment to college can provide insight into particular aspects inherent or lacking in existing pre-college collaborative programs and therefore guide policymakers, faculty, and administrators in the improvement of existing collaborative programs and in the development of additional, more effective ones.

CHAPTER 4

Student Transition at Central University

Introduction

In order to conceptualize student transition at Central University (fictitious name) and the possible impact of participation in a motivational/compensatory program on that transition, the researcher spent three days on the campus of Central University. During this visit, the researcher conducted 45-minute face-to-face interviews with 15 students, 13 freshmen and three sophomores. These videotaped interviews took place in a private room in the student union. All of the interviewees were alumni of the College Summit Program and had first encountered the program as rising high school seniors. All 15 students had participated in the four-day workshop, during which time they experience several components of the College Summit Program. Their involvement with College Summit (described later) began in the summer after their junior year in high school and continued throughout their senior year in high school.

The following narrative sections of Chapter 4 address the specific research questions noted: *Components of the College Summit Program*, Research Question 1; *Student Perceptions of the College Summit Program*, Research Questions 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d; *The College Decision: Influences of Family/High School Personnel/Others*, Research Question 3; *Student Perceptions of Their Transition to College*, Research Questions 4a, 4b, 4c, and 4d; and *Student Commitment to College*, Research Question 5. The story of these 15 students' journeys from high school to college most logically begins with a description of the participants and a discussion of their initial decisions to attend college.

Participants

In addition to the experience of College Summit, the 15 case study participants shared the following characteristics: All had graduated from high schools within two to four hours of the Central University campus, and all had attended college immediately after graduation from high school. Thirteen of the 15 students lived in Central University residence halls; only two lived off-campus, one in a fraternity house and one in a private apartment. Although the participants shared some characteristics, there was diversity in age, gender, race, and college major. Eight students were 19 years old, five students were 18 years old, and two students were 20 years old. Six of the 15 were male, and nine were female. The 15 College Summit alumni interviewed represented three different nationalities: Ten students were African American, three students were Hispanic/Latino, and two students were Asian. The interviewees also represented 13 different college majors. Two students were pre-med majors, and two were undecided. In addition, one student represented each of the following majors: political science, architecture, finance, sociology/pre-law, broadcast journalism, pre-physical therapy, human development/family sciences, print journalism, engineering/finance, psychology, and liberal arts and sciences.

How did these 13 freshmen and two sophomores decide that college was the route they wanted to take in their individual journeys? When did these students representing 13 different majors determine that a postsecondary education was the key to their futures? What were the events that led each of these students to make the decision to enroll in Central University?

Table 2 *Case Study One Demographic Information*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Class Rank</i>	<i>Residence</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>College Entry</i>
One	male	18	Hispanic/ Latino	fresh	off- campus	poli. sci	immed after hs
Two	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	architecture	immed after hs
Three	male	20	Hispanic/ Latino	soph	off- campus	finance	immed. after hs
Four	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	pre-medicine	immed after hs
Five	female	18	African American	fresh	residence hall	pre-medicine	immed after hs
Six	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	sociology/ pre-law	immed after hs
Seven	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	journalism	immed after hs
Eight	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	human dev. family sci.	immed after hs
Nine	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	pre-physical therapy	immed after hs
Ten	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	broadcast journalism	immed after hs
Eleven	male	20	Asian	soph	residence hall	psychology	immed after hs
Twelve	female	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	engineering/ finance	immed after hs
Thirteen	male	18	Asian	fresh	residence hall	undecided	immed after hs
Fourteen	male	18	Hispanic/ Latino	fresh	residence hall	undecided	immed after hs
Fifteen	male	19	African American	fresh	residence hall	liberal arts & sciences	immed after hs

Table 3

Case Study One Results at a Glance

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Influences</i>	<i>CS Helpful</i>	<i>Program Ideas</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Commitment to College</i>
One	brother	visitation personal statement	family, peer press. social/emot	got private counselor	counselor friends	very committed
Two	IB Prog/hs counselors	personal statement visitation	student panel	gave up e/c activities	Mom friends students	very committed
Three	counselors teachers	personal statement	adjusting to freedom midterms finals	joined fraternity/ to advisor	fraternity advisor friends	very committed
Four	parents Eng. & drama teachers	personal statement	time mgmt college class	went to advisor	advisor friend	very committed
Five	family, sisters	personal statement applying	FAFSA time mgmt, study skills longer visit	worked on time mgmt.	mother	very committed
Six	Big Sisters	personal statement	time mgmt FAFSA parents	gave up e/c activities	freshmen in dorm	very committed
Seven	English teacher	writing personal statement	roommate issues conflict resolution	went to advisor, gave up e/c activities	mother, father RA advisor	very committed
Eight	counselors teachers, self	personal statement	weeklong visit, mentor	went home often	friends mother	very committed
Nine	cousin, coach grandma 1st job	personal statement campus	roommate issues time mgmt	budgeted time changed major	boyfriend mother grandma	very committed
Ten	parents, tv	what to expect at college pers. state.	fun survey about majors mock schedule	took no morning classes	father	very committed
Eleven	everyone	personal statement	college schedule, majors	made friends interacted	family new friends	very committed
Twelve	mother, school	visit, personal statement	college classes careers	got new roommate/ tutor	friends mother tutors	very committed
Thirteen	career, English teachers	personal statement, head start!	longer visit the system time mgmt	gave up e/c activities	friends advisor	very committed
Fourteen	tv	personal statement	career dev. college class	manage \$	got loan	very committed
Fifteen	mother, English teacher	personal statement	time mgmt assignments	managed time	friends	very committed

The College Decision

Although all of the students interviewed had enrolled in and attended college immediately after graduation from high school, their initial decisions to attend occurred at various times in their lives. Six participants explained that they had always known they would attend college. A freshman African American female engineering major, for example, commented, “I always knew that I would come to college. I was like the straight A student.” A freshman African American female architect major paralleled this sentiment, stating, “I always knew to get where you want to go in life, college is the way.” “I thought that you just always go to college right after high school,” echoed a freshman Hispanic male who was undecided about his major. “That [going to college] was just the next step after high school from the time I was small,” similarly explained a freshman African American female pre-med major.

Whereas these six participants recognized that they had always known they would attend college, three other students acknowledged that they really did not have a choice. “Coming to college really wasn’t an option,” insisted a sophomore Asian male psychology major. A freshman African American female majoring in journalism concurred, remarking, “Attending wasn’t really an option because of my parents.” “It was never an option,” also claimed a male freshman undecided about his major. Although these students did not elaborate, it was clear to the researcher that they had been greatly influenced by their parents.

Other students made the decision somewhat independently of peers and/or family members. Two students who had decided to attend college while in middle school actually credited television with sparking their interest. A freshman African American

female broadcast journalism major explained, “From eighth grade, I always wanted to be an obstetrician. I liked the *Cosby Show*, and I had the grades for it, and my parents were like, ‘That’s great! We’re going to have a doctor in the family!’” Another student, a freshman Hispanic male who was undecided about his major, added, “Television influenced me to go. I wanted to be an astronaut.” These two students had apparently been positively influenced by television.

Other students highlighted their initial desire to attend college during high school. Four participants, for example, revealed that their decision to attend college had been made while in high school. A particularly unique response arose concerning a freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major’s motivation for attending: “I always wanted to be something. I like working with kids. I had my first job at 14, and it didn’t pay well, so I knew I would have to go to college.” A freshman African American female majoring in pre-med reported, “I decided when I got into high school.” Similarly, a freshman sociology major, also an African American, noted, “I wanted to go to college after my sophomore year of high school.” “I decided pretty much my junior year,” remarked a freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences.

Clearly, although all 15 students made the decision to attend college at different stages in their public school careers, all had made the commitment to attend by the time they were juniors in high school. One student credited a low-paying job as an influencing factor while two others discussed the effect that television had had on their decisions. What other people and factors influenced the students’ decisions to enroll in college?

Curious to learn the answers, the researcher probed deeper, posing questions that specifically related to the students' high school experiences.

Most of the students identified the high school years as the period during which they had made their decision to enroll in college. Various reasons and motivators were identified; however, the majority of the students attributed their motivation for attending college to either family members (particularly mothers, fathers, and siblings) or to high school personnel (particularly English teachers, guidance counselors, or coaches).

Influence of Family Members

The most commonly cited positive influence on a student's decision to attend college immediately after high school was an immediate family member. Ten of the 15 interviewees identified family members as positive influences. Responses to the question concerning influences most frequently included the immediate family with specific students identifying particular family members such as their brother, mother, sister, or father.

A freshman African American architecture major, for instance, stated, "My family has always been behind me encouraging me." Similarly, a freshman African American pre-med major remarked, "My family [influenced me to go to college]." An Hispanic political science major, on the other hand, specifically credited his brother: "My brother influenced/motivated me to go the same high school and college. I saw the beautiful campus and wanted to get away from the city."

A freshman African American male liberal arts major proposed, "I was influenced by my mother." "My mother influenced me because she didn't go to college, and she wanted me to have a better life," elaborated a freshman African American female

engineering major. A freshman Hispanic/Latino political science major was particularly grateful to his mother: “My mom gave me advice. I wanted to go into the Air Force. Now I’m glad I didn’t.”

Another student, a freshman African American pre-med major, mentioned her sister’s influence: “I was stressed about where to go. I was really undecided about that, and my older sister helped me.” Interestingly, when asked who influenced them to attend college, only two students mentioned their fathers. This may have simply reflected the fact that the majority of the students lived with their mothers in single-family homes. A freshman African American female journalism major explained, “My dad joined the Navy right after high school and came to college in a nontraditional way, so he was like ‘just go and experience it,’ so I was coming here for the experience too.” A freshman Asian male undecided about his major also mentioned his father: “My mother and father were first generation students from Bangladesh, so I pretty much knew I had to go [to college].”

Influence of High School Personnel

Just as several students identified mothers, fathers, and siblings as positive influences, others identified specific high school personnel. The most commonly cited influence was an English teacher. Four students specifically credited one or more English teachers with sparking their interest in attending college. A freshman African American liberal arts and sciences major exclaimed, “My senior English teacher encouraged me and prepared me for college; he made me write a lot!” “One teacher who was my English and drama teacher really helped me. He had programs for seniors and juniors to come to college presentations and listen to college recruiters help you [*sic*] get

into school,” commented a freshman African American pre-med major. A freshman print journalism major agreed, “One teacher who really sticks out in my mind is [Mr. F.]. He was my English teacher and my writing coach at College Summit.” Finally, a freshman Asian student undecided about his major hailed all of his English teachers for the role they played in his decision:

All of my English teachers were instrumental because when they are teaching you literature, they are teaching you morals—not facts and figures like in math or science. In English, you read these stories and then you write a paper, but in between that, there’s a lot of time and space you have with the teacher to get to know each other, so all of my English teachers influenced me a lot—not to say that my other teachers didn’t.

Similarly, three participants briefly discussed the impact that high school counselors had made on their decisions to attend college. A freshman African American architecture major reported that she was “already set in [her] intended college major, but high school counselors “encouraged [her] to do some research.” A sophomore Hispanic/Latino finance major mentioned, “High school counselors helped me.” Similarly, a freshman African American human development and family science major noted, “My guidance counselors and a few teachers helped me.”

In addition to teachers and guidance counselors, one student indicated that her basketball coach had had a profound impact on her future. “When I got into high school, my basketball coach helped me.... This lady got all the basketball girls to go to college,” remarked the freshman African American pre-physical therapy major.

Influence of Others

The majority of the students either cited family members, high school personnel, or both as having affected their decision to enroll in college. A few students, however, specifically identified special programs and people associated with those programs who had made a positive impact on their postsecondary futures. A sophomore Hispanic/Latino finance major, for example, reported that a special program in which he was involved, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, put him in contact with mentors who wanted him to go to college:

In middle school, the teachers encouraged me to go to the IB high school, which was basically college prep. It was a hard program to get into, and once I did, they [mentors] really wanted me to go to college...it was mostly the IB Program that encouraged me to go to college.

Equally grateful to the IB Program was a freshman African American female architecture major:

I was in the International Baccalaureate program where we had career strands. You [*sic*] focus on your career area and take an exam that is sent to Switzerland. You can maybe get college credits. This program helped improve my math skills for college.

One student, a freshman African American sociology/pre-law major, credited her experience with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program as motivating her to attend a university rather than stay at home and attend a community college:

I wanted to go to college after my sophomore year of high school. I was involved with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and my big sister was a real women's advocate.

She and I saw this speaker, who was a girl who had been raped and was telling all about her college experiences. Before that, I had only thought about attending the community college in our small town, and that was kind of like the thirteenth grade, so I wasn't real excited about that. But when I heard the speaker, I started thinking about going somewhere else, maybe even a big school.

Although none of the 15 participants specifically cited the College Summit Program as a factor in their decision to *attend* college, all 15 highlighted specific facets of the program that had assisted them in various stages of their *transition* from high school to college. These responses will be discussed in the *Student Perceptions of The College Summit Program* section of this chapter.

The Journey from High School to College

Even though the 15 students had made the decision to attend college at various points in their lives and had been influenced by a variety of different people, all had committed to attending college by their junior years in high school. It is at this point that the individual journeys converged when all 15 students attended the College Summit Workshop during the summer between their high school junior and senior years. Thus, the two sophomores had participated during the summer of 2002, and the 13 freshmen had participated during the summer of 2003. By 2002/2003, College Summit had actually been in existence for several years.

The College Summit Program

College Summit (CS) is a national non-profit organization designed to strengthen high school advising systems, improve college admission systems, and conduct College Summit workshops (described later). It is based on the premise that many college

admissions programs neglect a large number of academically mid-tier students, who tend to be under-valued low-income candidates because their grades and test scores do not reflect their true potential for college success. Often such students, unlike middle-income students, do not have the advantage of firsthand advice from college-educated parents who typically help their children navigate the college admissions process. College Summit attempts to provide this necessary guidance so that these students have an equal opportunity for college admission and success. In its 2000 FIPSE grant application, College Summit explains its purpose as follows:

Almost two-thirds of low-income students in America who graduate from high school do not go to college. If this merely reflected their inability to succeed beyond 12th grade, it would be a sad reflection on our public schools, indeed. Or, if these students could thrive in the 21st century economy with only a high school diploma, this low college enrollment rate would be interesting, at best. But today's economy demands a college-educated workforce, and few low-income workers will transform their circumstances without a college degree. Moreover, the bulk of high school graduates can succeed in college, if they are given adequate support in the transition phase. Since 1993, College Summit has been developing a model to fill this gap. (Rusnak & Zalesne, 2000, p. 1)

As such, the College Summit Program fits the general description of a collaborative student development program as described by Ascher and Swartz (1989, ¶ 2-3) because it includes components that attempt to improve the college preparedness of high school students, support student completion of high school, increase the college-going rate, and increase the likelihood that students will complete a college education.

The program also incorporates other primary motivators proposed by Greenberg (1992): “The changing student population, democratization of higher education admissions policies, students’ frequent lack of skill preparedness, awareness of a need for new models of in-service staff development for high school teachers, and greater competition in college student recruitment” (¶ 2).

Specifically, The College Summit Programs fits the definition of a motivational/compensatory collaborative program because of its attempt to increase the likelihood that academically mid-tier students will both prepare for and eventually attend college. Components of the program include mentoring to such students “who are at risk and/or underrepresented (women in science and minority group members)” (Greenberg, 1992, ¶ 2).

History of the Program

College Summit began in 1993 with four students at a teen center in the basement of a low-income housing project in Washington, DC. Working as a freshman advisor while in graduate school at Harvard, the center’s director had noticed that the admissions office frequently sought qualified low-income students. Upset about the wasted talent he observed at the teen center and the fact that many of his students graduated to “the street” instead of to college, the director became determined to help admissions offices identify and admit low-income, untapped talent. He contacted the best writing instructor he knew from Harvard and the best urban youth worker he knew from the West Coast. They worked together to design a program to provide talented, low-income students with the appropriate assistance to make the transition from high school to college. Thus, College Summit was born.

College Summit continued throughout the next year, and in 1995, the Dean of Admissions at Connecticut College called the initiator of the program to commend him for the well-written college applications of students from the program. Soon thereafter, Connecticut College hosted College Summit's first residential program. By 1997, College Summit had expanded to seven regions in 14 states, and the decision was made to concentrate its focus on the Chicago and Colorado programs and begin work in Florida and DC. In 1999, the principal and college counselor of Manual High School in Denver approached College Summit with a request to expand the program school-wide.

In 2000, College Summit became such a success that the U.S. Department of Education awarded the College Summit Chicago site one of the department's largest postsecondary Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grants and deemed the program a potential national model (College Summit, *The College Summit Story*, 2003). That same year, College Summit ran its first workshop utilizing only alumni as executive staff members and hired one of its first four alumni as the full-time Director of Student Affairs.

College Summit continued to flourish, and in 2001, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) awarded the program the highest national award for expanding college opportunity to under-represented youth (College Summit, *The College Summit Story*, 2003). This recognition prompted Dallas, the Central Valley of California, and Kanawha County of West Virginia to approach College Summit to help reform and improve their college admissions/access systems. By 2002, College Summit had developed and published its first op-ed, calling for a national yardstick to measure colleges' success in enrolling and retaining low-income youth (Uhlfelder & Schramm,

2002). This same year, the program expanded to include 24 workshops in 7 states with four regional offices in Chicago, Denver, Dallas, and Oakland. These College Summit workshops reached 2,500 low-income students and trained 200 of their teachers in 2002. The current College Summit student profile is as follows: 50% Black, 35% Latino, 10% Native American, 3% Asian American, and 2% White with an average 2.8 GPA (College Summit, *Transforming the College Admissions Process*, 2003).

