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### An Exploratory Descriptive Study of the Bridge Scholars Program at a Private, Faith-Based University

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## ABSTRACT

An exploratory descriptive study was completed regarding the Bridge Scholars program in a private, faith-based university setting. The program was described as bridge because it was created to be a flexible consideration in the student admissions process, as the required metrics for admittance were modified for students that would not have otherwise been admitted to the university. Admitted provisionally, these students had to earn a 2.5 GPA or above before they were considered fully assimilated students. This admissions exception has been in place since 2016, when the program was initiated.

Three student cohorts were analyzed with particular emphasis on academic achievement, as evidenced by GPA and university persistence, which was measured by semesters completed and/or degree completion. Independent variables sought in the archived de-identified data collected by the university office of institutional effectiveness (OIE), included gender, race/ethnicity, high school cumulative GPA, final college GPA, number of semesters completed by students, and degree completion. A data set that included these variables was statistically analyzed in a pre-experimental descriptive design format with a population of  $N = 110$ .

An Exploratory Descriptive Study  
of the  
Bridge Scholars Program at a Private, Faith-Based University

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Social Work

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Social Work

By  
Susan Lewis King

May 2021

This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate, Susan Lewis King has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Science in Social Work

*Donnie C. Snider*

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Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

Date

Apr 26, 2021

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	iii
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Access to Higher Education.....	3
Barriers to College or University Access.....	4
Student Success.....	4
Access Programs Supporting Potential Success .....	5
Bridge Scholars Program at a Private and Faith-Based University .....	6
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
University or College Access.....	10
Barriers to College or University Access.....	12
Lack of Appropriate Resources .....	12
Lack of Rigorous Academic Preparation.....	13
Lack of Family Support .....	14
First-Generation Status, Low Income, and Student Loans .....	15
Programs Impacting Access.....	17
Dell Scholars Program .....	17
Gates Millennium Scholars Program .....	18
Bridge Programs .....	19
Second-Year Considerations.....	22
Peer Mentoring for At-Risk Students and Exit Surveys .....	23

	College Persistence and Degree Completion .....	24
	Measuring Outcomes in Programming .....	24
	Description of Bridge Scholars Program .....	26
III.	METHODOLOGY .....	27
	Design .....	27
	Population and Sampling .....	27
	Human Subjects Protection.....	27
	Instrumentation .....	28
	Procedures.....	28
	Data Analysis .....	28
IV.	FINDINGS.....	29
	Description of the Sample.....	29
	Correlates of Success .....	34
V.	DISCUSSION.....	39
	Summary of Results.....	39
	Race and Ethnicity as Predictors of Success.....	39
	High School GPA and College GPA as Predictors of Success.....	40
	First-Generation Students as Predictors of Success.....	41
VI.	Conclusion .....	43
	Limitations of This Study .....	44
	Recommendations and Implications for Further Consideration .....	45
	REFERENCES .....	48
	APPENDIX: IRB Approval Letter .....	55

LIST OF TABLES

1. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment ( $N = 110$ )..... 30

2. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Gender ( $N = 110$ )..... 30

3. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Ethnicity ( $N = 110$ )..... 31

4. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by First-Generation Status  
( $N = 110$ )..... 31

5. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Type of High School  
( $N = 110$ )..... 32

6. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by State ( $N = 110$ )..... 32

7. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Persistence Progress  
( $N = 110$ )..... 33

8. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Students Continuous Persistence by Semester  
( $N = 110$ )..... 33

9. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Students- Last Overall GPA at University ( $N = 110$ ) .... 34

10. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Degree Completion/Major  
( $N = 110$ )..... 34

11. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Admission ACT Scores  
( $N = 110$ )..... 35

12. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment Comparison Between Cumulative  
GPA and Race/Ethnicity ( $N = 110$ ) ..... 36

13. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment-Comparison Between Semesters Completed and Race/Ethnicity ( $N = 110$ ).....	36
14. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment-Comparison of Academic Status and Race/Ethnicity ( $N = 110$ ) .....	37
15. 2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Students-Comparison of First-Generation Status with Cumulative GPA ( $N = 110$ ) .....	38
16. Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment-Comparison of First-Generation Students with Academic Status ( $N = 110$ ).....	38

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*When given the opportunity to interview this young man from a small Texas town, I seized it. This was a chance to better understand this unique designation that was the subject of my study. Who was this specific group of students who did not meet the absolute standards for admission? Sam had been admitted to the university through the Bridge Scholars program a few years earlier. He had only stayed in this pathway for one semester. By listening to Sam, I sensed that his goal was more than being in a group with atypical academic credentials. He researched, questioned, and pushed to realize his dream of acceptance into the Honors College.*

*Sam repeatedly shared his positivity that the Bridge was a great design to allow admission but surmised that a planned structure might be more helpful. His comment was of immediate interest to what I had already observed with Bridge Scholars. It occurred to me that Sam did not line up with the Bridge stereotype of lower academic performance. I realized that any available data on this program needed further study.*

This study examined the impact of a flexible admissions practice at a faith-based, selective university through the lens of evidenced-based practice comparing student demographics with measures of student success in an analytical snapshot of the Bridge Scholars program. This was to be determined by evaluating whether a flexible admissions practice could result in identifying student success by analyzing a retrospective data set.

The acquired demographics were from students who had entered the university through this academic determination. The subjects of this study were students who entered the university through a program called “Bridge Scholars.”

This program was created for students who were admitted provisionally when they did not meet the standards typically required for admission to the university. Factors including gender, race/ethnicity, high school cumulative GPA, ACT, or SAT scores, student persistence from semester to semester, first-generation status, non-persistence data that led to exit from the university, and persistence to degree completion were addressed. By describing the prevalence of these descriptors, it was possible to predict some contributing factors to student success. Student success was measured by academic performance (GPA) and persistence in school and/or degree completion. As part of the program, the holistic, spiritual formation and academic systems of Bridge Scholars were also among the components available to these students. These aspects, however, had data implicating the impact on student success.

There was no available documentation determining the student outcomes that were predictors of academic success. This study drew on data from university records to conduct an initial examination of the academic success of these students. The comparison of the differences in student data indicated correlations between differences in their academic achievement and degree completion rates.

Student readiness and preparedness in individuals who hoped to enter college was indicated in a myriad of ways. In the program studied, the lack of so-called readiness or preparedness could have been a reason for creating a flexible admissions standard.

Without this flexibility, a barrier to admissions was present. Gaertner and Hart (2013) defined *access* as the following:

While there is general agreement that the collection of factors we consider in admitting to college or graduate school ought to be a reflection of our values, there is significant disagreement about what those values are or should be. What would it say about a school's values if it were to admit students based exclusively on SAT/ACT scores? based on high-school class rank? race or ethnic background? athletic ability? musical talent? legacy status? economic background? (p. 371)

Additionally, when focusing on the first four years of this bridge-type program, academic support through tutoring, academic coaching, and supplemental instruction were part of the resources available for this student population. While the concept was originally designed to provide a transition from high school to college, documentation of student outcomes was not present. It was determined that a data set of variables from former students with this designation might offer substantial descriptive information.

