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A First-Year Experience Course and its Relationship to Retention and Academic Success at a
Public 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

Jackie Newman

December 2016

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Keywords: Retention, Academic Success, Community College, First-Time Full-Time

ABSTRACT

A First-Year Experience Course and its Relationship to Persistence and Academic Success at a
Public Community College

by

Jackie Newman

The purpose of this quantitative comparative study was to determine the relationship between retention and academic success of students who participated in a First-Year Experience (FYE) course and students who did not participate in a FYE course within a southeastern community college in the United States. The impact of the relationship was to inform an understanding of how a FYE course influences student success.

Archival data were collected from the southeastern community college's student information system, Banner. Data for first-time full time students were gathered, including whether or not the individuals enrolled in a FYE course. Other data included the student's gender, at-risk status, and non-traditional student status. Retention data of the first-year full-time students were collected and measured in accordance with enrollment requirements of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR). Data for academic success were collected and measured by first-year student's cumulative GPA.

Chi-square tests of independence and independent sample t tests were used to examine the relationship of the FYE course with outcomes that measured student success. Results from the chi square tests indicated, overall, the participants of the FYE course had significantly higher retention rates than those students who did not participate in the FYE course. The independent sample t test indicated students who participated in the FYE course had significantly higher cumulative GPA scores than those who did not participate.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family in appreciation of their unwavering love and support through this journey. If not for their love, support, and understanding this would have never been possible.

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There are no words to express the appreciation I have toward all those who were involved in the guidance, encouragement and support in making this dissertation process a reality. I thank God for his love and his forgiveness (as I was not, at times, very pleasant to be around during this process;)).

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To all my friends who have listened to all the ups and downs for the past three years, I thank you! To always be reminded, “how do you eat an elephant... one bite at a time,” is what got me through those challenging times. I am extremely thankful to each of you!

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And, to my mommy and daddy, I thank you for instilling in me the belief that through hard work and perseverance any goal can be accomplished. Your empathy, constant enthusiasm and willingness to help in anyway helped make this journey a reality. I am grateful to have your unconditional love.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A student's first-year experience is vital for building a foundation that can withstand academic obstacles as well as promoting persistence along the student's journey through higher education. As well documented, many students are not ready for the rigors of college. According to Tinto (1993), the first year is one of the most critical times for establishing a foundation for student success and retention; the retention of a student from the first year to the second year is a consistent indicator of success.

Many incoming freshmen lack adequate academic or social skills which may prevent them from achieving their degrees. Higher education institutions, including community colleges, must be prepared to provide the support and guidance needed as they traverse their initial college experience. To help address these issues, many institutions have implemented a first-year experience program. According to Gardner (1986), "The first year experience is based on the concept that success during the first year provides the foundation on which the rest of college experience is based" (p. 262). First-year experience programs, with various names, are designed to help first-year students prepare for the transition to higher education and explore academic, career, and co-curricular opportunities. Moreover, Hunter (2006) recommended other aspects of a first-year program including recruitment and admissions efforts, new student orientation programs, welcome week activities, rituals and traditions, common reading programs, first-year seminars, academic advising, academic support centers, supplemental instruction, undergraduate research initiatives, learning communities, service learning, and residence education initiatives to support with the transition to college life.

Modeling his plan from Tennessee Promise, President Obama announced a plan to eliminate tuition from community colleges in 2015. (Korte, 2015). Tennessee Promise is a last dollar scholarship program to allow incoming freshman students to attend community college tuition free. It was introduced by Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam.. With these new initiatives, record enrollments have been reported in community colleges around the nation.

Community colleges students are at a higher risk of not matriculating to four-year institutions. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) presented data that 45% of students who attended community college left without a degree, while only 17% of students who attended four-year institutions left without a degree (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). One reason for this early departure could be the outcome of open enrollment policies in community colleges. Students who may not have been admitted to other institutions due to their academic performance have the opportunity to get an education through open enrollment policies at many community colleges.

Further, being academically underprepared plays an impactful role in the retention of the first-year student. Some community college students do not intend to pursue a postsecondary education. But, because of the demands of today's workforce they have found themselves enrolling into college courses for which they may be unprepared. A first-year college survey posited that more than 33% of first-year students found it difficult adjusting to academic expectations in higher education (Higher Education Research Institute, 2014). Many of these students may have an unrealistic vision of skills needed to be successful in college, such as time management and study skills. Chickering and Schlossburg (1995) agreed that adjusting to this new environment can be confusing because entering college can result in changing routines which could create a unique identity. McCabe (2000) found that more than half a million

underprepared or at-risk students are successful in completely remedial courses and go on to be successful in other college courses. Boylan (2006) maintained that the reason for the success is using a developmental approach when working with at-risk students.

Statement of the Problem

Lower than expected academic performance and retention of first year students is an issue that many community colleges are presented with annually. Many institutions have implemented interventions to help generate success in these areas. Zwerling (1980) claimed institutions should evaluate internal policies and procedures to understand organizationally what can be accomplished to bring about change to improve student success. A small southeastern community college in Tennessee has developed a First-Year Experience program to help address the issues of lower than expected academic performance and retention rates. There is a limited amount of research that focuses on the First-Year Experience courses in the community college (e.g. Glass & Garrett, 1995; O’Gara, Mechur Karp, & Hughes, 2009; Zeidenberg et al., (2007).

Tinto (1993) stated:

Though we have a sense of what sorts of actions seem to work, we are not yet able to tell administrators how and why different actions work on different campuses for different types of students. More importantly, we have not been able to tell institutional officials what procedures they should follow to initiate successful retention programs suited to their own needs and resources. (p. 3)

Therefore, the purpose of this quantitative comparative study was to determine the differences in retention and the academic success between students who participated in a First-Year Experience (FYE) course and students who did not participate in a FYE course at a southeastern community college in the fall semesters of 2013 and 2014.

Research Questions

In order to determine if there were associations between retention and academic success after a first-year seminar course at a community college, 10 research questions were examined.

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for males who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for females who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course, and those who did not participate?

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for those students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for male students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for female students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ10: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Significance of the Study

Community colleges play a vital role in society. With the cost of higher education continually rising, industries demanding employees with specific skills, and open enrollment policies, community colleges are experiencing record enrollment. However, many students enrolling in community colleges are not ready for the academic rigors of higher education. Community college administrators and leaders must be cognizant of the issues of student retention and academic success in their institution before significant issues transpire. Program development, such as the first-year experience course, have the potential to assist in the retention and academic success of students. The results of this study may provide administrators and leaders who are responsible for the first-year experience course with a more informed view of the impact of a first-year experience program.

Definitions of Terms

To clarify their use, the following terms used within the context of this study are defined here:

Academic Success – “Engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational

objectives, and post college performance” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 5). In this study academic success is measured by cumulative Grade Point Average.

At-Risk Student – Students who are enrolled in two-or-more developmental classes putting them at risk for a high probability of failing academically or not persisting (At-Risk, 2013).

First-Time, Full-Time Student – A student who has never enrolled in a postsecondary institution and who enrolls in 12 or more semester credit hours (NCES, 2016a).

First-Year Experience Program (FYE) – A program designed to help first-year students prepare for the transition to higher education and explore academic, career, and co-curricular opportunities. First-year programs may include first-year seminars, student support services, academic success centers, and first-year orientations (National Resource Center, 2016).

First-Year Seminar Course – A course designed to enhance success in college by assisting students in obtaining life skills necessary to their educational, career, and life objectives (National Resource Center, 2016).

Grade-Point Average (GPA) – “A number representing the average value of the accumulated final grades earned in courses... calculated by adding up all accumulated final grades and dividing that figure by the number of grades awarded” (Grade Point Average, 2013, para. 1). GPA is most commonly based on a 0.0 to 4.0 scale.

Non-Traditional Student – Students at least 25 years of age. Age acts as a surrogate variable that captures a large heterogeneous population of adult students who often have family and work responsibilities as well as other life circumstances that can interfere with completion of educational goals (NCES, 2016b).

Persistence – The act of a student who enrolls in college and remains enrolled until degree completion (Hagedorn, 1999).

Retention – Students who persisted to any subsequent fall or spring semester.

Student Involvement – “The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p.518).

Limitations

Limitations were not accounted for or controlled may have influenced outcomes. One limitation is selection bias. Selection bias can happen when the selection of subjects into a study or their probability of being retained in the study leads to a result that is different from what you would have gotten if you had enrolled the whole target population (Stattek, n.d). Many students at the institution were not required to participate in the first-year experience course in fall 2013 or fall 2014. The only students required to take the FYE course were students who were considered at-risk, which means they were enrolled in two or more developmental courses. However, some students may have enrolled in the FYE course in order to be eligible for financial aid, to enhance study skills, or to become familiar with college life.

As an instructor of the first-year experience course at small southeastern community college, I had a special interest in student retention and the academic success of my students. It is my obligation to ensure that the outcomes of this study were as objective as possible and my biases were not evident in the presentation of materials.

Delimitations

At least three delimitations apply to this study. A small southeastern community college was the only institution that provided data for this research. Therefore, the findings are only relevant to this institution and may not be generalizable to other institutions. Only first-time full-time students participated in this study. Students who had previous course credits or were taking fewer than 12 credit hours of course work were excluded, with the exception of dual enrollment students. Also, individual fall-to-fall class grades were not examined.

Overview of Study

Chapter 1 focused on an introduction to the problem followed by research questions that forms the base of this research. Also, included within this chapter, the significance of the study along with limitations and delimitations. Chapter 2 provided the background and a literature review of the history and information of community colleges, at-risk students, non-traditional students, academic success, student retention, theories of student retention, and information concerning First- Year Experience courses. Chapter 3 described the research and methodologies proposed to address the research questions that are outlined. Chapter 4 examined the findings and results for the proposed research questions. Chapter 5 included a summary, conclusion, and recommendations for practice and for future areas of research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Community Colleges

The community college is a unique component of American higher education. It provides needs for students in many facets and is adaptable to the local industrialized society. Moreover, the Panic of 1893, which was a serious economic depression in the United States, led to the first formal considerations of 2-year colleges. With the major economic downturn, numerous institutions were experiencing insufficient finances and not a sufficient number of students to support the vast amount of small universities. Carroll proposed that the less attended colleges focus on the first 2 years of curriculum and rely on the larger institutions to provide the remaining third and fourth years. Making this shift would allow each institution to have fewer resources, teachers, and students to manage (Ratcliff, n.d.). As a result, in 1901 William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, helped found the first community college (Mellow, 2000).

The first community colleges focused on liberal arts. However, the focus shifted during the Depression of the 1930s to offer more job-training programs. Colleges started to see rapid growth after World War II with the passage of the GI Bill of Rights, which extended an opportunity for higher education to many Americans who otherwise would not have been able to attend (Mellow, 2000). At its peak, veterans made up 49% of college admissions, and by 1956 nearly 7.8 million World War II veterans had participated in this educational program (US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The 1960s saw rapid workforce growth, which led to the impetus of community colleges offering increasingly more vocational programs. Henceforth, Cohen and Brawer (2003) noted around the 1970s the majority of students attending community

colleges were not enrolling in vocational programs but were aspiring to seek credits to transfer to 4-year institutions. This resulted in many 2-year institutions seeking to become regionally accredited and overtime their programs evolved into more paraprofessional programs and less vocational programs. Since this time we have seen the community colleges constantly evolving.

