

2014

# Impact of an Online Student Bridge Program for First-Year Nontraditional Students

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*Walden University*

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Lisa Adkins

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Walden University  
2014

Abstract

Impact of an Online Student Bridge Program for First-Year Nontraditional Students

by

Lisa Adkins

MS, Warner University, 2009

BA, Warner University, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2014

## Abstract

Low retention rates for first-year students plague many higher education institutions, and are even lower among online institutions of higher education. At Athena Colleges (a pseudonym), the attrition rate can be as high as 50% in students' first academic year. To address this concern, Athena Colleges has implemented an online bridge program that addresses students' academic needs and persistence. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the bridge program in reducing the first-time student attrition rate and academic performance in their first term. Most of Athena Colleges students are nontraditional students and due to this, the theoretical framework that guided this study was Malcolm Knowles's theory of andragogy. The design of the study was a formative program evaluation using a quasi-experimental design to analyze the data, which measured the primary goal of the bridge program, the reduction of attrition of first-time students. The data used for this study was archival data provided by the institution. The data provided included academic program start date, enrollment status, secondary education credential earned, secondary credential award date, first-term GPA, bridge program status, and date of termination (if applicable) and consisted of 4,916 total records. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an ANOVA by comparing the academic performance of students who participated in the bridge program to those who did not, using a 300 student sample size for each group. The results showed there was no statistical difference between the two groups for retention, but there was a statistical difference on first term GPA. The social change implication of this study indicates that faculty and administrators must ensure that remedial academic services are in place for students who enter online programs with knowledge and skill deficits.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to my husband, Roy, who was my rock throughout this entire process. You were there through the frustration, the tears, and the triumphs. I could not have completed this journey without your support.

To my daughter, Rhea, who doesn't know yet what this means. As she grows up, she will understand the importance of her education and will be able to succeed in anything she puts her mind to.

To my friends and family, you were a constant support through this journey. I couldn't have done it without you. Thank you for everything.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee members for their support throughout this process. It has been a rocky road though multiple changes of my committee.

Dr. Earl Thomas, thank you for your willingness to learn with me and move this project forward. Thank you for your willingness to challenge me to constantly improve.

Dr. Dan Cernusca, thank you for your support in traversing the methodology section and your willingness to help me to constantly improve.

Mr. David Ross, thank you for your support and your willingness to listen to ideas and to help point me in the right direction.

Thank you to everyone who helped me “Defy Gravity” and complete this amazing journey.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

This doctoral study was based on a new intervention created by an online university to improve first year student retention. This section includes the background and significance of the problem, what the literature says about the intervention chosen, the research questions, and possible implications of the project.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The setting of the study was an open-enrollment online proprietary university, Athena University Online (the name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the institution), a career-focused institution whose primary mission “is to help students prepare for new careers or to advance in their chosen careers,” according to the university’s website. The university offers a variety of career-focused programs in business, justice, and technology fields. Students who take the institution's assessment and show low persistence and academic aptitude are required to complete the bridge program, which is designed to help ease the transition into higher education. To enroll in the student’s program of choice, the bridge program must be completed satisfactorily. To date, approximately 800 students have been enrolled into the bridge program, and approximately 600 have completed the program satisfactorily.

Low student retention rates are a concern for Athena University Online. Doyle and Gorbunov (2010) found that students who delay entering postsecondary education for 5 years or more have dropout rates as high as 50%. As with most proprietary institutions, Athena University Online has a large population of nontraditional students. According to

the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), 66% of students at proprietary institutions are over the age of 25. While there are many studies that show nontraditional students having a higher rate of attrition, the empirical research is still insufficient to fully explain the issue (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). In addition, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS; 2012) has recently changed its standards to a programmatic level where each program has to maintain certain retention, career placement, and graduation rates in addition to institutional levels. Enterprise Reporting has shown that up to 50% of first-time students drop out within their first academic year, while the required retention rate for ACICS accreditation is 70% for each program as well as the institution as a whole.

Athena University defines *first-time students* as students that are entering the institution without any previous postsecondary or military experience. One of the programs that the target university has put into place to help lower first time student attrition involves an assessment and a student bridge program. A bridge program is an intense introduction to college to help ease the transition of first time college students into postsecondary education. These programs can also help the student learn what resources are available to them, and many also will help with accountability due to the attendance requirements. While there are numerous research studies on the effectiveness of traditional bridge programs (McCurrie, 2009); there is a gap in the research on online bridge programs and the impact on student retention.

## **Relationship to the Larger Educational Setting**

In the past decade, there has been enormous growth in the number of students taking online courses as well as the number of students taking their entire program online. The expectation is that the growth of online learning will continue. According to The Sloan Consortium (2010), 61% of proprietary school chief academic officers (CAOs) have indicated that online learning is part of their long-term strategic plan. The Sloan Consortium also reported that over the past 7 years, the number of enrollments in online education has increased. From 2009 to 2010, the number of online students increased by 1 million (Sloan Consortium, 2010). In 2010, 30% of students in higher education took at least one online course, and the number of online enrollments was increasing at 21% compared to the number of higher education enrollments, which was increasing at just 2% (Allen & Seaman, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2009), enrollment of nontraditional students will continue to make up 41% of student enrollment. Hachey, Wladis, and Conway (2012) found that online students have a 5%-10% higher attrition rate when compared to those students who attend traditional classes. The discrepancy is even greater for those students who do not have previous online education experience.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The setting is an open enrollment online proprietary university, Athena University Online (the name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the institution), a career-focused institution whose primary mission “is to help students prepare for new careers or

to advance in their chosen careers”. The university offers a variety of career-focused programs in business, justice, and technology fields. Students who took the institution's assessment and showed low persistence and academic aptitude are required to complete the bridge program, which is designed to help ease the transition into higher education. To enroll in the student's program of choice, the bridge program must be completed satisfactorily. To date, approximately 800 students have been enrolled into the bridge program, and approximately 600 have completed the program satisfactorily.

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### **Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature**

In the past decade, there has been enormous growth in the number of students taking online courses as well as the number of students taking their entire program online. The expectation is that the growth of online learning will continue. According to The Sloan Consortium (2010), 61% of proprietary school chief academic officers (CAOs) have indicated that online learning is part of their long-term strategic plan. The Sloan Consortium also reported that over the past 7 years, the number of enrollments in online education has increased. From 2009 to 2010, the number of online students has increased by 1 million (Sloan Consortium, 2010). In 2010, 30% of students in higher education took at least one online course, and the number of online enrollments was increasing at 21% compared to the number of higher education enrollments, which were increasing at just 2% (Allen & Seaman, 2010). According to the National Center for Education

Statistics (NCES; 2009), nontraditional students will continue to make up 41% of student enrollment. Hachey, Wladis, and Conway (2012) found that online students have a 5%-10% percent higher attrition rate when compared to those students who attend traditional classes. The discrepancy is even greater for those students who do not have previous online education experience.

### **Rationale of the Local Problem and Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the recently implemented online assessment and student bridge program at Athena University Online. The bridge program was implemented by Athena University Online to reduce first-year student attrition. As noted, prior enterprise reporting from the online learning platform and student information system has shown that up to 50% of first-time students drop out within their first academic year. This research examined the characteristics of students who were placed into the bridge program after taking the assessment and those who were not. The characteristics included the secondary credential earned by the student and the delay between the time when the student earned his or her GED or high school diploma and the time when he or she enrolled in the institution. The research also examined the bridge program cohort and determined its attrition rate in comparison to those students who were not placed into the bridge program by overall cohort as well as by individual program for the students. This research will help institutional leaders understand the makeup of the students who enter the bridge program and to determine if those students are retained at a higher rate through their first academic year compared to those students

who do not go through the bridge program. This will also help to determine if the institution should make the bridge program mandatory for all students.

### **Definitions**

The following terms and phrases are defined as used in this study.

*Academic year:* An academic year is defined in the institution's training manual as three quarters or 36 weeks of instruction.

*Bridge program:* A bridge program is an intense introduction to college to help ease the transition to postsecondary studies for first-year students who are not fully prepared to enter college either academically or socially (McCurrie, 2009).

*Date of determination:* This is the date that the student requests to withdraw from the institution or the date that the institution determines that the student must be withdrawn due to satisfactory academic progress, not meeting attendance policies, or not following the student code of conduct.

*First-time college student:* A student entering the institution without any previous postsecondary or military experience.

*Nontraditional student:* The U.S. Department of Education has identified nontraditional students as having at least one of the following characteristics:

- delays enrollment,
- does not have a high school diploma ,
- attends school part time,
- works full time ,
- is a single parent,

- has dependents other than a spouse, or
- is considered independent for the purposes of financial aid (Choy, 2002).

*Online learning or distance education:* The use of technology to deliver typically asynchronous course material. This can be done as part of a traditional program of study or as a standalone study (Bressler, Bressler, & Bressler, 2010).

*Student retention rate:* ACICS (2012) defines the student retention rate as the total active population minus the number of students who withdraw divided by the total beginning population of the cohort that is being tracked.

### **Significance**

Given that student retention rates are an integral part of the accreditation standards for ACICS, it is vital that Athena University Online address the attrition rates of first-time students. There are many reasons that students withdraw from postsecondary education. Wilcoxson (2010) found that students who do not fully understand what is required of them are more likely to withdraw from school during their first year. As an effort to curtail first-year attrition and to help students better understand the expectations of online learning, Athena University Online implemented a bridge program for first-time students who showed low aptitude and the highest probability of not persisting as shown by student assessment scores.

Although there have been numerous studies regarding first-year student attrition, as nearly 50% of student attrition occurs in the first year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wilcoxson, 2010; Wintre, Bowers, Gordner, & Lange, 2006), it is only logical that the bridge program would focus on first-year students. Enterprise reporting has shown that

this institution's attrition rates are similar to those reported in the major research studies. By further studying the problem of attrition specifically as it relates to the creation of the bridge program, the institution can gain specific data concerning the retention rates of students who participate in the bridge program versus those who do not. Athena University Online will also benefit from the categorization of those students who are placed into the bridge program. This will not only help to build a profile of those students who are more likely to withdraw from the university based on secondary credential and their delay entering postsecondary education, but also address whether students withdraw from the university or persist through their first academic year.

