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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.

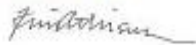
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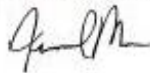
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School of Educational Leadership

First-Year Seminar and Its Impact on
Retention at a Small Liberal Arts College in South Carolina

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Michael A. Smith

August 2021

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the future development of Student Affairs and the students that we serve. There is still work to be done for our students.

Acknowledgments

I would like to first thank my family for always supporting me during this process, and for listening to me talk about this process and always pushing me to do my best work. I love you all and appreciate you more than you know.

Next, I would like to thank my significant other Whitney for her support during this process. Your love and support has been a gift that I never want to be without. I love you!

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Abstract

First-Year Seminar (FYS) courses have been the foundational building blocks for academic and nonacademic success for first-year college freshman since the late 1970s. With the focus on improving retention and persistence, FYS courses have been viewed as the resource that connects freshmen to the faculty, staff, student, and campus environment. Therefore, it is vital to see the impact that it has had on students and how it can further develop persistence through graduation. The researcher conducted this basic qualitative study to look for emerging themes of sophomore experience in the FYS courses and how that impacted their persistence and retention at the host institution. Data collected were in the form of one-on-one interviews with 20 student participants and a focus group with five student participants. The findings highlighted each participant's experience at the host institution. The findings suggest that FYS supports student persistence and retention in the form of several different functional areas on campus.

Keywords: First year, retention, persistence, sense of belonging, FYS, student involvement

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2020), the United States is comprised of 228 liberal art institutions totaling 15.4% of all colleges and universities in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there are 16.76 million undergraduate students currently enrolled in a four-year institution. This is down from the previous report of 16.87 million students (NCES, 2019). This is a drop of 0.7% from year to year. Students that choose to attend a liberal arts institution are selecting colleges and universities with some of the strongest influences on gains in the first year of college, because liberal arts institutions create more challenging, supportive, and engaging environments, students report greater learning and development outcomes (Herbst, 2004). Originally centered in classical studies, the liberal arts curriculum eventually expanded to include the natural, physical, and social sciences (Thelin, 2004). The liberal arts curriculum has slowly and steadily evolved over time, and with the addition of these disciplines, acceptance was widespread within the curriculum and a larger prospective student body was gathered. Despite the changing landscape of liberal arts education, it has seen a continuous decline in first-year persistence and retention. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center ([NSRC], 2019), persistence at four-year private institutions has dropped 3% from the comparison of fall 2010. This is not unusual as national numbers on retention of students from freshmen to sophomore year and overall persistence to graduation were also down about 4% overall (NSRC, 2019). For this reason, some liberal arts colleges have implemented new programs in and outside the classroom in order to revitalize declining enrollment and retention (Kurzweil, 2018).

Due to these contemporary enrollment challenges nationally, these small private liberal arts campuses must now compete against one another, low-cost public colleges, and universities for student enrollment. These institutions must look at all areas of their instruction to make sure they are offering the majors, resources, and experiences to continue to drive enrollment (Jaquette, 2013). Liberal arts colleges have traditionally worked to promote good citizens through a heavy emphasis on teaching in the liberal arts disciplines. These disciplines comprise the social sciences, humanities, fine arts, and the natural and physical sciences. Students that are seeking a comprehensive education with exposure to a variety of subjects attend liberal art colleges (Thelin, 2004). The rationale for this exposure is to emphasize the development of “social responsibility, strong intellectual and practical skills” (Moody, 2018 p. 3). Liberal arts education is important “to all students’ mental discipline and the teaching of a particular subject or skills” (Herbst, 2004). This would allow for more understanding of a broad range of liberal arts’ education, written and oral communication skills, and a foundation in local and global issues. A liberal arts education that supplies the aforementioned skills and experiences allows an individual to be more successful in the world.

Liberal Arts Student Experience

According to Hersh (1999), “Residential liberal arts colleges—primarily focus on teaching, their small size, residential nature, the quest for genuine community, and engagement of students in active learning emphasis” (p. 192). This traces back to the foundational elements of liberal arts education in the United States. While it is important to remember that these are academic institutions, outside the classroom experiences and interactions play a critical role in the retention and persistence of students. Thus, most institutions have some form of student engagement and/or cocurricular activities on their campuses. Across the board, student

engagement and cocurricular activities are foundational aspects of the collegiate experience. Students look for these activities to provide experience along with leadership and development to supplement their experiences in the classroom (National Association of Campus Activities, 2019). According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2019), student engagement refers to “time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities.” Student engagement, in this sense, is all activities that occur outside the classroom and expand or enhance the development of the student experience (Astin, 1984). Astin felt the more a student was involved in the campus environment, the more likely they would excel academically in the classroom. Because of this notion, colleges and universities have placed importance on academics and students being involved with leadership, organizations, and cocurricular activities (Kuh & Pike, 2005). Understanding how academic and nonacademic experiences influence the retention of students is significant in gaining insight into how to create an atmosphere that supports college success. This section lays the groundwork for understanding the difficulty of student retention, persistence, and student engagement in small liberal art colleges and universities. For the purposes of this study, we are looking at a small private liberal arts college located in South Carolina.

Precollege Foundation

According to Brecht and Burnett (2019), high school grade point average (GPA) and standardized testing (ACT/SAT) have been linked as successful markers for students to persist in a college or university setting. The previous research conducted in the early 2000s supports that high school GPA is one of the best predictors of academic success for students entering college (Brecht & Burnett, 2019). Using cognitive factors such as high school GPA and SAT/ACT scores, FYS courses could look to identify students that are more likely to persist in a college

environment and provide additional resources for students that may struggle with college transition.

Statement of the Problem

Without the desired academic and social support for the students, students will look for institutions that have proven to be successful in helping students prosper. Per the findings of a 2017 National Resource Center report, the private four-year institutional primary objective is to create academic success strategies. In other words, students desire a clear four-year pathway to graduation without unnecessary barriers. This trend has caused many colleges and universities to examine all aspects of the campus to create strategies to retain more students. (National Resource Center, 2019). It is not enough to provide resources for students entering their freshman year. With national and local calls for accountability from accreditation agencies, growing employer needs, and pressure from students and parents, institutions are required to advance strategies to help students be successful in college, and in doing so, assist colleges and universities to increase both retention and graduation rates of their students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kuh, 2003, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While athletics and additional resources may keep students engaged, the lack of meaningful cocurricular academics could be a factor in unsuccessful retention efforts from the campus administration.

According to Bullock (2015), “Increased mood and energy may also be associated with higher levels of distractibility and extra-curricular sociability, behaviors that are detrimental to academic engagement and performance” (p. 21). Without the necessary research, small institutions will continue to feel the struggles and strains from the impact of losing students because of student perception of a lack of belonging on the campus, social and academic experiences, and exposure to meaningful programming (Bullock, 2015). The inability to gain a

sense of community and belonging can impact the student experience and cause a student to remove themselves from the campus. With the dropout rates increasing, the campus will experience diminished budgets and resources to keep students on campus and connect the campus culture (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kuh, 2003, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

According to Bonet and Walters (2016), researchers should investigate how communities, student experiences, and additional factors affect student retention. By examining these factors, colleges and universities can begin to look at ways to improve their first-year experience and how seminar programs improve their overall retention and persistence at the institution. College campuses across the country place value on student engagement and how it impacts the academic experience. According to Green (2018), student engagement is the “students’ involvement in educationally purposeful activities” (p. 29). Success, in this case, is a higher GPA, a perceived sense of belonging, and a greater persistence to graduation. Furthermore, student engagement, student involvement, and student organizations can have a positive and/or negative impact on student retention. According to Webber et al. (2013), students that have high levels of student engagement will likely have a higher retention rate and be more likely to excel with the campus community. The connection to the campus and the community provides a sense of belonging and security to the students.

According to Miller (2017), the demographics of the traditional college student have changed a great deal since the early 21st century. Interactions with faculty, the campus, and other students can play a significant part in the retention of a college student. While success is difficult to measure in this case, a successful college campus can provide the necessary resources to students while they persist to graduation. As argued by Kim and Ra (2015), colleges should

provide skills and resources that make students successful beyond their first year and into their posteducation careers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts school in South Carolina, their experience in the institution's FYS program, and how these experiences impacted their persistence and retention. To pursue this investigation, I used a basic qualitative research approach using a focus group and semistructured interview design.

Research Questions

RQ1: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their academic success at the college?

RQ2: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their nonacademic success at the college?

RQ3: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their faculty/staff interaction at the college?

RQ4: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their retention and persistence at the college?

RQ5: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their sense of belonging at the college?

RQ6: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their vocation at the college?

Definition of Key Terms

First-year experience or first-year seminar (FYS). Used to classify transition courses for new incoming students to a college or university.

Liberal arts colleges. A form of college that focuses on the role of teaching instead of research. These institutions are usually small in size and have smaller classroom experiences.

Persistence. A success level of success for students at a higher education institution.

Retention. The rate at which student(s) stay at a given institution.

Service learning. A form of educational experience that focuses on community service activities.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts school in the state of South Carolina and their experience in the institution's FYS program, and how these experiences impacted persistence and retention. To pursue this investigation, I used a basic qualitative research approach using a focus group and semistructured interview design. A review of current research in the area of student retention, persistence, and involvement is discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As higher education continues to expand and evolve to meet the needs of the students, the goal of all colleges and universities is to have students persist to graduation. The study explored the first-year course from the development of the curriculum and its execution and how this impacted persistence and retention. In addition, this study looked at the impact it had students' sense of belonging, adjustment to campus life, student success, support for the institution, and academic/social integration. With the cost of education reaching never-before-seen heights and with student loan amounts recently surpassing \$1.5 trillion (Thune & Warner, 2019), institutions are looking for ways to prepare their students for the classroom and beyond.

Student Retention and Development Theories

Student motivation and persistence have been recurring conversations with first-year students. Basic theories of motivation factors can be seen with Tinto's student retention and dropout model (1975, 1993, 2012), Astin's theory of student involvement (1984), and Astin's I-E-O model (1993). These models focus on the engagement of students to build community at any college or university and many researchers have continued to use them in their studies.

Tinto's Retention and Dropout Model

According to Tinto (1975), the design and effectiveness of retention and persistence-based programs have become increasingly difficult due to the changing landscape of the college environment. Tinto suggested that this phenomenon of student persistence could be multifaceted and increase variables that were not originally described. Tinto also argued that the connection between student abilities and motivation could have a positive impact on the student experience and desire to persist. According to Alarcon and Edwards (2012), colleges and universities that have programs that target both motivation and ability have seen a higher rate of student retention

and persistence. With this understanding of motivation and the link between success and first-year experiences to persistence, first-year courses are now a crucial aspect of the college experience. Colleges and universities now make first-year seminars a requirement for each incoming freshman class. Nearly 96% of United States' higher education institutions offer a variation of this type of support in an effort to retain freshman students on campus for the next four years (Barefoot et al., 2012).

Tinto's Integration Model

As a restatement of his initial theory, Tinto (1993, 2012) developed and built onto his integration model for student retention by focusing on key elements of the organizational characteristics of programs and the effectiveness of the institution. Thus, Tinto was looking for a deeper drive into academic and social integration. Tinto referred to this as “the principle of effect retention” and suggests that this is looking at the student welfare and the commitment to education for all students and how this will impact the social and intellectual education of the student community. These principles are commonalities that are found in an institutional setting and that are available for the retention and persistence of all students on any college campus. These are the focal points on the energy and outcome that institutions place on all retention-based efforts. The research found that colleges and universities that focus on these actions should focus on one or more of the major themes from Tinto's three principles of affect retention (Tinto, 1993, 2012).

Institutional Commitment to Students

According to Tinto (1993), the commitment of the students is the first principle of a successful retention model. Tinto suggested that the organization must place the needs of the students first instead of the needs and goals of the institution. In addition, caring institutions will

build better communities and students are more likely to persist within that community. This requires a practical approach to the community from the institution and how they interact with students and their needs. In a similar study, Turner and Thompson (2014) theorized that the level of social and academic commitment of both the student and institution directly influences the first-year experience and level of academic persistence.

Educational Commitment

Another key component of integration is an educational commitment from the institution. Institutions must be committed to the educational development of their students. According to Tinto (1993), organizations must take proactive steps in the creation of educational opportunities for students to build skills. This includes opportunities students can take part in if they are lacking specific skills to succeed at the institution. Proactive institutions will do everything they can inside the classroom to make sure students are retained. Active classrooms will eliminate any hindrance in the learning process. Institutions can further enhance the educational commitment by showing the value of education and how a degree can align with the student's interest and their field of study (Tinto, 2016).

Social and Intellectual Community

Tinto's final aspect of integration is placed on the importance and need for the community. Tinto stated that programs should be committed to the development of social and academic support groups so they can be fully engaged in the institution (Tinto, 1993). Most institutions begin this community building as soon as students attend a campus visit or orientation session. The importance of an institution to have an established community for students to build a sense of belonging assists with the retention and persistence of students. The building of personal relationships between students, faculty, and staff cannot be neglected as the

need for this will continue to grow. Tinto further stated that an all-inclusive community needs to be established for relationship building along gender, race, culture, and socioeconomic lines. Brown (2017) stated that “belonging is a human desire to be a part of something bigger than ourselves” (p. 31). Belonging in this regard is seeking approval from peers and mentors and begins with self-acceptance before moving into a community aspect.

Astin’s Student Involvement Theory

In 1984, Astin’s designed his student involvement theory to help higher education professionals design effective and realistic learning environments that deliver the best outcomes for students. Astin broke down the theory into five basic hypotheses:

1. Involvement is the investment of physical and psychological energy in a student’s various academic and nonacademic activities.
2. Different students have various levels of involvement needs.
3. Involvement is both quantitative and qualitative—how many hours a student is studying and how well they are retaining the information.
4. The amount of time a student is learning is related to the level of involvement in the program.
5. Effective policies and practices are related to the capacity it has to increase a student’s involvement. (p. 292)

Further research has supported this model as it relates to the level of engagement for students outside of the classroom. Rubin et al. (2002) showed that involvement in this organization can lead to the development of high educational aspirations, enhanced self-confidence, and increased interpersonal and leadership skills. Foreman and Retallick (2016) further examined the

importance of involvement and how it related to another social change model and the impact it could have on the student experience.

Astin's I-E-O Model

I utilized Astin's I-E-O model (1993) as additional background for understanding the importance of the first-year impact on academic success: input (I) refers to the attributes of the student once they have gained admittance into any college or university setting; environment (E) (and setting) refers to the programs, strategies, and educational experiences to which a student will be exposed; and outcomes (O) refer to the attributes a student with being exposed at the institutions (p. 7). Astin's I-E-O model can be used for analyzing interventions and programs in higher education. I-E-O serves as a framework that supports the enhancement of student development, which runs counter to the traditional notion of institutional excellence (Astin & Antonio, 2012). The model looks to showcase a holistic experience for the student and how they are developing academic and personal skills that impact their lives beyond the institution (Cuellar et al., 2017).

First-Year Seminar and Impact on Retention and Persistence

According to Barefoot (2003), freshman student orientation (also known as First-Year Seminar (FYS) has become a common source of the foundation for incoming college freshmen. This course is an extension of summer orientation and suggests ways students can be successful as they begin their college careers. The FYS model was developed at the University of South Carolina in the early 1970s and now various forms of it exist at most colleges and universities in the United States. Information can range from academic success, study habits, and mental and physical wellness. These courses are designed to assist students in their transition from high school to college and provide all the necessary resources to be successful (Barefoot, 2003).

In addition, Dumford et al.'s (2016) building programs that engage first-year college students with resources within learning communities can lead to high engagement and retention rates of students. The engagement of faculty and staff increases the students' desire to persist at the institution and can lead to higher graduation rates. According to Chu (2016), between 20% and 30% will end up leaving an institution by the beginning of their second year. The focus should be on academic success and how engagement outside the classroom can assist the persistence of students in the college setting. Fike and Fike (2008) stated "that we must understand the 'why' in a student's choice to leave one institution for another" (p. 3).

As stated by Porter and Swing (2006), there has been a direct link between first-year courses and the establishment of persistence with many institutions. However, this has only been implemented with one institution. As previously stated, many institutions now offer some type of first-year experience course or seminar to aid in the persistence of first-year students. Furthermore, some institutions are still early in the process of the first year and have no data or statistical value established to show if there is a benefit yet to the course that is being offered. According to a 2012 national survey conducted by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, of 527 responses, 50% of responding colleges and universities showed that FYS courses increased retention among first-year students and/or graduation rates (as cited in Barefoot et al., 2012).

Additional aspects of first-year student persistence are a sense of belonging and success. According to Osterman (2000), a sense of belonging can be defined as "a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to being together" (p. 324). Another way to look at belonging is from a physiological aspect of life according to Maslow (1970). Maslow stated that "belonging is

where we can be found with families, friendships, memberships, and associations” (p. 6).

Success can be defined in several different ways. According to Jennings et al. (2013), success has “four thematic categories: academic achievement, social and residential” (p. 43). Each of these categories can be directly related to the measure of the successful collegiate experience.

This study investigated the presence of belonging and success of first-year college students from their own perspective. Success can be defined in a variety of ways.

Research for Small Private Institutions in South Carolina

With regards to research that focuses on FYS and its impact on student’s persistence and retention, there is a plethora of scholarly and peer-reviewed research. Colleges and universities are continuously looking at the lasting impact and how they can use this information to develop additional programs and experiences for their students. Some studies have examined first-year student variables and models within small community colleges in the Midwest (Klein, 2013). In addition, studies have looked at the impact of student perceptions of belonging, adjustment, success, and support to find trends among first-year students (Chu, 2016). While research is readily available that focuses on the various sizes of institutions across the United States, research that is specific to small private colleges and universities in South Carolina is limited and thus is needed to address and examine the impact of FYS on their student population.

Additional Factors That Contribute to Student Persistence

As previously stated, high school GPA and standardized testing (ACT/SAT) have been linked to successful markers for students to persist in a college or university setting (Brecht & Burnett, 2019). The previous research that was done in the early 2000s supports that high school GPA is one of the best predictors of academic success for students that are entering college

(Brecht & Burnett, 2019). Using intellectual factors such as high school GPA, SAT and ACT scores, we could look to identify students that are more likely to persist in a college environment.