From their inception community colleges have responded to the changing needs of their service areas (Vaughan, 1997). Responding to these needs is necessary to provide success to the institution and to the student. Ed Gleazer, considered by many to be the Father of the American community college, made the statement,

The institution must be able to change as communities change with new conditions, demands, or circumstances. Any time we can describe the community college in definitive, specific terms, we will destroy it. It has to change. It has to be different in different areas. (Walker, 2007, slide 8)

Furthermore, due to the global economy community colleges will likely shift from collegiate education to career education as a response to community issues (Ayers, 2002). Equally, “the most successful community colleges are those that have developed a well-defined mission and a shared vision of the future” (p. 11).

Community College Students

Enrollment in community colleges has increased significantly since the 1980s. In the United States community college enrollment comprises nearly 42% of higher education’s enrollment in credit courses (Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2004). A survey conducted by American Association of Community Colleges (2011) reported this growth could be attributed to lower tuition rates, open-access enrollment, and courses offered to prepare students for the academic rigors of post secondary education. In 2007, 1,195 community colleges in the United States enrolled 18.2 million students in credit and noncredit courses (Provasnik & Planty, 2008).

According to the NCES (Provasnik & Planty, 2008) approximately 7.8 million males,

and, 10.4 million females attend community colleges. Of that number 6.6 million were nontraditional students. Of those 18.2 million students who enroll in community colleges, 75% of first-year college students are underprepared despite being fully eligible to attend college (Shulock, 2010). While community colleges continue to experience this unprecedented growth, a challenge comes in recognizing the changing characteristic of the students who are attending (Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2004; Mullin & Phillipe, 2009; Schroeder, 2003; Zeidenburg et al., 2007).

Community colleges enroll a diverse group of students who attend for various reasons. The fact that traditional 4-year institutions are not designed for everyone makes 2-year colleges a better choice for some students' needs. Some students choose community colleges for financial reasons, academic flexibility, school life balance, personalized attention, professional certificates, or online class options (Mitchell, 2015). In addition, community colleges enroll more nontraditional, minority, and low-income students than traditional 4-year institutions (Provasnik & Planty, 2008).

As stated, community colleges enroll a high percentage of low-income students, nearly 44% in 2008 (US Census Bureau, 2008). Lower income students are choosing community college because of lower tuition rates. A report from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2014) states the average annual cost of tuition for community colleges in 2013-2014 was \$3,260 compared to the average annual cost of 4-year institutions at \$8,890 (AACC, 2014). The lower cost continues to drive the decision of attending community college more attractive.

Likewise, many community college students have jobs, families, and other obligations that prevent them from attending full-time. Nearly two thirds of community college students are

part-time (AACC, 2016). Flexibility in a community college is imperative for their success. Programs such as distant learning, online, and remedial courses provide the flexibility needed for the opportunity of success.

Students may attend community colleges because of their open enrollment policy. Open enrollment means that students are eligible to attend if they are high school graduates or have a General Education Diploma (GED) credential. These students are more likely to enroll with “demographic risk factors” that might impede their abilities to be successful in completion compared to those students who attend a 4-year institution (Cofer & Somers, 2001).

At-Risk Students

Many students have difficulties transitioning from high school to a college campus. Not being academically prepared can make the transition increasingly challenging placing the student at-risk for non-persistence. Several studies (e.g. Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999) have suggested that poor academic performance exhibits arduous times in adjusting to college life and is cause for high attrition rates within institutions.

A lack of readiness for students entering college is one of the leading reasons for low graduation rates. Approximately 25% of students entering a community college are fully ready for college-level studies. The remaining 75% require additional learning support in English, mathematics, or both (Shulock, 2010).

The term *at-risk* encompasses background characteristics, internal characteristics, and environmental factors (Bulger & Watson, 2006). Background characteristics are often looked upon when identifying the characteristics of at-risk students. Most are labeled as academically underprepared, and, in part, have unrealistic goals based on desire for instant gratification (Bulgar & Watson, 2006). Chen and Kaufman (1997) identified indicators including: Low

socio-economic status, from a single parent home, had averages grades of “C” or lower in the 6th-8th grade, repeated a grade, had an older sibling who dropped out, or the student changed schools two or more times.

Internal characteristics also contribute to identifying at-risk students. Roueche and Roueche (1993) agree that not only are at-risk students are not academically underprepared but also have weak self-concept. The students’ disbelief in their own selves may lead to failure. According to Bulfar and Watson (2006) prepared student may be motivated and set goals, but at-risk students are more likely to set unrealistic goals and are not motivated by success; but rather are motivated by failure.

In addition to internal characteristics, some students are considered at-risk due to impaired self-efficacy. Research (e.g. Morris-Rothschild & Brassard, 2006) suggests in order to withstand the demands of academic studies developing the students’ emotional abilities is as important as developing cognitive abilities. Self-efficacy is defined as beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997). As cited in Johnson (2006), students with high self-efficacy use intrinsic motivation to “press forward” through tasks. However, Solberg and Villareal ((1997) stated self-efficacy makes up only about 27% of the variance in college adjustment. Some students enroll in college uncertain if they have the ability to accomplish the goal of graduation, while others enroll with confidence and after unsuccessful grades begin to wonder if their goal can be accomplished (Sternberg, 2013). This doubt leads to the lack of academic self-efficacy, which is an individual’s belief or personal self-perception of competence in completing challenging academic task at the required level (Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007; Schunk, 1991).

It has been stated that self-efficacy helps individuals make decisions how much effort

they should be assigned to a task (Educational Research Review, 2011). In the past few decades self-efficacy has been gaining attention in educational research. Findings have suggested that self-efficacy has effects on motivation and cognition by affecting task persistence, task interest, the choices made, goals that are set and the use of self-regulatory, cognitive and meta cognitive strategies (e.g. Lent, Brown, & Hackett 2002; Schunk, 2003; Zimmerman, Bandura, Martinez-Pons, 1992). A considerable amount of research (e.g. Carmichael & Taylor, 2005; Lane et al., 2004; Schunk, 2003) illustrated self-efficacy plays a role in relation to students' motivation, learning, and achievements (Educational Research Review, 2011).

Studies have found that self-efficacy has a positive effect on a first-year students' grades (e.g. Brown, Lent, & Larkin, 1989; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1987). One study (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005) posited that self-efficacy beliefs, through acquired knowledge and skill, could affect student outcomes by increasing motivation and persistence to tackle academic challenges. More recent studies, such as Betz (2004), found that self-efficacy significantly influenced persistence. She concluded that in the face of obstacles, dissuading messages from the environment, or an occasional failure, a person with low self-efficacy was not likely to persist.

The Educational Research Review (2011) stated that there was an important need for higher education to assist students in developing skills, knowledge, and competencies. Knowing the factors that affect self-efficacy can help institutions develop an educational program plan that will enhance self-efficacy. Some of these factors are:

- Mastery experiences that give students a sense of accomplishment when they have faced a challenge.
- Vicarious experiences that occur when students see others succeed and feel an increased sense of their own ability to succeed.
- Social persuasion, where other people either increase or decrease a student's sense of confidence and ability to succeed.
- Physiological reactions that might occur as a result of stress, depression or anxiety (Do-It, 2015 para.1).

Moreover, Schunk (1995) identified three types of interventions designed to influence self-efficacy: models, goal setting and feedback. Models teach skills and are vicarious sources of self-information. Goal setting influences self-efficacy and allow for assessment to move forward. Feedback is a persuasive source linking performance to effort and ability is beneficial for self-efficacy, performance, and motivation.

Another way of identifying at-risks students is by considering certain environmental factors. Many at risk students feel limited in their support of their academic success. Bowl (2001) indicated some students receive confusing or vague advice that is not supportive to become a successful student. Overall, services offered by financial aid, admissions, counseling, tutoring, records and registration were all less than positive. For example, Bulfar and Watson (2006) described the financial aid process as discombobulated and caused delays in obtaining funds to register for classes and the knowledge required to maintain financial aid.

Other factors that contribute to students being at-risk include; part-time attendance (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993), working more than 30 hours per week (Habley & McClanahan, 2004), inadequate financial resources (Habley & McClanahan, 2004), being academically unprepared (McClenney, 2004; Ortiz, 1995; Saxon & Boylan, 1999), not expecting to succeed in college (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Ortiz, 1995; Williams, 2002), being undecided about major and career choice (Fralick, 1993, Lewallen, 1993; Pérez, 1998), low academic performance in high school (Allen, 1999; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Braunstein & McGrath, 1997; Tinto, 1997), and being the first-generation to attend college (Hayes, 1997; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003). Research has shown that the likelihood of academic success is diminished with each accumulating factor (Byrnes, 2009). Byrnes also stated that the risk factors are not perfectly predictive and that each case is

individual.

Sternberg (2013) suggested that inadequate development of self-regulation skills keep students from being successful. He explained that many students have relied upon close supervision in their high school day to help regulate their time and energy. When students find themselves on their own, they often find it difficult to manage independently and are at-risk for lack of success.

The number of at-risk students in community colleges continues to grow (Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn, 2003; McClenney, 2004). Community colleges offer a mix of programs that are uniquely positioned to support workforce development for the at-risk population (Bulger & Watson, 2006.) Therefore, reasons for the rapid growth, of community colleges, could partially stem from the economy in that the demand for high skilled jobs has increased and can be found all over the world (Friedman, 2005).

Higher education institutions are taking pro-active measures to assist at-risk students to help them persist to graduation. The basic rationale motivating these measures is that institutions can help the at-risk student by increasing exposure to success factors (Hidden Curriculum, 2015) such as in a first-year experience course where students are taught skills on how to succeed in their post-secondary environment. Other measures, including orientations and bridge programs, are being put into place before students enter college with a multiple measure for placement policy. The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2016) defined multiple measure for placement policy as a hierarchy of measures to determine students' readiness for gateway courses. The CCCSE reported several of those measures being; GPAs of 2.6 or higher; ACT scores of at least 18 in English, 22 in reading, 22 in math; and SAT scores of at least 500 in writing, critical reading, and math. Students who do not meet the requirements a diagnostic

placement test would determine placement. While more than 80% of students feel they are academically prepared for the rigors of college, 67% are reported as placing into at least one developmental class (Center for Community College Student Engagement (2016).

The decade since 2004 has brought profound reexamination of the role and results of developmental programs in community and technical colleges around the country. Pushed by the emerging student success and completion agenda, colleges have dealt with intense scrutiny and a demand for the redesign of these programs. (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2016)

Consequently, the Tennessee Board of Regent (TBR) (2015), reports nearly 60% of students who enter institutions have reading, writing, or math deficiencies. The TBR had historically enrolled these at-risk students in pre-college, or remedial, classes to help them prepare for credit-bearing classes. For most of these students remedial classes would have been their first and last college experience (Mathewson, 2016). Yet, recent work has revealed that students have the ability to achieve greater success when they begin in credit-bearing classes, and when they are required to participate in supplemental instruction (TBR, 2015. The “Corequisite Model” offers students a direct entrance into credit bearing courses with additional academic support. This precludes extended time taking and cost associated with non-credit bearing classes (Mathewson, 2016). A study from Complete College America (2015) showed dramatic gains from students who were enrolled in a corequisite class. Students in credit bearing English courses succeeded at twice the rate of students enrolled in a prerequisite English course. Students in credit bearing math courses succeeded at five to six times the rate of students in a remedial math sequence.

