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Persistence Rates of First-Year College Students Who Attend an Extended Orientation Camp Program Compared to Those Who Do Not Attend

Kristy G. O'Keefe
kgo18a@acu.edu

This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.

Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Date: June, 17, 2022

Dissertation Committee:

Jara Hornor

Dr. Tara Hornor, Chair

Laura Boren

Dr. Laura Boren

Andrew Lunpe

Dr. Andrew Lunpe

Abilene Christian University

School of Educational Leadership

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of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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Dedication

This one, this one is for me.

Acknowledgements

My village is tiny but oh so mighty. Since starting my career in higher education, I've been told "leadership is lonely" by many along the way. I experienced this firsthand through the doctoral process. The late nights researching until the sun comes up, staying after a long 8–5 day just to stare at a computer and start writing. The process was lonely, but I found so much passion in the quiet, peace in the late nights, and dedication in the research of all those that came before me; I found more of myself.

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Abstract

Student retention is a topic of concern among higher education institutions. The dissertation pronounces a comparative quantitative research study to examine participation in summer extended orientation programs as a predictor of fall-to-spring persistence for first-year college students. This research study was conducted through a conceptual replication of a decade-old study at a regional Texas institution. In this conceptual replication study, the researcher observed the enrollment impacts, such as persistence rates and grade point average, of first-year college students who attended a summer extended orientation program compared to those of students who did not. Conducting more specific research in the area of extended orientation and its impacts on retainment of first-year students guides higher education leaders on decisions, programing, and leadership of first-year students to help increase retention, thereby increasing institutional funding, and provide students with better career opportunities. The findings of this study provide time-relevant persistence data intended to inform funding decisions for first-year college student programming efforts.

Keywords: retention, higher education, persistence, regional institution, first-year college students, extended orientation, grade point average

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Higher education professionals desire to increase student retention among universities (Haynes & Atchley, 2013; McCabe et al., 2020; Pascarella et al., 1986; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). For students who enroll in a 2- or 4-year institution in the United States, only one half will persist to graduation, and 1 in 4 will not return for their second year of school (McCabe et al., 2020; Pascarella et al., 1986; Poynton & Lapan, 2017).

The transition to higher education is a difficult adjustment for recently graduated high school students (Lekena & Bayaga, 2018). Researchers asserted that academically and socially integrating students into institutions increases their commitment to the institution, therefore positively impacting persistence (Fussy, 2018). This chapter elaborates on persistence impacts, relevance to the problem, limitations of current research, plan of action, and purpose of the study.

Persistence Impacts

There are numerous ways the persistence of college students impacts higher education institutions. Persistence and retention rates affect institutions through funding, programming, and staffing (Elliott, 2016; Haynes & Atchley, 2013; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). On average, low retention rates cost an institution $10 million annually (Poynton & Lapan, 2017). There is analysis on the impacts freshman academic programming and mentorship have on first-year college students; however, little is known about other first-year experience (FYE) impacts, such as extended orientation (Maymon et al., 2019; Naylor, 2017; Pascarella et al., 1986; Yomtov et al., 2015).

Relevance to Problem

Researchers (Norris et al., 2017) have found that a sense of belonging, well-being, mindset, and connection to the university indicate a student's path to graduation. Norris et al. (2017) found students were more likely to succeed when held accountable by peers. Students felt a strong desire to have a goal to achieve when the peer-mentor was in a closer relation, giving the first-year student a standard to reach, a goal to set, and an example to view. Norris et al. (2017) stated students feel "the most successful when they are held accountable and empowered to do quality work" (p. 25). Lisberg and Woods (2018) showed a distinct difference in students' performance through the peer mentorship program versus those who did not participate. Students who participated in the peer mentorship program in Year 1 retained at a 96% rate, whereas students who did not participate retained at a 71.5% rate.

Plan of Action

Participation in summer extended orientation programs was studied as a predictor of fall-to-spring persistence for first-year college students. This research study was conducted through a conceptual replication of a decade-old study at a regional institution in North Central Texas. Haynes and Atchley (2013) conducted a study on the persistence impacts of first-year students who attended extended orientation summer programming and nonparticipants. This study used the freshman cohort in 2010 and found no statistical difference in participant persistence compared to nonparticipant persistence (Haynes & Atchley, 2013). There have been leadership changes, generational changes, and substantial growth in freshman class size at the North Central Texas institution through the decade since.

This study impacts the 2,400-plus freshman class, administration, faculty, and staff as future decisions are made. Poynton and Lapan (2017) informed that, on average, low retention

rates cost universities $10 million annually. The findings of this study provide time-relevant persistence data intended to inform funding decisions for first-year college student programming efforts. This replication study allows institution administrators time-relevant feedback for university goals, new strategic plans, and funding allocations.

There are many factors influencing persistence, such as a sense of belonging, self-efficacy, peer mentorship, and shared experiences (Birkeland et al., 2019; Chambers et al., 2019; Maymon et al., 2019; Naylor, 2017; Ottley & Ellis, 2019; Yomtov et al., 2015). These factors have been studied through a multitude of programs such as FYE courses, seminars, and peer mentorship programs during the academic year (Maymon et al., 2019; Naylor, 2017; Yomtov et al., 2015). However, more exploration is needed on programming that impacts persistence, such as extended orientation programs (Maymon et al., 2019; Naylor, 2017; Yomtov et al., 2015).

Statement of the Problem

First-year student persistence and retention are a topic of concern in higher education. For students who enroll in a 2- or 4-year institution in the United States, only one half will persist to graduation, and 1 in 4 will not return for their second year of school (McCabe et al., 2020; Pascarella et al., 1986; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Low persistence rates drastically impact institutional funding and support (Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Low retention rates can cost an institution up to $10 million annually (Poynton & Lapan, 2017).

Exploring why students persist or fail to persist is the subject of much research (Lekena & Bayaga, 2018; Pascarella et al., 1986). The transition to higher education is a difficult adjustment for recently graduated high school students (Lekena & Bayaga, 2018). Once enrolled, factors such as a sense of belonging and self-efficacy surfaced as themes in research regarding FYE courses, seminars, and peer mentorship programs (Maymon et al., 2019; Naylor, 2017;

Yomtov et al., 2015). Yomtov et al. (2015) found that first-year students who had mentors felt a sense of belonging and secure connection to the institution, resulting in the intent to stay (Yomtov et al., 2015). Mach et al. (2018) observed that students who participated in a mentorship living–learning program gained relationships and a connection to the institution and their degree program, resulting in a higher grade point average (GPA) and increased retention rates compared to nonparticipants. These research studies positively impacted students during first-year coursework.

There is analysis on the impacts of students once in coursework; however, more research is needed on the effects of student support prior to enrollment. Maymon et al. (2019) recommended future research and further investigation on assessing the various impacts support has on first-year students. Further research on student support could address how a sense of belonging is developed through participating in an extended orientation program or mentorship and the influence on persistence of first-year students. Failure to address this problem could result in the inability of students to adequately transition to an institution, reinforcing the concerning lack of persistence of first-year students and lower retention rates (Leidenfrost et al., 2014). Haynes and Atchley (2013) recommended further exploration on the topic of extended orientation programming. Specifically if positive impacts were found, extended orientation programs could justify more staffing and funding to their programming. According to Yomtov et al. (2015), those who do not persist are more likely to seek unemployment and government assistance. Conducting more specific research in extended orientation and its impacts on retainment of first-year students guides higher education leaders on decisions, programming, and leadership of first-year students. This helps increase retention, increasing institutional funding and providing students with better career opportunities (Elliott, 2016; Poynton & Lapan, 2017).

For example, Chambers et al. (2019) studied impact of peer mentorship in a STEM program and reported mentored students retained at 74.4% whereas nonmentored students retained at 48.7%. This showcases an example of peer-to-peer mentoring positively impacting student persistence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to examine participation in summer extended orientation programs as a predictor of fall-to-spring persistence for first-year college students. I observed the enrollment impacts (persistence rates and GPA) for first-year college students who attend extended orientation programs compared to those who do not. The findings of this study provide time-relevant persistence data intended to inform funding decisions for first-year college student programming efforts.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the persistence rate of students who attend extended orientation camp programming compared to those who do not attend?

RQ2: What is the GPA of first-year college students who attend extended orientation camp programming compared to those who do not attend?

Definition of Key Terms

Extended orientation. Extended orientation is programming beyond the 1-day orientation and class registration, expanding the transition experience designed to facilitate the transition of new students to the institution (NODA, 2021).

Persistence. Persistence is the action of a student who returns to an institution (Hagedorn, 2006).

Retention. Retention is the university measurement of the return of a college student to graduation (Hagedorn, 2006).

Transition. Transition is the process first-year students go through when entering a university for the first time (NODA, 2021).

Chapter Summary

Across higher education, there is a desire to increase the trajectory of first-year college students and help them persist to the second year of college. Researchers have conducted studies in a variety of ways, with positive outcomes. Through research and the article findings, peer mentorship positively influences the retention of first-year students, increases university funding, and supports staffing needs. Through mentorship programming, specialty advising, mentorship, relationships, and shared experiences, students feel connected to and engaged with the university. These positive traits found through the researchers are transferred through a multitude of studies shown in this literature review. However, there is a lack of research on the impact camp orientation programming has on the persistence of first-year college students (Haynes & Atchley, 2013). Chapter 2 encompasses a review of the literature, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Dissecting impacts on first-year college student persistence is a topic of interest among higher education (Lekena & Bayaga, 2018; Pascarella et al., 1986). Researchers discovered impacts on persistence, such as a sense of belonging, self-efficacy, peer mentorship, and shared experiences (Birkeland et al., 2019; Chambers et al., 2019; Maymon et al., 2019; Naylor, 2017; Ottley & Ellis, 2019; Yomtov et al., 2015). However, more experimentation is needed on programming that impacts persistence, such as extended orientation programs (Maymon et al., 2019; Naylor, 2017; Yomtov et al., 2015).

The purpose of this research study was to examine participation in summer extended orientation programs as a predictor of fall-to-spring persistence for first-year college students. In this study, I observed the enrollment impacts (i.e., persistence rates and GPA) of first-year college students who attended a summer extended orientation program compared to those who did not. I used a comparative quantitative research method to perform a conceptual replication study. The themes of this chapter result in a review of literature focusing on the impacts of peer mentoring, academic mentorship, belonging, and limitations of research.

Conceptual Framework Discussion

This research study pronounces a conceptual replication study to observe the enrollment impacts (i.e., persistence rates and GPA) of first-year college students who attended a summer extended orientation program compared to those who did not. A comparative quantitative research study examined participation in summer extended orientation programs as a predictor of fall-to-spring persistence for first-year college students. The analysis was conducted through a conceptual replication of a decade-old study at a regional Texas institution. The findings of this study provided time-relevant persistence data intended to inform funding decisions for first-year

college student programming efforts. A conceptual replication study influences extended orientation in higher education by providing time-relevant context to the impact of persistence. Replicating a 10-year historical study adds to the research by allowing trends, changes, similarities, and differences to arise. This replication study compared first-year college student persistence trends over 3 years instead of 1 year in the original study.

Review of Literature

Through research and review of literature of first-year students, retention and persistence of the first-year college student have grasped the attention of researchers (McCabe et al., 2020; Pascarella et al., 1986; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Low retention rates negatively impact institutions and negatively impact students who do not graduate (Elliott, 2016; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Students who do not persist are more likely to seek government assistance and unemployment. Yearly, low retention rates cost institutions on average $10 million (Elliott, 2016; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Researchers found that these factors improve first-year student retention: using strengths, enhancing well-being, belonging, transition, and more (Dos Reis & Yu, 2018; Lisberg & Woods, 2018). However, although there are findings of positive impacts on retention, there is still a need for further exploration (Maymon et al., 2019).

Persistence Gap

There is a significant gap in research on retention of first-year students and their persistence to the second year of college (Dos Reis & Yu, 2018; Lisberg & Woods, 2018). The transition to college is a critical feature in the success of first-year students. A student getting a college degree influences the future of their career, income, economy, family, and more. Yomtov et al. (2015) extended this statement to students who persist and earn a college degree: They are less likely to one day rely on government assistance. The benefit of the college degree and

student presence through completion impacts not only the individual but also society (Yomtov et al., 2015).

Yomtov et al. (2015) performed a study to see how peer mentorship impacted persistence of first-year students in a freshman seminar course. Two FYS sections opted in to this peer mentorship opportunity. The students who did not opt in were used as the comparison to show impact of the program. The cohort was divided into groups of 20–25 students with two mentors each. Aside from attending class with the mentees, the mentors had three projects with their groups throughout the semester. The first project was a one-on-one meeting to get the know them. The second was to teach the mentees about one academic resource on campus. The third project was for the mentors and a small group of mentees to attend one campus event.