Goals/Objectives of College Summit and Measures of Success

The primary goal of College Summit is to increase the college-going rate of academically mid-tier, low-income underrepresented youth. Therefore, College Summit evaluates its success as an organization by measuring the college enrollment and retention of low-income, underrepresented College Summit alumni and comparing it to the college enrollment and retention of low-income, underrepresented students who were not involved in the College Summit Program. For its yearly internal evaluation, College Summit utilizes the following terms:

College Enrollment is defined as actual attendance on a college or university campus the fall after graduation from high school. *Admission* is not sufficient; actual matriculation must be ascertained.

College Retention is defined as persistence toward graduation, once a student has enrolled in college. In other words, of the pool of enrolled students, College Summit determines at least one year later whether those students are still enrolled or have graduated within six years.

The results of College Summit's internal evaluation are impressive indeed. The

national rate of college enrollment for low-income students is 46 percent (US Census, 2000), the average college enrollment rate of College Summit participants from 1997-2002 was 79 percent. Equally impressive is the 80 percent average retention rate of College Summit students over the same time period (College Summit, *Internal Evaluation-College Enrollment and College Retention*, 2003).

Additionally, College Summit is currently involved in two independent evaluations in Chicago and in California's Central Valley, both of which will measure the impact of CS on the college-going culture of whole schools that are implementing the Senior Class Model, based upon the teacher-student and peer-to-peer relationships that develop. The evaluations will compare the baseline college enrollment and retention data for whole schools with corresponding data collected at the end of the three-year project period (College Summit Policy and Communications Coordinator, personal communication, August 23, 2003)

For the Chicago evaluation, CS has been working with Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) since 2001. P/PV's initial findings indicated that CS's Model would be most effective when formally integrated into the school day—which CS had fully anticipated and had already begun to put in place. Now the Chicago evaluation will move to its second stage, evaluating CS's effect on the schools' college-going culture. This evaluation was supported in part by grants from FIPSE and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The California evaluation was initiated by the James Irvine Foundation and began in the fall of 2003. Preliminary results from both studies are expected in 2006 (College Summit Policy and Communications Coordinator, personal communication, August 23, 2003).

Selection of College Summit Participants

The student selection process for College Summit workshops focuses on the mid-tier student. CS teachers and counselors are trained to identify academically mid-tier students with high potential for college success. The College Summit Policy and Communications Coordinator described the selection process in detail:

The program trains high school counselors and teachers to identify those students who are "better than their numbers would suggest," which includes a GPA requirement in the B to C (or 2.0-3.0) range, so that we are certain we're not "cream-skimming." Additionally, the training includes identifying those personal factors that show the students have more potential to succeed in college than their academic scores would suggest—such as being the primary caregiver to several siblings after school, working 30 hours a week, or being a leader at church. Of every four Peer Leaders selected, three must have a GPA of between 2.0 and 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale), and all must qualify as low-income according to the criteria used by the U.S. Department of Education's TRIO program income guidelines. Over the eight years of College Summit's programs, the average GPA has been 2.8. (personal communication, August 23, 2003)

Students learn about the College Summit opportunity through high school teachers and counselors who select 20 per cent of the junior class to attend the College Summit Workshop and peer leader training during the summer before their senior year. In addition, College Summit staff members conduct school visits to inform students about the College Summit Program in their respective high schools. The remaining 80 percent of rising seniors do not attend CS workshops, but, in participating high schools,

experience College Summit's weekly college application advisory curriculum, the Senior Class Model (College Summit Policy and Communications Coordinator, personal communication, August 23, 2003).

Components of College Summit

The primary mission of College Summit is to reform both high school advisement and college admission so that more underrepresented, low-income youth are accepted into college. The program utilizes a theory of social change to increase the college-going rate of low-income students. This theory, based on the belief that the College Summit Workshop is the forum by which high schools and colleges work together to institute systemic change, expands opportunity to talented, low-income youth, and as such, fosters accountability of both systems (College Summit, *The Workshop Handout*, 2003). The College Summit Program involves an ongoing process that begins with a four-day workshop for rising seniors, continues throughout the high school senior year, and culminates with the student's acceptance into college.

Four-Day Workshop

The focal point of the program is the four-day, on campus workshop for rising seniors, the goal being that students complete their entire college applications while attending the workshop. Forty to 50 low-income rising high school seniors (identified as Peer Leaders) stay on the college campus for four days during the summer, during which time they participate in three core activities: essay writing using a special curriculum designed by a Harvard writing instructor, peer supported "rap sessions" during which students discuss and explore their personal goals and fears, and one-on-one hour sessions

with a professional college counselor. Students also complete common college applications, financial aid forms, and scholarship searches.

Essay Writing

“College Summit's Writing Curriculum is designed to remove anxiety from the writing process so that students—even those who come convinced they ‘can't write’—learn to open up, take risks, and tell their stories” (College Summit Policy and Communications Coordinator, personal communication, August 23, 2003). Professional adults, who volunteer their time and skills during the four-day workshop, serve as writing coaches and assist four to six students (a writing team) in composing personal essays that will be included in their college applications. According to the College Summit Policy and Communications Coordinator, “The students' personal essays reveal what muted SAT scores and grades cannot: the courage, humor, resilience, and strength that make up each of their lives” (personal communication, August 23, 2003).

Rap Sessions

In addition to the essay-writing component, during the four-day workshop, College Summit Peer Leaders participate in daily rap sessions “where students start to answer some of the profound questions they have during this time of transition” (Rusnak & Zalesne, 2000). Rusnak and Zalesne describe the rap sessions as follows:

With the help of a trained facilitator, students take an honest look at their personal circumstances and identify the obstacles that could hinder their success in—or getting to—college. Students devise strategies to overcome these challenges and learn to take responsibility for their goals publicly so that their peers and mentors can help hold them accountable for their commitments. (2000, p. 5)

One-on-One Counseling

Finally, during the four-day workshop, Peer Leaders spend one hour in a one-on-one session with a College Summit trained college counselor:

College Summit's College Counselors are trained to guide the paths of Peer Leaders attending our workshops. The training will specifically address the goals of the college counseling component of the workshop, namely that students leave the workshop with a broader understanding of how different kinds of colleges can help them reach their dreams, a "to do" list for their senior year in high school, and a concrete listing of eight to ten colleges and universities that best match their priorities and interests. (College Summit Policy and Communications Coordinator, personal communication, August 23, 2003)

Alumni Training

Another facet of the program includes the training of College Summit alumni (Peer Leaders) so that they can serve as alumni leaders, workshop coordinators, rap directors, and workshop directors during the four-day summer workshops. Their continued involvement keeps the alumni connected to the College Summit community and strengthens their managerial and leadership skills so that they may be contributing members of society. The alumni leader position is described as follows:

You assist in all aspects of the program from registration to send-off, including helping to run the Alumni Sessions. You'll attend staff meetings; lend support to the Workshop Director, Assistant Director and Coordinator; and by your very presence you'll provide a model of encouragement and support for participants.

Two-Role Guidance

One tenet of the College Summit Program is that many low-income, urban students do not receive the one-on-one guidance that most suburban low-income students receive from their often college-educated parents. As a result, “College Summit works with high schools to improve overwhelmed systems of college guidance [because] in American public high schools today, the average ratio of students to college counselors is 350 to one” (Rusnak & Zalesne, 2000, p. 7). Successful guidance, according to the College Summit philosophy, requires two roles: the expert guidance counselor who disseminates information to students and the individual student manager, a role generally played by the parents of students in middle or upper class families. Believing that this is where the system breaks down for low-income students, College Summit trains high school teachers, youth workers, and corporate volunteers to play the role of college application advisors during the students’ senior year, using a specialized college application curriculum to keep students on track in the admissions process:

For a small honorarium, teachers attend mentor trainings before and during our four-day workshops, receive the College Summit Mentor Handbook, and get bi-weekly faxes during senior year, reminding them of the several, specific, pre-college tasks their students need to accomplish that week. (Rusnak & Zalesne, 2000, p. 8)

Holistic Review

A final component of the College Summit Program, holistic review of college applicants, corresponds with the completion of the personal statement that students compose during the College Summit summer workshop. Arguing that low-income

students who test well already have in place a system for entering college, College Summit proposes that college admission decisions be based upon a holistic review of low-income students who do not necessarily score well on standardized tests. This three-tier process includes not only grades and test scores, but also personal strengths. The completion of the personal statement essay provides an avenue through which low-income students who do not necessarily perform well in school or on tests can highlight their strengths in the form of a personal statement for college admissions.

The Freshman Year at Central University

General University Information

Central University is a public land-grant institution classified as a doctoral/research university-extensive (Carnegie Foundation, 2000). The campus, located in a rural suburb of a major city, covers 1,454 acres and includes 252 major buildings. There are currently 38,291 students: 28,271 undergraduate and 10,020 graduate and professional. The student demographics are as follows: 53% men, 47% women; 6.1% African-American, 11% Asian American, 5.1% Latino American, and .2% Native American. Students typically come from 50 states and 100 nations. Eight colleges and one institute within Central University offer 4,000 courses and 150 programs of study. Student housing includes 22 undergraduate university residence halls accommodating 8,450 students, five privately owned certified residence halls, and 12 certified houses accommodating 2,500 undergraduate students with 25% of the entering freshmen class choosing this option ("*Central University*" website). All faculty, staff, and students encountered by the researcher were quite welcoming and helpful to the researcher.

Student Perceptions of the College Summit Program

Most Helpful Components

Overall, the most frequently cited component of the College Summit Program was the writing of the personal essay. All 15 of the students lauded the program for helping them accomplish what they considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of getting into college. A sophomore Hispanic male majoring in finance commented, “The main thing was the personal statement, and we had several workshops about that.” A freshman African American female pre-med major added, “Basically, all I do remember is writing a college essay, being able to go through the steps and prepare; people around us helped us out a lot.” Another student, a freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major, noted, “They all helped us write our personal statement. This took about the whole weekend. The day before we left, we typed it, and they helped us proofread it.”

Participants continuously stated that they believed that the main goal of the College Summit Program Workshop was the completion of the personal statement. A freshman African American female sociology major remarked, “During the whole three days we worked on our personal statement.” “The biggest thing was helping us with our college paper/personal statement—that was the main thing of the program,” confirmed a freshman African American female pre-med major. “They [workshop leaders] gave us a printed copy [of our draft] and gave our advisors a copy,” continued a freshman African American female sociology major.

Several participants commented on the importance of having completed their personal statements before their senior year of high school. A freshman African

American female architect major commended the program for its assistance in easing the stress of her high school senior year:

What College Summit did for me was get me to write my personal statement, and I actually helped some other people. This was a big load off of me because of having to do all the other paper work like financial aid and admissions applications. That [the personal statement] was my favorite part of College Summit.

A freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences felt similarly:

The essay part was really helpful—they really help you—that’s like one major goal, so you have that done. They had teachers from all over to come and read the essay and help you and guide the writer’s workshop, so when you finished the program, you already had your college essay finished.

One other student, a freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major, elaborated: “We left and had our general applications done, our personal statements done, and knew what college we were going to. We were basically set.” A male freshman undecided about his major insisted that the personal statement positively affected his acceptance into college:

We focused on our personal statement, and I am extremely grateful to them because from what I understand, that was instrumental in my getting into [college] because my grades and scores wasn’t [*sic*] that high. They really helped me out—there were just exploration sessions where we just talked about issues in our life in our neighborhood and issues on a college campus and how our issues

would translate to those who would be reading our statements, and then we divided up into groups and did a lot of talking. We went through many scenarios of personal statements before we actually sat down to write, so we had it finished at the end of College Summit. It was one of the easiest and hardest things I've done.

A sophomore Hispanic male majoring in finance was equally relieved to have the statement completed:

Getting the personal statement out of the way was huge, especially with filling out our applications and all the other paperwork. I could send the statement out to different colleges. I could revise it just a little and send it out to different ones.

The following comment made by a freshman Hispanic male majoring in political science expresses the students' overall opinions concerning the completion of the personal statement: "They helped us write our entrance essay—it was very helpful—the best essay I ever wrote."

In addition to the completion of the college entrance essay/personal statement, eight students spoke about the financial aid workshops and other general information sessions in which they participated while at College Summit. "We did a lot of things on financial aid and just getting started on that and getting informed about how we can go to college...things like that," stated a freshman African American female majoring in journalism. A freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences added, "They had workshops about financial aid, study skills, skits about how it is at college and things.... The skits from College Summit helped a lot, and the experiences they told me about, especially the roommate situation, were helpful." A third

student, a freshman Hispanic male majoring in political science, discussed at length some of his experiences:

We talked to students and had sessions with a coordinator, and they explained things we need to get into college: financial, the ACT.... They offered us programs—tutoring, many sessions on peer pressure, what to expect on campus, party places. [Central] is known as a party school. It's a huge transition for minorities coming from the city.

A freshman African American female architect major clarified, “They let us know about their school, but it was more like letting us know what college is all about.”

Although one of the major components of the College Summit workshop was the completion of the general college application, only one student referred specifically to that part of the program. A freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major acknowledged, “It was basically trying to get us set with the applications.”

A final topic addressed by participants was their participation in group team building activities and life in the dormitory. A freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major verbalized her excitement:

It was the first time I was in a college, so it was wild. We stayed in a dorm for one weekend—two nights and three days. We had to first introduce ourselves and get to know each other and build this tower out of paper and straw.

Another student, a freshman Hispanic male majoring in political science, added, “It [College Summit] gave me a better understanding of what was coming ahead. Visitation on campus definitely made me more comfortable—I would have freaked out had I not visited here first.”

Similarly, five additional students confirmed that the college visitation in the residence halls played an important role in easing their transition to college. “I think staying on campus is very good, helpful in deciding if you want to go away or not,” commented a freshman African American female architect major.

The following comment made by a male freshman undecided about his major expresses the overall sentiment of most of the College Summit participants:

College Summit definitely made me not afraid. Before that program, it was always that I would go to college, but that program solidified my decision. I was no longer just going to college—I was looking forward to it. There was a different feeling, and I think that was solely because of College Summit. I was no longer just going; I was excited about going.

These comments suggest that, for the most part, students were very satisfied with their College Summit experience. They were especially grateful for the opportunity to complete the personal statement while residing on a college campus. Despite this apparent satisfaction with the program, several students shared valuable insights not only about their personal transitions into college but also about ways that future motivational/compensatory programs could improve to better address their needs.

Suggested Program Components/Improvements

Participants addressed current components of the program and suggested ways to improve upon activities that were already incorporated into the program. For example, eight of the 15 participants in the study stated that if they were designing a program to ease student transition, they would definitely include the writing of the personal statement. A freshman African American female sociology major noted, “I would keep

the writing coaches.” A freshman African American female engineering major concurred, “I would do the personal statement—it’s very important...” Although the students did not elaborate, it was clear that most of them felt that this aspect of College Summit was indispensable. Another student, a male freshman undecided about his major, similarly discussed the need for more follow-up after the summer workshop, asserting, “We [College Summit participants] had a big head start, but there was no follow-up.”

Other alumni made suggestions for improvements to the college campus visitation. A freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences contended, “[I would have] college visits definitely, but it should be a couple days when school is actually going on and not on the weekend, so you get the feel for college.” A male freshman undecided about his major concurred and offered an in-depth description of how a longer campus stay would have further benefited him:

[I would suggest] maybe some sort of a program like College Summit but much more comprehensive. The students who talked to us were very instrumental in helping us, but in my senior year, I could experience a week or two of college life...harder classes—talking to deans and professors beforehand. They can be very helpful. I’ve found them to be very open. Freshman year you don’t really have the courage, and you’re reluctant. You’re like one of 500 students, and you feel weird.

Three additional alumni commented on the necessity for familiarizing potential college students with the college system of course scheduling and general procedures. A

freshman African American female pre-med major proposed, “The program should be a whole week with a Tuesday/Thursday and Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule.”

A sophomore Asian male psychology major similarly believed that a program should include “block/college type scheduling.” A sophomore Hispanic male majoring in finance offered the same advice and argued that a program should be established in which high schools “have exams like midterms and finals so that you will be used to the system.” A sophomore Asian male psychology major emphasized the benefit of such an improvement:

My friend actually went to a high school that was college prep. They structured it just like a college schedule: midterms, finals, etc. It was exactly like college, a block schedule. He had a real easy time adjusting to college.

A sophomore Hispanic male majoring in finance added, “Something this simple would make a huge difference. Students could get used to this, and it would be easier.”

A freshman male undecided about his major supplied suggestions dealing with both campus visitation and acclimation to the college system:

[Students need to] get acquainted with the college system—things like you don’t have to raise your hand to go to the bathroom, and attendance is not as important as doing the work. One thing you never learn in high school is in college nobody teaches you; you teach yourself. Somehow [you have to] convey this to incoming freshmen.

Finally, five students alluded to the necessity for understanding the college classroom and testing procedures. A freshman African American female majoring in journalism noted, “I would inform the students that it is not at all like your life was.

You're set away from your parents, and you don't have to go to class." A freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences proposed, "I would have them [program participants] take a few classes like [college] introduction courses, college credits that you don't have to pay for." A freshman African American male liberal arts major elaborated further, "College Summit would have been nice if they would have given actual college assignments to do and turn in while there."