Non-Traditional Students

A “typical” freshman college student is between 18 and 22 who lives on campus, is enrolled in college full-time, and has recently graduated from high school. The reality is that

those “typical” freshmen college students are becoming the minority. According to a report from the NCES, 17.6 million undergraduates are enrolled in colleges and universities. Of those undergraduates 38% are over the age of 25, and 25% are over the age of 30. This number is expected to increase by 2019 (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Nearly 53% of non-traditional students attending community colleges are from a low-income homes and 57% work full-time jobs while attending school (Kazis, 2002).

Nontraditional students, defined by the NCES, meet at least one of seven characteristics: delayed enrollment into higher education, financially independent for financial aid purposes, attends part-time, has children, is a single parent, works full-time, and does not possess a high school diploma (Pelletier, 2010). Studies have indicated that some non-traditional students have problems affiliated with higher attrition rates and lower academic performance (e.g. Felman, 1993; Wlodkowski, Mauldin, & Gahn, 2001).

Nontraditional students may have difficult times adjusting to a traditional format of a college campus due to a higher likelihood of being employed, having obligations to children, attending only part-time, or having work schedules. A report conducted by the Learning Skills Council (2004) indicated non-traditional students identified several impediments to their academic success. Those include limited educational resources, high travel time, costs, and limited course offerings. Timarong, Temaungil, and Sukrad (2002) stated the inability to obtain financial aid, lack of support from employers, and lack of flexible scheduling for classes limits the academic success of the non-traditional learner.

Older female non-traditional students have not shown as much success at degree completion as their male counterparts (Hermes, 2008). Non-traditional females cited the reasons of withdrawal stemmed from financial burdens, work, health, and family responsibilities

(Scroggin & Styron, 2006),

Academic Success

Academic success is one of the mostly widely used constructs in educational research and assessment within higher education” (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015, p. 1). Researchers hesitate to define “academic success” because of its ambiguity and that it incorporates numerous student outcomes. However, York et al. (2015) defined academic success as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning outcomes, and post-college performance” (p. 5). Researchers have sought to determine what indicators most accurately measure academic success. It is most commonly measured by grades and grade point averages throughout literature (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Levitz & Noel, 1989; Strauss & Volkwein, 2002; Tinto, 1996; York et al., 2015).

Student Retention

Student retention is one of the most serious problems affecting higher education today. The institution finds losses in revenue, reputation, and the ability to make a difference in students’ lives when they are not retained (Sternberg, 2013). And, students lose an education that will benefit their future career and income potential.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2016) highlighted several organizations that are aimed for increasing student retention. For example, the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges want to increase completions rates by 50% by 2020, the Lumina Foundation has set a goal of 60% of Americans to hold degrees by 2025,

the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has set a goal increasing the number of young people who obtain a certificate or postsecondary credential with labor market value, President Obama's goal is for America to be once again the to hold the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

There are many reasons why students do not persist to graduation. In some situations students may not be intellectually ready or cognitively prepared for the rigorous challenges of college. For others, it may be social or personal obstacles that keep them from continuing their educations.

Research shows that well qualified community college students are not as likely to finish degree programs as students with similar qualifications who begin at 4-year colleges (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). The Department of Education Statistics reports a significant difference in students who begin their education at a community college from those who start at a 4-year institution. In their 6-year longitudinal study of 19,000 students who started at community colleges, 46% did not receive a certificate or an associate's degree. This is compared to 24% of students who began at 4-year institutions but did not receive a degree (Radford, Berkner, Wheelless, & Shepherd, 2010).

Comparatively, another study reported that,

- Twenty-eight percent of first-year students in four-year colleges do not return to for their sophomore year. Forty-four percent of those enrolled in two-year colleges do not return for their second year.
- Students enrolled in open-admission institutions are at even greater risk for failure. Two-year schools with open admission report 45% dropout rates after the first year. (In comparison, highly selective colleges maintain a rate of 7%.)
- Ultimately only 28% of students who attend a two-year public institution obtain a degree. (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011, p. 1)

Additionally, studies have been conducted comparing male and female retention rates.

Studies have indicated that men are at a greater risk of leaving college than women. For example,

findings show that 70% of all students who persisted into their sophomore year were women (Christensen, 1990). Department of Education statistics indicated regardless of race or socioeconomic group men are less likely than women to receive a bachelor's degree (Lewin, 2006). However, there is one exception to these statistics. Of students over the age of 25, men are more likely than women to receive their degrees. (Hermes, 2008).

As stated in Tinto's 1988 theory, academic and social integration is critical in retaining first-year students. Some studies have suggested that this theory is more prevalent at different structures of higher education. For example, Pascarella and Chapman (1983) conducted a study at multiple institutions including 4-year residential institutions, 4-year commuter institutions, and community colleges, to investigate the predictability of student retention. Results indicated that academic integration was more predictive of retention at both community colleges and 4-year institutions. However, social integration had an even more effective predictive ability for students at 4-year universities. Comparatively, other studies have indicated that social and academic integration is equal to student retention at community colleges (e.g. Deil-Amen, 2005; Haplin, 1990; Johnson, 1997; Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2008). Correspondingly, a study by Sorey and Duggan (2008) of traditional and non-traditional students attending community colleges indicated that academic integration was important to both groups, but only social integration was found to be a predictor for non-traditional students (Kronenberger, 2012).

Academic integration could be difficult for students who entered college with backgrounds that did not adequately prepare them for academic success. Many students who fail to persist into their second year of college are not unsuccessful because they lack the intelligence to do the academic work, it is more likely because they lack the basic skills in the strategies that lead to success (Feldman & Zimble, 2011). Skills and strategies that contribute to first-year

students' success may be found in writing ability, time management, effective reading strategies, note-taking skills, and having knowledge to prepare and strategically take tests (McCormick, Pike, Kuh, & Chen, 2009).

Social integration can determine the retention of a student. The act of socially integrating into a campus community is essential for students to connect. Establishing peers, mentors, and faculty members are factors that have been identified in successfully integrating students into college life (Swail, 2004). Tinto (1993) links social integration with academic persistence, but this concept has not been supported by studies with community college students who commute for classes and live off campus (Pandolpho, 2009).

Many students are not retained for reasons other than academic or social challenges. Budgetary realities can prevent students from continuing their education. Some may lack general knowledge about financial management such as balancing a checking account or managing credit card debt. Complex transactions such as student loans, work-study positions, and financial aid may be detrimental to the retention of students who lacks the skills to efficiently manage their finances. Students lacking these skills may develop emotional burdens or practical anxieties that may cause one not to persist (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011). In addition, when students have to pay for college costs not covered through financial assistance, they tend to work excessively, enroll as part-time students, or live off campus, which can have a negative impact on retention (Tinto, 2004). Tinto posited that higher education institutions must offer accessible academic, social, and personal support services to improve undergraduate retention. This helps build a connection to the institution, peers, and graduation.

Theories of Retention

The subject of retention has influenced much research. From this research several theories have evolved to assist in understanding the various factors that affect retention. Tinto (1993) highlighted several models that featured the impact of individual abilities on student departure.

Models such as Summerskill (1962) and Marks (1967) pointed to the importance of intellectual attributes in shaping the individual's ability to meet academic demands, while those by Heilburn (1965), Rose and Elton (1966), Rossmann and Kirk (1970), and Waterman and Waterman (1972) stressed the roles personality, motivation, and disposition play in influencing the student's willingness to meet those demands. (Tinto, 1993, pp. 84-85)

Tinto's 1988 student departure models, Astin's 1975 input-environment-outcome model, and Bean's 2001 psychological model of retention are several theories that attempt to discern why students choose to leave or stay in college. Although different models exist, Tinto's 1975 theory of student departure is one of the most frequently cited and researched models of retention. It has been widely accepted by many theorists and researchers (e.g. Hagedorn, 1999; Summers, 2003). Tinto's model provides an invaluable map for the first-year college student (Gardner, 2013).

After synthesizing research on multiple causes of students leaving higher education, Tinto (1988) developed a theory as to why some students are not retained. Tinto examined separation stages and the influence on first-year college student retention. He posited that students move through three stages – separation, transition, and incorporation – taken from *The Rites of Passage* by Van Gennep, a Dutch anthropologist who studied cultural rights of passage. Tinto compared Gennep's work to student persistence in college. This was explained “that it provides us with a way of thinking about the longitudinal process of student persistence in college and by extension the time-dependent process of student departure” (p. 442).

Tinto (1988) stated, “Like other persons in the wider society, they [students] must separate themselves, to some degree, from past associations in order to make the transition to eventual incorporation in the life of the college” (p. 442). To emphasize the correlation, Tinto equated the separation stage to college life because students will somewhat disassociate themselves from their previous communities. For some students this may be severe, but for them to fully integrate into their new community they must separate from their former community to stay in college.

Likewise, the transition stage (Tinto, 1993) is when the students are not firmly tied to their past community, nor does he or she have a tight bond to the new community. This can cause stress or confusion because the students have not yet established a sense of belonging in the new community but has already begun the process of separating from their past associations. Some students are unable to deal with this stress or are not committed enough to their educational goals and inevitably withdraw from college. Tinto (1993) reiterated that students’ desires and goals have a great impact on their response to the stress of transition.

The final stage in the theory is incorporation (Tinto, 1993). This stage is when students have moved away from the norms of their past associations and adapts to the norms of the new surroundings. It is stated, that not all new students can make this transition. Some students, especially those who are recently removed from long-known limitations, may find it difficult to blend in with new acquaintances; they may adopt behavioral styles different than the new community and permanently withdraw or seek out other institutions. The concept that Tinto (1988) described is a longitudinal process of integration into college life. He said, “we do not mean to oversimplify what is a very complex and quite fluid situation. The stages of passage... are abstractions that necessarily simplify for purposes of analysis the more complex phenomena

we understand as student departure” (p. 448). In conclusion he stated, “The notion of ‘front-loading’ of institutional action is... an appropriate strategy to reduce the early incidence of student departure” (p. 451).