After these students are retained, the next step is to ensure that they are set up for success and reach their ultimate goal of graduation. This institution has an attendance program for those students who complete their first term without passing any of their classes. This program requires students to attend classes each week; if the student is absent 2 weeks in a row, the student is dismissed from the university. Enterprise reporting has shown that these students have a much higher rate of attrition than those who are not in this program. Of those students who enter into their second term without passing a class, only 25% are retained, while 75% of those students who pass at least one class are retained. From these data, it is evident how crucial success is in the first term.

Previous research studies have shown that student retention rates and overall success are much lower in the online classroom than in the traditional classroom; however, there are steps that institutions can take to ensure a positive impact on students' experience and success. One of these steps is to have a robust student support network.

This includes having adequate technical support in both traditional business hours and after business hours, helping students feel a sense of community, and providing an online mentoring program for students. Another way to help online students be successful is to ensure that the students are ready to participate in online learning. For some institutions, this could mean limiting enrollment to students who would be classified as at-risk. For Athena University, this is not possible, due to an open enrollment policy. The institution can still provide resources to help ensure success, which can include student advising and tutoring. A third way to help ensure student success is to provide an orientation course for the students. The orientation should include skill development for online learning such as technical and computer skills and assist the students in developing soft skills such as time management, study skills, and net etiquette. The course should also introduce the students to the different types of assignments they will need to complete, as well as policies and procedures of the institution (Harrell, 2008). While the institution has implemented these suggestions, first-year attrition continues to be a problem. Because of this, other interventions, such as the bridge program, are still needed to help solve this problem.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

Past research studies that have addressed attrition have primarily focused on the students' first academic year, as 50% of attrition occurs within that first year. Moving past the general theme of attrition, there are more recent studies that have explored ways to help first-year students become acclimated to higher education, which has proven to help first-year attrition. Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) reported that there is still a lack of research that focuses on nontraditional students, and the National Center for Education

Statistics (2009) found that nontraditional students make up 41% of the higher education population. More recent studies have focused on tools and programs that can be used to address first-year student attrition; one of those programs is a bridge program, which has proven to be successful in improving student retention and success (Garcia & Paz, 2009).

Athena University Online has instituted a bridge program for first-time students in an effort to improve retention rates and student success. Although past research findings have demonstrated success in traditional programs, there has been, at best, minimal research done on bridge programs that are presented in an online format. The following questions were used to guide the research to address retention in the first academic year and student success in the first term.

1. Is there a difference in student attrition rates between those students who are in the student bridge program and students who are not?
  - a. *Alternative hypothesis*: The bridge program decreases student attrition in the students' first academic year.
  - b. *Null hypothesis*: The bridge program does not decrease student attrition during the students' first academic year.
2. Is there a difference in academic success, as measured by first-term grade point average, between students who participate in the bridge program and students who do not participate in the bridge program?
  - a. *Alternative hypothesis*: Students who participate in the bridge program have a higher grade point average after their first term than those who do not participate in the bridge program.

- b. *Null hypothesis*: Students who participate in the bridge program do not have a higher grade point average after their first term than those who do not participate in the bridge program.
3. Is there a difference in attrition rates between those students in the bridge program who earned a GED and those students in the bridge program who received a high school diploma?
  - a. *Alternative hypothesis*: The bridge program has a greater influence on attrition rates for students who earned a GED than on those who earned a high school diploma.
  - b. *Null hypothesis*: The bridge program does not have a greater or lesser influence on students based on their secondary credential.
4. Does the bridge program affect attrition based on the student's delay in entering postsecondary education?
  - a. *Alternative hypothesis*: The bridge program has a greater influence on students with a greater than 15-year delay in entering postsecondary education.
  - b. *Null hypothesis*: The bridge program does not have a greater influence on any group based on delay in postsecondary education.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Theoretical Framework**

As nontraditional students return to college, they are faced with a different experience than students who go to college immediately after high school. Malcolm

Knowles (1978) introduced assumptions for adult learners. Two of these assumptions are that nontraditional students have more experiences that they bring into the classroom than traditional students do and that nontraditional students want to know the “whys” behind the concepts they are learning. Knowles’s theory applies directly to this problem, as universities have to adapt to meet the needs of their nontraditional students. Knowles’s theory was introduced as the “art and science of helping adults learn,” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011) and currently consists of six assumptions. The two assumptions that were added in 1989 are indicated below (\* added in 1989; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The six assumptions are as follows:

1. Self-concept moves from a dependent personality to a self-directing personality.
2. Adult learners are ready to learn based on their social role.
3. Adult learners accumulate experiences that provide a rich resource for learning.
4. Adults need to know why they are learning something.\*
5. Learning changes to immediate application rather than future knowledge.
6. Motivations for learning become intrinsic rather than extrinsic.\*

Knowles’s theory also seeks to change the role of the instructor to one of a facilitator of learning rather than a transmitter of knowledge. This is especially prevalent in online learning, because most online programs are asynchronous and the student does not have direct contact with the instructor (Knowles et al., 2011). To help the students make the transition into higher education and ultimately their careers, one of the goals of the bridge

program is to help first-time students in moving from reactionary learning to proactive learning, by following the principles of andragogy. This is a shift from how most people have learned throughout their lives, but in training students for their future careers, it is necessary to teach them to become lifelong learners not only because this will enhance their learning in the classroom, but also because this skill will continue to grow and be of use when they are in new careers, helping them to move forward in any company in which they work (Knowles, 1990).

### **Current Research Literature**

In researching this topic, I found it worthwhile to use not only the Walden University library, but also the local university's library as well as the local public library. To reach saturation on this topic, I used the following search phrases to identify information about student types: *nontraditional students*, *at-risk students*, and *adult students*. To research student readiness, I used the following terms: *student readiness*, *student preparedness*, and *student success*. For student interventions, I used *student orientation* and *student bridge programs*. All of the search terms were also used with *online learning*, *distance education*, *student attrition*, and *student retention*. The information of these topics was limited in nature, especially when paired with online learning.

**Nontraditional students and student readiness.** The U.S. Department of Education has identified the term *nontraditional student* as applying to a student who

- delays enrollment,
- does not have a high school diploma,

- attends school part time,
- works full time,
- is a single parent,
- has dependents other than a spouse, or
- is considered independent for the purpose of financial aid (Choy, 2002).

It has been found that 40% of traditional students are underprepared for college course work; the rate of underpreparedness is even higher for nontraditional students. These students are also more likely not to have the soft skills that are needed to be successful in college. These skills include attending class and using effective study strategies (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). In addition, Salisbury and Karasmanis (2011) found that the majority of first-year students do not have the skills to develop search strategies, find journal articles, identify scholarly information, and evaluate the information once it is retrieved. Research has also shown that nontraditional students have different concerns than their traditional peers. Taylor and House (2010) found that these concerns include whether it is possible to be successful, managing time and finances, and developing work, life, and school balance. In addition to the normal concerns and readiness factors for nontraditional students, those who take their program 100% online have other factors that need to be considered. These students also have to be proficient on the computer and in using the Internet and be prepared to be self-directed learners. It was also found that these students are more likely to succeed if they have intrinsic motivating factors rather than extrinsic motivating factors ( Beaudoin, Kurtz, & Eden, 2009; Hung, Chou, Chen, & Own, 2010).

Research has shown that nontraditional students have a higher attrition rate than their traditional counterparts. It has been shown that 50% of students who delay their higher education for more than 5 years have a dropout rate of 50% and that 60% of these students drop out within their first year (Doyle & Gorbunov, 2010; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Knapp, Kelly-Reid, and Ginder (2011) from the National Center for Education Statistics showed that the overall attrition rate for proprietary institutions was 36% and for all postsecondary institutions was a comparable 34%, and that attrition rates for those students taking their programs completely online can be up to 10% higher. Factors that can lead to first-year attrition are lack of commitment to either the institution or the degree, not feeling well advised about enrollment options, or lack of skills needed to be successful at the college level (Wilcoxson, 2010).

To better meet the needs of nontraditional students, colleges and universities have to be able to offer a program to help transition them into collegiate studies, because most adults initially do not see themselves as students. It is arguable that transition planning should be a primary focus of institutions. For nontraditional students to see themselves as students, they must first choose to enter higher education at the right time and must be motivated to do so. Without a high degree of motivation, adults will most likely stop the process of becoming a student when any barrier is put in place (Blair, Cline, & Wallis, 2010; Hussey & Smith, 2010). In addition, to facilitate motivation of nontraditional students, the institution must make a commitment to these students. The campus needs to have faculty and staff who are trained in methodologies specific to nontraditional students, including teaching, learning, and advising strategies. The campus also has to

have curricula that will meet the needs of nontraditional students, which include flexible time frames, programs and services that appeal to these students, communication both on and off campus that is geared to these students, and a campus environment that is appealing to nontraditional students (Wyatt, 2011). In addition to ensuring that faculty and staff can meet the needs of these students, educators have to be aware that these students can be at higher risk than their traditional counterparts of not completing their degrees. The good news is that at-risk students can be identified early enough to make a difference in their success and make a positive difference in student attrition (Singell & Waddell, 2010). Nontraditional students may be returning to school to seek career advancement, to gain new skills after losing a job due to the recent recession, to pursue a bachelor's degree, to seek an education after returning from military service, or to create a better life for family members (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). These students will feel more connected to the university if they feel that they have an advocate to support them through their studies (Bailey & Marsh, 2010).

**Adult learners and online studies.** In addition to what is required of nontraditional students returning to school, there are additional factors for students who return to school online or are taking online courses. Adults will choose online learning for a variety of reasons, which include flexible and convenient scheduling and the ability to return to school without forfeiting their careers or family responsibilities. Students studying online have reported the need to be more disciplined than when attending traditional classes, but they have also reported feeling more connected to the university

and satisfied when they have had specific academic advisors who understood them and provided specific support for them and their academic needs (B. Taylor & Holley, 2009)

Adult learners have shown a propensity not to persist in online learning when they do not have the support of their family or institution, regardless of their academic preparedness and aspirations. Adult learners are also more likely not to persist when they are not satisfied with the curriculum and cannot find relevance within the course work (Park & Hee Jun Choi, 2009). Adult learners rely on frequent interactions with their professors and their peers as well as prompt feedback and communication from their instructors. It has also been found that the number of times a student visits his or her class page, rather than the number of discussion posts, is a predictor of his or her success (Ramos & Yudko, 2008).

