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A First-Year Seminar Course and its Relationship to Student Retention and Graduation

Rates at a Community College

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Patricia P. Weaver

May 2018

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Dr. Bethany Flora

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Dr. Michael Stokes

Keywords: Retention, Graduation Rates, Community College, First-Year Programs

ABSTRACT

A First-Year Seminar Course and its Relationship to Student Retention and Graduation Rates at a Community College

by

Patricia P. Weaver

The purpose of this comparative study was to determine the relationship of a First-Year Seminar course as well as student entry demographics to retention and graduation rates at community college in Tennessee. In the fall of 2013 the enrollment for the participating college was 3,790 with a mean composite ACT score of 18.9 and a mean GPA of 2.823. First-Year Experience programs at the community college consisted of First-Year Seminar (FYS), New Student Online Orientation (NSOO), New Student Advisement and Registration (NSAR), and mandatory academic advisement. For the purpose of this study the researcher examined only the First-Year Seminar course. The First-Year Seminar course was designed to provide students with strategies to further develop academic as well as life management skills. The course incorporated techniques to assist students in a successful beginning at the institution. Major topics focused on goal setting, institutional resources and activities, time management, basic study strategies including note-taking and test-taking, development of an academic plan, developing relationships, stress management, and career exploration. The populations studied were students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. Students who participated in the First-Year Seminar course were compared to the overall population of students prior to the implementation of mandatory participation in the first-year programs.

The research questions in this study were addressed through data analysis using chi-square 2-way contingency table. Archival data about students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course were retrieved from the institutions data system. Additional demographic information was collected on student gender, age, and financial aid status.

The findings in the study indicated there were significantly higher rates of retention for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In regards to gender, age, and financial aid status overall retention rates were significantly higher for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course. The findings however did not indicate a significant correlation between participation in a First-Year Seminar course and graduation rates.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, friends, and colleagues who continually encouraged me through this journey. I appreciate their support and understanding, but especially my husband's patience and support through the many late nights and weekends as I wrote. I also dedicate this work to the memory of my mother, whose love for knowledge and a strong education inspired me to continue my pursuit of higher education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2007 the United States entered into one of the longest recessions since World War II (Goodman, & Mance, 2011). The Economic Policy Institute indicated that 8.4 million jobs were lost during 2008 and 2009. During this economic recession, individuals without a postsecondary education had a 2.4 % higher unemployment rate than those who held postsecondary degrees, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report. The report also indicated that employment and income are impacted by educational attainment.

In August 2015, the unemployment rate for individuals age 25 and older who held a bachelor's degree was 2.5% compared to an unemployment rate of 5.5% for individuals age 25 and older who graduated high school and did not attend college (The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). For those individuals with less than a high school diploma unemployment rates reached 7.7% (*The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015*). Average median weekly salaries during the fourth quarter of 2015 indicated that individuals with a bachelor's degree earned \$1,245 compared to those individuals who had a high school diploma and earned on average \$690. (*Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers Fourth Quarter 2015, 2016*).

The United States has fallen behind other countries when it comes to college completion rates (OCED, 2014). According to OECD's report the United States ranked 19th out of 28 countries in college graduation rates. Educational attainment is not only good for the individual but the society as well. In 2013 Berger and Fisher found that high-wage states are states with a well-educated workforce. They also found that there is a "clear and strong correlation between the educational attainment of a state's workforce and median wages" (p. 1). In 2009, President

Obama recognized the need to increase educational attainment levels and announced his completion agenda. The goal of the completion was to attain the world's highest level of college graduates by 2020 (White House, 2009). In light of this agenda, the Complete College America was created in 2009 to work with states to increase the number of Americans with college degrees or certificates (Complete College America, 2014). In 2010, the state of Tennessee legislature embraced the completion agenda and passed the Complete College Tennessee Act.

The Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA) was designed as a:

Comprehensive reform agenda that seeks to transform public higher education through changes in academic, fiscal, and administrative policies at the state and institutional level. At the center of these reforms is the need for more Tennesseans to be better educated and trained, while also acknowledging the state's diminished fiscal capacity to support higher education. (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Complete College Act of Tennessee, 2010)

With the passage of the Complete College Act Tennessee, (CCTA) the principal goal is to increase postsecondary attainment and completion rates across the state. Topics addressed in the legislation included a new performance funding formula for higher education, remedial courses, and articulation and statewide course transfer systems. The CCTA established a new performance funding formula for higher education. The new performance funding formula linked performance measures such as student retention, degree attainment, and completion of learning support courses to state appropriations. In 2013 Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam launched his Drive to 55 initiative. Governor Haslam challenged the state to increase the number of postsecondary credential holders to 55% of the state's workforce by 2025 in order to meet the Tennessee's future workforce demands (Governor Haslam Launches Drive to 55 Initiative, 2013). With the call for increased accountability, many institutions of higher education are seeking new ways to improve retention and completion rates.

In the fall of 2014, 17.3 million students attended postsecondary institutions (NCES, 2016). Of those, 10.6 million attended 4-year institutions and 6.7 million attended community colleges. The Tennessee Complete College Act (2010) found that on average, a student attending a 2-year community college will take 3 years to graduate, and the average student attending a 4-year university will take 5 to 6 years to graduate.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) 60% of community college students attended part time, 47% are dependent on their parents, 26% were 24 years or older, 20% were married with children, and 15% were independent and single parents. Additionally, 61% of the community college students were independent as compared to 35% of 4-year institution students (NCES, 2016).

Overall, community colleges serve students with varying levels of academic preparation, age, and financial barriers, and attend community colleges for a wide variety of goals, of which obtaining an associate's degree is not always the main reason for attending (CCCSE, 2012). In their study the Center for Community College Student Engagement indicated that 79% of students attend to earn an associate's degree, 73% intend to transfer to a 4-year institution, and 57% want to complete a certificate program (CCCSE, 2012). With such a diverse mix of students and their various goals, a clear definition of retention is difficult for community colleges (Wilders & Ebber, 2002). Much of the research on student retention is grounded in the work of academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993) and involvement (Astin, 1975), based on traditional 4-year institutions, which does very little to address retention for community colleges (Wilders & Ebber p.504). Research has shown that community college retention rates are lower than the 4-year institutions (NCES, 2015). Retention of first time degree seeking undergraduates

from fall 2013 to fall 2014 were 80.8% at public 4-year institutions as compared to 60.3% at public 2-year institution (NCES, 2015).

Students who attend community colleges attend for various reasons. Consequently, it is important for community colleges to develop a clear definition of what retention means. According to Crawford (1999) retention can be defined as “maintenance of continued enrollment for two or more semesters, specifically from fall term to spring term and or completion of a degree or certificate or transfer to a 4-year college” (p. 13). Crawford (1999) found, “Effective college student retention is key to the accomplishment of any element of significant success for community colleges” (p. 2). Although there has been a plethora of research for the past decades on student retention, attrition, and success, much of the research has pertained to 4-year institutions. Very little research has been conducted on community colleges; therefore, it is necessary for community colleges to determine a common definition for retention and persistence (Wilder & Ebbers, 2002).

Defining student retention is a challenge for community colleges (Wilder & Ebbers, 2002). Definitions of retention have been normally based on traditional-aged students attending universities (Wilder & Ebbers, 2002). Although there is an abundance of research on retention (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012; Seidman, 2005; Roos, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993), much of the research applied to 4-year universities and does not necessarily apply to community colleges. For the purpose of this study retention will be defined as the continual enrollment of a student from fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall.

Due to the increased demand on accountability in higher education, retention of students has become a major focus for administrators. Consequently, many community colleges implemented strategies to improve the retention of students. In 2010 ACT conducted a study,

What Works in Student Retention where Academic Officers were asked what they thought to be contributing factors to attrition. The factors with the highest mean revealed academic preparation, job and family responsibilities, finances, and personal motivation as significant reasons why students leave community colleges. In addition, 59.5% of respondents indicated there was someone on campus who was responsible for the coordination of retention efforts versus 40.5% indicated there was not a person to coordinate such efforts. Furthermore, the survey indicated highly and moderately rated practices on college campuses which impacted retention were tutoring, advising interventions, academic advising, and first year seminar course (ACT, 2010).

Tinto (1993) indicated in his research students struggle in their first year transitioning from high school to college. Consequently, many students do not return after their first year. In order to address attrition, many institutions have implemented programs to help students transition from high school to the college environment that welcomed and supported them to the campus (Gardner, 1986).

In the state of Tennessee the number of graduates has decreased by 2.2% since 2009 (ACT, 2013). Compared to the national test scores, Tennessee students fall short. Thirty-nine percent of students who were ACT-tested did not meet any of the benchmarks, and only 18% met all four benchmarks, meaning a high percentage of Tennessee students entering college are academically unprepared. Various studies implicated the lack of success by students who enroll in college needing one or more developmental courses.

The first year of college for many students is the most critical time for student departure (Tinto, 1993). In order to help students succeed in college academic support services such as First-Year Seminars, academic advising, orientations, and early alert warning systems are

important in providing the support students need to successfully transition into college. Although there is a tremendous amount of research regarding student retention in 4-year institutions, very little research has focused on student retention at the community college level. Therefore, this study was focused on student retention at the community college level.

Background of Problem

Over the past several decades, community colleges have had nominal success in the retention of students. The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) 2012 report characterized the average community college student as one who “attends classes and study while working, care for dependents, and juggle personal, academic and financial challenges” (p. 6). Forty-one percent of the students attend full time, while 59% attend part time. Only 45% of the approximate 79% of students who enroll in community colleges desiring to obtain an associate’s degree complete this goal within 6 years (CCCSE, 2012). According to the 2010 Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) cohort data 66% of students who entered college were academically unprepared and needed at least one learning support course. Of the students who took placement exams upon entrance to college, 72% were placed into at least one learning support course (CCCSE, 2012)

Although retention rates for community college students appear dismal, First-Year Seminars, first year transition programs, and advising have been cited as having a positive impact on retention rates (Act, 2010). With the low graduation rates at community colleges (CCCSE, 2012), a further look at these strategies and the impact on retention are warranted at the community college level.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this comparative study was to determine the impact of a first-year experience program as well as student entry demographics to student success at community college in Tennessee. In the fall of 2013 the enrollment for the college was 3,790 with an average ACT score of 18.9 and an average GPA of 2.823 (Fact book, 2014-15). First-Year Experience programs at the community college consisted of First-Year Seminar (FYS), New Student Online Orientation (NSOO), New Student Advisement and Registration (NSAR), and mandatory academic advisement. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined only the First-Year Seminar course. The First-Year Seminar course was designed to provide students with strategies to further develop academic as well as life management skills. The course incorporated techniques to assist students in a successful beginning at the institution. Major topics focused on goal setting, institutional resources and activities, time management, basic study strategies including note-taking and test-taking, developing relationships, stress management, and career exploration. The populations that were studied were students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

Research Questions

In order to determine if there are relationships between retention and graduation rates after participation or nonparticipation in a First-Year Seminar course at a community college, nine research questions were examined.

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of those

students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in three-year graduation rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the three-year graduation rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between males and females?

RQ5: Is there a significant difference fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between males and females?

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of those students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between traditional aged (24 and under) and nontraditional aged (25 and older) students?

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between traditional aged (24 and under) and nontraditional aged (25 and older) students?

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on financial aid status, students

who receive Pell grants, and students who do not receive Pell grants?

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on financial aid status, students who receive Pell grants, and students who do not receive Pell grants?

Significance of the Study

Research has indicated that students who feel connected to peers, faculty, and the campus community are more likely to persist and graduate (Astin, 1993). Although there are several studies on student retention and effective student retention strategies, the majority have focused on 4-year institutions (Austin, 1975, 1984, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Passarella & Terenzini, 2005; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). With the Complete College Act of 2010, Tennessee's new performance funding formula which linked funding to student retention and persistence, and Governor Haslam's Drive to 55 initiative, it is necessary for community college administrators in Tennessee to address and implement strategies that will improve retention and graduation rates. Analyzing various first-year programs implemented by the community college to improve retention and graduation rates, will determine the effectiveness of the First-Year Seminar course and will provide the institution with the data needed to make changes in its strategies. This study will provide an in-depth look at First-Year Seminar course at Cleveland State Community College and the impact on student success as it pertains to first time full time students.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definition of terms are provided for understanding.

1. *At-Risk Students*: “students or groups of students who are considered to have a high probability of failing academically or dropping out of school” (At Risk, 2013, para 1)
2. *Best Practices*: Generally accepted, informally standardized techniques, methods, or processes that have proven themselves over time to accomplish given tasks.
3. *Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)*: Tool that helps institutions focus on good educational practices which are highly correlated with student learning and retention (Cleveland State Community College QEP).
4. *Early Alert Program*: A program designed to facilitate communication between students and instructors, identifying and supporting students at risk of attrition in order to improve student success. The program alerts students and their advisors to any academic issues (Holmes, Troy, & Ramos, 2014).
5. *First-Year Experience Programs*: Programs designed to promote academic and social integration to increase student retention (CCCSE, 2012).
6. *First-Year Seminar (FYS)*: A course designed to help first time freshmen students’ transition from high school to college. Course topics include study skills, time management, career exploration, campus resources, academic advising and planning.
7. *New Student Advisement and Registration (NSAR)*: Session on campus where student receive assistance from an advisor and register for the first semester of classes.

8. *New Student Online Orientation (NSOO)*: An online presentation consisting of five online modules providing information on programs of study, academic information, policies and procedures, and student activities.
9. *Retention*: Continuous enrollment in consecutive semesters, fall-to-spring, fall-to-fall.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

The participants in this study are delimited to students who are first-time, full-time freshman in a small community college in Tennessee. Only students who require one or more learning support courses are required to participate in the First-Year Seminar course. A small southeastern community college was the only institution used in the study. Therefore, the findings are applicable to this community college and cannot be generalized to other community colleges.

The primary limitation of this study is that not all students are required to take all four components of what the college considers First Year Experience programs. Only students with two or more learning support requirements are mandated to take the First-Year Seminar course. Another limitation is that the sample size is small. The average incoming freshman class is fewer than 1,000 students; therefore, the generalizations may not be applicable to larger 2-year or 4-year institutions.

Overview of Study

This study seeks to fill a gap in the research on retention efforts of community colleges. One of the five first-year experience program initiatives was evaluated in order to determine the relationship between participation in the First-Year Seminar course and retention and graduation rates. The first chapter introduced the study, statement of the problem, and significance of the

research. Chapter 2 provides a current review of the literature regarding student retention, theoretical frameworks as they apply to student retention and departure, and research related to the First-Year Seminar course. The methodology, data collection, and analysis of the data are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 offers discussion of the results and offers a conclusion for the research, as well as implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student retention and persistence have been topics of discussion at many institutions of higher education for decades. The purpose of this chapter is to review the relevant literature pertaining to the impact of a First-Year Seminar course on student retention and graduation rates. The present study examined first-time full-time students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. Success measures are determined by retention and graduation rates of first-time full-time students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course compared to those first-time full-time students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course at a small rural community college.