Academic Success and Course Structure

The design and implementation of a FYS provides a needed foundation for students and their success in a college environment. York et al. (2015) defined academic success as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning outcomes, and post-college performance” (p. 5). Thus, we have the foundation of the first-year seminar at any given institution. The learning experience that is gained in an FYS can assist students in the foundation development of education beyond the classroom and the institution.

Interaction and Campus Resources

Successful students will be retained by an institution that values personal relationships (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Students need to receive support from everyone on campus, especially their professors. Students that are not engaged in a personal relationship are less likely to persist. Fostering a student-to-faculty relationship requires just more than an academic relationship. It requires investment for the faculty member beyond the classroom (Schademan & Thomson, 2016; Turner & Thompson, 2014). Relationships can begin at academic advising and faculty members should be seen as a resource to students.

Nonacademic preparation can impact academic success as well. Having available resources, such as a student learning center, career services, and academic support, can directly impact a student’s level of success (Slade et al., 2015). Students that succeed in the classroom cannot be expected to succeed outside the classroom. Without an adequate learning environment and support services, students will likely struggle and are less likely to persist to graduation.

Success Predictors

In addition to the aforementioned areas, the first semester of college is a great predictor of success. Students that perform with a lower GPA in their first term are less likely to persist to graduation (Gershenfeld et al., 2016). There can be a direct link to the prior academic performance in high school and their preparedness level entering into a college or university setting (Raju & Schumacker, 2015). Finally, according to D’Lima et al. (2014), student motivation will play a role in the academic success of freshman students. In addition to academic success predictors, the term *grit* has become more common in relation to academic success. It has been defined as the “tenacious long-term pursuit of goals despite setbacks and obstacles” (Buzzetto-Hollywood & Mitchell, 2019, p. 381). In many cases, grit has been known to directly predict academic outcomes and goal attainment (Park et al., 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts college in South Carolina, specifically their experience in the institution’s FYS program and how these experiences impacted their persistence and retention. To pursue this investigation, I used a basic qualitative research approach using a focus group and semistructured interview design. In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology of the study, research questions, and the data collection process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter describes demographic information about the individuals that participated in the study and a brief background of the institution of study. Also, I describe the instruments I used to conduct the qualitative analysis of the data, its purpose and design, the methodology, the research site, and information on sample, data collection, and data analysis procedures, and efforts to establish trustworthiness while establishing research validity. This chapter includes the researcher's role, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Purpose and Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts school in South Carolina and their experience in the institution's FYS program, and how these experiences impacted persistence and retention. To pursue this investigation, I used a basic qualitative research approach using a focus group and semistructured interview design.

Participation and Setting

Upon meeting the required protocols and procedures established by Institutional Review Boards of Abilene Christian University (ACU) and the college where I conducted the study, I sought participants among sophomore and freshmen students previously enrolled in the FYS at a small, rural, four-year private liberal arts institution in South Carolina. The college is home to just over 1,200 students. Founded by Lutherans, the college uses Lutheran teachings to develop the educational principles that are at the core of the Lutheran faith. These include faith and reason, freedom and responsibility, diversity and inclusivity, and personal and public vocation. The college is a Division II institution of higher education and currently has 56% athletic student population. The student participants in this study could not be beyond two years postenrollment

in the FYS. This population was appropriate for the study problem as I looked to increase my understanding of persistence and retention among these students.

Trustworthiness

As trustworthiness was a vital course of the research study, I focused on the principal outcomes and foundational components that looked to capture information honestly and reviewed the experiences of the study participants in an ethical matter. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) stressed the importance of review and showcasing information in a variety of methods to support the trustworthiness and credibility of the data that has been collected. In the context of this study, *truth* was linked to the conducting of the interviews and how the analysis of data leads to a single perspective theory and the accuracy of that perspective theory (Patton, 2015). The use of truth and utility tests assisted me in how to gather and present the data.

Furthermore, displaying the data, findings, and implications of the study showed its transparency to the research topic with additional support to the dependability and credibility of the study. These also were seen in the presentation of the results and how information was captured from the participants in a variety of ways. Finally, using member checking showed additional credibility in the research. This also showed the accuracy of the findings and promoted any themes and meaningful information and how it was presented from the participants in the study. During this process, I used the following steps:

1. I provided participants with a reminder of informed consent during each process of the study.
2. I confirmed responses during the interview and focus group process to assure the accuracy of information.

3. After digitally transcribing information, I provided a detailed report to participants for them to review.
4. I provided an additional step-by-step process and follow-up for the participants and any next steps in the study.
5. I allowed study participants to request face-to-face or virtual appointments to review information
6. Using either a hardcopy or electronic copy of the transcript, I allowed each participant to identify any misinterpretations of the information that were collected by highlighting and initialing the areas of clarification.
7. After this process was completed, I made adjustments within the data and provided an update on the information provided by the participants.

Assumptions

There are assumptions with the development of any type of study. Assumptions that are related to the freshmen students that took part in the FYS are that they are persisting based on experiences in and out of the classroom. Furthermore, a broad look at the freshmen experience, and not any specific populations, may bring varied experiences to the table as not all student needs are the same. In addition, this can have a direct impact on the persistence of the student. This includes a sense of belonging, adjustment to campus life, student success, support for the institution, and academic/social integration. While it is the mission of every college to support its students, we can assume that not every student has the same experience and their experiences may have hindered their persistence to graduation. Another assumption was that all the participants shared an accurate and true account of their experience in the FYS and the impact it had on them. I decided that the focus groups and interviews provided the best information and

opportunity for data collection. To ensure safety and information accuracy, I provided participants with opportunities postinterview to review collected information and to delete information that they did not want to share.

Limitations of the Study

There was limited research data for small liberal arts colleges in South Carolina. However, there are some similar research models in other regions of the United States that could have helped with the framework of this study. Some studies examined first-year student variables and models within small community colleges in the Midwest (Klein, 2013). In addition, studies have investigated at the impact of student perceptions of belonging, adjustment, success, and support to find trends among first-year students (Chu, 2016). While this information does provide a framework for this study, it is important to note that I could find no studies or data for the small private liberal arts college with a focus on the first-year experience and student engagement in South Carolina. Finally, I eliminated any research bias and looked for alternatives when needed to present the findings of this study.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are ways that we can clarify the scope and focus of any study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The following are delimitations of the study: (1) broad target population of sophomore college students, (2) location of the study, and (3) use of one research question. A broad population of college students was the focus of this study. Sophomore students just completed the FYS and had the most to provide in the student population. Freshman students could have been used but were only able to provide limited experiences within the course and they had not completed it. I designed this study to have a range of student interactions between 10 and 20 participants. This was for the control of the study and to limit data saturation.

The college as the location of this was another delimiting feature of this study. The focus of the study was the impact of college students on a small private rural liberal arts institution in South Carolina. This focus was to improve smaller private institutions with FYS and provide meaningful experiences within the campus culture.

Another delimitation was the decision to limit the study to one campus that was a small, private, rural college campus. These factors were bound by time, the ability to conduct research, and to do data analysis. Furthermore, due to financial considerations and the ongoing global pandemic, I wanted to limit my travel within the region.

Researcher's Role

I currently serve as an assistant dean for student engagement at a small, private, rural college in South Carolina. I have been interested in the FYS experience. I only recently took charge over this area in my job on campus. I have five years of experience in the field of student engagement, student organizations, and student development theory. For this study, I collected data for an institution that I am closely associated with. My connection to the campus furthered my desire to seek information that cannot only assist the students that I serve, but students around the world. I hope to bring answers to some of the challenging questions and experiences students have at the site setting.

My role was to collect meaningful data by seeking information from students on the campus that invoked their reflection on their experiences. I conducted one-on-one interviews and asked open-ended questions of students from the FYS course and students that previously enrolled in the course. I followed the research protocol outlined by ACU's and the selected college's IRBs and any additional protocols to protect the information and privacy of the participants.

Data Collection

For this research, I collected data from focus groups and interviews. By using different sources of collection, I hoped to strengthen the overall study and provide a conclusive outcome (Leavy, 2017). Furthermore, using a variety of collection methods provided additional validity to the strength of the information that was presented. Interviews were the first step in the data collection process. This process is known as triangulation and this study will focus on data triangulation when reviewing information (Leavy, 2017). When completing the interviews, I observed the participants and determined if they were a candidate in participating in a focus group discussion. If needed, I looked for additional face time with the participants to explain any additional processes or to further ask questions.

Interviews

A semistructured interview was the first phase of data collection for this research. For these interviews, I invited 20 student participants to take part. Questions were designed to allow for creative responses and not restrict the flow of information from the participants while making sure the participants stayed on topic (Creswell, 2013). Interviews are an important part of this process as it allows for one-on-one interactions to observe the participants, but it also allows for a connection between the parties involved (Leavy, 2017). Interviews took place on the Zoom software platform per guidelines set forth by ACU. The questions were structured as open-ended to gain much information and a deeper understanding of the students' perception of the FYS course and how it impacted their time at the college and furthered their persistence and retention. Recording of the interviews was an option, and when used, these interviews were transcribed for data processing. All interview notes were digitally transcribed and maintained in a secured

password-protected device. Interviews were focused on the topics of the research and were each 30–45 minutes long.

Focus Groups

The next method of data collection was focus groups. The goal of focus groups is to provide participants an intimate setting facilitated by a researcher in which to freely discuss the research topic (Creswell, 2013). For the focus group, I chose individuals that took part in the interview process. For this study, I invited five students. The questions from the focus group were open-ended and followed a loosely formatted structure to allow the flow of dialogue from the students involved. Due to COVID-19 guidelines, all focus group conversations took place via Zoom. Focus groups lasted up to 90 minutes and allowed each participant to take part in the group. Notes and any recording were digitally transcribed and maintained in a secured password-protected device. The group examined the influence of the FYS and how it impacted their persistence and retention.

Data Analysis

I used a general inductive research approach for qualitative evaluation analysis. This approach allowed me to review data in its raw form and summary layout, examine clear connections between the assessment instrument and the research topic and to summarize its outcomes from the data presented, and develop a model or framework that relieves the understanding of the raw data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The main purpose of an inductive approach is to seek common themes or meaningful information that is representative of the data. The use of the cyclical analytical process was used during the data collection process and in seeking fundamental data points (Patton, 2015). This model looks to identify problems, develop working solutions, implement solutions, make any programmatic adjusts, and repeat the cycle.

Using the cyclical analytical model, I continuously analyzed data that I gathered and looked for the emergence of themes that could be categorized into foundation data points using a coding system to break down the themes as information was realized. Models and frameworks should be realized within the raw data. These allowed for the important themes to be described and organized within the context of the freshman students and their experiences in the FYS at a small, private, rural liberal arts college in South Carolina.

Coding

For the coding process, I initially used an inductive analysis of the interviews and focus groups with a review of initial notes. As I reviewed the information collected, I coded based on themes that were associated with the overall topics of each research question. If the software was available (e.g., Nvivo), I used it to look for the emergence of additional themes related to persistence and retention of students while seeking information on the sense of belonging, adjustment to campus life, student success, support for the institution, and academic/social integration.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the individuals within the study, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant. In doing this, they provided quality information while I protected the rights and privacy of the students involved. Also, I utilized a FERPA waiver to be permitted to access GPA information from the participants. Focus groups remained within the guidelines on standard structures between 10 and 20 students per group, and any interviews were one-on-one structured. Formal approval was sought by the study site's IRB before any research was conducted on campus. The participants were informed of all the information on the research, data collection, and security of the data. Furthermore, I adhered to the standards set forth by ACU and the standards of IRB and

human protections. All participants were able to opt out at any time during the study. Any physical data was kept in a secured lockbox. Finally, any electronic data will be kept on a password-protected hard drive and flash drive (backup). All information will be kept in a secure location and I am the only person to have access to the information.

Summary

The research design of this qualitative study was identified as a focus group and semistructured interviews. The rationale for using this design was clearly articulated within the section and will assist in the analysis of the data collected. The population, setting, and sample were defined along with the rationale of why this was chosen for this study. Data collection was done from various sources and data procedures were briefly used.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I examine and showcase the various findings from the performed study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts school in South Carolina alongside their experience in the institution's FYS program, and how these experiences impacted their persistence and retention. To pursue this investigation, I used a basic qualitative research approach utilizing a focus group and semistructured interview design. This chapter includes the findings, experiences, and discussion of any major themes that emerged from the focus group or interview process.

Chapter 2 presented a review of student development theory focusing on Tinto's student retention and dropout model (1975, 1993, 2012), Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, and Astin's (1993) I-E-O model. These focus on the engagement of students to build community and develop relationships at colleges and universities. From these models and theories, I sought a connection to the institution as well as how the course impacted their overall student experience. From the interaction through the focus group and interviews, underlining themes related to their experiences were illuminated.

In the first chapter, I discussed the impact of FYS courses by investigating how communities, student experiences, and additional factors play into the role of student retention. By probing these factors, colleges and universities can begin to evaluate methods that will enhance institutions' FYS programs and how they improve freshman students' overall retention and persistence at the institution (Bonet & Walters, 2016). Using Tinto's student retention and dropout model (1975, 1993, 2012), Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, and Astin's (1993) I-E-O model, I investigated the following research questions:

RQ1: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their academic success at the college?

RQ2: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their nonacademic success at the college?

RQ3: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their faculty/staff interaction at the college?

RQ4: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their retention and persistence at the college?

RQ5: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their sense of belonging at the college?

RQ6: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their vocation at the college?

In addition to the research questions above, focus group participants were asked the following questions as part of this research study.

1. Describe your experience in three words or less.
2. Why did you choose these words?
3. Has anyone or anything left a lasting impact on your college experience to this point?
4. What barriers have you had to overcome?
5. How did you overcome them?
6. Why did you decide to return to college the following semester?
7. What resources/information did you learn about in your FYS course that has been the most helpful?

8. What resources/information did you learn about in your FYS course that has been the least helpful?
9. Have you joined any organizations on campus? If so, how did you learn about them?
10. Would you recommend the FYS class to others? Why or why not?

Demographics for Interviews

This portion of the study was dedicated to a thorough interview process, which consisted of a total of 20 undergraduate students of various sex, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Of the participants in this study, nine identified as male, and 11 identified as female. When asked about their race/ethnicity, 11 identified as Black or African American ($n = 11$), eight identified as White ($n = 8$), and one identified as biracial ($n = 1$). The demographic information used for this study is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Research Participants

Demographics	Frequency <i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	9	45
Female	11	55
Ethnicity		
Black/African American	11	55
White	8	40
Biracial	1	5

Research Participant Profiles

Table 2 showcases the participant pseudonym that I assigned to each participant. Included within the graph are ethnicity, gender, and academic major at the institution for each participant.

Table 2*Research Participants Profiles*

Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	Major
Z.U.	White	M	Music
G.T.	African American	M	Business Administration
N.N.	African American	F	Health Science
J.	White	F	Music Education
G.	African American	M	Theatre
M.T.	African American	F	Pre-Law/Political Science
E.B.	African American	M	Biology
K.K.	White	F	Biology/Environmental Studies
N.	White	F	History
D.O.	Black	M	Nursing
M.	White	M	Accounting
A.B.	White	F	Forensic Psychology
R.R.	African American	M	Business Administration
M.A.	African American	F	Business Administration
B.Y.	Biracial	F	Communication/Broadcasting
E.S.	White	F	Nursing
B.O.	African American	M	Exercise Science
I.S.	African American	F	Nursing
S.M.	White	F	Elementary Education
R.F.	African American	M	Business Administration

Precollege Foundation

As stated in Chapter 1, high school GPA and standardized testing (ACT/SAT) have been linked to successful markers for students to persist in a college or university setting (Brecht & Burnett, 2019). The precollege foundation information for the participants is outlined in Table 3.

Participants with GPAs measured on a 5.0-point grade scale (numbers in parentheses) were converted to a 4.0-point grade scale for the ease of this table. Based on the information that was provided for this study, participants' average GPA was 3.49 (B+) on a 4.0 scale. Additionally, the participants that chose to divulge their SAT Scores indicated an average score of 1039.

According to College Board (2020), high school students within the SAT range of 1030–1040 scored within the 54–56 percentile among students nationally in the 11th- and 12th-grade range and had an SAT user percentile of recent graduates of 46-48. ACT.com (2020) has indicated that a 21–22 score is considered slightly better than average and places students within the top 57th percentile of students that have taken the ACT. Finally, based on a 2018 concordance tables of SAT and ACT scores, students that tested within the range of 1030–1050 traditionally have scored a 21 on the ACT. This information is pertinent to this study as it lays the groundwork for future educational experiences and potential success markers for college.

Table 3

Precollege Academic Information

Participant	High school GPA	SAT score	ACT score
Z.U.	4	820	-
G.T.	3.20	900	-
N.N.	4.12 (3.30)	980	-
J.	3.254	1000	-
G.	3.003	1000	-
M.T.	3.708	1001	-
E.B.	3.866	1030	-
K.K.	3.5	1070	-
N.	4.54 (3.63)	1170	-
D.O.	3.9	1180	-
A.B.	4.706 (3.76)	-	26

Participant	High school GPA	SAT score	ACT score
M.	4.0	1280	-
R.R.*	3.0	-	-
M.A.*	2.25	-	-
B.Y.	3.325	-	19
E.S.	4.647 (3.72)	-	21
B.O.	3.561	-	16
I.S.*	3.585	-	-
S.M.	4.763 (3.81)	-	27
R.F.*	3.476	-	-
Average Scores	3.49	1039	21.8

Note. *Participant did not share SAT and/or ACT information at the time of the interview.

Numbers in parentheses are converted grades from a 5.0 scale

Organizational Involvement

Table 4 showcases the level of student organization involvement for each of the study participants. It is important to note that traditional collegiate sports were not included in the following list.