**Interventions to improve student readiness.** It has also been found that targeted interventions can make a positive impact on student attrition. These interventions can be classified in roughly six categories: advising, academic help, first-year experience, social integration, orientation, and financial aid (Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008). One such intervention is the implementation of a bridge program. A bridge program is an intense introduction to college to help ease the transition to postsecondary studies for first-year students who are not fully prepared to enter college either academically or socially. In fact, 96% of colleges and universities have a formal orientation program to help students make the transition into the college setting, but despite the abundance of these programs, their effect on learning outcomes is rarely been reported in scholarly research (Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2010). These programs can be either mandatory prior to

enrollment or strongly recommended. The success of these programs may be defined differently by administrators, instructors, and students, but all agree that these programs are successful in helping to transition students into college (McCurrie, 2009). According to Ruff (2011), a transition program, like a bridge program, should include what to expect in college, instruction on how to research, academic readiness, how to use the necessary technology, and career and education planning. Research has shown that when programs address these concerns and issues, students are more likely to feel that they belong in college and can develop strategies for overcoming obstacles. One of the ways that these programs make a difference to students is that the students learn what resources they have available to them as well as develop a sense of accountability, due to the majority of these programs have an attendance requirement (Michael, Dickson, Ryan, & Koefer, 2010). Other interventions include having a robust offering of support services, aligning the academic environment to meet the academic and nonacademic needs of the student, and implementing a monitoring system to identify at-risk students earlier (Nichols, 2010). Research has also shown that the use of such services has a positive influence on students' grade point average (GPA) and retention (Robbins et al., 2009). In addition, universities can improve the success of their nontraditional students by providing tutoring labs and services specifically for nontraditional students that are staffed by their peers. The institution can also develop programs and organizations that are geared toward nontraditional students and their families (Wyatt, 2011).

**Effectiveness of bridge programs.** In determining the effectiveness of bridge programs, there seems to be a general lack of research, and the research that has been

done provides mixed results (Hollins, 2009). Garcia and Paz (2009) found it discouraging that there is a lack of evidence of the success of these programs, even though experience shows a tremendous success with the participants, in that they are willing to devote a part of their professional career to helping a new generation of students become successful in higher education. Kallison and Stader (2012) found that the majority of students reported that the bridge program was helpful in improving their study skills, learning about academic resources, and improving their reading skills, but that it was not helpful in improving their writing and math skills. Nguyen, Hays, and Wetstein (2010) and Pan et al. (2008) found that these programs help students at the beginning of their college careers but that the effect does not necessarily last. In addition, Perrine and Spain (2009) found that while students perceive orientation programs as beneficial in becoming acclimated to college, they have very little impact on students' GPA and retention. In contrast, Nguyen et al. (2010) found that students who attended an orientation program had a significantly higher retention rate than those who did not by a 2:1 ratio. In addition, these students were more engaged in their education by scheduling more appointments with their academic advisors and ultimately had a higher cumulative grade point average.

### **Implications**

Based on the literature and the positive impact that interventions and bridge programs have made in the traditional university, Athena University Online instituted an online bridge program. The purpose of this attrition data review was to look at the attrition of first-year students who took the online bridge program in comparison to the attrition of those who did not. Based on the results, the project yielded recommendations

to add different components to the program based on the students' grades in the Introduction to College course that is required for the majority of undergraduate students.

### **Summary**

First-year attrition is an issue for many institutions, and it is costly for the institution, student, and community. Athena University Online is a proprietary career-focused institution where students take their entire program online and the majority of students are considered nontraditional. Retention is a main focus for this institution because the accrediting body for this institution continues to raise its standards for retention at the programmatic level. The intervention that this institution chose was to institute an online bridge program to help first-year retention rates specifically for first-time college students. The next section describes the quantitative methodology used in this study.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

This section describes the quantitative methodology used in this study. It includes the type of quantitative design, the justification for the design, and the overall evaluation goals. This section also includes the setting and sample, instrumentation and materials, data collection explanation, limitations of the study, and how the participants of the study were protected.

### **Research Design**

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the online bridge program at Athena University Online. The purpose of this program was to improve retention in first-time students in their first academic year. The research design of this study was a formative evaluation of the program as the bridge program is currently providing services to students. According to Spaulding (2008), a formative program evaluation is used while a program is still taking place, in contrast to a summative evaluation, which is used at the end of a program. As this program was an ongoing program still in the early stages, a formative evaluation was best. This also allowed the program coordinators to make adjustments to the program if it did not meet the primary objective.

The overall evaluation goals for this program were to measure the retention rate of the students who participated in and completed the online bridge program to determine whether there was an improvement compared to those who did not participate in the online bridge program. Students who participated in the online bridge program who did not successfully complete the program were not allowed to enroll in a program of study.

The other goal for evaluation was to determine whether there was an improvement in the first-term grade point average for the students who completed the online bridge program compared to those who did not participate in the online bridge program.

The data for the formative program evaluation were measured using a quasi-experimental design. A quasi-experimental design was best for this study because it involved an intervention (bridge program) for one of the groups (treatment group), but the control group and treatment group were not randomly assigned (Creswell, 2011). The students who were selected to participate in the online bridge program were those who scored low in the aptitude and persistence categories of an assessment administered by the institution.

### **Scope**

This study involved looking at an online bridge program for a propriety institution that offers 100% online programs. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the online bridge program, which is a program to aid students with the transition into postsecondary education, improved not only first-time students' retention rate, but also their success in their first term as measured by their first-term GPA. This study also determined whether there were statistical differences based on the secondary credential earned and the delay with which the student entered postsecondary education.

### **Population and Sample**

The setting for this study was a university that is a career-focused institution whose primary mission "is to help students prepare for new careers or to advance in their chosen careers." The university offers a variety of career-focused programs in the

business, justice, and technology fields. The population was a heterogeneous group of first-year online students who had taken the university's assessment. To be enrolled in their program of choice, students had to complete the bridge program satisfactorily.

Therefore, the above criterion defined the two sample groups: those who were enrolled into the bridge program and those who were not—a nonrandomized criterion of participation. Based on the sampling error formula, the ideal sample size for each group was 300 students, which was met for each of the sample groups.

The bridge program group was also evaluated based on delay in entering postsecondary education and their secondary credential (i.e., GED or high school diploma). The sample size was based on a 5% error rate within the sample and on the equal chance of the student being placed into the bridge program or not being placed into the bridge program (Creswell, 2011).

The criteria for the selection of participants for this study were as follows: (a) that the student must be entering college for the first time and (b) the student must have completed the institution's assessment examination. The student must have also completed a secondary credential prior to enrollment and have not participated in an institution's ability-to-benefit program. Additionally, the student must have completed his or her first term to have a GPA established.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

I used archival institutional data for this study. The data provided by the institution had the elements that were required to complete this study. The required limited set of data was provided by the institution in an Excel format and was acquired

from the institution's business intelligence team, the gatekeeper for these data. The data obtained included academic program start date, school enrollment status, secondary education credential earned, secondary credential award date, first-term GPA, bridge program status, and date of determination (if applicable). Datasets often have irregularities within them, but by stipulating specific data fields and procuring them for a singular source, the irregularities in the dataset were minimized. The limited dataset from Athena University Online containing the necessary data was provided on February 18, 2014. Any incomplete record was removed from the population prior to choosing the sample; I will provide the raw data of 4,916 records on request. I will honor requests in adherence to the confidentiality agreements set forth by the institution and to protect the rights of the participants.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Variables**

**Independent variable.** Bridge program/non-bridge program, delay in entering postsecondary education category (1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, or 15 + years), and secondary credential (GED or high school diploma).

**Dependent variables.** Retention days and first-term GPA.

Data records that did not have normal variables, such as secondary credentials that were not GED or high school diploma, were treated as incomplete datasets and removed from the dataset. This ensured a normal dataset, which was required for the ANOVA analysis. To test the normality of the data, I conducted a skewness-kurtosis test. This returned a  $p$  value of 0.052, which indicated that there was no significant departure

from normality. This test also provided the outliers based on John Tukey's definition, which indicates that outliers are outside the first standard deviation, or anything lying outside the 25<sup>th</sup> to 75<sup>th</sup> percentile (Mcgill, Tukey, & Larsen, 1978). Once identified, the outlier data points were removed from the individual records from the sample dataset, keeping the overall record with missing data points.

The first phase of analysis was descriptive statistical analysis, specifically mean and standard deviations for the dependent variables, to look for high-level trends in the data. Once the descriptive analysis was completed, the second phase of analysis was inferential comparative analysis. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare the two sample groups (Creswell, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

The main assumption for this study was that the year in which the secondary credential was awarded and the type of secondary credential awarded were properly reported by the student. This assumption was needed because the institution was in a state that only requires the student to attest to the information.

#### **Limitations**

A potential limitation of this study was that it did not look at all potential reasons for student attrition, only the enrollment into the bridge program. Examples of reasons for student attrition include violations of the student code of conduct, specific student-initiated reasons for withdrawing, financial reasons, and courses taken, and so forth. Another potential limitation was that the study looked at whether the student was selected

for participation in the online bridge program rather than the specific results of the assessment.

The primary limitation of this evaluation was that it relied solely on quantitative data, whereas most program evaluations use both quantitative and qualitative data. The research questions only took into consideration those students who completed the online bridge program and not those who did not complete the program. Other variables regarding student attrition and success were not controlled or taken into consideration.

### **Delimitations**

This study was a first-tier analysis of the implementation of the online bridge program and how it affected student retention and success. In order to fully understand the impact of the online bridge program and how it affects the students; they would have to be tracked through graduation and placement into their career field, which was outside the scope of this current study. The study also did not look at other causes for withdrawing.

### **Methods for Protection of Human Subjects**

As in any research study, it was extremely important to protect the participants. In this research study, permission to use the required data was given by the cooperating institution.

### **Permissions Needed**

To use the data needed to complete the study, a confidentiality agreement was agreed to by both parties. The agreement specified what systems could be accessed and indicated that confidential information could not be disclosed or modified. It also

specified that if any violation of the agreement occurred, there would be legal implications. The cooperating institution signed a data use agreement that stated exactly the information it would provide for the study and that I was allowed to use the limited dataset. The data use agreement can be found in Appendix B. The limited dataset was provided without any identifying characteristics that could be traced to a specific student; the use of the data did not violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The data were obtained after approvals were granted by the Internal Review Board of both Athena University Online and Walden University.