Six participants also mentioned the need for a program to include assistance with time management. A freshman African American male liberal arts major suggested that the program "try to give a class on leisure/study time management and scheduling." A freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences also mentioned time management, as did a freshman Hispanic/Latino male political science major, a freshman African American male pre-med major, and a freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major. A freshman male undecided about his major conceded that as far as time management, however, "there is no way you can prepare for it." Although they did not go into specific detail, three participants also suggested that a program should include workshops on money management as well.

Another issue addressed by four students was the inclusion and expansion of sessions dealing with financial aid, particularly the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. "I would definitely include the financial aid aspect of it," stated a freshman African American female majoring in journalism. However, a male freshman undecided about his major lamented, "Scholarship and grant work [should be included]. We talked about it, but we didn't actually do it." Agreeing

with a male freshman undecided about his major, a freshman African American female majoring in journalism offered the following suggestions:

I would keep the help with the FAFSA, but the problem is you need the parents too. There should be a session for both parents and students. I had to do it for both of us. Or you could get the necessary information—maybe send a letter in the mail to parents and then the students bring it [the financial information] to College Summit to fill out. They also gave us access to web scholarships, but a lot of us don't have access to computers. They should allow time to do that during the program.

An additional suggestion included the incorporation of some type of career exploration or awareness. Several students expressed frustration with their lack of information about careers and/or majors. A sophomore Asian male psychology major indicated, "Some colleges don't let you pick a major until sophomore year; this is a great idea. Don't pick a major unless you know about all of the majors." A freshman African American female engineering major agreed that career awareness could benefit students:

I would have people come in and do a career fair—what major, job, and money you can make. I wish I would have had that.... I think that students choose majors, and they really don't know what they are majoring in. This is the most important. You often hear about people changing their majors five or six times. It's a personal choice, but awareness could help. Like for this school it is difficult to transfer from one major to another. There's a waiting list.

An interesting suggestion came from a freshman African American female broadcast journalism major:

The first thing I would have them [program participants] to do is a fun exercise/survey. I would ask, “When you were five, ten, 15, etc., what did you want to do when you grew up? If you can relate all those things and what they have in common, this could let you know what you should do, or you can look at the last thing and see how it is so different from all the others and ask why. If it’s not, look at all the others and realize that it is probably your calling for a career.”

This same student suggested that freshmen try to take a course just for interest every semester because it may be the one course that helps them identify their career path. Because many freshmen are unsure about their major and potential career, some type of career exploration is necessary, according to a male freshman undecided about his major:

In high school I focused on art, and I used to love losing myself in hours and hours of painting and drawing. Now I apparently don’t have the talent. I wish somebody had had a workshop about career exploration because I never really thought about it.

A final program suggestion concerning social/emotional issues arose from the student responses. Many College Summit alumni conceded that such an addition would be difficult to incorporate; nonetheless, six participants had valuable remarks concerning social/emotional issues. A freshman Hispanic male majoring in political science explained his viewpoint:

The main thing would be to learn how to deal with general issues like family, peer pressure, time consumption, work load, where to work on campus, how to relate to friends. It’s social/emotional more than academic. Coming to this college, you

have the academic background, but you need to get set mentally. [You're] playing with the big boys.

A freshman African American female majoring in journalism agreed, "I would have cultural awareness, tolerance, conflict resolution, so you know that just because you think you're going down there and having a good time, it might not be that way." "Talk to students—like an orientation—about consequences of their actions if they make bad decisions," continued a freshman African American male liberal arts major.

These participants addressed the social/aspects of the transition to college; a sophomore Asian male psychology major stated further:

Most of the programs are for students who are motivated to go to college, so they're going to make it.... It's motivation as opposed to programming, like the movie *Harlem to Harvard*. It's motivation, not the program. The program helps for those who want to achieve, but if you're trying to reach out to the vast majority, you have to tap into their mentality—what do they want?

All of the participants provided valuable input concerning the design of an ideal program for helping freshmen students adapt to college life. The most frequent suggestions involved the writing of the personal statement for college admission and the designing of an extended campus visitation during which students follow a traditional college schedule and participate in mock college assignments. Such a program, according to the students, should also incorporate sessions on time management, money management, and career exploration. Perhaps the most insightful idea involved the inclusion a workshop to help students deal with social/emotional issues such as sharing

space with a roommate, making new friends, and approaching college professors for assistance with coursework.

Student Perceptions of Their Transition to College

Situation

Although all of the 15 participants had participated in College Summit, attended college immediately following high school, and were still enrolled at Central University, their perceptions about the factors affecting their individual transitions were varied. Equally varied was each individual's unique set of circumstances. Although all students were coping with being away from home, one student, a freshman Hispanic/Latin political science major, was coping with the additional stress of his family's move to Puerto Rico to care for ailing grandparents. The remaining 14 students lived within two hours of their parent or parents and therefore had more opportunities to return home for visits. One striking similarity that surfaced in all of the interviews was the discussion of various sources of stress and how each individual's unique set of circumstances and psychological resources interacted to determine how prepared or unprepared he or she felt.

Self

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) posits that an individual's personal and demographic attributes, as well as his/her psychological resources, constitute the *self*. She argues further that coping skills such as ego development, outlook, commitment, and values are greatly influenced by a student's perception. Student demographics were discussed earlier. Other than the minor references made to gender differences concerning homesickness and cultural differences concerning roommates (discussed on pages 34, 39,

40), problems adjusting to college and the stress associated with those problems seemed to cut across demographic boundaries. All interviewees appeared to possess the psychological resources, physical health, and optimism necessary for success in college. The fact that all were still enrolled in college and progressing toward a degree is a testament to their personal commitment.

An analysis of participant responses led this researcher to believe that regardless of a student's psychological resources, very few, if any, college freshmen feel totally prepared or escape stress during the freshman year. Although attendance at a university was an anticipated event for all 15 of the participants, the new situation nevertheless included various levels of uncertainty and stress. Stressors identified by the interviewees ranged from issues as simple as completing paperwork to those as complicated as adjusting to newfound freedom. Only one student, a sophomore female African American broadcast journalism major, felt adequately prepared, stating, "I was prepared and was able to help out my peers. I'm an RA now—I had no transition problems." She went on to say, "Time management is a big factor, and I am a 'busy body,' and I tend to over-schedule, and that's one of the reasons I'm always the master of my schedule. I was best at it my freshman year." Although time management was not a problem for this particular student during her freshman year, it was a serious problem for nine other College Summit alumni. For example, a freshman Hispanic male majoring in political science discussed his exhaustion:

I was stressed about how to pay rent and bills and didn't know what to expect. I was eighteen and a college student working 30 hours a week, and I wanted to

keep my grades up. It was hard to manage time with only an average of five or six hours of sleep a night.

A freshman African American pre-med major agreed, “I had trouble getting to the right classes, waking up to get to classes, and scheduling breaks between classes. The time schedule was difficult to adjust to.” “Basically I had trouble with time management—knowing how to study for this class, do that for that class, and complete work for another class,” revealed a freshman male African American liberal arts and sciences major.

When asked about the most stressful aspect of the freshman situation, a freshman female pre-med major similarly remarked, “The top one is time management.” A freshman male Asian undecided about his major verified, “I struggled with time management. There is no way you can prepare for it.” A freshman female African American majoring in human development and family sciences concurred, “I had trouble with time management. It’s very, very important.” Finally, a sophomore male Asian psychology major elaborated, “Balancing study time and leisure time was a tough one. You’re just not used to assignments being due without reminders.”

A close second to time management as far as frequency of responses was the homesickness discussed by nine of the College Summit alumni placed in their new situation. During the face-to-face interviews, all nine described periods of homesickness, alienation, and boredom. A freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences explained, “When I first moved here, adjusting to being away from family and friends and being responsible for myself made me homesick. I cried.” A freshman African American female engineering major, a female, agreed, “Especially with females, leaving family and friends is difficult. Males seem to adapt a

lot easier. That was really hard. I missed my mother, and she would call me all the time. I would cry, and she would cry.” She elaborated, “ In high school everybody knew each other, and then you come here, and it’s like you start all over again. How do you get involved and make friends?” “I was most worried about being away from my mom. I’ve been without her before, but this seemed more permanent,” explained a freshman African American female sociology major. A male freshman undecided about his major also highlighted gender differences as far as homesickness:

[Home] is only two hours away, so missing family was not a big deal. The girls cried and went back every weekend, but it wasn’t an issue for me because I wanted some independence. I was a little homesick at the beginning, so I went back every three weeks.

A sophomore Asian psychology major discussed his initial feelings of alienation:

I came from a high school of 500 students, so I wanted a big school [college]. Freshmen here have to live in the dorms unless they join a fraternity. I needed a sense of belonging, but I didn’t have time to be running around doing silly things or paying for them [fraternity brothers] to be my friends—not unless they were going to give me a job or something.

Another student, a freshman African American pre-physical therapy major, described an unforeseen change in her situation:

Me [*sic*] and my boyfriend (now my ex) got accepted into the same school, but he changed his mind at the last minute. Then I didn’t think I wanted to come here without him. I was saying, “Can I come home?” But I stuck it out.

A freshman African American female majoring in journalism likewise indicated,

“Well, the most stressful thing for me is and has been that this place isn’t [home]. It’s kind of slow, and it’s isolated and stuff like that, and I understand that’s a good college environment, but I miss the city.” Another student, a freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major, stated, “I was afraid to leave my atmosphere, my friends. I had to adjust, and it was not easy. It’s quiet here, and I’m used to hearing police cars and sirens.”

Still, a freshman female African American sociology/pre-law major, pinpointed her initial feelings of alienation:

It was hard for me to take advice from students when I first got here. They were kind of snotty, and they acted like they just had a job to do. I was really nervous. (I’m a nervous person anyway). I didn’t understand why they would make us write out 15 different schedules when we might not even get into one class. They didn’t explain why, and the girl was yelling at me. Then when I got here, I felt alienated—like I didn’t know anyone. If I hadn’t had a lot of freshmen on my floor and in my dorm, I probably wouldn’t have made it.

A sophomore Hispanic/Latino male finance major concurred, “The first weekend was boring, and I wanted to go back home. Everyone moved in on Sunday. There was pretty much no one here.... I met people at orientation, and then I got adjusted.”

Just as many of the new freshmen felt unprepared in managing time and making friends, seven of the participants felt equally unprepared for the demands of college level coursework. A freshman male Hispanic/Latino political science major explained his adjustment:

The teaching in [my home high school] was...I don't want to say worse, but different. [This university] has higher standards, and there's a lot more reading involved and a lot more papers to write.... I'm not used to studying two to three hours every day to do my work.

A freshman female African American pre-med major felt similarly:

The courses here were much more difficult. I first started off—the first two weeks—I was really excited, and it was good. I was really motivated, went to bed early (about 10:00), and woke up and ate breakfast, but then I thought it was boring already. Plus I'm only two and a half hours away, so I wanted to go home. It was too much work.

A freshman African American female architect major similarly remarked, “As far as my major, I had tons and tons of paperwork...I had a lot of exams, forms, and papers.”

Other students, including a freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major, described their frustration in coping with more rigorous coursework than in high school:

I didn't feel prepared study-wise because you can just breeze through high school and not do your work until the night before, and now it's like, ‘We don't take anything late.’ It was tough because I spent so much time trying to do good [*sic*] in chemistry. This semester I'm still doing good [*sic*], but I could have all A's. I said I wasn't going to be too stressed out, but I've gotten a little too laid back this semester.

A freshman African American female engineering major echoed this sentiment: “I wished I had better study skills—the first year I did bad[ly]. I got a D in chemistry; I was studying, but there was too much information, so I had tutoring. I was used to getting all A’s.” A freshman African American female majoring in journalism offered, “It’s one thing to be smart in high school and another to be smart in college.” Finally, a freshman Asian male undecided about his major remarked, “Adjusting to the level of coursework was very hard for me the first semester. It is very easy to get off track here. You have to learn self-discipline—it’s just something you have to learn.”

Apparently, another skill that freshmen “have to learn” is managing money. Six different participants described their frustrations with money management. When asked about the most stressful aspect of the freshman year, a freshman Hispanic/Latino male undecided about his major replied bluntly, “Money management; that’s it. I just do it on my own with loans.” “Money-wise, it’s tough,” echoed a freshman female African American pre-physical therapy major. “Everything is paid for school-wise, but now since I have a cell phone, my mother’s making me pay the bill, so I had to get a job this semester. It wouldn’t be so hard, but I like to shop,” she continued.

Student responses certainly reflected the belief that with freedom comes responsibility, something for which six students honestly admitted they felt unprepared. Such newfound independence and freedom, they revealed, had created somewhat of a problem. A freshman African American female architect major clarified his ambiguity:

The only thing that was stressful when I first got here was that no one was telling me what to do. It’s wonderful to be independent, but you get complacent. I saw

how my work was going, and I had to make a decision to stay focused. Everyone tells you about the freedom, but it is a big adjustment.

A sophomore Hispanic male majoring in finance felt similarly and stated, “I think one thing I’ve seen is adjusting to the newfound freedom, especially if you are far away from home. That’s one of the biggest problems. That’s why a lot of people get here and get overwhelmed.” A freshman African American female sociology/pre-law major illustrated her adjustment:

I would have felt better if people didn’t talk to me like I knew what was going on. They had a lot of assumptions. Not even knowing I could register for another class made me feel cheated. They scare you with roommate stories, like your roommate is crazy or something. Especially for Latino and African American students, it’s difficult anyway.

Even though this particular student did not experience problems with her roommate, other freshmen did. Four different participants were especially stressed about the adjustment of living with a roommate, especially if there were cultural differences. A freshman African American female majoring in journalism expressed this problem clearly:

Being around people who are totally different from me, mostly culturally, [is stressful], and even though they may be nice, it’s just different, you know. Last semester I had trouble with both my roommates. One was from Bombay, India, and she’s from a completely different country, so I can’t blame her for not understanding, and my other roommate was from a hick town and had never even

been around Black people, so there was a lot of conflict because we were all just thrown in there together.

A freshman African American female pre-med major described a similar scenario and confessed, “I was most anxious about having a roommate. I was nervous about that.” She went on to say, “My roommate first semester was a devil. I have no roommate now. That’s nice.”

Just as four students described problems with roommates, one College Summit alumni experienced problems with other students in general. A freshman African American female sociology major described her personal experience:

I think I had a lot of angst. I think most of the kids here are carefree, and most here don’t have as much on their plate. For example, I couldn’t afford the book for a class, and the girl down the hall had it and wasn’t even reading it, but she wouldn’t let me borrow it. But I can’t stay mad at people, so I have since helped her with homework and stuff, but I still don’t like her. My roommate was carefree too, but she helped make me get out more and socialize more and stop worrying about things I can’t control. I felt like all the other students knew something I didn’t know.

When asked if she had any comments to add concerning preparedness for college, a freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences responded simply, “It’s stressful—it’s really stressful.”

Coping Strategies/Support

All 15 of the participants, when faced with difficult circumstances, took direct action by either developing strategies for coping with the issue themselves or requesting

support from friends, family, peers, teachers, and advisors or counselors. Five students who struggled with time management revealed that they had either cut back or eliminated extracurricular activities in order to have more time for school. A freshman African American male architecture major explained his decision concerning sports:

I always played sports in high school, but I came here to concentrate on academics.... I miss sports because I played softball, basketball, and tennis in high school. I know how much time is involved, so I chose not to play in college. I really miss it.

Another student, a freshman Asian male undecided about his major made similar sacrifices:

I'm not in any extracurricular activities other than social and cultural events. I'm just getting to know the campus. I was student body president of my high school. Here I'm in the Asian club, but I'm not as active as I was in high school.

One student, a freshman African American female sociology-pre-law major found that just the opposite course of action worked for her:

The first semester I wasn't that involved, so I was kind of bored, and the advisor only wanted me to take 12 credits, so I wouldn't get overwhelmed. But I was used to being so involved with activities in high school and having my family around. There was nothing. In hindsight, I should have just registered for another class, but I didn't know that I could do that, so I'm still like a little behind.... I'm much more involved in extracurricular activities this semester, though.

Like those students struggling with time management, students overwhelmed by the rigor of college coursework developed strategies to help them cope. Three students

enlisted the help of tutors, one lucky enough to live in a residence hall equipped with on-site tutors. This freshman African American female engineering major explained, “I’m in a dorm where all the women are in the same major, and I can go to anyone and ask questions. We have tutors there every evening, and it makes us study more.”

Seven students, including a freshman Asian male undecided about his major, met regularly with their academic advisors:

I have gone to see my academic counselor many times. I realized academically I needed advice. I am doing much better this semester. I took chemistry and calculus in my first semester, and like I said before, I had taken arts and humanities classes in high school, so it was a huge difference.

A freshman African American female pre-med major added, “This semester I’m doing better. Last semester I had some trouble. My academic advisor helped me adjust.”

Two freshmen actually changed their majors because of difficulty with a particular course. One, a freshman African American female engineering major, struggled with introductory computer courses and revealed, “I wish I would have changed out of my major earlier like after the first semester, but I told myself not to give up too soon.

Sometimes you just have to find a niche, and programming computers is not my niche.”