Tinto (1993) explained that the longitudinal process of how a student’s experience in an institution over time can cause withdrawal. Tinto (1987) previously proposed four transitions that may lead to institutional departure – academic difficulty, initial adjustment, feeling isolated, and incongruence with the institution. Of the transitions noted, academic difficulty and initial adjustment to college are two that may occur regardless of integration. However the final two, feeling isolated and incongruence with the institution, may be resolved through social and academic involvement (Kronenberger, 2012). Tinto (1975, 1993) implied that the student departure model had two foci, academic and social integration. He observed the importance of academic and social integration. It was through the 1951 theories of suicide of Durkheim, a French academician considered to be the founding father of sociology, Tinto (1993) constructed a foundation for building a conceptual framework for institutional dropouts. Tinto’s retention model suggested that the more successful students are in integrating into academic and social environments the better chances they have in persisting. Tinto (2006) theorized that the first year of college is the most critical time to establish this integration. He stated, “Successful student retention is at its root a reflection of successful student education. That is the job of the faculty” (p. 9). Faculty behaviors and attitudes can profoundly affect students. Academically, faculty’s behavior can have an effect on grades, intellectual development, and formal and informal social interactions with staff and faculty regarding academic and career issues (Mutter, 1992; Tinto, 1987). Researchers have applied Tinto’s 1993 model to several community college studies

(Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Mutter, 1992). As such, Tinto's model is relevant as it aims to assist students in retention.

Tinto's 1987 theory of involvement coincides with Astin's 1975 theory of involvement. A later longitudinal study conducted by Astin (1999) sought to identify factors in a college environment that affected student persistence in higher education. Astin concluded that every positive factor relating to student involvement contributed to the retention of the student. Those factors included campus living, involvement in social fraternities or sororities, honor programs, student faculty interaction, academic involvement, athletic involvement, and involvement in student government.

Astin's 1999 Student Involvement Theory demonstrated the comprehension of why students chose to leave or stay at their institutions. Astin proposed students who were more involved in both the social and academic aspects of college were more inclined to get more out of their studies. In contrast, those who put in little effort in collegiate activities or studies tended to be less involved. According to Astin, the lack of student involvement could often result in student departure. He describes *student involvement* as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Astin's theory postulated five ideas of involvement:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects...
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum...
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features...
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 519)

Both Astin (1999) and Tinto (1987) delineated that faculty and staff at higher education institutions could create an environment that was conducive for providing the opportunities and

support that are unique to students. Astin identified three pedagogical theories to highlight how his theory of involvement could connect directly to student development outcomes.

The Subject-Matter Theory of pedagogy is most common among college professors. The primary dynamic of this pedagogy is lecturing to students. Professors convey knowledge, through lecturing; they transmit their expertise to students enrolled in the course (Astin, 1999). This approach works well for highly motivated students or those with a strong interest in the subject matter, but this approach underserves the student who lacks interest in the subject.

Astin's 1999 second theory of pedagogy was Resource Theory, which postulated if sufficient resources were pooled together student development and learning would occur. One of the most popular measures of this theory was the student-faculty ratio. Not only did it highlight quantity but also the quality of the professor. This theory regarded high achieving students as resources to enhance the learning environment for the campus as a whole. Astin noted two limitations to the Resource Theory. The first limitation indicated that recruiting high achieving students and quality professors to one institution took the recruited talent away from other institutions. Astin's second limitation concerned the deployment of the accumulated resources whereby he said that administrators may have neglected to determine how accumulated resources could be used to their most effective potential.

Astin's 1999 Individualized Theory could also be termed as *eclectic*, because its emphasis was on borrowing from the most useful aspects of other pedagogical approaches. The approach was favored by many developmental and learning psychologists (e.g. Chickering, 1981) and was used to identify the instructional method that best met the student's needs. Astin (1999) admitted that, "although the theory is appealing in the abstract, it is extremely difficult to put into practice" (p. 521). He reiterated the theory's difficulty by expressing how extremely

expensive it could be to implement because of the time it required for each student. Although the pedagogical theory focused heavily on how faculty interacted with students on academic bases, the concept of student involvement encouraged the professor to focus more on “achieving maximum student involvement and leaning” (p. 526).

The aforementioned theories seem to produce the common thread of involvement. Involvement is what matters most during the critical first year of college (Upcraft, Gardener, & Barefoot, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial for first-year programs to incorporate components that enhance student involvement and in turn enhance student retention.

Likewise, another model to help in the understanding of student retention is Bean and Eaton’s 2001 psychological theory of student retention. This model differed from others by using environmental variables outside the college setting that could affect student retention including background variables like family support, educational goals, and a student’s high school education experiences (Bean, 2015).

Bean and Eaton (2000) recommended that psychological processes should lead to academic and social integration. Furthermore, they described the model as having four psychological theories including, “attitude-behavior theory, coping behavioral (approach/avoidance) theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution (locus of control) theory” (p. 50) that lead to academic and social integration.

The [attitude-behavior] model posits that behavior is the result of the intention to perform the behavior... First, intention is linked to an attitude toward the behavior, where attitude is based on beliefs about the consequences of the behavior. Second, intention is based on subjective norms that come from normative beliefs about the behavior. (p. 50)

Bean and Eaton (2000) described coping as “the collection of behaviors an individual uses in order to adapt” (p. 51). This is comparable to Tinto’s model identified as integration. Coping is a form of adaptive behavior expended in dealing with stressful circumstances. In a

similar study, Lazarus (1966) described coping as a behavioral process that can defuse a possible dangerous situation or improve an existing one. Bean and Eaton (2000) theorized that “students who cope well with the difficulties of college are those who... are more likely to gain the attitudinal perspectives of successful academic and social integration. As a result, they are less likely to leave college before graduating” (p. 51).

Bean and Eaton (2001) theorized that self-efficacy is important to the retention of students because it gives them self-confidence and develops higher goals. They stated, “Where locus of control is internal, we expect students’ motivation to study and to socialize to be high. We believe that these efforts will lead to academic and social integration” (Bean & Eaton, 2001, p. 77). Bandura (1986, 1998) defined self-efficacy as an individual’s awareness of his or her ability to perform the vital actions to reach a particular result. Moreover, Mone, Baker, and Jeffries (1995) posited that self-efficacy is a task-specific self-assessment, whereby the more specific the task, the better people are able to evaluate their self-efficacy for that task. In that same fashion Lent et al. (1987) implied that self-efficacy was a predictor of both academic performance and persistence. This statement holds true for at-risk students in that higher levels of self-efficacy contributed significantly to their success. A strong sense of self-efficacy within particular campus life events tends to enable a student to gain confidence and motivation to persist to graduation (Bean & Eaton, 2001).

Bean and Eaton (2001) delineated the attribution theory, or locus of control, as it pertains to a student’s self-confidence and belief that they are the instrumental key to their success. “Attribution as locus of control explains some of the process dynamics of how a student becomes integrated in the academic environment and, by analogy, the social environment of the institution” (Bean & Eaton, 2000, p. 55). Academic involvement in college includes student

attributes and the relationship between these abilities and the educational environment (Perry, Hechter, Menec, & Weinberg, 1993).

First-Year Experience (FYE) Courses

First-Year Experience (FYE) courses are designed for undergraduate students to enhance their academic and social integration into higher education (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). These courses vary by institution but ordinarily go beyond the traditional lecture format as they are taught in active classroom environments with instructor guidance and through peer activities. Students are presented various topics through the course such as *Academic Success* that evaluates new and existing study skills; *Career Planning* that explores different majors and career paths; *Campus Resources* that deal with the important personal and co-curricular resources available to enhance learning; *Campus Involvement* that provides opportunities to explore the clubs and organizations available on campus; and *Personal Development*, which helps the student appreciate and respect the diversity of the campus and other student's viewpoints (Kahn & Kahn, 2015). Orientation and academic advising are often incorporated into the experience to create a positive attitude toward higher education in general and specifically to the institution (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Studies have demonstrated students who participate in academic support have stronger indicators for being successful in higher education and for degree completion (Navarrete, Candia, & Puchi, 2013).

History

Orientating new students to college was recorded from the beginning of the history of higher education and date to before the American Revolution when only nine colleges had been

founded (Packwood, Miller, & Parker, 1977). Harvard, the first college in America, was the first institution to introduce freshman counselors to ease the transition from home to college and instituted the start of orientating freshman to their new environment. Although orientation courses can be identified as early as 1888, it was not until World War I rapid growth occurred (Fitts & Swift, 1928).

In the 1970s when diversity in college campuses significantly increased, it became apparent that programs had to be implemented to deal with the record number of students who were entering colleges and universities academically underprepared. Gardner founded the FYE program in 1972 when he designed a course for the University of South Carolina to ease civil unrest on their campus (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011).

First-Year Experience (FYE) Courses Today

First-year seminars have become ubiquitous in the past 20 years as many college campuses across the US have initiated some form of a first-year experience program to meet the needs of their first-year students (Goodman & Pascerella, 2006). The National Resource Center (NRC) for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition conducted a survey to determine the role FYE courses were playing in higher education. Results of the study showed that 85% of the schools surveyed offered courses and nearly half of those institutions made it a requirement for all incoming students (Koch, 2007). The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition survey also revealed a variety of innovative components in the various FYE programs. A new emphasis on digital learning was an element that 49% of institutions had added as an element in addition to a service learning component and the use of FYE courses to build relationships with faculty outside the classroom (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Koch, 2007).

Effectiveness of First-Year Experience (FYE) Courses

The first-year experience may be one of the most researched courses in the undergraduate curriculum (Cuseo, 2009; Koch, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). Many studies have focused on retention and academic performance. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) wrote that those who participated in a first-year experience course had

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 and on a considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor's degree completion. (p. 403)

Among the experiences related to the positive effects of a first-year experience course are the structural and instructional characteristics that are not commonly found in undergraduate classes. These characteristics include a smaller class size than most undergraduate classes, which promotes peer relationships and enhances student-faculty interaction; the curriculum is educationally purposeful and usually consists of service learning, interdisciplinary instruction, problem based learning, and experiential learning; and engaging pedagogies that include different teaching methods to initiate meaningful discussion and encourage students to participate in open dialog during class and with peers working in groups (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006; Keup & Petschauer, 2011; Kuh, 2005; Leskes & Miller, 2006; Light, 2001; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Swing, 2002).

Chapter Summary

Community colleges are setting enrollment records. Along with the increase in population come issues with student retention. In response to the problem, community colleges have implemented various programs. The American Association of Community Colleges (2011)

issued a report suggesting ways to help enhance their graduation rates by implementing early intervention programs, mandatory orientation, and first-year experience courses.

It is well documented that students who participated in FYE courses had more success and persisted into their sophomore year than those students who did not participate (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011). Additionally, FYE courses have been found to improve a student's college experience through graduation by helping students adjust to college life socially, academically, and personally (Hunter & Linder, 2005) According to Chickering and Schlossberg (1995), providing resources and classes on study skills and time management can enhance student success. Research strongly suggests that FYE courses not only increase first-year retention but also significantly enhance psychological benefits to first-year college students.

Much of the literature about the first-year experience is focused on 4-year institutions. There are limited studies that have addressed issues related to first-year experiences courses in community colleges (Glass & Garrett, 1995). This research may fill gaps as it explores the first-year experience course in a small community college by exploring its effect on academic success and retention while taking into consideration variables that impact student success such as gender, at-risk students, and non-traditional students.