Table 4*Student Club and Organization Involvement*

Participant	# of organizations
Z.U.	4
G.T.	3
N.N.	2
J.	3
G..	3
M.T.	3
E.B.	4
K.K.	3
N.	3
D.O.	1
M.	2
A.B.	3
R.R.	5
M.A.	4
B.Y.	4
E.S.	4
B.O.	3
I.S.	3
S.M.	3
R.F.	3
Average membership	3.2

Description of Research Participants' Interviews

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the design and effectiveness of retention and persistence-based programs have become increasingly difficult due to the changing landscape of the college environment (Tinto, 2012). Budget restrictions and the ongoing global pandemic have caused colleges and universities to further buckle down on their budgets for the long haul. Tinto suggested that this phenomenon of student persistence could be multifaceted and increased variables that were not originally described. These variables can include a sense of belonging, academic and community engagement, and commitment from the institution.

My goal to gain as much information along with a deeper understanding of the students' perception led me to utilize an open-ended question structure throughout the interview. Interview protocols were developed to allow each participant the opportunity to provide their experience from the FYS course within the subject area of each of the six research questions. Interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes each and interview times ranged from 10 minutes to 18 minutes, averaging around 13 minutes.

Participant A.B.

Participant A.B. is a White female sophomore majoring in forensic psychology major at the institution. She is classified as an in-state student and represents one of the few students from her high school that chose to attend this college for her secondary education. She is heavily involved on- and off-campus. She describes her experience in the FYS as meaningful and helpful with the transition into a college student. As part of the design of the course, students from similar majors (e.g., all business, nursing, etc.) were paired in the same section of the FYS course. This allowed for students to build relationships with each other as they would be sharing similar experiences based on the majors that they had selected.

Academics

Participant A.B. stated that the lessons within the FYS course and conversations with the instructor contributed to her academic success. Lessons about time management and basic study skills for the college environment were among the most impactful, according to her recollection. In addition, setting a weekly schedule for studying, homework assignments, and projects allowed her to build a strong foundation for study habits within the FYS course. She stated, “These lessons helped me focus on my studies.” This experience allowed her to apply the same tactics to the other academic courses during her freshmen year. This allowed the semester to flow more smoothly than she expected. The participant has continued to use these skills in her sophomore year which has proven to be very successful from an academic standpoint.

Nonacademics

A.B. stated several times throughout this interview that relationships were the biggest nonacademic factor in her success. From interactions within the FYS course, the social circles and peer groups that she has made has encouraged her involvement at the college. The FYS course also allowed her to find her best friend; they are currently living together. Having a roommate/best friend as an accountability partner when it came to her work for her course was a huge help to her experience. Furthermore, the FYS put her with “people I would not normally be around.” This has forced her to engage more openly with people from different backgrounds. Finally, having another level of support has encouraged her to be more open-minded to other students and successful in her nonacademic success. A.B. is very involved on campus and has several sought various leadership positions from the encouragement that she received in the FYS course.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

A.B. stated that her interactions with her FYS Instructor were key components in her progress. Her FYS would meet with her regularly and provide multiple outlets for contact via email, phone, and text. When A.B. encountered an issue, she would contact her professor and they would be able to take steps to solve problems by finding people that could assist her. Because of that experience, she took the same expectation in her other courses and has attempted to have similar working relationships with the professors. A.B. did not share if this has been successful with similar approaches with other professors at the time of the interview.

Retention and Persistence

When it came to her retention with the institution, she again credited her FYS instructors as one of the major reasons for staying. The ability to have access to the FYS instructors when she would have an issue made her feel comfortable at the institution. Whether the instructor aided or found the proper person to help her, she felt content with the experience. Regarding the FYS course, she stated, “Every 1-2 weeks a guest speaker would come to do a presentation of a joint session of the FYS course.” She specified that while the topics varied from each interaction, she was able to have conversations with the guest presenters afterward and has maintained contact with many of them. This has allowed her network to flourish and enabled her to connect with more resources on campus. While the course did help with persistence, she did not credit the overall experience with her persistence at the institution.

Sense of Belonging

Participant A.B. stated that she has been able to develop solid meaningful relationships from the FYS course that created a “second home” for her. Since she was far from home, this allowed for a sense of belonging at the institution as well. She was nervous about the new

experience of college and the course provided ease with that transition, as she was fearful of “doing college alone.” She has developed the ability to create multiple social circles from her experience and keeps close with students from the FYS course. She stated, “I actually never felt alone at any time.” She credited the FYS course for helping her find her best friend and current roommate. In addition to this, the course experience has led her to become more involved in organizations and seek leadership opportunities offered on campus. One that came to mind was that of membership in her sorority.

Vocation

A.B. stated that an event held by the FYS course provided the opportunity needed to discover her purpose. As part of a class assignment, she was instructed to attend an on-campus career fair. She was able to speak with members of a sexual assault center in the area where she explained that she was looking to pursue a doctoral degree in forensic psychology to work with children that have been victims of crimes of sexual assault. This interaction has fueled her passion since, and she had made efforts to see additional opportunities to have experiences with the sexual assault trauma center. In addition, she does recall a conversation of vocation in the classroom but credited the experiences outside the classroom as her career interest.

Participant B.Y.

Participant B.Y. is a biracial female sophomore majoring in communication and broadcasting at the institution. She claims that her experience was a bit of a mixed bag and had both positive and negative experiences with interaction from and with the class. She is a member of the small population of the college student body that does not participate in an athletic sport but is currently a member of the color guard. She is very active in student organizations on campus, but has not gained any student leadership roles to date.

Academics

B.Y. stated that the biggest contributor to her success were campus recourses, specifically the Center for Student Success. During a lesson in FYS, B.Y. and her classmates were shown the resources and features of the Center for Student Success. The center is in the campus library and is open to all students. Students can speak to advisors, seek disability accommodations, and have a quiet place to study. In addition, the center oversees the tutoring services that students can sign up for free of charge. Due to the success of the area, they have extended hours into the early morning to meet the additional needs of students and for students to have access to library resources as well. “I love that I can go there anytime and get help,” she stated.

Nonacademics

Like Participant A.B., gaining social groups and friends was her biggest factor of nonacademic success. With the interactions in the FYS course and the out-of-the-classroom engagement, she was able to form many peer groups. She is still connected to the other students from the FYS course and considered them one of her main support groups. “Until I joined the FYS course, I did not know a lot of people and I am pride to call them my friends,” she stated. She acknowledged the benefit of the FYS course as all the students in her section of that class were in the same major, so they were able to help them more with other course work and reminders as well.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

So far as her interactions with faculty and staff, B.Y. claims that they gave her “hope to be successful” in the course and as a college student. “They [faculty and staff] care about the students and they want you to succeed. The students are people and not “numbers” and it shows. They are resources that you can go to beyond the classroom and after your time with them for

additional assistance.” To this day, she still speaks with the FYS professor and classifies her as her “ride or die partner” at the college. She has attempted to take this approach in other courses but has not been successful. Finally, B.Y. was fortunate enough to have her FYS instructors as her freshmen advisor so they would be able to spend more time outside of the class.

Retention and Persistence

Retention for B.Y. has come in the form of campus events. As part of the class, students are encouraged to seek membership in organizations and attend campus events from the First 56 calendar. The First 56 calendar was designed and developed to showcase to freshmen students the various activities on campus. These activities range from simple homegrown programs to comedians and magicians. The purpose was to show there is always something to do on campus during the first 56 days and beyond. The FYS course assists with persistence and develops habits that make for a successful student. B.Y. had trouble recalling some of the information from the FYS course as it had been some time since she had reflected on it.

Sense of Belonging

As stated above, B.Y. connected with students in the classroom, attended events, and joined organizations through the encouragement of the FYS course. These interactions created a strong connection with the campus and her peers. Additionally, it has given her the motive to form similar connections in other courses. “I felt at home,” she stated. Furthermore, she has joined the esports team as a broadcaster to help with her academic major and gain practical experience for her career.

Vocation

As far as vocation is concerned, B.Y. did not have a moment that aided with her career development in the FYS course. She could not recall any conversation from FYS and seemed to

be confused about the concept of vocation. However, she has made a connection via the esports team where she is a broadcaster that is directly related to her major of communication and broadcasting.

Participant B.O.

Participant B.O. is a African American male sophomore currently majoring in exercise science. He is very active on campus in several student organizations and student leadership. He feels the course is “needed” for all freshman students, whether they are a first-time freshman or a transferring student, as each college has different goals and expectations for their students. “It helped me with my start the year on the right foot,” he stated. He further discussed that he was not sure he wanted to go to college, but the FYS course aided his process.

Academics

Participant B.O. stated that the FYS course itself was a huge help to his transition to college. The hard point of it was that his class was at 8:00 a.m., and it was “difficult” to get up in the morning for the course. However, he stated that the learning that occurred in the course made it easier to enjoy the early morning class. He stated that the professor was the biggest contributor to his success. The relationship that was formed from the in-class instruction was helpful in assist his learning and time management. He was able to speak with him anytime and focused on his learning process. Finally, some of the activities that were in the class were resources themselves. He stated the scavenger hunt and photo hunt activities were some of the activities that focused on his academic process. “I was able to see more of the campus and the people. This allowed me to connect more within the FYS course,” he stated.

Nonacademics

The FYS course encouraged B.O. to look at the different organizations on campus to get involved in. He is not currently a member of any sports team which is the minority on this campus. Since attending the FYS course, he has joined several organizations and currently serves as one of the class presidents for the Student Government Association. As part of the course, students were required to attend at least three different events on campus. He stated, “This got me out of my room and part of the campus, and I was able to join groups with my classmates.” Finally, he has taken a student leadership role as a resident advisor (RA) just before the interview was conducted. The engagement from this student can be traced back to the encouragement that he received as part of the FYS course.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

B.O. stated, “Anytime I need help I could ask the FYS professor.” Furthermore, the professor would provide additional resources if B.O. did not have access to printing services or a laptop. He said the professors went above and beyond to help his educational process. He did state if he had any similar success in his other course or had the same expectation as well. Furthermore, the FYS professor provided his number to be accessible 24/7. B.O. took advantage of this and would connect with his FYS instructor to discuss issues and problems that he was having. To this day, B.O. still reaches out to ask for assistance.

Retention and Persistence

The FYS course did help with his retention and persistence, but he credited more of the student involvement activities for this. B.O. called it a “predicament” in that he is involved with several aspects of the campus. The course laid the foundation for this development and has encouraged him to continue with it at the time of the interview. He stated that we will be looking

for more opportunities in the future even though he is extremely busy with all the organizations that he is currently a member of.

Sense of Belonging

B.O. stated the first day of the course had the biggest impact on him: “On the first day, everybody was there early, because we didn't know what to expect, so everyone just started talking.” He further stated the professor welcomed the class with open arms and made everyone feel at home and welcome. In addition, the course got him out of his comfort zone and allowed him to become more interactive with his peers.

Vocation

While the FYS course did not help with his vocation, B.O. was able to use skills from one of his exercise sciences courses to aid an athlete that was suffering from cramps during a competition. His quick thinking and actions allowed for the athlete to continue with their performance, and he felt an instant satisfaction from helping others. This was the main reason for exploring the field and seeking this career. He stated, “I was happy that I was able to help someone because that is what I want to do with my life—help people.”

Participant D.O.

Participant D.O. is a Black male studying nursing. As an international student, his FYS experience was difficult and a little different. There were some initial barriers with language and understanding of different educational systems than what he was accustomed to. He knew he wanted an advanced degree as he plans to move into the medical field once he has completed the requirement for this. He was equipped with an additional advisor to assist him through this process. At the time of the interview, he was just getting involved with one organization and has taken a leadership role in it.

Academics

D.O. attributed the FYS course for setting expectations for college: “Yeah, it was helpful because, in college life, we're given the guidelines of what we need to do and told the curriculum.” In addition, this course provided the skills to help maintain his academic requirements: “I am an international student with a scholarship, so I need to maintain a 3.0 GPA to keep my true scholarship.” While the course overall provided a foundation, nothing specific in the course stood out to him on the development of his transition to college life. “In general, just understanding the academic standards at the college is the biggest thing,” he stated.

Nonacademics

D.O. could not recall anything from a nonacademic mindset that impacted his FYS experience. “Everything was an academic focus for me because I needed help.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction

D.O. stated that he had positive interactions with members of the faculty and staff. “Because I am an international student, I had regular weekly meetings with many of the professors and advising team. They were making sure that I was doing well and understanding the material.” In addition, his FYS professor was available when further assistance in the class was needed. This was similar to what many of the other participants stated that the FYS went above and beyond for their success.

Retention and Persistence

D.O. is an international student and must maintain specific requirements to remain at the institution. The course aided this a bit, but for the most part, cost savings was his biggest motivator. However, learning how to develop strong study habits, time management, and task

management has allowed him to persist with a high GPA and assist some of his peers with their academic struggles. These lessons were directly from the FYS course.

Sense of Belonging

Since D.O. was primarily focused on his academics, he did not seek additional groups outside of academics. He had several study groups that he was a part of. He stated that “some of the teamwork activities helped him connect, but nothing else.” He seemed to have kept to himself for most of his freshman year. He has now sought out leadership in a newly formed first-year honor society that was chartered in fall 2020.

Vocation

D.O. did not have any vocational conversation within the course. As an international student, he was driven to purpose a career in the medical field and will be pursuing other degrees once he graduates from the institution. He hopes that future courses will expose him more to the field before he moves on. “I knew what I wanted to be before I got to college,” he stated.

Participant E.B.

Participant E.B. is an African American male sophomore currently majoring in nursing. He is very active on campus and is in several student organizations and active in student leadership. He credited many of the experiences that he had in the FYS course to his current success on campus. In addition, he has joined the peer mentoring program to assist with the transition of freshman students. Furthermore, he is an active member of the college football team.

Academics

E.B.’s main experience with academics in FYS was diversity week. He stated that “having people with different cultures and different backgrounds all come together impacted me

the most.” E.B. further stated that his precourse interactions, specifically the event Howl Effect (Freshmen Welcome Weekend) helped him become comfortable with his course and able to thrive in an academic setting with his peers. He stated, “Being able to meet with the FYS professor before the start of the academic year helped ease me into the freshmen experience.”

Nonacademics

E.B. stated that the extracurricular activities were the biggest nonacademic factor that helped his success. He has joined many organizations because of the experiences driven by the FYS course. He stated, “We were encouraged to look beyond what you were doing already and find new ways to connect with other people.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction

During the interview, E.B. discussed the interactions he has had during the FYS course and beyond; “Faculty and staff have tremendously encouraged me to participate.” He further stated, “In addition, being able to meet with them has had a big influence on me as well.” The access to the faculty and staff and their willingness to help him has made the college experience outstanding for E.B. Finally, his ability to maintain relationships beyond the FYS course and still use the FYS as a resource in times of need as played a huge factor in these interactions with faculty and staff.

Retention and Persistence

While the FYS course aided E.B., he did not state that the course had any direct impact on his persistence. The lessons from the course, such as time management and organizational management, have had a lasting impact on his freshman year experience. He stated, “They help me just get better organized and be a better student.”

Sense of Belonging

During the interview, E.B. drew on several different aspects of belonging at the college. First, he stated that Howl Effect was the first step in that process. “Getting to just to know random people, getting just to know my classmates, my peers that made me feel very welcomed and made me feel like I belong to the college.” In addition, he has joined several groups since his freshman year; this includes the student programming board, known as ACE (All Campus Entertainment), he became a resident advisor and a first-year peer mentor, and joined a national black male success initiative group on campus. Finally, E.B. stated, “I do play football at the college, and playing football there has made me feel at home.”

Vocation

E.B. could not recall any vocational conversations or experiences within the FYS. He had an idea of what he wanted to do before coming into the college environment. He stated, “I don't know if anything has made me find my calling. I mean it helped, but I cannot recall anything.”

Participant E.S.

Participant E.S. is a White female sophomore currently majoring in nursing. She is a high-achieving student and has been academically successful most of her educational career. She is very active on campus and enjoyed the course overall but felt some things needed to be different for the next groups of freshman students. This includes some issues with the academic lessons within the overall course. In addition, she enjoyed being in an FYS course with students of a similar major and built academic groups because of this. In addition, E.S. mentioned the benefits of the course but was not sure if everyone should have to take the course because at this stage “some of this is common sense.”

Academics

E.S. did not provide experiences or examples of how the FYS course aided in her development at the college. She did say that she learned a great deal from the course and still uses this information today. However, some of the topics are “redundant” and felt they were not necessary for some students, but she did say that some students may need them as not every experience is the same in the high-school setting. The needs of the student’s range based on their high-school experience.

Nonacademics

During the interview, E.S. stated that her campus involvement was a major influencer in her nonacademic success. “These helped me get more involved with the events that are on campus. It got me out of my room because we go to certain events.” From these experiences, E.S. was able to learn more about the college and become more engaged with the resources and surroundings.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

Her interactions with faculty and staff have had a huge impact on her experience. She stated, “The different faculty and staff coming in and speaking to us helped me. I became more open and expressed what I was feeling and thinking.” She has continued this mindset into her other courses on campus. She has had a positive engagement thanks to the foundation that was established from the FYS course and the expectations that were set. She further stated, “The interactions allowed me to get comfortable with expressing myself in the classroom.”

Retention and Persistence

While E.S. seemed to enjoy the course overall, she stated that it might not have assisted with the retention at the college, “I don't know if it necessarily impacted my retention.” As

previously stated, she was “better prepared” for college than most students and feels while there were aspects of the FYS course that did help, the overall course did not aid her persistence. She saw this course as more of a “check-in” for the freshman students just to make sure they were on the right path. She already knew that she wanted to stay at the college, because this was her first choice as an educational institution.

Sense of Belonging

As previously stated, involvement in the campus helped build her sense of belonging. She has made several friend groups and is now president of one of the sororities on campus due to the encouragement that she had in the FYS course. “I met my best friend from the course and now we live together,” she stated. The FYS course did encourage her to get out and experience what the campus had to offer, but nothing other than that was stated.

Vocation

During the interview, E.S. touched on her vocation during the FYS course: “Things like the Career Fair, for example, showed me they want you to succeed in your future.” Nothing else could be recalled at the time of the interview. She did not recall any experiences outside of the classroom that impacted her vocation.