### **Access to Higher Education**

The research indicated that access was complex because each institutional culture defined their own specific admission criteria. As a student was likely to seek multiple options for school entrance, these options resulted in an overload of possibilities. For this reason, it was imperative that each institution provide clear communication regarding the basis for the institution's admission policy.

While important, the high pressure for academic achievement was problematic if it overpowered the need for a transitional phase of a student's adaptation to the college

environment. Students were further characterized as needing to be resilient when adjusting to cultural and contextual changes imbedded in the new post-secondary experience.

### **Barriers to College or University Access**

Included in any discussion of programs that were designed to enhance university access, the existing barriers to access were also addressed. Although not commonly delineated, Osam et al. (2017) included the demographic of adult learners or non-traditional students to the list of potential barriers to university access. Osam et al. (2017) stated, “Adult learners may actually perform better academically than traditional students despite having fewer sources of support outside of their educational institutions and more stressors” (p. 54). Additionally, adult learners were noted as encountering barriers like those of a traditional first-time student. A study by Gray (2013) added that “access to an education is a social justice issue that requires a new courageous commitment to identifying and eliminating barriers to college success” (p. 1245). While this research by Gray pointed to public universities, a similar methodology of evaluating applicants could be extrapolated to the private university setting.

### **Student Success**

It was noted in the literature that the most important tenant after the issue of access was student success measured by degree completion. Swift et al. (2019) suggested that “in a time of change, both in the population of students who attend college and in the educational goals of colleges, it is important that programs and curricula adapt in order to enhance the success of all students” (p. 46). Whether the context was one of the celebrated Ivy League institutions, private, faith-based university, or mega public

university, most would agree that the door of access needed to be open wide enough to allow for potential student success.

It was the student who approached this entrance who must be convinced of their own ability to realize academic achievement. However, it was my belief that the cultural experience of entering this new setting brought added opportunities for growth and independence. Measuring these components was beyond the scope of this study as it would need to be measured qualitatively.

Different institutions offered unique ways to create the potential for student success. Each way was tailored specifically to the unique composite of individual academic needs. Examples of this uniqueness includes a rigorous engineering, pre-medical, nursing, or pre-law curriculum where pre-orientation to the coursework would enhance the student's preparedness for curricular rigor. It was the melding and crafting of these programs that framed the possibility for academic achievement.

College readiness and preparedness were typically defined by the high school experience. The so-called definition of "lack of readiness or preparedness" evidenced by grades was a barrier for traditional admission. The barriers that contributed to college preparedness included first-generation status (Arch & Gilman, 2019), socioeconomic level, high school GPA, class rank, and the ACT or SAT admissions test (Gaertner & Hart, 2013).

The remaining consideration of barriers was directed to the incoming, first-time or early-on transfer student who encountered potential roadblocks. These impacted academic or educational obstructions in their path to successful degree completion.

### **Access Programs Supporting Potential Success**

In some cases, colleges and universities had set up bridge-type programs or designations that helped to guide vulnerable students to success within their institution's academic structure. Just as the term "bridge" implied, it was a way to offer passage from one location to another. In many instances, a "bridge program" was structured to make academic support and/or assistance available at no additional cost to students. These assistance measures included tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic accommodations, or academic coaching during their first year. Although the term "bridge program" was not always defined, most of these measures were framed to provide an effective segue for the student from the high school experience to the academic challenges of college.

During the course of this study, I sought to create an informal sample ( $N = 6$ ) of similar universities (private, faith-based) for this analysis. It was found that there was a mix of academic supports available for students admitted under established criteria. Through phone interviews, I learned that these included short pre-start of school summer programs for preparatory purposes. There was also a variety of bridge-type programming with academic supports that were designed to offer opportunities for underprepared students to realize achievement through academic support resources.

There were no programs, however, other than the subject of this study, that admitted students who had not fully met the standard admissions criterion. This was unique to the Bridge Scholars program where students were admitted when not fully meeting the established entrance metrics.

### **Bridge Scholars Program at a Private and Faith-Based University**

The objective of this study was to take a retrospective look at the student outcomes in the four-year history of the Bridge Scholars program. Located at a private, faith-based university, Bridge was currently in its fifth year. Analysis of the current (or fifth) student cohort was not included in this evaluation due to an insufficient number of completed semesters needed for degree completion.

The Bridge Scholars' archived and de-identified data were reviewed in the format of an exploratory descriptive data analysis. Rubin and Babbie (2016) stated in their description of this methodology, "when we analyze data for descriptive purposes, our focus is limited to the data we have collected on our study's sample" (p. 346). The goal of this analysis was to evaluate the predictors of student success of the Bridge Scholars program as it related to student performance outcomes. Although potentially important as a descriptor, when a student did not persist to graduation due to cancellation by the student or leaving the university, these reasons were not indicated in the data set analyzed.

In an informal interview with T. Fleet (Personal communication, January 29, 2021), one of the founders of the Bridge Scholars program, Fleet shared that the most significant strength of the program was the relational support of the students. As this was a qualitative observation, there was no mechanism to evaluate this without student interviews, pre- and post-tests, or surveys. The quantitative archived data provided by the university Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) were descriptive evidence of the student demographics but not the students' supporting perceptions or opinions.

Regarding the Bridge Scholars, concrete goals were not discovered in the program's records that indicated the direction or outcomes of the program structure. To

create continuity in program transparency, it was recommended that consideration of a pre-admission survey of the students and their family members be created to test for comprehension of the proposed Bridge Scholars framework. Additionally, a post-completion or early-exit document was suggested to be completed and used as one measure to evaluate program strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for university exit.

The following key definitions will be utilized in this thesis:

- **Bridge-type programs** are programs in other universities that are fully developed programs, including a summer component that is designed to transition students to college success. These also focus on university access, first generation students, and academic achievement.
- **Bridge Scholars Program** is the descriptive title for student cohorts whose members gain admission to the university in this study who might otherwise not have been admitted to the university.
- **Student success** is the ability of a student to complete academic courses with grades metrics identified and subsequent returning semesters until there is degree completion within four years.
- **First-generation students** are those who are the first in their family to have successfully been admitted to an institution of higher education.
- **University access** is the process of an individual being admitted as a matriculating student at a college or university.
- **Academic achievement** is the concept of a student passing academic courses and maintaining a 2.5 GPA at a minimum. The ultimate academic achievement is the

completion of an undergraduate degree in a prescribed time span, typically four to six years.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

To accomplish this literature review, the One Search platform was utilized to capture the broad topics of university access, student access, barriers to access, bridge programs, transition to college, and degree completion. Additionally, the EBSCO research data sets were also utilized for specific studies created within the subtopic of social work research under the category of psychology and human services. Recent peer-reviewed journals in the last ten years (2011-2021), dissertations, theses, and books on these subjects were considered.

#### **University or College Access**

While many institutions of higher education pointed to student success, it was equally important to focus on the entry avenue to the higher education experience. This was the concept of access.

Arguments over methodology of admissions to higher education included the concept of holistic review where there was a more expansive look at the applicant rather than the obsession with the concrete values of GPA, ACT/SAT scores, or class rank. The concept of holistic review was held at the level of the Supreme Court of the U.S. and was decided in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*. This case was argued on December 9, 2015 and decided June 23, 2016. The University of Texas at Austin utilizes an admissions system that makes its first selection of undergraduate students based on the requirements under the Top Ten Percent Law in which students are granted automatic

admission for finishing in the top 10% of their class. After those students are selected, the university then offers admission to students based on SAT scores, high school academic performance, and other factors, including race.