Although several students sought outside help from academic advisors and tutors, only one student, a freshman African American female sociology major, approached a teaching assistant and a professor:

Something that wasn’t hard for me was talking to the TA or professor. I was kind of weirded [*sic*] out by that because everything here is done by email, and I

wasn't real familiar with that, but now I'm like a pro. I was worried about it at first.

Not surprisingly, 12 of the 15 students leaned on family or friends to support them through stressful times. "I talked to my mom and my ex-boyfriend every day. His grandmother is my mentor, and she kept saying, 'Read your Bible every day,'" commented a freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major. "My mom helped me with the forms. She always encouraged me," added a freshman African American female architect major. "My cousin helped me with financial aid," reported a freshman African American female majoring in human development and family sciences. A freshman African American female broadcast journalism major repeated advice given to her by her father:

Mostly my father helped because he is the one responsible for me. He does my tuition and gave me advice, "You're in college now, and you're supposed to be broke, so just manage. It won't last forever. We're doing what we can. Stay on your homework, stay on your books, work, and get yourself a little money, but don't get too focused on money that you're not doing what you need to do for school."

A few extremely resourceful students enlisted the support of several advocates. "My RA really mediated a lot of things and helped us [roommates] work through some problems." My academic advisor is supportive, and my Mom told me to be patient," offered a freshman African American female majoring in journalism.

A freshman Hispanic male majoring in political science, who was dealing with his family's recent move out of the country to assist his ailing grandparents, utilized this

strategy: “I ended up getting a counselor. I see him every Thursday. He helps me a lot and gives me input on everything I tell him. It took me a long time to decide—four, five, six months when I got in too deep.” Likewise, a sophomore Hispanic male majoring in finance sought the assistance of a special minority counselor. He explained, “I had a freshman year guidance counselor for minorities, and I met with her every other week. She is the only one I went to see. I met her through the Office of Minority Students. Her office was in the dorm I live in.”

While some students turned to family or academic advisors for assistance, others with friends on campus frequently turned to them for support. A freshman African American male liberal arts major stated, “I’m lucky. I have a couple of friends here.” A sophomore Hispanic male majoring in finance reported, “The first weekend was boring, and I wanted to go back home... Luckily, a bunch of people from my high school came here, so we had a core group.” A freshman African American female engineering major relayed a different, yet interesting scenario:

My best friend was coming here in engineering, and it was like we were going to finish college together and start our own business.... She ended up hating this school and transferred after the first semester. I didn’t know anybody because it was just her and me [*sic*]. Making friends after she left was easier. We almost got sick of each other, so everything worked out for the better. I got a new roommate who was totally different.

Interestingly, a freshman Hispanic/Latino political science major reported, “I am still in touch with another student from College Summit. We have a class together.” A sophomore Hispanic/Latino finance major joined a fraternity to establish new peer

relationships and “to live off campus.” He discussed the sense of community he felt by interacting with his fraternity brothers:

My fraternity did a lot of community service and played intramural sports. There are ten guys and ten pledges in the house, and through the orientation, I saw a guy I had gone to elementary school with and I met my girlfriend. It helped me get adjusted to everything.

All of the 15 participants in transition developed strategies and coping mechanisms that assisted them through the process. Most took direct action and/or sought information or assistance when they felt overwhelmed. Some depended mostly on family, some depended mostly on advisors, some depended mostly on friends, and some orchestrated a combination of all. Perhaps this willingness to take action is a reflection of their strong commitment to completing a college degree.

Student Commitment to College

Schlossberg (1995) asserts that along with ego development, outlook, and values, commitment to a specific goal influences a student’s success in achieving that goal. If student commitment to finishing a college degree is any indication of the success of the College Summit Program, then the program is definitely doing something right. When students were asked about their commitment to obtaining a college degree (on a scale of one to three, three being most committed), all of the participants answered three, very committed. A freshman African American female pre-physical therapy major most succinctly expressed the sentiments of all the others: “I’m not leaving until I’m finished. I’m going to stick to it!”

Equally encouraging was the fact that 12 of the 15 respondents reported that they were very committed to completing their degree at Central University, two were somewhat committed, and only one was unsure. Some students were transferring due to circumstances beyond their control. For example, a freshman Hispanic male majoring in political science was moving out of the country to assist his parents in caring for his grandparents. Indicative of the need for more career awareness and the nature of college freshmen, only seven of the students were very committed to their current major, two were somewhat committed, and six were unsure. A freshman African American female sociology major, admitted, “I wish I would have done more research. I’ve already changed my major from political science to sociology.”

All of the participants in this study were experiencing a major life transition. According to Schlossberg (1995), perception plays a significant role throughout a person’s movement in, through, and out of a transitional event. Although each individual student exhibited unique coping strategies, all 15 found a way to navigate the stress of their transitions from high school to college and perceived the experience as a positive, life-changing event.

Conclusion

The beautiful Central University campus provided the perfect setting for meeting with students to learn about their individual transitions from high school to college. Even when being videotaped, all of the study participants were cordial, open, and excited about sharing their insights. Rapport between the researcher and the participants was established easily and maintained throughout all of the 15 interviews. A great deal of

pertinent information was gleaned from the interaction between the researcher and each of the students involved in the study.

All the students had made the decision to attend college by their junior years in high school, the fall before their attendance at the College Summit Workshop. The most common influence for college attendance was either an immediate family member or a high school English teacher, and every student reported that the College Summit Program had been a positive, helpful experience in his/her transition to college. Most helpful, students claimed, were the completion of the personal statement and the visitation in the college dormitory. Although they agreed that the program was helpful, students gave insightful suggestions for improvement, such as extending the program to include more follow up, extending the campus visitation from three days to a week, acclimating students to the college scheduling system, and incorporating career exploration into the workshop agenda. The enthusiasm with which the students reminisced about their College Summit Program was testament to the fact that the experience had been a powerful one for these 15 students.

Although all of the students had made a successful transition from high school to college, the change was not made devoid of stress. Because all of the students came from high schools within two to four hours of Central University, it was surprising to learn that almost all of them still experienced homesickness. This is proof that regardless of geographical closeness to home, the psychological move from home to college life is a challenging one.

It is obvious, therefore, that incoming freshmen cannot completely avoid the stress associated with the transition from high school to college. They can, however, get

assistance and support from the people around them. Most students in this study depended upon the support of friends and family to help them adjust. Especially assertive students, however, contacted their academic advisors or sought private counseling. Interestingly, only one student felt comfortable meeting with her college professor. Perhaps teaching students how to make and maintain contact with their professors would be another valuable addition to a motivational/compensatory program. This could conceivably further enhance students' abilities to utilize helpful strategies and garner the support of others to cope with the stressful situation in which they are placed.

Even with such support, it takes a special combination of personal characteristics, including a determined personality and the ability to seek help, to make the transition from high school to college a successful one. Many students make the transition; many do not. A sophomore Asian male psychology major eloquently distinguished between the two divergent personalities of college freshmen:

You could probably define the two personalities: it's either *breaking in or breaking out*. When you move in, you have all this time to yourself, and you have to decide if you're just going to stare at the walls, or if you're going to interact. I chose to interact.

Obviously, the other 14 College Summit alumni, armed with their positive experiences from College Summit and a myriad of coping strategies and support systems, chose to "break in," interact, and succeed as well. Their personal stories can be a guide to others who are trying to understand the transition process and design programs that increase the likelihood that students will "break in" and not "out."

CHAPTER 5

Student Transition at Tidewater Community College

Introduction

In order to conceptualize student transition at Tidewater Community College and the possible impact of participation in an academic alliance program on that transition, the researcher spent four days on the campus of Tidewater Community College (TCC). During this on-campus visit, the researcher conducted 45-minute face-to-face interviews with 12 students, six males and six females, who were alumni of the Writing Coalition Program. These videotaped interviews took place in a classroom on campus. Participants' involvement with the Writing Coalition Program had occurred in their English classes during their senior year of high school. Unlike the College Summit Program, a motivational/compensatory program that involved low-income, academically mid-tier students, The Writing Coalition Program included all senior English students from the participating high schools—regardless of socioeconomic status.

The following narrative sections of Chapter 5 address the specific research questions noted: *Components of the College Summit Program*, Research Question 1; *Student Perceptions of the College Summit Program*, Research Questions 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d; *The College Decision: Influences of Family/High School Personnel/Others*, Research Question 3; *Student Perceptions of Their Transition to College*, Research Questions 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d; and *Student Commitment to College*, Research Question 5. A narrative detailing students' individual paths to college most plausibly begins with a description of the participants and a discussion of their initial decisions to attend college.

Participants

Participants in this case study were all Writing Coalition alumni currently enrolled at Tidewater Community College, a school located just outside their hometown. Because there are no dormitories at Tidewater Community College, all 12 of the participants lived off-campus, all resided with one or more of their parents, all had attended local public high schools, and all lived within one hour of the Tidewater Community College campus.

Of the 12 face-to-face interview participants, seven were freshmen, and five were sophomores. Nine students had attended Tidewater Community College immediately after graduation from high school, one student had delayed college enrollment for one semester, one student had delayed college enrollment for one year, and one student had entered Tidewater as a transfer student. The majority of the interviewees, eight students, were White. Two were African American, one was Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and one identified himself as “Multiethnic.” Although there was minimal diversity in race, there was some diversity in age and college major. Six students were nineteen years old, two were eighteen years old, two were twenty-two years old, one was twenty years old, and one was twenty-one years old.

The interviewees also represented a wide variety of college majors. Three participants were science majors, two were general studies majors, two were business administration majors, and one of each of the remaining five students represented the following college majors: computer drafting, fashion merchandising, graphic design, journalism, and computer science.

Each of the 12 students readily agreed to being videotaped while completing the semi-structured interviews. Despite this intrusion, all of the participants were candid, friendly, and cooperative. The following table serves as a visual representation of the demographic characteristics of the 12 study participants.

Table 4 *Case Study Two Demographic Information*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Class Rank</i>	<i>Residence</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>College Entry</i>
One	male	19	multi-ethnic	fresh	home	general studies	immed after hs
Two	female	18	White	fresh	home	science	immed after hs
Three	male	19	Native Hawaiian	soph	home	business admin.	immed after hs
Four	female	21	White	soph	home	science	after 1 year
Five	male	22	African American	soph	home	computer drafting	after 1 semester
Six	female	19	White	fresh	home	fashion mdsg.	immed after hs
Seven	male	19	White	fresh	home	general studies	immed after hs
Eight	male	19	Asian	fresh	home	science	immed after hs
Nine	female	22	White	soph	home	graphic design	transfer student
Ten	female	18	White	fresh	home	journalism	immed after hs
Eleven	female	19	White	fresh	home	business admin.	immed after hs
Twelve	male	20	African American	soph	home	computer science	immed after hs

Although at somewhat different times, 11 of these 12 students had begun their postsecondary journeys at Tidewater Community College. Only one had enrolled as a transfer student. How did these 12 students determine that a higher education was their ticket to a better future? Why had they selected Tidewater Community College in their home community as the place to continue their education? Had they simply decided that

they did not want to leave home? What other decisions had they made throughout their lives that led them all to the same place?

Table 5 *Case Study Two Results at a Glance*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Influences</i>	<i>CS Helpful</i>	<i>Program Ideas</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Commitment</i>
One	father's death	writing	FAFSA time mgmt	other friends' mistakes	classmates teachers grants	very committed
Two	Mom	portfolio confidence	mentors forms careers	gave up e/c activities	father	very committed
Three	parents sisters	writing style confidence	time mgmt syllabus awareness	pushed self talked to other students	other students	very committed
Four	parents athletic training fiancé	application confidence	the system interaction FAFSA	did research	fiancé	very committed
Five	self	confidence	FAFSA forms job info.	went to 2 yr. 1 st	mother	somewhat committed
Six	parents	comfortable w/English	college scheduling the system	stayed at home	sister & her boyfriend	very committed
Seven	parents	improved writing	career counselor college visits portfolio	met people went to 2 yr. 1 st	advisor	very committed
Eight	self	confidence	mock assignments	struggling students	family	very committed
Nine	career interest	writing process	jobs/careers students who struggled	gave up e/c activities took psych. class	mother disabilities counselor	very committed
Ten	parents	writing confidence	college visits more interaction	talked to friends, advisor 2 yr. 1 st	academic advisor friends	very committed
Eleven	siblings	confidence	time mgmt forms	saw counselor	N/A	very committed
Twelve	parents friends	improved writing	scheduling	took orient. class	family	very committed

The College Decision

Of the eight participants who had enrolled in and begun college immediately after high school, three reported that they had always known they would someday become college students. A freshman Asian male majoring in science stated, “I came to college right out of high school. That was always the plan. I just wanted to go to college and do whatever.” A freshman White female majoring in journalism agreed, “I came right after high school, and I always knew I would be coming.” Finally, a freshman White male majoring in general studies echoed, “I always knew I would come. I was just not sure where I would start out.”

In a similar manner, two additional students had decided to attend college at a very young age. A sophomore Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander male majoring in business administration offered, “I first considered it [going to college] when I was young. I just wanted to experience it and decide what I want to do.” A freshman White female majoring in fashion merchandising concurred, “I knew I would go to college since I was little—it was never really an option.”

Although five students had made the decision to attend college quite early in their lives, three others did not decide until they were high school students. A sophomore Black male majoring in computer drafting indicated, “I didn’t exactly come to college right after high school. I took the first semester off after graduation. I first considered college around my junior year, and I was juggling between [Tidewater] and the military.” A sophomore White female majoring in graphic design explained the timing of her decision: “I first considered college when I was a senior in high school. I was interested in learning about graphic design, and unfortunately, I didn’t have any knowledge about

graphic design.” Finally, a freshman White female majoring in business administration stated simply, “I decided to come to college when I was in high school.”

Interestingly, three other students who had enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation admitted that they had actually wanted to delay their college careers. A freshman White female majoring in science discussed the deal that she had made with her mother:

I came to college right out of high school, but I didn’t want to go right away. I wanted to wait, but my mom told me if I went these two years and did well, she would pay for it, and then I could go to a four-year school.

In contrast, a sophomore White male majoring in computer science had decided on his own, after some contemplation, to enroll in college right away: “I considered starting college after high school was over, but I also thought of taking a break. Instead, I went for it.”

One final student, a freshman Multiethnic male majoring in general studies, did not decide to attend college until a year after his high school graduation, stating, “I took a year off after high school before starting college....My mindset was that I wasn’t ready to think about college.”

All but two of the 12 participants from Tidewater Community College had resolved to attend college by the time they were high school students. The two remaining participants had made the decision after high school graduation, one immediately after and one a year later. Nevertheless, all 12 participants—influenced by family, friends, guidance counselors, or unique situations—had eventually enrolled in Tidewater Community College.

Influence of Family Members

Unequivocally, immediate family members were the most frequently cited positive influences on a student's decision to enroll in college. Ten of the 12 Tidewater interviewees credited family members with encouraging them to attend college. Of those ten, six cited both parents, two cited one or more siblings, and two cited mothers as having encouraged them the most. For example, a sophomore White female majoring in science explained the influence of her parents: "My parents wanted me to go to college because I was the smart one. My brothers went into the military, and I would go to college." Similarly, a freshman White male general studies major stated, "Mostly my parents influenced me." A freshman White female majoring in journalism echoed, "My parents influenced me to go to college." A freshman White female majoring in business administration offered a unique explanation concerning her desire to attend college: "My siblings didn't really start school after high school, and I saw where it got them, so I wanted to go right away." Finally, a freshman White female majoring in science noted, "My mom mainly influenced me to go to college."

Influence of High School Personnel

In addition to her mother, the freshman White female science major identified a high school guidance counselor as having influenced her to pursue a college career after high school graduation. She was the only student of the 12 interviewed to mention the influence of a high school guidance counselor:

My guidance counselor in high school influenced me because I told her I wanted to work with animals, and she would give me stuff about animals. One time she sent me this paper in my government class about pet therapy—actually counseling

pets. I would love to work with animals but with biology and all that, people tell me that you have to cut animals up and stuff, so next semester I'm leaning toward physics.

Influence of Others

A few students mentioned a particular high school teacher or counselor; others similarly alluded to a particular major or course of interest that influenced them to attend college. A sophomore White female graphic design major noted, "I was just interested in graphic design because I love to draw, and my main passion is art. When I looked in the paper, I saw a lot of job opportunities. I am taking an internship now." A freshman White female journalism major also mentioned her interests: "At first I came to college because I was interested in photography, and then I was interested in photojournalism....I looked into an art institute, but it was too expensive."

In contrast to these students' interests in a particular field of study, one student, a freshman Multiethnic male majoring in general studies, discussed the unique life experiences that had prompted his decision to enroll in college:

I started thinking about college this past year when my father passed away. That kind of woke me up to the real world. In high school, I was in vo-tech, and after high school, I was working in a technical program and doing bodywork. I was thinking that I would do that my whole life. Now I don't want to. Now I'm in general studies, but I'm thinking about physical education or communications. I've been thinking about becoming a phys ed teacher or working on the radio because I like music and I like working with kids.

The Journey from High School to College

In addition to their desire for a particular career field, several students identified The Writing Coalition as having encouraged them to make the transition from high school to college. Because their participation in this program occurred during their senior year in high school, it is important to highlight the specific components of the Writing Coalition before revealing the students' perception of its effect on each of them.