Participant G.

Participant G. is an African American male sophomore currently majoring in theater. He is very active on campus and enjoyed the course overall but had difficulty attending the FYS course due to topics of engagement and overall interest. He stated the overall course has the potential to help incoming freshman, but he felt he was not one of them. Furthermore, he has used his experience to assist the FYS instructors as an active peer mentor for the freshman

students in their transition. Finally, he felt that, with the right instructor, the FYS course could be more successful and impactful for the students.

Academics

G. could not recall anything specific from his FYS course that helped with academic success. He did admit that he missed over half the course because he felt the lessons were unnecessary and students should have a basic understanding of many of these ideas before coming to a college environment. While he did not see the benefit of the course, he would recommend the course for incoming freshman students. Furthermore, he stated that “the long lectures” and “redundancy of topics” in the course turned him off from going to the class. Finally, he stated, “the FYS course felt more like a pass-fail, so I did not take it very seriously.”

Nonacademics

When he did go to class, he had a unique experience. Due to the loss of a professor, two classes merged. He stated, “This started creating conversations and things like that with people that I never thought I'd speak to on campus, honestly.” The development of relationships for the merging of the FYS classes allowed him to build better relationships with the students. It is important to note the classes did end up unmerging later in the term.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

Because of G.'s extensive absences in the course, he did have to develop a working relationship with the instructor of the FYS course. G. stated, “He just basically explained that this class was just suited to freshmen in order to try and get them quickly acquainted on campus.” This led to more interactions with the FYS instructors and with other instructors. From this experience, he has tried to develop a similar relationship in other courses but has not been successful, and G. struggles with open communication at times when he needs help.

Retention and Persistence

G. stated the FYS course did not help his persistence or his retention.

Sense of Belonging

Giving a slightly different perspective from other participants, G. stated the history of the college connected him more than anything else. He stated, “I usually take an interest in learning things that have such a long history in the long past. Due to this personal interest and about that just helped me want to stay here on campus, honestly.” It is important to note that he is active on campus and holds several leadership roles. One of the lessons in the FYS courses was about the history of the college. “It was the most excited I was to go to the FYS course,” he stated. Finally, he stated, “The FYS instructors’ focus is to create for you the best experience at college. So as far as events and getting you involved in activities, just keeping you grounded.”

Vocation

During the interview, Participant G. could not recall any conversation about vocation or career pathways. “There was nothing at all,” he stated.

Participant I.S.

Participant I.S. is an African American female sophomore majoring in nursing. She struggled with adjustment during her first year but found resources and people through her interactions in and outside of the course. Her academics were the most impacted as she struggled during parts of the year. In addition to the FYS course, she found her purpose and ways to help cope with issues related to the first-year experience.

Academics

I.S.’s academic success was focused on her interactions with the Center for Student Success. She stated that this is the place on campus “where you could get help tutors and use

their laptops, their computers, and everything. Usually, that's what I did was I went to a tutor at once.” She was able to learn more about the services during one of the guest presentations and one of the lessons in the FYS course. In addition, her team coach was on top of her for her grades as part of her ability to be on the team.

Nonacademics

I.S. enjoyed the campus activities that were offered, and they helped with the success of her studies. She did not specifically state any one event, but she attended several as part of the “engagement assignments” that were offered in the FYS course. She went on to say, “We had to attend two or three on-campus events for the course.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction

I.S. took it upon herself to get to know her instructors and develop relationships. “Well, I know in general, you have to get close with all your professors. That's how I got close with the faculty and staff and then being involved with things,” she stated. While outside of the FYS course, she would have to speak with faculty and staff members for donations for the dance team. In addition, the relationships continued from the course. She also stated, “My FYS professor was supportive and understanding . . . if there was an emergency to come up, I could tell him, and he would let me know what I missed or anything and wouldn't take it against me.”

Retention and Persistence

I.S. stated, “College 113 was like a backbone to me beginning in my freshman year. Honestly, I didn't show it to a lot of the classes, but when I did show it to the classes, it was talking about things to expect so I knew to expect a lot of stuff in college. So, it helped me stay.” Like Participant G, she felt that the course was not necessary, but stated, “My class was early and

so if it was later, I would've gone more, but I did go to most of them. I felt like I knew the stuff that they were talking about, so I did not go.”

Sense of Belonging

During the interview, I.S.'s two student organizations have helped her build community on campus. They are the student programming board (ACE) and the Social Justice Club. In addition, during the interview, she stated that she had recently taken a leadership role as a resident advisor. While she is a member of the college dance team, she did not say that membership in this group contributed to her sense of belonging on the campus. As she previously stated, “FYS was the backbone of my freshmen experience.” Finally, she stated that “having activities to do every day instead of being in a room the whole time was a big plus during the FYS experience.”

Vocation

While she did recall some conversations about vocation in the classroom, it was outside of the FYS course that she has the biggest experience with vocation. She stated, “My coach helped me with that because I usually get homesick a lot. I found dancing my go-to coping skill. I even set up a business for it.” Using this, she was able to succeed in the FYS course.

Participant J.

Participant J. is a White female sophomore majoring in music performance. While she took an active part in the FYS class, she did not see any benefit for herself. She felt she was “better prepared” for college from her high-school days and was (and still is) a high-achieving student. From her FYS experience, the course book was not beneficial even though it was a free downloadable resource for all FYS students. She is less involved than the other students and currently does not hold any leadership positions at the time of the interview.

Academics

From an academic perspective, Participant J. stated, “I think most of the class didn't benefit me because a lot of the things we talked about in the class were things that I kind of figured out on their own within the first week.” She felt that some level of common sense would go far for most of the students. Most of the classes were PowerPoint handouts so she saw no point in going to the class if the instructors were giving you everything they were going to cover. She went on to state the following:

We were supposed to read outside of class, but usually one to two students would read it and the rest of the students would come to class and just piggyback off of what others had said, so the class would not go anywhere. It felt like we were just checking boxes.

Nonacademics

Participant J. stated nothing from the nonacademic side of the FYS course impacted her at all during her freshman year, and nothing from the FYS course was meaningful to her educational experience. “It was really nothing for me,” she stated.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

According to Participant J., the FYS course set a standard of how to communicate with the other professors as well the faculty and staff. She stated, “I know we talked about how to write appropriate emails. We would just get to the point and that's what the professors appreciate more.” In addition, she informed me that after each of the guest speakers' presentations, they had some time to talk with them, which made her feel more comfortable about speaking with other members of the faculty and staff team. Furthermore, she stated, “One of the professors came to our class and broke down some things about how to pass and how to stay here on campus, and that was helpful.”

Retention and Persistence

When it came to the FYS course and the lessons within it, Participant J. could not recall anything specific that helped her with retention and persistence at the college. She stated, “I think I would still be here without the course. I feel like most of what was explained is common sense.”

Sense of Belonging

J. did enjoy that she was in an FYS course with everyone studying music performance. They were able to connect and share experiences from the other courses. This helped them become a very tight-knit group on campus. From this, they were able to form study groups and spend time together away from the campus during trips and performances. “We were encouraged to get involved outside of class,” she stated. She did go on to say that she wanted to focus on a strong academic foundation before getting involved with organizations.

Vocation

Participant J. stated, “I feel like I kind of already knew who I was coming into college.” She went on to further state, “We talked a lot about it (vocation) in the FYS course. The things that you experience in college and how you know when you come to the college campus and you get away from your family.” She has always loved music and that is why she has chosen her major as music performance. With that said, nothing specifically from the FYS course impacted her experience when it comes to vocation.

Participant K.K.

Participant K.K. is a White female sophomore majoring in biology/environmental studies. During the FYS, she was able to make several connections with the various groups that led her to engage in and outside of the classroom. With her experience, she stated that “the most

important thing is having those people that are in your major so you like get to have those connections with the people in your class and make your year better.”

Academics

For Participant K.K., campus resources were the biggest help to her academic success from the FYS course—specifically, the use and understanding of the library database system for research. Since all her FYS classmates were of the same major, she was able to form study groups for other classes that she attended with them. This allowed her to develop sound study habits. Furthermore, she stated, “Making connections and having study groups so you can get better grades.”

Nonacademics

K.K. stated, “They made us go to a lot of different events and I think it helped me get involved with what's on campus, like now.” She was highly encouraged to join organizations and seek membership in honor societies as well. She went on to state that “I'm in a sorority and I'm also involved in the American Chemical Society, and it just helped me get those connections with people, so then I can be more involved on campus and with the college.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction

K.K. cited one example from interaction with faculty and staff during the FYS course, which was on a campus scavenger hunt. This assignment was designed to introduce new students to names, spaces, and places on the campus of common interest to freshman students. She stated, “This scavenger hunt thing where we went around campus and so we got to go see the dean of students and we got to meet different people on campus and what areas they work in.” In addition, she used these opportunities to get to know others during the various FYS course assignments.

Retention and Persistence

Some of the lessons from the FYS course have helped K.K. move forward in her academic career:

Lessons we went through were how to study and how to take notes in class; I think that helps how to be proactive in the classroom while you're learning, so then you can get better grades and just study better and know your information.

Sense of Belonging

Referring back to the interactions during the FYS scavenger hunt, K.K. stated, “we were able to have deep interactions and you can see from them that the faculty and staff care about the students on campus and the education that we are seeking.” Furthermore, she stated, “They (the professors) really took the time to just get to know you or, like, Pastor Ernie, he'll talk to you on campus or just other staff members.” Finally, she was able to join peer groups due to having friends within the major of her choice.

Vocation

K.K. stated that experiences and conversations in the FYS course allowed her and her classmates time to seek information on potential career paths by examining majors. She stated, “I think it helped us find people who are in the field and explore what we wanted to do because we study our majors and then this forces us to look at what we could do with that major.” Because of this FYS course experience, she has a better understanding of what she will experience when she starts looking for a job.

Participant M.

Participant M. is a White male sophomore studying accounting. M did not see any benefit in the FYS course as he felt he was prepared for college during his last year of high school. He

was a 4.0 high school student and has maintained that GPA into his college career. He was and still is focused on the academic foundation before joining any organizations on campus. He is involved with the college chorus and the esports team, but that was all he was involved in.

Academics

Because of his high-school experience, M. felt there were some redundancies within the FYS course. However, he did say that “some of the stuff that we learned from the FYS course, like good time management skills and study habits, they were helpful.” Furthermore, M. mentioned some of the in-class activities to get engaged with his academic standing were fun but were not truly engaging. M. went on to praise those “activities that we're figuring out where everything is on the campus, like the guided tour through the library to know where everything is when I need to study or do research for class.”

Nonacademics

While it was meant to be an academically focused event, M. credits the campus Dufford Diversity Week as a major nonacademic growth point for him. “It (Dufford Diversity Week) does help us grow as a person to see all those differences in people and culture,” he stated. It was important to him to get to know others on campus and as a self-proclaimed introvert, he was looking for ways to expand his mind and see others on campus for who they are. Other than this, M. did not state anything else that impacted his experience.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

M. could not recall anything specific about the interactions with faculty and staff. However, he cited events like the library tour and the scavenger hunt. He stated, “There wasn't a whole lot that I can recall regarding interacting with faculty and staff.” He also mentioned the guest speakers during the FYS course, but did not recall any real interaction with them as well.

M. went on to state that he keeps mostly to himself outside of the esports group, as he was not interested in forming relationships. He wishes he would have done more with faculty and staff during his freshman year. He concluded, “They weren't that helpful, but we still did get to see another facet of the college year that we might not have otherwise seen.”

Retention and Persistence

During the interview, M. stated that the skills he developed in the FYS course have assisted him with his persistence at the college. He did state that many of the topics that were covered were “redundant” and should be a basic skill when you are entering college. Furthermore, he shared that he was aware of time management and understanding the importance of this course and future courses. Finally, he did say that understanding Title IX was a huge help as he understands how his decision making could impact his academic career at the college. The FYS course did not seem to impact his retention at the college.

Sense of Belonging

M. recalled that many of the FYS assignments asked students to get involved or find an organization to join. He stated, “We had to do essays for some of the events we went to, so it kind of turned me off to joining groups at the moment.” While he is still considering joining a Greek Life organization, his time in the chorus/orchestra program and the campus esports team have been his group involvement since the FYS course. M. is a 4.0 student and wanted to focus on his academic foundation before joining student organizations. Because this is where his scholarship money comes from, he wants to focus on this to make sure he does not lose any funding for his education. Outside of these groups/teams, he has not been engaged in campus extracurricular groups.

Vocation

While vocation was discussed in the FYS course, M. already had an idea of what he wanted to do before coming to college:

While the conversations helped us understand vocation and the topics around it . . . I already knew what I wanted to do. We spent a lot of time on this during my senior year of high school, so it was an easy process for my career path.

Outside of the conversations in the FYS course, vocation was not a focus point for his freshman experience.

Participant M.A.

Participant M.A. is an African American female sophomore majoring in business administration. She had a great experience in the FYS course as it provided her with much-needed skills for college. M.A. is a heavily involved student on campus in both employment and student organizations. She is a high-achieving student and looks for new challenges daily on how to better herself. It also provided her with information on how to build resumes, find purpose in your career, and look forward to graduate school.

Academics

M.A.'s academic experience comes from within the FYS course, by way of the resources that were showcased during one of the class activities. "My experience has been around the Center for Student Success," she said. The resources that they have provided her have made it easier for her to be a college student. In addition, she has someone always reaching out to her, checking in and making sure that she is on task with her work. In addition, M.A. stated that

The FYS course was helpful because it provided me with the services that this campus offers. It also provided me with information on how to build your resume and prepare for a career. It made me look more deeply at what I wanted to accomplish.

Nonacademics

During her time in the FYS course, M.A.'s father died. She said, "They [Health and Counseling Service] helped me when I was having a personal problem, which was when my father had passed away a couple of months back." With the help of several departments and her peer groups, M.A. was able to move on and return to campus after this terrible event. She has since recommended the services to others that have similar needs and has continued to use the health and counseling services to help with other problems that have arisen during her freshman year.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

During the interview, M.A. was very open about interaction with not only faculty and student but students as well:

The different types of organizations that the campus does offer allows us to not only interact with the faculty and staff but also get to know the students as well. The plethora of events is something that everyone can enjoy and take part in.

When asked to name any specific events, she cited Howl Effect (Freshmen Welcome Weekend) and the welcome week events from the student programming board (ACE). She was able to interact with her FYS instructor more outside of the classroom more during the freshmen welcome weekend.

Retention and Persistence

From the FYS Course, M.A. cited several examples of things that have helped her with her persistence at the campus: “There were many meaningful lessons for how we should approach different scenarios and who we can reach out to if we're ever stuck in a situation.” M.A. felt that the campus was truly set up for student success but mentioned that some students may not seek this as they are as unsure how to. Furthermore, her relationship with her FYS instructor was a huge aspect of this: “Because of her field (sociology) she showed me a lot of things that I could use in my field and how to interact with people.” In addition, M.A. stated, “She was able to help with me any problem that I was having during my freshmen year.”

Sense of Belonging

M.A. was able to identify groups that she wanted to be a part of from the first week of the course. “The one that caught my eye the first time around was ACE, because it felt like they were one big family.” During the FYS assignment, she attended several of their events and was impressed with the experience. “I told everyone about them and want my friends to come with me,” she stated. She went on to further say that the events that they did on campus were engaging and fun and she wanted to get more people involved with them. She has gone on to join honor societies and seek leadership roles within the housing and residence life.

Vocation

M.A. did not clearly understand the thought of vocation. She informed me that no lessons or conversations took place in the classroom that she could recall. She provided information on her faith and how it has driven her to this point. Her purpose has been through experiences but mainly her interactions with her father. He worked in the health administration field and that is why she wanted to do it. She stated, “I've chosen that because he [her father] was an inspiration

of mine. I want to be hands-on in my job and help people. I want to help people find themselves and what they need.”

Participant N.N.

N.N. is an African American female sophomore majoring in health science. She had a great academic experience in the FYS course but struggled in other areas of the course. In addition, she was able to find the foundational footstep to be successful beyond the FYS course and has used this in all her courses to this point. She is an average student that is involved more with athletics than student organizations on campus.

Academics

For N.N., it was the ease of the course that had the biggest impact on her academic experience in the FYS. “The FYS course broke everything down for me in a way that I could understand it.” In addition, campus resources from the FYS course experience aided her academic success. In addition, the biggest resource for her was the library and the Center of Student Success. One of the success coaches was her advisor at the time, so she was able to discuss her current and future academic outlook with them regularly.

Nonacademics

N.N. could not think of anything specific to the FYS course, but she did state she joined several organizations as part of her experience. The student programming board (ACE) was the one that stood out to her as she enjoyed the welcome week events and the atmosphere that she created. She stated, “We were told to go to events and get involved. We had to do several assignments and provide a recall of the experience that we had for class.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction

While her interactions were limited during the FYS course, she was able to build some relationships with faculty and staff. “Just going to class and being engaged with the FYS instructor and just being able to talk with them,” she stated. This approach allowed her to develop many relationships for her FYS and through the term.

Retention and Persistence

During the interview, N.N. did not provide anything specific about her retention or persistence from the FYS course. However, she did say that making the dean’s list was impactful and gave her confidence to continue her education.

Sense of Belonging

Taking part in Howl Effect and the summer orientations had the biggest impact on her sense of belonging. As she was paired with other students in her FYS course, she was able to get to know them all on a different level. Furthermore, she actively took part in the welcome week events and this allowed her to get out of her comfort zone even more. “I enjoyed getting to know more people and being involved in the activities during the week and weekend,” she stated.

Vocation

Participant N.N. could not recall any conversations or experiences about vocation from the FYS course at the time of the interview. She stated that she still does not have an idea of what she wants to do as a career at this point.

Participant N.

Participant N. is a White female sophomore that is majoring in history. Her experience in the course comes with mixed feelings and outcomes. She seems to only enjoy certain aspects of the overall FYS course. However, she knows the lessons in the course are designed to assist the

student, but she may have been more prepared than she originally expected when she came to college.