The literature in many cases highlighted specific metrics for admissions, but the referenced Supreme Court case ruled in favor of the University of Texas at Austin and agreed that admission consideration could contain numerous factors, including race (*Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, et al., 2016). Research by Holland (2014) suggested that race and economic status had a profound impact on admissions policies. She did not align with affirmative action but found “although admissions decisions clearly play a role in race and class inequalities in higher education, there is a relative lack of research on the highly complex processes that occur in admissions offices” (p. 1193). Regarding the concept of holistic consideration, Bastedo (2018) explained in his study:

A more holistic review of applicants, the argument goes, will be legally viable and reduce inequalities in college access; yet there remains little consensus among college admissions officers about what holistic review should entail and how it should be enacted. (p. 786)

A highlighted discussion by Soares (2012) looked at the long practice of a laser focus on the numerical data points that follow a student to the admission process. “Admissions by old-regime numbers narrows the socioeconomic and racial diversity of one’s pool and yield.” (p. 66). Expanding the consideration of a student’s socioeconomic and racial/ethnicity factors gave a broadened look at the student’s individuality.

## **Barriers to College or University Access**

At a conference looking into the future of higher education 20-30 years out, Bharucha (2018) observed that the keynote panel proposed, “There are important questions here, such as whether and how higher education will survive; whether it is going to remain accessible to today’s and tomorrow’s citizens” (p. 551). This opened a free-wheeling look at the critical and important consideration of access that is a continuing question in the higher education dialogue.

Included in the reference to barriers in the introduction to this study, researchers showed that the presence of barriers to college and university access have remained essentially constant. Morton et al. (2018) pointed out that there is less emphasis on the demographics of rural area students. They stated, “Research by multiple investigators has suggested that the lack of access to appropriate resources, rigorous academic preparation, financial support, and issues involving family support are plausible explanations for students’ challenges with college attainment and access” (Morton et al., 2018, p. 156). These were aspects which could be connected to students in all geographic areas but were reported more frequently in the rural areas.

### **Lack of Appropriate Resources**

The lack of access to appropriate resources, while in some ways predictable, were considered in any discussion of college access. Research by Mitchall and Jagear (2018) reported,

Students’ self-determination was enhanced when parents were involved in college planning, served as positive examples, set high academic standards early, and fostered students’ sense of career volition. Motivation was undermined when

families limited students' choices, did not set clear expectations for college going, provided little feedback, or emphasized family obligations. (p. 582)

These findings indicated that parents, guardians, or adults of influence should be included in all aspects of the students' pathways in higher education.

### **Lack of Rigorous Academic Preparation**

Hooker and Brand (2010) wrote:

While policymakers at the national, state, and local levels have endorsed the movement to raise academic rigor and demand college and career readiness for all students, the stark reality is that the educational pipeline loses far too many young people before they can even enter postsecondary education. (p. 75)

The other side to this push was that the lack of rigorous academic preparation could result in gaps of academic ability exhibited when the student attempted entrance to college.

This perceived deficiency of preparation was due to the high school location, interest of the student in higher education, and other factors that created an achievement difference. Without first fully comprehending and reframing the factors that lead a student to be at higher risk of non-degree completion, it was impossible to fully understand the resulting non-completion rates. According to Hooker and Brand's (2010) review of programs, "it became clear that college and career readiness involves the development of a wide variety of skills, abilities, and dispositions well beyond the academic domain" (p. 76).

Research by Gray (2013) summarized the seminal aspect of lack of rigorous preparedness within the moniker "at risk" in his study stating, "Universities use the term 'at risk' to identify students who are not perceived to succeed academically because of

factors associated with socioeconomic status, family variables, and academic deficiencies” (p. 1247).

Research by Sousa (2021) discussed the intersectionality between the academic expectations and the social realities that are experienced in higher education. She further commented on the depth of responsibility for comprehending these distinctions and if they are held by the high school personnel. She added, “If we view higher education institutions as socially desirable organizations, then we have to consider the unique socialization process required to become members of these organizations” (Sousa, 2021, p. 2). In Sousa’s findings from three small central Texas high schools, she discovered that the educators did not include cultural contexts that would inform students of likely challenges. Her observation was, “Although some teachers were cognizant of the unique barriers their racially marginalized students may face in terms of transitioning into college, most of their messaging did not reflect these concerns” (Sousa, 2021, p. 4).

### **Lack of Family Support**

Family support was defined in many ways, but in this discussion, the comprehensive support of a college student by their family could not be underestimated. Less than optimal family support was based on the family’s knowledge regarding college life and expectations. Better information for students and families became an effective goal for universities. Putting forth a program of significant family orientation prior to the student’s arrival on campus was important to consider. I maintained that family support, while largely financial, was only one aspect of student success. Further, the social, emotional, and spiritual underpinning for the student could not be overstated as they navigated the challenging aspect of higher education.

## **First-Generation Status, Low Income, and Student Loans**

The focus on barriers, including first-generation status, low income, and student loans were additional layers that could complicate a student's access and persistence in college. According to Rubio et al. (2017), "the needs and concerns expressed by first-generation students throughout their educational career reveal the additional barriers of being the first in their family to embark on the path towards higher education compared to generational college students" (p. 5). The college experience was already burdened with challenges for both the student and their family. Additionally, the likely low-income status of this population necessitated the need for student loans to ensure access as a safety net to ensure persistence with their college efforts.

Vaughan et al. (2014) reported a study on the efficacy of a seminar course for first-year first-generation students. They emphasized the extra attention needed for this population and enacted the research to show that a cohesive course offered would include orientation and study helps type of information. The decision to offer this in the form of a comprehensive academic course, rather than a quick orientation, was helpful to these students. Their hypothesis that this course contributed to academic success in a large sample population of over 2000 students in a public university could not be conclusive but was suggestive of having a positive impact (Vaughan et al., 2014).

It was noted that there are different opinions on whether higher education and degree completion were an investment in future success. Specifically, this investment was considered a barrier to persistence in college as the cost of the loans could often outweigh the potential of the student to repay them.

However, as a U. S. President stated, “In the United States of America, no one should go broke because they chose to go to college.” President Obama made this statement on January 27, 2010, 9:00 p.m. EST in his State of the Union address. At that time, he was outlining his plan to ensure that Americans were able not only to attend college but also to graduate with student debt they could afford to pay back (Baker et al., 2017).

According to Baker, et al. (2017), “One challenge a researcher may face in studying student loans is the quality of available data linking student loan debt and academic outcomes” (p. 2). This was a question that could link financial concerns and a student’s inability to complete a degree. It was also a question that was exceptionally difficult to link together unless a student specifically stated this was the case.

A study by Eichelberger et al. (2017) raised two questions of importance: “Are students fully aware of the costs and benefits of a college degree, and do they have access to the information they need, that is, the necessary financial literacy and capability to make important college enrollment and financing decisions?” (p. 71). When financial barriers seemed overwhelming and there was a perceived lack of financial awareness in place, I believed students might go into survival or panic mode and abandon academic efforts, sensing they could not survive financially. This impacted the possibility of degree completion and a real-time monetary threat to continued access.