The Writing Coalition Program

The FIPSE Writing Coalition to Align Writing Instruction in Secondary and Postsecondary Institutions is a collaborative academic alliance described as follows:

Responding to reports revealing that high school students are graduating with deficient writing skills and colleges are expanding remediation programs for composition, Tidewater Community College and [local] high school English teachers designed this model to align twelfth-grade writing instruction with requirements for satisfactory placement in college freshman composition. The model includes pre- and post-placement testing, professional development for high school and college educators, exploration of innovative instructional strategies, portfolio assessment, a high school writing center, and ongoing collaboration [between institutions]. (FIPSE Grant Database, 2000)

Greenberg (1992, ¶3) defines an academic alliance as a “teacher-to-teacher partnership through which high school and college faculty jointly discuss a variety of subject areas and concerns.” In this particular case, high school and college English teachers share the common goal of improving student performance in the area of English composition. Van Patten and Dennison (1987, ¶4) maintain, “While [academic alliances

may be] the most difficult to establish and maintain, agreements which improve curricular coordination are among the most important for ensuring continuity in learning.” The Writing Coalition has attempted to ensure such continuity since its inception in 1998.

History of the Program

As stated in the literature review, academic alliances often begin as the result of a single faculty member or small group of faculty. Such was the case for this program when in 1997 a small group of high school English teachers questioned the English placement tool used by Tidewater Community College to place students in freshman English or remedial/developmental composition courses. As a result of their inquiry, TCC charged a team of its English faculty, under the leadership of Associate Professor Christine Jennings, with “researching student readiness, writing assessment, and composition pedagogy” (2001, p. 2).

Soon after, a survey was administered to local high school English teachers and high school senior English students. The surveys yielded the following information: few high school teachers had specific training in composition pedagogy, few had opportunities to gain professional development concerning this issue, and the majority of high school students reacted negatively/were uncomfortable when asked to complete a writing assignment while in English class (Jennings, 2001, p. 2).

Along with the results of the survey, the TCC task force reviewed the current literature related to graduating high school students’ skill deficits and the subsequent increase in enrollment in developmental education programs. They learned that multiple means of assessment to determine placement, specifically portfolios, were preferable to a

single means of assessment. At that point, both high school and college English faculty realized that neither had an understanding of the other's specific curriculum or writing standards. Thus, the college encouraged and supported an application to the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to support a collaborative problem-solving effort between TCC and local public high schools. The three initial goals of the project were as follows:

- Develop and disseminate a model for staff development in writing instruction.
- Improve student writing and increase the number of students competent to take college composition.
- Validate a multiple measures writing placement procedure.

(FIPSE Grant Database, 2000)

Since that time, four campuses of TCC and 12 area high schools have collaborated to develop and implement innovative approaches to the teaching and evaluation of composition, disseminate information to other interested secondary and postsecondary institutions, and serve as a model program to be duplicated at various sites across the United States.

Goals/Objectives of the Writing Coalition

Although the program initially identified the three previous goals, over the past several years, the Writing Coalition has expanded the project to include the following five goals/objectives:

- Promote partnerships to improve communication between secondary and postsecondary institutions to increase student learning opportunities.

- Provide opportunities for high school and college English faculties to collaborate in professional development workshops to design and implement innovative instructional strategies.
- Develop alignment between secondary and postsecondary institutions through a deliberate articulation of composition related curriculum and instruction to improve student skills in writing.
- Reduce the number of high school graduates needing developmental writing prior to enrolling in college composition classes.
- Implement successful reform initiatives through a transfer of knowledge and strategies to a variety of adapting sites to improve quality and accessibility to postsecondary education for diverse student populations.

(Tidewater Community College FIPSE Writing Coalition, n.d.)

Selection of Writing Coalition Participants

All senior English students from the selected high schools participate in The Writing Coalition as part of the course requirements for their senior English classes. The initial year of the project involved 200 senior English students from one public high school in the immediate Tidewater Community College area. It has since expanded to include 12 local public high schools and over 2000 senior high school English students.

Components of the Writing Coalition

Alignment of Writing Expectations

In an attempt to align writing expectations between secondary and postsecondary institutions, both college and high school faculty and English students are surveyed to determine their instructional and curricular needs and opinions. Results are shared

among survey participants in an effort to improve the alignment of writing expectations from secondary to postsecondary education. As a result, discussions occur at the weekly roundtable meetings.

Cooperative Workshops/Faculty Training

As a result of the surveys, various workshops concerning specific writing issues are scheduled for high school and college English faculty. Often, nationally known experts in the field of composition pedagogy serve as keynote speakers. Previous workshop topics have included the following: Understanding the Standards of Learning Development of Writing Instruction, Engaging Student Interest in Writing, Teaching and Learning Through Letters, Peer Collaboration in Writing, Evaluating Writing and Portfolio Assessment, The Teacher Model for Collaboration and Innovation, and Using Portfolios for Evaluation and Assessment (Jennings, 2001, p. 9).

Weekly Faculty Roundtable Discussions

In addition to the periodic workshops, regular weekly roundtable discussions with college site leaders and high school English teachers are conducted. During these discussions, the faculty writing teams review collaborative writing assignments and compare secondary and postsecondary curricula, syllabi, and course guides. In addition, faculty teams develop common calendars to support cooperative activities such as the high school/college student letter writing exchanges.

High School/College Student Letter Exchanges

In an effort to link secondary and postsecondary English composition students, selected TCC faculty teaching the introductory English course agree to include in their classes an exchange of letters with 10 classes of high school senior English teachers from

the FIPSE writing project. TCC and high school instructors receive a schedule to monitor the activity as a one-on-one exchange with two letters required per student. “What I wish I had known before I came to college” is the topic of the first letter from TCC students. High school students respond addressing, “What can I do now to prepare for college writing?” The second letter from TCC students includes advice about writing for college, especially what they have learned in freshman composition. The high school students respond by sending “thank you” letters to the TCC students, during which they express gratitude for the advice and relate how they will follow up on suggestions they have received. Photocopies of all student correspondence are made by the FIPSE director and copies are shared with both high school and college faculty involved in the process.

High School Writing Centers

The establishment of college-sponsored high school writing centers represents another attempt to better align secondary and postsecondary writing instruction and expectations as well as reduce the number of college students needing developmental English courses. As a component of the initial FIPSE grant, a writing center was established at the participating high school in 1998. The High School Writing Center Handbook developed by the Writing Coalition faculty identifies the following mission:

The Writing Center was created as a place for students to receive one-on-one help from a teacher and/or writing consultants. In this low-risk, collaborative environment, students learned to focus on their strengths and weaknesses and to recognize writing as a process.

Four teachers involved in the grant, additional teacher volunteers from the English Department, and student consultant volunteers from dual enrollment and advanced

placement English classes staff the writing centers. One teacher is designated as the Writing Center Director. High school students may visit the Writing Center during posted hours of operation or visit with their classes when scheduled by their teachers. Student volunteers assist with administrative duties; only teachers provide individual tutoring for students.

Portfolio Assessment

Of primary concern to the original project members of the Writing Coalition was the use of a single indicator of student readiness for college work. Responding to national trends and research supporting the use of multiple measures and authentic writing assessment (rather than standardized multiple choice examinations) for determining placement, the Writing Coalition established portfolio assessment for college English placement of students in the initial participating high school. Teachers from both the local high school and TCC were trained “to develop rubrics, identify anchor papers, and read portfolios for college placement (Jennings, 2001, p. 5). Educators from the high school and community college agreed on the contents of the student portfolio, and results of this innovative type of placement were monitored using pre and post-tests for study and control groups of students.

Pre/Post-Test Research

Research has been conducted during each year of the project in which the initial college English placement of a control group of students placed according to the traditional standardized test/writing sample procedure is compared to the initial college English placement of students placed according to the multiple measures/portfolio procedure. In addition, a locus of control instrument is administered at the beginning and

end of each year of the project to determine how participation in the Writing Coalition project affects student perceptions of internal versus external control of their academic environment. In this case, the control group consists of high school English students who did not participate in the FIPSE program and a study group of those who did. Results of these studies will be discussed in the *Evaluation of the Writing Coalition* section that follows.

Dissemination of Best Practices

A final component of the Writing Coalition is the dissemination of information to other interested sites across the nation. The coalition accomplishes this task in a variety of ways: by demonstrating and publicizing model strategies at the original high school site; by maintaining an agenda, list of participants, and evaluation for the annual workshops at TCC and the local high school; by surveying high school student writing consultants, writing center teachers, and student visitors; by composing regular progress reports from each dissemination site; by maintaining an annual report devised by the project director, and by completing four presentations or publications each year to national audiences (executed by the project director and high school site leader) (Jennings, 2001, p. 23).

Evaluation of the Writing Coalition

Performance data from the first year of the project indicated that the projected placement of students into freshman level English based on pre-test scores was 41.25 % while data based on post-test scores (after student participation in the project) revealed that 60 % of students were eligible for placement into freshman level English (FIPSE

Grant Database, 2000). This increase in competency indicated that students experienced a gain in writing proficiency as a result of their participation in the project.

Similarly, the most recent results revealed in the 2001 FIPSE Grant Summary of the Writing Coalition (Jennings, 2001, p. 11) verified that participation in the Writing Coalition had a positive impact on both initial college English student placement and student perception of their sense of control of their learning. The original study compared the initial college English placement of a control group (students placed by standardized test/single writing sample) to those of the study group (students placed by multiple measures/portfolio). The results for the control group were as follows: 54.4% placed into freshman level English composition, 28.8% placed into the upper level developmental English course, and 16.8% placed into the lower level developmental English course. In contrast, the results for the multiple measures group were as follows: 75.20% placed into freshman level English composition, 24.8% placed into the upper level developmental English course, and 0% placed into the lower level developmental English course. These results suggest that a more authentic writing assessment provides students with the opportunity to more accurately demonstrate their writing abilities.

Equally encouraging were the results of the internal/external locus of control instrument which revealed that “the study group [students who had participated in the project] had an average gain in internal control of 59.3 points over the year as opposed to the control group’s [students who had not participated in the project] loss of 11.7 points” (Jennings, 2001, p. 11).

FIPSE’s continued funding of the Writing Coalition is an endorsement of the project’s success. The original grant funded the project from 1998-2001, and a

subsequent grant was awarded to fund the project from 2001-2004. To ascertain students' perceptions of their experience and the impact it may have had on their transition to college, the researcher posed questions concerning student preparation for their freshman year at Tidewater Community College.

The Freshman Year at Tidewater Community College

General College Information

Tidewater Community College (TCC) is classified as an associate's college (Carnegie Foundation, 2000). It is located in a suburban area outside of Virginia Beach, Virginia. Information gleaned from the college website yielded the following additional information: TCC is the second largest of the community colleges in its state and enrolls more than 34,000 students annually. In 2001-2002, Tidewater provided college credit, training, and education for 33,196 local residents. The average age of TCC students was 29 years old; almost half (46%) resided in the immediate area. In fall 2001, 33% of the students enrolled full-time, and 67% enrolled part-time in fall 2001 in the following programs: 52% enrolled in college transfer programs, 30% enrolled in occupational/technical programs, and 18% were not enrolled in a specific program. Of the spring 2002 student body, 41.24% were male and 58.76% were female; 58.48% were Caucasian, 29.94% were African-American, and 11.58% were classified as other (Tidewater Community College Office of Institutional Research, Enrollment Summary: Fall Semester 2002 section, 2002).

According to the *Tidewater Community College Fact Book* (Programs and Degrees section, 2002), Tidewater Community College has seven nationally accredited programs including Diagnostic Medical Sonography, Dietetic Technician, Health

Information Technology, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Radiologic Technology, and Respiratory Therapy. TCC 's website clarifies its degree programs:

The Associate in Arts (A.A.) and the Associate in Science (A.S) degrees prepare students for transfer to a four-year college or university; the Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S) degree, the Diploma, and the Certificates are designed to provide specific programmatic coursework that prepares students for the workplace or that provides new skills for career advancement.

Student Perceptions of the Writing Coalition

Most Helpful Components

Nine of the 12 study participants alluded to or specifically described how their participation in the Writing Coalition academic alliance had either boosted their confidence, familiarized them with the demands of college level coursework, improved their writing skills, or affected them in more than one of these areas.

Five students, for example, explained how the FIPSE-funded program had acclimated them to college level coursework. A freshman White female fashion merchandising major contended, "The program made it easier because when I got here, I knew what to expect and I didn't have to take the remedial English classes." Similarly, a freshman White male general studies major remarked, "FIPSE prepared me a little by teaching me how to write at a college level." A freshman Asian male science major concurred, "The program showed me what they would want in a college English course." "It [the program] helped me to adapt to the college English class," similarly stated a freshman White female journalism major. Finally, a freshman White female business

administration major noted, “The FIPSE program helped me understand the differences between high school and college.”

Just as these students felt that the program had increased their understanding of college English coursework, three students felt that the program had boosted their confidence. A freshman White female science major explained her feelings:

The program gave me more confidence that I could write because I scored like a four, but I still didn’t want to go [to college]. The visit helped me know the campus because they had a person here show us around.

Likewise, a sophomore African American male computer drafting major explained, “When I took the program, I placed right into English 101, so that gave me confidence.”

One student, a sophomore White female science major, described the program in great detail:

We filled out an application to [TCC], which was nice. That got us in, and then you [*sic*] got the results back from the placement test, and that showed you your results from the computer test, and then you got to take the written test another day. Then we did the portfolio. If you placed into 111, you were okay, but if you placed in 03 or 05, you got to work on your skills the whole year and then retake the test. . . . When I sent my portfolio, I knew how to structure the essays, and I placed into 111. It was great!

Finally, a sophomore White female science major expressed her gratitude to the Writing Coalition Program: “I already had the [TCC] application in, and I was placed into regular freshman English, so when I got here, all I had to do was take my math placement and sign up for classes. This made it pretty comfortable.”

Suggested Program Components/Improvements

When asked to offer suggestions for a college preparatory program, several students made recommendations that would apply specifically to academic alliances focused on writing skills. For example, a freshman Multiethnic male general studies major offered the following insight:

I see a lot of people who don't even know how to write essay papers, and in college, you have to do that. I would try to help motivate the kids to not procrastinate and help them understand that writing is not that difficult.

Four additional students—a freshman White male general studies major, a freshman White female journalism major, a sophomore Black male computer drafting major, and a freshman White male general studies major—stated simply, “I would keep the writing portfolio.” A freshman White female business administration major elaborated, “I would keep the writing portfolio *and* the placement test.”

A sophomore White female graphic design major added, “I feel that the writing program was good for understanding introductory English, but it really depended on how much the student was willing to work. The placement test didn't really tell me what I was doing wrong or right.”

Two students argued that the Writing Coalition Program should be replicated in the content area of math. A sophomore Black male computer drafting major proposed, “I would do a similar program with the math. With that type of program, coming over to college might mean placing right into the freshman math.” A freshman White female journalism major agreed, “Maybe a similar math program would be good.”

Several other students shared their insights about devising a collaborative program even more comprehensive than the academic alliance in which they participated. The most common suggestion offered for such a program was the inclusion of assistance with completing forms and meeting deadlines, particularly those related to the FAFSA. Eleven of the 12 students interviewed believed that this type of assistance would have made their transition to college easier. A sophomore White female science major noted, “I would have help with the application process....Help with the FAFSA form would be good too.” A freshman White female journalism major added, “A program should include more awareness about deadlines, like the FAFSA and applications. I found this out at The Writing Center. If you didn’t go there, you wouldn’t have known.” A freshman White female business administration major echoed this advice, “There should be more awareness of deadlines—applications, the FAFSA, etc.” Finally, a sophomore White female graphic design major explained the importance of involving parents in the collaborative program:

A representative from TCC introduced us to all the forms. It was worthwhile, but they also need to have the parents involved because they know the financial information—well, not all do. There should be a class for parents to make them aware. Students could take home a letter about what to do if their child is going to college. This should be in the junior year. Then send a reminder letter the senior year.

While this student mentioned the necessity for involving the parents, eight participants in the study insisted that a collaborative program should involve more interaction between high school students and college students and/or faculty. A freshman

White female business administration major stated simply, “I would have college kids try to tell high school kids what they think about the college experience.” A freshman White female journalism major elaborated, “I think more interaction between students and the professors would be good. We did get to see them at the writing center, but there should be more interaction with college students too.” Agreeing with these recommendations, a sophomore White female science major offered the following:

I think I would do a lot more interaction between college and high school faculty and students, like working your way around the college. It’s tough because when you’re young, you don’t care what teachers say. I looked back and said, “Why didn’t I care?”

Just as these students recommended increased high school and college interaction, they had definite opinions about the kind of college students who should provide advice to high school students. A freshman White female fashion merchandising major stated, “The best people to give advice would be the college students to come back [to the high school] to tell them—a mixture of kids who did the right things and those who messed up.” A sophomore Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander male business administration major concurred, “I think college students would be best [to talk to high school students]. It should be a combination of students who did well and those who had a few problems along the way.”

Two other participants believed that students who had experienced problems adjusting to college would have a more profound impact on high school students. A freshman Multiethnic male general studies major argued, “I think it would be better to have the kids who messed up and got out of it, so students could relate a little better to

them.” Likewise, a sophomore White female graphic design major offered the following advice:

Representatives from each college could go to the high schools during lunch.

Both students and faculty could visit to hear both sides of the story. I would want both successful college students and those who struggled (been there, done that).

Otherwise you feel like an outcast. There are very few students who get it right the first time. The ones who experienced the struggles are better able to communicate with the high school students.