Academics

N. went into some detail about her academic experiences in the course; “I think the most impactful for academic success would be when we were over all the necessary tools, like when we went to the library when we did a step-by-step on how to use Wolf Den. I think all that was helpful cause it's still stuff that I use today.” N. went on to state that these are needed resources for incoming freshmen students to be able to fully experience the freshmen experience. “The course gave me a type of routine to being a college student and what would make me successful and how to manage the college environment,” she stated.

Nonacademics

Participant N. went on to say that the relationships with her fellow students were a big factor in her nonacademic success. “We joined classes for some of the lectures. It just introduced you to new people for your first year and then just making friends in the first class in general because we were the group by majors.” She found that like-minded people that share similar ideas was welcoming. In addition, she was able to form study groups from this interaction which led to more academic success on her part.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

During the FYS course, guest speakers were a regular feature and this is where N. built her relationships with the faculty and staff. She stated, “The presentations were open, and it just felt like you could talk to the professors who were presenting, and there was always a Q&A at the end or after they dismissed us.” This has led to N. having a strong relationship with many of the faculty and staff.

Retention and Persistence

During the interview, N. informed me of the requirement to attend events that they had to do as course assignments. While she could not recall all aspects of the event, she felt that nothing from the FYS course impacted her retention or persistence.

Sense of Belonging

While N. was exposed to organizations, she did not join anything specific during the FYS course. She stated, “I haven't joined any organizations from it, but I have made friends with people who are in the organizations and I think just seeing them involved and I am thinking about it (joining).” She focused on social groups outside of organizations more than student organizations during the first semester. In addition, she was recruited to play softball and focused on the time commitment to her sport.

Vocation

At the time of the FYS course, she was an undecided major. She could not recall any lessons or conversations that explored vocation and career paths. She stated, “While it did not provide a clear path, it did provide me with skills, such as public speaking and how to communicate with different populations of people.”

Participant R.R.

Participant R.R. is an African American male sophomore majoring in Business Administration. He is a local student and has loved the college for the longest time and knew he wanted to go to this campus. He had been coming to the college for events in high school and fell in love at an early stage and this was the “only college for me.” He saw the benefit of the FYS course as it helped with the transitions and skills needed to be successful during the college experience.

Academics

During the interview, Participant R.R. could not provide any examples of how the FYS course impacted his academics. This question was addressed several times during the interview with no examples provided.

Nonacademics

R.R. related his leadership growth to involvement in his church. During the interview, R.R. spoke on his experience in the classroom as empowering him to become a better leader. “The FYS class brought more out of me of my shyness and made me a stronger leader on campus. It took away my shyness and brought me out and I know I’m very outspoken now; I speak everywhere and I’m thankful for that,” he stated.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

Because of the involvement and student government position, R.R. sat in on meetings with higher-level administrators and was able to develop conversation skills with the “adults in the room.” He was able to use these skills in his classes and at events that he had to attend as part of his role. He stated, “I was able to build relationships with many administrators and have meaningful conversations thanks to the encouragement of the FYS course.”

Retention and Persistence

The course provided him with skills to help break bad habits. He stated, “I’m a very, very bad procrastinator, but when I got into that class, it helped me learn better time management skills. This made me focus on other courses and getting things in on time.” R.R. always claims without the FYS course he would not be in college now. No other examples could be provided at the time of the interview.

Sense of Belonging

In many ways, R.R. was already connected to the campus as he knew he wanted to come to the college and had visited several times before his freshman year. Once on campus and in the FYS course, he ran and won the freshman class president role on student government:

Being the freshman class president, I already felt like I belonged here before I even got that position, but when I did become the president, I was able to get to know students more and get more interaction with people, so I will say that did help me become more 'out' and broader and get to know people and get to talk to people.

Vocation

For vocation, R.R. looked toward the more spiritual side instead of the true meaning of vocation. No additional references were made to him during the course or thereafter. It is important to note that R.R. did come to college with a prechosen career path working with the church and funeral arrangement services.

Participant R.F.

Participant R.F. is an African American male sophomore majoring in business administration. While he was engaged in the FYS course, he did not take much away from it and had a mixed experience in it. He was not connected within the course and was more focused on his involvement with his team sport. It is also noteworthy that he had trouble recalling some of the experiences as it "had been so long since he was in the course."

Academics

The biggest takeaway from the academic side of the FYS course was the ability to manage tasks and develop skills. He says that "time management" was something that he took away. He was helped by the professor, who was heavily engaged in this process and showed the

course skills for “balancing” the burden of college life with social life. No other experiences or examinations were provided at the time of the interview.

Nonacademics

During the interview, R.F. could not recall anything related to nonacademics from the FYS course. This question was revisited several times during the interview and nothing was produced about this.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

The FYS professor and his team coach had the biggest impact on his experience. He was thankful that he had “someone looking out for him and making sure he was getting his coursework completed.” This is still the case now as his coach and student employer are still heavily involved with his college experience. Finally, the guest speakers that came to the class helped him build relationships with other professors and instructors. This has helped with relationship expectations in other courses.

Retention and Persistence

During the interview, R.F. could not recall how FYS assisted with his retention or persistence. This question was revisited on several occasions during the interview and no examples or experiences could be provided.

Sense of Belonging

R.F. is actively involved in organizations and campus activities. This can be directly linked to the experiences in the course as several assignments were required for FYS students to attend campus events. Also, at the time of the interview, he was a peer mentor on campus and looking for additional ways to get involved beyond this experience. Furthermore, R.F. was

recruited to be on the cheer and dance team and has invested more time in this sport than in joining other organizations.

Vocation

During the interview, R.F. could not recall anything related to vocation from the FYS course and has not had any experience that would assist with this process. “I don’t know anything that comes to mind,” he stated. This question was revisited several times during the interview and he could not recall anything specific in the course about vocation. He further stated that he was not sure what he wanted to do as a career at the time of the interview. R.F. seemed to have a limited engagement about this topic in the FYS course.

Participant S.M.

Participant S.M. is a White female sophomore that is currently an elementary education major. She is a local student that has been excited about the college for a long time. She has grown up with the college in her heart and family members have been attending for generations. She is a high-achieving student and looks for challenges in and outside the classroom. The FYS course was a great connection piece for her.

Academics

During the interview, S.M. stated, “The FYS instructor went into detail about what we need to do to be successful, such as scheduling and study techniques and various other activities. This is what helped me with getting my grades to a 4.0.” She further described the assistance from the professor as “powerful insight.” Outside of these elements, nothing else was directly related to the FYS course and academics within it.

Nonacademics

Because of a chance meeting with a staff member, she was able to get a job in the institutional advancement office and assists with meeting alumni and doing campaigns, such as the Phonathon. She credits the class for showing her a different side of the college and the job that she still has a year later. She stated, “The career services guy got me a job through them for the institutional advancement and we talked to alumni about what is going on with the campus.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction

Like some of the other participants, S.M.'s main interaction was with the guest speakers during the various presentations that were scheduled for the FYS course. This had led to more than just relationships:

We got to know faculty a little bit more, like we did some appreciation things. For the CAFE workers, and we even did something for Mr. Toole in the bookstore, so just stuff like that to be able to reach out and thank them for what they do. Because of the interaction I felt more comfortable reaching out and speaking with them.

Retention and Persistence

Learning about the campus resources, the faculty, and staff, and the skills from the FYS course have played directly into the retention and persistence of this participant. She stated, “The FYS course taught us to keep going and to not give up college. It was going to be hard and different and just to keep working at it.” From this she was engaged by her FYS instructor to seek assistance from various areas and found motivation during her FYS course: “The FYS instructor would tell us it was okay to not be okay.”

Sense of Belonging

Since this one of her first college classes, the instructor set up a GroupMe for them and the students could connect outside of class. In addition, they were made aware of campus engagement opportunities. However, S.M. wanted to focus on her academic foundation first. “We talked every day and really got to know each other, and we were able to become and stay friends from the interactions in the FYS course,” she stated. She was able to help other students that were having ideas or struggling in the course from this group as well.

Vocation

S.M. had some experience in high school with being a teacher cadet but had not thought anything about it until she came to college. She stated, “A professor in the class was talking about the things that we learned, which made me realize that I have the strong skills needed to be a teacher.” Further conversation between S.M. and the professor when she had a thought, “God was just saying, ‘S.M., you have an organization, you have this, you have that, you have this, use it for the better and put it toward teaching and helping students.’” Finally, she saw a parallel, because she was a teacher cadet in high school and it made sense why she is now on this path.

Participant M.T.

Participant M.T. is an African American female sophomore currently majoring in pre-Law and political science. Her experience was a mixed bag, but she has grown beyond the FYS course and it has led to increased involvement on campus. While she struggled during her freshman year, the FYS course provided a welcome “safety net” that helped her get back on track with a positive academic semester.

Academics

From the FYS course, the knowledge of campus resources has been the biggest help to M.T. Knowing that these resources are here and for her to use has been a big help. She stated, “Knowing that there were campus resources, such as the Center for Student Success to help with my academic struggles is comforting to me.” When asked, she was able to recall learning about these resources during the presentations for the FYS course and its resources activities.

Nonacademics

M.T. struggled at times during her freshman year and sought the help of the health and counseling services department as a recommendation from the FYS instructor. She has been able to have regular meetings with the counseling staff and has worked through most of the issues that she was having. This has helped her evolve during the freshman year. She said she will continue to get “mental health checks” with them from time to time. Furthermore, she stated that “having a plethora of campus activities to attend helps with my free time.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction

During her freshmen year, M.T. did not seek out faculty and staff, thinking she could do this all on her own. She stated, “I did not really reach out and honestly, I do not know why I did not. I wish I had, because they are there to help us move forward as students.” She had plenty of opportunities with the FYS presentations to get to know faculty and staff. As she entered the second term of her freshman year and into her sophomore year, she realized that this was not going to help but hinder her process. She has since tried to get to know her instructors and other key faculty and staff that can assist her education. She makes it a point to introduce herself to everyone to build a better network for herself.

Retention and Persistence

While nothing was explicitly stated about this in the FYS course, she told me that seeking student organization was the biggest retention tool for her. “Just getting to know all the campus organizations because I’m a part of them . . . that is really what caught my attention,” she stated. Because of this, she has joined four organizations since her freshman year and is active in all of them. She did not mention anything about persistence at the time of the interview. She did state that the Howl Effect and getting to meet the FYS instructor and students before the class made her “feel at home.”

Sense of Belonging

Like some of the other study participants, M.T.’s belonging started during Howl Effect weekend. During this time the freshman students spend two and a half days learning more about the campus and the resources for them. Also, they were paired with other FYS course members and had a chance to meet with their instructors to ask questions. This continued into the welcome week events where she continued to meet others, form friend groups, and eventually joined student organizations, like the student programming board (ACE).

Vocation

Rather than an FYS course lesson, a conversation about vocation helped M.T. find her calling. “I was talking with my FYS professor and he claimed that I have lawyer’s voice.” He said that I like to debate in class. This conversation has given her an insight into what she wants to do and a possible career path after college. She has furthered this by being an active member of the Social Justice Club and seeking opportunities to use her voice to make a difference.

Participant G.T.

Participant G.T. is an African American male sophomore currently majoring in business administration. He is very involved and a member of the college football team. He is a first-generation student and is also working to support his family while in school. He enjoyed the FYS experience and building relationships to help his academic process. He is heavily involved on campus in organizations for employment.

Academics

G.T. used a combination of the campus academic resources and the relationships that he built in the course to fuel his success, including using the Center for Student Success to keep track of his work and make sure he was on task. He also used the tutoring services to help with other courses outside of FYS. In addition, he has used peer groups and his football coaches as motivation to assist with his academic success. Furthermore, he joined several study groups to seek additional help. Finally, he told me he put success on himself as he is the only person that has true control over it.

Nonacademics

During the course, he appreciated the “real life” experiences that focused on how students can use the lessons beyond the classroom.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

“Everyone on campus is welcome and laid back,” said G.T. He understands that the instructors want you to succeed, and they are happy to have a conversation with you about your course work. They treated him “like a real person and not a number. He further stated, “The FYS professor was 100 percent honest with me and I appreciated that.” This has led to fostering relationships beyond the courses and led to more networking for G.T., which he feels has

encouraged others to get to know not only the faculty and staff, but the college culture and the people within it.

Retention and Persistence

While the conversation I had was insightful, G.T. could not cite anything specific to the FYS course that helped with retention and persistence. He is a first-generation student and that itself was his motivation to get to class and do the work every day.

Sense of Belonging

During the interview, G.T. spoke in depth of the belonging that the FYS course and the overall campus experience were trying to create. “Their focus is to create the best experience as far as events and getting you involved in activities. The stuff that just kind of keeps you grounded,” he stated. He later inferred that it was about creating balance in your academic and social life. G.T. stated, “Their focus is to create the best experience for college life and the freshman experience. They want you to be involved in the FYS course and outside as well.”

Vocation

G.T. did have a deep conversation about vocation in the FYS course, but nothing that led him to seek a permanent career path. He stated, “It didn't put my mindset on anything permanent. It did not open me up to anything specific, just a broad overview.” G.T. noted that he is struggling with career choice as he has “his wants” but feels that he would be letting down his family if he would choose this own path. He is the primary caregiver for certain members of his family.

Participant Z.U.

Participant Z.U. is a White male sophomore majoring in music. Since his time in the course, he has become more involved on campus and now holds several leadership positions.

Academics

Z.U. takes the FYS lessons that were provided as the focus for his academic success. He stated, “In the class, we talked about how to manage time, how to deal with stress, and some ways to work it out.” The focus of the assignment was to put a priority on different tasks or assignments and make sure that you put focus on them during the day until they were due. In addition, it looked at how to balance the day-to-day of one’s life with so much going on during the freshman year. He still used this approach this year and plans to use it for all his classes.

Nonacademics

From the previous examples, Z.U. focused on self-care, specifically stress management. “During the course, we looked at different ways we can handle stress, like meditating and stuff, one day.” This was a big help to Z.U., because he suffers from severe anxiety and having a set of skills for self-care is going to help him down the road as the courses become increasingly difficult. He plans to use this in his everyday life as he continues beyond the college experience.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

Attending on-campus events is where Z.U. had the biggest interaction with faculty/staff. Z.U. was a regular attendant of campus events and that is where he would interact the most with faculty and staff. From the course, he stated, “From the FYS presentation to the writing of assignments and reflecting, it helped me understand the faculty better.” Also, he mentioned the scavenger hunt assignment as something that helped get him out of his comfort zone and meet new people on campus and how they can help him succeed.

Retention and Persistence

A continuation of a previous comment, Z.U. showed that developing daily routines and best practices for studying were the key factors of retention and persistence. He stated what

really helped was the “daily routines that you do that help you pass or help you achieve a goal.” This helped him with the intense final exams and papers that he had. Another big factor for the FYS course was the final exam. He stated that “being able to showcase with the final exam and share my experience gave me a sense of pride in the campus.”

Sense of Belonging

During the interview, Z.U. stated that he was encouraged to seek organizations that he would want to be a part of—“from the different activities on campus and the ways we could get involved. In addition, being able to give back to the college was a huge piece of the experience for me.” However, the music major on campus is one of the most demanding majors offered. He did not seek membership in his first year, but has joined several organizations since in the peer-mentor program and works as a resident advisor.

Vocation

Z.U. did not reference any conversation about vocation during the FYS course. He also could not recall any activities or experiences in the same regard. However, he came to college with an idea of what he wanted to do. “I wanted to do music education and it has been a strong desire since I was probably in middle school. I always wanted to be a music teacher.”

Summary of Research Participant Experiences

All these participants shared many similar experiences about the FYS course. While each student’s experience did vary, their similar experiences did align and clear themes emerged.

Academics

Overall, most participants enjoyed the FYS course setup. Each section of the FYS course seats students with similar majors (e.g., business, music, sports professions, and so on) in the same section. This was done to build community within each program and allow students to seek

help from peers within their majors. In addition, specific lessons that were developed for the course (time management, study habits, and organizational management) left lasting impacts on the participants that have gone well past their FYS course. Furthermore, in-person activities with the Center for Student Success and the other campus resources have aided the freshman transition. Finally, weeks such as Diversity Week exposed students to different ideas and ideologies that aided their development process. However, at least six of the participants felt that the information provided in the FYS was redundant and did not have any impact on them. Furthermore, some participants did not fully engage in the FYS experience and missed several classes due to the lack of engagement that they experienced.

Nonacademics

A majority of the participants said that relationships with their peers, organizations, and student support services were the biggest nonacademic factors in their FYS experience. Many of the participants cited developing relationships with their best friends aided their experiences on campus. Furthermore, the college offered free services that many of the participants took advantage of during their time in the FYS course. This included the offices of health and counseling, career services, and peer mentoring, and having events on campus sponsored by student organizations and the Student Affairs Division. At least two participants did say there was nothing in the FYS course from a nonacademic aspect that impacted their college experience.

Faculty/Staff Interaction

All the participants shared and described various experiences with faculty and staff. The most noted experiences were the guest speakers and presentations that were a part of the FYS course. These events provided opportunities to connect with faculty and staff that they may not

have been able to experience without the FYS course. Furthermore, almost all the participants cited relationships with their FYS instructors. Many of the participants cited they developed a strong relationship with their FYS instructors they still have to this day. The participants were able to connect with the instructors beyond the FYS course hours to seek assistance in any matter that was troubling them.

Retention and Persistence

Similar to that of the interactions with faculty and staff, an overwhelming majority of students cited the FYS instructors as one of the best retention tools throughout their freshman year. In addition, academic lessons that were specific to coping with freshman transition—maintaining grades, stress management, and study habits—were cited for the helping with retention and persistence of the participants. Many of the students saw the FYS course as the backbone of the freshman year and without it, they would not have been as successful in the college environment. It is also important to note that at least six students did not see an impact from the FYS course on their persistence or retention. All six of these participants felt they would still be successful without the FYS course.

Sense of Belonging

Half of the participants cited the Howl Effect weekend as the beginning of their sense of belonging for the college experience. They spend the weekend with classmates and the FYS instructors. This gives them early exposure to the experiences and to the campus culture. In addition, this help set the foundation for the FYS course and the dynamics that would be expected every day. Furthermore, as 56% of the students on campus are heavily involved in athletics and sports, all students are engaged to join at least one organization, including Greek

Life, special interest groups, and ACE. Besides student organizations, participants were also engaged to seek employment opportunities to help fund their education.