Ruiz-Alvarado et al. (2020) researched the group of students who were considered high achievement, low income (HALI) who presented a unique intersectionality of academic success but without the financial supports that may have had an impact on the continuation of this success. They commented,

Although the field of research on HALI college students is growing, no studies have yet examined the link between pre-college attributes (including other identities intersecting with family income) expectations, enrollment behavior, and college completion for this population. (Ruiz-Alvarado et al., 2020, p. 4)

### **Programs Impacting Access**

Programs impacting access to the college experience were in some cases, a result of laws enacted such as affirmative action, or policies formulated by a particular university. There were also uniquely developed frameworks by corporate entities holding higher education as a focus for their financial support. The programs created by Dell as well as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation were examples of private industry investing in the academic success and growth of students.

### **Dell Scholars Program**

Access to the world of college was shown to be based on academic excellence or, in some cases, academic potential that could be bolstered by programming designed to fill in the gaps. A research study evaluated the Dell Scholars program offered an exhaustive look at access, persistence, and degree attainment as the driving forces informing student success (Page et al., 2019). Persistence could weigh into the equation when there were barriers due to family context and socioeconomic status.

The impact of the Dell program and other models looked to find the formula most likely to prompt and support persistence. A unique aspect of this program was that the student recipients of the scholarship (\$20,000.00) were required to upload data regarding their grades, finances, and other components of their college experience that in turn comprised the data sets informing the statistical analysis.

Researchers indicated that taking a holistic look at students that included their individual, heritage, and environmental components could lead to a higher degree of success. As an example, the hallmark of the Dell program highlighted on their website, the goal to “address all of the emotional, lifestyle, and financial challenges that may prevent scholars from attending college” (Page et al., 2019, p. 712).

### **Gates Millennium Scholars Program**

Another high-profile program, the Gates Millennium Scholars, had behind their efforts what seemed to be unlimited funding. These noteworthy philanthropists were not able to totally eradicate the baffling problem of college completion, but the push towards success through support was a seminal piece of their efforts. DesJardins et al. (2010) found in their study of the Gates’ program that the financial assistance offered to students seemed to result in improved academic achievement, as students had to work in employment fewer hours, which correlated with more time for academic efforts.

Page et al. (2019) noted that only utilizing a single strategy weakened and definitively hampered successful outcomes. With emphasis on academic achievement and not financial assistance, the success rate was less than optimal. Conversely, with financial support and a lesser support system for academic achievement, the results were less than optimal as well.

Arguably, the enormous investment in these students (both financial and non-financial) were indicators that led to a higher instance of successful and completion outcomes. Timely check-in points with scholars formed a hallmark of continuity to keep a measurement of each aspect of progress from the summer prior to entry, after each semester, and every year following. This consistency brought a measurable indicator on

the impact of human check-in and concern for the student. Glessner (2015) opined that there was more to supporting freshman students than academic safety nets, and even with budget-cutting eyes always present, these supportive measures paid off. She stated, “one of the best remediation and retaining tools is building relationships with students so they feel comfortable seeking necessary services and assistance” (p. 33). These were the intangible aspects of a supportive first year in college.

### **Bridge Programs**

Bridge programs were found in the literature in both public and private higher education settings. They were also available in multiple types of specialty institutions to help give students a smoother transition into the rigor of their academic curricula. The vast number of bridge programs discovered were presented with a pre-arrival component of an accelerated summer format. These summer frameworks were designed to provide a strong foundation to the entering students for their segue to the college environment and the framework of academic expectations. Hensley and Davis (2016) studied the value of a summer bridge program for students to have a more successful pathway to the start of the regular academic year.

When referring to the age group that typically was entering the university, O’Hare (2016) pointed to an “outcome trajectory for this dynamic period that bridges adolescence and adulthood can move one towards psychosocial growth, stagnation or decline” (p. 609). Consideration of the age of this population would need to be an important factor in program construction.

Frischmann et al. (2017) emphasized a summer jumpstart at Idaho State University for first-year students that was also a proactive continuation of programing

throughout the first year. This was a comprehensive program that allowed students to receive academic credits before the academic year started. Clearly, the concept of First Year Transition (FYT) programming was a priority, as there were two salaried employees who ran the program during their growth and development phase.

Included in this model was academic coaching, which could either be self-referred by a student or of an intrusive (referral) nature. “In an intrusive model, academic coaches do not wait for students to experience a problem and seek help; instead, the coaches preemptively identify potential impediments to success and retention and then reach out to students” (Frischmann et al., 2017, p. 2).

The Purdue University study by Nemelka et al. (2017) highlighted the case for full entry into the university via the summer program for students slightly below the admissions criteria. This program was mandatory for entrance, but there was no additional cost to the student. In a study by Johnson-Weeks and Superville (2016), it was evident that institutions of higher education were instrumental in expanding access to students who may be underprepared for the academic demands of college. Johnson-Weeks and Superville (2016) asserted,

Colleges and universities have played a crucial role in providing access to a postsecondary education to underprepared high school graduates. The fact that those incoming first-time freshmen students do not possess the necessary academic and social skills to be successful in college, has forced colleges and universities to be creative in retaining, progressing, and graduating them, often applying various types of educational developmental programs. (p. 20)

Grace-Odeleye and Santiago (2019) researched the reasons for developing bridge-type programs and the multiple design factors that were directed towards ameliorating student issues. They reported,

Bridge programs are designed to address the personal and inhibiting institutional factors of undergraduate students as they transition into college and have been suggested to increase academic readiness, promote inclusion and integration into the college academic and social community, introduce the students to the available supportive institutional academic support programs and services, and promote self-efficacy and persistence. (p. 36)

Lytle and Gallucci (2015) included the lessons learned from the Freshman Summer Start program that was potentially open to all first-year students. This was a distinguishing factor from typical bridge programs that typically were considered remedial in nature and were only for a certain subset of entering students. In another study of summer bridge programs, Velazquez-Torres (2018) discussed lifelong success potential based on summer bridge and first-year seminars. Howard and Flora (2015) focused on summer bridge programs, which were largely residential, and reported,

Summer Bridge Programs (SBPs) have been one retention effort aimed at positively influencing the academic preparation and skills of entering freshmen prior to the first day of classes. Usually residential in nature, SBPs may target new students based on various categories (race or ethnicity, socio-economic status, test scores, GPA, etc.) (p. 69).

The complexities of meeting the needs of underprepared students prompted a study in a large state that included large public universities. Wathington et al. (2016)

completed the study with multiple questions that would require further research. They frankly offered, “These findings suggest that there are no ‘magic bullets’ or ‘quick and dirty solutions’ to improve progression from remediation to college readiness. Persistence and postsecondary attainment represent the endpoints of educational pathways influenced by many factors” (Wathington et al., 2016, p. 173).