All students in the FYS course were encouraged to take pretests and posttests. To add advantage to taking the survey, students' names were placed in a gift card drawing. After matching pre- and posttests, 304 students were in the final sample of the study. After comparing results, the students reported feeling more integrated with the university and felt active in campus activities. The majority of mentees ranked their mentors with a high or very high rating (95%). Mentees listed qualitative data such as, "I feel an active part of the campus community," "I feel a strong positive connection to the university," "I have at least one person who I can turn to for emotional support at the university" (Yomtov et al., 2015, p. 32).

This study was a mixed-methods study using both qualitative and quantitative data. Testing between the mentored and nonmentored students was relative. The purpose of the study was to aim to increase retention and graduation rates. That article stated, "Results paralleled other studies that found peer mentoring to be beneficial in promoting feelings of integration and perceived supportiveness, which might consequently help students to persist beyond their

freshmen year and graduate on time" (Yomtov et al., 2015, p. 40). This study accomplished the goal of positive feedback on surveys. The study did not have retention numbers or impacts; it stated only the inference of a positive impact. This article emphasized the feeling, sense of belonging, and tie to the university from peer mentorship. This article supported the qualitative portion of my study of the personal impact peer mentorship has on first-year students. This study helps to support the need of mentorship past summer and into the first semester, helping to teach and mold students in their first year.

Less than 1 in 6 people are college graduates worldwide (Norris et al., 2017). Norris et al. (2017) stated, "First-year students face many struggles during this vulnerable time of their lives, and they long for guidance" (p. 22). Proximity to home to maturity level, ability to connect with others, feeling isolated, and more can all implicate a student's college trajectory (Norris et al., 2017). There is present research on the positive impacts of FYE programming through the first semester or year of college for first-year students; however, there is needed research on extended orientation camp programs (Dos Reis & Yu, 2018; Haynes & Atchley, 2013; Lisberg & Woods, 2018).

Peer Mentoring

First-year college students gaining support, peer mentorship, and learned skills increases their trajectory to the second year of college (Gunn et al., 2017). Maymon et al. (2019) also studied the impact of peer mentors through social support and peer mentorship through a student stress survey. The researcher found the quality of student relationships directly tied to the first-year students' stress level and well-being. Similar to Maymon et al. (2019), Gunn et al. (2017) found that peer mentors taught first-year students how to follow assignments and improve their communication skills. The mentees also revealed the most substantial benefit was the mental

support. These two studies showed a positive impact of similar peer mentorship programs on first-year students.

Maymon et al. (2019) studied the impact social-emotional well-being has on first-year students' transition to college. This study consisted of 126 students attending a secondary institution in Canada and the United States. Canada recorded 89 students participated, and the United States recorded 37. The study used a Likert scale to determine how often students received social support, different forms of social support, and the quality of social support. After performing the study and evaluating the impacts of each category on the level of sense of belonging and wellness with the questionnaire, the study highlighted the quality of support and the source of the support that impacted the student's transition to college. A greater level of friend support was directly related to low levels of loneliness. Lastly, the findings showed the orientation program directly impacted the students' motivation, lowered their level of burnout, and reduced intention of quitting. Orientation programming fostered first-year student well-being and mindset toward completion.

This study achieved strengths and limitations. The strengths of this study showed the correlation between orientation programing and the drive of success and college completion of first-year students. This indicated students felt supported and motivated to complete with the knowledge of faculty and staff support along the way. When referencing orientation programs, Maymon et al. (2019) stated, "Students' perceived quality of the support they receive, in addition to basic indicators of perceived frequency of support, should correspond with their use of coping strategies, perceived stress, and other well-being outcomes during their transition to higher education" (p. 70). A limitation of this study is the depth of knowledge of what orientation programs the students attended and the relationship to sense of support and success mindset. This

study directly relates the impact orientation programs have on first-year students. This study provides support to the context of the long-term effect of orientation programs on first-year students. Support impacts a student's drive toward completion and motivates them to keep going.

Gunn et al. (2017) performed a mentoring study to inquire about the impact the program had on the mentors and mentees. Fourth-year students at an institution in Canada applied for the mentorship position. Each applicant had to identify one of three areas of expertise: communication, math/Excel, or university transition. After applicants were selected, teams were created to consist of three mentors per team, one from each of the three areas of expertise. Each group was assigned 8–10 mentees to meet five times. Each 50-minute session was held on an area on campus and had a curriculum of different focus areas. Mentees consisted of 107 students with 16 mentors. I used qualitative responses to determine their experiences and critical incident technique to sort the data. The "mentees believed they benefited from talking to the mentors (gaining insight into their personal experiences) and acquiring support, which in turn has helped with their communication skills" (Gunn et al., 2017, p. 22). The qualitative data reveals the mentees were better able to complete assignments and received beneficial guidance on advice, leadership, campus information, and more. This mentorship program allowed a place for the first-year student to ask questions and get feedback on coursework. Students revealed they were able to ask mentors about assignments and learned greater communication skills.

This study has strengths of mentee benefit, positive impact on mentorship relationship, and study feedback on how to improve the study findings. I was aware of limitations and provided solutions to improve the study method and article detail. Limitations included sample size and depth of the survey questions. This study supports the literature review with the positive

impact on first-year students by utilizing peer-mentors. It provides depth and context to how mentees feel about mentorship and in what areas they leaned on their mentor.

Collings et al. (2014) executed a comparative study when the number of college students decreased across various institutions in the United Kingdom. They approached the study a little differently. They provided a survey to students with peer mentorship to see if the mentorship experience was related to the students' desire or intent to leave the institution. Surveys were taken twice: in the first 5 days and after 10 weeks. Participating on both checkpoints were 109 students. Mentors consisted of third- and fourth-year students who were available from welcome week through the first year of the mentee. There were no mentor guidelines or mandatory requirements. The mentors were mainly supportive through welcome week. Only 17% of mentors still mentored after the 10-week checkpoint.

After Checkpoint 2, students who were not mentored were 4.16 times more likely to want to leave the institution than those who were mentored. The proportion of nonmentored students who seriously thought about leaving the university was significantly higher than the university average (22% compared to a 9% average). At Checkpoint 2, there was a significant difference in felt support of those mentored and similar accordance with levels of self-esteem. Those mentored increased self-esteem through Checkpoints 1 and 2, whereas those who were not mentored decreased self-esteem.

The researchers found students with a high level of engagement and mentorship had a low level of intent to leave the institution. There were similar findings for the opposite case: Students who felt a lack of connection had a strong desire to leave the institution, specifically at Week 10 of classes. The integration of upperclassman and student involvement increased the students' desire to stay (Collings et al., 2014). The application of this study supports the mindset

and retention desire of students at an institution. Support, sense of belonging, and self-esteem directly tie to the students' desire and mindset to stay at the university. This article supports the relationship between peer mentorship and desire to stay. The impact of peer mentoring has a long-term impact on students and their connection and commitment to the institution. Students having the desire to stay at a university positively impacts retention and university finding efforts (Elliott, 2016; Poynton & Lapan, 2017).

Geng et al. (2017) performed a qualitative study on the impact peer mentorship had on first-year students. This interpretative phenomenological analysis studied the stress levels of first-year students and final-year students through a teacher education program at a university in Australia. Two first-year students and two final-year students participated in this study. Each student took a 10-question Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) test each week of the study to determine their stress levels. Both sets of students engaged in the same program, at the same university, and at the same placement location for teaching practicum. The final-year students served as a mentor for the first-year students in providing guidance and advice through the first 4 weeks. The stress scale showed the first-year students had a decrease in stress over 4 weeks, whereas the final-year students had an increase in stress. The first-year students expressed they worried about their lack of knowledge and experience in the program. The mentorship program allowed them to gain reassurance and guidance. The final-year students expressed they had added pressure on their shoulders, therefore adding to their stress levels, but increased their experience for their future in teaching. This article showed the impact peer mentorship has on the mentor as well, impacting their stress levels but also giving them real-world experience in mentoring to help their future career. Geng et al. (2017) allowed another example of the impacts peer mentorship has on college students.

Specialty Mentorship

Researchers studied a deep level of peer mentorship. Specialty mentorship consisted of select groups of students gaining mentors precisely due to a shared role or situation (Birkeland et al., 2019; Chambers et al., 2019; Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Ottley and Ellis (2019) performed a qualitative study to examine perceptions of retention and persistence of Black male students. Ten students of a male leadership program opted in to the study. The researchers conducted 10 semistructured interviews; they were an average of 1 hour long. The researchers then took the qualitative data and coded the responses and feedback by themes. One of the major themes of their feedback related to the positive impact the M.A.L.E. leadership mentorship program had on their experience. A student stated, "Without this initiative, the university would have a hard time retaining African American males or African-American students, period. This initiative gives students mentors and role models" (Ottley & Ellis, 2019, p. 95). Another student talked about being a first-generation student: "As a first-generation student, the guidance alone was cumbersome. It was intimidating to think about" (Ottley & Ellis, 2019, p. 96). The participants of this study showed the impact a peer mentorship program had on their experience at the university.

The students also spoke on sense of belonging to the university: "That (retention initiative) gives you a sense of belonging, especially for a lot of people. Most of us are first generation college people, to have a sense of belonging to an organization or a group who make you more comfortable here and your experience a lot better" (Ottley & Ellis, 2019, p. 97). The qualitative data showed the positive impacts on peer mentorship and how the support group impacted their belonging to the institution.

I intended to study how students viewed retention and their belonging to the institution. Peer mentorship had a direct impact on their view of retention. Limiting the study to Black male students was a limitation to this study. This study highlighted the benefits of peer mentorship and its impact on retention and how students feel about the university. This study was conducted for researchers to find what helps students stay and feel connected; peer mentorship organization was the outcome. This study supports the impact peer mentorship has on students and their connection to the university. The feedback from students was raw and real based on their student experience. The students valued connection, role models, and support. This qualitative feedback supports the context to my study in the influence peers have on each other.

Ottley and Ellis (2019) deepened peer mentorship by gathering a group of minority male students to mentor and lead them through their college experience. Findings from this study overwhelmingly indicated the need for specialty mentorship. These minority students felt heard, safe, and understood. A common theme of the student feedback showed students benefited from shared experiences. Shared experiences made them feel supported and defended (Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

Living and Learning Community. Retention of first-year students impact a university in serval ways. Universities want to find ways and resources to increase student retention. Relationships and sense of belonging can have a positive influence on academic success and retention. This study evaluated the impact a living-learning community had on student success and sense of belonging to the university. Retention of students in higher education is a working issue. I examined a positive outlet to increasing student retention. I collected qualitative data through a focus group within each living learning community. I studied first-year students in residence halls. These first-year students were in their first semester of college, learning how to

navigate college life and new academic expectations. The results of this study determined how students gained personal growth, leadership engagement, and career development: “Quantitative and qualitative data from this study demonstrate a thriving, supportive, and effective partnership between academic and student affairs representatives. … Research findings that students involved in LLPs have higher retention rates and report being more involved on campus” (Mach et al., 2018, p. 11).

There were a few limitations in this study. The purpose of the qualitative data was to get deep meaningful responses, and the responses were more surface level and overarching of the whole experience. Due to the space limitation in the campus residence halls, researchers were limited to 100 student participants. This study was enlightening to read how the leadership and relationship of upperclassman impacted first-year students. These relationships impacted one’s sense of belonging and support network. This article showed positive outcomes such as involvement, sense of belonging, and retention. This article also showed students with personal growth and academic growth through this mentorship program.

STEM Program. Chambers et al. (2019) also studied peer mentorship within a group. The STEM students at an institution showed a low retention rate of students in the program from Year 1 to Year 2. The research elaborated that 74.4% of students in the mentorship program persisted to Year 2 of the STEM program, whereas 48.70% of the students who were not mentored persisted to Year 2. In 2015, 50% of mentored students persisted to Year 2, and 25% of nonmentored students continued.

The study used four themes to study qualitative data. The researchers gained feedback through questions stemming from weakness and challenges, modifications, recommendations, and strengths and benefits. The qualitative data showed that “the growth of students’ confidence

as a scientist after the completion of the course was identified through their qualitative responses. This increase stresses the importance of scientific literacy and the impacts that a scientific literacy course can have on a student's confidence as a scientist" (Chambers et al., 2019, p. 8). The qualitative data directly related to the sense of belonging and connection the students felt with the program and peers. Peer mentorship gave the students a deeper connection to the material, coursework, and peers in their course. Peer mentorship also relieved the fears of what is to come next in coursework.

With a low persistence rate of STEM students, Lisberg and Woods (2018) studied the impacts of peer mentorship programs on the retention of STEM students at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. This university created a first-year STEM boot camp with the hope of increasing the retention of students into their second year. This boot camp created a peer mentorship program consisting of two to three student mentors per 12 STEM students. The researchers collected data with chi-square testing and use of the Institutional Resources and Planning Office at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater.