Increased educational attainment goals have placed more pressure from federal and state governments on community colleges to improve student success, as indicated by increased retention and graduation rates (Baily & Alfonso, 2005; Baldwin, Bensimon, Dowd, & Kleiman, 2011). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) agreed: “As the pressures have grown on public and private institutions to increase retention and degree completion, so has the research examining the effectiveness of programmatic interventions designed to promote both outcomes” (p. 398). Student retention has been a topic on the forefront of many universities and colleges for decades, and a significant number of students who enter college today fail to graduate on time. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Kena, & Roth, 2012), 11 million students attended college full time in 2010, while 7 million attended part time. Those attending a 4-year institution made up 44% of the total, with 26% attending 2-year institutions. Of the 7 million who attended college part time, 64% attended 2-year institutions (Aud et al., 2012). Between 2000 and 2010, students enrolled in postsecondary education increased by 37%

(Aud et al., 2012). Research indicated that almost one half of students who attend community college depart before reaching their goals (Schuetz, 2008).

In 2006 the U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings challenged universities and community colleges to become more accountable in the *Report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education*. The commission found that “despite the many successes of our systems...significant shortcomings remain (p. 6). Spellings emphasized the need to increase access and success for “every student in the nation” (*A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education*, 2006 p. 16). The report examined four issues in American higher education: access, affordability, quality, and accountability. Although America has some of the world’s best universities, other countries are now educating more of their citizens to higher educational levels than the U.S. (p. vii).

In 2004 the Lumina Foundation launched its national initiative, Achieving the Dream (ATD). The program was “built on the belief that broad institutional change, informed by student achievement data, is critical to significantly improving student success rates” (*Achieving the Dream*, 2011, para 1). The expectations of the initiative were that institutions would improve student success by assessing (1) successful course completion–progression, (2) continuous enrollment, (3) persistence to the next semester, and (4) graduation rates. The overall goal of the initiative was to help participating institutions “move the needle” on student success; however, minimal change has occurred. Although many community colleges have initiated strategies to improve retention, students’ outcomes have shown little improvement (Gonzalez, 2011).

In 2011 the MDRC, a nonprofit education and social policy research organization, released a comprehensive evaluation of the Achieving the Dream initiative that revealed overall trends in student outcomes remained relatively unchanged. The report covered a 5-year period,

beginning in 2004-5 academic year and evaluated the first 26 institutions that joined the initiative. Key findings indicated four out of the five Round 1 colleges made enhancements to their institutions. Characteristics of institutions that made the greatest strides had broad participation of college administrators, faculty, and staff, regular evaluations on programs, strong institutional research reports on student achievement, and scale-up of successful programs (Rutschow, et al., 2011).

In spite of the increased emphasis on access and success, ACT (2010) trend data indicated little change in student retention and completion. Data gathered by ACT in 2010 indicated a retention rate from first year to second year of 67% at public 4-year institutions and 55% at 2-year institutions. More importantly, only 39% at 4-year institutions and 28% at 2-year institutions reach the goal of degree attainment (ACT, 2010).

In order to be competitive in today's global economy, obtaining a college degree has become vital. In 2009 President Obama expressed "America cannot lead in the 21st century unless we have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world" (*Remarks by the President on Higher Education, 2009, p. 1*). "Globalization is driving the need for a better educated population and to meet the demands of the ever changing global economy," President Obama (2009) announced the American Graduation Initiative. The intent of this initiative was to strengthen community colleges and called for five million college graduates by the year 2020 in order to increase our competitiveness in a global economy (*Excerpts of the President's remarks in Warren Michigan, 2009*). Consequently in 2009 Complete College of America was created to work with states to increase the number of citizens with certificates and degrees. Although college enrollment has more than doubled between 1970 and 2009, the completion rate has remained stagnant (www.completecollege.org). According to the 2013 *Digest of Education*

Statistics, only 58% of students who enter a 4-year institution graduated within 6 years, and approximately 30% of students who enroll in a 2-year institution graduate within 3 years. Data gathered by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) indicated with the changing workforce, “employers rely on the very students who currently are least likely to complete their education” (American Association, 2015).

Working with Complete College America, in 2010, the state of Tennessee introduced their completion master agenda and passed the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA). The act is intended to provide:

A comprehensive reform agenda that seeks to transform public higher education through changes in academic, fiscal, and administrative policies at the state and institutional level. At the center of these reforms is the need for more Tennesseans to be better educated and trained, while also acknowledging the state’s diminished fiscal capacity to support higher education.

(Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Complete College TN Act of 2010, 2014).

According to the Center for American Progress (2012), “Tennessee has implemented the most aggressive performance-based funding model compared to other states” (p. 5). The new funding formula allocates state appropriations on the basis of outcomes including “student remediation, job placements, student transfer, and associates degrees at the community colleges” (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Complete College TN Act of 2010, 2014). In addition, the new formula allows institutions the opportunity to gain additional funds based on performance incentives for student success. With the implementation of the Complete College TN Act of 2010, the new performance funding formula linked performance measures such as student retention and degree completion to appropriations, which shifted higher education funding from enrollment-based to an output-based performance system. This call for increased accountability as indicated by the *Report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education*

has many institutions of higher education seeking better ways to retain students and increase graduation rates. With legislative demands on accountability, the days of the mentality of “the right to fail” must shift to “the right to succeed” (Bushnell, 1991 p. 2).

Trying to understand why students leave college and how to retain them and help them persist through to graduation has been a concern for many administrators for several decades. Research on retention began in 1926 (Braxton, 2000) with an abundance of research occurring in the 1970s and continuing through the present (Astin, 1975; Bean, 1980, 1982; Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Kronenberger, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2005, 2012). However, much of the research regarding retention and persistence pertain to 4-year baccalaureate institutions, and not specifically to 2-year community colleges (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). “The issue of retention is a persistent problem in higher education” (Swail, 2004, p. 3) and one of the most widely studied areas (Tinto, 2006, 2007).

Although extensive research has been conducted on student retention, student persistence from first year to the second year is the same or declining. According to American College Testing (ACT), student persistence from their first year to the second year was 55.7% in 2010, and in 2015 was at 54.7%. The research on student persistence reveals that the largest group leaving college will leave their first year (Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

According to American College Testing, (2000), between 1983 through 1999, dropout rates at the community college were a dismal 47.7%. For 2-year community college students, the average time to degree completion is 3 years instead of 2 years; the average time for degree completion by a student attending a 4-year university is 5 to 6 years (Complete College, 2009) . “Less than one-quarter of the 45% of students who start college and fail to graduate are

dismissed for academic reasons” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006 p. 2); therefore, many students leave for other reasons.

Relevant research on student retention at the community college level is needed in order to help institutions develop strategies to retain their students. Several researchers have documented that student retention and graduation rates are linked to the first year of college (Barefoot, 2000; Driscoll, 2007; Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999; Tinto 1975, 1993; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Consequently, many institutions have developed various first-year programs to assist students in making the transition from high school to college. These programs are designed to support, celebrate, welcome, and eventually integrate students into the college campus (Gardner, 1986).

Historical Overview of Retention Research

Student retention has been a major topic of concern for higher education institutions since the establishment of formal education (Habley et al., 2012; Tinto 1993). A brief overview of the history of retention research is necessary in order to understand where various theoretical models originated.

The 1600s-1800s

For many centuries, students were not interested in obtaining a degree and enrollment was small in early America between 1600s-1800s, and obtaining a degree was not deemed as that important (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyon, 2012). Most institutions at this time struggled just to have enrollment. During this period, early postsecondary institutions catered to specific populations and the need for persistence was not considered an issue. Students who attended college were attending but not necessarily interested in graduating. In 1862 the landscape of higher education changed with the signing of the Morrill Land Grant Act. The signing of the Morrill Land Grant

Act became one of the most defining moments for higher education and required every state to have a postsecondary institution that offered programs in agriculture and engineering (Berger et al., 2012).

The 1900s-1960s

During the early 1900s the industrialization of our nation and the increased complexity of the economy increased the demand for a college education in order to have a well-trained workforce (Geiger, 1999). With an increased focus on the importance of a college education, large numbers of private and public junior colleges emerged with less selective admission requirements in order to provide more access to an education (Berger et al., 2012).

Attrition and completion of a college degree led to the first documented study related to student retention by John McNeely in 1938 on behalf of the Department of the Interior and the Office of Education. His research focused on the failure of students to persist to graduation. The study entitled “College Student Mortality” examined time to completion, demographic characteristics such as gender, age at time of entrance, and reasons for departure (Berger et al., 2012). McNeely (1938) found that “one of the major reasons students left institutions of higher education was not because of voluntary exit, but rather from low academic performance” (p. 45). He also found financial difficulties to be a major factor that lead to student departure. McNeely’s work was the precursor to more comprehensive studies decades later.

In response to events such as the Great Depression and World War II, the government set policy that bolstered the rapid expansion of colleges and universities (Geiger, 1999). In 1935 the government created The National Youth Administration to assist in funding higher educational opportunities to thousands of students to counter the effects of the Great Depression (Seidman, 2005). After World War II, many of the industrial companies that were producing products for

the military retooled and began producing basic consumer goods. With this transition in the workplace, new skills were needed. In 1944 the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the Government Issue (GI) Bill, was passed and had a major impact on enrollment in institutions of higher education. The GI Bill provided veterans with the opportunity for higher education that otherwise would not have been possible (Mellow, 2000). These individuals accounted for 49% of college admissions with more than one million veterans enrolling in institutions of higher education (Berger et al., 2012). In 1957 the Soviet Union launched the first earth orbiting satellite, Sputnik that ignited a concern about the American educational system (www.senate.gov, n.d.). In the wake of the Russian launch of Sputnik and pressure from the public, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act of 1958 that provided substantial funds for low-cost student loans, increasing college enrollment. The Higher Education Act in 1965 was passed by Congress setting the groundwork for financial support by the federal government that encouraged and provided funding for additional access to higher education. Additional federal support was implemented with The Higher Education Act 1958 that created grants, loans, and other programs to help students obtain access to postsecondary education. With the passage of these Acts, postsecondary education became available to the masses. It was also during this time that community colleges gained in importance in the higher education arena (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005). With the industrialization of America, the need for skills training versus the traditional liberal arts education became apparent. The rapid growth of student enrollment and a need for trained workers became the impetus to establish 2-year colleges (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). The Civil Rights Movement created educational opportunities for African Americans and other racial and ethnic minority groups (Berger et al., 2012). The 1960s became the boom years for community colleges. With this

rapid growth in student enrollment and access, many of these students came to college campuses academically unprepared and, therefore, created retention challenges that many institutions were not prepared to handle.

The 1970s-1980s

In the 1970s the view of retention began to change (Tinto, 2007). Many studies conducted before the 1970s attempted to study the attrition phenomenon (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Marks 1967; Panos & Astin; 1968; Summerskill, 1962). Concerns with student satisfaction and dropouts that spurred several studies in the 1970s continue to present day (Astin, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Habley et al., 2012; Pascarella, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Reason; 2009; Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2005). One of the earliest models on student retention was completed by W. G. Spady in 1970. Spady's (1970) model of student dropout was grounded in part on the work of Durkheim's suicide model. Durkheim found that suicidal tendencies increased in people who were not integrated socially (Summers, 2003). Spady's initial model proposed five independent variables: "grade performance, intellectual development, normative congruence, friendship support, and social integration "(p. 67). His sociological model began to make the connection to social integration that linked potential dropout to the student and the institution's environment. Vincent Tinto (1975) built upon Spady's research and developed one of the most recognized models referenced in student retention. Drawing on research from Spady's work which was based upon Durkheim's suicide theory, Tinto (1975) used this as a reference point for his research on student departure. In essence, if an individual is unable to become integrated into society, the more likely he/she will commit suicide. This theory resonated with Tinto. In other words, the less integrated a student is

with the college community academically and socially, the more likely he/she will leave the institution.

Another recognized researcher in the field of retention during this period was Alexander Astin (1977, 1984), who developed a theory based on student involvement. This theory suggested students who are involved devote “considerable energy to studying, spend time on campus, participate actively in student organizations and activities, and interact with faculty” (p. 518). On the other hand, students who are uninvolved “neglect their studies, spend little time on campus, abstain from extracurricular activities, and rarely initiate contact with faculty or other students” (p. 518).

Earnest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini conducted several empirical studies and developed core constructs from Tinto’s model. This work provided the foundation that led to the expansion of a more systematic study of student retention. By the end of the 1970s student enrollment in higher education became stagnant. With concerns over continued enrollment, institutions began to realize a more concentrated effort was needed in order to retain students.

The 1980s-1990s

Toward the end of the 1970s institutions of higher education began to see a decline in the enrollment of students (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Leaders of colleges and universities began to explore strategies to better recruit and retain students that led to the emergence of the term Enrollment Management (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Enrollment management encouraged the collaboration between academic and student affairs divisions.

As retention continued to be a major focus for many institutions, new retention theories grew. One new theory was developed by Bean (1980) who derived his theory from studies of turnover in the workplace. According to Bean, student attrition is comparable to employees

leaving companies in that they both leave for similar reasons. Bean suggested that student persistence was affected by student perceptions of organizational variables such as student grade point average (GPA), institutional quality, and practical value that influenced student satisfaction.

Vincent Tinto, who began his research on student retention in the 1970s, continued his work in the field. His research was grounded in academic and social integration suggesting that a student's decision to stay or leave college is affected by his/her connection with the institution socially and academically. Tinto (1993) discussed his research in three areas that students move through: separation, transition, and incorporation. The basic premise is that a new college student will separate from family and friends and transition into the new norms and behaviors of the institution. This is often a difficult stage for individuals because they develop a sense of disconnectedness because they are no longer connected to previous norms and behaviors, nor are they connected to the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Much of the research over the past 30 years has shown that student involvement does matter specifically in the first year of college (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto 1975 1993, 2000, 2012; Wyckoff, 1998). As Tinto (1993) mentioned, "Though the intentions and commitments with which individuals enter college matter, what goes on after entry matters more" (p. 136). Tinto's model of Institutional Departure (1975, 1993), although studied and critiqued by many (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Braxton & Lien, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980, 1983, 1991, 1995), has gained credibility and validity.

Another recognized researcher in the field is Alexander Astin (1977, 1984) who developed a theory based on student involvement. His theory of student involvement consisted of three core concepts, inputs, environment, and outcomes (Astin, 1985). In this model student's

inputs refer to a student's demographics and background. Environment refers to the experiences the student is exposed to, and lastly outcomes are the student's characteristics, knowledge, attitude and values that exist after the student has graduated college. According to Astin (1993) students who feel a connection to other students and the campus community have a greater likelihood to persist and graduate.

2000-Present

Retention is still a topic of discussion for many institutions with discussions changing from "access to issues of choice, affordability, and persistence (Swail, 2004 p.3). The growing diversity of students and the retention of underrepresented populations gained attention during the first decade of the 21st century (Seidman, 2005). Retention research focused on a more comprehensive approach, indicating that institutions share in the responsibility to create the successful integration of students into college (Jensen, 2011). Habley (2004) found that relationships between faculty, staff, administrators, and advisors directly influence undergraduate retention.

Another major community college initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is Completion by Design. Completion by Design provides a "framework for colleges to identify student barriers to progression, design comprehensive solutions to overcome them, and drive institutional transformation to sustain new ways of doing business" (Achieving the Dream, 2018). One of the many initiatives of Completion by design is based on the concept of systematic change. In order to change the experience of the students, the roles of advisors, faculty, and other members of the campus community that come into contact with a student will involve changing attitudes and beliefs.

Another current trend in higher education is the development of guided pathways for students. Jenkins and Cho (2012) found that if students enter a program of study their first year of college, they are more likely to complete or transfer successfully than those who wait to declare a major their second year. With guided pathways students are given a clear roadmap of program requirements thereby simplifying student choices keeping them on a clear pathway to completion.