This student also advised that a collaborative program should include information about jobs and career exploration. “I wish I had known more about the kinds of jobs employers are hiring for the different types of degrees and whether or not these degrees would be good for getting a job.” Four other students made similar recommendations. A freshman White female fashion merchandising major, for example, explained, “I have friends who have gone to years of school and got[ten] degrees and then hate[d] what they do, so they are now waitressing. Don’t rush into choosing a major the freshman year.”

A freshman White male general studies major similarly revealed, “I wish I had more career awareness. I would have a career counselor come to the high school and visit during senior year.” “I would make up a program with how to get a job out of school if you decided not to go to college. Show students their options and the kind of jobs they could get,” continued a sophomore Black male computer drafting major. A freshman Multiethnic male general studies major added, “I see a lot of people today in school who are just doing so many outlandish things about what they want to be. I believe that anyone can be what they want to be, but sometimes they’re not realistic.”

In addition to these insights, three students alluded to the need for time management and scheduling skills. When asked about program components to ease student transition to college, a sophomore Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander male business administration major offered the most detailed advice: “Time management—I think time management is the most important thing, like how to study. The syllabus and reading ahead of time is good. Staying ahead is good. A program should teach strategies for how to stay ahead.”

This student, along with two others, also mentioned the need for student awareness of the various processes involved in college. “Students should build a college schedule and have an awareness of the process. There are more choices here than in high school,” she stated. A sophomore White female science major concurred, “There is a system here. It’s hard to figure it all out between counselors. Sometimes they tell you stuff, and it’s not right. You need familiarity with the system.” This student went on to say, “Maybe special programs should be in the freshman year like character building, teaching motivation, and time management. The intro to college class here is a joke. It would be better for other college students to give you the real story.” A freshman White female science major seemed to agree: “I think I would pair the freshman students with a college student and have them go around and show what it’s all about.”

A freshman Asian male science major was the only student to mention the need for high school students to become acclimated with the demands of college coursework. “A program should tell the requirements for college—have mock college assignments. AP courses seemed really hard while in high school, but then when you got here, the work seemed easier because you were used to it.” A freshman White female science

major offered a different viewpoint: “Some people just go through it easier than others. You know, it all depends on how well you do in school and the type of person you are. You can’t put that in a program.” A Multiethnic male general studies major also acknowledged, “You hear a lot out of people’s mouths, but you just don’t get it until you are here.” Obviously, this student, along with the other 11 interviewed by the researcher, perceived the journey from high school to college as one that is anything but easy.

Student Perceptions of Their Transition to College

Situation

Although all of the 12 students had participated in The Writing Coalition while seniors in high school, were currently enrolled freshman and sophomores at Tidewater Community College, and lived off campus while attending community college courses, their perceptions about the factors affecting their individual transitions were varied. Despite the fact that all students were attending college in their hometowns, they were still forced to deal with new experiences. One in particular, a freshman Multiethnic male general studies major, had enrolled in college in the wake of the death of his father. He had used this tragic life experience as a motivating factor in his desire to better his life. While no other student in the study was coping with such a tragedy, all were enrolled in college to better their lives and were therefore subjected to various levels of stress. Their ability or inability to handle this stress was a function of their individual combination of attributes, psychological resources, and coping skills that, according to Schlossberg (1995), constitute the *self*.

Self

Regardless of their individual attributes, all interviewees were in some way struggling to adapt to college life. Although the stressors identified were various, all involved students' feeling unprepared. The most common issues identified by students were adapting to college level coursework, meeting new friends, and adjusting to the responsibility inherent in being a successful college student. Six students mentioned their difficulty in adjusting to the demands of college level coursework. A sophomore White female science major, for instance, revealed, "I mostly had fun in high school. It completely changed in college. It took me a semester to figure out I had to study hard. Nothing was stressful in high school." A freshman White male general studies major concurred, "I had no idea how the coursework was going to be—how hard." A sophomore White male computer science major felt similarly: "The coursework is hard. Even math hurts a lot, but I try." "I wasn't prepared for math at all, but I was very prepared for English," added a freshman White female journalism major. Admitting that he wished he had been "more studious" in high school, a freshman Asian male science major described his initial college experience:

I was prepared for English but not for the science classes. I thought I was pretty good in school, so I took two labs. The first day was introduction, and the second day we jumped right in. I was lost.

Still other students felt unprepared for history coursework. A sophomore White female graphic design major, for instance, remarked, "I have always had trouble with any kind of detailed information, so I try to associate information and memorize....I was working my hind off, and all the other classes were suffering."

Just as these students felt stressed about particular content areas, other students struggled with college instructors' teaching styles. "Sometimes I notice that teachers throw things on us at the last minute without much guidance, acknowledged a freshman White female business administration major. A freshman White female fashion merchandising major similarly expressed her frustration:

Some of the classes seemed like the work was stupid. In order to be in English 111, I had to take a study skills class, and I did more work in that class than in any other class—denotations and connotations, and bibliographies. This project the teacher decided to take out for the next semester because we had so much trouble with it. We said, "What about us?" There was confusion.

Second only to adapting to coursework as the most frequently cited stressor, adjusting to the responsibility involved in being a college student was mentioned by four different students. "I had trouble being self-disciplined and going to class. I just had to push myself, especially about going to class," admitted a sophomore male Native Hawaiian business administration major. "I procrastinated in high school, and that worked well there, but sometimes it's hard here in college to prioritize," revealed a sophomore White female science major. A freshman Asian male science major described his stress:

The hard part was the workload. I wasn't used to it and all the independence you have. You read on your own. It's up to you if you want to do the work, to study, etc. Having to take responsibility for my learning was hard.

Finally, a sophomore African American male drafting major explained, "In high school things were demanding, but in college there is so much more responsibility."

Somewhat related and equally stressful, according to three of the students, was learning how to manage time effectively. A sophomore White male computer science major noted, “I tried to balance study time with my other times, but since I work and go to school at the same time, it’s hard to figure out when to do it and where to go for silent time.” A freshman White female business administration major agreed, stating, “Time management has been the most difficult.”

Three different students also revealed that making new friends and coping with feelings of alienation were taxing. A freshman White female fashion merchandising major described her experience:

It was weird. All my friends went away to school, but I have a twin sister and her [*sic*] and her boyfriend are here, but my boyfriend is still in high school. I was like the youngest one in all my classes. Some were getting divorces, and some had four kids.

A sophomore White female graphic design major commented, “My friends scattered. I didn’t have that many friends here.” “Well, all my friends moved, so I don’t see a lot of them here,” offered a freshman White female journalism major.

While three students cited the scattering of friends as an issue, only two students identified money management as a stressor in their transition to college. “I felt most unprepared about managing money like tuition, books, financial aid. I was always coming and going to get this or that,” indicated a sophomore African American male computer drafting major. A freshman White female science major added, “I knew I was going to come here, but all the money stuff was hard. I applied for money late because I didn’t really want to come, and I procrastinated.”

The 12 study participants identified a myriad of issues that had created stress for them as they made the transition from high school to college, but adapting to college English was not one of them. Apparently, the Writing Coalition had succeeded in its goal of preparing students for the academic field of English. Nevertheless, these 12 freshmen, like so many others, continued to struggle with other problems affecting their adaptation to college. Some adjusted immediately while others, like this sophomore White female science major, needed more time: “Figuring out how the whole college system works—that’s a toughy. It took me two semesters to figure out how the system works.” Fortunately, this student and the other 11 “figured it out” by developing the necessary coping strategies and/or enlisting the support of those around them to aid them in their transition.

Coping Strategies/Support

The 12 study participants utilized various strategies to get the support they needed to withstand the stressful situation in which they were placed. All of them had the fortitude to approach others and ask for help. The most common sources of support were college personnel (academic advisors, career counselors, or disabilities counselors), family members, and friends. It was clear to the researcher that these sources of support had been invaluable to the individual students.

Six different students identified college personnel as providing assistance during stressful circumstances. A freshman White female science major shared her experience:

Figuring out what to do was hard, but right now I’m supposed to get general stuff done; then when I go to the four-year school, I can figure out what I want to do

because I really don't know. At the beginning of the semester I saw my academic advisor.

Similarly, a freshman White male general studies major confided, "I talked to the career counselor here and asked her questions about classes, jobs, etc." A sophomore White female graphic design major explained, "Adjusting was not that difficult because I have a disabilities counselor here who has really been helpful for me in finding good instructors who would work with me." A freshman White female journalism major felt the same way about her academic advisor:

The guidance counselor [academic advisor] here at [TCC] helped me to get my schedule here. One of my friends told me this counselor was really good, so I made sure I got her....I have a good relationship with my academic advisor.

Just as these students enlisted the help of college personnel, three other participants specifically credited one or more family members as having served as systems of support in stressful times. Crediting her family with helping her develop good study habits, a freshman White female fashion merchandising major recognized, "It was good to be at home because my parents would check to see that I was doing my work." A sophomore African American male computer drafting major identified his mother as a source of support: "I had trouble managing money and time. My mom helped me with that." A sophomore White female graphic design major concurred, "Mom helped me. She had been to college so she knew what to do."

In addition to college personnel and family members, other students acknowledged that friends, classmates, and even a fiancé had assisted them with their transition. A sophomore White female science major noted, "I had to switch gears from

entertainment to college. My fiancé prompted me, ‘You need to get serious.’” In contrast to this direct advice, two students proactively garnered the help of friends and classmates. For example, a freshman White male general studies explained his strategy: “I didn’t know too many people in my classes. It was a totally different environment. It wasn’t like I walking around with my classmates, so I adapted by meeting people and making friends.” A freshman Multiethnic male general studies major developed two divergent strategies for getting the help he needed. First, he learned to ask for assistance: “It was hard to work and study, and I had to relearn how to study since I had been out of school for a while. I asked other classmates if I needed something, but I’ve been okay.” Secondly, he developed a rather unique way of relying on his fellow classmates for motivation:

I have a friend who is taking all prerequisite classes, and he is failing all of them. He says he wants to be a criminal justice major. I have another friend who is failing math, and I just use these situations to motivate me. I don’t want to be in that position. I think they can do well, but they just have to work hard.

Another proactive strategy utilized by two students was to enroll in specific courses to assist with their transition from high school to college coursework. Although she complained that the course was not that helpful overall, a freshman White female science major had enrolled in a student orientation course and hoped that the course content would help her in other classes. On the other hand, a sophomore White female graphic design major had enrolled in a psychology course to learn more about herself and her learning style. Her strategy seemed to be a success. “I took a psychology course, so I

could learn how to study....I used the knowledge that I got from psychology to learn how to associate information and memorize,” she stated proudly.

Fortunately, most of the students devised techniques for getting the proper assistance when they were struggling with stressful situations inherent in student adjustment to college. The majority of these strategies included some type of outside advice or assistance from others. One student, however, credited only herself as the reason for his successful adjustment. This sophomore White female science major declared, “I did Internet research to find the right answers [about careers and coursework], and then I would tell them [advisors] what I wanted to do. I took charge. It is a business—not just a college.”

Student Commitment to College

Although student commitment to college was not a goal of the Writing Coalition Program, student responses revealed otherwise. When asked how committed students were to completing a college degree on a scale of one to three (one denoted not sure, two denoted somewhat committed, and three denoted very committed), eleven of the 12 study participants indicated that they were very committed to completing a college degree. Only one student stated that he was only somewhat committed.

The level of commitment to completing a degree at Tidewater Community College, however, was less unified. Using the same three-point level of commitment scale, the researcher asked the students to report their desire to complete a degree at TCC. Only five students felt very committed to completing their degrees at TCC, six felt somewhat committed, and one student was not sure. These responses, however, may

have been skewed by the fact that many of the study participants intended to transfer to another institution after the first two years.

When asked about their level of commitment to the particular major in which they were currently enrolled, student responses almost mirrored those concerning commitment to a college degree in general. Nine of the 12 students reported that they were very committed to completing a degree program in their current field of study, and three reported that they were somewhat committed to their current major. Again, it is important to note that many of the students planned to transfer to four-year schools and therefore, in effect, change their majors.

Conclusion

Academic alliance programs such as The Writing Coalition are generally grassroots movements initiated by a few faculty members in the same discipline at either the high school level, college level, or both. The goals of such programs are as varied as their members. Nevertheless, the 12 students who devoted their time to this study provided valuable insight into their individual transitions to college and the effect that the academic alliance in which they were involved had on their adjustment. The original goal of the Writing Coalition to reduce the number of students requiring college developmental English courses by preparing them for college level English is obviously being met. Not one of the 12 students reported having felt unprepared for college English. This in itself is an endorsement of the program's success. Equally impressive are the results of the quantitative evaluations provided in the Writing Coalition documents provided by the FIPSE grant director and FIPSE's continued financial support of the project.

Overall, the students were quite satisfied with their experiences in The Writing Coalition. Many of them suggested that the program be replicated for other content areas, especially math. The most common suggestions provided by the participants actually pertained more to a comprehensive high school/postsecondary collaborative program than to an academic alliance. Clearly, the students longed for more interaction between high school and college students and personnel. They also alluded to their observation that if high school courses had been more challenging, their transition to college would have been much smoother. Of course, few high school students would ask their teachers to be more demanding. It is only later, once they reflect upon their prior academic history, that college students wish they had been forced (or forced themselves) to put forth more effort.

Eight students had entered TCC immediately upon high school graduation, one had entered a semester later, one had entered a year later, and one had entered as a transfer student. Nevertheless, many of their opinions and reflections were quite similar. An unexpected theme that emerged involved 11 of the 12 students' decisions to attend a two-year college before attending a four-year college. Although not a single interview question alluded to this question, seven of the 12 interviewees made a comment specifically related to this issue. Each had a somewhat unique reason for his/her opinion. A freshman Multiethnic male general studies made this observation:

I would advise a student to go to a community college first before he actually goes to a university. Basically, you're doing the same stuff trying to figure out what you want to be, and it costs so much more at university.

A freshman White female journalism major similarly stated, “I’m glad I came here to a two-year first because it’s a lot cheaper.” A sophomore White female science major offered a different viewpoint: “This community college campus is pretty comfortable. There’s a wide range of people, and it’s close to home. You’re not out of your element.” A sophomore African American male computer drafting major added a similar comment:

I was not intending to go to a community college, but people kept telling me to come. The other thing was, going to a community college gave me a chance to get everything in order. Classes were smaller, and there were a lot to choose from.

“I think it’s better starting at a two-year school,” supported a freshman White male general studies major. A freshman White female business administration stated it quite succinctly: “It’s easier to go to a two-year college at home before going away. It’s a stepping stone instead of jumping into it.”

These comments made by many of the study participants suggest that homesickness is one stressor eliminated from the college transition of most community college students. Nevertheless, community college students do not escape other forms of stress involved in the process of adapting to college. As noted by the students, adapting to the rigor of college coursework is number one on the list of stressful situations. Almost equally distressing for freshman is learning the workings of what several students referred to as the “college system.”

Fortunately, the majority of the Tidewater Community College students drew relied their own fortitude or took steps to get support from others to help them adjust to college life. Their repeated references to academic advisors and family members

illustrate the importance of such people in the lives of college freshmen. Obviously, all had continued in their college careers despite significant levels of stress. Thus, although college retention was not an initial goal of The Writing Coalition, perhaps the confidence that it instilled in its participants provided them with the psychological tools and coping skills cited by Schlossberg (1995) as extremely important to weathering a transitional event.

CHAPTER 6

Student Perception, Transition, and Commitment to College

A primary goal of this study was to determine how students who had participated in two different types of pre-college collaborative programs—motivational/compensatory and academic alliance—perceived their transition to college and what effect, if any, student participation in these programs had on their commitment to completing a college degree. Schlossberg (1995, p. 27) defines a transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” and asserts that a person’s perception of a transitional event is paramount to the experience. Other important variables related to the experience include the context, impact, and time of the transition as well as the trigger, timing, control, role change, concurrent stress, previous experience, and assessment of the situation. Finally, an individual’s assets and liabilities in the four areas of *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies* determine how well he or she will navigate the transition. These tenets of Schlossberg’s theory served as the conceptual framework for this study.

Via document analysis and face-to-face semi-structured interviews, the researcher utilized qualitative analysis to search for common themes across the two cases under study. Although the participants in this study had been involved in two very diverse types of pre-college collaborative programs and were currently enrolled in two distinctly different postsecondary institutions, similar themes concerning their pre-college experiences, their transition from high school to college, and their commitment to college completion emerged. In some instances, however, the dissimilarity of the two situations dictated unique student perceptions.

Situation

All 27 of the students involved in this study were currently enrolled in college and therefore faced potentially challenging circumstances as they adjusted to college life. Student responses verified that coping with various levels and types of stress was inherent in the process of transitioning from high school to college, no matter what type of college a student attended. However, the 12 students from Tidewater Community College, unlike the 15 from Central University, were living at home with parents and attending college in their hometowns. Thus, their situation did not involve the stress associated with homesickness or the adjustment to living away from home. Interestingly, although 14 of the 15 Central University students lived within two hours of their home cities, the majority of them nevertheless revealed feelings of homesickness and alienation. Thus, as Schlossberg asserts, the psychological transition of entering college is just as—maybe more—traumatic to the self as the physical transition.

Self

Although the 27 study participants recounted unique experiences in dealing with the stress of college life, all but one admitted to feeling unprepared for college in one or more than one aspect. By far, the most commonly acknowledged feeling of inadequacy involved student adjustment to college level coursework. Students from both collaborative programs identified this as a major stressor during their initial college semester. Central University students mentioned their lack of preparation for college coursework in general; on the other hand, Tidewater Community College students asserted that although they felt unprepared in the academic areas of history, math, and

science, they felt well-prepared for college level English, this preparation being a principal goal of the Writing Coalition in which they had participated.