Most of the literature on first-year experience programs indicates that FYE courses can afford significant results on retention and student success. The literature affirms that a first-year experience program serves as an instrument to assist students in feeling comfortable in their new environment, provides a connection to faculty and staff at their new institution, and extends some insight on how to manage their resources and time while embarking on the college journey.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this quantitative comparative study was to determine the relationship between retention and academic success of students who participated in a first-year experience course as compared to those who did not participate in a first-year experience course at a southeastern community college. This chapter explained the methodology used to assess the research questions presented.

The data for this study were collected at a small southeastern community college in Tennessee. The data collected were used to examine if first-time, full-time students who participated in a first-year experience course had more enhanced academic success and retention rates than those students who did not participate in the course. Controversy has been reported in the literature regarding the appropriateness of using retention and academic success as measures of success. However, these metrics are commonly used for institutional accreditation (Mullin, 2012; Zumeta, 2001).

The first-year seminar course was developed at a southeastern community college (2015) to

[Enhance] success in college by assisting students in obtaining life skills necessary to their educational, career, and life objectives. Students... create and apply critical thinking strategies in areas of time management, learning styles, study skills, career planning, resource utilization and media literacy. (para. 1)

The course is held 3 hours each week and taught by administrators, full-time professors, staff, and adjunct professors. The variety of instructors teaching the first-year experience course creates a cohesive environment for students. A course syllabus is presented in Appendix A.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

This study analyzed a first-year experience course and its relationship to retention and academic success at an east Tennessee community college during a fall-to-fall period. The study was focused on 10 research questions and corresponding null hypotheses.

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for males who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for males who participated in a first-year experience course and to those who did not participate.

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for females who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for females who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates from for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho4: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and to those who did not participate.

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho5: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rate from of non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and to those who did not participate.

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for those students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho6: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for those students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for male students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho7: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for male students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for female students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho8: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for female students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho9: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

RQ10: Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho10: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Population

A community college located in southeastern Tennessee is governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR). The institution is comprised of approximately 3,200 credit students and 1,500 non-credit students. The average age of students is 28 years old with the student population nonracially identifiable. The college is an open-enrollment institution. However, incoming students must submit ACT/SAT scores or complete a college placement exam before enrolling. The population of this study consisted of those students enrolled at a southeastern

community college in the fall semesters of 2013 and 2014. During those terms the first-year experience course was required for students who were enrolled in two or more developmental classes, but was not required for all students allowing for a comparison of groups who were enrolled and those who were not.

The student population of the college is diverse in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic background. First-time full-time students included are those who had not attended another postsecondary institution before enrolling at a southeastern community college. Limiting the population to students in their first year, rather than in their first semester, captured data for all new students and those who took the FYE course. For the purpose of this study first-time full-time students who did not participate in an FYE course were also used in this study.

In the fall terms of 2013 and 2014, 1402 first-time full-time students were enrolled at the college. Of those students 488 were male and 771 were female. Approximately 704 were considered *at-risk* students (defined as students enrolled in two or more developmental courses) and 128 were non-traditional students (over the age of 24). Students who enrolled in the first-year experience course during the official add period in the first week and then dropped were not included this study.

Only those students who completed the semester with final academic grades were included in the initial study. Students who were enrolled but received an (I) incomplete, (W) withdrawal, or (AU) audit were not included. The objective was to select students who had successfully completed their first term of college.

Instrumentation

Archival data were used in this study. The data for this study were collected from a southeastern community college's student records database, Banner, which is used by most all TBR schools and is in approximately 1,400 institutions world wide. Banner runs on an integrated database system. It assists many institutions in recording and maintaining data for their students. The archival data collected from Banner included information concerning students who were enrolled in a first-year seminar course and records of students, who in the same academic year, were not enrolled. Using archival data from a database rather than collecting information directly from the students can reduce bias (Good & Hardin, 2003). In addition to the enrollment status data, Banner is used to sort through data such as; GPA, age, gender, and matriculation to the next semester.

All community colleges, universities, and Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) systems in the TBR have used this or similar database to collect and store student information since 1992. The longevity of the system facilitated validity as data entry has been highly standardized over the years (Graybeal, 2007).

Data Collection

Permission was gained from the southeastern community college president and from the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board. This study consisted of first-time full-time southeastern college students who participated and those who did not participate in a first-year experience course. Archival data, consisting of data from 2013 and 2014 fall cohorts in the freshman year experience course, were gathered by the southeastern community college's institutional researcher from the community college Banner student information system. The database reported information of first-time students who successfully completed the FYE course

and students who did not take the FYE course, along with other variables of gender, at-risk students, and non-traditional students. Data for academic success were collected by the southeastern community college's institutional researcher and measured first-year student's cumulative GPA. Retention rates of the first-year full-time students were collected and measured as per reporting enrollment requirements of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR). In addition, the student's identity was protected, according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, by randomly assigning an identification number to each student's record. This process excluded the need to include names in the extraction of data collection.

After controlling for first-time attendance, student lists were generated in the same way for the fall 2013 cohorts and 2014 fall cohorts. Student variables such as, age, gender, college placement scores, enrollment status in the first-year experience course, and academic performance (as measured by GPA) were collected for students meeting the aforementioned criteria.

Data Analysis

Data were collected and entered into SPSS to test the null hypotheses. Data were divided into two parts – those who enrolled in the first-year experience course and those who did not. Student completion of the course was described as receiving any grade other than F, I, or W (Gardner, 2013). All data were analyzed at the .05 level of significance. For research questions 1-5 a series of Chi-Square tests of independence were used to determine the relationship of the first-year experience course with outcomes that measure student success. For research question 6-10, a series of independent sample *t* tests were conducted. The data analysis determined if there were any significant relationships between academic success and retention in those who

participated in FYE courses and those who did not. When all prospective student data had been identified and obtained from Banner, student information was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for further analysis.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the methods, research design, and procedures used in this study. The purpose of this quantitative comparative study was to determine the relationship between retention and academic success of students who participated in a first-year experience course and students who did not. The population of this study consisted of all first-time full-time freshmen who enrolled at the southeastern community college in the fall semesters of 2013 and 2014. Quantitative procedures were used to analyze the association of students who participated in a first-year experience program and those who did not. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data. Implications, conclusions, and recommendations for further research can be found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative comparative study was to determine the relationship between retention and academic success of students who participated in a first-year experience course as compared to those who did not participate in a first-year experience course at a southeastern community college. This chapter presented the results of analyses of data associated with each research question and null hypothesis.

Data for this study were housed in southeastern community college's student records database, Banner. According to institutional policy at the southeastern community college, the office of institutional research had to assign an analyst to assist with collecting the sample. The study compared first time-full time students from the fall-to-fall semesters of 2013 and 2014. The cohorts studied were divided into two groups, students who participated in a First-Year Experience course and students who did not participate in a First-Year Experience course (see Table 1). Next, the cohorts were compared according to gender, at-risk status, and traditional/non-traditional status. A series of chi square tests was used to determine if there was an association between each variable and fall-to-fall retention rates. Independent sample *t* tests were conducted in order to determine if there was a significant relationship concerning those students who took a First-Year Experience course and their GPAs.

Table 1

Demographics of First-Time, Full-Time Students

Variable	Participant (n=556)		Nonparticipants (n=846)	
	N	%	N	%
First-Time/Full-Time Student				
Fall 2013	243	43.7	445	52.6
Fall 2014	313	56.3	401	47.4
Gender				
Male	263	47.3	225	48.3
Female	358	64.3	413	48.8
At-Risk Students	286	52.4	418	49.4
Non-traditional students	24	.04	104	12.1

The demographic information, as shown in Table 1, indicates there were 1,402 participants in the study. There were more females (358) who participated in the First-Year Experience course than males (263). The percentage of male and female who did not enroll were not significantly different (48.3% males as compared to 48.8% females). Further demographic information shows nearly 52.4% of students who participated in the course were considered at-risk (defined as enrolled in two or more learning support classes) compared to 49.4% considered at-risk of those who did not participate in the First-Year Experience course. In this study 24 non-traditional students chose to participate in this course and the remaining 104 chose not to participate.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates of students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in the first-year experience course had higher retention rates than those students who did not participate. The analysis indicated that the association between participating in the First-Year Experience course and retention were found to be significant, $X^2(1, N = 1402) = 6.47, p = .004$, Cramer's $V = .06$. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 1 displays proportion of students retained who participated the First Year Experience course to those students who were not retained and those who did not participate and retained to those students who were not. In summary, the fall-to-fall retention rate is significantly higher for students who participated in a first year experience course than for students who did not. Table 2 indicates the frequencies and associated percentages of those who did and did not participate and those who were and were not retained as well as for the total population.

Table 2

Status of Participants and Non-Participants and Retention Status

	<u>Participants</u>		<u>Non-Participants</u>		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Retained	310	55.8	413	48.8	723
Not Retained	246	44.2	433	51.2	679
Total	556		846		1,402

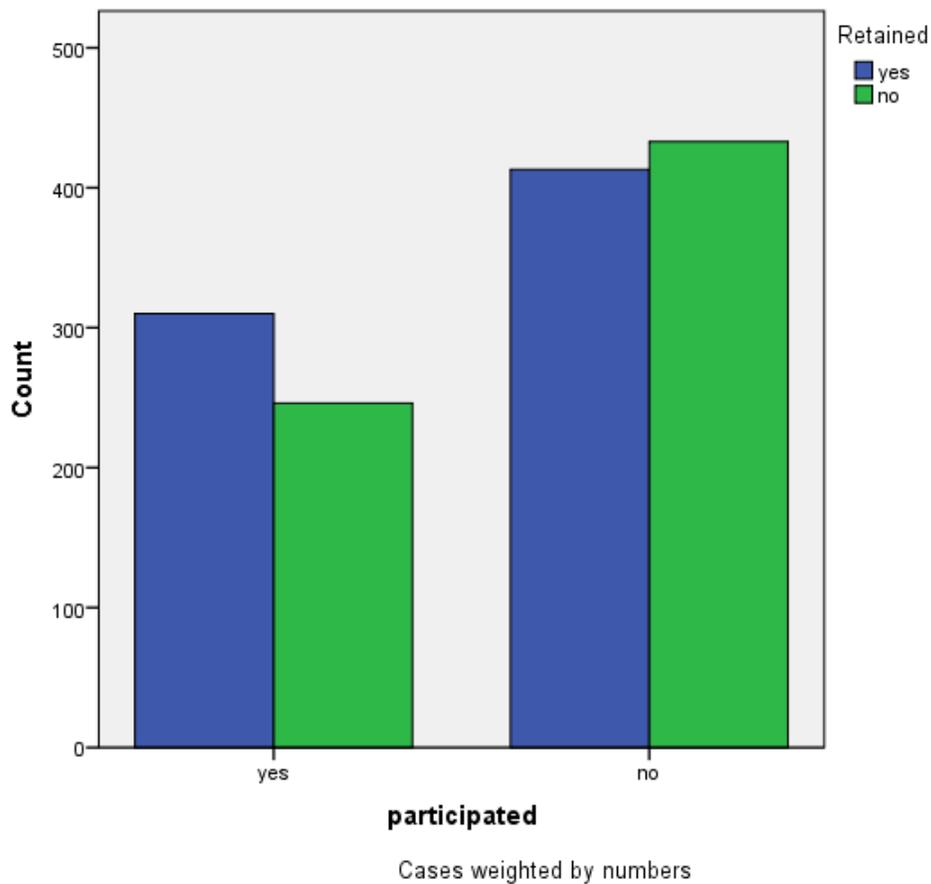


Figure 1 Participants and Non-Participants Retained

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for males who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for males who participated in a first-year experience course and to those who did not participate.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether male students who participated in the first-year experience course had higher retention rates than those students who did not participate. The analysis indicated that the association between the First-Year Experience course and retention was not significant, $X^2(1, N = 608) = 1.13, p = .287$, Cramer's $V = .04$. Therefore the null hypothesis was retained. Figure 2 displays proportion of male students retained who participated the First Year Experience course to those male students who were not retained and those who did not participate and retained to those students who were not. In summary, there was no significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates for male students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate. Table 3 indicates the frequencies and associated the percentage of male students who did and did not participate and male students who were and were not retained as well as for the total population.