Additional research based on college student withdrawal consistently has shown the importance of academic and social integration as a contributor to student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986; Tinto, 1988). Student attrition can be costly for both the student and the institution; therefore, addressing the issue of student retention is critical to the existence of community colleges. The increased demand on accountability has implications for the future of retention practices at many institutions. According to Complete College America, dropouts cost taxpayers almost \$4 billion at 2-year institutions in federal grants and state appropriations and student grants.

Characteristics of Community College Students

Community Colleges are designed to provide open access to all who desire to obtain an education. They provide certificates and degrees to those who might otherwise not be able to attend an institution of higher education. The American Association of Community Colleges described the mission of a community college as having the following basic commitments: 1) serving all segments of society through an open-access admissions policy that offers equal and fair treatment to all students; 2) serving as their community-based institution of higher education; 3) teaching; and 4) life-long learning (www.aacc.nche.edu).

Community college students make up close to 50% of all undergraduate students in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). With their open access policies, community colleges serve a diverse population and face many unique challenges. Most students tend to be from low income, first generation, and academically unprepared (AACC, 2015). The Center for Community College Student Engagement 2012 report characterized the average community college student as one who attends class while working, or is caring for a dependent. Because of their low tuition costs and open access, community colleges enroll more students who are academically, socially, and economically disadvantaged (Karp, O’Gara, & Hughes, 2008).

According to the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE, 2010) 66% of students who entered college were academically unprepared and needed at least one developmental course. Of the students who took placement exams upon entrance to college, 72% were placed into at least one developmental course (CCCSE, 2011).

ACT (2013) College Readiness report stated that nationally, 31% of all ACT-tested high school graduates did not meet the college readiness benchmarks, 43% met between one and three benchmarks in math, English, science, and reading. Twenty-six percent met all four benchmarks indicating one out of four students is academically prepared when they enter college. In the state of Tennessee the number of graduates has decreased by 2.2% since 2009 (ACT, 2013). Compared to the national test scores, Tennessee students fall short. Thirty-nine percent of students who were ACT-tested did not meet any of the benchmarks, and only 18% met all four benchmarks, meaning a high percentage of students entering college are academically unprepared. The 2012 report implicated the lack of success by students who enroll in college needing one or more developmental, remedial courses. These characteristics position students at

risk of not succeeding academically and dropping out before reaching their goal of obtaining a degree (Tovar & Simon, 2006). Consequently, these students require additional assistance from community colleges in order to be successful.

Students dropping out and stopping out has a significant financial impact not only on the student but the institution as well (Astin, 1975; CCCSE, 2010; Summers, 2003; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). For students the lack of postsecondary training or a college degree often means fewer job opportunities and lower earning potential in the workplace (OCED, 2012). According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE, 2010), “The higher a person’s educational attainment, the more likely he or she is to be gainfully employed, pay taxes, volunteer...” (p. 3). In other words, student success has an impact on the viability of the economy. For the institution the loss of tuition dollars and less funding from the state and federal level leaves the institution to not only raise tuition, but to also discontinue programs and possibly slash faculty and staff numbers (Heckart, 2006).

Various reports reflect that the United States continues to lag behind other countries when it comes to degree attainment (OCED, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016; Educational Workforce Policy, LLP). According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2012) the impact of economic conditions on the likelihood that an individual will be employed and have a higher income varies significantly by both educational attainment and gender (p. 15). Even though the United States has one of the highest levels of college participation, many other nations outperform the United States in degree completion. The education of the future workforce is crucial in order for us to be globally competitive (Education Workforce Policy, LLP).

According to Wild and Ebbers (2002) one of the many challenges community colleges face is defining student retention. In most universities, student retention is defined as on-time graduation, meaning students will complete their programs in the 4-year period. However, students who enroll in a community college may not necessarily enroll to obtain an associate's degree. Students may enroll to obtain new skills required for today's workplace, seek retraining for a new career due to layoffs in the workplace, or to simply take a few courses and then transfer to 4-year institutions. Definitions vary from college to college, for example, some will define retention as a persistent rate. Crawford (1999) defined persistence as "maintenance of continued enrollment for two or more semesters, specifically from fall term to spring term and or completion of a degree/certificate or transfer to a 4-year college" (p. 16). Although there is a tremendous amount of research regarding student retention in 4-year institutions, very little research has focused on student retention at the community college level. With increased enrollment in 2-year colleges, the lack of persistence and degree completion pose a challenging problem. McIntosh and Rouse (2009) found degree completion for 2-year colleges is complex largely in part to the differences in students who attend a 2-year institution versus a 4-year institution. According to the research, the typical 2-year student is twice as likely to attend on a part time basis, is working, more likely comes from families of lower socioeconomic status and is less academically prepared than the 4-year college student (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009).

A survey conducted by ACT in 2010 indicated that Chief Academic Officers at community colleges believed issues such as academic preparation, family and job responsibilities, finances, or personal motivation are among the most significant reasons students leave college. Equally important in the 2010 survey were programs that seem to have the highest contribution to retention efforts that include academic support/guidance and targeted

interventions for specific student populations and easing the transition of students to the college environment. Respondents in the study were also asked to define retention practices on their campuses and to indicate the degree of impact it made on retention practices. Retention practices responsible for the highest contribution to retention fall into first-year programs, academic advising, and learning support (Habley, 2004). Research also indicated that “students involved in some type of organized first-year intervention report higher levels of satisfaction and involvement in campus activities, achieve higher grades and are more likely to be retained and graduate” (Jamelske, 2009, pp. 373-391).

Support Programs for First-Year Students

Many factors are to be considered when examining attrition rates. Peer, environment, family, high school staff, and college staff all play an important role in a student’s first-year success (Smith & Zang, 2009, pp. 643-657). A synthesis of over 30 years of student outcomes research found implications for policies and practices at the institutional level point to the critical connections between the first-year of college and its influence on student outcomes (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). Tinto (2004) stated that in order for an institution to be effective in retaining and graduating students there are four guiding principles:

1. Provide support in the areas of tutoring, academic advisement, social groups, freshman seminar, and personal.
2. Provide the student with clear guidelines in what it takes to be successful. Connect learning to everyday life.
3. Assess activities and provide feedback such as entry assessment, early alert systems, and student engagement.
4. Involve students with faculty, peers, and staff.

In understanding the importance of student retention and persistence to graduation, many community colleges are developing programs and strategies to address the issue. Addressing students’ issues during their first year of college has the most influential impact on student

grades and retention. Overall research indicated there are several first-year programs and interventions in almost all colleges and universities. Most prevalent research on first year initiatives focused on retention efforts such as First-Year Seminars, supplemental instruction, service learning, orientation programs, and early alert systems, advising, and learning communities. These programs help strengthen student engagement and success.

Research has indicated many students who enter college today are considered at risk. Ender and Wilkie (2000) found that students who are considered at risk display characteristics such as “low academic self-concept, unrealistic grade and career expectations, unfocused career objectives, extrinsic motivation, external locus of control, low self-efficacy, inadequate study skills for college success, a belief that learning is memorizing, and a history of passive learning” (pp. 13-135). In addition to these characteristics, diverse sub-populations that are considered at risk also exist.

- They are academically underprepared as a result of prior educational experiences (e.g., academic failure, poor preparation, low expectations);
- Manifest a group of individual risk factors such as neurological, cognitive, health, or psychological factors that can contribute to academic failure (e.g., traumatic brain injury, learning disabilities, chronic illness, psychological problems, or student attitude toward learning);
- Experience familial risk factors including disturbed family functioning, dependent care issues, familial values concerning education, and lack of financial resources;
- Possess social risk factors i.e., conflicting ethnic or cultural values or stressful peer and social interactions. (Miller & Murray, 2005)

Students who are considered at risk may be students who did poorly in academics and are academically unprepared, are returning to school after an extended period of time, or are members of underrepresented minority group. This particular type of student needs specific advising that meets his or her needs and deals with the various characteristics they bring to the institution.

Typically students who attend community colleges enter with the need for one or more developmental courses and are considered at risk because of being academically underprepared. By the same token, as research has indicated, advising these students requires a more developed approach. Students who are considered at risk need more personal one on one attention. Walsh (2003) described a variety of programs that have been developed to address the needs of these students. Some of the programs mentioned were orientation programs, early alert where students who are in academic difficulty will be contacted, First-Year Seminars that familiarize students with the culture of the institution and provide valuable resources, intrusive advisement, and learning communities.

The community college in this study developed First Year Experience programs to help students succeed. The programs were mandatory academic advisement, First-Year Seminar course, Early Alert, New Student Online Orientation, and New Student Registration and Advisement.

Academic Advisement

Research on student retention suggests that academic advisement is crucial to the retention of students and their success. According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), contact with a significant person within the college is critical in students' decision to remain in college. Wildman (2009) stated "often the academic advisor is the only link the student has with the institution, therefore, having a profound effect on the student's academic career and the student's level of satisfaction with his college choice." Roos (2012) examined the relationship between first year student retention and the use of noncognitive risk factors information by both student and advisor in targeting self-defeating attitudes and behaviors. In his study, Roos (2012) found that there was a significant correlation between student retention and the use of this information.

As other studies have shown, the more the advisor knows about a student academically as well as certain risk factors, the more positive the impact will be on students staying enrolled. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found “increased interactions between faculty and students may serve to strengthen the personal bonds between the student and the institution, thereby increasing the likelihood of social integrations and persistence” (p. 394).

Academic advisement is important to the success of students as they enter college. Cuseo (2006) stated, “Academic advising is one of the major academic and social domains of the college experience that affect student decisions about staying or leaving” (p. 3). Many studies have noted the importance of academic advising in that it helps students make that transition from high school to college and feel connected to the institution as they reach their academic goals. The relationship built between academic advisors and students is a significant part of the teaching and learning environment of the college. The National Academic Advising Association [NACADA] (2006) Preamble states “through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community.”

Tinto (1993) discovered in his research that academic and social integration is instrumental to a student’s success. Astin (1977, 1993) revealed student persistence and retention are impacted by the quality of relationships with peers, faculty, and staff members of the institution. The role of the academic advisor should be one that not only provides academic recommendations but also follows the student through his/her academic journey providing direction to resources that will enhance success. Campbell and Nutt (2008) observed, “When viewed as an educational process and done well, academic advising plays a critical role in

connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their engagement, success, and the attainment of key learning outcomes” (p. 4). Literature on retention suggested that academic advising is one of the most effective strategies when it comes to improving student success. Joe Cuseo (n.d.) wrote in his manuscript *Academic Advisement and Student Retention: Empirical Connections & Systemic Interventions* “there is a connection between retention and advising and student satisfaction. Although students may be dissatisfied with the level of advisement they received during their college experience, students communicated they place a high value on advisor contact” (Cuseo, n.d. p. 5).

Advisors should develop relationships with their students who go beyond the advising of what academic requirements are needed for their degree completion. Advisement should include information regarding the whole person such as hobbies, job, and family life. Often students enter college with no idea of what careers they want to pursue and need guidance in making career choices. As an advisor building these relationships is vital to student success but requires the commitment not only of the advisor, but also of the student. The student must be willing to engage and reach out to the faculty member and be responsible for his/her success in the college environment.

Various approaches exist in regards to academic advising. For the purpose of this study prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive advising will be discussed. Prescriptive advising is a model of advising that is basically authoritarian (Daller, 1997). The advisor “prescribes” what needs to be done in order to complete graduation requirements, and the student takes no responsibility for the decision-making process. This type of advising is very convenient, and the faculty member does not have to get too involved (Crookston, 1994). Faculty responsibilities can be overwhelming; coursework, committee assignments, participation in the institutions’

events, and research require individual's time and, therefore, adding advisement is difficult. In this model of advisement the faculty member has completed his or her responsibility and feels it is now up to the student to follow through on his/her advice at the end of student advisement. This type of advisement may be useful with first semester students in that they need someone to tell them what to do until they become accustomed to the institution. These students are often unaware of what they need to do and need the authoritative style this provides.

Another approach to advising is known as "developmental advising." This type of advising is more than simply providing the student with course requirements. King (2012) indicated "developmental academic advising is a process and an orientation" (p. 1). Developmental advising takes into consideration the whole person and recognizes the importance of working with students in the development of their decision making, intellectual, personal growth and life goals (King, 2012).

The final advisement approach to be discussed is known as "intrusive advisement." Intrusive advisement is a model of advising where advisors reach out to the students and encourage the students to seek help and the necessary resources that are needed to make them successful. Earl (1987) stated that intrusive advisement "is a direct response to identified academic crisis with a specific program of action" (p. 1). It is the role of the advisor in this model to let students know they are available to help them. According to Earl (1987), "the intrusive advisement model is action-oriented to involving and motivating students to seek help when needed" (p. 1). When using intrusive advisement an advisor personally reaches out to students, meets with them, helps them identify the issues and situations contributing their academic difficulty, and helps them set short and long term goals (Higgins, 2003).

According to Soria (2012) satisfaction with their advisors is predictive of student retention. The role of the academic advisor should be one that encourages the development of the student and not just for the purpose of graduating that student. Developmental advisors see the potential in the student's ability to grow and will use past test scores and records as an indication of what is currently known about the student, whereas the prescriptive advisor will make judgment of student's abilities based on test scores and previous records.

While students need specific and targeted advising, results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2013, indicated that over half, 60%, of students use academic advising services sometimes or often, whereas one-third, 34% rarely or never use academic advising services. Many "at risk" students especially first generation students have no understanding of how college works and are unaware of what questions to ask and, therefore, fail to seek help. Makela (2006) concluded that students who are underprepared or "at risk" reap the most benefit from early and continual advisement.

First-Year Seminar Course

Colleges and universities have used a variety of interventions to increase student retention. The First-Year Seminar has been widely used to provide students with the necessary skills to succeed and has been the most studied courses in higher education (Cuseo, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded after reviewing more than 2,500 studies on college programs and experiences and how they affect students, "the weight of the evidence suggests that a first-semester freshman seminar... is positively linked with both freshman year persistence and degree completion. This positive link persists even when academic aptitude and secondary school achievement are taken into account" (pp. 419-420).

First-Year Seminar courses offer colleges the opportunity to create communities of learners, focus on academic challenges, and establish support systems. Hunter and Linder (2005) defined a First-Year Seminar as

a course designed to assist students in their academic and social development and in their transition to college. A seminar, by definition, is a small discussion-based course in which students and their instructors exchange ideas and information. In most cases, there is a strong emphasis on creating community in the classroom (pp. 275-276).

According to Tinto (2012), “nothing is more important to student retention than academic support, especially during the critical first year of college, when student retention is still very responsive to institutional intervention” (p. 25). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that “First-Year Seminar participation has statistically significant and substantial positive effects on a student’s successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college” (p. 403). Additional research indicated that there is a positive relationship between participation in a student success course and increased student engagement and satisfaction (Tobolowsky, 2005). These courses can also be an important part of a plan to help students acclimate into the academic community by “acting as a catalyst for building important relationships with professors and peers” (O’Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009, p. 28). Furthermore, first-year seminar courses offer guidance in student life skills (Goldrick-Rab, 2010), advising, career planning, (Braxton & McClendon, 2002; Karp, 2011), time management, knowledge of campus resources, and study skills (Braxton & McClendon, 2002; Jamelske, 2009; O’Gara et al., 2009).