A study by Slade et al. (2015) focused on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) in North Carolina. A program called Aggie Impact Scholars program (AISP) was created to form a type of transition culture for these students who were underprepared as evidenced by their admission test scores and high school performance. While this bridge program had similarities to others found in the literature, it was unique in that it “moved away from being an opportunity program for provisionally admitted students to being a retention program” (Slade et al., 2015, p. 128). The concentration on the applicant profile that pointed to a student’s potential challenges directing focus on the individual student. Critical to the retention of first-year students is adequately preparing those whose applicant profiles imply potential challenges in college that may ultimately result in attrition” (Slade et al., 2015, p. 128). The ability to look at these profiles seemed to connect actual programming with specific student needs.

### **Second-Year Considerations**

Other issues resulting from bridge program implementation included a focus on the pathway to the second year in college. The second-year transition issues of no longer being continuously checked on, as in the freshman year, brought a valid concern. A study by Schreiner (2013) added that including student input regarding their needs and how programs could be improved was important. Schreiner concluded, “ownership is

enhanced when students feel they matter to the institution and have a contribution to make” (Schreiner, 2013, p. 41).

Kinzie and Kuh (2017) referred to the vast research on student success but concluded “a re-envisioned student success framework is needed, one that is grounded in evidence- based policies and practices that explicitly recognize diverse institutional missions, educational purposes and organizational arrangements” (p. 20). It was this type of comprehensive observation that seemed to be missing from the bridge programs identified in sources found in the literature. Many programs were so specialized and group specific that a framework grounded in evidenced-based policies and practices might be overlooked to address a community such as first-generation students.

### **Peer Mentoring for At-Risk Students and Exit Surveys**

Another concept for consideration when assisting at-risk students, peer mentoring was studied and showed favorable results. Although there were factors such as first-generation or high preparation that impacted the success of the college experience that could not be changed, Hall et al. (2020) stated, “the college saw peer mentoring as a way of fostering more student-to-student engagement and using mentors to help mentees make the transition to college, especially in the majors with large enrollments” (p. 184).

Hall et al. (2020) reported on a private university’s practice of exit surveys, adding, “On the institution’s exit survey, next to unmet financial need, the second most common reason that first-year students gave for dropping out was a difficulty making the transition to college” (p. 184). No examples of an exit survey were located in the review of the literature.

## **College Persistence and Degree Completion**

There is research on considering what the student must do to persist in the path to degree completion. De-la-Rosa and Angulo (2016) report, “that is a query that each social context and university must consider anew because college completion rates including rates of bachelor’s degree completion are falling today” (p. 112).

Whereas persistence and degree completion are considered by many as measures of success, the variability in focusing on these aspects was seen as more complex in a qualitative study by Chung et al. (2020). Student interviews revealed a totally different dimension than quantitative data, which are more readily available. Chung et al. (2020) stated, “for example, peer support, while essential for students’ survival, allows the institution to absorb racialized incidents and maintain the status quo. Grounded in student interviews, we work toward a humanizing framework for student success” (p. 223). This study was instructive in that students’ opinions were noted to be considered in a holistic analysis of the programming.

A research study by Chang et al. (2020) noted, “Most significantly, quantitative research methods are less equipped to illuminate the dynamic, complex intersection of help-seeking behaviors and culture, including social class, while qualitative research on cultural mismatch affords the opportunity to do so” (p. 282). Chang notes the value of additional qualitative data to formulating student programs which was not included in this study.

### **Measuring Outcomes in Programming**

A comprehensive analytics organization, PAR (Predictive Analytics Reporting) Framework, was organized to analyze data to measure higher education academic

outcomes. Wagner and Longanecker (2016) illustrated the value of data evaluation and the challenges of including all variables within the analysis. Some populations, such as non-traditionally aged students were not included. These analyses were created with the idea to assist to “eliminate redundant programs, understand the scale of their programs, match interventions with the causes of student academic risk, measure the impact of student-success programs, and respond to budget cuts with informed decisions” (p. 53). Although this publication date was 2016, opinions shared were relevant to the current challenges impacted with the COVID-19 pandemic. Challenges under this spotlight illustrated the increased difficulty of supporting students in a program where to gain entrance, there was already a sense that they were behind academically.

Millea et al. (2018) studied determinants for student success in a mid-sized public university and looked at non-persistence. They stated, “For students, dropping out can mean unrealized potential and lower earnings over their working careers. The success of the university and the success of its students are intertwined” (p. 309). The study further indicated that certain data points that were not collected such as student employment and location of residence when in college were areas that may be significant.

Heileman et al. (2015) looked at the reasons why student success was such an enigma. To simply look at a student’s individual data did not illustrate the trends that informed the bulk of students’ path to success. They offered that “they found that the large amounts of data available across many platforms and within many offices simply baffle faculty and administrators alike” (Heileman et al., 2015, p. 32). This group of researchers utilized a platform where visual trends were created to lead more discoveries

to comprehend student non-persistence and at what point the ceasing of persistence took place.

### **Description of Bridge Scholars Program**

The Bridge Scholars Program at the institution in this study was initially created to increase student access to the university when they were just short of meeting the standard admission metrics. In a conversation with the founder of the Bridge Scholars program T. Fleet (personal communication January 29, 2021), she shared that historically, a federal grant addressing this population of students was eliminated after many years. This necessitated the need to create a new program that would bridge the gap between underprepared students seeking college entrance and the reality of admission. Support systems would need to be wrap-around services for this group of students. In the interview, Fleet shared that the foundational and most important aspect of the Bridge Scholars program was the relational support for the students.

Based on the review of the literature and the limitations in access to data due to privacy issues, three questions were addressed in this study. All three questions were chosen to show the relationships between data points that were present in the data set received. The three questions were: (1) Did entrance examination scores as measured by the ACT tests predict student success as measured by GPA? (2) Was student ethnicity predictive of student success, as measured by GPA and persistence in enrollment? and (3) Was there a relationship between first-generation status and academic success based on GPA and persistence in enrollment?

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY

**Design**

The design for this study utilized an exploratory-descriptive pre-experimental approach. While the quantitative and qualitative aspects could be explored in an analysis, the quantitative data revealed the information possibly indicative of the student outcome measures of this admissions practice.

**Population and Sampling**

The population from which the sample was drawn included four cohorts of Bridge Scholar students who enrolled in Fall 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. To ensure adequate data and document student persistence and achievement, only those students who were enrolled in 2016, 2017, and 2018 were selected. The total sample of students studied included three cohorts with a population of  $N = 110$ . This determination was made to be able to capture the persistence of the first three cohorts of the program's existence. The archived de-identified data from the Office of Instructional Effectiveness (OIE) of the university provided student information that included gender, race/ethnicity, high school GPA, high class rank, SAT or ACT scores, major subject of study, cohort continuation patterns from year to year, and degree completion.

**Human Subjects Protection**

All student data retrieved and evaluated were archived and de-identified. As a result, there was no documentation required to address the concern for human protection.

The study was determined to be considered non-research/non-human by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university (Appendix A).

### **Instrumentation**

Student de-identified and archived data were obtained from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness of the university. Data included information on gender, race/ethnicity, high school GPA, ACT scores, major subject of study, first-generation, cohort continuation patterns from semester to semester, and degree completion.

### **Procedures**

In collaboration with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) of the university, additional independent variables were discussed and requested to be supplied with the data provided. This was done to add more variables in the evaluation process to consider more aspects for the analysis. A formal request for this data set was submitted to the OIE.