After Year 1 of the peer mentorship program, first-year STEM students who attended the boot camp enrolled for their second year at a 96% rate. This number was substantially higher than the percentage rate the institution predicted (71.1%). This study revealed STEM students who participated in the peer mentorship program showed greater retention and program success than those who did not attend, from the same institution.

This study holds strengths and weaknesses. Strengths of the study include sufficient recorded data of retention rates, GPA, and course completion using comparisons of Years 1, 2, and 3 to show development and improvement. This study also provided a chart with a comparison of those who attended the peer mentorship program and the trajectory of those who

did not attend. A limitation to this study was the lack of detail of the peer mentorship program. A portion of qualitative data would add support to this study to indicate what aspects truly influenced the growth and support rate from Year 1 to Year 2. This study supports the literature review in studying the impacts mentorship has on the trajectory of first-year students. This study shows the impact on retention rates through peer mentorship and development of first-year students. This mentorship boot camp showed an increase in motivation and desire for completion with the influence of peers who were ahead of them in the program.

StrengthsQuest. Soria and Taylor (2016) studied the impact of mentorship through StrengthsQuest in first-year residential students. This study was performed at an upper-Midwest university with a population of 28,000 students, 5,500 of whom were first-year students. Each first-year student had the opportunity to take the Gallup StrengthsQuest test for free before they started school. In all, 96.3% of students took the test. All of the community advisor and live-in staff were Gallup trained to perform assessments and development with StrengthsFinder. The ratio of community advisors to students was 35:1; each student was required to have 2 one-on-ones during the academic year based around StrengthsFinder. The students were also encouraged to use StrengthsFinder with their roommates and hall mates to bond and make connections. Hall events and programming were also based around strengths development.

At the end of their first semester, the students were able to opt in to a survey. In all, 19.7% of students (1,085) responded to the survey. This survey consisted of a 12-item assessment based on the College Student Engagements Scale. For the second half of the assessment, Soria and Taylor (2016) pulled retention data: 93.7% of the students retained for their second year. This percentage was higher than the retention average for the entire class at 90.4%.

This article was strong and presented every detail of the study. The article included the dependent variable, independent variables, strengths, weakness, limitations, and all demographics of the first-year students. A limitation of the study was the low number of participants in comparison to the large number of incoming students. The researchers also found a gap in their research on making the development of community advisors consistent.

Another study was performed in 2016 by Soria and Taylor hoping to see self-awareness impact first-year students. All the universities in the Midwest provided the opportunity for students to take the StrengthsFinder personality test to determine their top five strengths. In all, 96% of the first-year students took the test, and 19.4% (1,072 students) opted in to the survey. This survey consisted of a version of the Hope Scale, measuring goals and pathways. The results of this survey were compared to those of the control group and showed the students who reported a high level of strength awareness were more likely to accomplish the goals they set. Those who understood their strengths and set goals proved to be lifelong learners. These students had a stronger sense of purpose.

This article shows the importance of psychological wellness in first-year students. The article presented limitations due to the low percentage of first-year students who participated. The study would be enhanced by including further information on if students who chose to opt in already had a higher sense of self-awareness and goal setting in comparison to those who did not opt in. This article was very beneficial to the gap in the research. There is limited research on the transition from high school to college concerning mental health, goals, self-awareness, and sense of belonging. This article helps support the need for mental and psychological development during the transitional period. This will help students retain and accomplish their goals.

Academic Advising Program. Another study that utilized specialty group mentorship also implemented peer mentorship through the Academic Advising Center. The design stemmed from a low retention rate within colleges and majors and a lack of interest in academic advising appointments. The Academic Advising Center at an institution provided a survey to students, gaining feedback on the advising process. Almost 605 of students stated they would like a meeting once a month, with only 1% stating once per year. Conversely, less than 105 students would prefer advice to come from professors, family, or career services. Students relied heavily on the opinion of their classmates: “Students rely more heavily on their friends, classmates, and academic advisors. Overall, students prefer to seek advice from classmates and friends than most other groups” (Birkeland et al., 2019, p. 325).

This article had strengths and limitations. The strengths of this article included valuable student feedback. The results of this study showed students look to peers for guidance, advice, help, and direction. Students of this next generation are comfortable with their peers and think highly of their input. In this study, I gathered information about an upcoming peer mentorship program and how the program should be structured for the future, adding a limitation to the study. The student input and feedback from this study helped shape the components of peer mentorship in my study. The student feedback of how often they would like to meet and having a mentor or the same major helped greatly in the setup and framework of my study.

Twenty-five percent of the first-year students at the University of Mississippi enrolled as undecided in their major (Birkeland et al., 2019). The researchers examined how academic advising impacts, helps, and guides students who are undecided. The longer students are undecided, the longer they do not take degree-tracking courses, which could impact their graduation rate and the number of unused course if they are on the undecided path for too long.

The study consisted of 30 first-year students who received counseling from the same academic advising center. Researchers collected qualitative data through face-to-face interviews and phone calls. These interviews were conducted during the winter break after students' first semester. A second set of interviews was done in the spring semester. Twenty-five of the students expressed they had a positive interaction with their advisor, whereas 10 expressed nervousness and apprehension. After two interviews were conducted, the conclusion was unanimous that the academic advising center was helpful and encouraging. The study also revealed that the back-to-back semester sessions increased their major selection. Sixteen of the 25 spring session students came to their appointment prepared and more knowledgeable of classes and majors.

Limitations of this study included lack of prepared advisor content. Were students advised the same way from advisor to advisor? Was there consistent messaging and development from all the advisors? This study related heavily to the problem of practice. The more ways researchers can identify to increase students' connection the university, the more likely students are to stay. Studies like this help the administration to know where to invest university resources to help student retention. When connection and relationships form between advisors and students, this benefits success rates, academic scores, and retention. This article provided an example, method, outline, and strengths to student connection and retention linkage.

Academic College. Roy and Brown (2016) studied leadership through the lens of peer mentorship of students in the College of Business Administration. Eighty-two third- and fourth-year students participated in a study to peer mentor first-year students. The mentors' role was to help the first-year students adapt to college life; provide campus guidance such as library guidance, tutoring services, motivation, leadership, and career goals; and even teach the students the ins and outs of the town. The mentors were required to meet face-to-face with their mentee

three times for 30 minutes. The mentor was also expected to take notes and work through a set of questions created from five themes of the program: research, personality, motivation, leadership, and reflection.

Thirty-four of the 82 students opted in to the follow-up research interviews to determine if mentor development took place during this study. In all, 82% of mentors said this mentorship role increased their intrinsic motivation to mentor, with 58.8% saying they loved the feeling of helping their mentee. However, 54% said there was a clash of personality during the mentorship. Moreover, 91% of the mentors said they believed this mentorship to be a valuable experience, increasing their communication skills, leadership skills, explanation of information, and meeting of new people.

This study provided strengths and weaknesses: 91% of students said they thought this study was valuable to the mentee, but on a different question of the study, 15% of the mentors said this was not a good experience for the mentee. This article provided support on the selection, development, and impact of peer mentors for the first-year students.

Another study that utilized mentorship programs at an academic college is Leidenfrost et al. (2014). Leidenfrost et al. (2014) studied peer mentorship through students studying psychology at the University of Vienna in Austria. Students were broken up in 48 groups of about 8 students each. This was a 3-month online mentor model with five face-to-face meetings. Overall, 376 first-year students opted in to this voluntary mentor program. Leidenfrost et al. (2014) studied the academic impact of those who participated versus those who did not. They also studied the difference in three mentorship styles. The three mentorship styles were motivating master mentoring, standard mentoring, and minimalist mentoring.

There was minimal difference in the three mentorship styles, yet there was a significant difference between those who were mentored and those who were not. GPA did not seem to be influenced easily. However, the number of classes they passed was impacted greatly. Those who were mentored passed 23 hours versus 17 hours passed during the first year for those not mentored. This article provided academic evidence in regard to number of hours passed and GPA. A limitation of this study was not including retention data. Did the students who did not pass class return to the university? The leadership styles were a limitation. The leadership styles lessened in connection and length of response and involvement; instead of keeping the same model with lessening connection, I wondered what the difference would have been in strictly online, strictly face-to-face, or mixed-model instruction. This article showed the impact peer mentorship had on students academically. This article supplemented the benefits of peer mentorship. This study was a great source for academic achievement but also showed the gap in connection and sense of belonging in first-year students.

Dos Reis and Yu (2018) studied the impacts of a peer mentoring pregame at an institution on the Western Cape. The mentors-and-mentees program was created to help the passing rates for economics courses. Mentees consisted of 36 students, who corresponded with 12 mentors. Mentors attended a workshop, created a group message for mentees, sent weekly motivational messages, and hosted a 30-minute group meeting each week. Mentees receive significantly higher marks in their courses if they attended the pregame program. Final marks for participants were 67.3, and the final mark for those who did not participate was 58.8. Dos Reis and Yu (2018) stated, “The results indicate that participation in the peer-mentoring program as mentees leads to a greater, significant impact on ECO133 examination performance” (p. 245). Along with the quantitative data, this study also gathered qualitative data for feedback of the mentorship

program. Students of the study stated, “My mentor is quite motivating. I receive daily inspirations from her and this keeps me going in life and at the university” (p. 247).

This study was full of strengths. This study revealed the positive impacts peer mentorship has on first-year programs. Academic grades, as well as overall motivation, were the two main benefits of this study. This study listed mentor compensation as a limitation. The university in South Africa believed all universities should host peer mentorship for their students, and direct compensation should be omitted. The study provided support to this topic for first-year students as it showed a positive impact on program retention. This study used quantitative and qualitative data to show support to peer mentorship during the FYE.

Spaulding et al. (2020) recruited 124 mentors to help the transition of the next incoming class of 1,000. Mentors need to have a GPA of 3.0 or higher to mentor in a certain class. They also needed to have free hours to commit to students in their week and used this to build on their resume. Mentors also endured a leader training on several topics. Mentors received two groups of 8–10 students and met with each group for 1 hour once a week. This study focused on the outcomes of the mentor when leading first-year students. This study found that mentors felt stronger for their own studies, learned more about their institution, increased motivation, and were better able to cope with stress. Through studying the mentors, this article not only showed how the upperclassman were impacted by mentorship but also what the needs were for student training. Feedback stated, “Mentors noted that many times mentees were overconfident, not doing their homework, not having time management skills, not handling the transition from high school to college well, not possessing good stress management skills, and not using university resources” (Spaulding et al., 2020, p. 34).

This article resulted in focusing on the impact mentoring had on the mentors and feedback on what the first-year students needed through the process. This article had limitations in not hearing feedback from the first-year mentees. This article had strengths through a different lens on the mentor's experience. Mentors revealed first-year students having much confidence and it negatively impacting their grades and study habits. They also revealed things that need to be hit on for mentors in training based on their mentoring experience.

Although this article took a different path, the feedback was useful in this study as it provided feedback from the mentor's experience. This article showed a different point of view on the need for topics and training and what the mentees are going through. This alternate perspective gives support to this topic, provides a similar outcome through a different lens, and offers validity.

Wallin et al. (2017) studied peer mentorship between first- and second-year education majors and upperclassmen (third- and fourth-year) education majors. This university in Saskatchewan wanted first- and second-year students to feel a connection not only to their major but to the university. They wanted to study how mentorship and leadership skills impacted them and enhanced the first- and second-year students for their upperclassman years in the education program. This study was performed with two focus groups and one-on-one interviews. The interview questions were consistent, yet there was a limitation in the study due to the interview being held after the long semester. Due to the semester being over, only 9 of the 30 students were interviewed. The upperclassman peer mentors learned leadership skills, how to build a community, how to lead peers, how to balance personalities, and more.

This article used qualitative data to show the impact students had on each other as partners through a peer mentorship teacher-leader experience. The two partners being able to

grow from each other and learn from one another impacted both parties' experience. Peer mentorship is encompassing in my problem of practice. This study helped to guide that peer mentorship not only helps, leads, and directs the mentee but also positively impacts the mentor along the way. This study expressed how the partnership between the two mentors impacts each party. This study took first-year students and upperclassman as partners, and both parties were greatly impacted.

Bridging the Programs. The three research studies showed positive mentorship impacts through peer support (Birkeland et al., 2019; Chambers et al., 2019; Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Students desired advice and feedback from peers who were previously in their shoes (Birkeland et al., 2019). The study by Ottley and Ellis (2019) relayed how students crave and benefit from shared experiences. These research examples are qualities (i.e., peer advice, mentorship, and shared experience) present during extended orientation programs. Peer mentorship impacts first-year students greatly, from GPA to passed classes, goals, stress levels, advice, and practicum knowledge. Students are impacted for the better through peer mentorship. These researchers studied peer mentorship through different lenses, such as academic, online model, StrengthsFinder, and college-based. All five of these studies impact and influence students once they attend university.