Many students feel threatened by the college experience, which in turn affects their belief that they can succeed. Building relationships has been shown to help students gain that sense of belonging and therefore, be more likely to stay in college. Karp (2011) maintained “that any intervention structured around a peer cohort or group pedagogy is likely to encourage the

development of social relationships. Student success courses, which explicitly aim to help students acclimate to college, gain access to information, and get to know faculty and peers, may do so” (p. 14) . There is a growing body of evidence associating these courses with strengthening connections with faculty, staff, and students (O’Gara et al., 2009; Tinto, 1993).

Students, especially those who are considered “at risk,” come to community college lacking in many success skills such as good study habits, time management, goal setting skills, knowledge of career requirements, and academic culture (Rath, Rock, & Laferriere, 2013). Cuseo (n.d.), in his study on the impact of the First-Year Seminar on student retention, persistence to graduation and academic achievement, explained that “national research suggests that holistic First-Year Seminars have the most significant impact on student outcomes” (p. 1). Swing (2002) conducted a multi-institutional study of different types of First-Year Seminars. He found that college transition seminars that focused on academic and nonacademic (holistic) topics, “performed best overall across the 10 learning outcomes investigated” (p. 1). Perhaps most importantly, college transition seminars with a holistic focus were especially more effective than discipline-based seminars housed in academic departments that focused exclusively on introducing first-year students to an academic discipline or major field of study (Cuseo, n.d.).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2005) reported that students who participated in First-Year Seminars were more challenged academically, more likely to engage in active and collaborative learning activities, interacted more frequently with faculty, perceived the campus environment as being more supportive, gained more from their first year of college, and were more satisfied with the college experience.

Other Studies on Impact of First-Year Seminars

Undergraduate student attrition continues to be a major concern for institutions across the United States (Barefoot, 2000). Influential theoretical models such as Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984) have driven colleges and universities to implement a variety of First-Year Experience programs. Most postsecondary institutions offer various types of First-Year Experience programs, using the First-Year Seminar course as a common tool to foster transition and learning for new students (Keup, Padgett, & Pascarella, 2013). These First-Year Seminar courses are designed to develop important skills that will ultimately promote academic success (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). The course will typically provide students with information about the college, where to find institutional resources such as tutoring, academic and career counseling, how to effectively study and skills to increase their awareness of how to succeed in college (O’Gara et al., 2009). Research literature indicated there is an association between the participation in these courses and positive student outcomes (O’Gara et al., 2009).

Several studies that addressed the impact of First-Year Seminar courses on retention and graduation rates have been completed over the years. The first published study comparing retention rates among students who participated in an orientation and those who did not was conducted by Smith (1963), and it was the first to introduce a research hypothesis to test the relationship between retention and the completion of an orientation course. Smith (1963) found that completion of an orientation course and retention were related. In 2005, Pascarella and Terenzini synthesized over 40 studies and found:

Studies consistently find that [First-Year Seminar] participation promotes persistence into the second year and over longer periods of time. More recent studies employ various multivariate statistical procedures to control for academic ability and achievement and other precollege characteristics. Whatever the procedure, the research points to the same conclusion, indicating positive and statistically significant net effects of [First-Year

Seminar] participation (versus nonparticipation) on persistence into the second year or attainment of a bachelor's degree (p. 402).

Jenkins-Guarnieri, Horne, Wallis, Rings, and Vaughan (2015) conducted a quantitative evaluation of a First-Year Seminar program at a public 4-year university to determine the potential role of the course in undergraduate student persistence and academic success. Participants consisted of 2,188 first-year students, of which 342 completed the First-Year Seminar program. The program was designed to develop cognitive variables associated with student outcomes such as motivation and commitment to the institution, as well as practical skills such as time management, critical reading, and study skills (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015). The study confirmed that First-Year Seminar participants were significantly more likely to remain enrolled, than were nonparticipants. The study also found that students who successfully completed the First-Year Seminar program showed significant increase in the odds of being in good academic standing (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015). According to the study the effect remained significant even after other variables such as first-generation student status, gender, race and prior academic performance were taken into account. Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., (2015) found results of the study were largely compatible with Tinto's (1975, 1993). The strong association between prior academic performance and persistence in the first year of college was reflected in their study, and is consistent with Tinto's position that experiences in high school would impact postsecondary student persistence.

Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh, and Tincher-Lader, (2014) used a post facto quasi-experimental study to determine what student characteristics increase community college student retention with an interest on the predictive nature of completing a student success course at a Southeast community college. In order to better understand student achievement, (Windham et al., 2014) used students who applied for admission without an American College Test (ACT®;

American College Test, 2006). The assumption made by the researchers was that students who enrolled with an ACT COMPASS® placement test and participated in the Improvement of Study (LLS 1413) course at the college would retain at higher rates than students who enrolled with an ACT COMPASS® placement test and did not participate in the study skills course. Results indicated that successful completion of the study skills course increased fall-to-fall retention over those who did not participate in the course. Additional predictor variables (ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status) were considered in the study, and while socioeconomic status and ethnicity were not significant, gender, age and ACT COMPASS Reading score significantly predict student retention (Windham et al., 2014).

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, in 2008 published research on First-Year Seminars that provided 22 case studies from various institutions that offered First-Year programs. Appalachian State University located in Boone, North Carolina offered a Freshman Seminar that is a three credit hour elective and enrolls approximately 60% of the first-year class. The 2005 fall cohort consisted of 2,522 incoming freshman of which 1,314 or 52% enrolled in the Freshman Seminar during the fall semester. The course is taught by full-time and part-time faculty, student services personnel, and administrative personnel. The institution wanted to determine if lower-ability students benefit from participation in a Freshman Seminar than their higher-ability counterparts.

Friedman and Marsh (2008) designed the study to analyze the impact of Freshman Seminar on academic achievement and one-semester retention rates based on students' expected ability levels. The expected ability level was based upon a predicted grade point average (PGPA) determined by using a formula that considered class rank, SAT scores, and high school grade point average. The researchers found that students who enrolled in the Freshman Seminar

had significantly lower PGPA's than students who did not enroll in the Freshman Seminar. Based on the lower mean PGPA, the researchers did not expect the students who participated in the Freshman Seminar to have a higher first semester GPA compared to their non-Freshman Seminar peers. However, they found that students who enrolled in the Freshman Seminar had significantly higher first semester GPAs than students who did not enroll in the Freshman Seminar. Freidman and Marsh (2008) also found students who participated in a Freshman Seminar were retained at higher levels fall-to-spring. Their data suggested that participation in a Freshman Seminar had the greatest impact on lower-ability students.

Kronenberger (2012) examined the effects of a first-year student success course at a Midwest Community College. The study consisted of first-time students who participated in a first-year student success course and were matched to students who did not participate in a First-Year student success course based on variables of age, gender, ethnicity, enrollment status, federal aid eligibility, and preenrollment academic ability, all of which are known to impact persistence and academic success.

The researcher attempted to capture the effects of the First-Year Seminar course on various types of students, including those who were considered underprepared of which 40% of the sample scored below the 75 cutoff score on the Accuplacer®, which placed them into remedial reading. Persistence was analyzed for three separate groups of students: all students in the sample, enrollment status (full-time or part-time), and academically underprepared. The results of the study did not reveal any statistical significance for persistence to the next term, but statistical significance was found 1 year after taking or not taking the course. There was also statistical significance in yearly persistence for underprepared students who took the First-Year course compared to underprepared students who did not participate in the First-Year course.

Once the data were disaggregated based on enrollment status and academic preparedness, there was statistical significance for part-time students, but not full-time students. Kronenberger (2012) also found that when it came to academic success, academically unprepared students who participated in the First-Year Seminar course, had higher GPAs than students who were academically unprepared, but did not participate in the First-Year Seminar course. Basically, Kronenberger (2012) research reflected that the participation in the First-Year Seminar course impacted long-term persistence for part-time and underprepared students.

Hall (2007) analyzed the effects of a Freshman Experience at a community college and its relationship to academic performance and retention. This study examined a student orientation program at a rural public community college. Two groups of first-time freshman students who participated in the orientation program and a comparison group of students who did not participate in the orientation program, were tracked from the start of their first semester to the start of their second semester to determine program effectiveness. The study found similar results in students who participated in the program and students who did not participate in the orientation program in academic performance, GPA, and attrition in that there was no significant difference in GPA or attrition rates; however, the study found a significant difference in retention. Those who participated in the orientation program were more likely to re-enroll in the following semester.

Although there is an abundance of research on First-Year Seminars and their effects on persistence and academic success at 4-year institutions (Cuseo, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006; Tobolowsky et al., 2005), studies analyzing the effects of these courses at community colleges are still limited.

Chapter Summary

A review of the literature suggested that student engagement plays an important role in the retention of students. First-year program initiatives such as academic advisement, early alert systems, First-Year Seminar courses, and new student orientation seem to contribute to increasing student success. First-Year Seminar courses vary from institution to institution, but all have the same goals “promoting academic performance, persistence, and degree attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005 p. 400). A review of First-Year experience courses indicated these courses have a significant impact on first semester GPA (Friedman & Marsh, 2008; Hall, 2007) and retention (Friedman & Marsh, 2008; Hall, 2007; Kronenberger, 2012; Windham et al., 2012). Most research focused on variables associated with students and their impact on outcomes such as age, gender, enrollment status, financial aid eligibility, and academic preparedness (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Although there is a lack of research in community college persistence, research studies completed in 4-year institutions do have implications for community colleges. Due to new performance funding formulas and budget constraints, community colleges must focus their attention on effective retention and persistence strategies.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research indicated students enrolling in community colleges as first-time, full-time students historically face greater challenges when it comes to success than students who enter 4-year universities (Kuh et al., 2006). Because of community colleges' open enrollment policies, students served enter college academically unprepared (NCES, 2011). Many institutions have developed first-year programs that incorporate First-Year Seminar courses, orientation, early alert, and mandatory academic advisement to encourage student success.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the impact of a First-Year Seminar course at a comprehensive 2-year community college to student retention and graduation rates. According to Creswell (2003), a quantitative approach is best, when trying to identify the factors that influence an outcome or understanding the best predictors of outcomes. The study compared participation in a First-Year Seminar course to student success measures of academic performance, persistence, and graduation. Student characteristics were also examined to identify any correlation between student attributes to student success measures. Attributes included age, gender, and financial aid status. The independent variable was participation in a First-Year Seminar course. The dependent variable, student success, was generally defined as academic performance, persistence, and graduation. In this chapter the sample, collection methods, and data analysis are described.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

The relationship of a First-Year Seminar course on fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention rates and student success was analyzed in this quantitative study. “The comparative approach is seen as one of the most fruitful in higher education studies, because it allows researchers to broaden their observation base and to achieve a more extensive and reliable understanding of the phenomena observed” (Reale, 2014, p. 409). The present study was focused on the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of those students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in the First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of those students who do not participate in First-Year Seminar course.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in 3-year graduation rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the 3-year graduation rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

Ho3: There is no significant difference in 3-year graduation rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the 3-year graduation rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males and females?

Ho4₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of those students who participate in First-Year Seminar course and those who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males.

Ho4₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for females.

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males and females?

Ho5₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males.

Ho5₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for females.

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between traditional aged (24 and under) and nontraditional aged (25 and older) students?

Ho6₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between traditional aged (24 and under) students.

Ho6₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between nontraditional aged (25 and older) students.

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between traditional aged (24 and under) and nontraditional aged (25 and older) students?

Ho7₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for traditional aged (24 and under) students.

Ho7₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for nontraditional aged (25 and older) students.

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on financial aid status, students who receive Pell grants and students who do not receive Pell grants?

Ho8₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of those students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for students who receive Pell grants.

Ho8₂: There is no significant difference in retention rates from fall-to-spring of those students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for students who do not receive Pell grants.

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on financial aid status, students who receive Pell grants and students who do not receive Pell grants?

Ho9₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for students who receive Pell grants.

Ho9₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course who do not receive Pell grants.

Population and Sample

The population selected for this study consisted of students who were enrolled at a public 2-year comprehensive community college within the Tennessee Board of Regents. The college serves a diverse student population from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of approximately 3,500 students. The average age of students was 28 years old. Furthermore, in fall of 2013, the mean ACT score for entering freshman was 18.9 with a GPA of 2.83 (Fact book, 2013-2014).

The criteria used for selecting participants were: (1) individuals who were first-time, full-time degree seeking freshman attending a Tennessee Board of Regents community college during the 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 academic years; (2) individuals who were enrolled in a First-Year Seminar Course; (3) individuals who were not enrolled in a First-Year Seminar Course.

Instrumentation

Archival data were used for this study. Data were collected from the student records Banner database, from a rural southeastern community college. No individual identifying student information was collected. The Banner information system's archival data provided demographic and academic records of all students during the years studied, in addition to enrollment in a First-Year Seminar Course. Institutional Research department of the college provided data regarding age, gender, and financial aid status for the purpose of this study.

Data Collection

Existing data collected from the college Banner student information system were used to conduct the study. Through East Tennessee University Institutional Review Board and the president of the community college, permissions were obtained to study the data. The researcher's responsibility to maintain confidentiality and security of the data collected were adhered to and no identifying information from any student was included in the data for analysis. The data were extracted from the community college Banner system by Institutional Research department without using identifying data. The data were collected and maintained by the college located on the Banner software system.

Data Analysis

The data were extracted from the community college Banner system and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. A series of chi-square tests of independence (two-way contingency table) was used to analyze data to determine if a relationship existed between academic performance, retention, and graduation rates of students who participate in First-Year Seminar Course and students who do not participate in First-Year Seminar Course. In addition, a chi-square test was applied to determine the relationship between precollege characteristics and participation in First-Year Seminar course. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). All reported findings were based on a .05 level of significance.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the relationship between retention and three-year average graduation rates of students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course as compared to those who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course at a community college in East Tennessee. This chapter presents the analysis of data associated with each research question.

The data for this study were housed in a southeast Tennessee community college's database of student records known as Banner. The population consisted of 781 first-time, full-time freshman enrolled at the community college in the fall of 2013. The study looked at the impact of a First-Year Seminar course on retention and graduation rates for first-time full-time freshman who entered the community college in the fall of 2013. The entering cohort of students were divided into two groups, those who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and those who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In addition, attributes of gender, age, and financial aid status were also evaluated (see Table 1). Chi-square tests were used to determine if there was an association between each variable and fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention rates and the 3-year graduation rates.

Table 1

First-Time, Full-Time Students

Variable	Participants (n=241)	Nonparticipants (n=540)
First-Time/Full-Time Student		
Fall 2013	241	540
Gender		
Male	82	262
Female	159	278
Age		
Traditional	240	453
Nontraditional	2	86
Financial Aid		
Pell	150	366
No Pell	91	174

The demographic information shown in Table 1 indicated there were 781 participants in the study. There were more females (159) who participated in the First-Year Seminar course than males (82), and there were more females (278) than males (262) who did not participate in the course. Further demographic information indicated 31% of students who participated in the First-Year Seminar course were traditional aged (24 and under) compared to only .003% were nontraditional aged. Additionally, 58% of the first-time, full-time entering freshman who were

considered traditional aged (24 and under) and 11% of nontraditional (over 24), chose not to participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course had higher retention rates from fall-to-spring than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. The two variables were participation in a First-Year Seminar course (yes or no) and fall-to-spring retention (yes or no). The analysis indicated that the association between participating in a First-Year Seminar course and retention from fall-to-spring was significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 781) = 11.08, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .12$. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 1 displays the proportion of students retained who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar. In summary, fall-to-spring retention rates are significantly higher for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course than for students who did not participate.