### **Data Analysis**

Archived, de-identified student data were analyzed by utilizing the IBM SPSS Statistics Platform 25.0. Data were de-identified before receipt by the principal investigator. The principal investigator had no access to any identifying information including name, physical address, or date of birth. The key for the data was only known to the OIE. Specific analyses were determined following consideration of the received data.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings for the study. Data provided by the OIE of the university included Bridge-designated students from five cohorts (those entering in the fall semesters of 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020.) Because the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Bridge Program on continuous academic success, only those students entering the program in Fall 2016, 2017, and 2018 were analyzed. Students from these cohorts had at least 4 semesters of grades to serve as an indicator of “success.” After describing the sample, I analyzed the relationships of those factors identified in the literature as predictors of success to student’s academic performance.

#### **Description of the Sample**

As described above, de-identified data were obtained for a population of 180 Bridge-designation students from the years of Fall 2016-Fall 2020. Of that number, only a population sample of 110 cases was included in the study (students entering in academic years Fall 2016, 2017, and 2018). This study evaluated “success” specifically as (1) persistence to the junior academic year, and (2) overall level of performance, measured by cumulative GPA.

The first year of the program development and enactment at the university was 2016. The initial cohort in 2016 had the highest number of entering students (55). The two cohorts to follow showed decreases in admission numbers in Fall 2017 (33), and in

Fall 2018 (22). The identity of the three cohorts were by year admitted to the university were presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment (N = 110)*

Year Admitted	Total Bridge Enrollment	Percentage of Total Sample
2016	55	50.0%
2017	33	30.0%
2018	22	20.0%
Total	110	100%

In each of the three years of admission, there were more female than male students (Table 2). Only in year three of the analysis in 2018 was the split between female and males less than 10 percentage points in difference. With the highest percentage of students admitted in 2016 being female, the overall gender split of students leaned female in all three cohorts (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Gender (N = 110)*

Year Admitted	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total
2016	39	70.0%	16	30.0%	55
2017	20	60.0%	13	40.0%	33
2018	12	54.1%	10	45.9%	22

When looking at ethnicity (Table 3), the three-year sample revealed a majority-minority of students within the total sample. The total number of students who were Black and White-Hispanic were a combined percentage of 70 percent. Three students did not indicate their ethnicity.

**Table 3***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Ethnicity (N = 110)*

Year Admitted	Black (%)	White-Hispanic (%)	White-Non-Hispanic (%)	AA/PI (%)	Total
2016	21 (39.6%)	15 (28.3%)	17 (32.0%)	0 (0%)	53
2017	15 (34%)	12 (36%)	4 (14%)	1 (3.1 %)	32
2018	8 (18%)	4 (12.2%)	8 (27%)	2 (9.0%)	22
Total	44 (100%)	31 (100%)	29 (100%)	3 (100%)	107

According to the U.S. Department of Education in the Higher Education Acts of 1965 and 1998, the definition of a *first-generation college student* was a student where both parents did not complete a bachelor’s degree, or in the case of students who lived with and were supported by only one parent, a student whose only such parent did not complete. There was a disproportionate identification (71%) of first-generation students as opposed to those where both parents had completed a college degree (29%) (Table 4).

**Table 4***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by First-Generation Status (N = 110)*

All Cohorts (2016, 2017, 2018)	First-Gen Status (%)	Non-First-Gen Status (%)	Total
	78 (71.0%)	32 (29.0%)	110 (100%)

The type of high school attended was substantially public school. (Table 5) The review of the literature had few studies that looked at private university data regarding students admitted in any kind of Bridge program format. This also included a breakdown of the types of high schools that were represented by entering students.

**Table 5***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Type of High School (N = 110)*

All Cohorts (2016, 2017, 2018)	Number of Students	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Missing Data	12	10.9%	10.9%
Homeschool	1	0.9%	11.8%
National Christian	4	3.6%	15.5%
Private	3	2.7%	18.2%
Public	90	81.8%	100.0%

Students were primarily from Texas (94.5%) over other U.S. states (2.7%) and there was small representation from other countries (2.7%, Table 6). Six students did not indicate their country of origin which lowered this descriptor by 6 from  $N = 110$ . This allocation indicated the largest number of students would have similar orientations to academic preparation due to being from a single state.

**Table 6***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by State (N = 110)*

All Cohorts (2016, 2017, 2018)	Number of Students	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Out of U.S.	3	2.7%	2.7%
California	1	0.9%	3.6%
Nevada	1	0.9%	4.5%
Ohio	1	0.9%	5.4%
Texas	104	94.5%	100.0%

Non-persistence in academic progress (Table 7) was a negative impactor of student success. There were three measures of non-persistence and one measure of successful persistence. Successful persistence was indicated by degree completion (14 students, 12.7%). These 14 students were included in the category of eligible to register.

**Table 7***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Persistence Progress (N = 110)*

All Cohorts (2016, 2017, 2018)	Number of Students	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Cancelled by student	46	41.8%	41.8%
Eligible to register	42	38.2%	80.0%
Student suspended	17	15.5%	95.5%
Withdrawn from university	5	4.5%	100.0%

A further description looked at the number of semesters completed by cohort. The following table (Table 8) showed the persistence from 1 to 5+ semesters in a contiguous pattern. In year 2016, the two largest drops in persistence were between the first and second semester (18%) and between the second and third semester. There was also a large decrease

**Table 8***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Students—Continuous Persistence by Semester (N = 110)*

Year Admitted	<i>Number of Semesters</i>				
	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5+ (%)
2016	55 (100%)	45 (82.0%)	31 (56.3%)	27 (49.0%)	28 (51.0%)
2017	33 (100%)	22 (67.0%)	16 (25.8%)	15 (26.7%)	18 (55.0%)
2018	22 (100%)	18 (81.0%)	15 (26.7%)	14 (25.0%)	6 (36.0%)
Total	110 (100%)	85 (77.0%)	62 (56.3%)	56 (50.9%)	54 (49.0%)

Last recorded GPAs shown for the three cohorts showed a mean GPA in the 2.5 range overall (Table 9). These numbers were presented as individual cohorts. There was no substantial difference within the three years except for a slight drop in 2017, which was also below the required minimum of 2.5 GPA per university standards.

**Table 9***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Students—Last Overall GPA at University (N = 110)*

Year Admitted	Number of Students	Mean GPA
2016	55	2.5527
2017	33	2.4218
2018	22	2.5495

Student majors and degree completions (Table 10) showed a total of 14 graduates within the three cohorts. There were no data available beyond these 14 students to indicate additional degree completion within the time frame analyzed. The three clustered patterns of majors accomplished were Social Work, Psychology, and Ministry/Vocation.

**Table 10***2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Degree Completion/Major (N = 110)*

Year Admitted	Social Work	Psychology	Ministry/Vocation	Other	Total Graduates
2016	4	3	3	3	13
2017	0	0	0	1	1
2018	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	3	3	4	14

### **Correlates of Success**

The following analyses performed compared various key descriptors of the Bridge Scholars program. These descriptors were previously identified as to how they compared with each other. Remarks indicated their reflectiveness of findings in the literature review. The literature highlighted these were predictive factors of academic success for some college students. It also focused on indicators present that impaired success as measured by different degrees of academic non-persistence. Overall GPA, as a predictor

of academic success, was compared with the correlates of first generation, race/ethnicity, ACT scores, and the relationship between high school grades and ending college GPA upon degree completion.