### **Ensuring standardization and Ethical Practices**

To safeguard each student's identity once the data were entered into SPSS, only a case number was used (Lodico et al., 2010). For the requisite 5 years, the individual files, raw data, and data use agreement were stored on a protected computer, and each file was also secured to avoid any information being divulged inadvertently. The risk to the individual was minimized, the institution provided a limited dataset and any protected group was not be treated any differently than a student who was not in a protected group. Through the safeguards, the risk to the individuals and institution was minimized (Walden University, 2012).

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The two test groups were as follows: the group labeled *Bypass* refers to those students who were exempted from the bridge program by their assessment score, and the group referred to as *Complete* included students who participated in the bridge program and completed it prior to enrolling in an academic program of study.

Research Questions 1 and 2 were as follows:

1. Is there a difference in student attrition rates between those students who are in the student bridge program and students who are not?
2. Is there a difference in the academic success, as measured by first-term grade point average, of students who participated in the bridge program and students who did not participate in the bridge program?

In order to address Research Questions 1 and 2, I examined the mean and standard deviation for the two dependent variables, first-term GPA and retention days or the number of days the student remained in an academic program of study. Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for the students' first-term GPA and retention days. These data suggested that the bridge program could be improved to better help participating students improve academic GPA in the first term of study; however, the statistical difference between the two groups was determined by the subsequent inferential analysis.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables Based on Bridge Program Status*

| Bridge program<br>status | First-term GPA |                    | Retention days |                    |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                          | Mean           | Standard deviation | Mean           | Standard deviation |
| Bypass                   | 1.20           | 1.47               | 192.54         | 138.02             |
| Complete                 | 0.73           | 1.18               | 201.36         | 182.99             |

Following the examination of the mean scores and standard deviations for the collected data, I conducted an ANOVA using the Holm-Bonferroni method; each ANOVA was tested at the .025 level, the original level of significance .05 divided by the number of dependent variables. Table 2 shows the results of the ANOVAs. The ANOVAs conducted yielded significance for the dependent variable first-term GPA, where  $p < .001$ , indicating that there was a difference between the two test groups and their first-term success. The ANOVA conducted did not yield significance for the dependent variable retention days, indicating no statistical difference between the two groups with regard to retention. Thus, the results suggest that the alternative hypothesis (the bridge program decreased student attrition in the first year) was supported, due to the fact that the two groups were not statistically even, as enrollment into the bridge program was dependent on low aptitude and persistence and expected not to perform to the same initial level as the students who assessed out of the bridge program.

Table 2

*Tests of Between-Groups Effects by Bridge Program Status*

| Dependent variable | Type III sum of squares | <i>df</i> | Mean squares | <i>F</i> | Significance | Partial Eta squared |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------------------|
| First-term GPA     | 33.701                  | 1         | 33.701       | 18.780   | < .001       | .030                |
| Retention days     | 11668.860               | 1         | 11668.860    | .444     | .505         | .001                |

In order to address research question 3 (Is there a difference in attrition rates between those students in the bridge program who earned a GED or high school diploma?), I conducted an ANOVA analysis to determine how the bridge program impacted student attrition and first-term GPA based on what secondary education credential (HS diploma or GED) the student had earned and the delay between the time that the student earned the secondary credential and that the student entered a program. Table 3 shows the mean first-term GPA and retention days for those students who completed the bridge program based on the secondary credential. These data suggested that there is not a difference between the two groups but will be confirmed by the subsequent inferential analysis.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables Based on Secondary Credential*

| Secondary<br>credential<br>earned | First-term GPA |                       | Retention days |                       |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|                                   | Mean           | Standard<br>deviation | Mean           | Standard<br>deviation |
| GED                               | 0.83           | 1.27                  | 202.17         | 198.63                |
| HS                                | 0.70           | 1.16                  | 201.11         | 178.32                |

Following the examination of the mean scores and standard deviations for the collected data I conducted an ANOVA using the Holm-Bonferroni method, each ANOVA was tested at the .025 level, the original level of significance .05 divided by the number of dependent variables. Table 4 shows the results of the ANOVAs. The ANOVAs conducted did not yield significance for the dependent variable First Term GPA, where  $p = .428$ , indicating that there was not a difference between the two test groups and their first term success. The ANOVA conducted did not yield significance for the dependent variable Retention Days,  $p = .966$ , indicating there was not a statistical difference between the two groups with regards to retention. Thus, the results suggest the null hypothesis: The bridge program did not have a greater influence on students based on their secondary credential was supported.

Table 4

*Tests of Between-Groups Effects*

| Dependent variable | Type III sum of squares | <i>df</i> | Mean squares | <i>F</i> | Significance | Partial Eta squared |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------------------|
| First-term GPA     | .894                    | 1         | .894         | .631     | .428         | .002                |
| Retention days     | 60.877                  | 1         | 60.877       | .002     | .966         | .000                |

In order to address research question 4 (Does the bridge program affect attrition based on the student's delay entering postsecondary education?), I conducted an ANOVA analysis to determine how the Bridge Program impacted student attrition and first term GPA based on the time delay from which the student earned the secondary credential and when the student entered a program. Table 5 shows the mean scores and standard deviations based on the delay based on a student entering a program from when they earned a secondary credential. This data suggests that the students those students who delayed entry into the program longer benefited from the program more, but the statistical differences will be confirmed in the subsequent inferential analysis.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables Based on Delay*

| Delay category | First-term GPA |                    | Retention days |                    |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                | Mean           | Standard deviation | Mean           | Standard deviation |
| 1-5 years      | 0.64           | 1.17               | 173.94         | 147.55             |
| 6-10 years     | 0.60           | 1.15               | 163.34         | 158.77             |
| 11-15 years    | 0.63           | 1.05               | 240.32         | 216.41             |
| 15 years +     | 0.98           | 1.28               | 243.02         | 207.34             |

ANOVAs were also conducted on the dependent variables to determine the significance on the separate dependent variables. Using the Holm-Bonferroni method, each ANOVA was tested at the .025 level. The results of the ANOVAs can be found in Table 6. The ANOVAs showed that there was significance found for the First Term GPA,  $p = .130$  as well as Retention Days,  $p = .007$ . This indicates that the bridge program does affect students differently based on how long the student has delayed entry into postsecondary education. Thus, finding supports the alternative hypothesis: The bridge program will have a greater influence on students with fifteen years delay.

Table 6

*Tests of Between-Groups Effects Based on Delay*

| Dependent variable | Type III sum of squares | <i>df</i> | Mean squares | <i>F</i> | Significance | Partial Eta squared |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------------------|
| First-term GPA     | 7.991                   | 3         | 2.664        | 1.900    | .130         | .019                |
| Retention days     | 396481.561              | 3         | 132160.520   | 4.068    | .007         | .040                |

**Conclusion**

A quasi-experimental quantitative design was used for this formative study. The data used was a limited dataset provided by Athena University Online. The results on the data analysis concluded that the students that matriculated through the online bridge program retention are not statistically different than those students that assessed out of the program. However, their first term GPA is still significantly lower for the students who completed the bridge program which shows there is still room to improve the bridge program to further help these students succeed.

In comparing the characteristics of the students that matriculated through the bridge program, it can be concluded that the online bridge program did not have any impact on the student based on the secondary credential earned but did have an effect of the students based on the delay in entering the program and those students with a delay of 15 years or more seemed to benefit the most from the program.

As within the literature this results of the study show mixed results. Although first year retention for these students improved the students' first term GPA did not improve as much as hoped for these students. However, the results do suggest an intervention like this can be transitioned to online learning with success to help improve at risk students' retention rates. The next section details the project that is part of this study, the interpretations of the findings and the local implications of the study.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

This section includes the outline of the project, the rationale of the project, and the review of the literature. This section also includes the potential barriers implementing the project, the potential timeline and roles and responsibilities to implement the project, and the implications of the project. Additionally, it addresses the social change that may derive from this project.

### **Description and Goals**

The project for the evaluation is the evaluation itself, and the product and genre is an evaluation paper. The goals of this evaluation is to provide formative data to assist in the evaluation and redesign of the bridge program to better serve the students of Athena University Online.

### **Rationale**

This nature of this study lent itself to a program evaluation to evaluate if the intervention performed as expected. The formative evaluation also provides the opportunity to redesign the bridge program and gather new data to test if the program better meets its primary goals. This project in and of itself will not provide a direct solution to the problem but does provide an avenue to gather data on the problem and to address any area the bridge program can be improved to address the problem of first year attrition and success.

Review of the Literature

With paradigm shifts in education that are challenging conventional teaching methodologies, evaluations of programs have become not only important, but necessary (Bentley, Selassie, & Shegunshi, 2012). Evaluation is generally accepted as a way to improve all educational processes (Lindahl & Beach, 2013). Program evaluation can be defined as “the systematic application of social research procedures in assessing the conceptualization and design, implementation, and utility of social intervention programs” (Rossi & Freeman, 1982, p. 20). Another way to view program evaluation is that an evaluation will be conducted to assess a program and to evaluate the program (McNeil, 2011).

The history of program evaluation can be traced back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but its systematic use is relatively modern, having become commonplace in education and public health in the post-World War I era. One of the first public requests for a systematic program evaluation was done by a university professor to evaluate FDR’s New Deal. The boom in program evaluation began post-World War II; in the 1950s and 1960s, program evaluation became more widely accepted not only in the United States, but also worldwide. The 1970s saw program evaluation become a distinct specialty that was used in more diverse fields (Rossi & Freeman, 1982).