Vocation

Nearly half of the participants in this study could not recall a conversation or event that was associated with vocation or career choice in the FYS course. However, many could recall an experience before the course (life expectation or parent/family influence) that led them on their chosen career path. Several of the participants did not fully understand the concept of vocation and how it related to career exploration. Finally, five of the participants recalled a specific interaction, such as a career fair or conversation with an FYS instructor that put them on their current career trajectory. There seemed to be a disconnection between vocation and the FYS course at the time these participants attended the course.

Emerging Themes From Interviews

In this section, I present the themes that emerged from my analysis of the participant interviews. I examine this in the context of each research question, and identify the emerging themes in Table 5. Interviews are an important part of this process, because it allows for one-on-one interactions to observe the participants while also allowing for a connection between the parties involved (Leavy, 2017). In addition, this will allow for the development of connections between the information provided and the themes that have emerged. Of the 20 one-on-one interviews, six different themes emerged from each of the research questions.

Table 5*Emerging Themes from One-on-One Interviews*

Research Question	Themes	Support
RQ1: Academics	Academic Lessons & Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Course setup (expectations, course pairing & maintaining grades) 2. Lessons & Activities (Success College Skills, scavenger hunt & Dufford Diversity Week) 3. Campus Resources 4. Issues (some redundancy in the course, lack of use of an online book, some did not see the benefit of course)
RQ2: Nonacademics	Support Groups, Campus Events & Organizations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relationships (with classmates and accountable partnerships) 2. Campus Activities (First 56, Welcome Week) 3. Support Services (Center of Student Success, Health & Counseling & Career Services) 4. Nothing really
RQ3: Faculty/Staff Interaction	Campus Connections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal connections with instructors 2. Guest speakers & presentations 3. Encouragement to build similar relationships in other courses like that of the FYS course. 4. Building networks beyond the four years of college.
RQ4: Retention & Persistence	Freshmen Transition & Beyond FYS Course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coping with transition to campus (stress management, social life balance, and so on) 2. Student organizations 3. Foundation of college experience (beginning first term with success) 4. Nothing from the FYS course.
RQ5: Sense of Belonging	Peer Groups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Began before their course (interactions during freshman welcome weekend/Howl Effect) 2. Encouragement to seek out student organizations. 3. Student employment opportunities
RQ6: Vocation	Life Experience & Vocational Exploration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Previous life experience or already know what they want to do in life 2. Career fair or organization involvement 3. Course encouraged career exploration 4. Vocation was not covered or connections not explicitly made in the course

The participants in this study come from various backgrounds and represent a range of ethnicities. While they each shared different experiences, their focus group conversations revealed many similar themes. Table 5 illustrates the themes that were developed from the data analysis of the one-on-one interview with the participants. The supporting information is included along with the theme from information that was presented during the interviews.

Academics Theme: Academic Lessons and Activities

RQ1: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their academic success at the college?

During the interviews, several examples of the academic lessons, activities, and overall course design were made by the participants. It was clear that the course design and setup was sufficient. As part of the design of the course, students sat with others from similar (e.g., business administration, nursing, music, and so on). This set the stage for consistency in the classroom, general expectations, and how to take college seriously. Furthermore, the lessons within the FYS course addressed the development of needed skills for freshman students. This included time management, successful study habits, and knowledge of campus resources, to name a few. Finally, access to special academic weeks like the Dufford Diversity Week, exposed the students to other academic departments and personnel on the campus. Below are participant responses that were significant to this research question:

Participant Z.U.: “We would talk about for example time management . . . this included making sure we have time to ourselves.”

Participant N.N.: “I started going to the library and I will talk to my advisor or I like to ask for help.”

Participant M.T.: “Knowing about the campus resources because when I first got here, I was unsure. This includes the Center for Student Success.”

Participant K.K.: “The course helps you like form study groups and just get to know people better.”

Participant N.: “We were going over all the necessary tools, like when we went to the library when we did like a step by step on how to use WolfDen.”

Participant D.O.: “We're giving the guidelines of what we need to do like with where to the course is our major courses and were told the curriculum.”

Participant M.: “Some of the stuff that we learned there, good time management and study habits, were helpful.”

Participant A.B.: “She (the professor) made us do a plan on in like planned study hours during the days for every day of the week and I think that helped me because I stuck to that my first year.”

Participant M.A.: “The experience I've so far received has been the help from the Center for Student Success. They are very helpful when it comes to reaching out to us about our grades and making sure that we are very comfortable in our classes.”

Participant B.O.: “The course itself, really helped me a lot with my experience.”

Participant I.S.: “I would go into the Center for Student Success and speak with the tutors and use their computers.”

Participant S.M.: “She (the professor) helped us do the scheduling and like study techniques and stuff like that. So that helped me with getting up my grades in getting the 4.0 so I feel like if it wasn't for that class being able to like breakdown everything.”

Participant R.F.: “My college, my teacher taught me how to time management and like managing a sport and school and my social and my social life.”

Nonacademics Theme: Support Groups, Campus Events, & Student Organizations

RQ2: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their nonacademic success at the college?

During the FYS course, several students cited that the relationships with classmates and support groups allowed them to succeed during the FYS course. In total, 14 of the 20 participants provided a comment or statement on this topic. This included accountability partnerships and roommates. Furthermore, more interaction at campus events was heavily cited, such as specific events from First 56. These events were academic and social and allowed the participants to reflect on the experience that has led to their high level of engagement on campus. First 56 is a comprehensive campus activity calendar that is designed for all students on campus, but it specifically is designed to get freshman students involved with clubs and organizations on campus. Finally, campus support services such as Health & Counseling, Career Services, and the peer mentoring programs assisted students with nonacademic support. Below are participant responses that were significant to the research question:

Participant G.T.: “My professor was a real group focus on the real...they were completely honest with us.”

Participant N.N.: “I’m a member of ACE. After this, I started getting involved more on campus with other organizations.”

Participant M.T.: “Going out talking to Health & Counseling Services.”

Participant E.B.: “The different activities that we do just to have fun.”

Participant K.K.: “They may just go to a lot of different events and I think it helped me get involved with what's on campus, like now.”

Participant N: “When we joined classes for some of the lectures. It just introduced you to new people for your first year and then just making friends.”

Participant A.B.: “I meant literally like my best friend on campus through that class, so that was like helped me get out there and then I also I met a lot of people through that class.”

Participant R.R.: “I was the freshman class president so that itself is a big leadership role that I've taken. I took it upon myself to do more and learn from my peers.”

Participant M.A.: “They helped me when I was having a personal problem, which was when my father had passed away a couple of months back.”

Participant E.S.: “Getting more involved with the school and try new things and join different things.”

Participant B.Y.: “The friend groups I created in the class.”

Participant B.O.: “He pushed me to join different organizations on campus to better improve my experience on campus.”

Participant I.S.: “I joined ACE and the dance team. I participated in the first-year experience as well as a Howl Effect leader.”

Participant S.M.: “The career services guy and he got me a job through them for the institutional advancement and we talked to alumni in history.”

Faculty/Staff Interaction Theme: Campus Connections

RQ3: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their faculty/staff interaction at the college?

At some point during the interview process, every participant mentioned the interactions with faculty and staff and the positive impact that it had on them. Concerning the FYS course instructors, most (if not all) provided additional means of contact whether it was a cell phone or personal email. The tone set by the FYS instructors was that they were approachable and could be asked anything from academic to personal life issues. The participants also felt that “they were not just numbers” but people with real feelings and emotions. From the institution, it was clear that personal attention was a feature of this course and the mission of the college. Finally, FYS students were encouraged to build similar relationships with other instructors and get comfortable with everyone on campus. Below are participant responses that were significant to the research question:

Participant G.T.: “The first impression through my 101 teachers into what professor that I had that impression with that then laid back and cared about you.”

Participant J.: “I remember them coming to our class and breaking down some things about how to pass and how to stay here on campus and that was helpful.”

Participant K.K.: “We have this scavenger hunt type thing where we went around campus and meet the faculty and staff.”

Participant N.: “Those presentations were open, and it just felt like you could talk to the professors who were presenting and there was always a Q&A at the end or after they dismissed us.”

Participant D.O.: “While due to my being an international student I had to have regular meetings with advisors.”

Participant A.B.: “I emailed my FYS instructor when I ever have any questions about anything, because I know her, and I got close with her through that class. So, I met her, and she helped me realize that the faculty on campus like care.”

Participant M.A.: “I feel like all the different types of organizations that the campus does offer allows us to not only interact with the faculty and staff but also get to know the students as well.”

Participant E.S.: “By the faculty and staff coming in and speaking to us, I learn more about what they do and places that I can go to for help. Become more open with us and expressing ourselves.”

Participant B.Y.: “It gave me hope like you know the start, getting yourself right here and we are more than just a number.”

Participant B.O.: “I could go through them and ask them what's was going on in the lesson and they would sit me down and break it down for me.”

Participant I.S.: “That's how I got close with the faculty and staff and then being involved with things and asking for donations got me also close with faculty and staff.”

Participant S.M.: “We met a lot of people through that class through speeches, and guest speakers. So then we got to know faculty a little bit more.”

Retention and Persistence Theme: Freshmen Transition and Beyond FYS Course

RQ4: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their retention and persistence at the college?

Most participants stated that the FYS course did help with persistence in some way with the biggest factor being providing skills to help with the freshman transitions. The FYS course provided a foundation of academic learning which focused on tools to assist with the freshman

transition. Beyond the academic resources that have been stated, this includes stress management and self-care. Furthermore, participation in student organizations helped with student retention at the college. It is important to note that most students could not specify any lesson or information in the FYS course that led to the retention more than the experiences around the course. Finally, participants are still using skills learned in the FYS course to persist to graduation. Below are participant responses that were significant to this research question:

Participant Z.U.: “Establishing daily routines that you do that helps you pass or help you achieve a goal.”

Participant M.T.: “Getting to know all the campus organizations because I'm a part of them; that caught my attention.”

Participant K.K.: “Lessons we went through were how to study and how to take notes in class; I think that helps how to be proactive in the classroom while you're learning.”

Participant D.O.: “Good habits and regularly coming to class that made me improve my time management skills.”

Participant M.: “General ideas on how they want to manage time. I know it's a lot easier to talk about them and put them into practice.”

Participant A.B.: “Our guest speakers and everything were very encouraging and gave us notes about lots of ways to cope with stress and everything.”

Participant R.R.: “I'm a very, very bad procrastinator, but when I got into that class it helped me learn ways to be better.”

Participant M.A.: “Using many meaningful lessons for how we should approach different scenarios and who we can reach out to if we're ever stuck in a situation that we just can't handle on our own.”

Participant B.Y.: “The course let me know like you know, I got to stay on top of my work because you know, I might fall behind and like that's just losing money.”

Participant E.S.: “The class was a way to relax and like check-in with how you're doing with your other classes. It was kind of just like an outside support perspective rather than more of an impacting my academic and personal life.”

Participant B.O.: “Begin involved with so many organizations and in more leadership roles.”

Participant I.S.: “College 113 was like a backbone for me during my freshmen year.”

Participant S.M.: “Well, I mean, what I was saying earlier, being persistent, how they taught us to be persistent and to keep going and to not give up; college is hard, just keep going.”

Sense of Belonging Theme: Peer Groups

RQ5: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their sense of belonging at the college?

For many of the participants in the study, a sense of belonging begun before the FYS course met for the first time. Many of the participants cited the freshman welcome weekend (Howl Effect) as the beginning of this connection. For the weekend, students were placed in groups based on their major. This allowed for the connections to begin outside of the classroom and peer groups to form. In addition, the exposure to faculty and staff outside of the normal setting allowed for a sense of comfort to take place. Finally, all participants were members of at least one student organization not including athletic teams. Membership in these organizations was encouraged as part of the FYS course to find engagement outside of the classroom. Below are participant responses that were significant to this research question:

Participant G.T.: “Their focus is to create the best experience at the college. So as far as events and getting you involved in activities and stuff like that and just kind of keeping you grounded.”

Participant N.N.: “It was the first couple days of school, Howl Effect, and meeting new people.”

Participant J.: “I feel like we had a lot of good discussions about life at college and our professor let us talk about our experiences as we were on campus and by the end of College 113.”

Participant M.T.: “I will say ACE and Howl Effect . . . I feel that sense of belonging because I felt at home; faculty made me feel like I was at home.”

Participant E.B.: “All the other teams I'm a part of—ACE, peer mentoring—have helped me.”

Participant N.: “I've made friends through College 113 and then seeing them involved when I see them on campus representing their organizations and giving information out.”

Participant A.B.: “There are a lot of good relationships through that class, so it helped me feel more at home here.”

Participant R.R.: “Sometimes it felt like home to me, so when I became a student here and got to know people, it just was normal.”

Participant M.A.: “All the different types of organizations on campus. The one that caught my eye the first time around was ACE.”

Participant E.S.: “I think it shows that for the Career Fair, for example, when I went to that, it just showed that they do care, and they want you to succeed in your future.”

Participant B.O.: “The first day of the class. Everybody was there early because we didn't know what to expect. So when I went there, then everybody started talking.”

Participant I.S.: “Mainly ACE . . . I know that before my roommates were a part of the Social Justice Club as well.”

Participant S.M.: “Those were the first class that I ever had, like the first college class I ever had, so . . . those were my friends, and we had a GroupMe as well.”

Participant R.F.: “I go to campus activities like ACE events.”

Vocation Theme: Life Experience and Vocational Exploration

RQ6: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their vocation at the college?

Based on the experiences and interactions from the participants, the FYS course did not focus extensively on career and vocation. Some of the participants did recall at least one lesson or conversation about vocation, but most of these participants could not recall a conversation or lesson. However, most have had some type of similar experience or sufficient event that has led them to their major. Some even had prepared for a chosen career before coming to college. Within the college, events like Career Fair or other organizations' involvement had also exposed students to the career that they are seeking. Finally, a few participants did not yet have any experience with career choice or vocation. Below are participant responses that were significant to the research question:

Participant Z.U.: “So coming into college, I wanted to do music education and I was strong about it and ever since I was probably in middle school.”

Participant G.T.: “It didn't.”

Participant N.N.: “I don't know.”

Participant J.: “I feel like I kind of already knew who I was coming into college.”

Participant G.: “Nothing at all.”

Participant M.T.: “I guess he (the professor) saw when people talk to me, they see I have like a ‘lawyer voice’ because I like to argue, so and would have debates in class.”

Participant E.B.: “It did not do anything for me.”

Participant K.K.: “It (the course) made us like to think about where we're going in the future.”

Participant N.: “I am still undecided.”

Participant D.O.: “I knew before coming to college I knew what I wanted to be. I mean, I am a nursing major, and I want to be a nurse or a doctor.”

Participant M.: “I kind of already knew coming into college what I wanted to do. So, in that regard, it didn't help me out too much.”

Participant A.B.: “Organization that was at the career fair helps with sexual assault victims. I want to work with children [victimized by] these crimes.”

Participant M.A.: “So, with my career, I've chosen to become a health administrator to work in hospitals. I want to be the one that helps people find what they need.”

Participant B.Y.: “I do not remember anything.”

Participant B.O.: “I was able to use what I was learning in real time. I think that a person caught a cramp-like issue in their leg. Because I was there, I was able to help them out.”

Participant I.S.: “My coach helped me with that because I usually get homesick a lot. I found being a dancer's been my go-to coping skill. I even set up a business for this.”

Participant S.M.: “A professor in the class . . . made me realize that I have the strong skills needed to be a teacher.”

Participant R.F.: “I don't know yet.”

Demographics of Focus Group Interview

For the focus group, I selected and invited a total of 10 from the interview group. Of these 10, five chose to participate. Two identified as male, and three identified as female. When asked about their race/ethnicity, two identified as Black or African American ($n = 2$), three identified as White ($n = 3$). Table 6 below presents the demographic information for this study.

Table 6

Demographics of Focus Group

Demographics	Frequency n	%
Gender		
Male	2	40
Female	3	60
Ethnicity		
Black/African American	2	40
White	3	60

Description of Focus Group Research Participants

In addition to the interviews, I used the focus group to examine emerging themes. The goal of focus groups is to provide participants an intimate setting facilitated by a researcher to freely discuss dialogue about a research topic (Creswell, 2013). For the focus group, I selected individuals that have taken part in the interview process. For this study, I invited five to 10 students from the previously mentioned interview process. The questions from the focus group were open-ended and followed a loosely formatted structure to allow the flow of dialogue from the students involved. Due to COVID-19 guidelines, all focus group conversations took place via Zoom and all conversations was recorded and transcribed. The focus group was scheduled to last up to 90 minutes and allowed each participant to take part in the discussion. Notes and any

recording were digitally transcribed and maintained in a secure, password-protected device. The group examined the influence of the FYS and how it impacted the student's persistence and retention. It lasted just over an hour.

Participant M.A.

The first question for discussion was the following: *Experience in three words and why these words?*

Participant M.A. selected the words “experience, enjoyable, and creative.” When asked why she selected these words, she stated, “These words are what the college is . . . without any of these things (words) my first-year experience would have been boring. I wouldn't have the experience I would have had my first year.”

Has anyone or anything left a lasting impact from your FYS course?

For M.A., the lasting impact from the FYS course began before the class even started. Her Howl Effect leader (freshman weekend leader) is someone that she has stayed in contact with during her freshman year and still to this day. M.A. relied on her leader for resources and as a friend that she could speak with about what was going on in her life. She stated, “She helped me with all the new things that I was experiencing.”

What barriers did you have to overcome and how did you do it?

Unfortunately, M.A. lost her father during her freshman year; this was the barrier that she faced during the course. “I came home and did not want to come back,” she stated. She was focused on her family and trying to figure out what to do during this difficult time. She was able to come back to take her finals. During that time, she also started speaking with the dean of students and a member of health and counseling services to help her move forward. In addition

to these conversations, the connections that she made on campus helped her with the support she needed, and she was able to overcome the dreadful event that she faced.