Table 2

Retention Rates of Participants and Nonparticipants Fall-to-Spring

	Participants		Nonparticipants		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Retained	203	84.2	396	73.3	599
Not Retained	38	15.8	144	26.7	182
Total	241		540		781

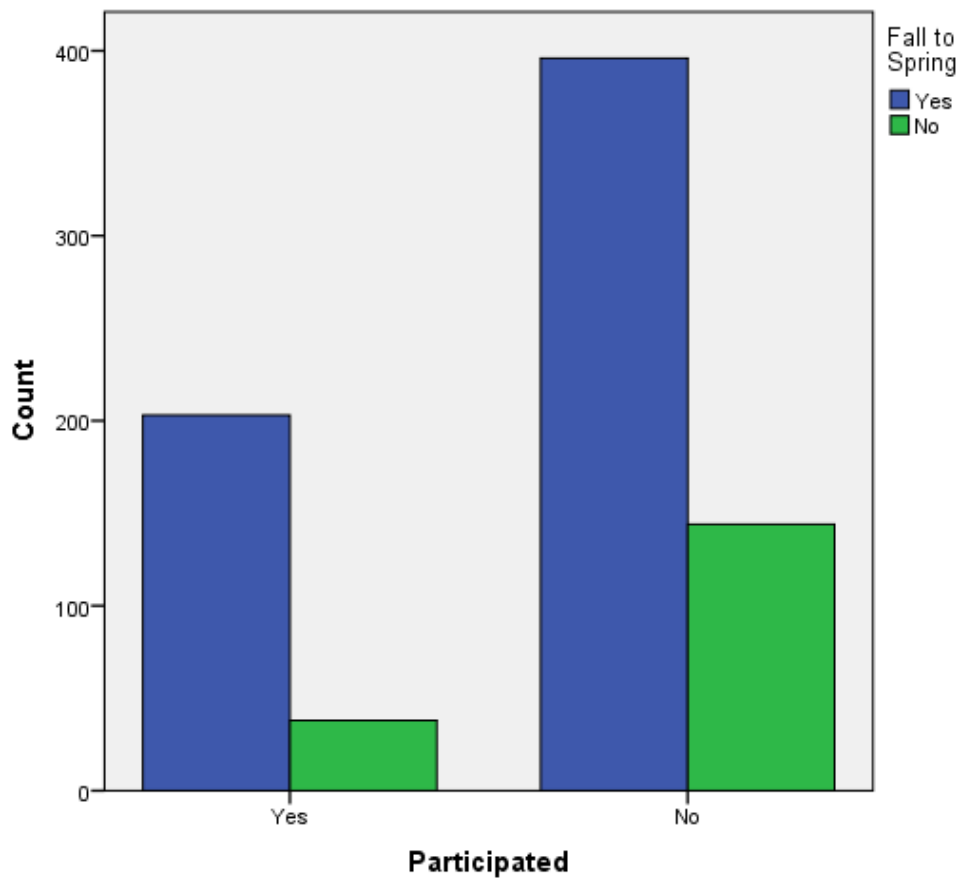


Figure 1: Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-spring

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in the First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in First-Year Seminar course.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course had higher retention rates from fall-to-fall than students who did not participate. The analysis indicated that the association between participating in a First-Year Seminar course and retention from fall-to-fall was significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 781) = 11.28, p = .003$, Cramer's $V = .12$. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 2 displays the proportion of students who were retained fall-to-fall that participated in a First-Year Seminar course and those who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, fall-to-fall retention rate was significantly higher for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

Table 3

Retention Rates of Participants and Nonparticipants Fall-to-Fall

	Participants		Nonparticipants		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Retained	150	62.2	266	49.3	416
Not Retained	91	37.8	274	50.7	365
Total	241		540		781

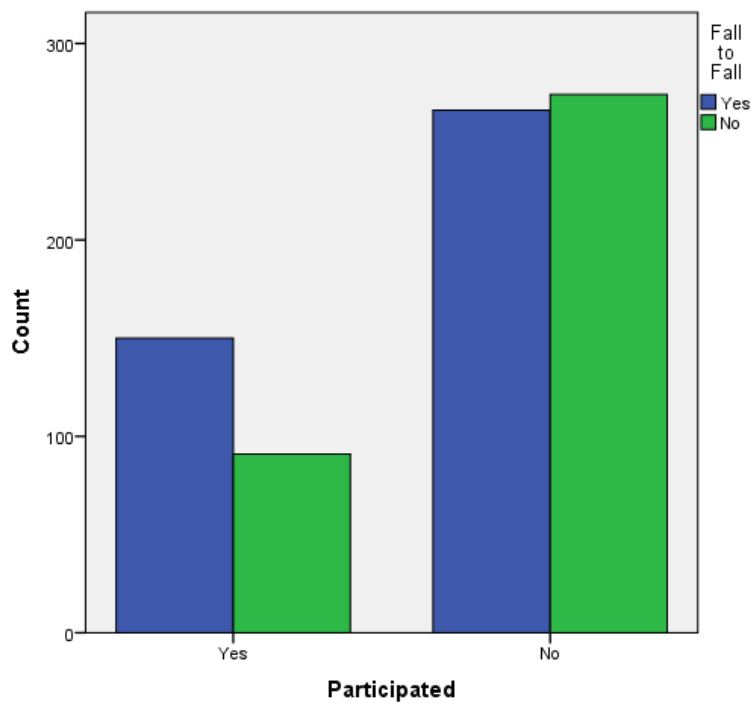


Figure 2: Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-fall

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference in 3-year graduation rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the 3-year graduation rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course?

Ho3 There is no significant difference in 3-year graduation rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the 3-year graduation rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course had higher 3-year graduation rates than students who did not participate. The analysis indicated that there was no significant association between participating in a First-Year Seminar course and 3-year graduation rates of students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course, $\text{Pearson } X^2(1, N = 688) = .00$, $p = .996$, Cramer's $V = .996$. The two variables were participation in a First-Year Seminar course and graduation rates. Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Figure 3 displays the proportion of students' 3-year graduation rates of students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and graduated to students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. The participation in a First-Year Seminar was not related to the 3-year graduation rates. In summary, the 3-year graduation rates for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course were not significantly higher than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

Table 4

Graduation Rates of Participants and Nonparticipants

	Participants		Nonparticipants		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Graduated	57	23.4	106	23.9	163
Did Not Graduate	187	76.6	338	76.1	525
Total	244		444		688*

*Note 93 students either dropped out or stopped out from the original cohort of N = 781

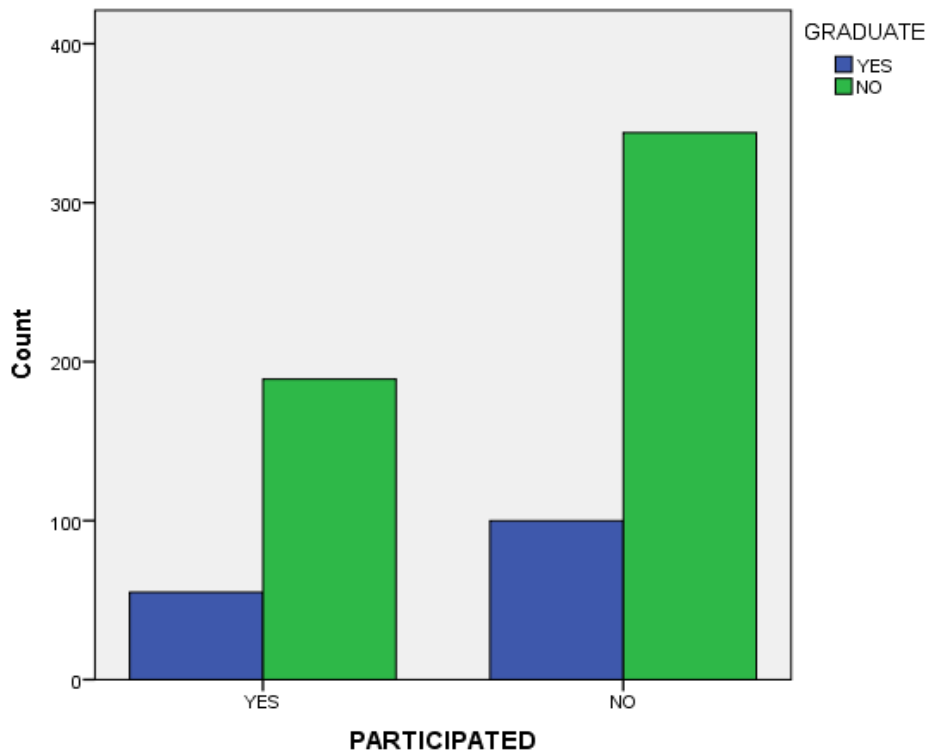


Figure 3: Participants and Nonparticipants and Graduation Rates

Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males and females?

Ho4₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in First-Year Seminar course and those who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in retention rates from fall-to-spring for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on gender. The analysis indicated that the association between participation in a First-Year Seminar course and non-participation in a First-Year Seminar course for male students was not significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 345) = 1.60, p = .206$, Cramer's $V = .07$. Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Figure 4 displays the proportion of fall-to-spring retention rates of male students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and male students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, fall-to-spring retention rates were not significantly different for male students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and male students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

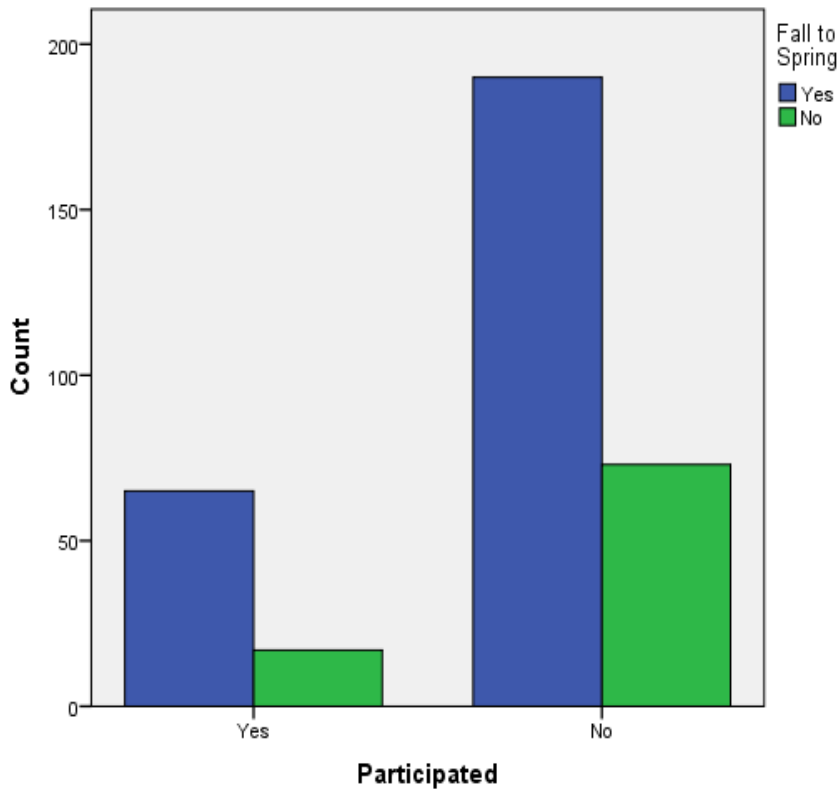


Figure 4: Male Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-spring

Ho4₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in First-Year Seminar course and those who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for females.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in retention rates from fall-to-spring for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on gender. The analysis indicated that the association between participation in a First-Year Seminar course and non-participation in a First-Year Seminar course for female students was significant, $\text{Pearson } X^2(1, N = 436) = 9.36, p = .002, \text{Cramer's } V = .15$. Therefore, the null

hypothesis was rejected. Figure 5 displays the proportion of students' fall-to-spring retention rates for female students who participated in a First-Year Seminar and female students who did not participate in a first year seminar. In summary, fall-to-spring retention rates is significantly higher for female students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course than female students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

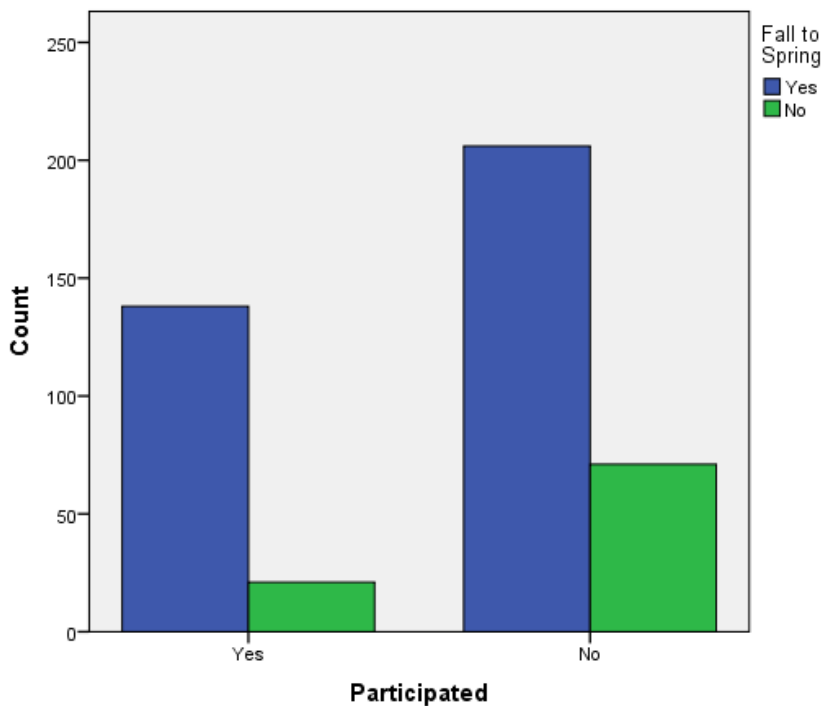


Figure 5: Female Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-spring

Research Question 5

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males and females?