These articles provided both qualitative and quantitative data. They presented retention data, GPA, passed classes, and reflection and feedback on students' experience. The articles had limitations, but they all provided strong evidence of peer mentorship through the academic realm. Retention is crucial to higher education. What makes students stay? What makes them persist? These research articles helped bridge the gap in these retention questions.

There is a gap in research showing the impact on the summer transition process from high school to college. I desired to research this gap to determine if summer transition program models impact the retention and sense of belonging of first-year students. I examined this gap by studying the impact on peer mentorship that extended orientation has on first-year students and their retention at the university.

Servant Leadership

Norris et al. (2017) studied servant leadership. This study broke down the millennial generation and approaches to servant leadership. This study took an FYE course and used it to help reveal how students were impacted by servant leadership. The surveys were to reveal the leadership-follower relationship using a Likert scale. The study was made up of 18-year-olds (85%) and a mixture of older nontraditional students. The total number of participants was 433. This study revealed accountability and empowerment were the highest-ranked impacts on the follower-to-leader relationship. Norris et al. (2017) found, "This research yields implications for implementing strong mentorship components in higher education" (p. 25). This study revealed students felt the most successful when they were empowered and held accountable for work and education. This showed the positive influence servant mentorship has on followers.

This study had strengths and weaknesses. This study broke down servant leadership, and students revealed the benefit of its influence on their motivation and work ethic. This provided the context that students like to be pushed and like something to look up to and forward to; students want to be held to a high standard and like standards to be set for them to reach and exceed. A limitation of this study was how it did not relate to students' current college. Peer mentorship has many layers and levels. This article supported the training and preparation of the

peer mentors in my study. This article supported the teachings on servant leadership and provided context to the why behind the method of leader training.

Belonging

Naylor (2017) performed a study to learn what factors influence the relative importance of first-year persistence. He used a Likert-scale and a quadratic voting system to identify how sense of belonging and personalization link to retention. Naylor (2017) invited 2,226 students to participate in this first-year study. In all, 201 students completed the survey, and 192 completed both survey portions. The surveys indicated the student gravitated to three main themes they needed in the first year. The first was completion, the students needed to feel like they were moving forward, moving toward their goal. The second was achievement, feeling a sense of success, advancement, and growth. The last quality was sense of belonging; the students needed to feel a part of the university, like they belonged and were making a difference. The students equated sense of belonging to their university transition process: "Sense of belonging and social integration into university has been identified as vital to success at university and strongly predictive of retention" (Naylor, 2017, p. 16).

This study provided great context to the benefit of success orientation programs and affirmation that students felt an impact of the help that relationship orientation programs bring to the transition process. This study would have been strengthened with qualitative feedback on why students ranked the way they did. There would also be benefits to hearing in what areas students got their buckets filled in these categories. The articles elaborated on a few topics but could be stronger in depth. This article provided great insight into the literature review portion of my study, highlighting the need for strong orientation programing. The student feedback from these findings helped support the why and need behind the topic chosen.

First-Generation Students

Parents who have a college education are more likely to expect their children to also attend college than parents who did not receive a college education (Hertel, 2002). Hertel (2002) stated, “These first-generation students may know less about college life, receive less support for college attendance, and may possess different values than more affluent students” (pp. 3–4). However. On the flip side, Hertel (2002) explained that students whose parents did attend college were able to pass on the knowledge and experience of college culture to their students, increasing their ability to adjust quicker.

Transitioning to a college institution brings high levels of stress and vulnerability when adjusting to a new life setting (Hertel, 2002). Hertel (2002) stated, “First-year college adjustment can be exacerbated by sociographic variables” (p. 3). Therefore, Hertel studied the comparisons between first-generation college students and second-generation college students to see if there was an adjustment difference as they entered college. Hertel (2002) found that the second-generation students came from a higher socioeconomic background than the first-generation students. Hertel (2002) also found that the first-generation students had a harder time adjusting to the social life of college, whereas the second-generation students had a higher level of self-esteem and found campus support quicker. Hertel (2002) found that first-generation college students needed significantly more help in socially adjusting to college, and they did not feel sufficient levels of support on campus compared to second-generation students.

Extended Orientation

All areas of freshman orientation programs are to help smooth the transition from high school to college for students attending college for the first time. Peterson and Borden (1993) stated, “Recent research indicates that participation in orientation enhances academic

achievement, retention, and personal development" (p. 6). This is a positive sign that orientation programming is beneficial to college students and their persistence trajectory. Typical college freshman orientation constitutes as a 1-day experience that accomplishes academic registration and on-campus checklist items. Extended orientation programs consist of an extended transition experience that focuses on relationships, mentorship, and university traditions and is a 2-night, 3-day experience (Haynes & Atchley, 2013; Peterson & Borden, 1993).

There is scant research on extended orientation programming for incoming first-year college students. Orientation programming has been used universally at intuitions to ease the transition of students into their new environment. However, Yarbrough (1993) described extended orientation as "an acknowledgement of the need for intrusive orientation efforts on the part of the institution in order to provide active, and opposed to passive, learned experiences for the students it serves" (p. 2). Yarbrough (1993) moved on to explain that extended orientation programs are being rapidly established. However, "research on the outcome of students persistence is not rapidly proceeding at the same pace" (p. 3). A study conducted by Yarbrough (1993) showed students who participated in extended orientation efforts were more involved on campus through activities such as athletics, recreations, arts, music, theater, and faculty members. There is a need to better understand what impacts extended orientation makes on academic outcomes, retention, and university participation (Yarbrough, 1993).

There are many emotions and experiences a student can feel through transition, Brunelle-Joiner (1999) stated, "Negative experiences such as poor adjustments from high school academics to college academics, homesickness, loneliness, and stress tend to be problems experienced by freshman during their first months of college" (p. 1). However, in successfully adapting to change and a new environment, one is considered resilient (Brunelle-Joiner, 1999).

After Brunelle-Joiner (1999) studied the impacts of students who participated in extended orientation programming compared to those who did not, researchers found a higher GPA in participants. This higher GPA also continued for these students into their sophomore year. There was a higher retention rate for those who participated in the program compared to those who did not: “Of the students who participated in FYE, 92.8% returned for their sophomore year. In the non-participant group, 86% returned for their sophomore year” (Brunelle-Joiner, 1999, p. 96). However, it was not a significant difference. Brunelle-Joiner (1999) recommended a replication study with a larger incoming class.

Opposition. There is very little research on extended orientation programming; however, a study was conducted by Haynes and Atchley (2013) over the persistence impacts of first-year students who attended extended orientation summer programming and nonparticipants. This study was performed one decade ago and showed no statistical difference in participant persistence than nonparticipant persistence (Haynes & Atchley, 2013). This study held limitations and gave recommendations for future research. This study created a foundation for future analysis of extended orientation programs. Through performing a replication study with this historical research, data determined if the impacts of extended orientation progressed, decreased, or remained the same over the years (Haynes & Atchley, 2013).

Relevance to Problem

Researchers (Norris et al., 2017) have found that a sense of belonging, well-being, mindset, and connection to the university indicate a student’s path to graduation. Norris et al. (2017) found students directly correlated to success when held accountable by peers. Students felt a strong desire to have a goal to achieve when the peer-mentor was in closer relation, giving the first-year student a standard to reach, a goal to set, and an example to view. Norris et al.

(2017) stated students feel “the most successful when they are held accountable and empowered to do quality work” (p. 25). Lisberg and Woods (2018) showed a distinct difference in the students’ performance through the peer mentorship program versus those who did not participate. Students who participated in the peer mentorship program in Year 1 retained at a 96% rate, whereas students who did not participate retained at a 71.5% rate.

Chapter Summary

Across higher education, there is a desire to increase the trajectory of first-year college students and help them persist to the second year of college. An analysis of the research indicates peer mentorship positively influences the retention of first-year students. Through mentorship programming, specialty advising, mentorship, relationships, and shared experiences, students feel connected and engaged with the university. These positive traits found through the researchers are transferred through a multitude of studies shown in this literature review. However, there is a lack of research on the impact camp orientation programming has on the persistence of first-year college students (Haynes & Atchley, 2013). Chapter 3 elaborates on the methodology of the study, research design, and data collection procedures to enhance the understanding of the quantitative action plan.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study highlights the enrollment impacts (i.e., persistence rates and GPA) of first-year college students who attended extended orientation programs compared to those of students who did not. In support of the need to increase research on the impact extended orientation camp programming has on first-year college students, this chapter defines a quantitative study to add to the literature. This chapter describes the research design, population, setting, sample, limitations, delimitations, trustworthiness, and data collection and analysis.

Research Design

I used a quantitative comparative study to determine the impact of extended orientation programs on student persistence from fall to spring from 2017 to 2019. Quantitative research is objective and formal. This research method ensures the validity and objectivity of the study (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Comparative quantitative research is used when looking for a relationship between two variables, presenting numerical data. This method is ideal for testing hypotheses and assumptions. Comparative quantitative research designs investigate the relationship between first-time-in-college (FTIC) students who attend summer extended orientation programs before starting their first semester of college and those who do not attend. This comparative quantitative research design determines if those who participate in extended orientation camp persist to the spring semester at a higher rate than those who did not attend extended orientation camp programming.

Comparative Study

A comparative quantitative research study was performed through a conceptual replication study. Block and Kuckertz (2018) stated, “Replication studies serve an important function in the academic discourse, as they are an indispensable ingredient needed to develop

convincing, robust, and reliable structured literature reviews and quantitative meta-analyses" (p. 356). This quantitative study replicated a study by Haynes and Atchley (2013). Haynes and Atchley (2013) performed a study using the FTIC cohort from 2010 to study the impact camp orientation had on persistence. In the past decade, there has been leadership turnover at the institution of relevance. This turnover spans from the president to the department level. A replication of this study is relevant due to the 10-year longevity of the study. Since this study in 2010, there has not been a review of the impact of extended orientation programs. Maymon et al. (2019) recommended future research and further investigation on assessing the impact support has on first-year students. Further research on student support can be studied by how a sense of belonging is developed through participating in an extended orientation program or mentorship and its influence on the persistence of first-year students.

Replication Study

The replication of a study strengthens the research base on the topic of first-year student persistence. Maymon et al. (2019) recommended further research on the impact of persistence and retention. Replicating a 10-year historical study adds to the research in this field. This research helps provide more time-relevant context to the impact of persistence. Growth is another essential factor for change. The institution relevant in this study has grown substantially in the past 10 years, with the freshman class almost double that from the initial study 10 years ago. This institutional growth, change of university leadership, and generational shift present an opportunity to replicate the study by Haynes and Atchley (2013).

Population, Setting, and Sample

The fall-to-spring persistence of first-year college students was studied through participation in summer extended orientation programs. The study takes place at a host

institution in North Central Texas with a population size of nearly 14,000 students, with over 50% of the student body classified as a first-generation college student. This institution employs over 700 staff and almost 900 faculty members. The institution also recently shifted to Division 1 intuition in the Western Athletic Conference (WAC). The freshman incoming class size ranges from 2,000 to 2,400 students. The host institution has a 2-year live-on requirement for first- and second-year students. The institution occupies over 4,000 live-on students annually. The host institution is a part of a university system that has 11 total universities.

This research study used data from the incoming class fall cohorts from 2017, 2018, and 2019. I used preexisting data to study persistence impacts for students who attended optional extended orientation camp programs versus those who did not attend. This study used a 3-year sample size in a conceptual replication of a decade-old study by Haynes and Atchley (2013).

Extended Orientation Description

The extended orientation program is called Freshman Camp. Freshman Camp is a 2-day, 3-night off-site experience where students learn the history and tradition and experience homecoming-like events. Campers check in on the university campus, meet their group for the first time, sign the class flag, learn chants and cheers, and have their first group time. Campers are then loaded up on buses to be taken to the campsite facility.

Campers are placed in groups by residence hall placement for the fall semester. This alignment provides students an opportunity to meet classmates in their building before move-in weekend. Campers are grouped in a range of 12–16 campers depending on the size of the camp. Each group is labeled by a university tradition and led by two trained student leaders. These student leaders interview for the position in September, are selected in December, and attend an 8-week leadership class in the spring semester leading up to summer programming. Each group

also has a “super group;” these two are linked together for some of the activities at camp to meet more campers.

Activities at camp range from small, intimate group time where leaders answer questions and give mentorship on what to expect during the first semester of school, examples of homecoming events and traditions to prepare for the fall semester, a traditions session, a service session, and free time. Free time is a great way for groups to intermingle and for campers to pick activities they like best, even if that includes a nap.