Why did you decide to return to this college?

When asked why she returned for her second term as a freshman, M.A. stated, “The connections that I had made while being on campus that first semester and the friendships” were her biggest reasons. In addition to this, she holds several on-campus jobs, which is helping fund her education as well.

Most Helpful Resources From FYS

Since she is funding her college tuition on her own, knowing the financial counselors was the most helpful resource from FYS. She has regular meetings with them to make sure she is doing everything right and meeting all the deadlines. In addition, because of the established relationship, the counselors notify her if there are any additional opportunities for funding.

Least Helpful Resources From FYS

For M.A., information about the campus security was the least helpful. She has had many experiences where she has needed them, but the “slowness” of the department has made her rely on other departments and people. In addition, information about the IT department was not needed as the department is “limited” at best based on her experiences.

Have you joined any organizations and how did you learn about them?

Outside of student employment, M.A. is a member of four organizations on campus. Between the interactions with her peers and attending events, she has been able to join these groups and hold various leadership positions in them.

Would you recommend the FYS course to other students? Why or why not?

According to M.A., she would recommend the FYS course to incoming freshmen as it helped them learn about the campus and the departments. Also, because of the resources that you will need as a freshmen student.

Participant K.K.

Experience in three words and why these words?

During the focus group, K.K. described her experiences as “fun, experiences, and connections.” When she was asked to explain these words, she stated, “I chose these words because I was introverted, so it got me out of my shell to meet new people and have more fun experiences that I probably never would without the class.”

Has anyone or anything left a lasting impact from your FYS course?

Similar to Participant E.B., K.K. has felt a lasting impact from the FYS professor. “Dr. McCarthy has gotten me out of my shell and involved on campus. She is the person that introduced me to the American Chemical Society and who I talked with when I was struggling with chemistry during that year.”

What barriers did you have to overcome and how did you do that?

For K.K. the biggest struggle during her freshman year was with her initial roommate. While she tried to work this out, she was unable to and ended up having to get the housing and residence life department involved. She ended up moving rooms and the issues seemed to disappear with the assistance of the housing department.

Why did you decide to return to this college?

When asked why she came back, K.K. stated, “I did make some great friends there and I couldn't imagine leaving them, and the professors are great as well.”

Most Helpful Resources From FYS

The handouts from the course were the biggest help for K.K, especially those on time management and study skills; she still uses these in her other courses.

Least Helpful Resources From FYS

While her experience was not positive or negative, her interactions with the class peer mentor were not helpful. According to K.K., “She was rarely in class and when she was, she did not engage with us.” Furthermore, when K.K. tried to get information from the peer mentor, she was met with “stunning silence” and was brushed off. She felt this was a waste of her time and did not meet any of the needs that she had at the time of the course.

Have you joined any organizations and how did you learn about them?

Outside of marching band, K.K. is a member of three organizations and her friends are the reason that she joined them. She has been able to keep these connections and develop some of her best friends.

Would you recommend the FYS course to other students? Why or why not?

While it is an academic course, K.K. would recommend this to incoming freshmen because of how much fun it was to learn about yourself and the campus.

Participant N.

Experience in three words and why these words?

Participant N. provided the following words for her FYS experience: “educational, comfortable, and reliable.” When asked to explain this, she provided the following statement: “I just felt we learn something every day. I felt the class was comfortable, because you could discuss whatever you wanted. It was a safe space.”

Has anyone or anything left a lasting impact from your FYS course?

Participant N. could not recall anything from the course, but the professor was her last impact. She was fortunate enough to have the dean of students as her FYS instructor. She still has regular interactions with her and now that she is a student leader, sees the dean almost every week. “It was nice to see someone with such high authority at the school taking part in the FYS course,” she stated. She went on to further say that this helped with showing that the faculty and staff cared about the students and you can approach anyone on campus.

What barriers did you have to overcome and how did you overcome them?

As many freshman students struggle with transition, N.’s biggest issue was time management. The techniques that were introduced from the class allowed her to adjust and improve in all her courses. She still uses these techniques to this day and has allowed her to gain excellent marks in other courses. This was especially important because she must maintain a certain GPA for membership on the lacrosse team.

Why did you decide to return to this college?

During the focus group, Participant N. said that “this is my family” and this was one of the biggest reasons she returned to campus. In addition, she found a place that “she belongs to” and could not imagine leaving these people behind for any reason.

Most Helpful Resources From FYS

Library resources were the most helpful resource for N. She regularly uses them to this day as a history major.

Least Helpful Resources From FYS

Participant N. agreed with K.K. and M.A. on the resources that they listed as not helpful. Furthermore, she stated that her class was “surveyed and assessed at least five times during the

term.” She felt this was not necessary as she was unsure if the institution was getting any data that they could use for the future development of the program.

Have you joined any organizations and how did you learn about them?

Outside of lacrosse, N. has been a member of three different organizations that have become her support system, as she is so far away from home. She learned about them through interactions with her friends.

Would you recommend the FYS course to other students? Why or why not?

N. stated that “coming into the college you do not know everything or where to go to get things done . . . this course helps with that and provided resources that you need to succeed.”

Participant Z.U.

Experience in three words and why these words?

Participant Z.U. provided the following words for her FYS experience: “exciting, educating, and enlightening.” When asked to explain this, he provided the following statement: “I was in a section of the FYS course that was for music majors; it was a place that was open and welcoming and made me feel comfortable as a freshman student.”

Has anyone or anything left a lasting impact from your FYS course?

For Z.U., the lasting impact was now his best friend, who at the time of the FYS course was a peer mentor for freshman students. He stated, “I’ve kind of stepped out of my comfort zone (with her) and tried new things . . . as she was different and cool. That would keep me more involved on campus.”

What barriers did you have to overcome and how did you that?

As previously stated, Z.U. used his peer mentor to overcome his biggest change, which was shyness and getting outside his comfort zone. Through these actions, he was able to find “his

voice” in the class and began to share more of the experiences that have led him on the path he is currently on.

Why did you decide to return to this college?

From his experience, Z.U. loved the “atmosphere” that has been created from the campus and courses that he has been involved in. This goes for the student organizations as well. He loves the connections and friendships that he has made and wants to keep learning and growing from them. Finally, the interaction with the professors and the opportunities for campus jobs has led him to where he is today.

Most Helpful Resources From FYS

For Z.U., the handouts from the class were the most helpful resources. Since he was in a specialized section of the FYS course, “all the handouts were specific to the major.” This helped him and provided a real experience to the things that he was going to experience during his time as a music major. It showed him that he could have both an academic focus and an extracurricular focus as well. Finally, because he was very shy, he began to have assignments that had a public speaking element to them, which helped remove his shyness.

Least Helpful Resources From FYS

Z.U. could not recall any information that was directly related to his experience. He did agree with M.A. on his experiences with resources that were not helpful.

Have you joined any organizations and how did you learn about them?

Outside of marching band, Z.U. is a member of four different organizations on the campus. He found out about them through emails from the organizations and conversations with members about what each organization does.

Would you recommend the FYS course to other students? Why or why not?

Z.U. agreed with Participant N.'s assessment and would recommend the course to all incoming freshmen and a successful transition to college life. The skills and conversation that occurred in the FYS course aided the learning process for his first year.

Participant E.B.

Experience in three words and why these words?

During the focus group, each participant was asked to share three words that would best describe their experiences from their FYS course. E.B. selected “exciting, educating, and comfortable.” When asked why he selected these words, he shared similar experiences to the other participants but looked at the FYS course as a place where “you can get comfortable and be open with the other students.”

Has anyone or anything left a lasting impact from your FYS course?

For Participant E.B., his FYS professor had the most impact on him. He stated, “The professor showed me that everyone at the school would support me and my dreams. You know how the college is a small campus and because of this we have close bonds with each other.”

What barriers did you have to overcome and how did you do that?

Like N., E.B. struggles with some of the transition skills that are needed for freshmen. Like other participants, he struggled with time management and organization management. In addition, he struggled with “shyness” and it took some time for him to overcome and try new things on campus.

Why did you decide to return to this college?

Similar to the other participants, E.B. draws on the connections from his friends and professors as to why he came back. In addition, he is excited to be a part of the college campus and obtain a degree from the college. Finally, as a member of the football team, he wants to

support and share these experiences with his team and build the bonds that he has experienced in the FYS course.

Most Helpful Resources From FYS

When it comes to the most helpful resources from the FYS course, E.B. was thankful for the library resources and how the library staff helped him learn how to do research. In addition, the usage of the Wolf Den (similar to a Blackboard system) is the main point to find information on academics and other campus resources. “I would have been lost if I was not shown how to use that,” E.B. stated.

Least Helpful Resources From FYS

E.B. had an interesting take on this question. He stated, “There were mini-lessons that we focused on the major lessons that just felt out of play and unnecessary.” When asked if he could recall an example, he could not provide one at the time of the focus group.

Have you joined any organizations and how did you learn about them?

Outside of football, E.B. is a member of four student organizations. Interactions with faculty, staff, and students was how he found out about these organizations.

Would you recommend the FYS course to other students? Why or why not?

E.B. stated that he would recommend this course to incoming freshmen as it provides meaningful skills that every freshman will need to succeed at the college.

Emerging Themes From Focus Group

The participants within this study come from various backgrounds and represent a wide range of races and ethnicities. While they each shared different experiences, their focus group conversations revealed several similar themes. From the focus group conversations ($n = 5$), the emergence of themes that support similar themes from the one-on-one interviews can be seen.

This includes themes of the top three words that best describe the FYS experience (educating, creative, comfortable), the connection to the people and the overall atmosphere, lessons with FYS, freshman issues with an emphasis on coping with transition, support groups, and the overall recommendation of the FYS course. This section will showcase the themes that were presented from data analysis from the focus group with the five research participants. Each focus group question was examined, and emerging themes were identified in Table 7. Supporting information was included from the focus group conversations.

Table 7*Emerging Themes from Focus Group*

Questions	Theme	Support
Q1 & 2: Three Words and Why	Top 3 Words: educating, creative and comfortable	These words were selected as the FYS course was a safe space for learning and sharing. In addition, the FYS course made students feel as if they were at “home”.
Q3: Lasting Impact	The People (faculty, staff and students)	From professors to peer connections, the people of the FYS course have had a lasting impact on the students.
Q4 & 5: Barriers and Overcoming	Freshman Transition Coping Issues	Time management, study skills, and public speaking
Q6: Returning to College	Connections and Atmosphere	Connections; campus atmosphere, peer groups and professors
Q7: Most Helpful Resources from FYS	Academic Lessons	This includes time management, organization management, library resources, and online resource (Wolf Den)
Q8: Least Helpful Resources From FYS	Mixing of Information from Multiple Sources	Several examples of information from the FYS course and experiences with peer mentors have caused issues with these students.
Q9: Organizations	Support Groups	Student organizations have assisted with academics & peer groups.
Q10: Recommend FYS	Incoming Freshmen Need This!	Unanimously yes. Campus resources and transition to campus life

Themes From Focus Groups***Top Three Words: Educating, Creative, and Comfortable***

From the focus group discussion, the following words were mentioned the most: educating, creative, and comfortable. The participants felt that these words best described the overall experience within the FYS course. The environment in the course was one of open communication and comfort with the ability to express ideas and have many meaningful discussions, and the lessons were engaging and allowed for the learning process to take place. In addition, many of the assignments allowed the students to use creative ways to express

themselves and their opinions. Finally, the comfort level allowed for friend and peer groups to be formed that lasted beyond the course.

Lasting Impact: The People (Faculty, Staff, and Students)

From the FYS course, the people, not the lessons, had a lasting impact on the participants. From the peer mentors that have been used from day to day, to the professors, to the deans of the campus, the people have been the biggest influence on the participants. From all the participants it was a welcome sight to see “so many people care about us” and “we are not just numbers, but we are people with real issues and problems.” The FYS professors are still actively engaged in the learning process for the students and have invested more than just academics into each of these students.

Barriers and Overcoming: Freshmen Transition Coping Issues

Support services on campus in addition to the FYS course lessons allowed for these participants to thrive and overcome barriers that they were experiencing. While most of the barriers were academic (i.e., study habits, time management, and so on) one participant cited the use of health and counseling services as her saving grace. During her freshman term, her father unexpectedly died. This all but eliminated her motivation to complete coursework or be a part of the campus. With the help of health and counseling services, she was able to slowly come back to campus to reengage with the community. The peer groups that she had developed allowed her to move on from her terrible experience and begin to thrive again.

Returning to College: Connections and Atmosphere

From the focus group conversation, there were two clear emerging themes from this question—students returned to campus because of the connections that they had made in the previous semester, and the campus “felt like home to them.” These themes have emerged both in

the focus group and the one-on-one interviews. All the participants have contributed to peer groups that have inspired them to come back to campus for another term. In addition to this, four of the five participants had an on-campus job, which has allowed them to pay for their tuition at the time of the focus group discussion. Finally, the relationship that was developed with professors, faculty, and staff gave these participants a sense of home away from home, so they were able to thrive in this academic environment.

Most Helpful Resources From FYS: Academic Lessons

The academic lessons in the FYS course were described as helpful by all participants in the interviews and focus groups. The participants cited multiple transition issues (e.g., study habits, time management, and coping with stress) that freshman students need addressing. In addition, the overall course design and structure allowed for freshman students to gain the most useful information that could aid them beyond the FYS course. Furthermore, some of the lessons were not solely within the classroom; lessons on finances and paying for college also emerged during the focus group interview.

Least Helpful Resources From FYS: Mixing of Information From Multiple Sources

While there have been many lessons from the FYS course that have been able to benefit the participants, there were lessons and messages that were not viewed as helpful by the students. First, there were several references made about campus security. There seems to be a disconnect between the services that are offered and what is “actually offered.” Participants cited examples: contacting assistance but no response, long wait times, or rudeness from the campus team. Besides this, the participants negatively referenced “microlessons” in the FYS course. While no direct evidence could be provided, based on the conversations within the focus groups, some lessons were mixed that did not belong together or just confused the participants in their studies.

Organizations: Support Groups

With a similar line to the one-on-one interviews, support groups (such as student organizations) have allowed students to thrive in both the academic and nonacademic setting. All participants were members of at least one student organization. This does not include athletic teams. Membership in these organizations was encouraged as part of the FYS course to find engagement outside of the classroom. Finally, because of the focus on academics for membership eligibility in many of the organizations, participants stated that this helped them maintain above average marks in their groups.

Recommend FYS: YES!

With unanimous consent, all focus group participants agreed that all incoming freshmen should take the FYS course. Like the one-on-one interviews, these participants experienced the benefit of the FYS course. From the conversations, the participants cited multiple transition issues (i.e., study habits, time management, and coping with stress) that freshman students need. In addition, students are not all prepared the same way for college, so it is important to prepare the baseline skills to need to be successful during their first year until they have persisted to graduation.

Summary

Chapter 4 examined the findings from this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts school in South Carolina, their experience in the institution's FYS program, and how these experiences impacted persistence and retention. This study included 20 research participants and a focus group session with five of these participants students. The participants reported their demographic information: gender, race/ethnicity, and college major. In addition, they provided precollege foundation

information that included high school GPA, and SAT or ACT scores. Finally, they provided information on their memberships in college student organizations. Following this information, I provided a description of the interview and focus group conversations for each participant and themes that emerged from each section.

For the first research question—what experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their academic success at the college—the primary theme that emerged was *academic lessons and activities* from the course setup and structure.

For the second search question—what experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their nonacademic success at the college—the primary themes that emerged were *support groups, campus events, and organizations*.

For the third research question—what experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their faculty/staff interaction at the college—the primary theme that emerged was *campus connections*.

For the fourth research question—what experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their retention and persistence at the college—the primary theme that emerged was *freshman transition and engagement* beyond the FYS course.

For the fifth research question—what experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their sense of belonging at the college—the primary theme that emerged was *peer groups*.

For the sixth research question—what experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their vocation at the college—the primary themes that emerged were *life experience* and *vocational exploration*. A further examination of the finding and implications will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In Chapters 1, 2, and 3, I provided an introduction to the study, a literature review on FYS courses, student experiences in college life, and research questions surrounding the topic of the first-year experience and the impact it had on retention and persistence for sophomore students. In Chapter 4, I offered insight regarding the study participants. This insight included demographic information, student involvement, interview, and focus group responses. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the themes from the research questions that were presented. Chapter 5 consists of an overview of the study, interpretation of the findings, conclusion, current and future recommendations, a chapter summary, and the overview study summary.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts college in the state of South Carolina. As well as their experience in the institution's FYS program, and how these experiences impact their persistence and retention. To pursue this investigation, I utilized a basic qualitative research approach utilizing a focus group and semistructured interview design.

According to Barefoot (2003), freshman orientation courses (also known as the First-Year Seminar) have become a common source for the foundation for incoming freshman students. According to Dumford et al. (2016), building programs that engage first-year students with learning communities can lead to high engagement and retention rates of the students. Positive faculty and staff interactions can also lead to a desire to persist toward graduation. According to Chu (2016), between 20 to 30% of students leave an institution by the beginning of their second year. Chu's work suggested the focus should be on academic success and how

engagement outside the classroom can assist with the persistence of students in the college setting. Fike and Fike (2008) also suggested that we need to understand the “why” in the decision to leave to better retain them beyond the first year.

Another aspect that can impact students’ sense of belonging is campus engagement and involvement. Astin’s student development theory (1984) stated that involvement is the “investment of physical and psychological energy that a student uses with various academic and nonacademic activity” (p. 519). In other words, the more involved a student is where they live and study, the more likely they are to persist and eventually graduate. In addition, students with higher levels of student engagement statistically have a higher GPA than unengaged students. According to Dugan (2013), an estimated 53% of college students spend at least one hour each week participating in clubs and organizations and 80% of students have participated in at least one college organization by their senior year.

In a restatement of his initial theory, Tinto (1993, 2012) developed and built onto his integration model for student retention by focusing on key elements of organizational characteristics of programs and the effectiveness of the institution. One of these factors was the social and intellectual community of the student. The importance of an institution to have an established community for students to build a sense of belonging assists with the retention and persistence of all students at the institution.