The main types of program evaluation are formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and goal-based or outcome-based evaluation. *Summative evaluation* can be defined as testing the success of an intervention, while *formative evaluation* can be defined as testing to maximize the success of an intervention. An *intervention* is any program designed to produce a specific change in the target population (Rossi &

Freeman, 1982; Samkange, 2012). *Outcome-based evaluations* focus on assessing program results, based on evaluation by the participants to measure learning and the impact of this on stakeholders (McNeil, 2011). A qualitative outcome-based evaluation seeks not only to measure what was achieved, but also to gain an understanding of how and why the achievement occurred. This type of evaluation can also discover outcomes that were not intended and assess the intended outcomes' validity (Grimmett, Rickard, Gill, & Fintan, 2010; Owen & Rogers, 1999). One danger of program evaluation is that many stakeholders regard it as an end (summative) rather than a means for improvement (formative; Shower, 2013). In many cases, the same evaluation can be used for both summative and formative purposes. This most likely occurs with a midterm and final assessment (Emanuel, Robinson, & Korczak, 2013; Jenkins, 2010). Daly, Pachler, Mor, and Mellar (2010) argued that the assessment itself indicates whether the evaluation is summative or formative.

A formative evaluation provides a collection of evidence without waiting until the end of the program and due to regular assessments ensures that the intervention and changes remain socially relevant (Samkange, 2012). Formative program evaluation has also become an avenue to build a positive and dynamic experience for individual learners that has been found to have a positive impact on student achievement (Emanuel et al., 2013). Torrance (2012) argued that formative assessments have reached a crossroads where these assessments are being used not as a way to gain understanding of an intervention but more as an outcome-based evaluation to gather what knowledge was

gained in the intervention. This process, however, is gathering momentum as a pedagogical process in K-12 education (Clark, 2010).

Formative program evaluations should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is the scope of the problem requiring action?
2. What intervention might ameliorate the problem significantly?
3. What is the target population?
4. Is the intervention reaching the target population?
5. Is the intervention being implemented as envisioned?
6. Is it effective? (Rossi & Freeman, 1982; Ross, 2010)

The evaluation should also provide timely and constructive feedback to inform effective decisions and serve to facilitate a program's development, implementation, and improvements (Cellante & Donne, 2013). Because of this, formative evaluation can become an important part of the instructional process because it provides both the instructor and learner with information at the right time (Cherem, 2011; Samkange, 2012). The evaluation includes both formal and informal conclusions, where formal evaluation uses scientific procedures for the process of collecting and analyzing the information, including content, structure, and outcomes (Clarke & Dawson, 1999; Shawer, 2013). The process should include four distinct steps:

1. Assessment for the need of the program,
2. Assessment of the process design,
3. Assessment of the impact of the program, and

4. Separating gross from net outcomes (Keshavarz, 2011; Grigal, Dwyre, Emmett, & Emmett, 2012).

For an evaluator, it is important to complete all the necessary steps. One issue in formative evaluations is that the assessment tools can be time consuming and may be viewed as difficult to achieve. If the results are not reviewed critically, then the stakeholders may fail to make positive changes in the learning environment they are in (Emanuel et al., 2013). It is also important to take all these steps to increase credibility to the stakeholders. Further, it is important for many stakeholders to have empirical evidence rather than just subjective analysis (Lillis, 2012). As the steps are completed, the program evaluation can do the following:

1. Diagnose the weaknesses of the intervention and identify items missed in the development stage.
2. Validate the program's goals and ensure that the program is meeting the goals or is progressing toward meeting the goals.
3. Provide feedback and recommendations for problematic traits to promote better outcomes (Han, Hu, & Li, 2013).

One of the most important parts of any evaluation is working with the stakeholders who will receive the evaluation. The stakeholders will need to feel that the evaluation is credible in order for them to accept the findings. The stakeholders will also usually want to be a part of the evaluation in some fashion. This may occur in the design of the evaluation, in conducting the actual analysis, and in helping to create the recommendations that come from the program evaluation. This will help the

stakeholders buy into the evaluation and be more willing to follow the recommendations. The danger in including the stakeholders is that they may unwittingly try to influence the evaluation (Bryson, Patton, & Bowman, 2011).

Some situations create a more difficult atmosphere for the use of formative evaluations. These situations include environments that have programs that are decentralized, programs that are constantly fluid, lack of dedicated funding, and programmatic outcomes (Baughman, Boyd, & Franz, 2012). Depending on the program evaluation methodology selected, other limitations of the program evaluation can include the following: (1) the design of the program evaluation can be too broad and (2) it can miss key components, such as economic factors (Sridharan & Nakaima, 2011).

### **Implementation**

The project will be a program evaluation report that is formed by the analysis found in Section 2. The implementation of this project is multifaceted; the first proposed step is to hold a retreat to discuss findings and strategies for the new bridge program. Once that is complete, the curriculum designers will need to design the new bridge program based on the strategic planning session. After the new design has been completed, the new bridge program will be uploaded to the online learning platform; it will then be verified by the project team and/or executive stakeholders. Any necessary changes will be made, and the course will then be released to students.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

There will not be any additional resources required to complete this part of the project. For the executive retreat, the necessary resources will include a meeting room,

the retreat PowerPoint presentation, presentation equipment, a project manager, appropriate stakeholders, and curriculum designers. Athena University Online has supports in place for this project, with a project management department as well as a curriculum design department; these two departments will provide direction in the redesign of the bridge program, along with the chief academic officer of online learning.

### **Potential Barriers**

The desire of the executive stakeholders to help our students to succeed and graduate should remove most barriers; however, barriers that potentially exist are other higher priority items, such as regulatory changes and company mandates. If the executive stakeholders' attention must be diverted from this project, a potential solution is to meet with a smaller project team to redesign the bridge program and then present the new bridge program format to the executive stakeholder team.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The tentative timeline is as follows:

- January 8, 2015: Executive stakeholder and project team retreat
- January 13, 2015-Janury 23, 2015: Follow-up design strategy sessions
- January 26, 2015-February 6, 2015: Curriculum design team creates new course module
- February 9, 2015-February 20, 2015: Executive stakeholder and project team feedback and module changes
- February 23, 2015-February 25, 2015: Employee training
- February 26, 2014: Student release for upcoming term start

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

- *Business intelligence team*: Responsible for reporting and data analysis for the online bridge program
- *Curriculum design team*: Designs the actual module for the bridge program
- *Executive stakeholders*: Provide strategic guidance and overall approval of redesign
- *Project manager*: Facilitates and record minutes from all strategic meetings; creates communication plan; responsible for dissemination of memos
- *Training team*: Creates web-based training for staff on new bridge program

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

As more students are returning to school and a greater number are returning to online programs, a fully online bridge program gives institutions the ability to provide an intervention for these students to help them transition into higher education. State institutions, such as those in Florida, are no longer requiring remedial courses (O’Conner, 2013). A program such as this provides an alternative solution to aid these students without having them go through remedial coursework.

Locally, this project helps to validate that the intervention of the bridge program does help students remain in school and perform somewhat better in their classes. With attrition and graduation rates part of the accreditation standards for Athena University Online, finding an intervention to help students remain in school and graduate is of the utmost importance.

**Far-Reaching**

These same metrics are for the most part standard among accrediting agencies; because of this, interventions to increase students' success are necessary, and remedial coursework is not always the best solution, given that approximately 50% of students who enroll in remedial course work do not finish their course of study (O'Conner, 2013).

**Conclusion**

There are several types of interventions that institutions can offer their at-risk students. The bridge program offered by Athena University Online is one type of intervention. The implications of this project not only affect Athena University Online, but also show that such an intervention can also be transitioned to students who take their entire program online at other institutions as well. The next section addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the study as well as reflections on the process. The next section also provides recommendations for further study of this topic.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This project evaluated Athena University's online bridge program. The main goal of the program was to increase student retention and increase first-term student success. The project focused on the retention and first-term success of students who went through the program as compared to those who tested out of the program. This project should provide a starting point to continue to redesign the bridge program to address the needs of the students.

### **Project Strengths**

The strengths of the formative program evaluation are that it is able to answer the question of whether the bridge program positively affects student retention and first-term student success with readily available data. With the data being readily available, the quantitative tests can be repeated easily with the same population for new versions of the bridge program. This platform will also provide a launch point to address improvements to the bridge program so that it is possible to continually improve the program to further aid the students' success.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

One of the limitations of the formative program evaluation is that it does not have a qualitative portion. Therefore, it does not allow me to ascertain if the bridge program helps students to transition into higher education and feel better prepared to handle the course work. Another limitation is that the evaluation focuses only on the fact that a student withdrew and not on why the student withdrew. If there is a commonality in the

withdrawal reasons, its identification might lead to an adjustment that needs to be made to the bridge program to address that specific need.

### **Scholarship**

This process has reinforced the importance of scholarship and how it should be used in an education setting. As with any situation, asking the right question and the resulting analysis, when used correctly, can lead to powerful changes in operations to better serve the students of the institution and beyond.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Throughout this process, I have learned quite a bit about how research projects are put together and the importance of integrity within research. This project reinforced my previous knowledge of the importance of asking the right question, due to the fact the research question or the overall guiding question becomes the basis for the entire process. Without that foundation, this process becomes aimless and unfocused. The importance of researcher integrity also became quite apparent in this study. I can see the temptation of trying to select a sample that reinforces preconceived results or to create results that are desired.

### **Leadership and Change**

Change is always hard, no matter the situation. This project reinforced the importance of communication to manage change. Too often, this element is not managed properly by leadership; either not enough communication is delivered, or there is not enough detail in the communication delivered. It has also become evident that in the absence of the communication needed by the staff, they will make up what they think is

correct, and this is often not close to what is actually going on. During any implementation of a new program or modification of an existing program, proper communication will alleviate many concerns and much angst.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

This process reinforced my understanding that in any scholarly endeavor, patience is important while going through a process. As someone who is usually quick to respond and act, I have found this process to be an exercise in patience, which is not a bad thing. Sometimes, it is extremely important to slow down, as this gives one time to reevaluate where a project is going and if any course corrections need to be made.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

During this process, I learned the importance of stepping back and looking at a project not only as a whole, but also in terms of the individual steps. As someone who tends to look at the outcomes first, I found that this project made me take a needed step back to look at the individual steps, as this process was extremely linear and each step had to be completed before moving on to the next step. In the past, when I started a project, I tended to jump around from one area to the next, but this project forced me to create timelines and outline different phases. I will now be able to look at the goal of projects I create as a whole, as well as to ensure that I look at each phase of the project to ascertain that important steps are not missed.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As a project developer, I learned the importance of teamwork in a project such as this one. While this may seem like a strange lesson in a solitary project, I would not have

been able to have completed this project without my committee members, who influenced its development. I have always been one to rely on myself to complete projects and assigned tasks, but by leaning on others in their areas of expertise, I have found that it is possible to make projects go more smoothly and yield better results

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

With higher education institutions being held to higher standards for retention and graduation rates, opportunities to help students have become extremely important. Given that more institutions no longer offer remedial courses, it has become necessary to find other ways to assist students (O'Conner, 2013). This research study has shown that there is an opportunity to better prepare students for their college experience and the challenges they will face, in addition to assisting them in increasing their persistence and success.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

#### **Implications and Applications**

This study shows that an online bridge program will have a positive impact on student attrition rates as well as the possibility of improving student success in the first term, which will also help to increase student retention. Previous studies have reported that the impacts of traditional bridge programs do not last; the results do not show conclusively how the online bridge program will affect students throughout the entire length of their studies (Nguyen et al., 2010; Pan et al., 2008).