On Day 3 of camp, there is a chance for each group to pass out group awards for most spirited camper and reflect on the past 3 days. Then there are camps awards to highlight a few campers who stood out and made an impact on the experience. Campers are then able to line up at the microphone to provide some insight into their experience. When campers arrive back to campus on the buses, there is a Greek welcome back for campers to get to meet upperclassmen and learn about a few organizations on campus. These students help the campers to their cars with their luggage and offer popsicles and water. This camp is one component of a three-step process consisting of Orientation, Freshman Camp, and Transition Week.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

With approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix), I collected data from an institution in North Central Texas. I analyzed the data to determine persistence impacts for students who attended extended orientation programming versus students who did not attend camp programming. I also examined the data through the lens of the average GPA for each cohort and category of camp attendee or non–camp attendee. All students from each incoming class (2017, 2018, or 2019) was studied from institutional data and research.

After I collected the data, I used chi-square testing through SPSS to see if there was a significant persistence difference between students who attended extended orientation camp and those who did not attend. Pavlov (2020) stated, “Chi-square tests can also be used to compare the fit of two models that are nested” (p. 6). The chi-square test is used for testing performance, mean, and variance between data (Pavlov, 2020). The chi-square test was the methodology used in the original study by Haynes and Atchley (2013) that is being replicated. Using the same methodology for the replication study added validity and trustworthiness to the data.

This research study contained independent and dependent variables. USC Libraries (2021) described variables as “a person, place, thing, or phenomenon that you are trying to measure in some way” (p. 5). The independent variable is something that causes a change; in this study the extended orientation camp program was the independent variable. A dependent variable is something that can be changed and influenced; in this study persistence rates of students, persistence rates of first-generation students, and GPA served as the dependent variables.

Ethical Considerations

Quantitative data remain consistent and reliable. Bloomfield and Fisher (2019) explained further that quantitative data are a “formal, objective, systematic process used to describe variables, test relationships between them, and examine cause and effect associations between variables” (p. 27). Quantitative data are used to “determine whether two or more variables are related” (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019, p. 29). Quantitative methodology is also used to perform minimal bias in a study (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). The data from this study allowed for the removal of bias due to the data being historical institutional records. The historical nature of

these data prevented influence from myself as the researcher that would result in inaccurate data analysis.

Limitations

Haynes and Atchley (2013) conducted a research study on the persistence impacts for first-year students who attended extended orientation summer programming versus for nonparticipants. The researchers used the freshman cohort in 2010 and found no statistical difference in participant persistence (Haynes & Atchley, 2013). In the decade since the study was performed, there have been leadership changes, generational changes, and substantial growth in freshman class size at the North Central Texas institution. Limitations of Haynes and Atchley (2013), presented at the end of their study, referenced a limitation of some data being self-reported for the study. Another limitation was related to first-generation college students possibly not knowing the importance of precollege programs or understanding the value.

A limitation of this replication study was the leadership changes that the North Central Texas institution has endured over the last decade. There has been change at the institution from the presidential level down to the department level since the original study was performed with the 2010 incoming class cohort of students. These leadership changes can influence the data, program, leadership approach, and overall design of the program. Another limitation of this replication study was not knowing what communication was sent out to first-generation college students. Not knowing if or how much communication these students received could impact the data from 2010 to the present day. First-generation students might not have known the benefit to extended orientation or how to sign up for this optional program. The third limitation of this replication study was the variety of upperclassmen leaders guiding and mentoring FTIC students through this extended orientation program. Although the student leaders go through an

application and strong interview process, in-depth student development, and mentorship training, every person leads differently. Having a wide variety of student leaders in terms of personality and leadership style could impact the experience of the campers attending.

Delimitations

Limitations are present in the possibility that many reasons could impact the persistence of first-time college students. This study determined if extended orientation programming is one of the impacts. However, it is known through a multitude of research that there are numerous factors. A delimitation of this topic is to narrow the expanded analysis of persistence and study one specific impact to determine if it is significant to the research.

A delimitation of this replication study is narrowing the expanded research of freshman persistence and studying one specific impact such as extended orientation to determine if it is significant to the research. This topic takes one overarching topic of first-year persistence and narrows it to one specific area of extended orientation. A second delimitation of this study is the method of research: using a replication study. This study used a historical study as its framework to see if there has been a difference in the persistence rates of those who attended extended orientation compared to those who did not.

Trustworthiness

This study aligns with trustworthiness, beginning with a solid foundation of historical data and research. This replication study fits exempt status due to the replicated study providing a solid foundation of research supporting the need for future data and testing. This study offers trustworthiness from the data presented as historical public intuitional data that are retrieved and compared.

Chapter Summary

Although research exists showing impacts on retention and persistence rates, there is still a need among higher education professionals to continue this work in increasing persistence (McCabe et al., 2020; Pascarella et al., 1986; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Lack of persistence hurts the funding of institutions and negatively impacts the future career opportunities for the lost students (Elliott, 2016; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Maymon et al. (2019) and Haynes and Atchley (2013) recommended further research on this topic of first-year college student persistence and the impact of a sense of belonging and peer mentorship. Failure to address this problem could result in the inability of students to adequately transition to an institution, reinforcing the concerning lack of persistence of first-year students and lower retention rates (Leidenfrost et al., 2014). Chapter 4 elaborates on the results and the findings of this study. Chapter 4 explains if there is a significant persistent difference between students who attended camp versus students who did not attend camp.

Chapter 4: Results

The fourth chapter of this study presents the results of the replication study, analyzing if there is a statistical difference in persistence of those who attended extended orientation camp programming compared to those who do not. This study used data from a North Central Texas institution with a population size of nearly 14,000 students for the years 2017, 2018, and 2019. This university has an extended orientation camp program. Freshman Camp is a 3-day, 2-night off-campus retreat style event for first-time in college students. This camp program is designed to teach students university history and tradition and give students a mentor to help guide them through the first semester of college. This is a replication study done by Haynes and Atchley (2013) utilizing the same program from the same university in North Central Texas. Two research questions led the direction of the study:

RQ1: What is the persistence rate of students who attend extended orientation camp programming compared to those who do not attend?

RQ2: What is the GPA of first-year college students who attend extended orientation camp programming compared to those who do not attend?

Results

I determined that there is a statistical difference between persistence rates from fall to spring semester of those who attended extended orientation camp programming versus those who did not. Tables 1–3 show the quantitative data breakdown of attendance and persistence that aligns with Research Question 1.

Table 1

Freshman Camp Cohort 2017

		Persist Spring 2018		
Year	Attendance	NO	YES	Total
Freshman Camp	Attended	82	995	1,077
2017	Did not attend	97	725	822
Total		179	1,720	1,899

Table 2

Freshman Camp Cohort 2018

		Persist Spring 2019		
Year	Attendance	NO	YES	Total
Freshman Camp	Attended	117	1,160	1,277
2018	Did not attend	159	725	884
Total		276	1,885	2,161

Table 3

Freshman Camp Cohort 2019

		Persist Spring 2020		
Year	Attendance	NO	YES	Total
Freshman Camp	Attended	128	1,206	1,334
2019	Did not attend	117	622	739
Total		245	1,828	2,073

Tables 1–3 display the raw data pulled from the institutions to show the breakdown of each incoming class: size, their participation in camp programming, and persistence. I used the chi-square test to determine if the difference in persistence between those who attended camp and those who did not showed significance. All 3 years showed a statistical difference in persistence rates. Tables 4–6 display the findings.

Table 4

Chi-Square Tests for 2017 Cohort

Test	Value	*df*	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	9.572[a]	1	.002		
Continuity correction[b]	9.087	1	.003		
Likelihood ratio	9.473	1	.002		
Fisher's exact test				.003	.001
N of valid cases	1,899				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 77.48.

b. Computed only for a 2×2 table

Table 4 lists data from FTIC students who attended the university in 2017. The chart shows there is an impact on persistence due to showing a number that is less than .05 in significance.

Figure 1 visualizes the difference of those who attended extended orientation and persisted and those that did not attend camp. In 2017, of those who attended extended orientation camp programming, 92.39% persisted to the spring semester, whereas of those who did not attend camp, only 83.70% persisted to the spring semester.

Figure 1

Freshman Camp Cohort 2017

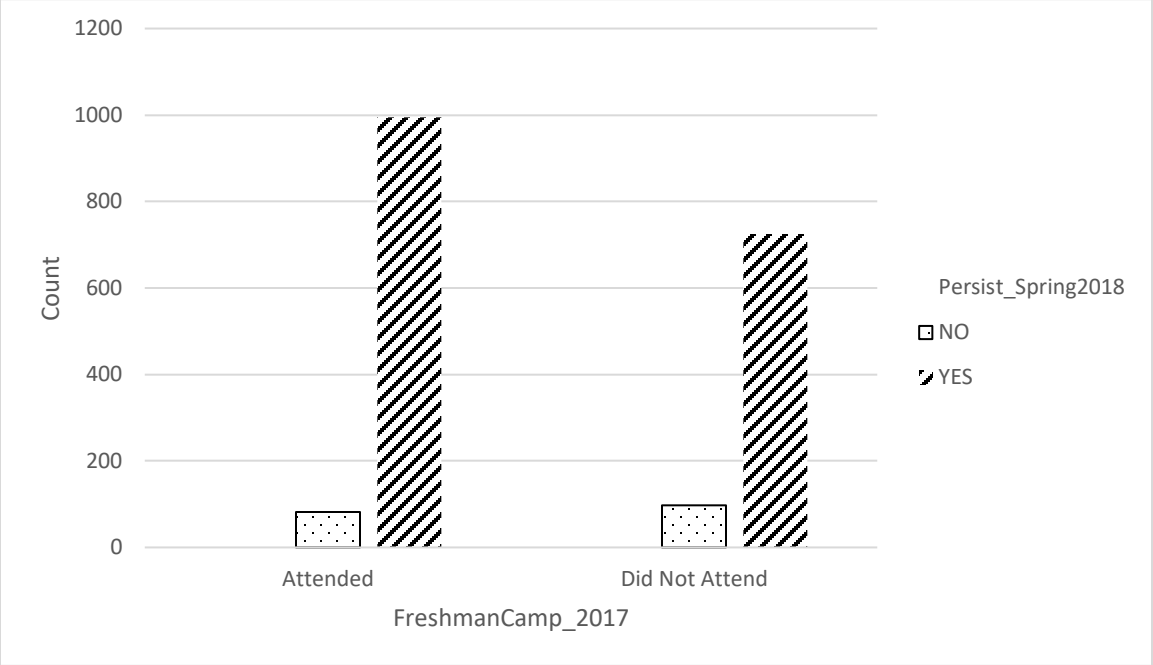


Table 5 lists data from the FTIC students who attended the university in 2018. The chart shows there was an impact on persistence due to a number that is less than .05 in significance.

Table 5

Chi-Square Tests for 2018 Cohort

Test	Value	*df*	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	36.512[a]	1	<.001		
Continuity correction[b]	35.725	1	<.001		
Likelihood ratio	35.841	1	<.001		
Fisher's exact test				<.001	<.001
N of valid cases	2161				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 112.90.

b. Computed only for a 2×2 table

Figure 2 visualizes the difference of those who attended extended orientation and persisted and those who did not attend camp. In 2018, of those who attended extended orientation camp programming, 90.84% persisted to the spring semester, whereas of those who did not attend camp, only 82.01% persisted to the spring semester.