Table 3

Status of Male Participants and Non-Participants and Retention Status

	<u>Male Participants</u>		<u>Male Non-Participants</u>		
	N	%	N	%	Total
Retained	105	34.8	197	65.2	302
Not Retained	94	30.7	212	69.3	306
Total	199		409		608

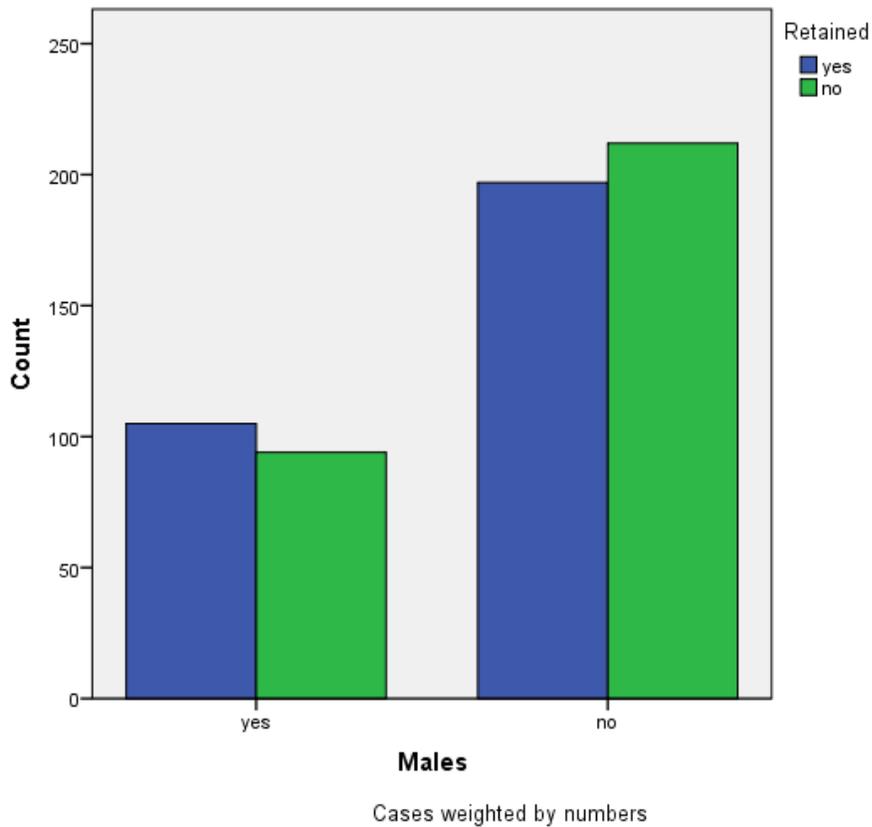


Figure 2 Males Participants and Non-Participants Retained

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for females who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for females who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether female students who participated in the first-year experience course had higher retention rates than those students who did not participate. The analysis indicated that the association between participating in the First-Year Experience course and retention were found to be significant, $X^2(1, N = 794) = 5.04, p = .025, \text{Cramer's } V = .08$. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 3 displays proportion of students retained that participated the First Year Experience course to those female students who were not retained and those who did not participate and retained to those female students who were not. In summary, the fall-to-fall retention rate is significantly for females who participated than for females who did not. Table 4 indicates the frequencies and associated percentages of female students who did and did not participate in a first-year experience course and who were and were not retained as well as for the total population.

Table 4

Status of Female Participants and Non-Participants and Retention Status

	<u>Female Participants</u>		<u>Female Non-Participants</u>		
	N	%	N	%	Total
Retained	205	48.7	216	51.3	421
Not Retained	152	40.8	221	59.2	373
Total	357		437		794

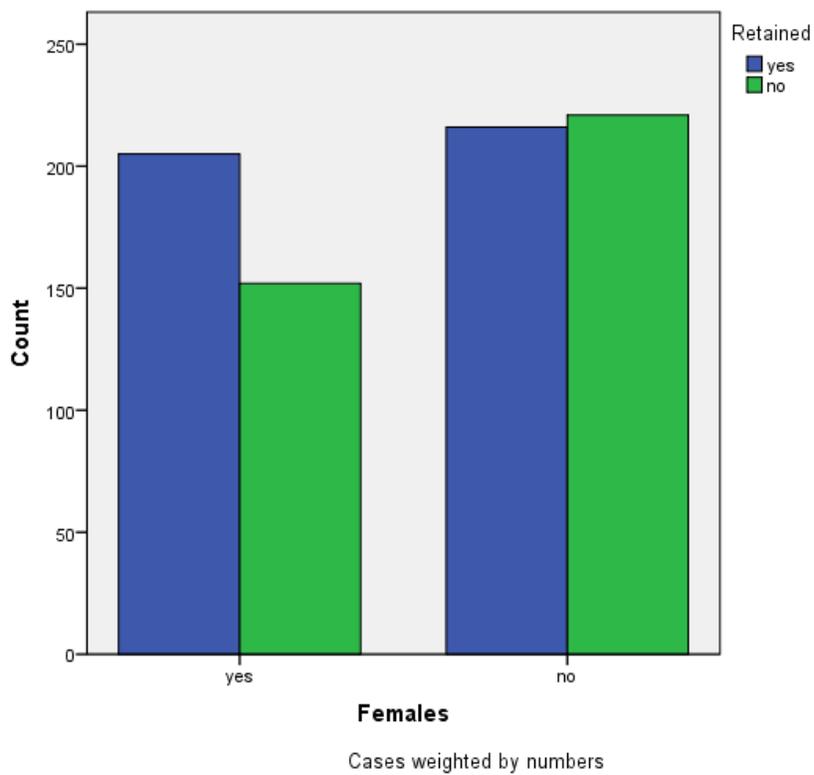


Figure 3 Female Participants and Non-Participants Retained

Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates from for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho4: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and to those who did not participate.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether at-risk students who participated in the first-year experience course had higher retention rates than those students who did not participate. The analysis indicated that the association between participating in the First-Year Experience course and retention were found to be significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 504) = 5.35$, $p = .021$, Cramer's $V = .10$. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a greater significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course. Figure 4 displays proportion of at-risk students retained that participated the First Year Experience course to those students who were not retained and those who did not participate and retained to those at-risk students who were not. In summary, the fall-to-fall retention rate is significantly higher for students with at-risk status who participated in a first year experience course than for students who did not. Table 5 indicates the frequencies and associated percentages of at-risk status participants who did and did not participate and non-traditional students who were and were not retained as well as for the total population.

Table 5

Status of At-risk Participants and Non-Participants and Retention Status

	<u>At-risk Participants</u>		<u>At-risk Non-Participants</u>		
	N	%	N	%	Total
Retained	133	62.7	79	37.3	212
Not Retained	153	52.4	139	47.6	292
Total	286		218		504

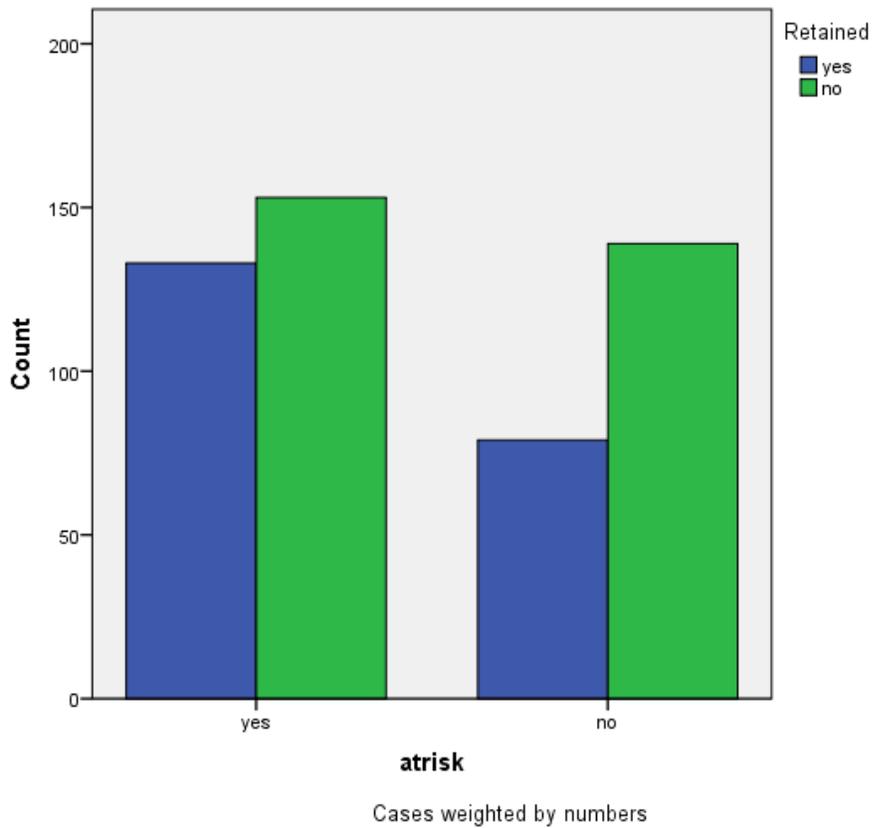


Figure 4 At-risk Participants and Non-Participants Retained

Research Question 5

Is there a significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rates for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho5: There is no significant difference in the fall-to-fall retention rate from of non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and to those who did not participate.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether non-traditional students who participated in the first-year experience course had higher retention rates than those students who did not participate. The analysis indicated that the association between participating in the First-Year Experience course and retention were found to be significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 8.63, p = .003, \text{Cramer's } V = .31$. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Figure 5 displays proportion of non-traditional students retained that participated the First Year Experience course to those students who were not retained and those non-traditional who did not participate and non-traditional students retained to those students who were not. In summary, the fall-to-fall retention rate is significantly higher for non-traditional participants who participated in a first year experience course than for students who did not. Table 6 indicates the frequencies and associated percentages of non-traditional participants who did and did not participate and non-traditional students who were and were not retained as well as for the total population.