Ho5₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for males.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on gender. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for male students was not significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 345) = .72$, $p = .396$, Cramer's $V = .05$. Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Figure 6 displays the proportion of fall-to-fall retention rates for male students who participated in a First-Year Seminar and male students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar. In summary, there is not a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for male students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and male students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

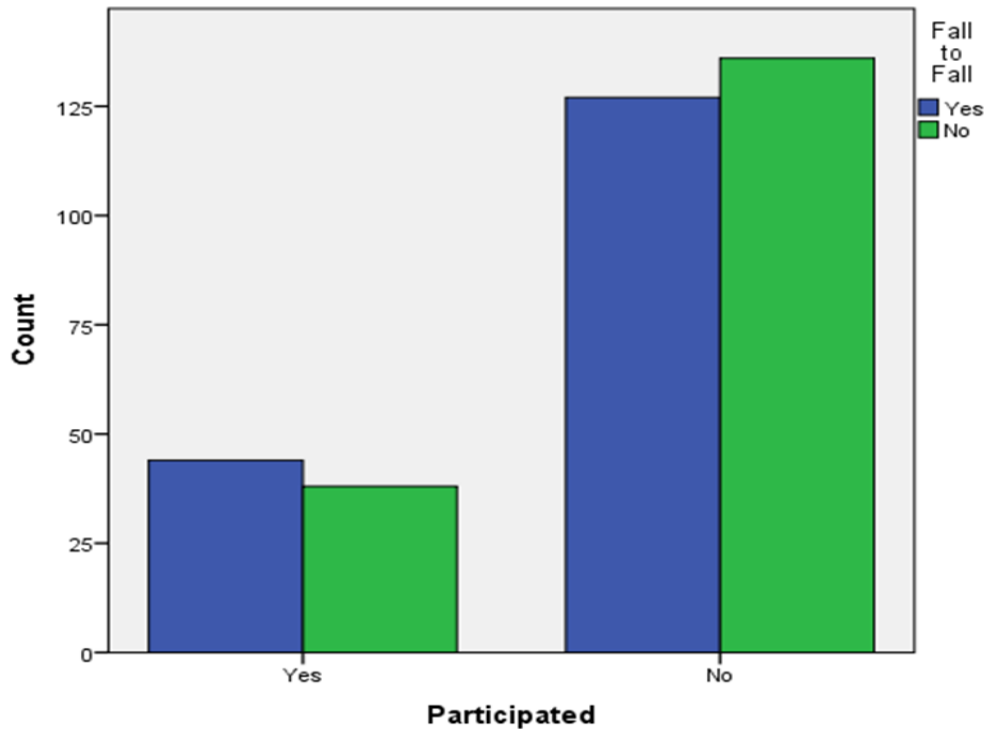


Figure 6: Male Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-fall

Ho5₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for females.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on gender. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-fall retention rates for female students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and female students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course was significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 436) = 11.15$,

$p = .001$, Cramer's $V = .16$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 7 displays the proportion of fall-to-fall retention rates for female students who participated in a First-Year Seminar and female students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, fall-to-fall retention rates for female students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course is significantly higher than female students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

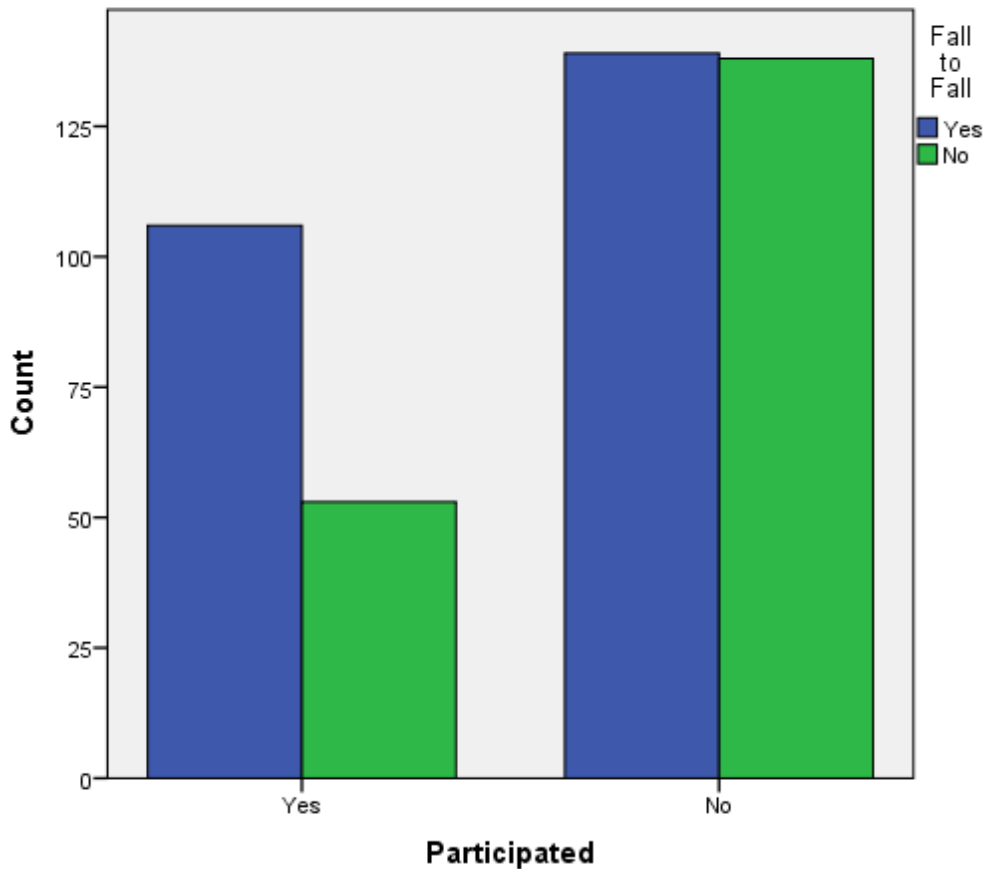


Figure 7: Female Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-fall

Research Question 6

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between traditional aged (24 and under) and nontraditional aged (25 and older) students?

Ho6₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for traditional aged (24 and under) students.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in retention rates from fall-to-spring for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on age. The analysis indicated that the association between retention rates from fall-to-spring for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course who were traditional aged students was significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 699) = 12.48, p = .05$, Cramer's $V = .13$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 8 displays the proportion of fall-to-spring retention rates for traditional aged (24 and under) students who participated in a First-Year Seminar and traditional aged (24 and under) students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar. In summary, fall-to-spring retention rates is significantly higher for traditional aged students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course than traditional aged students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

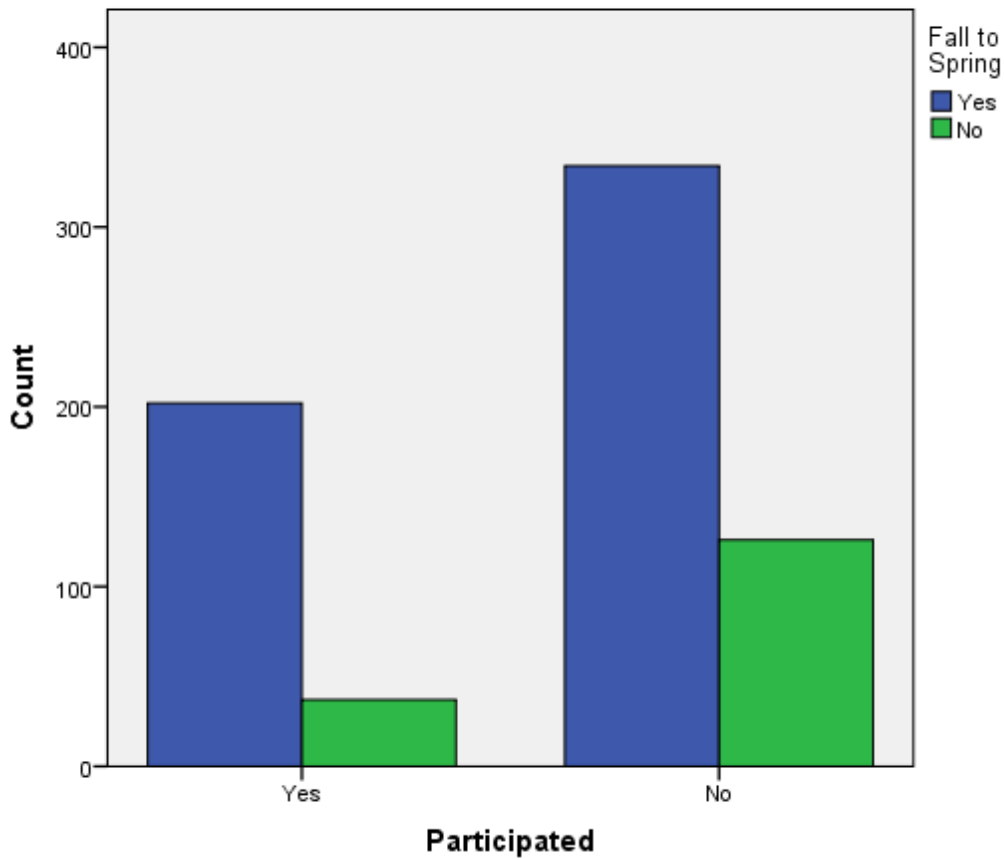


Figure 8: Traditional Aged (24 and under) Participants and Nonparticipants

Retained fall-to-spring

Ho6₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between nontraditional aged (25 and older) students.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates for non-traditional aged students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and non-traditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. The analysis indicated that the association between

fall-to-spring retention rates for nontraditional aged students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and nontraditional age students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course was not significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 82) = .83, p = .363$, Cramer's $V = .10$. Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Figure 9 displays the proportion of fall-to-spring retention rates for nontraditional aged (25 and older) students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and nontraditional aged (25 and older) students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar. In summary, there was not a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates for nontraditional aged students who participated in a First-Year Seminar and nontraditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar.

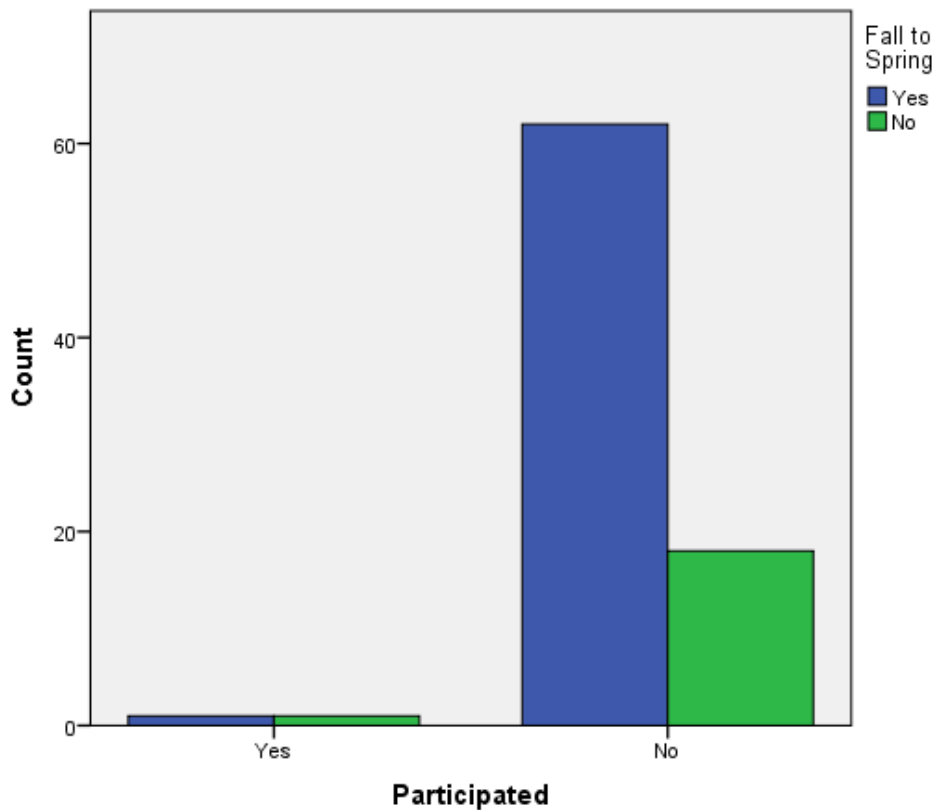


Figure 9: Nontraditional Aged (25 and older) Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-spring

Research Question 7

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and the retention rates of students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course between traditional aged (24 and under) and nontraditional aged (25 and older) students?

Ho7₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for traditional aged (24 and under) students.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on traditional age. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course who were traditional aged students was significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 699) = 12.52, p = .001$, Cramer's $V=.13$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 11 displays the proportion of fall-to-fall retention rates for traditional aged students who participated in a First-Year Seminar and traditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, traditional aged students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course were retained at higher rates fall-to-fall than traditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

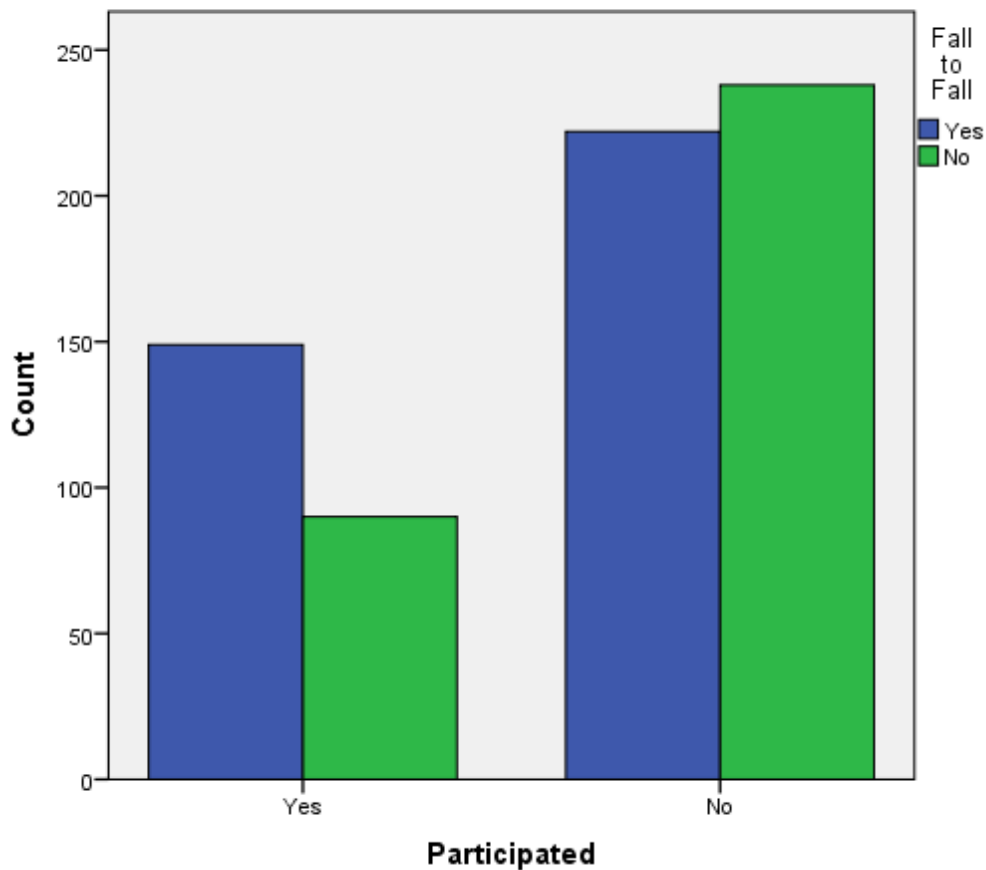


Figure 10: Traditional Aged (24 and under) Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-fall

Ho7₂: Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for nontraditional aged (25 and older) students.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on nontraditional age. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-fall retention rates

for nontraditional aged students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and nontraditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course was not significant, $\text{Pearson } X^2(1, N = 82) = .020, p = .888, \text{Cramer's } V = .02$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. Figure 12 displays the proportion of fall-to-fall retention rates for nontraditional aged students who participated in a First-Year Seminar and nontraditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, nontraditional aged students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course were not retained at higher rates than nontraditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

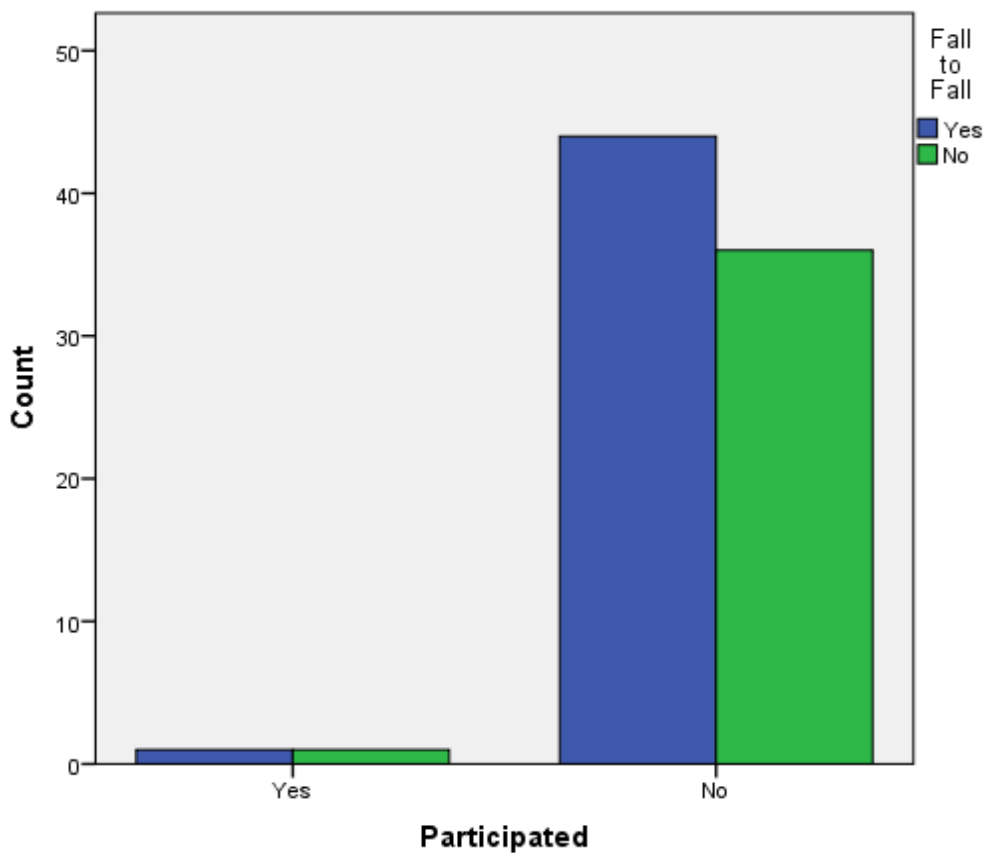


Figure 11: Nontraditional Aged (25 and older) Participants and Nonparticipants Retained fall-to-fall

Research Question 8

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on financial aid status, students who receive Pell grants and students who do not receive Pell grants?