Figure 2

Freshman Camp Cohort 2018

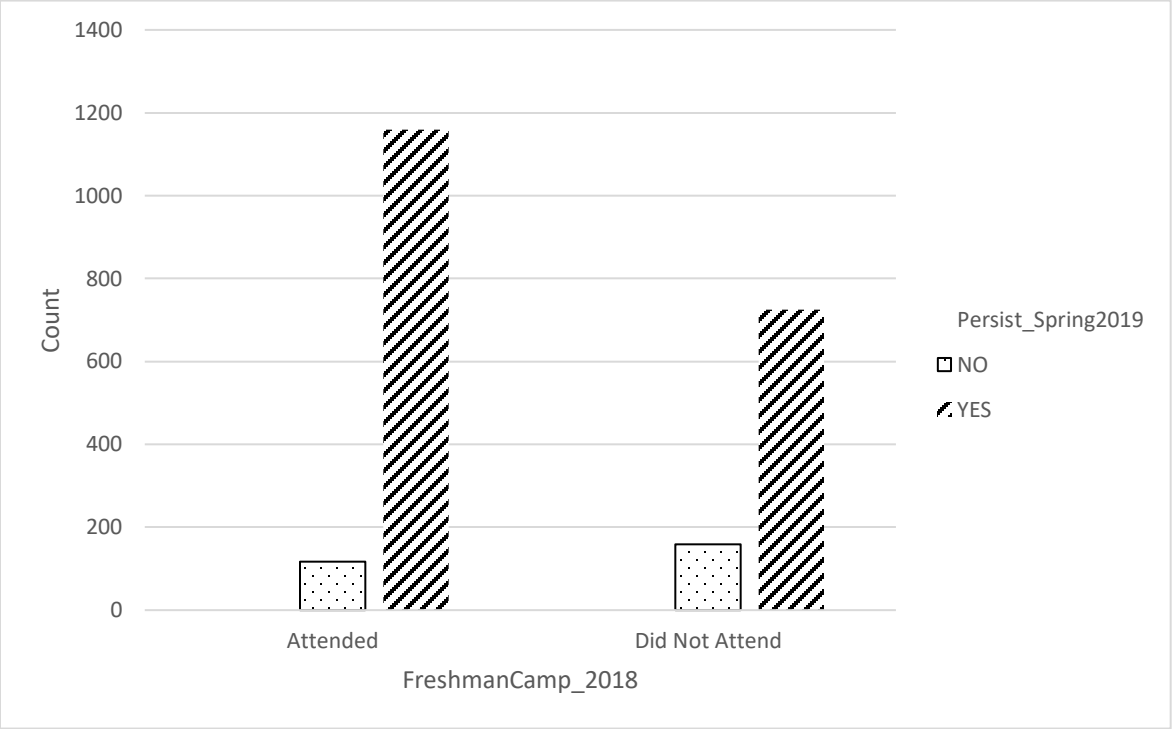


Table 6 lists date from the FTIC students who attended the university in 2019. The chart shows there is an impact on persistence due to showing a number that is less than .05 in significance.

Table 6

Chi-Square Tests for 2019 Cohort

Test	Value	*df*	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	17.750[a]	1	<.001		
Continuity correction[b]	17.157	1	<.001		
Likelihood ratio	17.173	1	<.001		
Fisher's exact test				<.001	<.001
N of valid cases	2073				

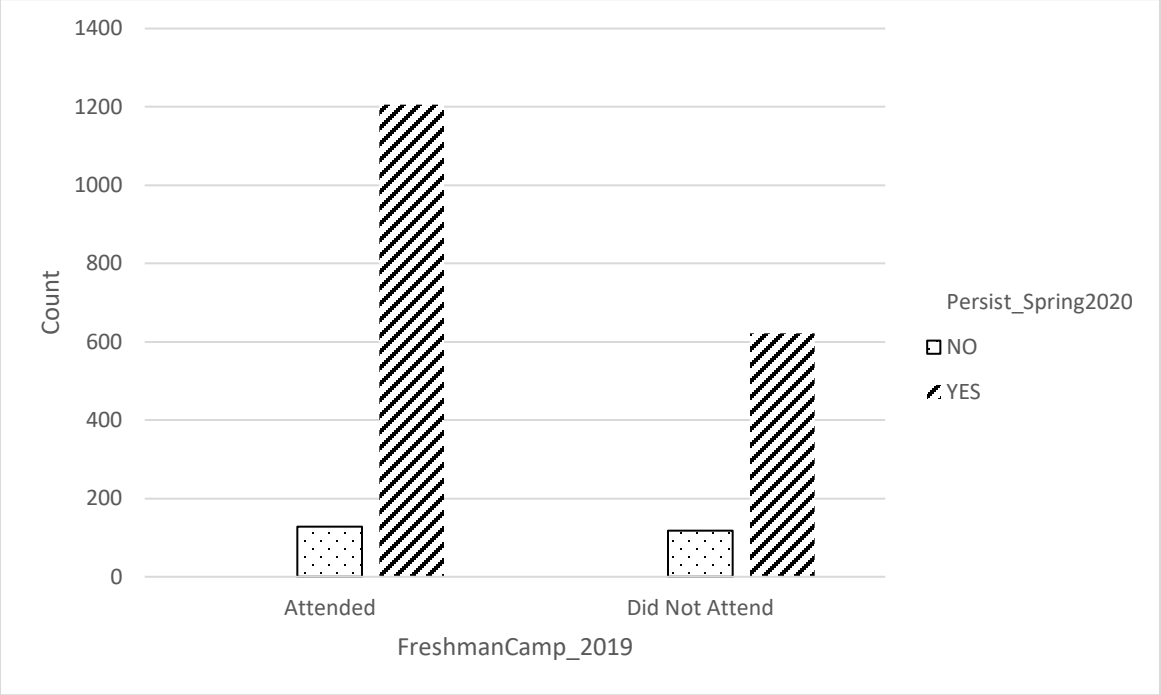
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 87.34.

b. Computed only for a 2×2 table

Figure 3 visualizes the difference of those who attended extended orientation and persisted and those who did not attend camp. In 2019, of those who attended extended orientation camp programming, 90.40% persisted to the spring semester, whereas of those who did not attend camp, only 84.17% persisted to the spring semester.

Figure 3

Freshman Camp Cohort 2019



Grade Point Average

Table 7 shows the comparison of student GPA for each incoming class of 2017, 2018, and 2019 between those who attended extended orientation programming and those who did not.

Table 7

GPA Comparison

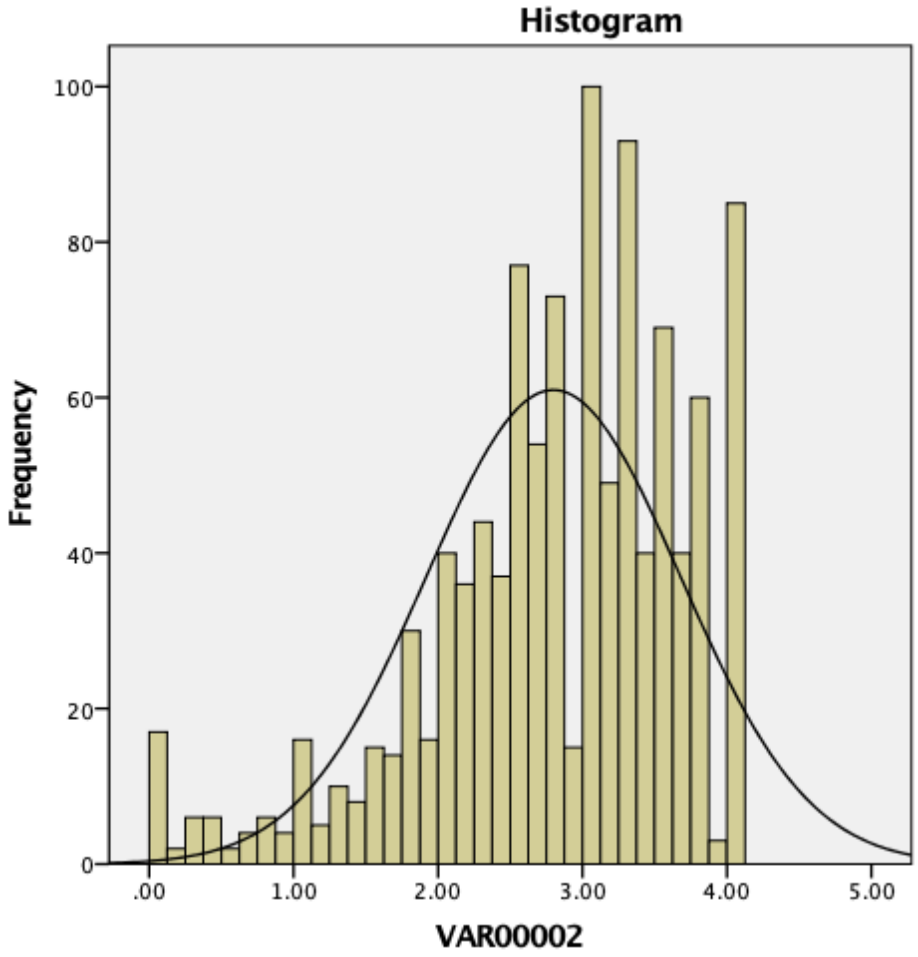
Year	Attended camp	Did not attend
2017	2.79	2.55
2018	2.73	2.45
2019	2.86	2.67

The GPA comparison shows that in all 3 years the GPA at the end of the spring semester was higher for those who attended Freshman Camp extended orientation programming compared to those who did not attend the camp programming. Figure 4 shows a bell curve to show the GPA as the variance and the quantity on the frequency of those in the cohort of 2017 who attended Freshman Camp. Figure 5 shows a bell curve to show the GPA as the variance and the quantity on the frequency of those in the cohort of 2017 who did not attend Freshman Camp.

Tables 8–10 show the *t* test results comparing the first semester GPA of those who attended extended orientation camp programming in 2017 and that of students who did not. The *p* value significance is less than a value of .05; this determines there is a significant difference in GPA between those who attended compared and those who did not. Figure 6 shows a bell curve to show the GPA as the variance and the quantity on the frequency of those in the cohort of 2018 who attended Freshman Camp. Figure 7 shows a bell curve to show the GPA as the variance and the quantity on the frequency of those in the cohort of 2018 who did not attend Freshman Camp.

Figure 4

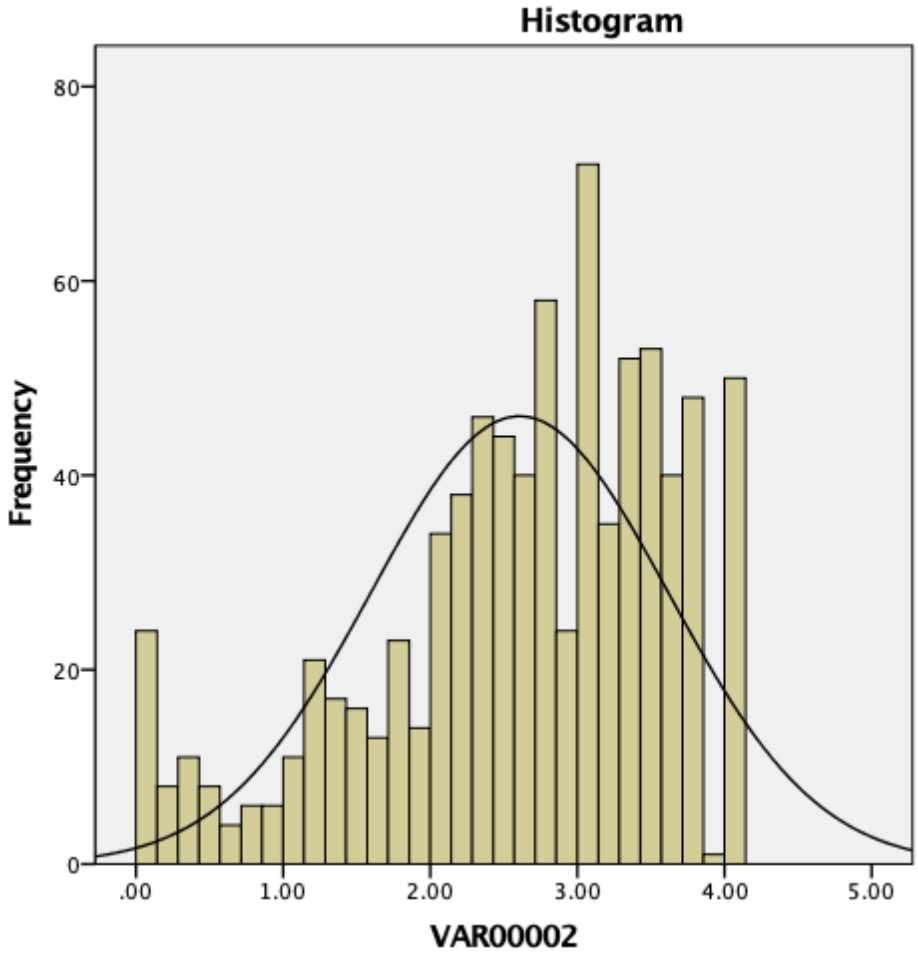
2017 Freshman Camp Attendee GPA



Note. *M* = 2.80; *SD* = .88; *N* = 1,076

Figure 5

2017 Non–Freshman Camp Attendee GPA



Note. M = 2.61; SD = 1.01; N = 817

Table 8

Descriptives—2017 Term GPA

					95% confidence interval for mean			
Attendance	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	Lower bound	Upper bound	Minimum	Maximum
Freshman Camp	1076	2.79859	.879992	.026827	2.74595	2.85122	.000	4.000
No Freshman Camp	817	2.60683	1.010437	.035351	2.53744	2.67622	.000	4.000
Total	1893	2.71583	.943057	.021675	2.67332	2.75834	.000	4.000

Table 9

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances—2017 Term GPA

Test	Levene's statistic	*df*1	*df*2	Sig.
Based on mean	19.989	1	1,891	< .001
Based on median	14.787	1	1,891	< .001
Based on median and with adjusted *df*	14.787	1	1,871.286	< .001
Based on trimmed mean	18.284	1	1,891	< .001