Table 6

Status of Non-traditional Participants and Non-Participants and Retention Status

	<u>Non-traditional Participants</u>		<u>Non-traditional Non-Participants</u>		
	N	%	N	%	Total
Retained	10	17.2	48	82.8	58
Not Retained	14	46.7	16	53.3	30
Total	24		64		88

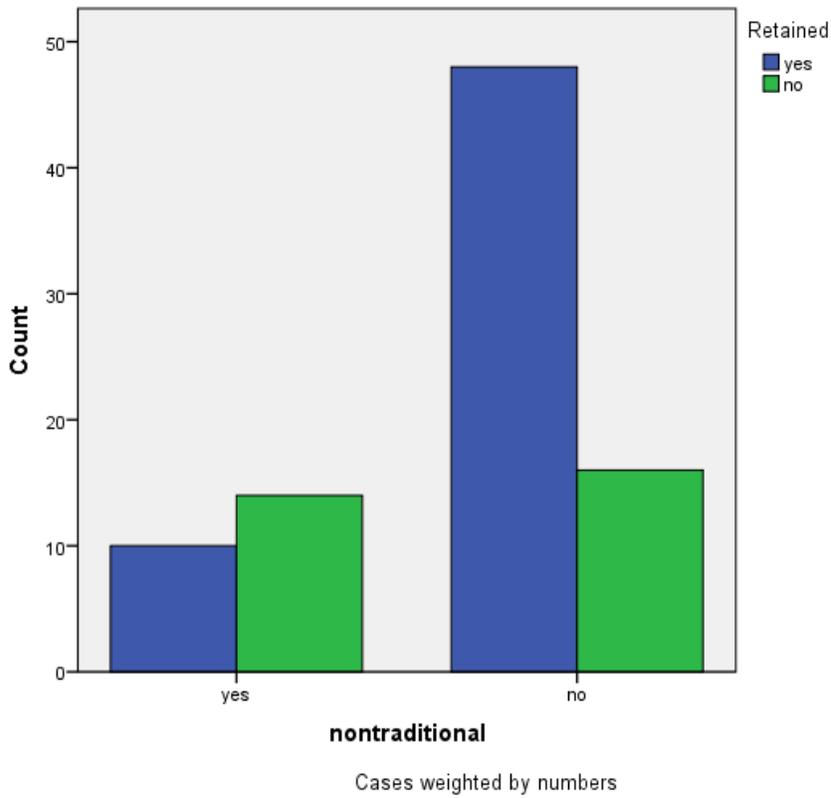


Figure 5 Non-Traditional Participants and Non-Participants Retained

Research Question 6

Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for those students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho6: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for those students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of students cumulative GPA differ from participating in the First-Year Experience course or not participating in a First Year Experience course. Students cumulative GPAs were the test variable and the grouping variable was participating or not participating in the First-Year Experience course. The test was significant, $t(1332) = 24.54$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Students participating in the First Year Experience course ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .77$) tended to have a significantly higher cumulative GPA than those who did not participate ($M = 1.48$, $SD = 1.317$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 1.31 to 1.54. In summary, the GPA is significantly higher for students who participated in a first year experience course than for students who did not. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

Cumulative GPAs of Participants and Non-Participants

Participated	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	GPA Range
Yes	721	2.90	.77	0.0 – 4.0
No	613	1.48	1.32	0.0 – 4.0

Research Question 7

Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for male students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho7: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for male students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of male students cumulative GPA differ from participating in the First-Year Experience course or not participating in a First Year Experience course. Male students cumulative GPAs were the test variable and the grouping variable was participating or not participating in the First-Year Experience course. The test was significant, $t(562) = 15.76$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Male students participating in the First Year Experience course ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .75$) tended to have a higher cumulative GPA than those who did not participate ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 1.26$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 1.24 to 1.59 In summary, the GPA is significantly higher for male students who participated in a first year

experience course than for male students who did not. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

Cumulative GPAs of Male Participants and Non-Participants

Participated	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	GPA Range
Yes	257	2.69	.75	0.0 - 4.0
No	307	1.28	1.26	0.0 – 4.0

Research Question 8

Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for female students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho8: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for female students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of female students cumulative GPA differ from participating in the First-Year Experience course or not participating in a First Year Experience course. Female students cumulative GPAs were the test variable and the grouping variable was participating or not participating in the First-Year Experience course. The test was significant, $t(562) = 15.76, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Female students participating in the First Year Experience course ($M = 3.02, SD = .03$) tended to have a higher cumulative GPA than those who did not participate ($M =$

1.68 $SD = .07$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 1.24 to 1.59. In summary, the GPA is significantly higher for female students who participated in a first year experience course than for female students who did not. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 9.

Table 9

Cumulative GPAs of Female Participants and Non-Participants

Participated	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	GPA Range
Yes	464	3.02	.03	0.0 – 4.0
No	306	1.68	.07	0.0 – 4.0

Research Question 9

Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade point average after one academic year for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho9: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of male students cumulative GPA differ from participating in the First-Year Experience course or not participating in a First Year Experience course. At-risk students cumulative GPAs were the test variable and the grouping variable was participating or not participating in the First-Year

Experience course. The test was significant, $t(463) = 14.27, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. At-risk students participating in the First Year Experience course ($M = 2.76, SD = .05$) tended to have a higher cumulative GPA than those who did not participate ($M = 1.24, SD = .08$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 1.23 to 1.62. In summary, the GPA is significantly higher for at-risk students who participated in a first year experience course than for at-risk students who did not. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 10.

Table 10

Cumulative GPAs of At-Risk Participants and Non-Participants

Participated	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	GPA Range
Yes	210	2.67	.05	0.0 – 4.0
No	255	1.24	.08	0.0 – 4.0

Research Question 10

Is there a significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

Ho10: There is no significant difference in the academic success measured by cumulative grade-point average after one academic year for non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course and those who did not participate?

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of male students cumulative GPA differ from participating in the First-Year Experience course or

not participating in a First Year Experience course. At-risk students cumulative GPAs were the test variable and the grouping variable was participating or not participating in the First-Year Experience course. The test was significant, $t(137) = 8.71, p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. At-risk students participating in the First Year Experience course ($M = 3.04, SD = .72$) tended to have a higher cumulative GPA than those who did not participate ($M = 1.38, SD = 1.38$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 1.28 to 2.05. In summary, the GPA is significantly higher for non-traditional students who participated in a first year experience course than for non-traditional students who did not. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 11.

Table 11

Cumulative GPAs of Non-Traditional Participants and Non-Participants

Participated	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	GPA Range
Yes	65	3.04	.72	0.0 – 4.0
No	74	1.38	1.38	0.0 – 4.0

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis that addressed each of the ten research hypotheses. Descriptive Statistics provided student demographic information to explore each hypothesis to determine if relationships exist between participating in a First-Year Experience Course on retention and academic success.

Results from the two-way contingency table analysis indicated there was a significantly higher retention rate for students who participated in a first-year experience course than those

who did not. Females, at-risk students, non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course also indicated a significantly higher retention rates for students who participated in a first-year experience course than those who did not. However, the two-way contingency table analysis for males who participated in a first-year experience did not indicate a significant difference. Analysis from the independent sample *t* test indicated students who participated in a first-year experience course achieved significantly higher GPAs than those who did not participate. Males, females, at-risk students, and non-traditional students all had indicated significantly higher rates in academic success for students who participated in a first-year experience course than those who did not.

Chapter 5 interpreted and summarized the findings of the data presented in Chapter 4 and then presents conclusions based upon the analysis. Chapter 5 also included recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The implications of the results defined in Chapter 4 are presented in this chapter. It also restates the purpose, reviews the process, summarizes the results and provides recommendations for additional research.

According to Tinto (1993), the first year is one of the most critical times for establishing a foundation for student success and retention. The retention of a student from the first year to the second year is a consistent indicator of success. Higher education institutions, including community colleges, must be prepared to provide the support and guidance needed as they traverse their initial college experience. To help address these issues many institutions have implemented a first-year experience program. Therefore, community colleges have an opportunity to improve student success and retention through a First-Year Experience course (Peterkin, 2012).

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative comparative study was to determine the differences in retention and the academic success between students who participated in a First-Year Experience (FYE) course and students who did not participate in a FYE course at Cleveland State Community College in the fall semesters of 2013 and 2014. This study examined quantitative data obtained from the institutions research office Banner system using first-time, full-time students. The data examined the retention and the academic success of males, females, at-risk students, and non-traditional students. Retention was determined by examining whether or not the student re-enrolled the following fall semester. Academic success was determined by the

student's cumulative grade point average. Statistical analysis was completed using SPSS.

Research Question 1

The results indicated the fall-to-fall retention rate is significantly higher for students who participated in a First Year Experience course than for students who did not participate. A review of literature on the association of retention and the First-Year Experience course supports the findings of this study. For example, Felman and Zimbler (2011) stated that students who participated in First-Year Experience courses had more success and persisted into their sophomore year of college than those students who did not participate. Additionally, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) wrote,

those who participated in a first-year experience course had 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 and on a considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor's degree completion. (p. 403)

Sidle and McReynolds (2009) posited that, in recent studies on retention rates at public institutions students who chose to participate in the First-Year Experiences courses re-enrolled for their second year at a higher rate of (63%) than students who chose not to participate in the seminar (56%). A Study by Derby & Smith (2004) examined the effects of a First-Year Experience courses at a community college on retention. A greater significant relationship between the first-year experience course and completion of an associate's degree was found. A major reason that all types of colleges, including community colleges, implemented first-year courses was to improve the retention of first-year students to their second year (Fralick, 1993, Upcraft et al., 2005).

Research Question 2

Results indicated male students who participated in a first-year experience course did not have a significantly different retention rate than male students who did not participate. The related literature review regarding males and its association with fall-to-fall retention rates were consistent with previous research. The Department of Education statistics indicated that, regardless of their race or socioeconomic group, men are less likely than women to receive a bachelor's degree (Hermes, 2008). Although there has been encouraging research about the effectiveness of First-Year Experience courses, the relationship of these programs with student subgroups (e.g. males) are lacking (Swanson et al., n.d.).

Research Question 3

Results indicated female students who participated in a first-year experience course had a higher retention rate than female students who did not participate. The related literature review regarding females and its association with fall-to-fall retention rates supports this study. Christenson (1990) presented a study comparing male and female retention rates. The findings show that 70% of all students who persisted to their sophomore year were women. Numerous studies that have examined student gender (specifically female) with programs, such as FYE, with the conclusion that programs targeted at this group can aid in increasing female student retention (St. John et al., 2004).

Research Question 4

Results indicated at-risk students who participated in a first-year experience course had a higher retention rate than at-risk students who did not participate. These findings, which are

consistent of a study by Bradburn and Carroll (2002), found 24% of the university students who needed development courses left within 3 years while the rate from community college students who needed developmental courses did not differ significantly. A study by Potts and Schultz (2008) explored the retention rates of at-risk students who participated in a FYE course compared to a control group that did not participate. The results indicated a significant positive retention outcome of 74.1% being retained that participated vs. 42.1% who did not participate.