Ho8₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for students who receive Pell grants.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates for students who receive Pell grant funds and participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who receive Pell grant funds and do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-spring retention rates for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course who receive Pell grant funds was significant, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 516) = 4.93, p = .026$, Cramer's $V = .10$.

Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 13 displays the proportion of students who receive Pell grant funds and participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who receive Pell grant funds and do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, students who receive Pell grants and participated in a First-Year Seminar course were retained at higher rates than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar and received Pell grants.

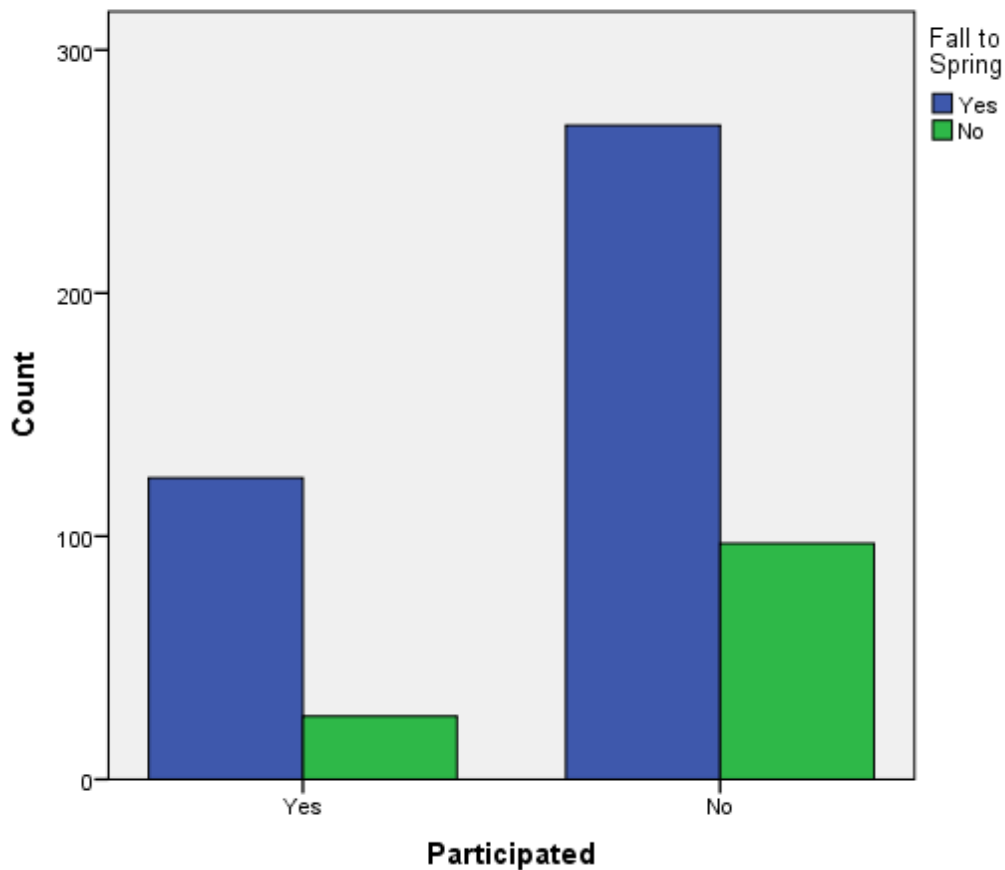


Figure 12: Participants and Nonparticipants who Received Pell Grants Retained fall-to-spring

Ho8₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course and do not receive Pell grants.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-spring retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course and did not receive Pell grants. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-spring retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not

participate in a First-Year Seminar course and did not receive Pell grants was significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 265) = 6.60$, $p = .010$, Cramer's $V = .160$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The analysis indicated that students who do not receive Pell grants and participate in a First-Year Seminar course were retained at higher rates fall-to-spring than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar and did not receive Pell grants. Figure 14 displays the proportion of students who do not receive Pell grants and participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not receive Pell grants and do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, Pell grant recipients who participated in a First-Year Seminar had higher fall-to-spring retention rates than students who did not receive Pell grants and did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

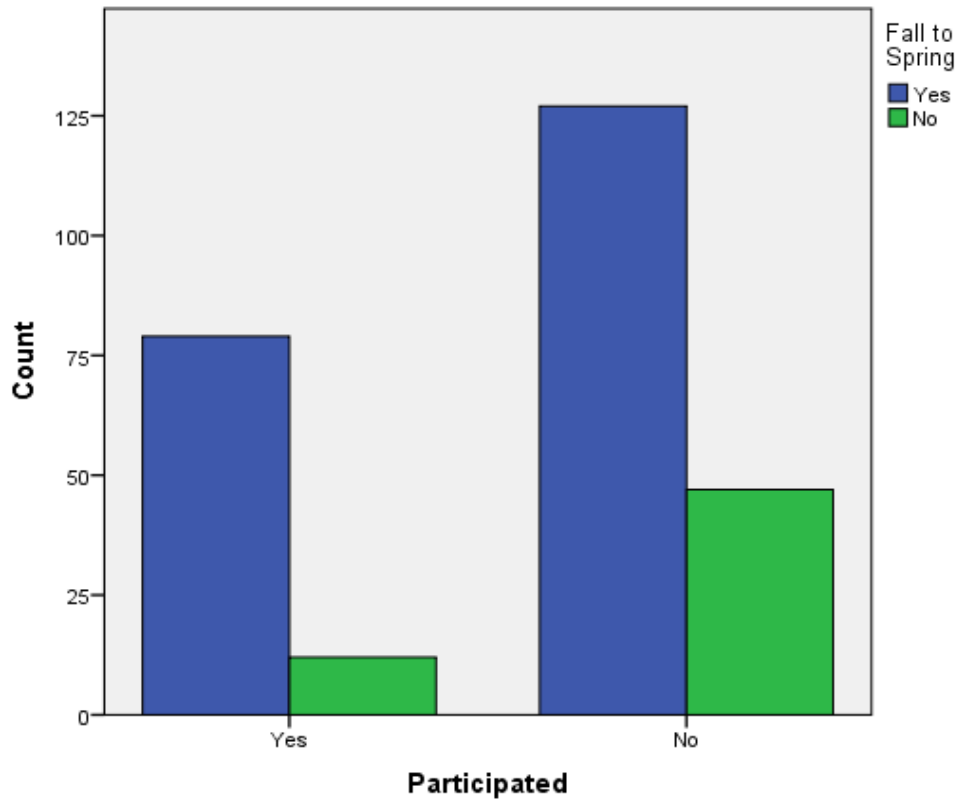


Figure 13: Participants and Nonparticipants who did not Receive Pell Grants Retained fall to spring

Research Question 9

Is there a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on financial aid status, students who receive Pell grants and students who do not receive Pell grants?

Ho9₁: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for students who receive Pell grants.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course that based on financial aid status. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course who received financial aid (Pell Grant) was significant, Pearson $X^2(1, N = 516) = 6.935, p = .008$, Cramer's $V=.12$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 14 displays the proportion of students who receive Pell grants and participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who receive Pell grants and do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. Students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and received financial aid (Pell Grants) were retained at higher rates than those who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course and received financial aid (Pell Grants).

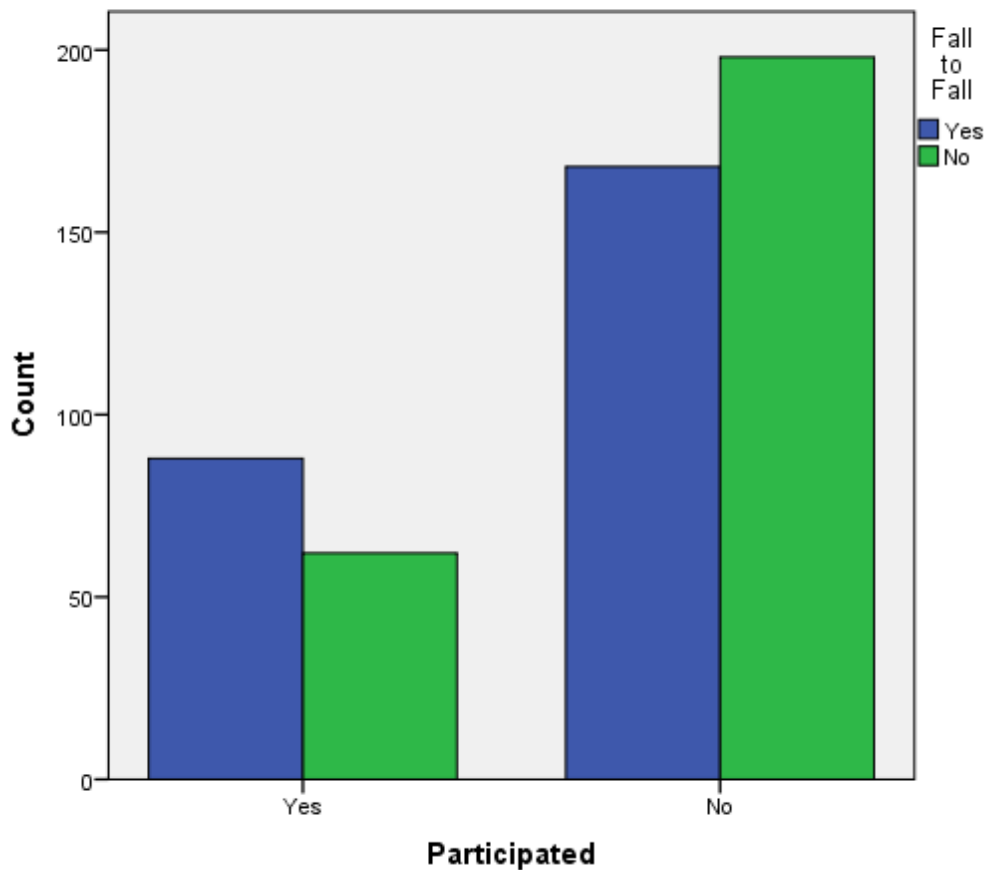


Figure 14: Participants and Nonparticipants who Receive Pell Grants retained fall-to-fall

Ho9₂: There is no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who do not participate in a First-Year Seminar course for students who do not receive Pell grants.

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course based on financial aid status. The analysis indicated that the association between fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participated a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not

participate in a First-Year Seminar course and did not receive financial aid (Pell Grant) was not significant, $X^2(1, N = 265) = 3.48, p = .062$, Cramer's $V = .12$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. Figure 15 displays the proportion of who did not receive Pell grants and participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not receive Pell grants and did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. In summary, students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and did received financial aid were not retained at higher rates than those who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course and did not receive financial aid.

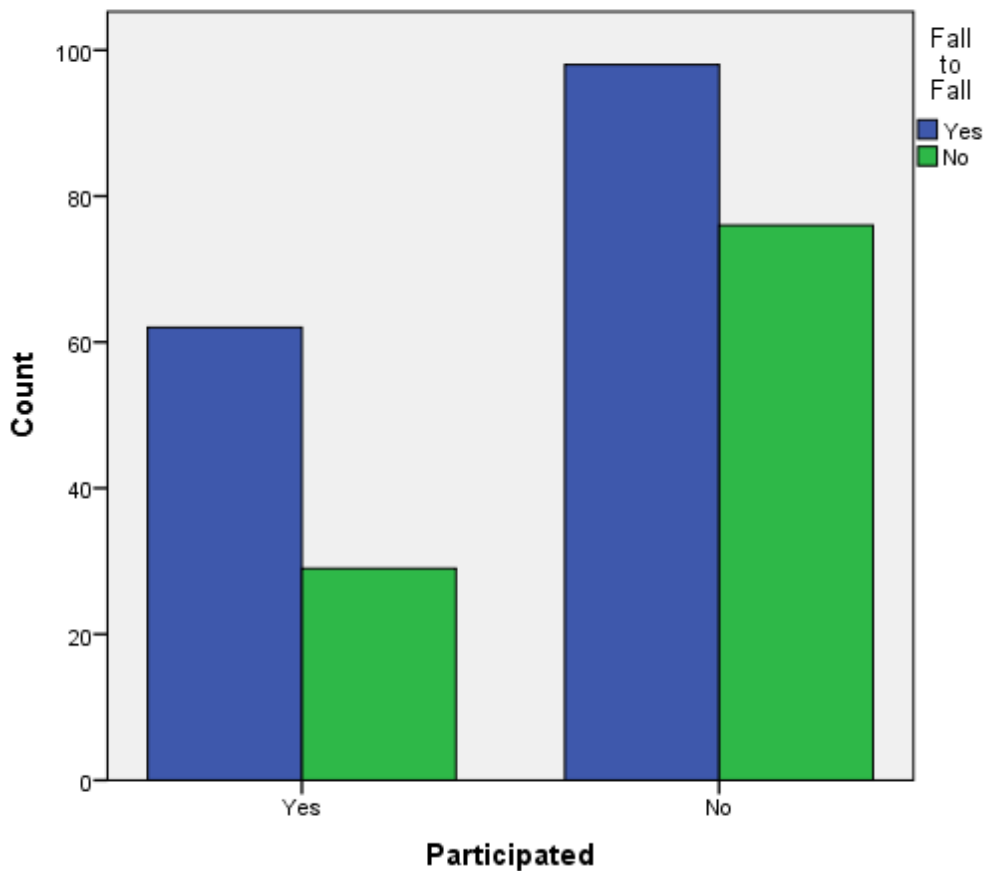


Figure 15: Participants and Nonparticipants who did not Receive Pell Grants retained fall-to-fall

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutions of higher education today are faced with increased accountability from federal and state governments. Because of this increased demand for more accountability, student retention has been and continues to be a major topic of concern for higher education institutions (Habley et al., 2012; Tinto 1993). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) indicated retention rates for first-time full-time degree seeking students who attend 2-year institutions was 61% with graduation rates of 22%. One out of every two students entering college are predicted to drop out before they graduate (ACT, 2013). Community College retention and graduation rates are among the lowest. With the varying levels of academic preparation, age, and financial barriers of students community colleges serve, approximately 79% actually attend community college to earn an associate's degree (CSSCE, 2012). In addition, overall retention rates for community college students range around 61% as compared to 4-year institutions which have overall retention rates of 81% (NCES, 2017).