Without known admissions metrics of required for ACT scores, it was difficult to analyze this data other than presenting it as a descriptor (Table 11) of the sample population. The literature indicated that the ACT had a range of 1-36, and the national average score was 21. There was not a significant difference between ACT scores (Table 10) between the three cohorts. All years demonstrated a mean of 16.95 and average minimum score of 12 and a maximum of 25.

**Table 11**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment by Admission ACT Scores (N = 110)*

Year Admitted	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Min	Max
2016	55	16.91	1.839	.248	14	21
2017	33	17.00	1.581	.275	14	21
2018	22	17.00	2.655	.566	12	25
Total	110	16.95	1.941	.185		

There was an effort to determine correlations between two metrics that could be predictors of academic success. To analyze the relationship between high school GPA and college GPA, a Pearson’s *r* test was run. There was no correlation between these two variables ( $r = 0.079$ ;  $n=110$ ;  $p = .433$ ). There is no table provided for this correlation analysis.

This chart (Table 12) was designed to compare the ethnicity descriptor of the student cohort with the overall cumulative college GPA. The descriptor titles of the specific ethnicities were those selected by the admitting students. Of the ethnicities, the

students identifying as Black had the highest mean GPA, followed by the Hispanic identified students.

**Table 12**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment—Comparison Between Cumulative GPA and Race/Ethnicity (N = 110)*

Ethnicity	<i>n</i>	Mean/Avg. GPA	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
White	32	2.4900	.88396	.15626
Black	33	2.6885	.80045	.13934
Hispanic	29	2.5369	1.01743	.18893
Mixed Race	10	1.9370	1.30028	.41119
AA/PI	1	2.2500		
No indication	5	n/a		
Total	110	2.5104	.09246	.09246

This analysis (Table 13) evaluated the comparison between race and ethnicity and the numbers of semesters completed. The Hispanic students had the highest mean number (5.24) of completed semesters with the White students being next (5.16) and followed by Black students (4.97) with this completion metric. There was less than one semester overall difference between the three noted minority evaluated. Five students did not indicate their race/ethnicity, dropping the sample number to 105.

**Table 13**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment—Comparison Between Semesters Completed and Race/Ethnicity (N = 110)*

Ethnicity	<i>n</i>	Mean/# of Semesters	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
White	32	5.16	2.411	.426
Black	33	4.97	2.721	.474
Hispanic	29	5.24	2.695	.500
Mixed Race	10	3.60	1.776	.562
Asian	1	2.00		
Total	105	4.94	2.556	.249

Persistence as measured by the student’s last enrollment status was compared to race/ethnicity (Table 14). For this analysis, students were categorized as not persisting if their last enrollment status was recorded as cancellation by the student (when it was their decision to leave college, suspension by university action, or withdrawal from the university (students leaving mid-term voluntarily. Persistence was eligibility to register based on GPA for the fifth semester. While Black and Hispanic students were somewhat more likely than other groups, the differences in persistence by race/ethnicity were not significant (Table 14).

**Table 14**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Student Enrollment—Comparison of Academic Status and Race/Ethnicity (N = 110)*

Ethnicity	Persisted to 5th Semester	Did Not Persist	Total
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	
White	13 (33.3%)	24 (66.7%)	36
Black	16 (48.5%)	17 (51.5%)	33
Hispanic	12 (40.0%)	13 (60.0%)	25
Mixed Race	1 (10.0%)	9 (90.0%)	10
AA/PI	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	1
Total	41 (37.3%)	69 (62.7%)	110

*Note:* 3 cells (30%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .37. Chi-Square 5.884; *df* = 4; *p* = .208.

Students with First-Generation status were compared with their last overall Cumulative GPA (Table 15). This analysis showed the last GPA of the combined cohorts of 2016, 2017, and 2018. Although the first-generation presence was greater than the non-first-generation status, the mean values for GPA were essentially the same.

**Table 15**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Students- Comparison of First-Generation Status with Cumulative GPA (N = 110)*

First-Gen Status	<i>n</i>	Mean GPA	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Total
Yes	78	2.5726	.95356	.19797	78
No	32	2.4934	.93515	.16531	32
					110

Persistence of first-generation status students was compared with that of students coming from homes where both parents had completed college using the same definition of persistence as presented in (Table 16). While first-generation students were somewhat less likely to remain enrolled into the fifth semester of study (35.9%) compared to 40.6% of students who both parents completing college), the difference was not significant.

**Table 16**

*2016-2018 Bridge Scholars Program Student Enrollment—Comparison of First-Generation Students with Academic Status (N = 110)*

Last Registration Status	Non-First Gen <i>n</i> (%)	First Gen <i>n</i> (%)	Total
Non-continuing	19 (59.4%)	50 (64.1%)	69 (62.7%)
Continuing	13 (40.6%)	28 (35.9%)	41 (37.3%)
Total	32 (100%)	78 (100%)	110 (100%)

Chi-Square = 0.217; *df* = 1; *p* = .641

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### **Summary of Results**

In this study, three research questions to were considered. These questions were presented to analyze the relationship between descriptors of Bridge Program students and related predictors of student success. The findings were specific to the sample of three cohorts of students in three academic years with a total sample of 110. Within this study, this group of students was not compared to the total university population. This was an exploratory descriptive study that looked at students admitted to the university with less than the required metrics that would not have otherwise been admitted.

The research questions addressed were: Was there a relationship between race/ethnicity and academic success as measured by GPA in this population? Was there a relationship between high school academic performance as measured by high school GPA and academic success as measured by college GPA? Finally, was there a relationship between first-generation status and academic success as measured by college GPA? To answer these questions, seven analyses were performed as correlates of success. These were in addition to the first nine descriptive tables in Chapter 4 that delineated the demographics of the student population in the Bridge designation.

#### **Race and Ethnicity as Predictors of Success**

The first question was related to the impact of race/ethnicity on student success in this academic designation. GPAs did not differ appreciably as related to race/ethnicity.

This was likely because the Bridge designation students were compared to each other and not the entire student population. Bridge students were a small microcosm of the whole university student population and wide differences were not expected. Within the Bridge designation, there were similar distributions between the main ethnicities of Black, Hispanic, and White students. This was not the case with the entire university as there was a larger numerical disparity between these groups. There was a more significant difference in the rate of persistence in the Bridge Program with Black students having the highest non-persistence rate of the three main ethnic groups.

Noting a lack of supporting data to qualitatively document reasons for this non-persistence, this was an area identified for further evaluation. Academic status or eligibility to register showed a mix of data that was not explicable in the three areas of student cancelled, student suspended and withdrawn from the university. These were all descriptors of non-persistence and non-success. No studies in the literature were located that evaluated the exit reasons for students that did not complete their college degree. In a study by Rubio et al. (2017), there was mention of the multiple layers complicating the success of first-generation students.