A program such as this could be implemented at any school that offers online classes. The design of a bridge program should follow a standard format that should include the following: information on what to expect in college, instruction on how to

conduct research, material on academic readiness, instruction in how to use the necessary technology, and career and education planning (Ruff, 2011). This program, along with other interventions, should help students become more successful in classes and ultimately graduate.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Based on the findings and limitations of the current study, one recommendation is to create a mixed methods program evaluation that incorporates students' insights on how the program prepared them to enter their program of study, including students' familiarity with the online learning platform; whether the program helped them to feel better prepared academically; what, if anything, the program could do to help students be better prepared to start their program of study; and, if a student withdrew, what the reason was and whether the university could have done anything differently to have kept the student enrolled.

Another recommendation is to also evaluate the criteria by which a student tests into the bridge program. Currently, students must have low aptitude and persistency scores on the assessment in order to go through the bridge program. Based on the results of the current study, I would recommend including in the analysis those students who had high aptitude and low persistence scores. By measuring these students' attrition rate against the attrition rate of those who completed the bridge program, it may be possible to determine whether including these students in the program would increase their retention rate. Likewise, I recommend analyzing students with high persistence and low aptitude scores to compare these students' first-term GPA against the first-term GPA of students

who completed the bridge program to evaluate if these students should complete the bridge program.

### **Conclusion**

With more students returning to school later in life and choosing the convenience of online learning, it becomes important to find an intervention that helps these students succeed in the program of choice to graduate and be able to find a career in their chosen profession. The results of this study indicated that students who tested with lower persistence and aptitude had the same attrition levels as their counterparts who tested out of the bridge program. While the students who assessed in the bridge program did not perform better than their counterparts, however, it is reasonable to conclude that the students without the intervention would have performed worse than their counterparts without the bridge program.

Contrary to initial thought, the bridge program did not yield different results based on the secondary credential earned. One group of students that the bridge program had the most effect on was composed of students who delayed entry into school for 15 or more years. These students saw positive impact in both first-term GPA and days retained in their program. This indicates that these students were able to apply their previous knowledge gained from personal experiences to their course work, which is consistent with one of Knowles's (1978) assumptions concerning adult learners. It would seem that the students who delayed entry into the program by more than 15 years had intrinsic motivation to complete the program and that, with the assistance of the bridge program, these students had an advantage in their program of study.

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doi:10.1080/07377363.2011.544977

Appendix A: Program Evaluation Report

Project Title:

A Formative Program Evaluation on Athena University's Online Bridge Program

Project Dates:

May 2014-June 2014

Date of Report:

October 2014

## Executive Summary

The university has been concerned with attrition of first time students specifically within their first year. One of the reasons is the change in accreditation standards by the university's accrediting agency the Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) (Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, 2012). These changes make the university not only held to an overall retention percentage, but also a retention percentage for each program offered. To address this concern a bridge program was created to help transition the students into higher education that assessed with low persistence and low aptitude on the university's assessment. This formative program evaluation was guided by the ten step model that is informed by a Realist approach (Sridharan & Nakaima, 2011). The evaluation was based on the goals of the program which is to improve first time student attrition and first time student success in the first term.

The stakeholders for this program evaluation are:

- The students: they are affected by the outcomes of this program by the help that it offers then and ultimately it is their success that is affected.
- The faculty and staff: they are affected with the students who have to go through the program and they will be in their populations, which they are held accountable for their attrition rates.
- The executive leadership team: they are ultimately responsible for the retention rates of the individual programs and Athena University Online. The executive team will also be responsible for the continuance or the termination

of the program and they will also be responsible for any changes that will be made to the program and the implementation of the program. This group of stakeholders is also the audience for this program evaluation.

This program evaluation compared the students that were not required to complete the bridge program by their assessment score to those that were required to complete the bridge program prior to enrollment based on their assessment score. Once the limited data set was acquired from Athena University, analysis of variance (ANOVAs) was conducted to compare the Retention Days (days the student remained enrolled in their program of study) and the students first term GPA. ANOVAs were also conducted to compare those students that were required to complete the bridge program to examine if the students were affected by the bridge program differently based on the secondary credential earned (high school diploma or GED) and the students delay in entering postsecondary education. The analyses did not reveal a statistical difference in the retention days between the two groups but did yield a statistical difference between the groups on their first term GPA. In examining those students that completed the bridge program, the secondary credential earned by the student did not yield a statistical difference for either the retention days or the first term GPA. In examining the student that completed the bridge program by delay in entering postsecondary education yielded a statistical difference in both the retention days and first term GPA with the group outperforming the others were those students that delayed entrance more than 15 years.

The conclusion is that the program has met the goal of improving retention for those students that completed the bridge program; however, there is still room to improve

these students' first term GPA. There is also room to improve the outcomes of the students who delayed entry less than 10 years. These students had the lowest first term GPA and the least amount of time in their program of study. This project will conclude with a one day retreat to discuss the recommendations made and the redesign of the program.

## **Introduction**

The evaluation report will contain six sections: Introduction, Background, Methodology, Results, Conclusion, and Recommendations. This formative program evaluation, evaluated the online bridge program for Athena University Online that was designed to improve students who were entering postsecondary education for the first time and their success in their first term as measured by the first term GPA. Students who took the assessment that scored low in persistence and aptitude were required to go through the bridge program prior to enrolling into their program of study.

## **Background**

In 2011, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) changed their standards for maintaining accreditation. The university must maintain an overall retention rate of 70% and a 65% retention rate for each program (Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, 2012). Enterprise reporting showed that within the first academic year at least 50% of the first time students withdrew from their program of study. Due to this, Athena University Online created an assessment that measured aptitude and persistence, if a student tested low in both areas the student was enrolled into the online bridge program that had to be completed successfully prior to the student enrolling into their program of study. The program theory behind this, is that if a student was prone to withdraw they would not complete the bridge program, therefore self-selecting out of the program prior to enrolling, thus improving the overall retention rates. It can be argued that these students would not possess the intrinsic motivation, which is one of Knowles's (1978) assumptions of adult learners. One of the benefits of a

program such as this, the results can be seen within one term based on the retention rates of this cohort compared to previous cohorts or this bridge program group compared to those that assessed out of the bridge program. However, the ideal time frame to examine these students is at least the first academic year. Arguments can be made that a longitudinal study should be completed to track these students through graduation and ultimately placed into their field of study since both graduation rates and placement rates are part of the ACICS accreditation standards.

### **Methodology**

The basis of the formative program evaluation was a quasi-experimental design. This was used since it involves an intervention (bridge program) for one of the groups but each group was not randomly assigned, since the groups were created by results of the assessment rather than being randomly assigned (Spaulding, 2008; Creswell, 2011). This evaluation looked at the bridge program to validate if it did aid students' transition into postsecondary education by an increased retention rate and a higher GPA. The evaluation also looked at traits of the students that assessed into the bridge program, specifically the secondary credential earned and the delay the student had between the time the secondary credential was earned and the student entered postsecondary education for the first time. The population that was utilized for this evaluation was a heterogeneous group of first time online students that had taken the university's assessment. The sample size used was 300 students per test group; this was based on the sampling error formula.

The data used for this study was a de-identified limited data set that was provided by Athena University Online. The data that was provided on February 18, 2014 was: *academic program start date, school enrollment status, secondary education credential earned, secondary credential award date, first term cGPA, bridge program status, and date of determination* (if applicable).

### **Research Questions**

Athena University Online has instituted a bridge program for first time students in an effort to help improve retention rates. Although past research findings has demonstrated success in traditional programs, there is at best minimal research done on bridge programs that are presented in an online format. In order to address retention in the first academic year and student success in their first term and create recommendations for the program as the outcome of the doctoral study, these questions will guide the research.

1. Is there a difference in student attrition rates between those students who are in the student bridge program and students that are not?
  - a. *Alternative Hypothesis*: The bridge program decreased student attrition in the students first academic year.
  - b. *Null Hypothesis*: The bridge program did not decrease student attrition during the students first academic year.
2. Is there a difference in the academic success measured by first term Grade Point Average, between the students who participated in the bridge program and those students who did not participate in the bridge program?

- a. *Alternative Hypothesis*: Students who participated in the bridge program will have a higher Grade Point Average after their first term than those students who did not participate in the bridge program.
  - b. *Null Hypothesis*: Students who participated in the bridge program will not have a higher Grade Point Average after their first term than those students who did not participate in the bridge program.
3. Is there a difference in attrition rates between those students in the bridge program who earned a GED or High School Diploma?
- a. *Alternative Hypothesis*: The bridge program had a greater influence on attritions rates for students who earned a GED rather than a High School Diploma.
  - b. *Null Hypothesis*: The bridge program did not have a greater influence on students based on their secondary credential.
4. Does the bridge program affect attrition based on the student's delay entering postsecondary education?
- a. *Alternative Hypothesis*: The bridge program will have a greater influence on students with a greater than fifteen year delay in entering postsecondary education.
  - b. *Null Hypothesis*: The bridge program will not have a greater influence on any group based on delay in postsecondary education.

### **Data Analysis**

Variables:

Independent variable: Bridge Program/Non-bridge program, Delay in Entering Postsecondary Education Category (1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, or 15 + years), and Secondary Credential (GED or High School Diploma).

Dependent variables: Retention Days and First Term cGPA.

Any data record that did not contain normal variables or missing variables were treated as incomplete and removed from the dataset prior to selecting the sample. This was a required step to ensure a normal dataset that is necessary for proper analysis utilizing SPSS (Green & Salkind, 2010).