Not only did students from both cases admit to feeling unprepared for college level coursework, but they also struggled to adjust to their newfound freedom and responsibility. This issue was closely related to the necessity for students to develop effective study habits and to practice efficient time management. Twenty-six of the 27 study participants highlighted their struggles to develop these skills in the wake of demanding college coursework and enticing extracurricular distractions. Students also alluded to the anxiety they had experienced as they attempted to acclimate themselves to the “college system.” Recurrent issues included knowing what courses to take, completing necessary paperwork, and knowing whom to contact for assistance.

A final widespread theme consistent across cases was the strain of making new friends and fitting in with other college students. Even students from Tidewater Community College who continued to live at home admitted to feeling out of place in many classes and to missing their high school friends and acquaintances. Likewise, students from Central University discussed their feelings of alienation and estrangement from former friends, admitting that they often felt as if their college peers somehow knew something they did not.

Although students from both cases dealt with adapting to the rigors of college level coursework, adjusting to newfound freedom and responsibility, and coping with feelings of alienation, Central University students faced unique, additional challenges because they were living away from home. One challenge in particular was the anxiety experienced while living with a roommate, especially if there were cultural and ethnic

differences. Four Central University students asserted that learning to live with someone they had just met created a stressful situation that was sometimes so extreme that the decision was made to either find a different roommate or, if possible, live alone.

Commonly cited problems were unfamiliarity with another person's lifestyle and/or culture.

One final difference between students from Central University and Tidewater Community College involved the issue of money management. Again, this problem was not apparent for students who were living at home and attending the community college. It was, however, a problem for those students at Central University, who were, in many cases for the first time ever, learning to budget their money. Six Central University students identified money management as a significant burden for them as they adjusted to college life.

Whether or not stress-inducing situations were common across cases or inherent in only one scenario, coping with various levels of stress was a problem facing nearly all of the study participants. Only one student of the 27 interviewed indicated that her adjustment to college was stress-free. The other 26 participants readily admitted their anxiety. In many instances, these students found ways to reduce the amount of stress they experienced by developing strategies for improving their situations and/or by enlisting the help of outside support.

Support/Strategies

Fortunately, the majority of the students interviewed sought outside assistance when they felt overwhelmed. In both cases, academic advisors, family members, and friends were the primary sources of support in times of stress. Students from Central

University, who were living two hours away from home, nonetheless relied on family members and friends as frequently as Tidewater students, who were for the most part still living at home. A few students found unique ways to cope with the challenges they were facing.

A particularly resourceful student from Central established a relationship with a private counselor, with whom he met weekly. Conferring with this unbiased adult provided him the support he needed when his family moved out of the country. Other students attempting to juggle numerous responsibilities, whether from Tidewater or Central, took the initiative to eliminate some commitments in order to have more time to study. Many reduced the number of—or altogether eliminated—extracurricular activities and/or work responsibilities to allow more study time. A few actually relied on the assistance of student tutors to aid them with their studies or changed majors when they realized that the content was too difficult for them to master.

Overall, other than stressors intrinsic to living away from home (such as money management and homesickness), students in both cases exhibited striking similarities in their feelings of inadequacy, strategies for coping, and sources of outside support. The simple fact that all 27 of the students were still enrolled in college in either the second semester of their freshmen or sophomore years was indicative of their ability to weather the transition from high school to college.

Student Commitment to College

This ability to realistically assess one's attributes and actively seek guidance when necessary is, according to Schlossberg, paramount to one's commitment to completing a goal. Indisputably, the 27 students in this study shared a profound

commitment to college completion. Of the 27 students interviewed, 26 confirmed that they were very committed to completing a college degree. Only 18 of the 27 students, on the contrary, were committed to completing their college degrees at their current institution. For many of the Tidewater Community College students, this number simply indicated that many of the students planned to transfer to a four-year institution to complete their college degrees. Finally, only 16 of the 27 students revealed that they intended to complete a degree in the major field in which they were currently enrolled. Perhaps this is indicative of the need for more career awareness prior to attending college, a consistently identified programmatic suggestion that will be addressed further in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Recommendations for Theory, Practice, and Further Study

Introduction

The candid comments offered by the 27 students in this qualitative research study provided valuable insight into the struggles that many college students face as they attempt to make the adjustment from high school to college. Even more helpful were the numerous suggestions they made as they revealed their personal frustrations and challenges. This study attempted not only to conceptualize student transition to college within the framework of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, but also to identify student opinions about the most helpful collaborative program components in which they participated. Additionally, students shared their opinions about activities they believed would have made their journey from high school to college less stressful. A qualitative analysis of student responses led to the following recommendations for specific audiences.

Recommendations for Theory

Although originally developed for use in the counseling and guidance professions, Schlossberg's Transition Theory is applicable to numerous populations, situations, and contexts. A similar conceptual framework could certainly be utilized in research targeting displaced workers, divorced women, or bachelor degree-holding students re-entering the educational arena to increase their employability and/or knowledge base. Similarly, the four factors important to Schlossberg's Transition Theory (situation, self, support, and strategies) could serve as the basis for improving academic advisement programs so that more students can benefit from a positive, supportive relationship

provided by academic advisors in their role as student advocates. As Light reports, “Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (2001, p. 81).

Finally, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory has implications for the further study of student engagement in correlation with the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE). Results of the initial NSSE study revealed that “first-year students on average reported only occasional contact (once or twice a month) with their teachers” (Kuh, 2001, ¶ 14). Results from this dissertation research add credence to NSSE’s unfortunate discovery: only one student in 27 participants of this study reported having met with a faculty member for assistance with coursework. According to Kuh (2003, ¶ 2), postsecondary institutions must find ways to encourage faculty/student interaction to increase the support that Schlossberg identifies as so crucial to students in transition. Kuh also argues that educational institutions be judged on their efforts to promote such student engagement—not simply on their resources and reputation.

Recommendations for Practice

High School Personnel

A consistent theme across both cases under study was students’ feelings of inadequacy at succeeding in college level coursework. Students also stressed the importance of effective writing skills in the college setting. Fortunately, students who had participated in the Writing Coalition were exposed to the typical expectations of a college English course. Nevertheless, they emphasized that advanced writing skills were necessary across most content areas in college. Thus, high school administrators and

teachers must work together to assure that complex writing skills are incorporated across the high school curriculum.

Students made additional, enlightening comments concerning course rigor. Although participants conceded that they had never asked a high school teacher to increase his/her classroom expectations, most believed that their struggles adjusting to college level work were a direct result of the ease at which they had completed high school courses. Thus, a recommendation stemming from this study is to increase the rigor of high school coursework, not only in the area of English composition, but also in other content areas such as math, science, and history. Higher expectations and increased rigor would assist students in their adjustment to college coursework as well as in their performance on standardized college placement tests, such as the ACT or SAT. This would, in turn, potentially reduce the number of students requiring developmental education courses as a condition of college enrollment.

Along with increasing academic rigor, students—primarily those living away from home—expressed the need to hone money management skills. The incorporation of practical lessons about money management into the traditional high school math curriculum is certainly warranted. Quite often, college-bound students are well versed in the advanced math skills included in their algebra, geometry, and trigonometry courses, yet they have little or no exposure to basic life skills such as money management. These skills are often stressed in the general math curriculum but neglected in the college preparatory curriculum. It is imperative, then, that potential college students (all students for that matter) are exposed to these real-life skills throughout their high school years.

A final recommendation for high school personnel involves college students' difficulty in acclimating to the "college system." Students consistently stressed that they had problems adjusting to the midterm and final grade system utilized by college instructors, the Monday/Wednesday/Friday and Tuesday/Thursday course meeting schedule, and the syllabus format of outlining assignments. Most college-preparatory high schools, therefore, have instituted a schedule and system that closely resembles those facets of the college system. The results of this study suggest that the same revision be made in all high schools. This adjustment, according to student participants, would tremendously reduce their difficulty in adjusting to "the system" once they enter college. This change in the high school system would also aid students in developing their time management skills, an issue that many identified as creating stress once they entered college.

The researcher acknowledges that it may be difficult to implement some of these recommendations because quite often, curricular and scheduling decisions are made at the state level with little or no input from local administrators and teachers. Nevertheless, it is quite feasible to expect that whenever possible, teachers can incorporate basic math skills, money management skills, time management skills, and high expectations within the framework of the required curriculum. As a postsecondary education becomes more of a necessity for high school graduates, perhaps it is time that local administrators and teachers lobby their representatives for more structural changes in the public school system.

Collaborative Program Directors

Many of the recommendations for high school personnel are equally applicable to collaborative program directors. These include the incorporation of writing assignments, money and time management skills, and a college scheduling system as part of the program. Another recommendation includes incorporating the completion of college admission materials into the program schedule. It is crucial that parents also be involved in the process by either attending the financial aid sessions or providing the required financial information for completion of forms. One student made a valid suggestion that a letter be drafted to parents informing them of the information that their child would need in hand to complete the necessary forms for both admission and financial aid.

An additional recommendation is to include workshop sessions highlighting college majors and the corresponding courses and jobs associated with these majors. Often, students choose a college major that does not necessarily align well with their talents and personality. Therefore, increasing career awareness as part of a collaborative program is a valid recommendation. This could be accomplished in a myriad of ways: by scheduling question/answer sessions with current college students in the participant's intended major, by scheduling similar sessions with professionals in fields corresponding to the intended major, or by implementing job shadowing experiences for student participants.

Collaborative programs should, if at all possible, continue to or begin to include student visitation to a college campus, preferably during the students' junior or senior year. The researcher recommends that, whenever possible, on-campus programs include the pairing of culturally diverse students and an awareness of and appreciation for

cultural differences among potential college roommates. Campus visitation should occur during the regular school week when participants can actually attend a college class or two, complete a mock college assignment, and become accustomed to the college scheduling routine. A further recommendation is that, during this campus visit, high school students could be assigned a college student as a mentor who remains in contact throughout the participant's high school senior year and even into his or her college freshman year. In this way, students have a peer to whom they can turn when they are struggling with transition.

Similarly, programs should include as much contact between high school students/faculty and college students/faculty as possible because the more support systems the student has, the less likely he or she is to give up and drop out of college. Contact could be in the form of face-to-face meetings, email correspondence, or letter exchanges as in the case of the Writing Coalition. Of course, the support of administrators in both arenas is necessary for this contact to subsist.

Admittedly, the particular goals of a collaborative program will dictate the most important components to be included. The type of program—academic alliance or motivational/compensatory—will likewise affect these program goals. Still, if one facet of the program is to assist students in their transition from high school to college, comments provided by the participants of this study and the corresponding recommendations should be considered.

College Personnel

Most importantly, to improve student transition from high school to college, college personnel must function as team members alongside high school personnel. The

atmosphere of cooperation must be ongoing, consistent, and mutually respectful. College faculty must keep in mind that high school faculty members do not often enjoy the same academic freedom as college faculty members. Nevertheless, both entities can work together for a common goal, student success.

Recommendations for Office of Academic Affairs

For college and high school personnel to collaborate, college administrators must be willing to reward their faculty for participating in collaborative programs.

Appropriate rewards and incentives include reduced teaching loads, additional stipends, campus-wide recognition, and the consideration of such extracurricular activities in decisions concerning tenure and promotion. College faculty members need time and motivation to make high school visits, meet with high school teachers and guidance counselors, and sustain long-term contacts in the public school system.

Recommendations for Office of Student Affairs

Other recommendations for college personnel to improve student transition to college relate to the specific policies and procedures on the college campus. Student affairs personnel must work diligently to assure that roommates are compatible and to provide guidance when problems arise. This can be accomplished by administering detailed questionnaires in an attempt to identify students' study habits, lifestyles, and personal interests and hobbies. While it is certainly appropriate to pair students with a roommate from another culture and/or background, this should not occur without the proper training concerning cultural differences and conflict management. This training must not only be an integral part of any freshman orientation program, but also continue throughout the semester.

Along with making appropriate roommate assignments and providing training in cultural awareness and conflict management, student affairs personnel must begin or continue to encourage increased contact between students and their academic advisors. Unfortunately, the only contact that many college students have with their advisors involves registering for, adding, or dropping classes. Academic advisors must serve more visibly as advocates for their advisees and sources of support under times of stress.

Finally, the researcher recommends that, if at all feasible, freshmen students should be paired with an upperclassman who will serve as a mentor. If a high school/postsecondary collaborative program is in place, this mentor could be identified during the collaborative program and continue to work with the freshman student throughout his/her freshman year and beyond. Repeatedly, participants in this study reported that having a peer with whom to confide made a marked difference in their ability to cope with the stress of adjusting to college life. This type of support, along with the advice of the academic advisor, can be crucial in helping a student adjust to and eventually succeed in college.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study, within the framework of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, focused on traditional college freshmen and sophomores, their transition to college, and the effect that participation in a specific collaborative program had on that transition. The researcher recommends that a follow-up study involving the same participants be conducted in one year to determine which students have remained in college and if they have changed their views about their pre-college experiences and/or their commitment to college completion.

Three limitations of this research study prompt the researcher to suggest additional replications. First, because the study involved only two specific sites and collaborative programs—Central University students who were alumni of the national College Summit motivational/compensatory program and Tidewater Community College students who were alumni of the local Writing Coalition academic alliance program—the researcher proposes that a replication study be conducted at two different colleges, one with College Summit alumni and one with academic alliance alumni. Such a study would help support or refute the results gleaned from this study. Second, Tidewater Community College students who participated in this study were not representative of community college students whose average age is 24 years old. Thus, a replication study in which participants more closely resemble the typical community college student is warranted. Finally, the small number of participants in this study (27) indicates the need for a similar qualitative study involving a broader sampling of students.

The researcher further recommends that the study be replicated for the non-traditional student population and focus on the effect that post high school work and/or family experiences had on student transition to college. Such a study would be helpful in identifying programs and policies to support non-traditional students as they attempt to re-enter the educational arena, improve their skills, and/or complete a college degree. Such a study is imperative for identifying program components that will support nontraditional students in their transition to college.

Results of this study also illustrate the need for more comprehensive, longitudinal research. Because the majority of study participants revealed that they had made their decision to attend college by the junior year in high school, another recommendation for

further study involves a longitudinal study that follows students from the junior year of high school through (potentially) the freshman year in college. This study should include both qualitative and quantitative data (demographic data, GPA, class rank, etc.) from students who made the decision to go to college, those who did not, those who remained in college after the first semester, and those who withdrew. Perhaps by identifying and comparing student characteristics in the areas of *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies*, high school and college personnel can work together more effectively to increase the chances that students will not only make the decision to attend college, but will also make a successful transition.

A final suggestion for further research is a mixed study that includes both college students who have participated in a pre-college collaborative program and those who have not. This study would further assist policy makers in determining the effect that collaborative programs have on student transition and in developing programs that include components that encourage and support college student success. Furthermore, such a study could further clarify the effect that collaborative programs may have on student commitment to college completion and identify which additional variables (gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, etc) are statistically significant.

Final Summary

This study focused on the college student's journey from high school to college and the effect that pre-college participation in a collaborative program may have had on student transition to college. Based on student responses, the researcher made the following conclusions:

- Students perceive their involvement in pre-college collaborations as positive experiences in their journey to college.
- Students readily admit that they are often academically unprepared for the rigors of college level coursework.
- Students concede that they are often socially and emotionally unprepared for the newfound freedom and responsibility they face.
- Students also need assistance in the areas of time and money management, conflict resolution, study skills, and the standard operating procedures of the “college system.”
- It is possible (and preferable) for high school and college personnel to work together toward the common goal of better preparing high school students for successful postsecondary experiences.
- Students whose test scores and high school GPA’s do not necessarily deem them college-bound can, given the right support, succeed in the college setting.
- Postsecondary institutions must search for ways to increase the contact between students and their professors and students and their academic advisors.
- Parents and family members play an important role in encouraging college enrollment and supporting student success. Thus, programs involving student advocates must be implemented for those students who do not have the benefit of parental encouragement and support.
- Ongoing evaluation of programs that aligns assessment with program goals and student outcomes is necessary to garner resources to support successful collaborative programs.

- Secondary and postsecondary educators must pool their resources and identify innovative financial sources for developing and maintaining successful collaborative programs.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER FOR HIGHER ED. GRANT CONTACT PERSON

Date:

Address:

Dear **(insert name)**:

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my attempt to explore how participation in high school/post-secondary collaborative programs affects student transition to college. The purpose of this letter is to describe the focus of my research study. I have also included in this mailing a sample permission letter that you may transfer to your college letterhead and return at your convenience in the self-addressed envelope.

Because I am primarily interested in gauging student perception of the ease or difficulty of their transition to college and determining if participation in the pre-college collaboration influenced this perception, I would like to interview at least 15 students who participated in the **(insert name)** FIPSE funded collaboration and who are currently first year college students. A secondary goal of my study is to identify particular activities and experiences that assisted students in their transition to college; therefore, I would also like to obtain a copy of the FIPSE grant abstract and any other documents relevant to my study in an attempt to outline the specific components of the collaborative program. Knowledge of the components will guide me in formulating appropriate questions for my interviews with students.