I selected 20 undergraduate students for interviewing. These participants described experiences inside and outside of the FYS course and how their experiences have impacted their involvement, persistence, and success at the college. Using basic qualitative research, the following research questions were addressed through interviews.

Research Questions

RQ1: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their academic success at the college?

RQ2: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their nonacademic success at the college?

RQ3: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their faculty/staff interaction at the college?

RQ4: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their retention and persistence at the college?

RQ5: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their sense of belonging at the college?

RQ6: What experiences in the FYS program did sophomore students perceive to impact their vocation at the college?

In addition to these research questions, five of the 20 participants took part in a focus group that identified additional factors from the FYS course that have impacted their experience. These questions are as follows:

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your experience in three words or less.
2. Why did you choose these words?
3. Has anyone or anything left a lasting impact on your college experience to this point?
4. What barriers have you had to overcome?
5. How did you overcome them?
6. Why did you decide to return to college the following semester?

7. What resources/information did you learn about in your FYS course that have been the most helpful?
8. What resources/information did you learn about in your FYS course that have been the least helpful?
9. Have you joined any organizations on campus? If so, how did you learn about them?
10. Would you recommend the FYS class to others? Why or why not?

Interpretation of the Findings

The review of literature in Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of a sense of belonging, faculty and staff interaction, student engagement and persistence, and retention for students who attend an FYS course. Using the information from the review along with the findings from this study, I was able to find themes that could help with the development of the student experience from the first year to graduation.

Research Questions: Interview Themes

Academics Theme: Academic Lessons and Activities

From the interviews, 13 of the 20 participants cited examples that were related to the academic focus of the FYS course. Several examples of the academic lessons, activities, and overall course design were made by the participants. It was clear that the course design and setup was a featured experience from the FYS course. It is important to note that all the FYS groupings within the class were set up according to academic majors. This is relevant as this played into the experience of these participants and the interactions that occurred within the course. This set the stage for consistency in the classroom, general expectations, and how to remain focused in college. Furthermore, the lessons within the FYS course addressed the development of needed skills for freshman students to include but are not limited to time management, successful study

habits, and campus resources. Finally, access to major academic weeks, such as Dufford Diversity Week, exposed the students to other academic departments and personnel on the campus.

Nonacademics Theme: Support Groups, Campus Events, and Student Organizations

During the FYS course, several students cited that the relationships with classmates and support groups allowed them to succeed during the FYS course. In total, 14 of the 20 participants provided a comment or statement on this topic, which included accountability partnerships and roommates to assist with nonacademic support. These events ranged from academic to social in style and allowed the participants to reflect on the experience that has led to their high level of engagement on campus. Furthermore, the interaction at campus events was commonly cited by participants, such as specific events from the First 56, which allowed for social and support groups to form more naturally. The First 56 is a comprehensive campus activity calendar that is designed for all students on campus but is designed to involve freshman students in campus culture, clubs, and organizations. Finally, campus support services, such as health and counseling, career services, and mentoring programs, assisted students with nonacademic support. For the participants of this study, these organizations, events, and support groups were directly related to the overall experience of college life and their first-year experience. These experiences aided this transition outside of the classroom and allowed for a positive impact on their experience.

Faculty/Staff Interaction Theme: Campus Connections

Every participant in this study mentioned the interactions with faculty and staff and the positive impact that it had on them. Most FYS course instructors provided additional means of contact, whether by cell phone or personal email. The tone was set by the FYS instructors that

they were approachable and could be asked anything from academic to personal life issues. The participants also felt that “they were not just numbers” but people with real feelings and emotions. From the institution, it was clear that personal attention was a feature of this course and part of the mission of the college. Finally, FYS students were encouraged to build similar relationships with other instructors and get secure with everyone on campus. Creating a sense of community and support with the faculty allowed for meaningful relationships with the students and allowed for a more successful transition into the campus environment.

Retention and Persistence Theme: Freshman Transition and Beyond the FYS Course

The FYS course provides a foundation of academic learning which focuses on tools to assist with the freshman transition. Eighteen of the 20 participants mentioned a combination of either persistence and/or retention during the interviews. Most participants stated the FYS course helped with persistence in some way with the biggest factor being providing skills to help with the freshman transition. Beyond the academic resources that have been stated, this included stress management and self-care. Furthermore, the students reported that participation in student organizations helped them decide to remain on campus and complete their degree programs. It is important to note that nothing specific to the FYS course has led to the retention of the students more than course experiences. Finally, participants are still using skills learned in the FYS course to persist to graduation.

Sense of Belonging Theme: Peer Groups

For many of the participants in the study, a sense of belonging began before the FYS course met for the first time. Many of the participants cited the freshman welcome weekend, known as Howl Effect, as the beginning of this connection. For the weekend, students are placed in groups based on their FYS cohort. This allows for the connection to originate outside of the

classroom and peer groups to form within. In addition to this, there is exposure to faculty and staff outside of the normal setting, allowing for a sense of comfort to take place. Finally, all participants were members of at least one student organization, not including athletic teams. Membership in these organizations was encouraged as part of the FYS course in an effort for students to find engagement outside of the classroom.

Vocation Theme: Life Experience and Vocational Exploration

Based on the experiences and interactions from the participants, the FYS course did not focus extensively on career and vocation. Some of the participants did recall at least one lesson or conversation about vocation. Most of these participants could not recall a conversation or lesson but had had some experience or event that led them to the major they are pursuing. Some even had experiences in high school that had prepared them for a chosen career before coming to college. Within the college, career fair-type events or organizational involvement also exposed students to the career that they are pursuing. Finally, a few of the participants did not have any experience with vocation.

Research Questions: Focus Group Themes

Three Words and Why Theme: Top Three Words—Educating, Creative, and Comfortable

From the focus group discussion, the following words were mentioned the most: educating, creative, and comfortable. The participants felt that these words best described the overall experience within the FYS course. The environment in the course was one of open communication and comfort with the ability to express ideas and have many meaningful discussions. The lessons were engaging and allowed for the learning process to take place. In addition, many of the assignments allowed students to use creative ways to express themselves

and their opinions. Finally, the comfort level allowed for friend and peer groups to be formed that lasted beyond the course.

Lasting Impact: The People (Faculty, Staff, and Students)

From the FYS course, the students reported that it was the people, not the lessons, that made a lasting impact on them. From the peer leaders that they consulted from day to day, to the professors and deans, the people had the biggest influence on the participants. Participants unanimously reported that it was a welcome sight to see “so many people care about us” and “we are not just numbers, but we are people with real issues and problems.” The FYS professors are still actively engaged in the learning process for the students and have invested more than just academics into each of these students.

Barriers and Overcoming: Freshmen Transition Coping Issues

Support services on campus in addition to the FYS course lessons allowed for these participants to thrive and overcome barriers that they were experiencing. While most of the barriers were academic (e.g., study habits, time management) one participant cited the use of health and counseling services as her saving grace. Her father unexpectedly died during her freshman term. This all but eliminated her motivation to complete coursework or be involved in campus life. With the help of health and counseling services, she was able to slowly come back to campus and reengage with the community. The peer groups that she had developed allowed her to move on from her terrible experience and begin to thrive again on campus.

Returning to College: Connections and Atmosphere

From the focus group conversation, there were two clear emerging themes from this question: 1) Students returned to campus because of the connections that they had made in the previous semester, and 2) the campus “felt like home to them.” These themes emerged both in

the focus group and the one-on-one interviews. All the participants have made peer groups that have inspired them to come back to campus for another term. In addition to this, four of the five participants had on-campus jobs which have allowed them to pay for their tuition at the time of the focus group discussion. Finally, the relationship that was developed with professors, faculty, and staff truly gave these participants a sense of home away from home, so they were able to thrive in this academic environment.

Most Helpful Resources From FYS: Academic Lessons

As a consistent theme from this study, the FYS course academic lessons have been a learning point for all participants in the interviews and focus groups. The participants cited multiple transition issues, such as poor study habits, time management, and stress management, that freshman students need assistance with. In addition, the overall course design and structure allowed for freshman students to gain the most useful information that could aid them beyond the FYS course. Furthermore, some of the lessons were not solely within the classroom. Lessons on finances and paying for college also emerged during the focus group interview.

Least Helpful Resources From FYS: Mixing of Information From Multiple Sources

While there have been many lessons from the FYS course that benefited participants, there were also lessons and messages that were not too helpful to the students. First, there were several references made about campus security. There seems to be a disconnect between the services that are offered and what is “actually offered.” Participants cited examples from contact for assistance with no response or long wait times to rudeness from the campus security team. Besides this, the participants referenced “microlessons” in the FYS course. While no direct example could be provided, based on the conversations within the focus groups, some lessons were mixed that did not belong together or just confused the participants in their studies.

Organizations: Support Groups

With a similar line to the one-on-one interviews, support groups (e.g., student organizations) have allowed students to thrive in both academic and nonacademic settings. All participants were members of at least one student organization, not including athletic teams. Membership in these organizations was encouraged as part of the FYS course to find engagement outside of the classroom. Finally, with a focus on academics in many of the organizations for membership eligibility, they have been able to maintain above-average marks in their groups.

Recommend FYS: YES!

With unanimous consent, all focus group participants agreed that all incoming freshmen should take the FYS course. Like the one-on-one interviews, these participants experienced and understood the benefit of the FYS course. From the conversations, the participants mentioned multiple transition issues, such as study habits, time management, and coping with stress that freshman students need. In addition, students are not all prepared the same way for college. It is important to prepare all with the baseline skills to be successful during their first year through to graduation.

Conclusions

This study produced several themes regarding the experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts school in South Carolina. I investigated their experience in the institution's FYS program and how these experiences impacted their persistence and retention. Through the individual one-on-one interviews and focus group conversations, the following themes emerged: *academic lessons, support groups, campus events, campus connections and organizations, freshman transitions, peer groups, and vocation experience*. Similar themes

emerged from the focus groups: *the people, freshman transition, connections, events*, and *support groups*. Based on the findings from this research, it is clear that Tinto's integration theory found support in the findings. With the design and lessons of the FYS course, the host institution is committed to the educational development of each student. Furthermore, support groups and connections with instructions have been able to bring together a sense of belonging and commitment to the social development of the student beyond the FYS course. This includes aspects of residential learning to student events and organizations.

Recommendations and Implications

From academics to belonging to support groups, these themes are associated with experiences within the FYS course. Previous research has emphasized how each of these themes is directly beneficial to the student experience. The interviews revealed that incoming freshman students should participate in an FYS to better ensure their success during their first year. These factors can be directly and indirectly related to their experience in the FYS course, and an institution must be able to showcase them for the growth of the student.

The themes that have emerged from this research show how an FYS course can positively impact the student experience from the freshman transition and experience. Through these interviews and focus groups, consistent themes from Tinto's (2012) and Astin's (1984) approach in this research along with each of the functional areas. While defining each element, participants were dedicated to their FYS experience and engagement in and outside the classroom. From this research, the following practical and future implications are presented.

Recommendations for Practical Application

Colleges, such as the one in this study, must make an effort to use the results of this study to enhance the overall FYS experience and provide freshman students the needed skills for

transition while providing outlets for engagement on the campus. Based on the results of this study, I recommend the following practical applications.

Academic Restructure for Freshman Students

Most of the participants from this study stated they were able to take away a lesson or practice from the FYS course that has been able to help their persistence to this point in their college education. However, some lessons within the FYS course were redundant and did not engage all participants. Generation Z students are looking for both hard and soft skills that they can use in their everyday and career life. It is important to make sure that the lessons within the FYS course have a practical usage beyond the college experience. With Generation Z in the classroom for the years to come, the academic structure and lessons in the course should be revisited to align with their passion, purpose, and values.

Expansion of Vocational Conversations

Many of the participants did not report a meaningful experience about future career or vocation in the FYS course. The college is Lutheran faith-based, and vocation is a fundamental pillar to that faith. The focus of most Generation Z students is to gain meaningful employment; thus, conversations about vocation need to begin in the FYS course. While it is not expected that freshman students know exactly what they want to do as a career, opportunities should be presented to them. This can include an on-campus job fair, expanded internship opportunities, and networking opportunities with alumni from the college. Finally, vocation should be integrated into each course at the college in some way so all students can establish a working knowledge of the subject.

Promotion of Support Groups and Engagement

Sense of belonging and connection to campus has been a consistent theme from the one-on-one interviews and the focus group conversations. With the need to have something that helps besides classroom engagement and supports the growth of the student, support groups and engagement are needed for these students. These support groups can provide additional resources that freshman students need for their transition experience. In addition, the connection to campus in the form of student engagement (e.g., clubs, organizations, and events) can bring a sense of belonging and connection that provides pride in the campus culture.

Recommendation of Future Research

While research is widely available about the impact of FYS on a college campus, studies that look at smaller institutions are not as widely available. The findings in this study revealed other areas of research that could be beneficial to the area of FYS. This continued research could further examine the relationships that FYS courses and how this can impact persistence and retention on college campuses and better align with campus mission statements.

A Qualitative Study Exploring FYS Experiences at Campus of Similar Size

This study explored an institution of just over 1,200 students. However, more research on the impact of FYS on a campus of similar size could be done on a national scale. Previous studies have continued to show a link to FYS, engagement, and student retention. These factors could be further examined to showcase a more in-depth analysis of how small campuses (public and private) could extend or realign resources on campus to provide the best FYS experience for their students.

A Qualitative Study Exploring FYS Impact on Students: A Four-Year Examination

A few of the participants noted that some of the information from the FYS was redundant or not beneficial to them. Future studies could look at the lessons within the FYS course and see if they provide important, necessary information for the students. While some “standard” lessons are needed, values and focal points of this generation of college students should be included more in the classroom. Furthermore, looking at specialized sections of FYS could benefit populations of students that may need additional resources for their freshman transition.

Quantitative Study Exploring Varying Demographics and FYS Impact

While this study employed participants with some varying demographics, it would be worthwhile to explore more populations of students and the impact that FYS has on them. This could include student and nonstudent athletes, varying social backgrounds with varying precollege foundation experiences. This could allow for a more comprehensive look at the FYS course and how these courses could be better tailored to the varying needs of college students.

Effects of COVID-19 and FYS and How This Will Impact Future Generations

At the time of this study, the people of the United States were still feeling the impact of COVID-19. Higher education had to quickly pivot to accommodate all students according to CDC guidelines and manage the risk of COVID-19 infection. It is fair to say that no one can predict the short- and long-term impact of the pandemic on the FYS course. While this will be a continuing issue for some time, researchers could examine the impact COVID-19 has had on the FYS experience and if it impacted the development of students and their persistence to graduate.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 includes a review of the previous chapters of this study. Furthermore, it addressed the research questions at hand and presented information on the emerging themes from

both the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The themes that arose from this study were *academic lessons and activities, support groups, campus events, organizations, campus connections, freshman transition, peer groups and life experiences, and vocation*. Finally, recommendations and future implications were presented and discussed.

Overall Summary

This basic qualitative study pursued experiences of sophomore students at a small private liberal arts school in South Carolina and their experience in the institution's FYS program, and how these experiences impacted persistence and retention. The study revealed some factors did impact the experiences of these participants and were both positive and negative within the FYS course. While in the FYS course, students can connect with the campus (sense of belonging) in the form of peer, support, and student groups. The students were comfortable with their faculty and staff interactions and were empowered to seek them out when they needed assistance. The academic focus of the FYS course looked to provide a foundation and expectations of what college life would be like for students as they pursued graduation and a career. Finally, campus resources and skills were provided to make sure every student has a chance to graduate.

The interviews and focus group discussions in this study provided students with an opportunity to share their experiences and provide a fresh perspective from their point of view. Having these students share this information will inform campus leaders on how to create, adapt, and maintain their FYS course and how the participant experiences in the FYS course can and will impact their academic, retention, and persistence to graduation.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Each interview will begin with an introduction and icebreaker for the conversation, such as “What has been your favorite class so far and why?” The six main questions mirrored the six research questions.

The interview will address the following questions:

Q1: What experiences in the FYS program did you perceive to impact your academic success at the college?

Q2: What experiences in the FYS program did you perceive to impact your nonacademic success at the college?

Q3: What experiences in the FYS program did you perceive to impact your faculty/staff interaction at the college?

Q4: What experiences in the FYS program did you perceive to impact your retention and persistence at the college?

Q5: What experiences in the FYS program did you perceive to impact your sense of belonging at the college?

Q6: What experiences in the FYS program did you perceive to impact your vocation at the college?

Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Questions

The focus group discussed these questions:

1. Describe your experience in three words or less
2. Why did you choose these words?
3. Has anyone left a lasting impact on your college experience to this point?
4. What barriers have you had to overcome
5. How did you overcome them?
6. Why did you decide to return to college the following semester?
7. What resources/information did you learn about in your FYS course that has been the most helpful?
8. What resources/information did you learn about in your FYS course that has been the least helpful?
9. Have you joined any organizations on campus? If so, how did you learn about them?
10. Would you recommend the FYS class to others? Why or why not?

Appendix C: ACU 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



Dear Mike,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

was approved by expedited review (Category^{6 & 7}) on 10/23/2020 (IRB # 20-158). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.

Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix D: Approval Letter from IRB at Study Site College

[REDACTED] IRB Review Report Form

September 29, 2020

Michael,

Your request to conduct research at [REDACTED] has been **approved** under Exempt Category 2. This does not mean that the IRB will not monitor your study, and that you do not need to report to the IRB if you make changes to your protocol.

The study is referenced by the approval number listed. The permission to collect data is valid for one year from the date of this letter and can be submitted for continuing review should the study extend beyond that. Please inform us of the final number of subjects involved in the study upon its completion and use the included STAMPED consent form to collect data.

EX2-2021-0929-MS-DISS

Respectfully yours,

Naomi Simmons

Naomi Simmons, PhD
Chair, Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED]
Committee Members; Dr. Naomi Simmons (Chair), Dr. Charles Horn, Melissa Taylor, M.S.N.,
B.C., Dr. Jerry Alewine

[REDACTED]