## **Results**

The two test groups were as follows; the group labeled Bypass refers to those students who were exempted from the bridge program by their assessment score and the group referred to as Complete meaning students who participated in the bridge program and completed it prior to enrolling into an academic program of study.

In order to examine research questions 1 and 2:

Is there a difference in student attrition rates between those students who are in the student bridge program and students that are not? and

Is there a difference in the academic success measured by first term Grade Point Average, between the students who participated in the bridge program and those students who did not participate in the bridge program?

I examined the mean and standard deviation for the two dependent variables, first term GPA and retention days or the number of days the student remained in an academic program of study. Table A.1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for the

students' first term GPA and retention days. The ANOVA that was conducted concluded that there was no statistical difference between the two groups for retention, but that there was a statistical difference on first term GPA. This finding suggests the bridge program could be improved to better help participating students improve academic GPA in the first term of study.

Table A1

*Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables Based on Bridge Program Status*

| Bridge Program<br>Status | First Term GPA |                       | Retention Days |                       |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|                          | Mean           | Standard<br>Deviation | Mean           | Standard<br>Deviation |
| Bypass                   | 1.20           | 1.47                  | 192.54         | 138.02                |
| Complete                 | 0.73           | 1.18                  | 201.36         | 182.99                |

In order to address research question 3 (Is there a difference in attrition rates between those students in the bridge program who earned a GED or high school diploma?), I conducted an ANOVA analysis to determine how the Bridge Program impacted student attrition and first term GPA based on what secondary education credential (HS Diploma or GED) the student had earned and the time delay from which the student earned the secondary credential and when the student entered a program. Table A.2 shows the mean and standard deviations for the students the matriculated through the bridge program and the ANOVA that was conducted did conclude that there

was not a statistical difference between the groups based on the secondary credential earned.

Table A2

*Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables Based on Secondary Credential*

| Secondary<br>Credential<br>Earned | First Term GPA |                       | Retention Days |                       |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|                                   | Mean           | Standard<br>Deviation | Mean           | Standard<br>Deviation |
| GED                               | 0.83           | 1.27                  | 202.17         | 198.63                |
| HS                                | 0.70           | 1.16                  | 201.11         | 178.32                |

In order to address research question #4 (Does the bridge program affect attrition based on the student's delay entering postsecondary education?), I conducted an ANOVA analysis to determine how the Bridge Program impacted student attrition and first term GPA based on the time delay from which the student earned the secondary credential and when the student entered a program. Table A.3 shows the mean scores and standard deviations based on the delay based on a student entering a program from when they earned a secondary credential. The ANOVAs conducted did conclude that there is a statistical difference between the groups based on delay. The data suggests that the students who delayed entry longer had more benefit from the program.

Table A3

*Means and Standard Deviations on the Dependent Variables Based on Delay*

| Delay Category | First Term GPA |                    | Retention Days |                    |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                | Mean           | Standard Deviation | Mean           | Standard Deviation |
| 1-5 Years      | 0.64           | 1.17               | 173.94         | 147.55             |
| 6-10 Years     | 0.60           | 1.15               | 163.34         | 158.77             |
| 11-15 Years    | 0.63           | 1.05               | 240.32         | 216.41             |
| 15 Years +     | 0.98           | 1.28               | 243.02         | 207.34             |

### **Conclusions**

With more students returning to school later in life and choosing the convenience of online education, it becomes vital to find an intervention that helps these students succeed in the classroom as well as graduate and get placed in their chosen profession. This evaluation shows that an online bridge program will have a positive impact on student attrition and potentially the ability to improve student success which should also have a positive impact on student attrition. However, studies of traditional bridge programs report that the positive impacts do not last (Nguyen et al., 2010); (Pan et al., 2008). It is inconclusive at this time if the online bridge program will continue to benefit the students that completed it.

The analysis of this program showed that the students who completed the bridge program had the same retention levels as those students who took the assessment and

assessed out of the program. It is reasonable to conclude that these students would have performed worse without the intervention of the bridge program. Contrary to initial thoughts, the bridge program did not show any difference to the students based on the secondary credential earned, specifically that the GED students would perform worse than the students that earned a High School Diploma. There was a difference in the students based on how long they delayed entering postsecondary education. The area that the bridge program had the most impact on was the students that delayed entry for more than 15 years. These students had the highest retention days as well as the highest first term GPA, which indicates that these students were able to apply another of Knowles (1978) assumptions of adult learners, that they will be able to apply previous knowledge gained and apply it to the classroom. With the intrinsic motivation of the students coupled with the bridge program intervention these students were able to gain an advantage in their coursework.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Based on the findings and limitations of the current study, one recommendation for this project would be to create a mixed methodology program evaluation to incorporate the students' insights on how the program prepared to enter the program of study including: familiarity with the online learning platform, if the program helped them feel better prepared academically, what, if anything, could the program do to help the student be better prepared to start the program of study, and if the student withdrew, what was the reason the student withdrew and could the university have done anything differently to have kept the student enrolled.

Another recommendation is to evaluate the criteria in which the student tests into bridge program. Currently the student must have low aptitude and persistency scores on the assessment to go through the bridge program. I would recommend analyzing the students who had high aptitude and low persistence to measure these students' attrition rate against those that completed the bridge program to evaluate if it would increase the students' retention rates if they were included in the bridge program. Likewise, analyze the students who had high persistence and low aptitude to compare these students first term GPA against those students that completed the bridge program to evaluate if these students should complete the bridge program.

### **Recommendations for Program Improvement**

Although the bridge program met the primary goal of improving student retention, there are still areas that could use improvement to help improve first term student success. If students are successful in their first term then it should lead to future success in sequential terms. One area that can be improved for the bridge program is to clearly lay out expectations of what is required for an Athena University Online student. This should include attendance requirements, what is required as discussion posts, and the importance of completing every assignment every week. These explanations should also include why these aspects of online learning are important and the consequences, such as what happens if the student's courses are not attended and what happens if the student does not meet Satisfactory Academic Progress.

The bridge program does a good job of explaining the online learning platform and the resources of Athena University Online as well as time management. However, in

addition to currently what is in the bridge program, a more robust section on study skills and tips to be a successful is a necessary addition. The bridge program does a good job at introducing internet research, computer literacy and writing at the college level.

However, one area that can be addressed is the online community that is in place with Athena University Online to help the student feel connected to the university.

An additional resource that could be utilized for the bridge program students is the university's ambassador program. An additional recommendation is to assign each student that enrolls into their program of study after successfully completing the bridge program an ambassador from within the same program of study to help be another resource for the student as well as a mentor to help guide the student through difficult times.

### Program Evaluation Report References

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**Program Evaluation Appendix A: Retreat PowerPoint Presentation**

Program Evaluation of  
Athena University  
Online's Bridge  
Program  
{ Executive Retreat  
October 9, 2014

- ⌘ Due to the increased retention metrics from ACICS, a bridge program was developed
- ⌘ This evaluation was based on the goals of reducing first time student attrition and improving student success.
- ⌘ The evaluation compared those students that assessed out of the bridge program to those that required to complete it.
- ⌘ The bridge program did make a difference in retention rates.

## Executive Summary

- ⌘ January 8, 2015: Executive stakeholder and project team retreat
- ⌘ January 13, 2015-Janury 23, 2015: Follow-up design strategy sessions
- ⌘ January 26, 2015-February 6, 2015: Curriculum design team creates new course module
- ⌘ February 9, 2015-February 20, 2015: Executive stakeholder and project team feedback and module changes
- ⌘ February 23, 2015-February 25, 2015: Employee training
- ⌘ February 26, 2014: Student release for upcoming term start

## Timeline

- ⌘ Business Intelligence Team: Responsible for reporting and data analysis for the online bridge program
- ⌘ Curriculum Design: Designs the actual module for the bridge program
- ⌘ Executive Stakeholders: Provide strategic guidance and overall approval of redesign
- ⌘ Project Manager: Facilitates and record minutes from all strategic meetings, creates communication plan and responsible for dissemination of memos
- ⌘ Training Team: Creates web-based training for staff on new bridge program

## Roles and Responsibilities

- ↳ Is there a difference in student attrition rates between those students who are in the student bridge program and students that are not?

| Bridge Program Status | Retention Days |                    |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                       | Mean           | Standard Deviation |
| Bypass                | 192.54         | 138.02             |
| Complete              | 201.36         | 182.99             |

- ⌘ The ANOVA did not yield a statistical difference between these two groups.
- ⌘ This can be seen with only the slight difference between the means of the two groups.

## Research Question 1: Results

- ⌘ Is there a difference in the academic success measured by first term Grade Point Average, between the students who participated in the bridge program and those students who did not participate in the bridge program?

| Bridge Program Status | First Term GPA |                    |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                       | Mean           | Standard Deviation |
| Bypass                | 1.28           | 138.02             |
| Complete              | 0.73           | 182.99             |

- ⌘ The ANOVA yielded a statistical difference between the two groups.
- ⌘ The group that completed the bridge program had a lower average GPA , which is an area of improvement for the program.

## Research Question 2: Results

⌘ Is there a difference in attrition rates between those students in the bridge program who earned a GED or High School Diploma?

| Secondary<br>Credential Earned | First Term GPA |                    | Retention Days |                    |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                                | Mean           | Standard Deviation | Mean           | Standard Deviation |
| GED                            | 0.83           | 1.27               | 202.17         | 198.63             |
| HS                             | 0.70           | 1.16               | 201.11         | 178.32             |

- ⌘ The ANOVA did not yield a statistical difference between the test groups for either RetentionDays or First Term GPA.
- ⌘ This can be seen with the relatively similar means. However, the distributions of the two groups show that the GED students perform slightly better.

## Research Question 3: Results

⌘ Does the bridge program affect attrition based on the student's delay entering post-secondary education?

| Delay Category | First Term GPA |                    | Retention Days |                    |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                | Mean           | Standard Deviation | Mean           | Standard Deviation |
| 1-5 Years      | 0.64           | 1.17               | 173.94         | 147.55             |
| 6-10 Years     | 0.60           | 1.15               | 163.34         | 158.77             |
| 11-15 Years    | 0.63           | 1.05               | 240.32         | 216.41             |
| 15 Years +     | 0.98           | 1.28               | 243.02         | 207.34             |

- ⌘ The ANOVA yielded a statistical difference between the four groups.
- ⌘ The biggest difference in First Term GPA was the students that had earned their secondary credential over 15 years ago. Likewise, the Retention Days has the a clear difference between those students that earned their secondary credential 1-10 years ago and over 11 years ago. This is an area of opportunity.

## Research Question 4: Results

- ↳ The bridge program met the primary goal of improving student retention.
- ↳ An area of improvement is still to help the students become more successful in their first term.
- ↳ The students the delayed entry into post-secondary education for more than 15 years had the highest retention days and the highest First Term GPA.
  - ⌘ This indicates that these students are able to apply what they have previously learned in the classroom. It is arguable that these students will also have a higher level of intrinsic motivation.

## Conclusion

↳ Clearly outline the expectations of what is expected as an Athena University Online student.

↻ This should include:

- ↻ Attendance requirements
- ↻ The importance of completing every assignment every week.
- ↻ What makes a good discussion post and reply.
- ↻ Why these aspects of online learning are important and the potential consequences for not meeting attendance requirements and Satisfactory Academic Progress.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

- ⌘ The bridge program should also include:
  - ⌘ A more robust section on study skills
  - ⌘ Tips on becoming a successful online student
  - ⌘ Tips on how to stay connected to the university through it's online community and social media
  - ⌘ Assign each student that enrolled in the university after successful completion of the bridge program a mentor through the ambassador program.

## Recommendations for Program Improvement

- ⌘ Should every student be required to take the assessment regardless of previous education?
- ⌘ Should we expand the bridge program to all incoming students?
- ⌘ Should transfer students be enrolled in a transfer student seminar, similar to the bridge program but geared for transfer students?
- ⌘ How do we take the success of the students with more than 15 years delay to those who enter school sooner?

## Questions for Discussion

## Appendix B: Data Use Agreement

**DATA USE AGREEMENT**

This Data Use Agreement effective as of November, 11, 2013 is entered into by and between Lisa Adkins and Corinthian Colleges, Inc. The purpose of this Agreement is to provide Data Recipient with access to a Limited DataSet (“LDS”) for use in research in accord with the HIPAA and FERPA Regulations.

- 1. Definitions. Unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, all capitalized terms used in this Agreement not otherwise defined have the meaning established for purposes of the “HIPAA Regulations” codified at Title 45 parts 160 through 164 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, as amended from time to time.*
- 2. Preparation of the LDS. Corinthian Colleges, Inc.(Data Provider) shall prepare and furnish to Lisa Adkins (Data Recipient) a LDS in accord with any applicable HIPAA or FERPA Regulations*
- 3. Data Fields in the LDS. No direct identifiers such as names may be included in the Limited DataSet (LDS). In preparing the LDS, Corinthian Colleges, Inc. shall include the data fields specified as follows, which are the minimum necessary to accomplish the research: academic program start date, school enrollment status, secondary education credential earned, secondary credential award date,*

*first term cGPA, bridge program status, and date of determination (if applicable).*

**4. Responsibilities of Data Recipient. Lisa Adkins agrees to:**

- a. Use or disclose the LDS only as permitted by this Agreement or as required by law;
- b. Use appropriate safeguards to prevent use or disclosure of the LDS other than as permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
- c. Report to Data Provider any use or disclosure of the LDS of which it becomes aware that is not permitted by this Agreement or required by law;
- d. Require any of its subcontractors or agents that receive or have access to the LDS to agree to the same restrictions and conditions on the use and/or disclosure of the LDS that apply to Data Recipient under this Agreement;  
and
- e. Not use the information in the LDS to identify or contact the individuals who are data subjects.

**5. Permitted Uses and Disclosures of the LDS. Data Recipient may use and/or disclose the LDS for its Research activities only.**

## **6. *Term and Termination.***

- a. Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence as of the Effective Date and shall continue for so long as Data Recipient retains the LDS, unless sooner terminated as set forth in this Agreement.
- b. Termination by Data Recipient. Data Recipient may terminate this agreement at any time by notifying the Data Provider and returning or destroying the LDS.
- c. Termination by Data Provider. Data Provider may terminate this agreement at any time by providing thirty (30) days prior written notice to Data Recipient.
- d. For Breach. Data Provider shall provide written notice to Data Recipient within ten (10) days of any determination that Data Recipient has breached a material term of this Agreement. Data Provider shall afford Data Recipient an opportunity to cure said alleged material breach upon mutually agreeable terms. Failure to agree on mutually agreeable terms for cure within thirty (30) days shall be grounds for the immediate termination of this Agreement by Data Provider.
- e. Effect of Termination. Sections 1, 4, 5, 6(e) and 7 of this Agreement shall survive any termination of this Agreement under subsections c or d.

## **7. *Miscellaneous.***

- a. Change in Law. The parties agree to negotiate in good faith to amend this Agreement to comport with changes in federal law that materially alter

either or both parties' obligations under this Agreement. Provided however, that if the parties are unable to agree to mutually acceptable amendment(s) by the compliance date of the change in applicable law or regulations, either Party may terminate this Agreement as provided in section 6.

- b. Construction of Terms. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed to give effect to applicable federal interpretative guidance regarding the HIPAA Regulations.
- c. No Third Party Beneficiaries. Nothing in this Agreement shall confer upon any person other than the parties and their respective successors or assigns, any rights, remedies, obligations, or liabilities whatsoever.
- d. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.
- e. Headings. The headings and other captions in this Agreement are for convenience and reference only and shall not be used in interpreting, construing or enforcing any of the provisions of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each of the undersigned has caused this Agreement to be duly executed in its name and on its behalf.

DATA PROVIDER

Signed: Jan Perovich

Print Name: Jan Perovich

Print Title: SVP Chief Academic Officer

DATA RECIPIENT

Signed: Lisa Adkins

Print Name: Lisa Adkins

Print Title: Business Analyst, CC, Inc, State/Worldwide

## Curriculum Vitae

**LISA ADKINS**

## EDUCATION

Walden University, Minneapolis, MN

**Ed.D. in Higher Education and Adult Learning** **Pending: 2014**

Doctoral Study: Exploring the Impact of an Online Student Bridge Program to First Year Nontraditional Students

Warner University, Lake Wales, FL

**M.S. in Management** **2009**

Final Project: Corinthian Colleges, Inc. Business Plan

Warner University, Lake Wales, FL

**B.A in Organizational Management** **2007**

Edison State College, Ft. Myers, FL

**Associates of Arts** **1998**

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Corporate Training** **2007-Present**

Developed course content and presented trainings on business critical information for admissions, student services, and career services personnel.

**Director of Education/instructor** **2005-2006**

Facilitated training for instructors on Sylvan Learning programs and methodology.

Facilitated tutoring sessions for students Pre-K-12 for math, science, reading, writing, literature, and SAT Prep.

**Course Instructor**

**1999-2005**

Developed content and presented science programs for homeschooled students for K-12 students. These courses included a variety of topics including astronomy, physics, biology and chemistry.

**Science Instructor**

**2003-2005**

Created lesson plans for and delivered course content for physical science, biology, physics, and chemistry classes. Responsible for grading all assignments and creation of labs.

**RELATED EXPERIENCE**

**Corinthian Colleges, Inc, Tampa, FL**

**Business Analyst**

**July 2012 – Present**

Leveraged superior analytical expertise to produce operational reports for the Student Services and Career Services departments of this operator of a network of

degree-granting business schools. Collaborated extensively with key internal stakeholders to define, focus, and clarify business needs and functional requirements. Engaged in detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative information gained from focus groups and surveys, formulating informed recommendations to guide strategic planning processes and achieve growth.

**Director of Student Services**

**November 2007 – June 2012**

Fulfilled a critical role managing a full spectrum of shared services for the benefits of students attending the various schools operated by this company. Effectively supervised coaching, training, and refresher training activities for all employees, ensuring complete proficiency in all organizational policies and procedures and achieving unsurpassed levels of customer service.

**Student Services Specialist**

**July 2007-October 2012**

Provided key support to Advisors, identifying, addressing, and resolving student issues, technology issues, and conducting research as required. Leveraged superior attention to detail to actively monitor

orientation, registration, and book procurement processes. Counseled students seeking to withdraw from active enrollment.

**Student Services Advisor**

**May, 2006-June, 2007**

Instrumental in transitioning students through their first term, providing guidance on class selection, enrollment, textbook orders, and orientation. Spearheaded the administration of general support services, addressing and resolving a wide range of student issues and motivating each individual to continue enrollment. Trained new staff members on all company policies and procedures.

**Gabriel Learning Enterprises**

**June, 2005-June 2006**

**Director of Education**

Effectively managed a broad array of administrative functions for the Winter Haven location of this successful provider of customized tutoring services spanning multiple disciplines. Continually audited each student's academic progress, as well as Learning Center operations, to ensure compliance with all standards of

the Sylvan organization. Engaged in a variety of human resources and training responsibilities, including the hire, supervision, and evaluation of Instructors, Instructional Coordinators, and Teacher Assistants. Assumed a lead role in the planning and execution of Parent Conferences and School Conferences, establishing a framework of communication, collaboration, and cooperation with parents and teachers to ensure success in the classroom

**Museum of Science & Industry**

**July, 2002-May 2005**

**Challenger Learning Center Coordinator**

Developed and implemented an interactive training program for this exceptional educational facility that encourages students to see themselves in successful roles as scientists, engineers, and researchers. Produced student preparation materials and information packets in full compliance with all Sunshine State Standards, while engaging in curriculum development, program updates, and new program installations. Gained invaluable experience in the formulation of curricula specifically targeting homeschool environments and visiting

exhibits. Orchestrated all planning related to student days for special events. Contributed additional expertise as a lead and participating InterActor, as well as an instructor at the Lee Academy for Gifted Education in the topics of Physical Science, Biology, and Chemistry.

#### MEMBERSHIPS

Phi Theta Kappa

Phi Theta Kappa Alumni Association

Sigma Alpha Iota

#### AWARDS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Corinthian Colleges, Inc. Award of Excellence                     | 2008 |
| Corinthian Colleges, Inc. Online Division Outstanding Director    | 2008 |
| Corinthian Colleges, Inc. Online Division Outstanding Coordinator | 2007 |