In order to select the appropriate students to interview, I would like a list of all students currently enrolled at your college who, while enrolled in high school, participated in the FIPSE funded program. I will also need contact information for each of the students. When I receive that list, I will identify specific students as potential participants in my study and send each a formal letter outlining the study and a consent form acknowledging their consent to participate. Once I collect these materials, I would appreciate your assistance in arranging interview dates and times. I plan to spend three or four days at your site, during which time I will conduct 45-minute interviews with each of the students.

Because your collaboration was funded by FIPSE, it was deemed exemplary and could therefore serve as a model for other school districts and post-secondary institutions who are interested in designing similar programs for helping students adapt to college. The results from case studies such as this one can provide insight into the obstacles students face as they move from high school to college and assist faculty and administrators in designing activities and programs that address these obstacles.

Certainly, the identities of student participants will remain confidential as will the names of your school and grant administrators unless you prefer that the program itself and the schools be identified. Likewise, your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you prefer, I would be happy to send you an executive summary of my dissertation once it is completed. Perhaps it could be of some use to you as you continue to seek funding from FIPSE. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to visiting your campus and learning more about your program. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Billie A. Unger
Doctoral Candidate
West Virginia University
bunger@shepherd.edu

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE PERMISSION LETTER

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of **(insert name)** College and the **(insert name)** FIPSE-funded collaborative program, I strongly support and approve of the research being conducted by Billie A. Unger as part of her doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership Studies at West Virginia University.

I have secured permission from the appropriate higher level administrators here at **(insert name)** college, who also support Ms. Unger's research. As co-director of the **(insert name)** collaborative program, I give my permission for Billie Unger to meet with and interview current **(insert name)** college students who participated in the program. I understand the interview will examine the effect of the program on student transition to college.

Since the information gathered in the study will be valuable to other colleges who want to develop effective collaborative alliances with public schools and one of the criteria for FIPSE funding is dissemination of information, I give my permission for **(insert name)** College and the **(insert name)** Program to be identified. I do understand, however, that the names of individual students will remain anonymous, and confidentiality will be maintained in the reported results. I also understand that the study will undergo human subject review by the West Virginia University Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER TO POTENTIAL STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Date:

Address:

Dear **(insert name)**:

I am currently a doctoral student majoring in higher education leadership at West Virginia University. The purpose of this letter is to outline a research study that I am completing in order to fulfill my requirements for a doctoral dissertation. Dr. Jane Doe, Director of **(insert name)**, thought that you would be interested in meeting with me to discuss your transition to college and your participation in the **(insert name)** program while still in high school. Your participation in this collaborative program and your current status as a college student give you keen insight into the focus of my research: student transition to college and the effect of participation in pre-college collaboration on ease of transition. As a thank you for helping me with my research, I will be giving you a FREE PIZZA coupon for **(insert name of restaurant)**.

The main purpose of my study is to learn about the problems and obstacles students face as they leave high school and enter college. Specifically, I want to determine how students cope with the transition and whether or not participation in the pre-college collaboration influences students' ability to cope. I also want to gather recommendations from students about programs that could help make the move from high school to college an easier one. I would like to interview you for about 45 minutes regarding your thoughts about these issues.

Your firsthand experiences in the pre-college collaboration and your reflections about your transition to college will be an invaluable source of information for my study. Your insights can help future collaborative program directors develop activities that will help students adapt more easily to college life. The information gained in this case study can also help college administrators develop programs that will help freshmen students adjust more comfortably to college.

Certainly, your name and any other information that would identify you will not be revealed in the final dissertation and will remain confidential. Also, your participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate in my study, please complete and return the enclosed consent form in the self-addressed, postage-paid envelope by **(insert date)**. After I receive responses from enough students, I will contact you about arranging an interview schedule. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Billie A. Unger
Doctoral Candidate
West Virginia University
bunger@shepherd.edu

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Billie A. Unger, a doctoral candidate in the field of higher education leadership at West Virginia University, is examining student transition from secondary to post-secondary education in an attempt to identify pre-college experiences that may help to bridge the gap between high school and college. By interviewing college freshmen who have participated in a pre-college collaborative program, this researcher seeks to provide insight into the various obstacles students face as they enter college and the impact that pre-college experiences have on students' abilities to cope with the transition process. The researcher, Billie A. Unger, has identified college freshmen who participated in two FIPSE funded model collaborative programs, academic alliance and motivation, while still in high school.

During the Spring 2003 semester, the researcher will interview these students about their pre-college experiences, particularly participation in the collaborative program, to learn about the obstacles they faced in moving from high school to college and about the coping strategies they used to overcome these obstacles. The actual questions will focus on the following broad topics: activities/experiences associated with the collaborative program, student awareness of college as an option after high school, social support provided to students as they made the transition, sources of stress encountered and strategies to overcome obstacles, and student level of commitment to completing a college degree.

It is important to note that your name and any other personal information that could identify you will not be released in the final written results and will remain confidential. Also, your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and should you refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, your class standing and grade will not be affected.

Yes, I have read and understood this consent form and the accompanying letter. I agree to participate in this research project, *The Journey from High School to College: Do Collaborative Connections Improve Student Transition?*

I give my permission for Billie A. Unger to record and use my interview responses. I understand that my name and any other identifying information will not be revealed in the reported results. I also understand that I may discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences to me. Please return this form to Billie A. Unger by **(insert date)**.

Name (Please Print)

Signature

Work Phone Number

E-mail

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PILOT STUDY

Script: Hi; my name is Billie Unger, and I am a doctoral student majoring in higher education leadership. I truly appreciate your agreeing to participate in my pilot study. My dissertation will focus on student transition to college and the effect that participation in a pre-college high school/post-secondary collaborative program has on that transition. Such collaborations are a way to bridge the gap between high school and college and to provide students with the tools necessary to make a successful transition from high school to college.

Interviewing students who have participated in a pre-college collaborative program can provide insight into developing effective transitional programs. My goal is to identify the obstacles students face as they adapt to college, the effect that participating in a collaboration has on student transition, the components of a program that increased students' coping skills, and any suggestions for additional components or experiences that would help students in their transition to college.

Before we start, I want you to understand that your participation is entirely voluntary, and you do not need to respond to every question. Your responses will remain completely anonymous, and confidentiality will be maintained, and your class standing or grade will not be affected by refusal to participate or by withdrawal from the study. Is it acceptable to you if I tape record the interview and take notes as we converse?

_____ Yes _____ No

Name of Student _____

High School Attended _____

Collaborative Program _____

Program Components Student Participated In _____

Probes: mentoring/tutoring
 summer workshop
 college visitation
 study skills workshops
 financial aid workshops

Gender _____ Male _____ Female

Age _____

Race _____ American Indian or Alaska Native

_____ Asian _____ Black or African American

_____ Hispanic or Latino _____ Native Hawaiian or Other
 Pacific Islander

- _____ White
- High school coursework _____ General _____ College Preparatory
- College Attending _____
- Current college major _____
- Type of degree program _____ certificate
 _____ associate's degree
 _____ bachelor's degree
- Resident status _____ commute from home
 _____ live in a residence hall
 _____ live in an apartment off campus
- Distance from home _____ campus is within one hour
 _____ campus is 2-4 hours away from home
 _____ campus is more than 4 hours from home

1. When did you first consider attending college? Why?

Probes:

 - Did you discuss college with your friends? Parents? An older brother or sister? A teacher? A guidance counselor? Someone else?
 - Is there a particular career you are interested in that requires a college degree?

2. Did any of your high school experiences affect your decision?

Probes:

 - (academic) Did a particular course, teacher, or program influence you?
 - (social) Did participation in a specific club or organization influence you?

3. Describe your journey from high school to college.

Probes:

 - When did you make your decision?
 - What were the steps involved in choosing a college and applying?
 - Who helped you during this process?

4. Tell me about your transition from high school to college?

Probes:

 - What was easy/what was difficult?
 - the decision to go?
 - which college to attend?
 - filling out the application/applying for financial aid?
 - deciding where to live?
 - selecting a major?

5. What (if anything) about your transition was stressful? How did you overcome these obstacles?

Probes:

- leaving my boyfriend/girlfriend
- leaving my family
- leaving my friends
- living on my own for the first time
- managing my money
- adjusting to the more difficult coursework
- managing my time
- studying appropriately

Probes:

- talked with my friends
- talked with my family
- talked with my college advisor
- sought help from a counselor

6. In what ways did you feel prepared/unprepared?

Probes:

- academically? Any particular subject area? Study skills?
- socially? How did you initially balance study and leisure time?
- emotionally? How did you adjust to leaving friends and family ?

7. Tell me about your participation in the (insert name) collaboration.

Probes:

- What was your involvement?
- Did you receive tutoring? Work with a college student? Visit a college campus? Take pre and post tests? Other?

8. Did any of these experiences affect your decision to go to college or your ability to adapt to college life? If so, how?

9. What activities or experiences do you suggest might have helped ease your transition even more?

Probes:

- academically?
- socially?
- emotionally?

10. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the most committed, how committed are you to competing a college degree? Explain.

11. How committed are you to completing a college degree at this institution? Explain.

12. How committed are you to competing the major in which you are currently enrolled?

13. If you could change one thing about your pre-college experiences, what would it be?

Probes:

- the classes I took
- how much I studied
- my awareness of college choices

14. If you could change one thing about your transition to college, what would it be?

- I would have gone part time
- I would have attended closer/farther from home
- I would have lived on/off campus instead
- I would have enrolled in a different college
- I would enrolled in a different major
- I would have asked for more help

15. Is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to add o help me better understand your transition to college?

Thank you again for donating your time to my research study. If you think of anything else, please feel free to email me at bunger@shepherd.edu

Close the interview.

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONS FOR PILOT STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Script: An important step in completing my doctoral dissertation involves interviewing freshmen college students about their pre-college experiences (specifically high school/post-secondary collaboration) and their transition to college. The following questions will assist me in revising my interview protocol. With your feedback and suggestions, I will be able to improve the wording and/or sequence of the questions so that the interview process will be successful.

1. Did my cover letter clearly explain the purpose of my research?
2. Was the cover letter easy to understand?
3. Is there any information I need to add to the cover letter?
4. Did I clarify the purpose of the interview? If not, how can I improve?
5. Are the interview questions clear and understandable?
6. Give me any suggestions as to how to improve the clarity of any specific questions.
7. Did the questions seem to be in a logical order, or is there some way I should rearrange them?
8. Are there any additional questions that should be included in the interview protocol?

APPENDIX G
REVISED COVER LETTER

Date:

Address:

Dear **(insert student name)**:

I am currently a doctoral student majoring in higher education leadership at West Virginia University. The purpose of this letter is to outline a research study that I am completing in order to fulfill my requirements for a doctoral dissertation. **Dr. Jane Doe** of the **(insert name)** program thought that you would be interested in meeting with me to discuss your transition to college and your participation in the **(insert name)** program when you were in high school. Your participation in this collaborative program and your current status as a college student give you keen insight into the focus of my research: student transition to college and the effect of participation in pre-college collaboration on ease of transition. As a thank you for helping me with my research, I will be giving you a **FREE PIZZA (\$10.00 gift certificate) for Pizza Hut.**

The main purpose of my study is to learn about the problems and obstacles students face as they leave high school and enter college. Specifically, I want to determine how students cope with the transition and whether or not participation in the pre-college collaboration influences students' ability to cope. I also want to gather recommendations from students about programs that could help make the move from high school to college an easier one. I would like to interview you for about 45 minutes regarding your thoughts about these issues.

Your firsthand experiences in the pre-college collaboration and your reflections about your transition to college will be an invaluable source of information for my study. Your insights can help future collaborative program directors develop activities that will help students adapt more easily to college life. The information gained in this case study can also help college administrators develop programs that will help freshmen students adjust more comfortably to college.

Certainly, your name and any other information that would identify you will not be revealed in the final dissertation and will remain confidential. Also, your participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate in my study, please **email or call me by (insert date)** at bunger@shepherd.edu or **1-800-344-5231 (ext. 5240)**. After I receive responses from enough students, I will contact you about arranging an interview schedule, during which time you will sign a consent form. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. (I am easier to reach by email than by phone.)

Sincerely,

Billie A. Unger
Doctoral Candidate
West Virginia University
bunger@shepherd.edu
(w) 1-800-344-5231 ext. 5240
(h) 1-304-263-4301

APPENDIX H

REVISED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Script: Hi; my name is Billie Unger, and I am a doctoral student majoring in higher education leadership. I truly appreciate your agreeing to participate in my pilot study. My dissertation will focus on student transition to college and the effect that participation in a pre-college high school/post-secondary collaborative program has on that transition. Such collaborations are a way to bridge the gap between high school and college and to provide students with the tools necessary to make a successful transition from high school to college.

Interviewing students who have participated in a pre-college collaborative program can provide insight into developing effective transitional programs. My goal is to identify the obstacles students face as they adapt to college, the effect that participating in a collaboration has on student transition, the components of a program that increased students' coping skills, and any suggestions for additional components or experiences that would help students in their transition to college.

Before we start, I want you to understand that your participation is entirely voluntary, and you do not need to respond to every question. Your responses will remain completely anonymous, and confidentiality will be maintained, and your class standing or grade will not be affected by refusal to participate or by withdrawal from the study. Is it acceptable to you if I tape record and/ or videotape the interview and take notes as we converse?

Yes No

Name of Student _____

Gender Male Female

Age _____

Race American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino Native Hawaiian or Other
Pacific Islander

White

High School Attended _____

High school coursework General College Preparatory

Collaborative Program _____

1. In what components of the program did you participate?
Probes: mentoring/tutoring
summer workshop
college visitation
study skills workshops
financial aid workshops
2. Tell me more about your participation in the (insert name) collaboration.
Probes:
 - What was your involvement?
 - Did you receive tutoring? Work with a college student? Visit a college campus?
 - Take college entrance exams (ACT, SAT, placement tests)
3. Did you attend college immediately after high school graduation?
____ Yes ____ No
4. When did you first consider attending college? Why?
Probes:
 - Did you discuss college with your friends? Parents? An older brother or sister? A teacher? A guidance counselor? Someone else?
 - Is there a particular career you were interested in that requires a college degree?
5. Did any of the (insert program) collaborative experiences affect your decision to go to college or your ability to adapt to college life? If so, how?
Probes:
 - Were you familiar with the demands of a college course?
 - Were you more comfortable attending classes on a college campus?
6. Did any of your other high school experiences influence your decision?
Probes:
 - (academic) Did a particular course, teacher, or program influence you?
 - (social) Did participation in a specific club or organization influence you?
7. What (if anything) about the decision to go to college was stressful during your senior year in high school and the summer after your graduation? How did you overcome these obstacles?
Probes:
 - where to attend/apply
 - how to apply
 - how to fill out forms
 - when to make college visits
 - which college preparatory classes to take

8. Describe your experiences as you transitioned from high school to college.

Probes:

- What were the steps involved in choosing a college and applying?
- Who helped you during this process?
- What was easy/what was difficult?
- the decision to go?
- which college to attend?
- filling out the application/applying for financial aid?
- deciding where to live?
- selecting a major?

9. College Attending _____

2-year _____ 4-year _____

10. Current college major _____

11. Type of degree program _____ certificate program
 _____ associate's degree
 _____ bachelor's degree

12. Resident status _____ commute from home
 _____ live in a residence hall
 _____ live in an apartment off campus

13. Distance from home _____ campus is within one hour
 _____ campus is 2-4 hours away from home
 _____ campus is more than 4 hours from home

14. Are you working while attending college? If yes: _____ 1-10 hrs/wk.
 _____ 11-20 hrs/wk.
 _____ 21-39 hrs/wk.
 _____ 40 or more hrs/wk.

15. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities?

Probes:

- athletics
- drama
- music
- sororities, fraternities
- other clubs or organizations

16. What (if anything) has been stressful for you during your freshman year in college? How did you overcome these obstacles?

Probes:

- leaving my boyfriend/girlfriend

- leaving my family
 - adapting to the scattering of high school friends
 - living on my own for the first time
 - managing my money
 - adjusting to the more difficult coursework
 - managing my time
 - studying appropriately
- Probes:
- talked with my friends
 - talked with my family
 - talked with my college academic advisor
 - sought other help (minister/counselor)

17. In what ways did you feel prepared/unprepared?

Probes:

- Did coursework seem too difficult? Any particular subject area? Study skills?
- How did you initially balance study and leisure time?
- How did you adjust to leaving friends and family and making new friends?

18. What activities or experiences do you suggest might have helped ease your transition even more?

Probes:

- more demanding high school classes
- visits to the campus
- help with paperwork
- more awareness about opportunities

For questions 19-21, use the following scale: 1=not sure
2=somewhat committed
3=very committed

19. How committed are you to competing a college degree? Explain.

20. How committed are you to completing a college degree at this institution? Explain.

21. How committed are you to competing the major in which you are currently enrolled? Explain.

22. If you could change one thing (other than your academic effort) about your pre-college experiences, what would it be?

Probes:

- the classes I took
- my awareness of college choices

23. If you could change one thing about the decisions you made concerning college, what would it be?

Probes:

- I would have gone part time
- I would have attended closer/farther from home
- I would have lived on/off campus instead
- I would have enrolled in a different college
- I would enrolled in a different major
- I would have asked for more help

24. If you were designing a program to help students make an easy transition from high school to college, what would the program include?

24. Is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to add to help me better understand your transition to college?

Thank you again for donating your time to my research study. If you think of anything else, please feel free to email me at bunger@shepherd.edu

Close the interview.