Research Question 5

Results indicated that non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course had a higher retention rate than non-traditional students who did not participate. Studies from Felman (1993) and Wlodkowski et al., (2001) indicated some non-traditional students have problems affiliated with higher attrition rates. The Education Advisory Board (2012) stated “the first-year experience programs do not target non-traditional students, but those students typically reap the greatest benefits”. (p.17)

Research Question 6

Results indicated that GPAs of students who participated in a first-year experience course are significantly higher than GPAs of students who did not. The National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (2012) indicated a vast amount of institutions approach the first-year experience course as an extended orientation that promotes the development of academic skills and informs of other collegiate services. Bradburn and Carroll (2002) found students who had cumulative GPAs of less than 2.75 in the first year were more likely to leave college without completing their degree. Another study from House (1988)

compared a group of participants and non-participants of a FYE course for five consecutive years and it was found that students who participated earned significantly higher GPAs than those who did not.

Research Question 7

Results indicated that GPAs of male students who participated in a first-year experience course are significantly higher than GPAs of male students who did not participate. Although most literature reiterates male GPAs tend to be higher after participating in a FYE course a study examined that no data has shown males GPA to increase after taking and FYE course (Griffin & Romm), 2008.

Research Question 8

Results indicated that GPAs of female students who participated in a first-year experience course are significantly higher than GPAs of female students who did not participate. In terms of connecting these findings to previous literature, this study validates the claims of previous studies that First-Year Experience courses can be effective. Research on the area of the relationship of females GPA and the first-year experience course, however, was extremely limited. In as much, additional research is recommended.

Research Question 9

Results of the present study indicated that students GPAs of at-risk students who participated in a First-Year Experience course are significantly higher than GPAs of at-risk

students who did not participate. Wilkie and Kuckuck (1989) conducted an “experimental” research design selecting at-risk students who were randomly assigned to participate in a FYE course and a control group that were not assigned to participate. Students who participated achieved significantly higher GPAs over a three year period than the control group.

Research Question10

Results indicated that GPAs of non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course are significantly higher than GPAs of non-traditional students who did not participate. Felman (1993) and Wlodkowski et al., (2001) indicated that some non-traditional students have problems affiliated with lower academic performance. An Education Advisory Board (2012) study found non-traditional students who participated in a first-year experience course have slightly higher GPAs than non-participants.

Recommendation for Practice

This research can be used by community colleges administrator’s to assess programs, policies, and procedures of that could be beneficial to the retention and academic success of their first-time full-time students. Community College leaders should consider implementing a mandatory first-year experience course that requires a first-time full-time student to enroll. Research from Karp et al., (2008) was consistent with this study in finding that a first-year experience course has a positive impact on student retention. Students who participated in a first-year experience course were more likely to be retained than those who did not participate. Additionally, students who participated in this course were more likely to achieve academic

success over those who did not participate. Therefore, college leaders should consider the first-year experience course as a retention tool.

Most importantly, this study has the potential to assist upcoming first-time full-time students who are entering a community college. Driscoll (2007) suggested, “ those who do well in their first semester and who manage to persist in their education and maintain their high aspirations after the first semester are more likely to transfer than the majority of students who do not” (p.2). The current study found most students who participate in a first-year experience course have higher rates of retention and greater academic success. Tinto (1993) noted the first year of college can be the most critical time for students and colleges need to provide services to help students make the transition. Consequently, community colleges should consider mandating the first-year experience course to promote retention within their freshman class.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that all community colleges implement the first-year experience course for all first-time full-time students to aid the participants in transitioning into college life and in persisting thereafter. Although not all variables within this study were significant, in regards to retention, the majority of the variables tested indicated that participants did benefit from taking such a course.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations could further develop the body of knowledge of the First-Year Experience course for community colleges in this study. Existing literature and future studies within the area of the First-Year Experience will enhance the opportunity for institutions to structure these courses to better meet their specific needs.

This study compared the relationship between participating and not participating in First-

Year Seminar course at a single community college institution making the generalizability of the study limited. Therefore, the following recommendations for future research are presented:

1. Replicate this study in multiple like-size community college institutions. This would provide a broader base of results to other institutions and First-Year Experience programs.
2. Examine the cumulative grade point average of students who participated in a First-Year experience course and those who did not participate and compare the student's retention rate to their GPA to see if there is a significant difference comparing higher GPAs and a higher retention rates.
3. Include the relationship between a First-Year Experience course and student graduations rates. The current study only measured fall-to-fall retention rates. Extending the retention measurement until graduation, using the same variables applied in this study, may present beneficial information to community colleges on how to better structure courses to meet specific needs.
4. Collect and analyze additional data other than what is presented in this study. That would be useful for future research. By conducting surveys and interviews with first-time/full-time students, researchers could investigate reasons they did not return, if they completed the course, and explore if participating in the course made a difference in their academic performance.
5. Future studies should focus on finding the components within the course that makes a difference in retention and academic success. Those variables could be topics covered within the course, instructors teaching the course, and teaching methods.
6. Inhabiting strong self-efficacy as a student is another component that is encouraged in the

First-Year Experience course. Expanding the analysis to examine grade point average and retention rates in correlation with self-efficacy could provide community colleges with information needed to better structure courses to aid in encouraging students in raising self-efficacy levels and in turn improve academic success and retention rates.

Conclusions

Results of this study provide information to community colleges in order for them to make informed decision about the allocations of resources and revisions for their First-Year Experience courses. The study also adds to the body of literature concerning First-Year Experience course at community colleges and provides perspective to the effectiveness at a small southeastern community college. Upcraft, et al. (2005) noted while a study of a comprehensive national population might be interesting, a study of the local community college would quite possibly have a greater impact on that campus and be more relevant to the students, faculty, and administration.

The purpose of this quantitative comparative study was to determine the differences in retention and the academic success between students who participated in a First-Year Experience (FYE) course and students who did not participate in a FYE course at a southeastern community college in the fall semesters of 2013 and 2014. The findings indicated the fall-to-fall retention rate is significantly higher for students who participated in a first year experience course than for students who did not. Additionally, for several independent variables tested, specifically females, at-risk students, and non-traditional students, significantly greater difference in fall-to-fall retention rates were found for students who participated in an FYE course than those who did not participate. However, male retention rates were not affected by participation in the first-year

experience course. Moreover, the results indicated the fall-to-fall academic success rate (measured by cumulative GPA) is significantly higher for students who participated in a first year experience course than for students who did not. Furthermore, for the variables tested, specifically males, female students considered at-risk, and non-traditional students, significantly greater difference in fall-to-fall academic success rates were found for students who participated in an FYE course than those who did not participate.

The findings of this study relate to previous theory about the relationship between students who participated in a first-year experience and students who do not. As noted by Pascarella and Terenzi (2005), the evidence is consistent, but only suggestive, that participating in a first-year experience course seems to promote retention and academic success. More research needs to be examined to determine why there was a greater significance in retention rates and academic success for students who participated in a first-year experience course.

While this study focused on student success by measuring retention from fall to fall and grade point averages, the ultimate focus should be on how the First-Year Experience course can lead to degree completion. Unremitting evaluation is crucial for any program offered at a community college to support retention and academic success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

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 Four-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
 - Academic Plan & Advisor Meeting
 - Diversity Reflection
 - 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.

FYS WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction, Ch. 1: POWER Learning: Becoming an Expert Student

Aug 25 Introduction
READ Chapter 1: POWER Learning & pgs. 162-6 before class
Quiz 1 due before class
Studio Connect Library Orientation (meet at Library)

Week 2: Chapter 1

Sept 1 Scavenger Hunt assignment due today
Personality Inventory reflection due
Service Learning workshop (meet in computer lab)
research one of the service agencies for Final Project
finish Personal Collage project (meet in computer lab)

Week 3: Chapter 2: Making the Most of Your Time

Sept 8 READ Chapter 2: Making the Most of Your Time before class
Quiz 2 due before class
Personal Collages due -- you will present them in class
Agency Summary for Final Project due in Dropbox

Week 4: Chapter 2

Sept 15 Time Management reflection due

Week 5: Chapter 5: Reading and Remembering

Sept 22 READ Chapter 5: Reading and Remembering before class
Quiz 5 due before class
email Attention Span reflection after class (TryIt! 5-3, pg 113)

Week 6: Chapter 3: Taking Notes

Sept 29 READ Chapter 3: Taking Notes before class
Quiz 3 due before class
Library Tutorials and Quizzes due today
research Problem in Community for Final Project (meet in computer lab)

Week 7: Chapter 4: Taking Tests

Oct 6 READ Chapter 4: Taking Tests before class
Quiz 4 due before class
Taking Texts reflection due

Week 8: Oct 13 Fall Break – No Classes

Week 9: Chapter 6: Choosing Your Courses and Academic Program

Oct 20 READ Chapter 6: Choosing Your Courses and Academic Program
Quiz 6 due before class
Meet in computer lab
email advisor and instructor to set up advisor meeting
Finish Academic Plan today in computer lab

Week 10: Chapter 8: Transfer Strategies: Making the Leap from Community College

Oct 27 READ Chapter 8: Making the Leap from Community College before class
Quiz 8 due before class
meet in computer lab

Week 11: Chapter 9: Diversity and Relationships

Nov 3 READ Chapter 9: Diversity and Relationships before class
Quiz 9 due before class

Week 12: Chapter 9:

Nov 10 Advisor meeting reflection due
Diversity reflection due

Week 13: Chapter 10: Money Matters

Nov 17 READ Chapter 10: Money Matters before class
Quiz 10 due before class
Financial Philosophy reflection due
Complete Service Hours by Saturday

Week 14: Chapter 11: Juggling Stress, Family, and Work

Nov 24 READ Chapter 11: Juggling Stress, Family, and Work before class
Quiz 11 due before class
Stress reflection due

Week 15: Chapter 12: Careers

Nov 31 READ Chapter 12: Careers before class
Quiz 12 due before class
Review of Professional Interview is due today
Final Project Reflection paper is due in Dropbox by Friday

Week 16: Service Learning Discussion & Final Project

During Final Exam period, have students present Final Presentations

APPENDIX B



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

May 26, 2016

Dear Jackie Newman,

Thank you for recently submitting information regarding your proposed project "A First Year Experience Course and its Relationship to Persistence and Academic Success at a Public Community College".

I have reviewed the information, which includes a completed Form 129 and email correspondence with the campus coordinator.

The determination is that this proposed activity as described meets neither the FDA nor the DHHS definition of research involving human subjects. Therefore, it does not fall under the purview of the ETSU IRB.

IRB review and approval by East Tennessee State University is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are human subject research in which the organization is engaged, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Thank you for your commitment to excellence.

Sincerely,
Stacey L. Williams, Ph.D.
Chair, ETSU IRB



Accredited Since December 2005

VITA

JACKIE NEWMAN

- Education: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. Ed.D.
Educational Leadership, December 2016.
- Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, TN. Ed.S.
Instructional Leadership, May 2011.
- Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, TN. Masters of
Arts, Instructional Leadership, August 2003.
- Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, TN. Bachelor of
Science in Education, December 1999.
- Professional Experience: Cleveland State Community College
Instructor, 2011 – present
- Tennessee Wesleyan College
Adjunct professor, 2004
- Tennessee Wesleyan College
Director of Student Life 2001-2004