### **High School GPA and College GPA as Predictors of Success**

The second question was a focus on the connectivity between high school GPA and the possibility that the college GPA would persist at a similar level. The literature looked at student success in many arenas, but it was more broad-based than specifically comparing high school GPA as a predictor of college GPA academic success (Swift et al., 2019). In my study, there was a correlation between the two GPAs, as they were similar when looking at the two side by side. This seemed to indicate that the high school GPA

was not a predictor that the college GPA would not be either substantively higher or lower than the high school value.

### **First-Generation Students as Predictors of Success**

The third question directed towards understanding a correlation between First-generation students and predictors of success. These included GPA, semesters completed, degree completion and academic status in both retention and persistence. Johnson-Weeks and Superville (2016) made the case that colleges had to become creative in meeting the special needs of first-time freshmen.

This creativity meant planning, engaging students to assess their needs, and creating a program structure that encouraged persistence and had plans in place to encourage student success. Having all resources or services as optional may have given the students the impression that these resources were not important. With these students being academically vulnerable, offering tutoring, academic coaching, or supplemental instruction as an option made it unlikely that effectiveness could be measured. The Bridge Scholars designation did not have a retrospective evaluation based on student data. In a move toward collecting pertinent data, actions were being taken to enact survey evaluations and capture reasons for non-completion when applicable. The bulk of the designation has been to interview students individually to assess needs, offer support, and direct to available resources.

This Bridge Scholars framework was analyzed in an exploratory descriptive format. The premise of the evaluation was based solely on and instituted for the purpose of measuring outcomes of the first four years of the program. By looking at the data, it

was my opinion that the program could allow continued access to the university for students with academic potential beyond their presentation upon application.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This study was designed to look at the data descriptors of the Bridge Program student population. By assessing the different cohorts, I believed conclusions could be drawn to add to the body of knowledge of predictors of student success. With this analysis, predictors of student success would form the foundation for a more structured and results-driven program.

The literature had studies delineating bridge-type programs, but none of these references were descriptive of this university's format. For the designation studied to become a functioning program, policies needed to be in place that should be communicated to both students and families before campus arrival. Assigned interns needed to have access to this information to add seamless interactions with the designation's purpose.

As has been mentioned about Bridge Scholars, Glessner (2015) strongly suggested that building relationship was the best retention tool for students. The Bridge Scholars program was essentially focused on building relationships, but meetings with students were non-mandatory and were only for the first semester of the initial year. Any further meetings to build on a relationship were at the student's discretion. Resources to be utilized by this population were encouraged but were also available to the general student population. Opportunities at no additional charge to the student such as tutoring,

supplemental instruction, and academic coaching were utilized through student initiative. These academic support options were encouraged but not required.

### **Limitations of This Study**

One limitation of this study was the smallness of the sample population. Additionally, the lack of comparison to the entire student population was a lost opportunity to show comparative data between all university students. Further, qualitative data that would add richness to the numerical data were not collected. Additionally, this was the first time that a data set of student achievement and predictors of potential student success was analyzed.

I was unable to receive data regarding the reasons for student non-persistence in the university. Unofficially, I was advised that this information was no longer obtained by the university. This was also the case with the department when the Bridge Scholars program was located. The implication was that the underlying factors for a student's non-completion were not identified and therefore not a component of evaluating program success.

Within the program's history, success was defined more as progress in completing subsequent and sequential semesters rather than actual degree completion or graduation. A further limitation of this study was that these recommendations for future consideration were not possible for the current student cohort already in progress. It was projected that the students' insight coupled with the investigator's analysis would eventually provide the foundation for measurement of the program's ongoing value to those students served as well as the university.

## **Recommendations and Implications for Further Consideration**

Implications for practice, policy development, and further research have been observed and considered based on the potential of the de-identified data set analyzed in this study. Although the data evaluated for this study were compiled and maintained in the university's OIE, an internal record of student success with even more specificity was considered for secure storage within the University Access Programs department. In this way each student would have a record of their university performance that was analyzed on a semester basis.

On the qualitative or holistic side, adaptation to the culture of academic achievement and persistence to completion were the success measures noted in the literature review that could be measured but were not included in this study. This type of qualitative data was absent and would be an enhancement to program development. The complexity of students in the program who are underprepared needed to have a needs assessment at the outset of the program.

It was my recommendation as a social work intern with this program to enact a pre-admission survey of the students and the family members to test for comprehension of the proposed Bridge Scholars framework. Subsequently, a post-completion or early exit document from the university was a way to evaluate framework strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for non-completion. To seek the reasons for university non-completion as a member of the Bridge Scholars programs would be an important aspect of program continuation.

As a practice consideration for social work, I believed a council of Bridge Scholars students could be tapped to contribute to program change and development.

Formally questioning the students to ascertain their ideas for a functioning program was not a part of the existing program. As the experts on living this path of college experience, their input would be invaluable. Additionally, the use of academic support services was a non-mandatory part of the program. Measuring outcomes of service utilization would reveal a dimension of the services effectiveness.

There could be global implications for this type of program had consistency in data collection and subsequent analysis took place. This type of second-chance model for university access would not only expand the opportunity for more students but would also lead to understanding the causes of non-completion. The analysis of the cost effectiveness of a university education would be benefitted by the exploration of factors impacting non-completion.

Implications for future research were to include qualitative data to support the quantitative data collected by the university. Bridge Scholars, if it were to become a defined program, would benefit from an actual program evaluation. The measurement of and analysis of student success could be realized by such an evaluation. A research focused on adding the component of student input into programs was not discovered in the literature review.

As the study was completed, I believed that the future of the Bridge Scholars program was possible if the program's evaluability was both a goal and a core function. With further consideration, I realized that the program as it currently stood was more of a designation than a structured program. Although structures such as goals, vision, and mission statements were not officially present, this program had the potential for further development. As data were further evaluated, the potential success of the Bridge Scholars

program was demonstrated by the data set presented and analyzed. Further analysis and research of this type of designation needed to be more than a mere descriptive design and might lead to a full program evaluation in the future.

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APPENDIX

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

**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



January 26, 2021

Susan King  
Department of Social Work  
ACU P.O. Box 27866  
Abilene Christian University

Dear Susan,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Program Evaluation of Bridge Scholars Program",

(IRB# 21-007 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as:

- Non-research, and
- Non-human research

Based on:

\* 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

**Non-Human Research Signature Page**

The Investigator understands ACU's policies on research and will oversee the activity/research to ensure that it is conducted in accordance with these policies and all ethical standards.

The Investigator will ensure compliance with HIPAA and FERPA laws, as appropriate.

The investigator assures that should the details of the study change such that it no longer qualifies as non-research/non-human research, the investigator will promptly contact the ACU IRB.

  
 Principal Investigator/Project Director Signature 1/8/2021  
Date  
SUSAN L. KING  
 Principal Investigator/Project Director Printed Name

If the above signed is a student, the faculty mentor is responsible for the supervision and assurance of compliance for this project. The faculty mentor should review protocols as often as needed to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institutional policies and any respective regulations.

By signing below the faculty mentor agrees to monitor the project and ensure the student is meeting the above responsibilities.

  
 Faculty Mentor Signature 1/8/2021  
Date  
THOMAS L. WINTER  
 Faculty Mentor Printed Name