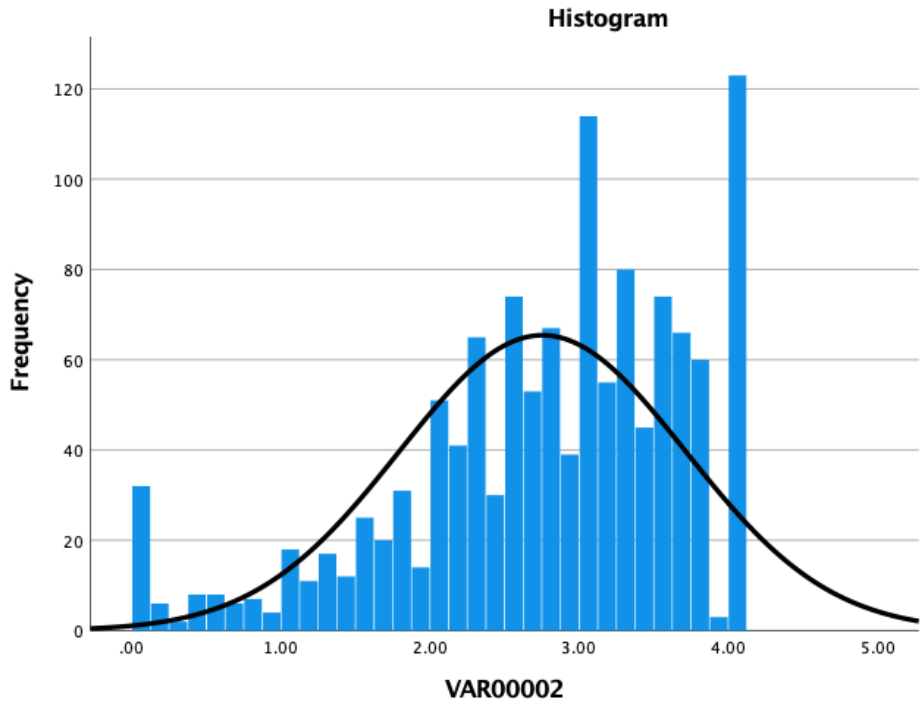
Table 10

ANOVA 2017 Term GPA

Variable	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	Sig.
Between groups	17.076	1	17.076	19.387	< .001
Within groups	1,665.588	1891	.881		
Total	1,682.663	1892			

Figure 6

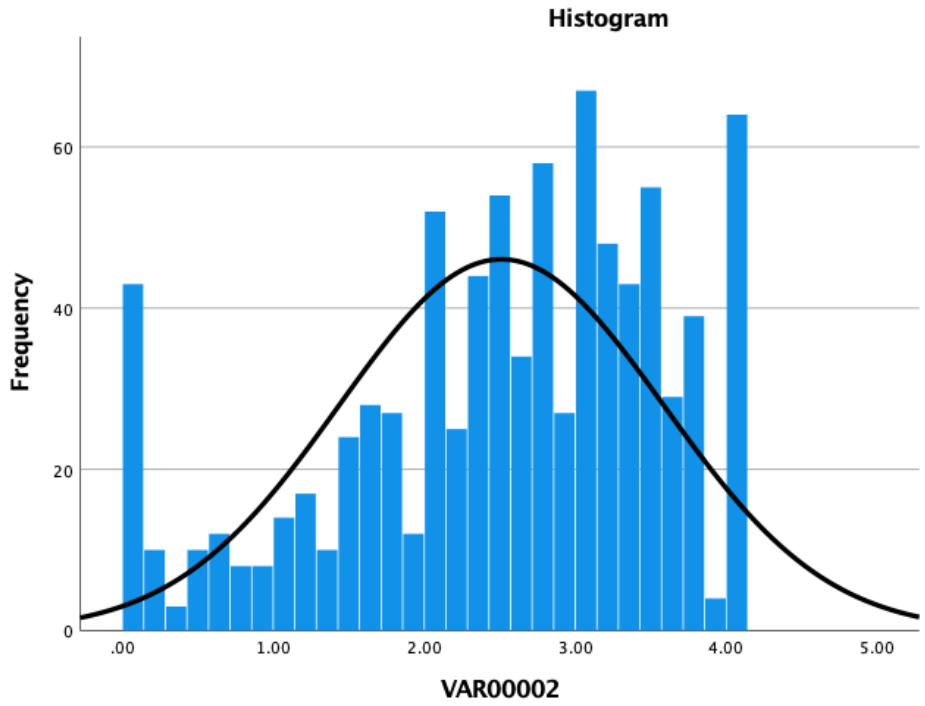
2018 Freshman Camp Attendee GPA



Note. *M* = 2.75; *SD* = .961; *N* = 1,261

Figure 7

2018 Non–Freshman Camp Attendee GPA



Note. *M* = 2.51; *SD* = 1.075; *N* = 869

Tables 11–13 show the *t* test results comparing the first semester GPA of those who attended extended orientation camp programming in 2018 compared to that of students who did not. The *p* value significance is less than a value of .05; this determines there is a significant difference in GPA between those who attended compared to those who did not. Figure 8 shows a bell curve to show the GPA as the variance and the quantity on the frequency of those in the cohort of 2019 who attended Freshman Camp. Figure 9 shows a bell curve to show the GPA as the variance and the quantity on the frequency of those in the cohort of 2019 who did not attend Freshman Camp.

Table 11

Descriptives—2018 Term GPA

Attendance	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	95% confidence interval for mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower bound	Upper bound		
Freshman Camp	1,261	2.75417	.960919	.027060	2.70108	2.80726	.000	4.000
No Freshman Camp	869	2.51093	1.074978	.036466	2.43936	2.58250	.000	4.000
Total	2,130	2.65493	1.015826	.022010	2.61177	2.69810	.000	4.000

Table 12

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances—2018 Term GPA

Test	Levene's statistic	*df*1	*df*2	Sig.
Based on mean	16.211	1	2128	< .001
Based on median	14.378	1	2128	< .001
Based on median and with adjusted *df*	14.378	1	2,115.041	< .001
Based on trimmed mean	16.176	1	2128	< .001

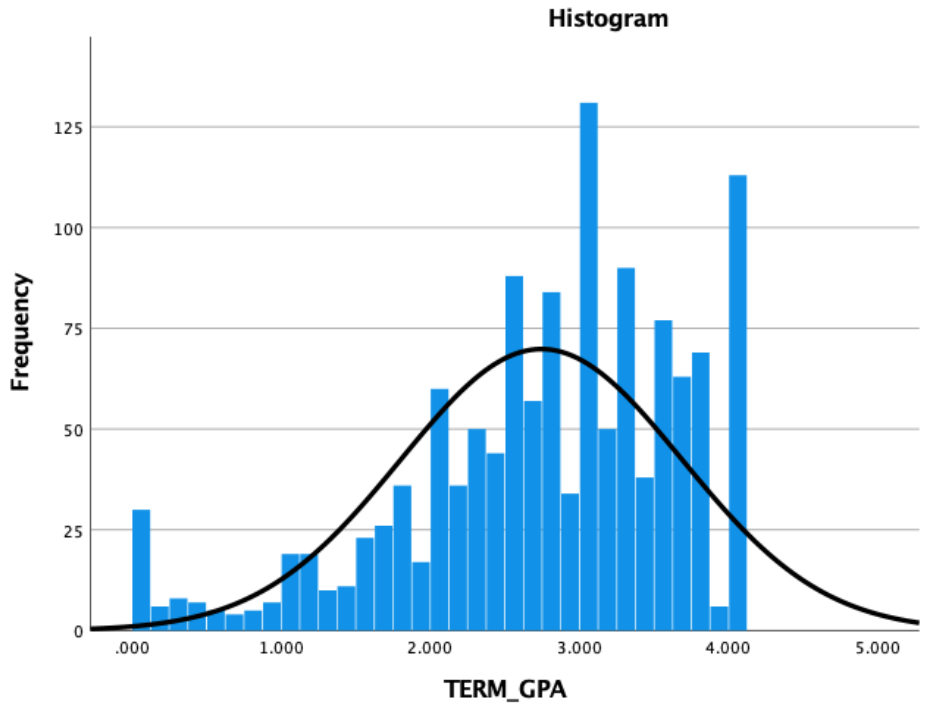
Table 13

ANOVA 2018 Term GPA

Variable	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	Sig.
Between groups	30.438	1	30.438	29.898	< .001
Within groups	2,166.482	2,128	1.018		
Total	2,196.920	2,129			

Figure 8

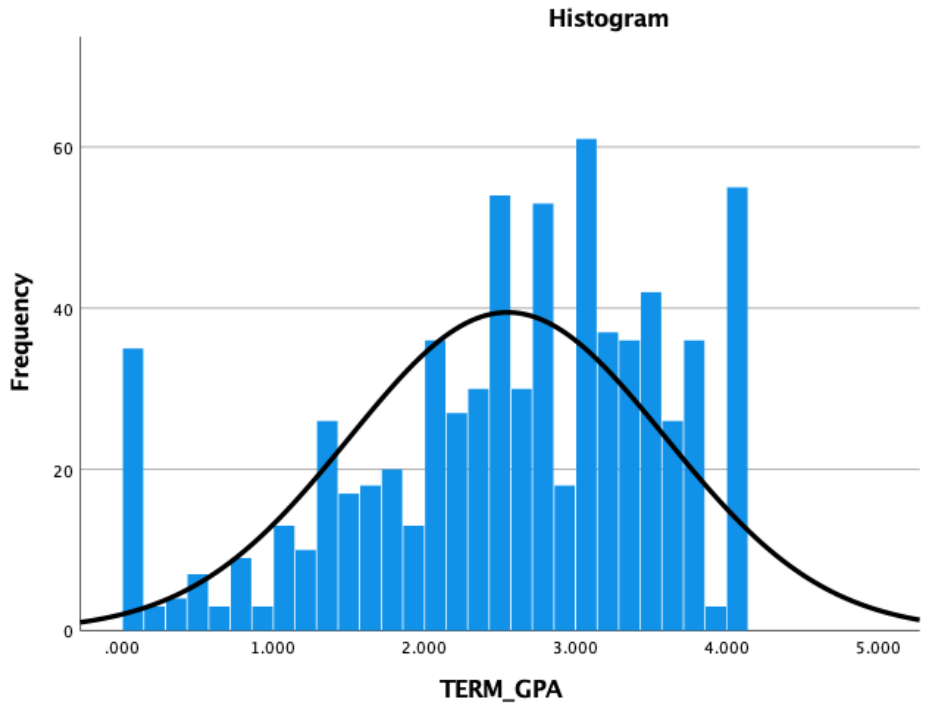
2019 Freshman Camp Attendee GPA



Note. *M* = 2.745; *SD* = .944; *N* = 1,323

Figure 9

2019 Non–Freshman Camp Attendee GPA



Note. *M* = 2.550; *SD* = 1.046; *N* = 725

Tables 14, 15, and 16 show the *t* test results comparing the first semester GPA of those who attended extended orientation camp programming in 2019 compared to that of students who did not. The *p* value significance is less than a value of .05; this determines there is a significant difference in GPA between those who attended compared and those who did not.

Table 14

Descriptives—2019 Term GPA

					95% confidence interval for mean			
Attendance	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	Lower bound	Upper bound	Minimum	Maximum
Freshman Camp	1,323	2.74504	.944392	.025964	2.69410	2.79597	.000	4.000
No Freshman Camp	725	2.55047	1.046500	.038866	2.47417	2.62677	.000	4.000
Total	2,048	2.67616	.985902	.021786	2.63344	2.71888	.000	4.000

Table 15

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances—2019 Term GPA

Test	Levene's statistic	*df*1	*df*2	Sig.
Based on mean	12.181	1	2046	< .001
Based on median	10.499	1	2046	.001
Based on median and with adjusted *df*	10.499	1	2,036.791	.001
Based on trimmed mean	11.974	1	2046	< .001

Table 16

ANOVA 2019 Term GPA

Variable	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	Sig.
Between groups	17.731	1	17.731	18.396	< .001
Within groups	1,971.959	2,046	.964		
Total	1,989.689	2,047			

Chapter Summary

The results from the chi-square test in all 3 years show a significant difference in persistence for students who attended the Freshman Camp extended orientation programming. In each of the 3 years of 2017, 2018, and 2019, there was a *p* value of less than .05, resulting in statistical results of benefit. Extended orientation camp programming also showed results of a

higher GPA in each of the 3 years studied. In the next chapter, I discuss limitations, recommendations, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Persistence of first-time in college students requires more research in the higher education field (Haynes & Atchley, 2013; McCabe et al., 2020; Pascarella et al., 1986; Poynton & Lapan, 2017). This study highlighted one area of higher education that could impact the persistence of first-time in college students. The area this study focused on is extended orientation camp programming. In this chapter, I analyze the results and implications for practice, along with the recommendations for the future, the limitations that exist, and the conclusions.