According to Tinto (1993) one of the most critical periods for establishing student success is during the first year of college. Consequently, many institutions have developed various first-year programs to assist students in making the transition from high school to college. These practices are designed to support, celebrate, welcome, and assist students in the integration of campus life (Gardner, 1986). This study was designed to contribute to the literature and to provide the community college with guidance on the impact of the First-Year Seminar on student retention and graduation rates. With declining state appropriations and increased accountability measures it is important for the community college to provide strategies that will help retain students and increase completion rates.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between retention and graduation rates and participation in a First-Year Seminar course at a small rural community college. The study used archival data from the community college's student database, Banner. The population for the study consisted of first-time, full-time freshman enrolling at the institution during the fall of 2013. The 3-year graduation rate for first-time full-time students was considered, which reflected students seeking a certificate or degree in fall of 2013 attained it within 150% of the normal time required to complete a program. Retention was determined by examining whether students re-enrolled fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall. There were three attributes or variables considered: age, gender, and financial aid status. The population studied (N = 781) consisted of 241 students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and 540 students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

Further demographic information of the participants in the study (N = 781) indicated that 56% of the participants were females (N = 436) of which 66% participated in a First-Year Seminar course. Only 24% of males participated in a First-Year Seminar (N = 82), whereas 76% of the males did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. The frequency analysis also indicated that 90% of the population studied were 24 and under, and 10% were 25 and older. In addition, the analysis revealed 66% of the participants received financial aid.

The demographics revealed of the students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course, 84% were retained fall-to-spring and had a retention rate of 62% fall-to-fall, compared to retention rates of nonparticipants equaling 73% fall-to-spring and a rate of 49% fall-to-fall. The frequency analysis is represented in Table 4 illustrates the demographic information of the participants in the study (N = 781).

Table 5

Demographics of First-Time Students

Variable	Participant (N=241)		Nonparticipant (N=540)	
	N	%	N	%
Age				
Traditional (24 and under)	239	99.2	460	85.2
Nontraditional (24 or older)	2	.8	80	14.8
Gender				
Males	82	34.0	263	48.7
Females	159	66.0	277	51.3
Financial Aid				
Received Pell	150	62.2	366	67.8
Did not Receive Pell	91	37.8	174	32.2

The results of the analyses indicated there was a statistical significance for fall-to-spring persistence for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. Eighty-four percent of the students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course persisted to spring semester, while students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course persisted at a rate of 73%. The chi-square analysis indicated the fall-to-spring retention rate was significant $p = .001$. Fall-to-fall retention rates were also significantly higher for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course as compared to students who did not participate, $p = .001$. Tinto (1975) indicated that a positive experience during the first year has an impact on persistence, which supports the results. After synthesizing a considerable amount of research, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found substantial evidence that consistently indicated First-Year Seminar participation increased

retention from first to second year. Studies conducted at the University of South Carolina of first-year students revealed for 16 consecutive years, students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course were more likely to continue to the sophomore year than students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course (Jajairam, 2016). Sixty-two percent of the students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course persisted to the fall semester.

When data were further disaggregated results indicated females who participated in a First-Year Seminar course were retained fall-to-spring at much higher rates 87% versus 75% ($p = .002$) than females who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar. Fall-to-fall retention rates were also significantly higher for females, 67% versus 50% who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. Windham et al., (2014) found gender to be a significant variable where females were retained at higher rates than males. The findings of this indicate that females do retain at higher rates than males. Analyses did not indicate a significant difference in persistence for males who participated or did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

Additionally, there was significant difference in fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall persistence for traditional aged students. Eighty four percent of traditional aged students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course were retained fall-to-spring as compared to 72% of traditional aged students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course. Although there was a statistical difference for fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall persistence of traditional aged students, there was not a statistical difference for nontraditional aged students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course. This could implicate that the delay in entering college could impact persistence due to responsibilities this age group have gained over time (Windham et al., 2014). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics trend report (2015) completion rates for adult learners, (those over the age of 24) were lower than students who were under the age of 24. Results

indicated that the association between fall-to-fall retention rates for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and students who did not participate who were traditional aged were retained at higher rates than students who did not participate. Sixty-two percent of traditional aged students were retained versus 48% of students who did not participate in a First Year Seminar course. Fall-to-fall retention rates for nontraditional aged (25 and older) were not found to be higher for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course than students who did not participate. There could be several reasons for this finding for nontraditional aged students. Due to various barriers and additional responsibilities outside of school, older students are more likely to have jobs and families, creating time constraints that would interfere with their ability to attend class and complete coursework.

When financial aid status was considered, there was for students who participated in a First Year Seminar course and received financial aid (Pell grant) for retention from fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall versus students who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course and received financial aid (Pell Grant). However the analysis did not indicate a statistical significance for students who participated in a First Year Seminar course and did not receive financial aid (Pell grant). Tinto (2012) found that “persistence is more reflective of the character of their social and intellectual experiences on campus than it is of their financial resources” (p. 180). Although research has indicated that need-based aid affected both enrollment and completion, (Bettinger, 2004; Bound & Turner, 2000; Dynarski 2003); therefore, these results did not indicate a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for students who received or did not receive financial aid, consequently, one could conclude that financial aid status did not impact retention. Table 4 shows results of overall retention rates of participants and Nonparticipants analysis in relation to gender, age, and financial aid status.

Table 6

Retention Rates of Participants and Nonparticipants

	Participants		Nonparticipants		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Retained					
Gender					
Males	44	25.7	127	74.3	171
Females	106	43.3	139	56.7	245
Age					
Traditional (24 and under)	149	40.2	222	59.8	371
Nontraditional (25 and older)	1	2.2	44	97.8	45
Financial Aid Status					
Pell Grant	88	34.3	168	65.7	256
No Pell Grant	62	38.8	98	61.2	160
Not Retained					
Gender					
Males	38	22.0	136	78.0	174
Females	53	27.7	138	72.3	191
Age					
Traditional (24 and under)	90	24.7	238	73.1	328
Nontraditional (25 and older)	1	2.7	36	97.3	37
Financial Aid Status					
Pell Grant	62	23.9	198	76.1	260
No Pell Grant	29	27.6	76	72.4	105

Graduation rates were based on obtaining a degree in 3 years, or 150% of the time it would normally take to complete a degree. A recent study by Leeger (2012) indicated that students who participate in a First-Year Seminar are 17% more likely to graduate than students

who do not participate. Although the findings of this study were not indicative of Leeger’s study, the overall graduation rate for this 2013 cohort was 23.7% which was slightly higher than the reported official graduation rate of 21.1% for public 2-year institutions (AACC, 2015).

Table 5 displays graduation rates of participants and nonparticipants.

Table 7

Graduation Rates of Participants and Nonparticipants

	Participants		Nonparticipants		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Graduated	57	23.4	106	23.9	163
Did Not Graduate	187	76.6	338	76.1	525

Conclusions

The findings of this study possibly will serve as a guide for college administrators at this rural community college as they strive to implement high impact practices to assist in retention and graduation rates of students. Retention of students is one of the most significant challenges community colleges face today (ACT, 2010). Much of the research indicated a strong relationship between student engagement and persistence; therefore, a key strategy to retention has been First-Year Seminar courses (O’Gara et al., 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, 2005).

In 2013 the First Year Seminar course was not required of all incoming freshman. The requirement to take a First-Year Seminar course was based on whether a student needed two or more developmental or remedial courses. Since the writing of this study the institution has

mandated the completion of a First-Year Seminar course for all incoming freshman. Based on the findings of this study, it would be recommended that all incoming first-time full-time students participate in a First Year Seminar course and would provide evidence to support the institution's mandate. Furthermore, retention data for 2014-2015 provided evidence as to the impact of participation in a First-Year Seminar course with fall-to-spring retention rates of 73.7% for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course versus 69.8% for nonparticipants and fall-to-fall retention rates of 47.9% for students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course versus 34.9% for nonparticipants (Peters, 2015). It is important to note, although advising was not examined in this study, mandatory advising was implemented in 2013. Current data from the institution does reflect an increase in progression of credits by students who could also impact retention rates.

Overall, results indicated that students who are traditional aged, females, and students who receive financial aid can benefit by participating in a First-Year Seminar course not only for retention purposes, but also for the added benefit of an overall positive transition into the college arena. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that "FYS participation has statistically significant and substantial positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year"... (p. 403). The results of this study adds to the literature and is consistent with the research concerning the impact of First-Year Seminar courses on student retention. However, the findings should not be generalized because the population was limited to a small rural community college and further research should be conducted to determine additional variables that may impact the retention of students, such as progression of credit hours in the first and second semesters, GPA, and part-time, full-time status. With projected enrollment increases in community colleges due to Tennessee Promise and Adult

Reconnect Scholarships, the institution should be poised to implement additional retention strategies to support these populations of students.

Although participation in a First-Year Seminar course indicated a positive impact on fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention, the study did not find a significant difference in graduation rates in regards to participation and nonparticipation in a First-Year Seminar course.

Recommendation for Practice

The results of this study may be used as a guide for community colleges administrators' decision making process as it attempts to implement high impact practices to help retention and completion rates. It is from the findings of this study that participation in a First-Year Seminar course improved student retention; therefore, participation in a First-Year Seminar should be a priority for all incoming freshman. Findings indicated that all types of students, traditional aged, females, and individuals from various socioeconomic status can benefit by participating in a First-Year Seminar course not only for retention purposes but also for the added benefit of an overall positive transition into the college arena

In addition, administrators should seek to find opportunities to invest in the adult population and develop programs that will assist them with possible barriers. With Tennessee Reconnect grant beginning in the fall of 2018, it will be important for the institution to provide assistance to this population to help them to be successful. The community college administrators should consider a thorough review of all interventions that may impact the retention and graduation rates of students.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future research recommended for the community college would be to consider a qualitative study to determine student perceptions of the benefit of the course and to determine relevance of the course content. The college also has an early alert system, Freshman Connection and mandatory advising that was not considered in this study. Another area of study would be an analysis of the impact of these programs on retention.

The findings and conclusion of this study have led to the following recommendations for future research.

1. Collect and analyze additional data not presented in this study. The current study measured fall-to-spring, fall-to-fall retention rates and graduation rates. Entering student characteristics such as high school GPA, ACT scores and the need for learning support and/or remedial coursework should be considered.
2. The present study should be replicated and additional research is warranted in order to evaluate the implementation of mandatory participation in a First-Year Seminar course and mandatory advising.
3. Future research should focus on course content, identifying objectives that supports academic and social integration. Additional areas to consider would be the development of courses that are part of learning communities and full time versus part time faculty teaching the course
4. Examine the effects on academic success measured by successful completion of gateway courses such as English Composition, Biology, and mathematics, comparing

students who participated in a First-Year Seminar course and those who did not participate in a First-Year Seminar course.

5. Analyze the impact of a “boot camp” format (10 days of classes) versus full semester (15 weeks), which has been implemented at the institution.
6. Future research could focus on indirect benefits to students such as motivation and commitment to college studies that might result from completing a First Year Seminar course.
7. A qualitative study should be considered to determine any environmental influences that would affect the impact of a First-Year Seminar course.
8. Conduct research to determine possible second-year initiatives that impact community college graduation rates.

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APPENDIX

Course Syllabus

GEN-1010 First-Year Seminar

3 CREDITS

Instructor:

Office:

Phone:

Email:

Text: Feldman, Robert S. (2014). *P.O.W.E.R. Learning: Foundations of Student Success*. ISBN: 978-0-07-802093-3

Community College Student Planner. (2015-2016). This is a free day planner available at the bookstore or by the Student Senate offices, both of which are in the Student Center Building.

Course Overview:

First Year Seminar enhances success in college by assisting students in obtaining life skills necessary to their educational, career, and life objectives. Students will create and apply critical thinking strategies in areas of time management, learning styles, study skills, career planning, resource utilization and media literacy. Students will learn skills that will allow them to be self-aware, self-motivated, civically aware, and personally responsible.

1. P.O.W.E.R Learning: Becoming an Expert Student
2. Making the Most of Your Time
3. Taking Notes
4. Taking Tests
5. Reading and Remembering
6. Choosing Your Courses and Academic Program
7. Technology and Information Competency
8. Transfer Strategies: Making the Leap from the Community College to a 4-year School
9. Diversity and Relationships
10. Money Matters
11. Juggling: Stress, Family, and Work
12. Careers

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will use academic processes and procedures related to advising and major exploration to create and maintain an academic plan.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of institutional resources and services.
3. Students will use a variety of institutional tools and resources to develop an individualized plan to set personal, educational, professional goals.
4. Students will develop their ability in analyzing, evaluating, and applying information to problem solving and study skills needed for college success.
5. Students will recognize and reflect upon a diverse community.

Assessments:

Student Learning Outcomes will be assessed through:

- Participation and Weekly Assignments: 45%
 - Scavenger Hunt
 - Becoming An Expert Student
 - Receptive Learning Style Reflection
 - Personality Inventory Reflection
 - Personal Collage
 - Time Management Reflection
 - Attention Span
 - Library Quizzes
 - Exam Preparation Reflection
 - Diversity Reflection
 - Academic Plan & Advisor Meeting
 - Financial Philosophy Reflection
 - Stress Reflection
 - Professional Interview
- Attendance: 10%
- Quizzes: 20%
- Final Project: 25%

Evaluation and Grading Procedures:

90-100	A	80-89	B	
70-79	C	60-69	D	59 and Below F

Attendance Policy:

Attendance to each class meeting is necessary due to participation grade, which involves in and out of class assignments. If you are unable to attend class, please communicate with your instructor upon knowing that you will not be in class.

VITA

PATRICIA PATTERSON WEAVER

Education: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: 2018

Tusculum College, Greeneville, Tennessee
Master of Arts in Education: K-12 Emphasis: 2001

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee
Bachelor of Science in Education, Marketing Emphasis: 1980

Professional Experience: Assistant Vice President Workforce and Economic Development
Cleveland State Community College, Cleveland, Tennessee
June, 2017 – Present

Director Off Campus Centers
Cleveland State Community College, Cleveland, Tennessee
August, 2006-June, 2017

Adjunct Professor
Cleveland State Community College, Cleveland, Tennessee
June, 1999-Present

High School Marketing Teacher
Monroe County Schools, Sweetwater, Tennessee
October, 1994-August, 1998
August, 1999-June, 2001

Honors and Awards
Cleveland State Community Distinguished Staff Award, 2016

Cleveland State Community College Cougar Pride Award, 2016

Cleveland State Community College Outstanding Service to Students Award, 2010

Monroe County Teacher of the Year, 1998