Discussion of Findings

This study focused on two questions within the quantitative data:

RQ1: What is the persistence rate of students who attend extended orientation camp programming compared to those who do not attend?

RQ2: What is the GPA of first-year college students who attend extended orientation camp programming compared to those who do not attend?

Research Question 1 showed through data analysis that students who attended extended orientation camp programming persisted at a higher rate than students who did not attend. A chi-square SPSS test indicated a significant different in persistence from fall to spring semester in first-year college students. Research Question 2 showed through data analysis that students who attend extended orientation camp programming have a higher GPA at the end of the spring semester than students who do not attend. For example, students who attended Freshman Camp in 2017 had an average GPA of 2.79, whereas students who did not attend camp had a 2.55 average GPA. Camp attendance impacted both persistence and student grade point averages.

These research findings concluded higher education practitioners and administrators should consider implementing an extended orientation program to help students get acclimated to the university, easing the transition from high school to college, if they do not already have one in place. If an institution does have an extended orientation in place, it is important to study the student impact or influence of the program. In this case, a study was performed on an incoming class in 2010 that did not show a statistical difference, but with university, division, and department reorganization and change of mindset, the impact on students has increased. Extended orientation programming is not an easy expense to take on. From buses to shirts, food, and host facilities, camp can gain expenses quickly. However, keeping the cost for the participant as low as possible enables more students the opportunity to attend. In the years Freshman Camp has been hosted, even with inflation, the fee has not exceeded $150 for students. This consistency and dedication of a low-cost attendance is in favor of administrators who believe in the impact of the program. In the past 2 years, the institution has increased the amount of scholarship money available, so money is not a barrier for students to attend.

Maintaining students at an institution is a priority for higher education; low persistence negatively impacts an institution's funding (Poynton & Lapan, 2017). Upperclassmen involvement increases a student's desire to stay at an institution (Collings et al., 2014). Poynton and Lapan (2017) and Elliott (2016) stated that peer mentoring has a long-term impact on a student's desire to remain at a university by increasing their connection, relationships, and commitment. Students' desire to stay at a university positively impacts retention and university funding efforts. Adding orientation initiatives creates long-term gain in relationship building, student sense of belonging, commitment to the institution, and increased GPA, overall impacting a student persisting at an institution.

Replication Study

This is a comparative replication study that is one decade old. Haynes and Atchley (2013) did a study of the incoming class in 2010 to study if extended orientation camp programming had a statistical difference on persistence rates. The study resulted in no significant difference of persistence for those who attended camp compared to those who did not. The cohort in 2010 showed that those who persisted at a 52.3% rate, and those that did not attend camp persisted at 47.7% rate. The previous study did not show an impact on persistence rates compared to attendance (Haynes & Atchley, 2013). Years later, using a 3-year timeline, I found all 3 years showed a higher percentage rate of persistence for those who attended camp as well as a higher GPA. Using the same methodology of the chi-square SPSS test, I found a statistical difference in persistence.

Implications for Practice

Analysis of the research and evolution of the program since the 2010 original study yields several implications for practice. These implications for practice include consistency of facilities, expansion of student leadership development opportunities, programming intentionality, and university buy-in. There has also been a shift in the student leader training model. The increase in training could result in an increase of impact and influence on the incoming students. Residential consideration also created pathways to collaboration and intentionality through extended orientation camp programming.

Freshman Camp Evolution

Throughout the years the Freshman Camp extended orientation program has served students, the program has grown and evolved. Freshman Camp was founded in 1995 as a 3-day,

2-night retreat-style event to help students learn the history and tradition of the institution while gaining a peer-mentor to help guide first-year students through their first semester of college.

Leadership Change. There have been leadership changes in the decade since the original study was created. This includes generational changes and substantial growth in freshman class size at the North Central Texas institution. The institution experienced many changes of leadership through the past decade, from the president level down to the department level. These leadership changes potentially influence the data, program, leadership approach, and overall design of the program. As the people have changed, the staffing count has not. Even with the influx of number of extended orientation programs hosted, professional staff has changed personnel but not quantity. The institution has grown significantly, which has led to the growth of incoming class size and growth in the number of extended orientation camp programs the institution hosts.

Consistency in Facilities. Freshman Camp has hosted the event at a multitude of retreat-style facilities in Texas. In 2010, the extended orientation camp program changed facilities each year and sometimes between camps. Inconsistent facility creates changes in programming and scheduling based on accommodations and facility changes from location to location. The current iteration of Camp for the years studied (2017, 2018, and 2019) is consistent with the host site location. Since 2013 Freshman Camp has hosted its extended orientation programing at the same camp facility. This allowed the staff to create a consistent schedule of events and gain a relationship with the retreat facility. This consistency added a level of comfort for student leaders and staff to lead on familiar campgrounds. The host facility Freshman Camp has stayed with is very flexible in the camp-desired outcome and objectives. This was not always the case with the change of facilities. The consistent host site has a flexible management style that allows

Freshman Camp to create its own atmosphere, from music selection to late-night activities of engagement and team building to allowing the university to bring in its own camp staff, consisting of police officers for safety and security and university ropes course instructors. Allowing Freshman Camp to have full control over the schedule and the environment creates a home-like atmosphere.

Student Leadership Development. Freshman Camp leaders in 2010 gained a very different experience of training and development than the current training structure. In 2010 the students leading Freshman Camp were called Freshman Camp leaders. Student leaders would apply and interview for a Freshman Camp staff position, with no separate interview process for a second- or third-year students applying. The style of one interview process created a disadvantage for the first-year students applying for a position against upperclassmen who just did the exact interview the previous year. This created a scenario of a high number of upperclassman returners and a low number of first-year students gaining a leadership role. Freshman Camp leaders in 2010 would come to campus for a 2-day, 1-night staff training, where they would meet their partner.

There have been leadership changes in the decade since the original study was created. This includes generational changes and substantial growth in freshman class size at the North Central Texas institution. The institution experienced many changes of leadership through the past decade, from the president level down to the department level. These leadership changes potentially influence the data, program, leadership approach, and overall design of the program. As the people have changed, the staffing count has not. Although there has been an increase in the number of extended orientation programs hosted at the institution, the professional staff count has not increased in quantity. The institution has grown significantly, which led to the

growth of incoming class size and growth in the number of extended orientation camp programs the institution hosts.

Peer Mentorship Training. The Freshman Camp program altered its model entirely to create a higher level of leadership for upperclassman and added a leadership and development peer mentorship course. Orientation, Freshman Camp, and Transition Week (on campus, prior to classes for the first-year student transition process) now all fall in one university department. In 2012 this department created a mentality for student leaders instead of students operating only as "Freshman Camp leaders." Students leading these summer programs are called transition mentors. The department created leadership levels, so no student has the same experience twice. As a student progresses in the program, a higher level of leadership and responsibility is added to the student. This has created an opportunity for the students to learn from each other in a peer mentorship model. The students are now selected at the end of the fall semester to begin a cocurricular peer mentorship leadership training course in the spring semester to be ready for summer programming. This leadership training course has allowed the student leaders to grow themselves before growing others. This added leadership component could have impact on the persistence of students. Due to the change of leadership philosophy and practice from the selection process to training of leaders, having a higher caliber of student leaders could impact the influence and rate of the event, in turn resulting in a higher impact on persistence.

Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration. The Freshman Camp program added a level of intentionality to the 3-day, 2-night experience. Under the historical model, any campus partners, visitors, guests, and a few campus spirit groups would go out to the campsite just to hang out. The current model of Freshman Camp intentionally invites specific faculty and staff to host intentional sessions and bring an element of leadership or knowledge to the program. This

added level of specificity allows positive, influential guests to serve the incoming class with intention and purpose. The selective guest process allows the students to have a higher level of influence and direction at camp. Taking away the unpredictable guests allows the students to gain a stronger level of leadership and mentorship when the guests have a purpose and serve a role in the camp schedule.

Expansion of University Buy-In

In 1999, Brunelle-Joiner did a study of extended orientation programming, finding that students who attended this program returned to their sophomore year at a higher rate and held a higher GPA compared to those who did not attend. At the end of the study, Brunelle-Joiner recommended a replication study with a larger incoming class size, as the study used a sample size of 311 students. Yarbrough (1993) showed students who participated in extended orientation efforts were more involved on campus through activities such as athletics, recreations, arts, music, theater, and faculty members. The more buy-in students have, the more they will give back to the institution and stay enrolled.

Naylor (2017) explained students need to feel a part of the university and see themselves making a difference. The elements of sense of belonging and social integration have shown to be a vital part of the transition experience (Naylor, 2017). Programming like Freshman Camp extended orientation helps first-year students feel welcomed and invited and allows them grow into the university family. The peer mentorship and shared experience allow the student to feel like a member of the family before they even move in to campus. Pascarella et al. (1986) stated, “Higher levels of integration should increase commitment to and lower likelihood of voluntary withdrawal from the institution” (p. 157). A program like Freshman Camp offers a high level of

integration, from teaching homecoming traditions to learning university chants and cheers and hearing about campus resources.

Residential Cohort

The integration of relationships is also at a high level. Each camper is grouped by residence hall assignment for the fall semester and has two upperclassman Transition Mentors as their group leaders. This alteration in group assignments has changed the way students meet each other. This added grouping step allows students to meet people who will be in their residence hall in the fall semester. This takes a level of intimidation away when a student moves into a residence hall of 500 strangers. Grouping campers by their fall assigned residence hall guarantees a handful of people will be familiar with each other during their first semester of school.

Limitations

A limitation of this replication study was not knowing what communication was sent out when this study was done in 2010. Not knowing if or how much communication these students received could impact the data from 2010 to the present day. With the new era of technology, texting, and social media, this could have positive impact on students learning about the program. A limitation is first-generation students might not know the benefit to extended orientation or how to sign up for this optional program, especially since they are the first of their family to attend a university. There have also been leadership changes in the decade since the original study was created, which includes generational changes and substantial growth in freshman class size at the North Central Texas institution. The institution experienced many changes in leadership through the past decade, from the president level down to the department level, which brings a limitation to the study as they are not congruent in staffing.

The difference in student staffing each year was another limitation to the study. The student leaders go through an extensive interview process and leadership course designed to teach leadership skills, peer mentorship, university knowledge, and more. However, each year there are new students, new personalities, and new styles of leadership that are brought to the extended orientation camp program, which presents a limitation in not every student leader operates the same way. The difference in leaders could present an impact on camp experience or a student's persistence. A limitation to this study was not receiving student feedback through interviews. Numbers are able to tell a piece of the story through a student's actions; however, words give depth and meaning to influence and impact.

Recommendations

For future studies, I would recommend researching if students who are first-generation college students impact the data. Is there a correlation between first-generation college students and fall to spring persistence? Another recommendation for the future is adding qualitative data to the research. Numbers represent a big piece of the story; however, qualitative data fill in the gaps and tell why the numbers matter. I would recommend studying the impact the program has on current university students in the mentorship program. Does the position, program, or leadership component impact the Transition Mentors' passion level and persistence rates to the institution? What impact does being a mentor in the Transition Mentor program have on the student experience? Another recommendation is comparing this institution's extended orientation camp programming to that of other institutions in the state and nationwide. Adding nationwide data to the study would tell more of the story on the impact extended orientation programming has on persistence. Is this university unique in its numbers? How do other extended orientation camp programs in the nation compare? Do other institutions that host

extended orientation camp programming have attendance rates similar to those of Freshman Camp? Do they have persistence rates similar to those of Freshman Camp attendees?

Conclusion

The completion of this study uncovered important findings that will help the future of higher education and future programming for institutions nationwide. Each and every impact on persistence will help make positive change for future generations' education success. The more researchers learn about what helps or hurts persistence, the better researchers can increase university 4-year retention. Between the two studies, a decade apart, were differences from university leadership to the event staff and training; however, there were also significant differences in persistence rates. This study showed the benefit to replication studies, as with each year and each new generation comes change in results. Replicating this study helps to change the narrative about extended orientation camp programming.

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Appendix: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

February 17, 2022

Kristy O'Keefe
Abilene Christian University

Dear Kristy,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled
"Persistence Rates of First-Year College Students Who Attend an Extended Orientation Camp Program Compared to Those Who Do Not Attend",

(IRB# 22-015)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as:

☐ Non-research, and
☐ Non-human research

Based on:
"My research does not involve interaction or intervention with living individuals, and the information I am collecting is not individually identifiable" [45 CFR 46.102(f)(2)]

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs