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# Retention of Minority Students in a Bridge Program: Student Perceptions on Their Successes and Challenges

Chadwick Biermeier  
*Walden University*

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Chadwick Biermeier

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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

Retention of Minority Students in a Bridge Program:  
Student Perceptions on Their Successes and Challenges

by

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MA, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, 2005

BS, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2017

## Abstract

This study was an examination of the minority student retention rate in a year-long bridge program. The retention rate of these students is 25%. University administration was concerned about the retention rate and its impact on future enrollment. Using Jack Mezirow's transformative learning as a framework of understanding, the purpose of this study was to identify successes and challenges that minority students experienced in the bridge program and how those experiences affected future decisions on retention. A qualitative case-study design was implemented and 9 of the 140 bridge students were purposefully selected for individual interviews. Data analysis was conducted using open coding procedures with iterative recategorization to identify the themes. Key findings indicated that students found peer mentoring, flexibility in lab schedules, and speakers to be successes. Challenges that students faced included efforts associated with self-regulation and self-efficacy. Based on these findings, a policy recommendation was developed for the local site that suggested developing a mentoring program and continued use of Student Support Services beyond the first year. The results of this study will help university administration make informed and strategic decisions to revise and enhance the bridge program towards a focus upon the improvement of minority student retention. Further, this study promotes social change by serving as a model for other institutions in similar situations and continues the conversation in the literature regarding minority student retention rate.

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## Dedication

For Myrical.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my family, friends, and colleagues for supporting my journey to make this dream come true. Their positive encouragement helped me along the way, giving me confidence and renewing my dedication.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

The goal of this study was to look at minority student retention of the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf, a small, private, Presbyterian university located in the Midwestern region of the United States of America. This section will explain the current problem at the University of Asdorf and include contemporary, relevant literature. An explanation of the significance of the problem, along with current research, is also provided in this section. I explored questions that helped drive the study and implications that could result from conducting this study.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The proposed local problem that was studied was the low retention rate of minority students in a year-long Bridge Program. The Bridge Program admits students who have low American College Testing (ACT) scores, or low high school Grade Point Averages (GPA). These students are only admitted with an agreement to enroll and participate in this Bridge Program for their first year at the University of Asdorf. The current retention rate of the minority students in the Bridge Program is 25%. The University of Asdorf actively recruits minorities that may be first-generation students. Local administrators worry that this low minority retention rate could adversely affect future minority students looking to enroll at the University of Asdorf (M. Willonberg, personal communication, October 3, 2013). The University of Asdorf is located in a city which has three other universities and one community college. There is also another large university located 20 miles away. These institutions recruit against each other for

local students, and retention rates could affect the college choice of minority students. An example of this recruiting would be the University of Prochester's Tri-State Initiative. This initiative tries to draw local students from the surrounding states (University of Prochester, 2015). The University of Prochester has in-state and out-of-state tuition prices for students. This initiative offers these local students the same tuition as in-state students. This initiative is an opportunity for some students to attend college at a lower rate than other local in-state colleges. Another recruitment tool encourages students to earn their two-year Associates Degree and then attend a university or college for another two years to earn their Bachelor's Degree. This idea encourages students to save money by only attending the university or college for two-years (NICC, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education recommends that students consider retention rate when applying for student financial aid and choosing a college or university to attend (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education (2015) stated that 85% of college and university students receive financial aid. Students' decisions whether or not to enroll at the University of Asdorf could be affected by the school's low retention rates, based on the U.S. Department of Education information.

Most research on minority students in a Bridge Program discussed the short period of time before the school year begins during which students attend a class or sessions to acclimate them to university life and course work (Barnett, Nakanishi, Pretlow, Teres, Wathington, & Weissman, 2011, Bowler, 2009; Garcia & Paz, 2009; McCurrie, 2009). The research has shown this period to be four to six weeks. The literature did not discuss year-long Bridge Programs, but did discuss programs similar to

the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf. These programs include the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) Program (McCurrie, 2009) and federally funded TRIO programs (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). TRIO refers to the number of original programs the federal government created to increase access to higher education for disadvantaged students (East Gateway Community College, 2014). This study on minority students and their reasons for retention, or lack of retention, will add to the current literature.

## **Rationale**

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

The University of Asdorf is located in the Midwest, in a community of 57,637 residents as of the 2010 census (City of Asdorf, 2013). The community consists primarily of Caucasians (91.7%), with African-Americans (4%) and Hispanics (2.4%) making up a greater segment of the remaining population. Since 2001, the City of Asdorf has taken steps to increase the minority population of its city. This increase in the minority population also brought opportunities for future first-generation students to attend college. These are the students that could participate in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program.

As part of this effort, the city officials made plans to develop accessible and affordable housing for people of low to moderate income. The City of Asdorf has several factories that have seen minimal reductions in force over the last five years. The change in housing and thriving business industry has increased the minority population over the

last 10 years. The increase in population has brought more families to the area, and the children who want to attend a post-secondary school have options within the city.

The community supports four universities and one community college. The community college enrolls many students who complete general education requirements before moving on to a four-year university. Students save money by attending the community college for two years to receive their Associate's Degree and then spend two to three years at a four-year college to receive their Bachelor's Degree.

The University of Asdorf has maintained quantitative data about the Bridge Program's retention rate. The students in this program have a low retention and graduation rate. University of Asdorf administrators, Dr. Willonberg, Ms. Sunderland, and Dr. Sanders have had concerns about these low numbers and expressed interest in having qualitative data collected (M. Willonberg, personal communication, October 3, 2013). These concerns led to the development of this study. Information gathered from this study's one-on-one interviews divulged reasons for this low retention rate. These interviews allowed students to express their concerns and ideas without having the guided questions of a quantitative course evaluation. It may be hard to solve the retention problem of this program if students do not have the opportunity to share input into what keeps them enrolled or why they dropout. The interviews offered an alternative way for the students' voices to be heard.

### **University Setting**

The University of Asdorf recruits across the entire United States of America, accepting students that other secondary institutions turn away. It is an institution that



focuses on student achievement and success in the classroom. The University of Asdorf actively recruits first-generation students that may have low college admission scores (M. Willonberg, personal communication, October 3, 2013). About 33% of the students at the University of Asdorf are minorities (Anderson, 2013). The minority population is made up of students from 12 different countries and ethnic backgrounds (Anderson, 2013). Many of these minorities take part in the university's Bridge Program and were the focus of the study.

The University of Asdorf consists of about 200 faculty members with half of them being full-time instructors and the other half being adjunct instructors. There are no research specific faculty members on staff. The faculty focuses on the students' academic success. The university offers numerous options for on-campus housing. Many new apartment dorms, called dorm suites, have been built in the last five years, and many houses around the campus are available for students to rent. About 35% of the students participate in athletics, which helps draw those first-generation students to the University of Asdorf. The university has local and national sororities and fraternities for students to join, including Phi Beta Sigma, Omega Si Phi, Delta Phi Sigma, and Zeta Phi. Along with these organizations, the university has a large ROTC department and many department specific student organizations. These organizations, along with athletics, are additional reasons why students choose to attend the University of Asdorf.

### **Bridge Program**

The Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf is fully funded by the university. There is no grant money, nor are there federal funds that pay for this program. This lack

of funding means there are no imposed guidelines, and the university can set program regulations and admission requirements. The function of the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf is to help academically challenged students succeed at the post-secondary level. The Bridge Program welcomes students who come into college with low American College Testing (ACT) scores or low high school Grade Point Averages (GPA) (M. Anderson, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Students who score below a 17 on the ACT are candidates for this program. The program also welcomes students who are first-generation students. These students are enrolled at the university based on recommendations from high school teachers or counselors. These students may not have an accurate perspective of how to be successful in college and graduate with a degree; the Bridge Program provides the support they need to visualize their paths to success.

On October 3, 2013, I sat down with Dr. Miles Willonberg, Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Ms. Kimberly Sunderland, Director of Institutional Resources, and Dr. Phillip Sanders, Vice-President for Enrollment Management to discuss the university's Bridge Program. The average retention rate stands at 25% over the five years the Bridge Program has existed (Anderson, 2013). Student feedback in the past has consisted of voluntary evaluations completed at the end of each semester. Students provide feedback on the class through the Moodle page, using a five-item Likert Scale, and have the option to provide written feedback, if necessary.

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

The purpose of this study was to examine the low retention rate of minority students in the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf. Administrators at the University were concerned about the retention rate and wanted to identify what causes minority students to dropout (M. Willenborg, personal communication, October 3, 2013). The problem at the University of Asdorf is the low retention of the minority students. The Bridge Program started in 2008 and saw its first class graduate in May of 2013. The graduation rate for this class was 38%. Only 24.5% of bridge students who started in the fall of 2009 remained on campus (Anderson, 2013).

The University of Asdorf accepts these students in order to help them succeed when other colleges deny their applications. Students who qualify for the Bridge Program follow a set of guidelines created to assist them on their academic journey. Students are mandated to move to campus three weeks before the start of the school year. During the three-week period, students receive education about the campus and the community. To help prepare students for the semester, they engage in learning how to manage their time and learning about the resources available to them at the university.

The Bridge Program has only existed on campus for five years. The University of Asdorf has collected quantitative data on the retention rate, but has made no efforts to find out why students dropout or transfer. The participants offered reasons during interviews as to why they drop out, or why they stay enrolled, and this information helped contrive additional support for the Bridge Program. Students receive support for the first year from the Bridge Program, but none for the remainder of their time at the

University of Asdorf. This support consists of three hours of class per week, with two hours of a tutoring lab during the first semester (M. Anderson, personal communication, November 13, 2013). If students receive a grade of C or higher in the first semester class, they are only required to attend two hours of a tutoring lab during the second semester (M. Anderson, personal communication, November 13, 2013). The data helped provide an understanding of why students chose to continue in the program, or drop out.

The University of Asdorf has this ongoing support throughout the semester, whereas states such as Illinois and Texas have Bridge Programs during summer months to prepare students for college (Barnett, 2012; Barnett et al., 2011; & Bragg, 2010). This support throughout the semester is important to the University of Asdorf and is tailored this way to meet the needs of the recruited students. The support comes in the form of tutoring and mentoring from bridge coordinators. The students' advisors also play a role in meeting with their bridge students throughout the semester. Many of the students come from numerous states and often want to dropout and go back home after the first year. This is a concern of the administration at the University of Asdorf. Dr. Willonberg stated that the university would like to see this retention rate increase and for the minority students in the Bridge Program to graduate at a higher rate.

Students are the only ones who know why they dropout. Demaris and Kritsonis's (2007) study pointed to student engagement as a reason for dropping out. Kinzie, Ward, and Wolf-Wendel (2009) also supported this reason, by stating student involvement is often a predictor of retention. I conducted interviews to try to uncover some of the reasons why University of Asdorf students dropout and to legitimize extra support for

future students. Szelenyi (2001) talked about minority students who struggled with English (ESL) having difficulty at the college level. Another reason for minority struggles came from Engle's study. Engle (2008) suggested that students from low-income families have trouble paying for college, which can lead to them leaving school. Engle (2008) defined leaving school as students who dropped out and did not return. These reasons could exist within the minority students at the University of Asdorf. The results of this study may be helpful to universities and colleges in the Midwest, and possibly around the country, to find ways to correct this retention problem.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions were provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study. I developed all definitions pertaining to how they were used in this study.

*Academic influences:* Referred to factors that influence retention. These included local support services such as the Academic Success Center, tutoring, and advising support along with other personal and environmental variables (Ashine & Zewude, 2016).

*Bridge Program:* Referred to the program at the University of Asdorf that admitted students with low ACT scores or low high school GPA's. This program required students to enroll during their first year at the university and to follow all set guidelines. Bridge Programs assist students in successfully transition to college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

*Drop out:* Referred to any student who left the university for any reason (Grau-Valldosera & Minguillon, 2014).

*First-generation students:* Students who were the first in their immediate family to attend college. Neither parent had a degree beyond their high school diploma or GED. The students were not defined by age, gender, or race, but by simply being the first in their immediate family to attend college (Ishitani, 2016).

*Minority students:* Students from a race other than the Caucasian race. For this study, minority students included African-Americans, Latinos/Latinas, Native Americans, Asians, and other races not identified as Caucasian (Santelices & Wilson, 2015).

*Personal influences:* Referred to factors outside of the university's control. These factors included lack of basic skills, financial support, loneliness, work, and family support (Thompson-Ebanks, 2014).

*Retention:* Referred to the number of students, often reported as a percentage, who stayed enrolled from one semester to the next without taking a semester off (Thompson-Ebanks, 2014).

### **Significance**

Minority student retention was compelling because of its potential effect on future enrollment numbers. Having a low minority retention rate may affect the recruitment of students in future years. Students are more inclined to attend a university that has a retention rate of 75%, than a university that has a retention rate of 25%. The University of Asdorf needed to improve the minority student retention rate, even though it had seen

increasing enrollment and had support services in place. Prospective students who saw a low retention rate wondered why students did not stay enrolled and, therefore, chose a school that had a higher rate of retention than the University of Asdorf. Studying reasons for this retention problem helped the university formulate solutions that helped the Bridge students stay enrolled. This university accepted students who were declined enrollment at other universities and offered them a chance to obtain a college degree. The University of Asdorf offered support to help such students be successful. Increasing the retention rate increased the success that first-generation, struggling students experienced. Increasing the retention rate helped the University of Asdorf be a leader for other universities in developing similar, successful, yearlong Bridge Programs.

The low retention rate affected future enrollment numbers at the University of Asdorf. Higher Education institutions received funding based on retention numbers (Angulo-Ruiz & Pergelova, 2013). Students and their families looked at the retention numbers and feared there was no support system in place to help prospective students succeed. Angulo-Ruiz's et al. 2013 study suggested that institutional image plays a role in retention and enrollment numbers. Universities around the country have faced budget issues when funding has decreased and future students decided not to attend based on retention numbers.

Allen and Lester (2012), Demaris et al. (2007), and Tinto (2007) studied ways to identify students and their possible success at the college level. College success is often predicted by using high school GPA's, ACT and SAT scores, or other high school experiences (Brown, 2012). The Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf takes

students with low GPA's, ACT, or SAT scores and supports them in their transition to college. Studies have also shown that student engagement is an accurate predictor of retention (Allen et al., 2012; Demaris et al., 2007; Tinto, 2007). This suggestion was used to guide the questioning during the one-on-one interviews. Hetzel and Laskey (2011) found that student participation in tutoring was a more accurate predictor of retention. The University of Asdorf offers many forms of tutoring through the Academic Success Center, TRIO Student Support Services, and the Bridge Program. Every college and university has different levels of support for their students. This level of support may determine whether past performance or future engagement determines success and retention. Students shared their reasons for leaving or staying at the University of Asdorf through their one-on-one interviews. The previously mentioned components of engagement and tutoring and support services were discussed in these interviews to determine if they had any influence on future enrollment.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

As the purpose of the proposed study was to determine factors of retention of students in the Bridge Program, the guiding questions to support the proposed study were:

- What successes and challenges do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program?
- How do these successes and challenges influence minority student retention after their first year?



The literature review discussed several reasons why students chose to stay in school or dropout. Some of the reasons students dropped out included a need to work to pay for incurred expenses, inadequate family support, lacking basic skills knowledge, and feeling homesick. All of these factors impacted the student negatively, and the university was not be able to support the student fully in these areas. The university assisted students by offering them tutoring in deficient areas, advising support on how to handle stressful situations, and remediation classes to develop skills that they lacked.

Studies have been conducted on Bridge Programs in the past, but those studies focused on summer programs (Barnett, et al., 2011; Bowler, 2009; Garcia et al., 2009; McCurrie, 2009). The purpose of the summer Bridge Program is to get students ready to succeed at the college level. The University of Asdorf's Bridge Program is a year-long program of support. No studies on other year-long Bridge Programs were found. Similar programs exist and have been named CARE (McCurrie, 2009) and TRIO (Soria et al., 2012). Past research has looked at reasons for student dropout and developed programs to support these students. Conducting the qualitative study allowed students to provide direct input into their successes and challenges and helped lead to ways to increase the retention at the University of Asdorf.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

Higher education institutions were explored in the literature review. These included universities, colleges, and community colleges. I conducted searches through EBSCOhost, Sage, Google Scholar, and the School Library of Iowa. Topics of these

searches included minority student retention, student retention, Bridge Programs, and reasons for dropping out. I also conducted searches using current articles cited in the studies read. I reached saturation when the same authors and article titles appeared as duplicates in previous studies and the search engines.

This literature suggested a lack of: basic skills from high school, financial support, jobs, family support, and loneliness as reasons for minority students dropping out (Baker, 2010; Breier, 2010; Engle, 2008; Soria et al., 2012). The literature also referred to support services offered by the university, such as advising support, tutoring support, and Bridge Programs, to prepare students for the rigors of college as reasons for students to stay in school (Bowler, 2009; Divjak, Haines, & Ostroski, 2010; Garcia et al., 2009; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Hetzel, et al., 2011; Jerrolds, Klyce, Schwebel, & Walburn, 2012).

### **Theoretical Base: Transformative Learning**

The conceptual model that frames this work is Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Transformative learning is defined as a transformation of beliefs or attitudes (Baumgartner, Caffarella, & Merriam, 2007). Mezirow (1997) considered the importance of people understanding the meaning of their experiences. Every individual develops a perspective on a situation, based on his experiences in that situation (Taylor, 1998). Role models, such as teachers, parents, and other mentors, can help individuals develop perspectives, based on their teachings and reactions to situations (Taylor, 1998). Once these perspectives have developed, they can often be difficult to change (Taylor, 1998). People start by being part of an experience, reflect on that situation, and then make a

decision on how to react. Often, the perspectives are developed during a major crisis in one's life (Cooper, n.d.). An example of this would be a death of a close relative. The first time an individual faces this scenario, they may not know how to react. The individual may look to parents to see how they react under the circumstances. The individual would develop a perspective that this is a sad moment where grieving in the form of crying is appropriate. This perspective will be applied each time the individual is faced with the same situation.

Participants in this study were first-generation, low-income students. Perspectives and attitudes towards college, homework, and being on their own may not have been developed yet. This study looked at participant experiences before college and during their first year of college in the Bridge Program. Their perspectives may have been negative towards college because they were first-generation students. The importance of education, lack of previous family success in college, and support are some perspectives that may be influencing student success. The interview questions invited students to talk about new situations they have faced, how they reflected on the situation, the perspective they have developed, and who helped influence their developed perspective. Participants described the transformation they made from being unsuccessful prior to college with low ACT scores or low high school GPA, to being part of the program. They were allowed to talk about their metamorphosis into a successful college student and what helped them become successful. Some talked about the lack of transformation in their academic lives, which led the students to consider dropping out.

During the literature review, I discovered that one reason students drop out is because of their peers (Ackermann, & Morrow, 2012; Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Cruce, Gonyea, Kinzie, Kuh, & Shoup, 2008; DeWitz, Walsh, & Woolsey, 2009; Terrell & Wright, 1988; Shelley & Whalen, 2010). Students tend to socialize and connect with other students who are similar to them. This socialization and connecting with other students, or lack thereof, could be one reason for students to remain at this university, or to dropout (Ackermann et al., 2012; Ampaw et al., 2012; Cruce et al., 2008; DeWitz et al., 2009; Shelley et al., 2010; Terrell et al., 1988). Eckles and Stradley (2011) asserted in their research that students are five times more likely to drop out if their friends drop out and two and one-fourth times more likely to stay enrolled if their friends stay enrolled. This supports the Transformative Learning Theory and its emphasis on a student's understanding and interpreting of their experiences.

### **Trends in Minority Retention**

Szelenyi (2001) stated that by the year 2050, the minority population in the United States would be 47% and colleges and universities would see a similar increase in their minority population. Colleges and universities are likely to also see an increase in the population of first-generation students that attend college. Roman (2007) described first-generation students as being the first members of their family to attend college, and minority students often fall into this category.

The retention rate declines when a student does not return to the school where he or she is currently enrolled. If a student takes a semester break, but returns following that break, he or she is still considered a dropout and the retention rate drops (Breier, 2010;

Currie, Hagel, Horn, & Owen, 2012). Students are also considered dropouts if they transfer to another university. They are continuing their pursuit of a degree, but their departure negatively affects the retention rates of their previous universities. Leach, Prebble, and Zepke (2006) conducted a study in New Zealand with a different approach on the retention of students because he looked at students who considered both full withdrawal and partial withdrawal. Partial withdrawal is simply dropping a class that does not suit the student's academic needs. Reasons for withdrawal, full or partial, were teacher quality, the course did not suit the student, and feelings of not belonging (Leach et al, 2006). Retention rates are negatively affected by these reasons for dropping out. The University of Asdorf considers dropouts as students who do not return to school the following semester for any reason. Partial withdrawal may be something the university needs to consider if a student takes time off, but returns to finish their degree program.

Terrell et al. (1988) discussed an increase in minority student retention in the 15 years prior to 1988. Prior to 1988, studies on retention focused on Caucasian students. Colleges and universities saw an increase in minority student enrollment during the 1960s and 1970s that prompted more studies on minority retention (Terrell et al., 1988). Research continued throughout the 1990s, but lessened during the 2000s. Studies that occurred during the 1980s uncovered the reasons students gave for dropping out as: adjustment to college, performance, finances, loneliness, racial identity development, racial hostility, poor previous education, and a lack of role models (Terrell et al., 1988). The lack of family and university support was also cited as a reason for dropping out of school (Guillory, 2009). Current quantitative studies conducted by Ackermann et al.

(2012), Ampaw et al. (2012), Cruce et al. (2008), DeWitz et al. (2009), and Shelley et al. (2010) uncovered the same reasons why students leave colleges and universities. Few qualitative studies on this topic could be identified through the literature review. The quantitative studies often used surveys to gather research. The surveys suggested reasons for why students drop out. The students may have wanted to offer other reasons, but were limited to choosing one of the options they were provided. A qualitative study allowed students to express these reasons and others that may not have been revealed in previous research.

### **Academic Warning Signs**

Fike and Fike (2008) conducted a study of 9,200 students over a four-year period at community colleges. The dropout rate at these community colleges was 47% over this four-year period. Fike et al. (2008) and Roman (2007) acknowledged that the situations at community colleges are different from four-year colleges, in that students often enter on a part-time basis and are often older than the average four-year student. Roman (2007) described the non-traditional students as first-generation, low-income students of color. In Fike's et al. (2008) quantitative study, it was discovered that students who came in lacking basic skills were less likely to finish their program. Fike et al. (2008) found that the biggest predictor in this lack of basic skills was whether or not students needed a developmental reading course. If the course was not needed, then the student was likely to stay in school (Fike et al., 2008). Similar results were found with developmental math and writing courses, but the findings were not as significant as with the reading course (Fike et al., 2008). Cruce et al. (2008) supported that pre-college preparation can predict

student retention, but could be overcome at colleges that have a strong support system in place. This pre-college preparation involved a rigorous curriculum that included classes that count towards college credit. Proper high school preparation can help any student learn proper study skills that will help them succeed in college (Bourneuf, 2014; Bragg, 2010; Demaris et al., 2007; Engle, 2008; Raines, 2012; Siegel, 2011).

Other predictors of retention may also exist. Honken and Ralston (2013) found that gender did not play a role in retention, but that parent education, interest in subject, and high school homework were common factors in students who dropped out. Many of the reasons uncovered in these studies related to students that had academic problems or lacked family support. Family support can include financial assistance and supporting the student emotionally during stressful times. These students are the exact students that are recruited for this university's Bridge Program.

### **Reasons Students Drop Out of Higher Education**

First-generation students may face obstacles on their journeys to gaining college degrees. Job responsibilities, family responsibilities, weaknesses in math or reading, lack of study skills, and stress are obstacles that can negatively influence first-generation students (Soria et al., 2012). Soria et al. (2012) further suggested remedial classes, faculty support, involvement in clubs or organizations, and tutoring can help support these students.

Faculty support can come in the form of teaching style in the classroom or advising assistance. Classrooms that are student-centered and teach to various and appropriate learning styles can help increase the retention rate (Ackermann et al., 2012;

Divjak et al., 2010). Baker (2010) cites faculty availability and feedback on assignments as ways to help support students. These examples can help motivate students to seek help and be engaged in the classroom. Advising can also help with student engagement. An effective form of advising is called intrusive advising. This requires students to meet regularly with their advisor to talk about the semester progress. This type of advising has led to an increase in retention at some institutions (Bowler, 2009; Drake, 2011; Heisserer et al., 2002; Jerrolds et al., 2012).

A reason that students may drop out of college is that they do not feel like they belong (O’Keeffe, 2013). Heisserer et al. (2002) supported this claim and identified the following groups as being ‘at risk’ for dropping out: ethnic minorities, academically disadvantaged, disabled students, students of low socioeconomic status, and probationary students. This feeling of belonging could be connected with motivation. Students can be motivated extrinsically or intrinsically. Boretz (2012) found that students who do not have proper college preparation lack the intrinsic motivation to learn and maintain enrollment from semester to semester. Students who lack motivation may know they need help, but do not see a need to seek the help they know exists on college campuses (Currie et al., 2012).

### **Support for Student Retention**

Tinto (2007) discussed how several colleges found helping students adjust to college as another task on a long list of responsibilities. Some colleges do not make a serious attempt to support these students, and programming has little effect on retention (Tinto, 2007). Tinto identified the following items that helped increase student retention:



expectations, advice, support, involvement, and learning. In each of these areas, college support is needed to help the student succeed. Terrell et al. (1988) stressed that the first six weeks are vital in getting students acclimated to college life. This acclimation and support needs to continue during the first six months to further assist the students.

Roman (2007) put the responsibility solely on college administrators in saying that the admissions office needs to take some responsibility by advising and counseling students on ways to capitalize on their education. Siegel (2011) also described retention as being everyone's responsibility, but retention problems can be solved with proper planning and implementation.

Proper support for students who struggle may help these students continue in their programs. Jerrolds et al. (2012) discussed a strategy called intrusive advising that could provide this support. Intrusive advising is when a university requires students to meet with their advisors on a regular basis (Jerrolds et al., 2012). Failure to attend these meetings may lead to the student being put on academic probation. Jerrolds's study found that students who took part in intrusive advising were retained at a slightly higher rate than students who were not part of intrusive advising. Drake (2011) supported the importance of advising by saying that advisors must do more than just listen to students. Advisors need to help develop a plan for success for students who are contemplating dropping out.

Another form of support that may be found at colleges and universities is tutoring services. Hetzel et al. (2011) found that even attending a regular tutoring session once a week can result in a higher retention rate than those that do not attend tutoring sessions.

Peer tutoring, or student group study sessions, has also shown an increase in retention (Ackermann et al., 2012; Carrillo, Domingo, & Stolle-McAllister, 2011; Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012; Guillory, 2009; Soria et al., 2012). This form of peer tutoring can take place in a formal setting, like an Academic Success Center, or in an informal setting arranged by peers in the same class (Arendale, & Wilson, 2011).

### **Student Responsibility**

**Active learning.** Braxton, Hartley, Hirschy, and Jones (2008) added active learning as a key way to increase retention. Active learning can be described as an activity that involves students doing or thinking about things they do (Braxton et al., 2008). This responsibility falls on the lap of both professors and students. Professors need to create discussions and activities that engage students. At the same time, students need to be willing to participate in these discussions and activities. Active learning can be accomplished through role-playing, debates, and cooperative learning (Braxton et al., 2008).

A couple of other activities that help students engage in learning are service learning and peer team building. Bringle, Hatcher, and Muthiah (2010) discussed the component of service learning in helping with retention. Bringle et al. (2010) said that service-learning results in more engaging and active learning. Kay and Wolfe (2011) saw an increase in retention at a university that required freshmen to take an outdoor adventure class. The class took students on a survival trip that included canoeing, running, and camping. After completion of this class, students had developed a positive

attitude toward the university. Kay et al. (2011) believed this positive attitude would help retain these students.

### **Campus Involvement**

Kinzie's et al. (2009) study cited involvement, engagement, and integration as three keys identified to help retain students. Involvement falls on the responsibility of the students; integration requires joint efforts between the student and campus, and engagement is the responsibility of the campus (Kinzie et al., 2009). This engagement requires the university to provide opportunities for students to become involved in activities. Engagement could also involve intrinsic motivation. Boretz (2012) discovered that students were self-motivated to succeed after they had been put on academic probation and attended a workshop. The workshop helped students develop success plans with the help of staff members. They created these plans after filling out self-assessments and listening to speakers (Boretz, 2012).

Campus involvement can involve something as small as living in the resident halls and taking part in resident hall activities (Kay et al., 2011). It can also take other forms, such as becoming part of student government, study groups, athletic teams, fraternities, and sororities (Eckles et al., 2011; Kay et al., 2011). Becoming part of these organizations or teams may help the student feel connected to the university and help retain students (Cruce et al., 2008; O'Keeffe, 2013).

### **Campus Climate**

Campus climate can factor into reasons why students remain in school. Many studies look at academic performance and administrative support. Eckles et al. (2011)

found that students were more likely to stay in school if they had many positive peer influences. These influences came from participating in activities with peers. Baker (2010) conducted a study that looked at 149 faculty members and examined what they did to help increase student retention. The most successful strategies were study groups and peer mentoring, but these strategies were used the least among participants (Baker, 2010). An important point that came out of the discussion part of this study was the fact that many studies looked at why students leave school. Perhaps the discussion needs to turn to what campuses are doing that is successful in retaining students.

### **Campus Influences**

Demaris et al. (2007) stated that 46% of African-Americans at his university graduate. The dropout rate of these students was then 54%. These numbers are similar to the statistics that Bowler discovered in his research. Demaris et al. (2007) briefly discussed the importance of learning communities building relationships between students and faculty. Learning communities can help remove barriers that impede teaching and learning and can help retain students (Demaris et al., 2007). Allen et al. (2012) conducted a study using a pretest/posttest survey format that showed an increase in student engagement in their program. These at-risk students saw an increase in retention, grade point average, and engagement in their program (Allen et al., 2012).

A current trend in society, and another unlikely source in the eyes of many, may help support the retention of students. Heibergert, Junco, & Loken (2010) reported that in 2005, 94% of first-year students used social networking websites. Further studies have found a relationship between technology use and engagement. Heibergert et al. (2010)

discussed how students reported higher engagement when they were allowed to answer questions anonymously and electronically. Heiberger's study focused on the use of Twitter as a discussion mechanism. At the end of his study, it was determined that using Twitter did increase collaboration between students (Heiberger et al., 2010). Twitter also allowed for a promotion in active learning and provided prompt feedback between professors and students (Heiberger et al., 2010). Divjak et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study and found a positive increase in student attitudes towards school when there was a combination of online work and traditional face-to-face time. This use of online, hybrid classes has helped students complete class work on their own time, as long as they have the computer technology to accomplish this task. Bowler (2009) found the use of hybrid classes benefitted students by allowing them to work regular jobs and complete homework when it was convenient for them.

Another source of influence is the library. Libraries can help support Tinto's claim of providing proper support for retention. Currie et al. (2012) said libraries can help teachers engage students, assure proper technology and books are accessible to all students, and work with other support services to assist students. Not all minority students can afford to own a computer, and the library can support these students by having multiple computer labs available to students. Libraries can also collaborate with instructors on student needs and develop useful online guides for students to use (Currie et al., 2012).

### **Instructor Influences**

Several studies conducted in the early 2000's found adapting to student learning styles can benefit student retention. Palma-Rivas (2000), Sanchez (2000), and Szelenyi (2001) talked about the learning styles of minority students as being the key in retaining those students. Hispanic and Native American students learned best by interacting with their peers and having concrete learning experiences (Sanchez, 2000). African-Americans learned best through oral experiences and interpersonal relationships (Palma-Rivas, 2000). Professors should be aware of these differences to help universities with retention.

Raising entrance standards, decreasing academic rigor, slowing down the pace, and enhancing learning are ways to increase retention (Fincher, 2010). Fincher (2010) claimed that retention would increase only by allowing highly qualified students to enter your university. Fincher (2010) also said students would be more successful if teachers make the work easier and decrease the pace. Slowing the pace may be a viable option for the students. Tuition would need to be adjusted if students need more than four years to complete the degree program.

Studies have been conducted to find ways for new programs to succeed. Arendale et al. (2011) found that having peer educators is one way to help programs succeed. The peer educator success was due to following successful models, setting clear procedures, and having rigorous evaluations to validate the program. An Emerging Scholars Program was developed in California to help students with common goals achieve their ultimate goal of obtaining a college degree (Arendale et al., 2011). Students in the Bridge

Program have a similar goal and could benefit from such an addition to their current program. Peer-Led Team Learning is another program that has been successful at the post-secondary level. This program involves student leaders guiding peers to find solutions to everyday problems (Arendale et al., 2011). These programs could help add to the current program at the University of Asdorf. Terrell et al. (1988) stated that orientation programs, Bridge Programs, parent programs, mentoring, and peer counseling are ways to support minority students in their quest for a college education. DeWitz et al. (2009) found that those students with high self-efficacy were more likely to stay in school.

After conducting this literature review, there seems to have been a shift in expecting college administrators to provide programming to increase student retention to expecting professors to engage students actively. Some responsibility for retention has been passed on to the professors who teach minority students. The professors have more interaction with minority students in their classrooms than administrators. By providing proper professional development for faculty, student satisfaction may increase, and in turn, retention may increase.

### **Minority Students in the Bridge Program**

**Minority retention rates.** Bowler (2009) claimed that the dropout out rate of college students was 30% for first-year students in 2009. An article found in the U.S. News and World Report also stated that 50% of students fail to graduate. Bowler (2009) stated that Florida State has an African-American graduation rate of 72%, and much of that success goes to leadership and its CARE program. The program seems to be

successful for this University, but what about the African-American students who are not in the program? Fike et al. (2008) conducted a study of 9,200 students over a four-year period at community colleges. The dropout rate at these community colleges was 47% over this four-year period. Fike et al. (2008) and Roman (2007) acknowledged that the situation at community colleges was different from four-year colleges, in that students often enter on a part-time basis and were often older than the average four-year student.

Roman (2007) described non-traditional students as first-generation, low-income students of color. First-generation students face challenges such as being single parents, having to work to pay for schooling, lack of family support to seek a higher degree, and pressure to succeed for the family (Eckles et al., 2011; Engle, 2008; Guillory, 2009). Universities can better support these students by allowing more credits to transfer in for students who begin at a community college (Engle, 2008). Engle (2008) conducted a study that found students are seven times more likely to complete their degrees if they start at a four-year university, versus starting at a community college and transferring to a four-year university. Universities can help support the first-generation transfer students by getting them involved and connected to their new institution (Eckles et al., 2011).

Latino's are an ethnic group that falls into this first-generation, low-income group. The Latino population is growing rapidly in the United States, but, yet, only 11% of Latinos have a bachelor's degree (Cerezo et al., 2012). Cerezo et al. (2012) cited a reason for this low percentage as a lack of support from universities and colleges. Cerezo et al. (2012) created a support system for students in their study and saw an increase in adjustment to college and the student expectations. This support system



included weekly meetings with mentors to help build a sense of community and maintain their cultural identity.

**Other Bridge Programs.** Support for these students could come in the form of a Bridge Program. These programs have been developed to help strengthen students academically and prepare them for the challenges of college (McCurrie, 2009). Barnett et al. (2011) conducted a study of Bridge Programs in Texas and found that students were more likely to pass college classes and attempt higher level classes than those that did not participate in a Bridge Program. Raines (2012) found that students in a two-week summer Bridge Program had a higher GPA than students who did not participate in the program. This program also shows a higher retention rate for Bridge participants when compared to the overall freshman retention rate (Raines, 2012). In one of the few qualitative studies on Bridge Programs, the results found that students felt acclimated to the campus and course expectations at the completion of the program (Carrillo, Domingo, Stolle-McAllister 2011).

Students who attend college do not always declare a major. Students who do not declare a major may feel isolated because of this, but there are students just like them on campus. Students that qualify for the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf may have the same feelings. They have low high school GPA's and low ACT scores. Some may feel embarrassed to have to be part of the Bridge Program. Garcia et al. (2009) said the Bridge Program brings peers together to help build a support system. Students can establish friendships and have an understanding of what it will take to be successful in college.

Some schools take a different approach to Bridge Programs. Hosseini, Jablonski, Munson, & Reisel (2012) described how the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee uses the Bridge Program to excite students for their upcoming college career. This excitement can help keep students motivated and excelling in their program of study (Hosseini et al., 2012). Implementing this approach resulted in an increase of three points when the ACT was retaken after the summer Bridge Program.

Five years ago, the University of Asdorf started a Bridge Program to assist minority students in their journey to obtaining an undergraduate degree. The university has seen a low retention rate of these students and has not conducted any research to understand why its students dropout. By conducting a qualitative study, I had hoped to uncover the reasons for why the retention rate remained low over the five-year period.

Current retention rates may influence prospective students to either attend or not attend a university. The reasons students drop out will help not only the University of Asdorf, but other universities who have a similar population within their Bridge Programs. The findings may drive improvements in Bridge Programs that can increase retention. Results and conclusions from the data collection and analysis will be made available to any campus who has similar problems.

### **Implications**

The initial results from this study helped the university understand reasons for students choosing to stay enrolled or dropout. The results led to making policy recommendations to help support the minority students in their pursuit of a postsecondary degree. As discussed in the literature, reasons that may be uncovered are lack of

financial support, low engagement in coursework, or inadequate college preparation. The results may lead to developing ways to address these areas of need.

This study, and possible future evaluations, could help increase the retention of minority students at the University of Asdorf. These results could lead to the formation of other support services that would increase student retention. An increase in retention could help the overall presence of minority students across campus, whether or not they are required to be in the Bridge Program. The work done in this study will be available for all universities and colleges to read. Higher education institutions across the United States could use the positive impact of this study to increase their retention rates and help students achieve their goals of obtaining college degrees.

### **Summary**

Past research has studied Bridge Programs that have been established as summer programs to prepare students for college or a specific program. These programs have existed only as summer programs and have not continued during the school year. The University of Asdorf uses the Bridge Program during the students' entire first year, implementing it to help low academic achieving students. Minority students in this program have a low retention rate and this study uncovered reasons for this and took steps to provide additional support to meet the needs of the students. Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory helped frame the questioning to uncover some of these reasons. I will now explain the process that was undertaken to recruit participants from the Bridge Program, along with the data collection and analysis processes.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

This study focused on a qualitative case study design for data collection to get feedback from minority students in the Bridge Program on their reasons for staying enrolled or leaving the University of Asdorf. Retention of these minority students has been a problem at the University of Asdorf. A case study approach was used with participants to help collect and analyze the data for this study.

### **Research Design and Approach**

This project study was a qualitative case study using face-to-face interviews with students from a Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf. The University of Asdorf had collected quantitative data using end of the semester evaluations. The evaluations contained questions in which students responded using a Likert scale. This study allowed students to express their thoughts through open-ended questions. The case study approach collected data in a way that had not been done in past years.

The focus of qualitative studies is to gain a deeper understanding of human behavior and reasons for that behavior (Creswell, 2012). Case studies can focus on programs, events, or activities of individuals (Creswell, 2012). This specific case study focused on each individual student as they provided feedback on the enrollment decision they arrived at and reasons for that decision. The case study design was most appropriate for this study because of the low number of students in the Bridge Program. It will include the in-depth experiences of each participant.

Other designs for this study could be ethnography, grounded theory, or phenomenology. The ethnography design focuses on specific cultures and describing the characteristics of that culture (Creswell, 2012). I eliminated this design because there are many cultures within the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program. Multiple studies would have needed to be done to focus on each individual culture and their attitudes towards education and the Bridge Program. The grounded theory design revolves around the development of a theory that is supported by the data collection (Creswell, 2012). As stated throughout the literature review, studies have been completed on minority retention and reasons for low minority retention, such as family support, student engagement, and test scores. The theory development base is the reason this design was also eliminated. The other design I considered was phenomenology design. This design's goal is to describe experiences as they are lived (Creswell, 2012). The description of experiences was intriguing when developing this study, but this design was ultimately eliminated because the analysis called for classifying and ranking the data. Sometimes researchers go into a case study design expecting, or even knowing, what will be said and what may be important in evaluating the problem (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) also stated that sometimes what the researcher knows or expects is of no importance to the problem. The case study design looks for the in-depth description of the participant experience and that best fit the needs of this study.

My study focused on minority students participating in the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf. These students were at the end of their mandatory one-year enrollment. Using the case study approach, I was able to get close to the minority

students in the program. Student decisions to stay enrolled or drop out were made by most participants by the time the interviews were conducted. My goal was to get 10 to 12 minority students for the sample in this study. The case study design helped gather necessary information on student satisfaction of their time at the University of Asdorf.

### **Participants**

Yearly enrollment determines the number of students that enter the Bridge Program. Over the five years that the Bridge Program has existed, there have been 90-140 students enrolled into the Bridge Program each year (M. Anderson, personal communication, February 14, 2014). The overall enrollment at the University of Asdorf continues to increase and has resulted in a higher numbers of students enrolled in the Bridge Program. The enrollment of the Bridge Program for the 2014-2015 school year was 140 students. This made up the target population from which I drew my participant pool. My goal of this study was to invite all Bridge students to volunteer to participate and use 10 to 12 students for the actual interviews. Using 10 to 12 students would allow me more time for follow-up interviews, if they were necessary. The selection of these students was done through purposeful sampling. As previously stated in the literature review, many of the earlier studies on minority retention were quantitative. Guillory (2009) conducted a qualitative study using 30 American Indian students, while Carillo et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study using 12 focus groups. Cardon, Fontenot, Marshall, Poddar, and (2013) found recommendations ranging anywhere from three to six participants. 10 to 12 participants allowed for saturation to be reached in this study.

Purposeful sampling involves the selection of participants, based on their ability to help understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The target population of this study was minority students in the Bridge Program. Therefore, students that were currently enrolled in the Bridge Program were eligible to participate in this study. The study targeted 10 to 12 participants to allow saturation to be reached. I gained access to possible participants by attending the Bridge classes and speaking about the study. I sent informational emails to students and included an invitation for them to be possible participants. I included a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix B) in each email. Students completed and returned the Letter of Cooperation once they agreed to participate. Each student had their own viewpoint, and it was important to hear from students who were currently enrolled and planned to stay enrolled or drop out at the end of the semester.

Once I had a sample of Bridge students, I implemented a random sample to determine the 10 to 12 students to be interviewed. I determined this random sample in a Microsoft Excel worksheet. This worksheet included information, such as the students' first and last names, their email addresses, phone numbers, if offered, and assigned numbers. I ran a RAND function to determine the 10 to 12 students that would be the study participants. Students had to be willing to meet for a one-on-one interview that may last up to 90 minutes. Students also needed to be willing to meet for a follow-up interview if one was needed to clarify any information given during the original interview. A total of nine Bridge students volunteered for the study, so they became the participants.

I took the following measures to address ethical issues. I applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through both Walden University and the University of Asdorf. The University of Asdorf acted as the oversight for this study, using IRB# 151024140, which expired on August, 31, 2015. I gave all participants a form that explained the purpose of the study, the interview process they participated in, and potential risks that were involved. Participants gave written consent, using the Informed Consent Form, before any interviews were conducted. Students read over this consent form and signed it prior to the start of the interview. I requested verbal permission and reviewed potential risks immediately before the participants were asked the first question. I allowed participants the option to stop the interview at any time if they became emotionally distressed. I conducted interviews in my office and at the university library in a study room. I gave participants the option to choose the location, so they were comfortable during the interview. These interviews were recorded. Following the interview, I debriefed the participant. I provided a full explanation as to what I was investigating and why I was investigating it. I allowed the participant to declare if they had been deceived in any way prior to or during the interview, and also I gave him or her an opportunity to ask questions.

### **Data Collection**

I used one-on-one interviews to determine what brought participants to this university. Interview prompts (Appendix C) sought participant's positive and negative experiences with the Bridge Program, how much support they felt prior to and during the school year from the Bridge Program, other involvement in university activities such as



sports, clubs, or other tutoring programs, whether or not they contemplated dropping out, and their reasons for deciding to stay enrolled or drop out. I provided the interview prompts in Appendix C.

Participants came from the 2014-2015 Bridge Program that had an enrollment of 140 students. I visited that semester's Bridge classes to meet all of these students and educate them on the study, its purpose, and the opportunity to become part of the study. A follow-up email was sent to all Bridge students and included information on the study, an invitation to participate, and a letter of cooperation.

The interviews were conducted individually with those participants who decided to take part. The interviews lasted between 1 to 1 ½ hours. I met participants in my office or a study room in the university library. This provided a private, quiet area to conduct the interview and allowed the participant to feel comfortable speaking to me. A recording device was used to record the interviews. The recording device allowed me to review answers to questions during the transcription process. I labeled the data by participant number, and those assigned numbers were used during the explanation of the results of this study. This recording process kept the names of the participants anonymous. The audiotapes remained in a locked cabinet, except during the transcription.

Questions were open-ended to allow participants to answer as freely and honestly as possible (Creswell, 2012). Follow-up interviews were not necessary. I had a copy of all questions to be asked during the interview. This copy was used to jot down notes. These notes included key words or phrases used by the participant during the answering

of questions. I used the notes to create follow-up questions, or ask for clarification on responses from the participant.

At the completion of each interview, I wrote down thoughts and information that were fresh in my mind. I wrote clear, complete thoughts during this reflection process to assure I could understand my notes when I went back to re-read them. This reflection helped me develop potential follow-up questions for any follow-up interviews that were needed. However, no follow-up interviews were necessary. This reflection was available to me during the transcribing of the interview. It was possible that questions or ideas that I reflected on after the interview would be answered during the transcription. All information on each participant was kept in a separate folder with his or her assigned number on it.

I was in my second year as a professor at the University of Asdorf. The students in the Bridge Program are all freshmen. I did not teach any freshmen in my classes, so I had no prior contact with these students before visits to their Bridge class. Prior to this role, I was a public school educator in a local school. It was possible that former students of the local public school were enrolled at the University of Asdorf and may have been part of the Bridge Program. However, I did not interview any participants that went to this public school. I know this based on information gathered about family and participant background prior to enrollment at the University of Asdorf.

Documentation was in place before any of these interviews took place. Audio recordings included a label and paper documents included a title page. The labels and title pages included the title of the project, date of data collection, place of data

collection, the ID number of the participant, and methods of data collection. This documentation helped keep the data organized and easily referenced when needed for data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, I took the inductive approach. I began this approach with an open mind and developed a theory based on participant feedback. The transformative learning theory helped group the data, and I began to look for relationships among the collection of data. Using the transformative learning theory, I looked at ways the students had transformed their views. They changed from unsuccessful high school students, who had low ACT scores or low high school GPA's that kept them from getting into other colleges and universities, into successful college students that passed college courses and maintained an acceptable GPA. I also looked at ways in which the participants lacked transformations and planned to drop out.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim the same day as the interview. I used hyperTRANSCRIBE software to type up the interviews. This software allowed me to type the transcript as small portions of the interview audio file played. I also transcribed notes taken during the interview. I put extra spaces between comments, highlighted questions, and transcribed all words and gestures (Creswell, 2012). Gestures and possible facial expressions came from the notes taken during the interview. Once the transcripts were prepared, I allowed the participants to verify the accuracy of my notes and to clarify anything that was said during the initial interview. This viewing of the

transcript is called a member check (Lodico, 2010). A member check allowed for the information to be considered dependable.

I coded the information after the member check. I began by open coding the transcripts, including the notes taken during the original interview. I created categories of themes that occurred during the interviews. I also created subcategories that were similar to the main category, including key words, which I highlighted in different colors to help identify the information in future referencing. I entered these categories into a Microsoft Excel document that corresponded with the number assigned to each participant and page number of the transcript. I asked a colleague to go over my information to verify or suggest new themes. This peer reviewer signed a Letter of Confidentiality to protect the identity of the participants and unpublished research. This peer review added dependability to my study.

I coded and shared all of the information in the final write-up of this study. No discrepant cases arose during the interview process. This information would have been shared, as it would have been vital to the university under study as they looked at ways to improve the Bridge Program.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative study on minority students in the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf used a case study approach for one-on-one interviews. The experiences that the participants shared during interviews helped uncover reasons for retention problems and will help the administration provide better support to minority students in this program.

## **Data Analysis Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project study was to look at the low retention rate of minority students in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program. The University of Asdorf recruits students who are first-generation minority students and uses the Bridge Program to help these students succeed in their first year of college. Participants were nearing the end of their mandatory one-year enrollment in the Bridge Program. Conducting the study at this point in the semester was important because students were making decisions on whether to register for classes for the fall semester or not to register, if they did not plan to return. I conducted interviews to determine factors that affected the retention rate. The purpose of this section is to share the data analysis results and resulting themes that were developed from those interviews.

### **Research Questions**

As the purpose of the proposed study was to determine factors that affected the retention of students in the Bridge Program, the guiding questions to support the proposed study were:

- What successes and challenges do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program?
- How do these successes and challenges influence minority student retention after their first year?

The research questions have been framed using Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Transformative learning refers to a person's beliefs and attitudes and how those

beliefs and attitudes can be transformed by experiences and role model influence (Baumgartner, Caffarella, & Merriam, 2007; Mezirow, 1997). Research question one explored participant beliefs and attitudes towards the Bridge Program and its requirements over the course of the year. Discussions of perceived successes and challenges and how beliefs and attitudes influenced those perceptions occurred during the interviews. Participants shared beliefs and attitudes that related to three different themes. These themes were pre-college support, bridge successes, and bridge challenges. Within the pre-college theme, participants talked about different groups of individuals who influenced their decisions to go to college. Three sub-themes developed within the pre-college support theme. These sub-themes were teachers, coaches, and family members. A second theme that developed was Bridge Program Successes. This theme was part of research question one, and three subthemes developed from the interviews. Participants identified mentors, flexibility, and guest speakers as successes that made being part of the Bridge Program enjoyable for participants. The final theme that developed from research question one was the Bridge Program Challenges. This theme was also part of the first research question and had three sub-themes. Participants discussed self-regulation, self-efficacy, and their decision for future enrollment as challenges they faced in the Bridge Program.

These discussions led into the second research question about how those successes and challenges influenced their retention at the University of Asdorf. Participants who were able to transform their negative beliefs and attitudes stayed enrolled at the University of Asdorf, while students who struggled with their enrollment

decision were not experiencing a transformation in negative beliefs and attitudes. Future suggestions for this project will address the ongoing need to provide role models that can aid in positive transformation.

### **Study Participants**

The information in Table 1 was obtained from the Bridge Assessment Data Document (M. Anderson, 2013). The information represented in this table supports the focus of the study, which is minority student retention. Nine students in the Bridge Program participated in the study, with seven of the participants being male and two being female. Three of the participants were African American (AA), three were Latino/a (L), and three were Caucasian (C). Students are accepted into the Bridge Program when they enter college with a low GPA or ACT score. These scores are included in the table to show the range of GPA's and ACT scores that participants had upon entering the University of Asdorf. Reported ACT scores ranged from a composite score of 13-18, and high school GPA's ranged from 2.20-2.87. The University of Asdorf also looks at whether the student is a first-generation or minority student when enrolling them into the program. Previous research explained that first-generation students might face obstacles in their journey to obtain a college degree. Job responsibilities, family responsibilities, weaknesses in math or reading, lack of study skills, and stress are obstacles that can negatively influence first-generation students (Soria et al., 2012). Eight of the nine participants in this study were considered first-generation students. Participants were not identified by name to protect their anonymity.

The participants volunteered for the study after I visited the classroom to explain the study and sent a couple of emails, inviting volunteers. A follow-up email was sent to schedule the interviews. Two of the participants needed to reschedule their interview after missing the initial one. All other participants showed up early and willingly engaged in a conversation about the Bridge Program. They were eager to talk and shared examples of their experiences in both the Bridge Program and their overall experiences on campus. The participants were traditional students with limited knowledge of what college would be like, but were excited about their academic journeys.



Table 1

*Student Participant Demographic Data*

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Ethnicity</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Composite ACT score</b> | <b>High School GPA</b> | <b>First Generation Student</b> |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Participant 1      | AA               | M             | 13                         | 2.48                   | No                              |
| Participant 2      | AA               | M             | 16                         | 2.20                   | Yes                             |
| Participant 3      | AA               | M             | not reported               | 2.41                   | No                              |
| Participant 4      | L                | M             | 16                         | 2.32                   | Yes                             |
| Participant 5      | L                | M             | 17                         | 2.74                   | Yes                             |
| Participant 6      | C                | F             | 18                         | 2.59                   | Yes                             |
| Participant 7      | C                | F             | 14                         | 2.58                   | Yes                             |
| Participant 8      | C                | M             | 15                         | 2.87                   | Yes                             |
| Participant 9      | L                | M             | not reported               | 2.85                   | No                              |

*Note:* AA=African American, L=Latino/a, C=Caucasian, ACT=American College Test, GPA=Grade Point Average

**Data Analysis Process**

I started the data analysis immediately after the interview. I took notes during the interviews, which allowed me to highlight key information that described the successes and challenges of students in the Bridge Program. I reviewed these notes after the interviews to clarify thoughts that I jotted down and to develop any follow up questions. I completed a member check with the participants after I transcribed the interviews. I gave participants copies of their transcripts through email communication. The review of this copy allowed the participants to ask questions and clarify anything they thought might be misunderstood. All participants were satisfied with their transcripts and did not

ask any questions. Upon receiving verification from all participants, I read through each completed transcript, looking for similar themes throughout all of the interviews, related to the successes and challenges in the Bridge Program. I allowed myself to be open to all possibilities during the coding process and, therefore, used the open coding process (Merriam, 2009). During the first read of the transcripts, my focus was on noting the successes and challenges each participant identified. These notes were written directly on the transcripts. For example, one of my interview questions asked how the participant decided to go to college. The answers to this question connected well with the transformative learning theory since participants talked about how someone had transformed their thinking about the success they could have in college. Participant 9 provided an example of how a teacher helped him decide to go to college when he said:

School wise I was a pretty good student. I was always committed to my work, but I didn't feel I was capable of going to college. I had one teacher in high school that always told me that I could do it. She always pushed me to do my best.

I entered the notes from the first read into a Microsoft Excel worksheet, which allowed me to see common answers. On my second read of the transcripts, I looked at my previous notations and the student answers and started to develop the subthemes as I saw similar responses. Additional notes were added to the Excel worksheet after the second read. A peer conducted a final review of the transcripts. The peer review led to verification of my findings and developed themes.

## **Research Findings**

The previous literature review provided reasons why student retention rates may be low at secondary institutions. Some of these reasons related to academics, such as teacher quality and poor course structure (Leach, Prebble, & Zepke, 2006), while other reasons were non-academic, such as lack of family support, (Guillory, 2009), job responsibilities (Soria et al., 2012), and a lack of role models (Terrell et al., 1988). This research focused on the university's Bridge Program and their low retention rate. The questions remained open-ended to allow themes to develop naturally from the data gathered in this study. The open-ended questions allowed students to respond freely without any bias. This study was on a Bridge Program and none of the previous studies from the literature review had conducted a study on students in a Bridge Program. Based on the analysis of the data, the following table displays the themes and subthemes developed from the participant responses and will help show the findings of this study.

## Research Findings Related to Research Questions

Table 2

### *Themes and Subthemes Developed from Data Analysis*

| <b>Themes</b>             | <b>Subthemes</b>  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Pre-College Support       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers</li> <li>2. Coaches</li> <li>3. Family</li> </ol>                            |
| Bridge Program Successes  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mentors</li> <li>2. Flexibility</li> <li>3. Speakers</li> </ol>                       |
| Bridge Program Challenges | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-Regulation</li> <li>2. Self-Efficacy</li> <li>3. Continuing Education</li> </ol> |

I developed three main themes from the interviews with the participants. Two of the themes that arose from the coding and categorizing related to the research questions. The interview responses often fit into either Bridge Successes or Bridge Challenges. As students talked about their successes, they mentioned items like mentors, class flexibility, and arranged speakers as successes of the Bridge Program. For Bridge Challenges, participants talked about self-regulation, similarities to high school classes, boring class work, self-efficacy, and how many almost dropped out during their first semester in the program. A third theme developed when all participants talked about what helped them to decide to pursue higher education. That third theme was Pre-College Support.

Participants recalled teachers, coaches, and family members that supported their desire to attend a college or university.

The interview process allowed me to gain additional insight on what being a Bridge student entails, and their transformation as a result of being a Bridge student. I was able to understand what parts of the program helped students succeed and areas that need improvement. The framework for this study centers on Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1997) put an emphasis on the importance of people understanding the meaning of their experiences. These experiences help people change their beliefs about any given situation. Role models can help influence this transformation in people. The participants in this study talked about the support, or lack of support, they experienced before enrolling in college, and during their first year in college. This support, or lack of, helped influence these participants into having either positive or negative perceptions of pursuing post-secondary education. Many of these perceptions transformed as students found out they would be in the Bridge Program, and some perceptions transformed with the help of the Bridge Program.

### **Pre-college support**

In this study, all of the participants talked about the support they received before making the decision to pursue a higher degree. This theme aligns to the transformative learning theory and the first research question. Some participants lacked the confidence to attend college and be successful, but someone helped them transform to a positive mindset. The way the Bridge Program is run, with classroom and lab support during the first semester, students continue to make the transformation to being successful in

college. Peer support and time management are two ways the Bridge Program helps students make that transformation.

The support starts prior to college for the participants. Some participants talked about the support that came from teachers in high school. This support came in both negative and positive forms. Four of the participants discussed the encouragement they received and how they never considered college until a teacher or coach discussed it with them.

Participant 9 provided an example of how a teacher helped him decide to go to college when he said, “I had one teacher in high school that always told me that I could do it. She always pushed me to do my best,”

Participant 4 discussed his experience with a class and teacher that took underprivileged students on trips to colleges:

I started looking at colleges when my teacher in my Upward Bound class took us to different colleges. They took us to the University of Asdorf as freshmen in high school. I remembered it. It was nice and helped plant the idea of going to college for me.

Participant 2 talked about the influence a coach had on his decision when he said:

My high school coach sat down with me; he was also my guidance counselor, and he told me that I was good at football and that I should learn to channel my skills to help me get through college and gain a better degree.

Participant 1 shared another example of how a coach helped transform his thinking towards college by saying:

One coach in high school told me that I had good potential to be successful in the sport in college. I really don't know how far it will take me in the future, but I believed in him and look where I am at.

The teachers and coaches talked about their academic or athletic successes in college and wanted the participants to take advantage of their talents. One participant discussed the negative support from a teacher. The teacher told the student they would not be able to be successful, and they would waste their time and money if they pursued a college degree. Participant 3 shared:

My teacher was really cool. My senior year he did his best to get me a scholarship. He did his best, I am not mad at him for that, but he told me you're stupid for thinking about college. You are going to go and burn through this \$3,000, and then you are going to come back here to me looking for help. That was the key point that tipped me off that now I am going to go to college and prove him wrong.

This student came to the University of Asdorf with a low self-efficacy because of this negative support. In this case, low self-efficacy influenced the student's enrollment decision.

The participants also discussed similar positive and negative experiences with their families. Some families were very supportive and encouraging, while other families discouraged the idea and told the study participants they needed to get a job right away and work. Four participants talked about their negative experiences with family. These experiences included having seen family members attend and drop out of college. Other

negative experiences came when family members told participants not to waste their time and money on college and to get a job after high school graduation.

“My sister came here for a semester, but it didn’t work out, and she came back home,” said Participant 9.

Participant 1 said, “My parents attended college, but were not able to finish. I am trying to finish to be the first.”

Participant 5 said:

I wanted to go to college for myself because I wanted to be more successful for me. I wanted to show my parents I can do this. My dad has been working his whole life. He started when he was my age, and now he owns his own business. They respected my decision but said I didn’t need college to be successful.

Participant 4 shared a similar experience with his family when he said:

My parents just wanted me to work, because that was the way they went. They didn’t have money for me to go to college, so they never really committed to supporting me because they thought I was going to slack off like I did in high school. They were like, you do whatever you want

These, again, are examples related to self-efficacy as identified in the second research question. This lack of support led participants to feel low self-efficacy and influenced their success or lack of success at the University of Asdorf, which affects their enrollment decision. The following sections will discuss different groups of people, teachers,



coaches, and families, who influenced participant self-efficacy as they began their year at the University of Asdorf.

### Teachers

All licensed teachers have attended college and understand the work it takes to earn a college degree. K-12 school teachers spend six to seven hours a day teaching and working with students. They can help students identify areas of interest and develop skills that can lead students to being successful. Participants discussed this positive influence that teachers had in planting the seed of attending college after they graduated from high school. Sometimes this influence can help transform the perceptions that students have towards college and what it takes to be successful. Participant 9 provided an example of how a teacher helped him decide to go to college when he said:

School wise I was a pretty good student. I was always committed to my work, but I didn't feel I was capable of going to college. I had one teacher in high school that always told me that I could do it. She always pushed me to do my best.

This statement shows an example of a transformation by Participant 9, based on a role model who had that college experience. Participant 9 did not believe he could be successful in a college setting, but his teacher saw differently and helped transform Participant 9's thinking toward having success in college. This teacher pushed Participant 9 to do better than he was currently doing, helped him to be successful, and helped him to believe that he could be successful in college. This transformation in

thinking helped Participant 9 finish his first year successfully and look forward to additional years at the University of Asdorf.

Participant 3 discussed a negative influence that a teacher had on his decision to go to college. Participant 3 saw this teacher as a strong mentor and often went to him for advice. Participant 3 used this negative influence as motivation, and it pushed him to want to go to college and prove this teacher wrong:

My teacher was really cool. My senior year he did his best to get me a scholarship. He did his best, I am not mad at him for that, but he told me you're stupid for thinking about college. You are going to go and burn through this \$3,000, and then you are going to come back here to me looking for help. Why would he say that? I talked to my friends, my doctor, they all said he is not really a good mentor and don't worry about him. Usually, mentors don't say that. They might tell you it is stupid, but it is your decision, and they support you. That was the key point that tipped me off that now I am going to go to college and prove him wrong.

Participant 3 had some mixed feelings about college. His teacher was negative, but Participant 3 was motivated to prove this teacher wrong. This teacher helped transform Participant 3's thinking toward how successful he could be in college.

Participant 4 discussed his experience with a class and teacher that took underprivileged students on trips to colleges:

I started looking at colleges when my teacher in my Upward Bound class took us to different colleges. They took us to the University of Asdorf as

freshmen in high school. I remembered it. It was nice and helped plant the idea of going to college for me.

This positive experience from Participant 4's teacher helped influence him to begin thinking about college, and he eventually enrolled at one of the colleges he visited. This transformation in thinking about attending college began when Participant 4 was a freshman.

### **Coaches**

Thirty percent of all students enrolled at the University of Asdorf participate in athletics. Forty-four percent of the participants interviewed came to the University of Asdorf to participate in athletics, while 22% chose the university because of a major.

Coaches are another group of people that the participants discussed as having an influence on their decision to attend college. Participant 2 talked about the influence a coach had on his decision when he said:

My high school coach sat down with me; he was also my guidance counselor, and he told me that I was good at football and that I should learn to channel my skills to help me get through college and gain a better degree.

Participant 2 also mentioned that his coach was the first person to plant the seed of going to college. No other adult in school or at home had ever talked to him about attending college, but his mom did support the idea planted by the coach. Participant 2 saw college as being an unattainable goal until his coach talked to him. This coach is another example of a role model helping transform the belief of Participant 2. Participant 2 did not believe he could attend college and be successful. Participant 2's coach had played

football in college and used that experience to help Participant 2 transform his thinking towards college. His coach's experience was a real-life example that helped Participant 2 believe it was possible to be successful in college. Participant 1 shared another example of how a coach helped transform his thinking towards college by saying:

Track and field has gotten me to where I am today. I don't know where I would be without it. One coach in high school told me that I had good potential to be successful in the sport in college. I really don't know how far it will take me in the future, but I believed in him and look where I am at.

### **Family**

Family was another group that participants talked about as having influences on their decision to attend college. These influences came in both positive and negative forms. Participant 9 and Participant 1 had not experienced college themselves before this past year. Their beliefs towards college began to develop as they saw friends and family members attempt to go to college and who were unable to be successful. This failure entered their mindset and proved to be a challenge that needed transformation.

Participant 9 saw a sister attempt college and return home after enrolling for only a semester. "My sister came here for a semester, but it didn't work out, and she came back home," said Participant 9.

Participant 1 had heard about similar experiences as Participant 9's sister and described it when he said, "My parents attended college, but were not able to finish. I am trying to finish to be the first."

Participant 7 said, “I was encouraged by lots of people, but my grandparents had the most influence. They really wanted me to be the first one in our family to go to college.”

Participant 7 was the first in her family to attend college. Her grandparents played a key role in helping her develop into the person she is today and had a great influence on her decision to attend college. They believed she could be successful in college. Participant 7 had doubts after scoring a 14 on her ACT, but pursued her dream because of her grandparents’ support. Other participants also experienced similar situations as Participant 7

Participant 2 said:

My mom always wanted me to go to college, but she was always working and never talked to me about it. Once my coach got the idea in my head and I talked to my mom, she was real supportive.

Participant 8 went on to say, “My dad was real strong on me going to college. He said if I got accepted I should just go for it.”

Participant 3 discussed similar support he received from his parents:

My dad said if I want to go to college I can. My parents and I started looking up schools that had the program I was looking for. I am not the first one to go to college. I am like the seventh or eighth one in my family. My dad went to college; my two aunts went to college; my uncle is in college right now.

Originally, Participant 3 had talked about the negative influence his teacher had on him about college. This showed that there was lots of family support for Participant 3.

Not all support from family members was positive. Participant 5 and Participant 4 experienced negative support from their family members when they shared their interests in attending college. Participant 5 said:

I wanted to go to college for myself because I wanted to be more successful for me. I wanted to show my parents I can do this. My dad has been working his whole life. He started when he was my age, and now he owns his own business. They respected my decision but said I didn't need college to be successful.

Participant 4 shared a similar experience with his family when he said:

My parents just wanted me to work, because that was the way they went. They didn't have money for me to go to college, so they never really committed to supporting me because they thought I was going to slack off like I did in high school. They were like, you do whatever you want, but don't count on us.

These experiences appeared to have been a negative influence on Participant 4 and Participant 5, but they also used them as motivation to prove them wrong. They wanted to prove they could be successful with this endeavor.

### Bridge Program Successes

The Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf has been in existence for five years. Programs take time to develop and become successful for its participants. The

study participants shared some of these successes as they relate to research question one. They talked about the ability to help peers, flexibility, the Skills Tutoring test, speakers, time management, tutors, and lab time as elements they liked about the program.

**Mentoring.** The theme of mentoring covered research question one to identify successes of the Bridge Program. Allen et. al (2012) and Demaris et. al (2007) discussed how their research showed that student engagement could often be a predictor of college success. Some participants were able to engage more than others when opportunities arose to help their peers. Participant 6 discussed her feeling of pride by saying,

I would always have my assignments done in class. I had the highest grade in the class and the teacher always told me I know you are going to get it done, but try to be patient with the others. They noticed that I would get it done. Others would come up to me and ask for assistance because I knew what I was doing. I enjoyed it. I like being able to help others.

Participant 6 was feeling pride and having success in class and saw the opportunity to engage and help her peers experience similar success. This is an accomplishment of the Bridge Program that needs to be developed. Participant 6 also discussed how she did not put much effort into her work in high school and that led to a low GPA during her first two years. She claimed to be a good student when she applied herself and began to do so during her junior year of high school. Her high school GPA ended up being 2.59.

Participant 6 also had a low ACT score of 18, and these scores were what admitted her to the Bridge Program. Participant 6's original perception was that she was smart enough and could be successful on her own. Without the Bridge Program, Participant 6 would

not even have been given a chance to attend the University of Asdorf because of these low scores. Participant 6 did not like the idea of the Bridge Program at first, but transformed her thinking in a positive way. She was able to use her change to help other students experience success with their work.

**Time Management and Flexibility.** This theme was also identified as a success of the Bridge Program and addressed research questions one and two. Management and Flexibility were identified as successes. Participants identified these skills as assets that helped them succeed during their first year, and that they would help them succeed in future years. Several participants talked about their lab times and how they enjoyed the flexibility of it. Students in the Bridge Program spend their first semester in class three days a week for an hour and in lab for two hours a week. The lab contains 11 computers and is in a smaller classroom in the library. Students are assigned a lab time and required to attend and complete homework. The second semester of the Bridge Program only consists of the 2 hours of lab time each week. Participant 3 and Participant 5 talked about lab flexibility by saying,

We had to go to the computer lab and do our work. I like that if I missed a lab one week, I could make it up later on. If you want to do more work you can show up more than twice a week.

Participant 3 supports Participant 5's comments by saying, "I love the lab format. It gives me time to study. Because of lab, I was able to pass one of my finals in algebra class." Participant 2 also added support to lab flexibility, "The lab time and having extra



help was great. It's not only the teacher; there are other students who can relate to you. They are going through the same thing as you.”

The lab time also helped the participants with time management. The labs forced students to work on their homework, instead of giving in to distractions like friends, television, and video games back in their dorm or apartment. The participants' feelings towards the Bridge Program had transformed into a positive feeling because they had peers that were going through the same experience. This program was having success because they were putting students in a position to be successful by helping students see the benefits. These benefits came in the grades they received on homework, tests, and overall grade in the classes they attended. Students were able to see these benefits and understand they needed to continue using these skills to remain successful in future years.

**Speakers.** The speakers that addressed the class in the first semester were a final success that many participants discussed. The speakers were scheduled to come in during evening hours to talk to the students about their negative views of college and how they overcame challenges to be successful in life. Some of the speakers were part of the University of Asdorf's first Bridge class. Participant 7 talked about her favorite speaker when she said,

We had one lady that was helping kids and women that were abused come and talk to us. I felt she was the best speaker. She really made me feel like college could help me do something successful with your life.

Participant 8, Participant 3, and Participant 4 also talked about how the speakers really made the program applicable to them. They all referenced a speaker named Juan.

Participants could see themselves in him since he had been part of the Bridge Program and turned out to be very successful in life because of what he learned.

Participant 8 said, “He talked about how he struggled, but the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf helped him to be successful. It gave me confidence that if he made it, I could make it.”

Participant 3 said, “I know Juan through sports. Everyone likes him. I had no idea he had been a Bridge student. Now that I know that, I want to prove that I can graduate with a college degree.”

Participant 4 said, “Juan was the best. He made me excited to get to class and show that I was ready to learn.” Mentoring, time management/flexibility, and speakers showed the successes of the Bridge Program, as asked in the first research questions. These items made the program work for students, but along with successes participants talked about some challenges.

### **Bridge Program Challenges**

Programs can always look for ways to improve to help students to be more successful. The Bridge Program has always evaluated students and given them a chance to share their thoughts in a quantitative form. This study offered students a chance to give a qualitative evaluation, which has not been offered in the past. They talked about program requirements, their personal feelings of self-worth, and their enrollment decisions as areas of challenges of the current Bridge Program. These challenges also helped answer research question one and helped create ways to improve the program. These challenges also came up in discussion when participants discussed their future

enrollment plans at the University of Asdorf. These discussions and challenges covered research question two.

**Self-Regulation.** As this program is still fairly new, just in its fifth year, it can take steps to improve to further meet the needs of its students. While some students viewed the class and lab times as successes of the program, others saw them as challenges. Participant 5 talked about this when he said,

The class the first semester was boring. I did not like how we had to relearn stuff we already knew. It was common sense stuff. I want more detail or more in depth. The studying and looking at textbooks. It is simple, we all know what to do in that situation. The book was pointless basically.

Participant 5 made a reference to having to buy the book. It is possible that Participant 5 experienced a similar class in high school and viewed the Bridge Program as a waste of time. At the same time, Participant 5 had a low GPA (2.74) and ACT score (17) that qualified him for this program. His perception of his abilities did not match up with his GPA or ACT score from high school. Participant 2 also made a reference to the first-semester class being a negative,

The first days of class we didn't do anything. It was just us sitting there and like basically wasting time. Then we took the Skills Tutor test, and it was a lot better. Maybe get us going on some work faster.

Here Participant 2 is referring to a test that students took for reading and math skills.

Once the test was taken, students continued through a tutorial to strengthen their skills in

these two areas. These tests have proven beneficial for some students in their introductory math classes and text readings they have for other classes.

Participant 6 and Participant 3 felt frustrated by having to be a part of the program for two semesters. Participant 6 had previously talked about how she did not put much effort into high school until her junior and senior year. Her grades improved as she began to apply herself to her studies. Participant 6 went on to say,

The first semester was the least helpful. I don't like how you have to stay in that class regardless. Even from day one, a week in, everyone else was struggling and I was fine. I knew all the answers. I knew all the different things. It was frustrating to me that I couldn't be like I know what I am doing. Is there anything I can do to test out of this? I can interview with you to discuss another option for me to do. I really wanted to take classes that would help me graduate as fast as I could to save more money for myself. It was just really frustrating for me that I couldn't leave that portion of the Bridge Program.

Participant 3 expressed a similar frustration by saying,

I had already participated in a similar program in high school called AVID. The Bridge class wasn't fun. I already knew all of the information. I took AVID and that is what it was for. I wish we could skip the second semester if we have a certain GPA.

Again, each of their comments seemed valid, but they entered college with a low GPA or ACT score. Participant 6 had a high school GPA of 2.59 and an ACT score of 18, while

Participant 3 had a high school GPA of 2.41 with no ACT score reported. These skills may have been developed late in high school before a major change could take place with their GPA. Another concern from Participant 8 was the lack of tutors available during his lab time. The lab time often has student tutors available for math and writing. These tutors are not available for every lab time. Participant 8 said, "I struggle with math, so it would have helped me if a math tutor was there." Participant 8 felt that having these tutors available at all times would help him and others have more success in the Bridge Program and their course work. A couple of other negatives about the Bridge Program referenced the evening times that they had to attend speakers and class times were too early in the day. These participants knew that these negatives probably could not be addressed because of speaker availability and room availability for class times.

Participant self-regulation summed up these concerns. While in high school, these participants self-regulated themselves when it came to completing homework assignments and studying for exams. Struggles occurred with this skill, which led to low GPA's or ACT scores. The Bridge Program curriculum should help develop this skill, but participants still struggled to meet the expectation. Participant motivation seemed low to attend the class and complete the work. This motivation likely led to self-regulation problems for some participants.

**Self-Efficacy.** The pre-college support already discussed showed examples of how students had influences that helped them believe that they had the skills to be successful in college. Participants expressed how that thinking changed before classes began, or during their first week of classes. Participant 4 talked about feelings about by

saying,

When I first found out that I was in the Bridge Program, I thought why am I doing this. I thought I should just go back to work and listen to my parents. They were right. I was here at college with those negative thoughts, and this reinforced those thoughts. I thought I am a real mistake, because I am not even going to make it in college the right way.

Participant self-efficacy regressed from believing they would succeed to thinking they could not be successful in college. This regression occurred when they found out that they had to become part of the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program. Students are enrolled in the Bridge Program if they have a low ACT score, low GPA, or both. Each student receives notification in their acceptance letter to the University of Asdorf. Students are reminded of this requirement when they attend a registration day during the summer months. Students will see a class called Bridge on their class schedules. If the student is an athlete, the coach will often look at their class schedule and talk about the program. The reactions that the participants had when they learned they were in the Bridge Program were strong. Some participants did not recall the letter or registration day and talked about finding out during the first class period. Participants used words like, embarrassed, upset, awkward, unsure, a mistake, angry, frustrated to describe their feelings about finding out that they were part of the Bridge Program. Participant 4 describe the shock of being part of the Bridge Program,

I found out the first day I was here. It was a shocker. I was confused, shocked, and amazed that I had to do this and that to stay enrolled here. At the end of the day, it was a class I have to take so I have to take it. I had people back home to prove wrong.

The Bridge Program is there to help students who underperformed in high school. It exists to help students succeed. Many participants saw that it labeled them in a negative way. However, the only individuals on campus who know who is in the Bridge Program are the students, the teachers, the coaches, and the students' advisors. Other students do not know this, unless the students talk about it. Participant 6 discussed the embarrassment at being part of the Bridge Program:

I didn't like the idea of being in the Bridge Program, to begin with. I was embarrassed. I just thought this would be a program for those people who were not smart and I don't want to be labeled as that.

These reactions had the potential to reinforce beliefs that these students would not succeed at college and needed this help from the Bridge Program to be successful. These participants gave the program a chance to help show them what it took to be a successful college student. The Bridge Program proved to have many elements that students appreciated.

### **Continuing Their Education**

This sub-theme developed with all participants. At some point during the first semester of enrollment, all of the participants contemplated dropping out. Some thought about doing it during the first semester, while others thought they would do it at the end

of the first semester. The reasons for these decisions varied, but every participant made a decision to stay enrolled during that first year. They all faced this decision at some point in that first year. Something had occurred in their thinking to bring about this change of wanting to drop out. Some participants made this transformation on their own, while others needed a little help. Participants showed their growth as individuals as they used their experiences to transform their thinking towards college.

Participant 6 referenced her experience in her sport as a reason she thought about dropping out when she said,

I was thinking about transferring at the middle of the year. Volleyball didn't work out. It was challenging for me to want to go and meet all these different people and it was overwhelming. I needed a job. This (college) is really hard. I changed my mind as I switched majors because this school has a really good nursing program and I didn't want to lose that.

Participant 2 described his reason for wanting to leave, "When I considered leaving and not coming back, it had a lot to do with football. I sat down and talked to my mom. She made sure I understood how many opportunities I had back here at school." Here is another example similar to where Participant 6 was able to transform her thinking on her own because of the opportunities the school offered her. Participant 2 needed a little help from a role model to transform his thinking, but the transformation occurred because of the opportunities that were being offered by the school.



Three participants talked about family issues being a reason why they contemplated dropping out. Participant 4 said,

Three months into the school year my family was having problems. I broke up with my girlfriend. I wanted to go home. I really didn't care, but I realized that I was here for me and not for them. I think that is when I changed my thinking.

Participant 3 discussed his moment of doubt by saying,

There were lots of times that I wanted to leave and go home. There was a lot of personal baggage I was dealing with back home and it came with me. I never thought it would; there was a situation that sparked it and I was ugh. I was grateful that I had close friends. I had a close friend that stepped in. She stepped in and I was able to get some help.

Participant 1 shared his experience of struggling with his decision to drop out or to stay enrolled when he said, "I thought about leaving during the first two or three months, because I was struggling with food, money, and a lot of stuff. I had to work through these things on my own."

Some participants decided to stay because of the caring individuals across the entire campus. Others stayed for sports and advancing opportunities, such as being a Resident Assistant. Many of the participants faced situations they had never faced before. A reaction to unfamiliar situations is to fight or flight. Many of the participants almost chose to flee college because they were not sure how to approach the situations they faced and overcome them. It took other individuals or opportunities to help

transform participant thinking to knowing what it took to be successful and overcome adversity.

There were many successes of the Bridge Program, such as the mentoring, the speakers, and the flexibility. The successes helped the students learn that the program was there to help them succeed. Along with successes, there were challenges. Participants identified these challenges as program requirements, personal feelings of being identified in this program, and how this experience affected their future enrollment decisions. These successes and challenges will help make recommendations for the Bridge Program in future years.

## Study Findings Summary

The first question guiding this project study was:

- What successes and challenges do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge

**Table 3**

*Themes aligned with Research Question #1*

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Research Question #1: What successes and challenges do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program?

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| Question Parts                   | Themes   |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Successes of the Bridge Program  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Peer Support/Mentoring</li> <li>2. Time Management and Flexibility</li> <li>3. Guest Speakers</li> </ol> |
| Challenges of the Bridge Program | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-Efficacy</li> <li>2. Self-Regulation</li> </ol>   |

**Research question #1 summary.** There were many successes that resulted from the Bridge Program. Participants talked about their support from their peers in the class. Participants saw their peers struggle with similar coursework, while others saw an opportunity to help their peers with coursework they did understand. Participant 6 discussed her feeling of pride in being able to help peers by saying:

I had the highest grade in the class and the teacher always told me I know you are going to get it done, but try to be patient with the others. Others

would come up to me and ask for assistance because I knew what I was doing. I enjoyed it. I like being able to help others.

Instructors in the Bridge classes encourage participants to help their peers when they were able to. The instructors help participants gain confidence in their abilities, as they support the mentoring among peers. This mentorship helped develop friendships among the Bridge participants and led to a network of support on campus. Students began to lean on this network of support when they struggled with different problems related to class, relationships, and sports. Participant H talks about the friendships developed in the Bridge Program by saying, “I know a lot of people in the Bridge Program. Because of the Bridge Program, I have really close friends. Friends that are on the football team with me. I could rely on them for support.”

Participants also saw their time management skills develop. Participant 3 said, “I love the lab format. It gives me time to study. Because of lab, I was able to pass one of my finals in algebra class.” Participant 2 also added support to lab flexibility, “The lab time and having extra help was great. It’s not only the teacher; there are other students who can relate to you. They are going through the same thing as you.” The skills improved as students attended required lab sessions with the specific goal of completing homework. These lab sessions helped students understand that they needed to get away from the distractions of their dorms or apartments and go to the library to complete work. Participant 1 reinforced this in his interview when he talked about how he and a group of friends went to the library every day after practice to study and get other homework done. “We found this room where no one goes to and we do all of our work in one sitting.

Sometimes we work from six to midnight and at the end of the day you feel like you have gotten so much work done. Then you don't have to worry about it the next day.”

These skills developed with the help of the Bridge Program requirements and reinforcement by the instructors. Participants also discussed how lab flexibility was appreciated. If they missed a class on Monday, they were allowed to come another day to make up that missed lab time. Participant 3 talked about lab flexibility by saying,

We had to go to the computer lab and do our work. I like that if I missed a lab one week, I could make it up later on. If you want to do more work you can show up more than twice a week.

Participant 2 also added support to lab flexibility, “The lab time and having extra help was great.”

Arranged speakers for the Bridge participants were also a success of the Bridge Program. Participants expressed how much they enjoyed the speakers and how their stories about overcoming struggles, similar to theirs, motivated them. Participant 7 talked about her favorite speaker when she said,

We had one lady that was helping kids and women that were abused come and talk to us. I felt she was the best speaker. She really made me feel like college could help me do something successful with your life.

Participant 8 said, “Juan talked about how he struggled, but the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf helped him to be successful. It gave me confidence that if he made it, I could make it.”

Participant 3 said, “I know Juan through sports. Everyone likes him. I had no idea he had been a Bridge student. Now that I know that, I want to prove that I can graduate with a college degree.”

Participant 4 said, “Juan was the best. He made me excited to get to class and show that I was ready to learn.”

Participants also discussed how tutors being available during lab times facilitated their success in class. Participant 4 adds, “The labs were really, really helpful because we had a math tutor and an English tutor there.”

Along with successes, participants talked about their challenges in the Bridge Program. A big challenge that students had was the label that came with being in the Bridge Program and how that affected their self-efficacy. Participant 4 said, “I thought I am a real mistake, because I am not even going to make it in college the right way.”

Participant 9 says, “At first I was pretty upset.”

Finally, Participant 7 states, “I felt awkward at first because I did not know what it was.”

Students knew they were there because of their low achievement in high school and felt they were being singled out by having to be part of this program. This challenge came from within each participant because no one else on campus knows they are part of this program, except for the director and the few teachers of the Bridge classes. Participants still felt a low self-efficacy because they needed the extra help to be successful.

Participant 6 discussed her feelings at being part of the Bridge Program, “I was embarrassed. I just thought this would be a program for those people who were not smart and I don’t want to be labeled as that.”

Many students, not only those in the Bridge Program, struggle with adjusting to college and succeed or fail on their own. This program was established to help these students understand what it takes to be successful, and it did take time for them to realize it.

Another challenge revealed throughout the interviews was the first semester class time and self-regulating themselves on assignments. Many participants felt they had experienced a similar study skills class in high school; it was a repeat of the class, and it wasted their time and money. Participant 3 stated, “To me it wasn't really fun I already know this. I took AVID. That is what AVID was for.”

Participant 4 added, “I was in the Upward Bound. We did a lot of the same things as the Bridge class.”

The participants understood that they pay for the classes they take, and the credits for this first-semester class were costing money that did not count towards their degree. They would rather have taken a class that counted towards their degree. Participant 6 said, “I don’t feel like I need to be here. I feel like I could be taking classes that help me graduate sooner and finish faster.”

While participants faced these successes and challenges, they were deciding to remain enrolled at the University of Asdorf after their first year. The second research question was developed to see how the Bridge Program affected their decision.

Participants could develop positive study habits that would help them achieve high grades

in their classes. Time management and using the writing center were two ways participants had increased their study habits. Confidence was another success of the program. Some students were able to share their knowledge to help other students learn, which in turn increased their confidence in their ability to learn and succeed.

There were also challenges that influenced their enrollment decision. Many participants identified the requirements of attending labs and class each week as a struggle. Participant 5 talked about this when he said,

The class the first semester was boring. I did not like how we had to relearn stuff we already knew. It was common sense stuff. I want more detail or more in depth. The studying and looking at textbooks. It is simple, we all know what to do in that situation. The book was pointless basically.

Participant 6 went on to say,

The first semester was the least helpful. I don't like how you have to stay in that class regardless. Even from day one, a week in, everyone else was struggling and I was fine. I knew all the answers. I knew all the different things. It was frustrating to me that I couldn't be like I know what I am doing. Is there anything I can do to test out of this?

Participant 3 expressed a similar frustration by saying,

I had already participated in a similar program in high school called AVID. The Bridge class wasn't fun. I already knew all of the



information. I took AVID and that is what it was for. I wish we could skip the second semester if we have a certain GPA.

Participants saw the class as a waste of their money since the class did not fulfill any graduation requirements. Enrollment in this class was a requirement of admittance to the college, but participants did not make this connection. Enrollment into the Bridge Program and its classes are a requirement of these participants because of their low GPA or ACT scores. Participants also had a low self-efficacy about having to be in the Bridge Program during the first semester. They saw themselves as not deserving to be there, but all participants remained enrolled for the second semester. Participant 4 said, “I thought I am a real mistake, because I am not even going to make it in college the right way.”

The discussions turned to how these experiences affected future enrollment plans of each participant. Research Question #2 states,

- How do these successes and challenges influence minority student retention after their first year?

**Table 4**

*Themes aligned with Research Question #2*

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Research Question #2: How do these successes and challenges influence minority student retention after their first year?

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| Questions Parts                  | Themes                                 |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Successes influencing retention  | 1. Study Skills<br>2. Peers            |
| Challenges influencing retention | 1. Self-Efficacy<br>2. Self-Regulation |

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**Research question #2 summary.** As the new school year started, eight of the nine participants in this study enrolled for the fall semester at the University of Asdorf. I could not find information on why the other student did not return to campus. The year these participants spent in the Bridge Program appears to have been a success. The participants' experiences led to their enrollment in classes. These participants showed they were able to overcome the challenges of inadequate feelings about being in the Bridge Program, attending classes they felt were a waste of time, and what they expressed as a lack of help (tutors) during their lab times. Some participants expressed how they felt awkward when they attended the first few classes, but quickly made friends with their classmates. They were able to make friends because of the common bond they shared of struggling academically in high school. This friendship may have been another factor encouraging these participants to enroll for the second year. Participant C stated, "Honestly, it allowed me to make more friends."

Participant 3 talked about friendships from Bridge when saying, "It's helped me create a lot of friends inside of the program."

Participant 5 said,

I actually like the people I have met through it like you kind of find out the people are in the same situation you are academic wise. You want to help each other out. Like if you have a kid in your class not knowing what to do then you can talk to them.

The focus of this study was on minority students, but three Caucasian students volunteered for the study. The Caucasian students expressed similar feelings towards

being in the Bridge Program and talked about the support they needed to apply to colleges while in high school. Participant A referenced the word ‘embarrassed’, while Participant C said the feeling was ‘awkward’. The Caucasian students also talked about the flexibility of lab times and the speakers as being beneficial. Participant 8 said, “Our speaker talked about how he struggled, but the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf helped him to be successful. It gave me confidence that if he made it, I could make it.”

Overall, there were no significant differences in the responses the Caucasian students gave, versus responses from the minority students.

The overall graduation rates for the Bridge Program over the first four years ranged from 21%-39% (Anderson, 2015). Other reasons may arise for these participants that lead to their dropping out in future semesters. The information gathered from these interviews shows that the program was successful in the first year. Participants learned time management skills along with resources, such as the writing center that helped them succeed in year one. Once the participants complete year one, they no longer attend Bridge classes. They are on their own to maintain the study skills they learned and continue using the resources that helped them succeed in that first year. Part of that success came with weekly support from faculty and the use of other academic resources. That support still exists if the students choose to use it. During the year in the Bridge Program, students have a teacher and a lab instructor who constantly reinforce study skills and the use of the campus resources. Participants need to be self-motivated beyond that year to continue using the skills and resources they have learned. Participants may

not feel the need to use the resources and skills after year one because they were successful. However, some may need continued support, and this is one of the ways the Bridge Program may be improved.

### **Quality of Study**

The procedures followed in this study allowed participants to be open about their thoughts on the Bridge Program and clarification of those thoughts. Recruitment of participants included a face-to-face visit to classes to introduce myself and talk briefly about the study. A follow-up email was sent to all students, explaining the study in further detail and asking for volunteers. Once students agreed to participate, I sent a letter of cooperation (Appendix B) to them. I set up interview times and the students chose the location from two options offered. Before all interviews, the participants read and signed their informed consent forms. I transcribed and coded the interviews by myself, and then sent the transcripts to the participants for a member check. A peer completed a review to reinforce my findings and offer additional suggestions.

I developed codes as common words and phrases began to repeat themselves in the interviews. I developed these codes into themes and discussed how they related to the research questions. In some cases, information from participants varied. An example of this would be the class requirements. Some participants liked being required to attend sessions, while others found it to be a waste of time. In examples like this, both points of view were discussed. It is important to hear both sides for the program to improve itself. I remained open to all views shared during the interviews.

**Salient Data**

The themes presented in this study are important to the identification of the challenges participants identified and development of the project to address those challenges. I framed the study using Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. Participants discussed how different individuals had influenced their attitude towards pursuing a post-secondary degree. Participants also identified challenges once in college in the areas of self-efficacy and self-regulation. These challenges and attitudes needed transformation to allow success to be achieved. I developed the project to allow for continued positive transformation to take place with the goal of more students graduating.

**Discrepant Cases**

There were times when participants offered contradictory responses to questions asked during the interviews. These opposite responses were offered in the write up of the results to show the varied experiences the participants came to the University of Asdorf with. An example of this was with the influences that students discussed when making a decision to attend college. Some participants experienced both positive and negative influences, while others only experienced either positive or negative influences. I discussed all responses to show that all of these participants still made the decision to attend college. To me, this was a sign that there was some high self-efficacy in these students. It just needed more development, which this project will offer.

**Summary of Findings**

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of the successes and challenges of the University of Asdorf's Bridge

Program. Data analysis led to the development of the following themes and discussions, as they related to the Transformative Learning Theory Framework for this study: Pre-College Support, Bridge Program Successes, and Bridge Program Challenges.

Pre-College Support came in the form of teachers, coaches, and families. Some areas provided positive support, while others brought negative support, and still, others had both kinds of support. Bridge Program successes and challenges were also uncovered during the study, as related to research question one. Mentoring was one identified success. Allen et al. (2012), Demaris et al. (2007), and Tinto (2007) all cited student engagement as a key for students staying enrolled. The Bridge Program allowed one participant to be more engaged through the tutoring of students. Flexibility in the attendance at lab was cited as a success of the program. This flexibility created a sense of responsibility in the students in knowing they could choose to miss a class and still find time later in the week to make it up. Speakers were brought in to talk about how they faced similar situations to the Bridge Program students, and they shared how they overcame those struggles to be successful. During interviews, we discussed Bridge Program challenges, and participants identified self-regulation, self-efficacy, and enrollment as problems.

Self-regulation challenges occurred as students lacked motivation to complete work they felt they already knew. Participants saw this work as a waste of their time. Participants also discussed how being part of the Bridge Program affected their self-efficacy. These feelings seemed to have placed a negative feeling about college into each participant. One participant used the words “feeling like a mistake;” another was

“confused,” and yet another was simply “embarrassed.” Being in a class where others were experiencing the same feelings was helpful to the students. The development of negative feelings about their self-efficacy may be a challenge of the program, as some participants shared. Placing students together who are having similar feelings allows them to express these emotions and understand how others are feeling. This could build rapport among students and leads to friendships and a sense of belonging, which is important for retention (Heisserer, 2002; O’Keefe, 2013). A final challenge was enrollment. Even though all of these students stayed enrolled for the whole year, they discussed how they faced decisions early in their first semester about staying enrolled. These decisions participants faced related back to Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory. Participants had to overcome challenges that made them question their ability to succeed at the University of Asdorf. Questioning their ability made participants want to drop out, but something or someone was able to help transform their thinking back towards success and what needed to be done to achieve their academic goals.

The results from this study followed some trends discovered in past research. Brown (2012) and Fike (2008) both cited GPA and ACT scores as good predictors of college success. Each participant came in with low GPA’s or ACT scores and faced struggles during their first year. The Bridge Program helped them be successful during their first year and has potentially set them up to be successful in the future. With the current graduation rate of Bridge Program students being 25%, the research done by Brown and Fike looked accurate and may mean these students need continued support following year one. As previously discussed in the conclusion, student engagement,

family support, tutoring, and a sense of belonging also influenced participants throughout their first year.

Conducting a qualitative study allowed participants to express their thoughts in a way they have not been able to do with past quantitative evaluations. Future research on Bridge Programs should include a collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Other institutions can use the findings from this study as a base from which to develop a Bridge Program, and areas that need to be focused on to help students adjust to college and be successful.

These findings from this study have led to the development of a project aimed to help students in the Bridge Program experience continued success during their time at the University of Asdorf. The following recommendations will aid in the development of this project and continued transformation of students in the Bridge Program. I am recommending that University of Asdorf administration look at hiring co-directors for the program, develop a stronger mentoring system, implement a tracking system for Bridge students, and require continued use of the Student Support Services. Recently, the Director of the Bridge Program announced her retirement, effective at the end of the spring semester of 2016. The University of Asdorf can seek out candidates that have experience working with diverse cultures. This may better help meet the needs of all students.

A stronger mentoring program needs to be developed so that students know whom they can talk to, if the need arises. This mentoring program may include upper-class students who were once part of the Bridge Program, or even faculty members. Another



suggestion for future changes would be tracking of past Bridge students. The program brought in a speaker from a past Bridge class that could talk about the success he had had. This speaker helped students see where they could end up in four years. Tracking Bridge students and sharing their success stories can help in the motivation of current students. A plan to require the use of the Student Support Services would help address the self-regulation challenge that students identified. Section 3 provides a detailed description of the project and recommendation as summarized above.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

The focus of this study has been to explore retention of minority students in the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf. Participants identified successes and challenges they faced in their first year of enrollment and how those successes and challenges influenced their decision to continue their education or leave the University of Asdorf. These successes and challenges, as discussed in previous sections, have led to the development of the following project.

### **Policy Recommendation**

This project will move forward, making policy recommendations to address the self-regulation and self-efficacy problems identified during interviews and data analysis. The Bridge Program is in a transition period with the announced retirement of the current director. A new director will bring new ideas to the Bridge Program. These recommendations will address the challenges that students identified and help during the transition period. The recommendations also can be carried across campus to help lead to social change on a broader spectrum, instead of just in the Bridge Program.

### **Research Question #1**

1. What successes and challenges do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program?

Students talked about challenges that would fall under self-efficacy and self-regulation. They shared their beliefs of how they felt when they discovered that they would be in the Bridge Program. Students used words such as, "shocked," "confused," and

“embarrassed.” These reactions showed low self-efficacy in these students and was an obstacle they needed to overcome before they could be successful. Students in the Bridge Program only spend a year in the program and then they do not have a required class to help them remain successful. The first recommendation is to have former Bridge students work with the first year students and continue that mentorship beyond that first year. This mentorship will encourage the self-regulation that students start to develop in their Bridge class and lab. Part of the mission statement at the University of Asdorf states, “commitment to relationships which encourage intellectual, spiritual, and moral development.” This recommendation promotes this piece of the mission statement and also encourages the development of social change across the campus when establishing these relationships. The mentors have their experiences of success to share that will help the intellectual development of their mentees. This intellectual development may take place through discussions of how to continue to develop study skills and how to reduce stress. A success that participants identified during interviews was peer mentoring. Using this success identified from research question one to address the challenge participants identified from research question one builds on the transformation students are making.

Another challenge that the students discussed was the class requirements during their first-year. Students attended a class during the first semester on campus. They learned study skills, how to read a college textbook, and worked on a Study Skills software to test current abilities in math, reading, and writing. The Study Skills acts as the remedial Math and English classes these students would enroll in if they were not in

the Bridge Program. The identified success of peer mentors, again, can assist with this weakness. Mentors can continue mentee intellectual development by sharing their successful study habits developed during their time at the University of Asdorf.

Along with these requirements, students attend a lab and use it as a supervised study hall. Students learn about tutoring services, counseling services, and other services the campus has to offer during this time in the Bridge Program. These services are related to the second research question.

#### Research Question #2

2. How do these successes and challenges influence minority student retention after their first year?

Students learn about these services, and the study participants used them successfully during their year in the Bridge Program. Again, the graduation rate for Bridge students ranges from 21%-39% (Anderson, 2015). The next recommendation is to have all faculty require students to continue to use the campus resources. Classes that contain most first year students could also be required to have these services visit their class to share what support they can give students. Making this change could eventually lead to a strong community of learners where seeking help when needed is expected. This recommendation would create social change across the campus and reinforce the importance of these resources for the Bridge students.

The director of the program has decided to retire at the end of the current school year, and the lead instructor for the lab classes has also announced his retirement. The next recommendation is specifically for the Bridge Program, but departments across

campus could implement a similar idea. The recommendation is to hire co-directors for the program. The current director also teaches and heads up another campus-wide committee. The responsibilities of the program could be split between two people. Some parts of the Bridge Program are training instructors, orienting students before the start of each semester, meeting with students during their first semester to talk about progress, scheduling speakers, and improving curriculum. The recommendation will suggest the other director be in charge of the lab and create a tracking system for the students in the program. This tracking would simply allow incoming students to see real-life success stories of other students who sat in their place years before. Tracking graduated students can be implemented in all departments so current students can see the career fields past graduates chose.

### **Description and Goals**

Students enroll in the Bridge Program as freshmen when they enter college with low ACT scores or low GPA's. The current retention rate of the Bridge students is 25% (Anderson, 2015). Graduation rates for the first four graduating classes of the program have been between 21-39% (Anderson, 2015). In both research questions, study participants identified low self-efficacy and difficulty self-regulating themselves to maintain success throughout the school year. For the project of this study, the University of Asdorf can receive policy recommendations that will address these two areas of concern. The goals being put forth for the project are:

1. Implement a peer mentoring program to address Bridge student self-efficacy issues by August of 2017

2. Develop a process to have all first and second-year students use campus study services to address self-regulation issues by August of 2017

The first goal of implementing a peer mentoring program comes directly from participant feedback during interviews. Participants identified a success of the Bridge Program was peer mentoring that occurred during work time in class or during the lab time. Participants gained confidence and experienced a transformation in their self-efficacy. The mentoring program will allow for transformations like this to continue to occur during the student's time on campus. Taylor (1998) discussed how student perceptions could be hard to transform once they have been developed. The mentoring program can assist in transforming the students' thinking and giving them more confidence moving forward. The second goal of using campus study services also supports the transformative learning theory. Participants discussed how these services are for students who don't know how to write or complete math problems. Participants need to transform their thinking and allow these services to help them. Requiring students to use these services allows them to see the benefit and influence it can have on their learning. A strong mentor supports the use of these study services and can assist in that transformation.

The Bridge Program will have a new director to start the 2016 school year, and the new director will work on developing a mentoring program. Elements of the mentoring program can include how to identify peer mentors, developing a training program for mentors, how to assign mentors to students, the protocol for follow-up during the school year, protocols for addressing problems, and a formal evaluation at the

end of each semester. The administration at the University of Asdorf can address the second goal by having instructors of first and second-year students require the use of the university study services for struggling students. These goals and recommendations can address the self-efficacy and self-regulation problems identified by the Bridge students. These goals can also be applied across campus to affect greater social change.

### **Rationale**

The recommendation project has the ability to affect change within the Bridge Program and affect social change across campus. Study participants identified self-efficacy and self-regulation as problems of the program. Policy recommendations can address these issues for the students in the Bridge Program and for other students across campus who have similar difficulties with self-efficacy and self-regulation. These recommendations also support the Transformative Learning Theory that is the framework for this study. Participants of the Bridge Program have started the transformation in their beliefs in their skills, but support needs to continue to reinforce that transformation. The three recommendations that will continue to assist in student transformation for this project are creating a mentoring program, requiring students to use support services, and assigning new roles to the director and assistant director of the Bridge Program.

These identified problems of self-efficacy and self-regulation are addressed with changes suggested in the policy recommendations. The development of a mentoring program will help support students as they face their self-efficacy and self-regulation issues. Mentors can use their experiences and training to help students cope with these problems and make a transformation in their thinking. Not all students are required to be

in the Bridge Program, but the policy can lead to students outside of the Bridge Program being assigned mentors. This mentoring program will lead to greater social change across campus. Mentoring addresses the self-efficacy problem by allowing the student to have a peer to talk to about problems that arise. The mentor will be an older student and will have experienced things the younger student, whether they are a Bridge student or not, has not experienced. By sharing these experiences, the student can build additional knowledge of what it takes to be successful, transforming their perceptions.

This project genre addresses the problems identified in the data collection. New curriculum or professional development will not have as strong an impact on students if students are expected to handle issues of self-efficacy and self-regulation on their own when those issues led to students needing the Bridge Program to get into college in the first place. Mentors can share their experiences of dealing with the problems to help students overcome their struggles and have successful college experiences.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conducting the Research**

The literature review and analysis was conducted through the EBSCOHost site through Walden University, the library at the University of Asdorf, and Google Scholar. The search began by taking a look at other support services offered to minority students. This search was conducted through Google and support services identified were TRIO, Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. Each of these words was entered into Walden University's EBSCOHost, the University of Asdorf's library website, and Google Scholar. Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support



Services were linked back to TRIO, so the TRIO search provided me with the greatest amount of articles. I also conducted searches on self-efficacy theory and self-regulation theory to address the challenges that the study participants faced. The searches led to identifying 30 current articles, books, or websites in the literature review. Each search brought no more than nine current sources to review, and information in each source contained content related to TRIO, self-efficacy theory, and self-regulation theory. TRIO has been in existence since 1965 and has experienced minor adjustments over time, which limited the current research.

By looking at current programming for minority students, I was able to identify successes of the program and develop policy recommendations for the University of Asdorf. Current programming targets this population at an early age to instill beliefs in the ability to succeed. Student self-efficacy is being built at this time, along with the ability to self-regulate themselves. Only one participant in the study identified as taking part in such a program before coming to the University of Asdorf. Study participants identified self-efficacy and self-regulation as challenges and also identified peer mentoring as a success. The literature and identified successes and challenges guided the policy recommendations.

There are currently programs developed and funded by the federal government that support the minority student focus of this study. The programs fall under the title of TRIO, which stands for the number of programs developed under this initiative, three (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These three original programs have expanded to eight programs today. Even with these programs and federal funding to run these

programs, the Council of Opportunity in Education estimated that 11 million students are eligible for these services, but funding serves less than 7% of these eligible students (Jaeger & Venezia, 2013). The Bridge Program does not fall under the TRIO services described. So, the University of Asdorf is attempting to reach some of these eligible students. The policy recommendations also attempt to provide services to eligible students.

### **Federally Funded TRIO Programs**

TRIO began as a federally funded program in the 1960s. The name TRIO comes from three programs developed to support its target population. These three programs are Upward Bound (UB), the first program developed under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (Arendale, 2015), the Talent Search Program in 1965, and the Student Support Services (SSS) program in 1968 (Arendale, 2015). The SSS was originally called Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (University of California-Riverside, 2016). Participants in the study referenced Upward Bound and another program called AVID. These participants shared that skills they learned and developed in these programs were similar to what was learned in the first semester of the Bridge Program. Both of these programs are available for student prior to enrolling in college so they have the necessary skills developed to be successful. The Student Support Services offered at the University of Asdorf continue to build on these skills the participants learned in high school with the assistance of the Bridge Program curriculum. The support assists in the transformation in student's belief in college success.

TRIO assists individuals that come from low-income families where neither

parent has graduated from college (Arendale, 2014, 2015; Jehangir, Jeske & Williams, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These individuals can be made up of any gender, race, or ethnicity. The following is a breakdown of the participants in TRIO programs: Caucasian 37%, African American 35%, Hispanic 19%, Native American 4%, Asian American 4%, and other 1% (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016; The U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These numbers closely mirror the representation of participants in this study of the Bridge Program. TRIO expanded from three to eight programs in the late 1900's with the addition of the Opportunity Centers and Upward Bound Veterans Program in 1972, the Training Program for federal TRIO programs in 1976, the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Programs in 1986, and Upward Bound Math/Science (UBMS) in 1990 (Arendale, 2015). Studies have shown the effectiveness of these programs if proper implementation and planning takes place (Patton, 2015). Students in the SSS program were 12% more likely to be retained to year two, and 23% more likely to be retained for year three, when compared to students not in the SSS program (The Pell Institute, 2009). The Pell Institute (2009) study found that students in Upward Bound programs were 50% more likely to attain a bachelor's degree than similar students not in the program. The numbers from these studies support the effectiveness of such programs and need to be available to support student transformation and success.

The University of Asdorf currently has TRIO that supports students who meet one of the criteria of first-generation students, low-income, or if they have a documented disability. This program at the University of Asdorf falls under the SSS category.

Ganuza and Grier-Reed (2012) described the SSS as a program that supports students with tutoring and advising services. Jehangir, Jeske, and Williams (2012) expanded this description by adding intrusive advising, career development, peer assisted learning, and leadership opportunities. The Department of Education (2014) added another component to the SSS by stating that students also receive counseling to increase financial and economic literacy. The University of Asdorf used a combination of these descriptions by using both peer and professional tutoring, advising, workshops to strengthen study skills, and having a full-time financial advisor on campus. The Bridge Program's use of the TRIO services and related Academic Success Center needs to increase to help students experience and maintain success during their enrollment at the University of Asdorf.

No two TRIO programs are the same, and studies have been conducted to help make policy recommendations at other post-secondary institutions. One study focused on the development of a constructivist career course. This course was developed to help empower the students to promote a positive self-efficacy within themselves (Ganuza et al., 2012). Ganuza et al. (2012) discussed the current shift in post-secondary institutions recruiting first-generation students. More are attending college and many that fall into the first-generation, low-income categories are at risk. The development of a positive self-efficacy to promote persistence is important. The constructivist course developed for this study focuses on students' narrative, action, construction, and interpretation (Ganuza et al., 2012). The course allows the first-generation students to overcome their perceptions that they are breaking from the family by being the first to complete college. This perception adds to the stress and tension that they feel. The constructivist course

allows students to learn about their family and reflect on the successes they have experienced in their chosen careers and their attitudes towards work (Ganuza et al., 2012). This study showed that upon completion of the course, students were more confident, had increased self-efficacy, were able to assess skills, set goals, create plans, and problem solve (Ganuza et al., 2012). The University of Asdorf can take a similar cue from the Ganuza and Grier-Reed study and look to use the SSS effectively. A policy recommendation to have new students use these services helps support a positive transformation for students during their first year on campus.

Arendale (2014) also discussed the need to create an additional course to support students whose parents do not have the abilities to do so. Arendale named this class an Integrated Learning Course. Arendale (2014) saw a need for this as students struggled in beginning classes in the areas of Science, Math, and English. The approach in the 1970s and 1980s was to enroll students into a learning strategies class that often focused on study skills. Arendale (2014) saw this format as a challenge because the students were not able to directly apply these skills as they learned them. An integrated learning course would be paired with a class, such as biology, to allow the student to immediately apply the learned study skill in that class (Arendale, 2014). The current Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf also has study skills as part of its curriculum, but does not integrate it with other classes. Again the University of Asdorf can be a leader in post-secondary education by linking the study skills curriculum to current classes that Bridge students are enrolled in. This allows students to actively apply the skills and had potential to help make a positive transformation in students.

Multicultural learning communities are another alternative looked at by Jehanger et al., (2012). This learning community is a group of courses that TRIO students are allowed to select as an option. The learning community would take classes in composition, humanities, and social sciences together to promote a support system among its members (Jehanger et al., 2012). The classes would all count towards the general education credits that students are required to take to graduate. The University of Asdorf has an Honors program for students. This program allows students to take core classes with a cohort of students with high academic achievement. The University of Asdorf could look at creating a similar model with Bridge students to support the application of study skills and continue with a positive transformation.

### **Upward Bound**

This program within TRIO has shown success over the years of its existence. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) said that Upward Bound participants were four times more likely to graduate than those not in the program. Cahalan and Goodwin (2014) found that 75% of Upward Bound participants entered college within a year of graduating high school, versus 62% of those in the Talent Search Program, and 45% of those receiving no services. Another study cites enrollment numbers between 83-86% (RTI International, 2016). Cahalan et al. (2014) also found that Upward Bound participants were 3.3 times more likely to obtain their bachelor's degree within six years, compared to those that did not participate in the program, and 1.4 more times likely to graduate than those that were in another support program similar to Upward Bound. One of the study participants participated in Upward Bound and found that much of the

Bridge Program's coursework was similar to Upward Bound. The student had the Upward Bound support prior to enrolling at the University of Asdorf, but still qualified for the Bridge Program and its services. The skills needed further support to be developed to allow the students to be successful and make the positive transformation.

Upward Bound is a program that begins for students when they are in high school. The students receive support to better prepare them academically in the areas of literature, composition, math, science, and foreign languages on a college campus (Cahalan et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Upward Bound provides social support through tutoring, counseling, mentoring, cultural enrichment, and work-study programs (Jaeger & Venezia, 2013). Students attend classes over a six-week period in the summer, and then weekly during their school year. These classes are developed by four-year and two-year college campuses, and stipends are available to students (Miranda, Moore, & Vega, 2015). Along with academic support, some Upward Bound programs provide financial aid counseling and opportunities for field trips to attend plays, museums, and college campus visits (Aguirre, Rhodes, & Rodriguez, 2015; Perna, 2015). The results of participating in Upward Bound are encouraging, but Miranda et al. (2015) discuss that some urban youth fail to complete the program because of a lack of family support, or the need to earn more money working a full-time summer job. Miranda et al. (2015) found that students who participated full-time in Upward Bound said that the staff was supportive and pushed them to succeed.

Some study participants shared experiences in pre-college preparation through their participation in programs such as Upward Bound and AVID. These participants

expressed how these programs helped them feel prepared for college. The development of such a program for University of Asdorf students may have the same effect as those who have already participated in Upward Bound or AVID. TRIO programs, such as Upward Bound, support Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning. The TRIO programs have been developed to work with students on strengthening their academic backgrounds for future college opportunities, and the University of Asdorf needs to utilize the existing programs. These programs help students transform their self-regulation and self-efficacy early to help them see and achieve success in the future.

The literature explained the success that students experience when they participate in a program like Upward Bound. The directors hired to run the Bridge Program can use the template of the Upward Bound program when making future changes. The Bridge directors can look at the curriculum currently offered at the University of Asdorf and align it with other successful programs similar to it, with Upward Bound being an example.

### **Self-Efficacy**

I framed the study around Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. This theory is defined as a person's ability to transform their beliefs and attitudes (Baumgartner, Caffarella, & Merriam, 2007). Students were able to identify their struggles in the Bridge Program as self-efficacy and self-regulation. Albert Bandura developed a self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1995) said self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs in their capabilities to accomplish something. Schwarzer (2014) said self-efficacy affects how people feel, think, and act, which can lead to feelings of depression,



helplessness, or even vitality and optimism. Study participants discussed their feelings about their ability to be successful and dealing with the label they assumed came with being in the Bridge Program. These participants needed to transform their self-efficacy and the recommendations supported that transformation. Everyone develops their perspectives based on their experiences, and the perspectives will remain unchanged until a different experience occurs (Taylor, 1998). Increasing the use of the support services and providing mentors helps support the transformation of student thinking.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory included four forms of influence. These four forms were called mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional (Bandura, 1995). When success is experienced, future success is expected (Kelleher, 2016). This explains the first form of mastery. Success does not occur 100% of the time, so there will be challenges to overcome. The study participants have had limited success, as their low GPA's and ACT scores showed. Participants needed to experience success, so they were willing to try more challenging tasks. Experiencing success increases the student's self-efficacy. Students will try more challenging tasks when success is experienced because their self-efficacy is higher (Derosier & Soslau, 2014). Students in the Bridge Program expressed success through peer mentoring and some time management skill development. Bandura (2012) said easy successes will result in the expectation that everything will be effortless. Easy classwork that participants complete adds to the expectation that things will always be that simple. This increases self-efficacy for easy assignments, but creates challenges with harder assignments.

The second form of influence was through vicarious experiences. Bandura (1995) lined this form with social models. Kelleher (2016) described this form as when a person sees someone they perceived as equal having success. When you experience this, it increases your self-efficacy in performing the same task. Participants have seen their peers have success in various areas during classwork and lab time. Continuing to see these experiences from peers increases their self-efficacy (Kelleher, 2016).

Verbal persuasion was the third form of influence developed by Bandura. Those that can be verbally persuaded show the capability to master tasks at hand (Bandura, 1995). Verbal persuasion comes from a person that is respected and trusted (Cheung, Siu, & Yiu 2012; Kelleher, 2016). Participants discussed their negative feelings about being in the Bridge Program, in addition to the negative feelings toward some of the coursework. As participants worked towards mastery of their writing and math skills, they saw other classmates step in and provide assistance. This is an example that Kelleher is talking about when he says persuasion from a respected or trusted person can increase self-efficacy. As classmates, the participants built trust and were able to rely on each other when help was needed. Bandura (2012) found that people will persevere when encouraged by others.

The final form of influence is physiological and emotional. Kelleher (2016) mentioned that stress and anxiety can negatively affect self-efficacy. First-generation students experience stress and anxiety when trying to figure out how to balance work, school, and home. A challenge is finding a way to help manage the stress and anxiety.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2013) discussed how student self-efficacy can be affected by the instructors. Instructors that possess a high self-efficacy tend to have high expectations for student learning, hold students accountable for meeting these expectations, use innovative methods to engage students in learning, and encourage autonomy. This is another area that the directors of the Bridge Program can explore, the quality of the instructor. Instructors with high self-efficacy may be able to create learning experiences that increase motivation in students to succeed and in turn increase student self-efficacy.

Schwarzer and Warner (2013) discussed the importance of motivation in the development of self-efficacy. Participants in the study discussed how some negative influences provided motivation for them to pursue a post-secondary degree and be successful in that pursuit. The motivation these participants possess may give them a higher self-efficacy than other students. How can students with low self-efficacy create motivation to succeed and in turn increase their self-efficacy? Motivation is directly related to self-regulation, another challenge participants identified. The next section will discuss self-regulation and its importance in helping students transform themselves.

### **Self-Regulation**

This study's theoretical framework focused on Jack Mezirow's transformational learning theory. Students identified self-regulation as a struggle of the Bridge Program. Schunk and Zimmerman (2012) made a connection between the two identified struggles from participants by saying that an increase in self-efficacy will result in an increase in self-regulation. Self-regulation describes how people can meet the demands or

expectations put on them (Baumeister, Nelson, Schmeichel, Tice, Twenge, & Vohs, 2014). Baddeley, Hofmann, and Schmeichel, (2012) added that self-regulation also describes how people think, their motivation to achieve a goal, and capacity to achieve goals. People struggle with self-regulation when those demands or expectations are too high, or if people cannot conform to the established standard or goals (Carver & Scheier, 2012). The Bridge Program assists students in developing their study skills, knowledge in math, reading, and writing, and time management skills. The instructors of the Bridge classes can also support increased self-regulation by doing the following: organize the classroom with visual prompts so students can self-direct themselves, establish clear expectations and routines, give students voice and choice, model self-regulation skills, and provide positive feedback (deFur & Korinek, 2016). Study participants identified their ability in time management as a success. They attributed this success in part to the lab time they were able to use each semester to complete work. This acknowledgement of success is an example of how students were able to transform their thinking when it came to managing their time. The graduation of Bridge students remains low. So, the unanswered question remains, are students able to self-regulate themselves beyond their year in the Bridge Program when they are required to attend class and lab sessions?

Self-regulation is defined as when people exert control over themselves to accomplish something (Baumeister, DeWall, Gailliot, & Oaten, 2006). A person needs the ability to complete two things: organizing what needs to be done to complete that task and completing a task (De Corte, 2016). An example of this would be when students are assigned a reading assignment. The task is to read the assigned pages. Students who

can self-regulate understand reading the words is not enough. Students should key in on vocabulary words that are italicized or in a bold-faced type. Students also should take notes and interrupt their reading regularly to ask themselves what they just read. These types of skills are part of the current curriculum in the first semester of the Bridge Program. Successful students can make a transformation and understand this skill needs to be repeated to achieve success. This is just one example of self-regulation and how the participants need support to build this skill.

Roy Baumeister's self-regulation theory discussed four important keys to being successful. They are standards of desirable behavior, motivation to meet standards, monitoring situations and thoughts, and willpower. Self-regulation and goal setting are connected, along with a person's ability to achieve those set goals. All Bridge students spend the first year of college attending lab sessions that assist students in completing work for all of their respective courses. This lab help teaches self-regulation related to the use of time to complete coursework. Avci (2013) found that students who were able to set long-term goals and keep them in mind were more successful in self-regulating themselves than those whose long-term goals were interrupted. As students enter college, the long-term goal is to graduate and attain a job. Building of smaller goals to attain the larger goal is not currently supported in the curriculum. A successful, positive transformation begins as students set goals and achieve them. Baumeister's theory fits in with goal setting from a different perspective. People at any given time have more than one goal they are working to achieve. Self-regulation and motivation allow people to meet their goals. Baumeister and Vohs (2011) said that you can only focus on one goal at

a time. By focusing on one goal at a time, other goals become secondary, and no progress is made towards meeting those goals. Baumeister and Vohs (2011) discussed the fact that focusing on one goal can cause other goals to expire.

An example of this comes from the study participants. Some participants were involved in sports along with their studies. These same participants worked jobs and lived in their own apartments with roommates. At any given time, these participants had goals they were working on. Some of these goals could be weight training for their sports, completing a homework assignment in philosophy, working at their job to have money to pay for rent and other utility bills, spending time with roommates, working on skills that will make them better in their sport, and completing an assignment in math. These may seem like tasks, but they relate to goals to graduate from college, be the best athlete they can be, and live on their own without parental support. Student face decisions of prioritizing what is most important at any given time. Perhaps they are scheduled to work eight hours, and then they have practice for three hours. The student also knows they have that paper to write for philosophy. The student has to make decisions on what is most important and the end goal of attaining a degree may not be at the forefront. Baumeister and Vohs (2011) related this situation to attainable goals, and the need to forget some goals to attain others.

Some students will use self-regulation and spend their time in their sport. Other students will use self-regulation and complete their homework. This is where a mentor can help the students prioritize their goals. The mentor can help the student identify what the long-term goal is when enrolled in college. That goal may be to achieve a degree to

be able to provide for themselves, and possibly a family, in the future. Some are able to achieve this in sports, but others need the college degree to be able to do this. According to Baumeister's theory, some of the study participants lacked the ability to monitor themselves to assure they were completing tasks that would help them to meet their goals. Some participants lacked the will power to do what would help them meet their goals.

### **Addressing the Problem**

The study participants were all students that participated in the Bridge Program during the past academic year. The participants identified self-efficacy and self-regulation as challenges they faced while in the Bridge Program. Self-efficacy was an issue as participants discussed their feelings of inadequacy for having to be in the Bridge Program. Self-regulation described students who struggled with motivation to complete the course requirements each semester. Making policy recommendations addresses these issues to support students for their future success. Arendale (2014) discussed the integrated learning approach that would help students with self-regulation and make the Bridge course more applicable to success in other coursework. The success with this step would also affect self-efficacy. Student confidence in their abilities will increase as they learn new skills, apply them in all classes, and see success. The Transformative Learning Theory this study is centered on leads to these policy recommendations and allows students to transform their thinking through their experiences.

## **Project Description**

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

A mentoring program will need committed students. Since the study participants are Bridge students, it would be ideal to have previous Bridge students be mentors. The mentors need to be juniors or seniors since the mentoring will start in year two. Good candidates will have to be able to demonstrate an ability to be successful beyond their year in the Bridge Program. Success can be measured by grades achieved, participation in activities, and through advisor recommendation. Money would be a resource needed for this recommendation. The mentors need to be properly trained in how to work with other students. Lyons and Pastore (2016) identified the following skills as keys in successful mentorships: how to build a relationship, accountability for both participants, goal setting, and evaluation/reflection. An outside specialist needs to be brought in to provide the training that will be successful. The director of the Bridge Program will guide this process and assign mentors to students.

The second recommendation of continued use of university support services has existing support in place. These support services include tutoring in both math and writing, counseling services, and student life support. The services may need to be expanded with an across campus push for students to use these services. Bridge students are not the only students who struggle with self-efficacy and self-regulation. To affect social change across campus, all first year students will need to be required to use these services. This could also extend to second year students if needed. Additional resources



in the form of people and money to pay them may be necessary if current staff is unable to handle an increase in the use of these services.

The third recommendation of hiring co-directors or a head and assistant director is potentially in place. Currently, there is a director and lab director of the Bridge Program. Both have recently retired and new individuals are being hired to fill these positions. The lab director can be given more responsibility than just overseeing the lab times and be given a title change. Tracking students beyond the first year needs to take place to evaluate the success of the program. Tracking also needs to occur beyond graduation. Sharing stories of student success beyond graduation helps incoming Bridge students see that they can be successful with the right support.

### **Potential Barriers and Solutions to Barriers**

Potential barriers to the mentoring recommendation include lack of funding and lack of mentors. Money does not exist to support this recommendation since it would be a new program. A solution to this barrier could be to develop and implement training, utilizing staff expertise to help save on costs, instead of paying an outside vendor to provide the training. Finding students that want to be mentors could be another barrier. Part of the University of Asdorf's mission is to develop relationships that encourage intellectual and moral development. A possible solution to finding mentors would be to use the mission as a call for help from current students. Another potential way to deal with this barrier is to pay students for being mentors.

The second recommendation of continued use of support services has barriers of money and staff available. Current staff has limited time during the day and can only see

so many students during those times. Many staff at the University of Asdorf also teach classes. A solution to this barrier is to hire additional staff to address the increase in use of these services. This comes at a cost of money and also office space. Each services is housed in a different area on campus and may not have open space to add new staff. The support service department is located in the library and cannot be relocated. There are other staff that occupy space near the support service department that need to be relocated to accommodate any new staff hired. This solution will allow the support service department to remain in the location students are familiar with.

Time may be the main barrier with the director responsibility. These recommendations add new responsibilities to each job. The director of the Bridge Program continues with his current work, but now has an added responsibility of developing a mentoring program. This involves potentially creating professional development, recruiting mentors, and following up with mentors on their progress. Each Bridge class has over 100 students, so the mentor responsibility increases the time commitment, which in turn increases the monetary compensation. The lab assistant or assistant director of the Bridge Program will also need more time to follow up with students through transcript checks, emails, phone calls, or face-to-face visits to learn about their success. A solution to time does not exist, but additional monetary compensation could be offered for the increase in time these individuals need to spend to properly address the job requirements. Another possible solution would be to hire additional staff, but that would also come at an increase in monetary compensation.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

**Table 5**

*Timetable for Implementation*

| <b>Task</b>                                 | <b>Month/Year of Implementation</b> |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Hire New Bridge Directors                   | Immediate                           |
| Mentor Recruitment                          | September-October, 2016             |
| Mentor Training Workshop                    | November, 2016 (first week)         |
| Mentor-Mentee Assignments                   | November, 2016 (second week)        |
| Mentor-Mentee Meetings                      | November-December, 2016             |
| First-Year Required Use of Support Services | August, 2017                        |

Finding the first group of mentors will require at least one full semester, if not a full year. The fall semester of 2016, September-October, will be used to find current juniors and seniors, who participated in the Bridge Program, that are in good academic standing and have shown an ability to balance school, work, and possibly athletics. The candidates will be identified in the month of September and October. Identification will start by looking at transcripts and talking to the students' advisors. Candidates will be contacted through email to explain that they have been identified to be mentors and to set up a meeting with the Bridge director. A workshop titled, "What is a mentor?" will be delivered in early November. These candidates will be matched with a current sophomore that was a previous Bridge student who is struggling now without the support that existed in year one. The mentor will then be able to get to know their mentee for a

few weeks at the end of the fall semester, during the months of November and December, and set goals and expectations for the spring semester. Recruitment and training needs to continue each semester to have mentors available to students. Mentors could also be students that did not experience the Bridge Program, but it would be ideal if they could have been part of the Bridge Program so they understand that experience.

The second recommendation can be implemented immediately in the fall semester of 2017. Time can be set aside during the fall faculty days to discuss the importance of our students using the resources to help them to overcome self-efficacy and self-regulation issues. The faculty days take place during the second week of August.

University administration can ask that professors with first-year students require them to use tutoring services in writing before papers are turned in, and math if they see a student struggling to comprehend information. The support services on campus keep a record of scheduled meeting times, so the instructor can follow up with each service to see if the student is using the service. Papers or math assignments could assign a portion of the grade for using the tutoring service. This implementation can be gradual for the first semester by starting with a few classes or professors. All freshmen are required to take a World View class, so that may be a good place to start.

The timetable for the director and assistant director is immediate. These positions will be filled during the summer of 2016. The new responsibilities will start in the fall of 2016. Once these individuals are hired, they need to be part of the planning process for these new responsibilities.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

**Director.** The Director of the Bridge Program is responsible for identifying potential candidates through transcript reviews, advisory surveys or conversations, and interviews with mentor candidates. The director also needs to provide training for the mentor candidates. This may be through hiring an outside source to provide training, or developing training through on-campus sources. The students who are mentors will need to take part in an interview, and then take part in the training to learn what a good mentor does. The mentor is responsible for building trust with their mentee and being available to them whenever needed. Mentors will lead goal setting and time management meetings with their mentor and keep a log of student progress. Regular meetings will need to be scheduled with mentees to discuss any problems that may be occurring.

**Students.** My role in the policy recommendations is to share my knowledge of the results of the study and help implement any changes necessary to support student transformation. I have created a basic outline of the mentoring training, recruitment of mentors, and evaluation of the program. These documents are available to the Bridge Director and may be adjusted as needed. I can offer support and guidance on my vision as the mentoring program is implemented.

The Student Support Service recommendation will be taken over by the Support Service department. Additional support from myself may come in creating a better electronic tracking system. I have an understanding of what our technology/internet staff is able to do as I work with them on summer programming for the University of Asdorf.

It would also be my responsibility to share the results of the study with our faculty and assist in informing them that all first year students will need to use Support Services.

The final recommendation of tracking is given to the Bridge Directors. I am available to assist these individuals in explaining how I track students in my own department each year. Collaboration with technology/internet staff may lead to a more effective tracking system than the current recommendation.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The project for this study is a Policy Recommendation to address challenges study participants identified about the Bridge Program. The following three policy recommendations for this project are to create a mentoring program, requiring students to use support services, and to assign new roles to the Director and Assistant Director of the Bridge Program. Each recommendation can have an evaluation at the completion of the academic school year.

### **Goal-Based Evaluation**

The project's goal is to help increase student retention of Bridge participants, and in turn increase the overall graduation rate of the Bridge participants, which was the original concern from the University of Asdorf administration. There are factors outside of University control that affect the graduation rate. A couple external reasons, as identified in the literature review, are family and work. The University of Asdorf can only put resources in place to help students be successful. A goal-based evaluation helps determine the outcome of the project when compared to the set goals. This type of evaluation can assist in further developing ways to keep improving programs, or to

potentially reorganize programs that are not successful (Root, 2016). The administration's desire to increase the graduation rate is addressed by the project's policy recommendation. The goals of this project help address the identified challenges of self-efficacy and self-regulation.

### **Evaluation Goals**

**Mentoring recommendation goals.** One policy recommendation is to implement a mentoring program for Bridge students once they leave the guidance of the program after their first year. This recommendation is supported by The Pell Institute Study (2009) that found students were 12% more likely to be retained in year two and 23% more likely to be retained in year three with SSS support. The mentoring program provides additional support for student success. Goals for the mentoring program are based on the need to help students continue the success they experienced in the first year of the Bridge Program. A goal-based evaluation will help evaluate if students make connections between what they learned in the Bridge Program and implementing it in the following year with the help of their mentor. Goals for the mentoring program are: establish a relationship that promotes an environment for encouragement and feedback, reduce stress for the mentee, and strengthen study skills. These goals are in place to help students increase self-efficacy and make the positive transformation needed to graduate with a degree.

To monitor the success of the mentor recommendation, two checkpoints will be used. The first checkpoint will consist of a quantitative evaluation and will be administered at the end of the first semester. The evaluation will consist of Likert scale

questions related to the effectiveness of mentors based on training, the relationship established with mentee, and areas where more training needs to occur. This allows for a large amount of information to be gathered over a short time. The evaluations will be available through email, and completed evaluations will be tracked by the director of the program. Data will be compiled electronically and evaluated by the director of the program. Feedback from this evaluation will allow for needed adjustments during the winter break. The second evaluation will be completed near the end of the second semester. This will be a qualitative evaluation in which participants will be interviewed. These interviews will be conducted by both directors of the Bridge Program, allowing for more feedback than if just one director conducts the interviews. The interviews will align with the goals of the program. Questions will revolve around the mentor's ability to establish a relationship that promoted encouragement and feedback, helped reduce stress for the mentee, and the mentee's strengthening of his study skills. Feedback from these interviews can help guide needed adjustments for the next year's training of mentors.

**Support service goals.** Another policy recommendation of this project is to require all first-year students to use the support services available on campus. This recommendation addresses social change across campus. Students see the need to ask for help as a weakness and are also embarrassed at times to ask for help. This negatively affects self-efficacy and in turn has a negative effect on the student's ability to make a positive transformation. Requiring the use of the services allows students to see the benefits and continue using these services in future years. As success is seen when using these services, future success is expected (Kelleher, 2016). The goal with this policy is to



increase the use of student support services. An obvious increase will occur in first-year students as they will be required to use the services. The real assessment will be beyond that first year when students have the choice to continue using the services. This goal can be evaluated by the support service department's continued tracking of student meetings, content areas, and length of time for the meetings. This information is currently tracked and can be made available at the completion of each school year.

The final recommendation for this project is the hiring of co-directors for the Bridge Program. The goals for this recommendation are to hire co-directors to split the job duties instead of having a single director, as in past years. Evaluation of this recommendation will be handled by administration during the year end evaluations. This evaluation is a multipart document the directors will need to complete prior to meeting with administration.

### **Key Stakeholders**

Key stakeholders leading to the success of this recommendation and evaluation are the University of Asdorf administration. They need to provide proper resources for the program's implementation. The Bridge Program directors are key stakeholders as they are matching up mentors with mentees and monitoring the progress. The mentees are stakeholders because their struggles are being addressed with the mentor. Finally, the mentor is a key stakeholder. The mentor needs to have an understanding of the university mission and live the mission by taking on this role.

## **Project Implications**

### **Possible Social Change Implications**

At the local level, this project addresses the needs of the Bridge students. The graduation rate ranges between 21%-39% (Anderson, 2015). University administration wants to see this low number addressed, and developing a mentoring program helps support these students beyond the first year. This project will help Bridge students build their self-efficacy and strengthen their self-regulation skills by continuing to develop them with guidance after their year in the Bridge Program. Part of the university's mission is to build relationships that encourage intellectual, spiritual, and moral development. This program will foster the opportunity for students to live this part of the mission.

Students in the Bridge Program entered their first year with a low high school GPA or ACT score. These students are also first-generation students and minority students. Attending a post-secondary school is a big step for these students and families. Student success can help other family members transform their thinking about post-secondary schools. Failure can lead to long-term financial issues if the student attends, does not graduate, and is left with debt they cannot pay off. School faculty and administration are invested in their students and want them to succeed. Faculty and administration follow the mission of being life-long learners and providing service to others. The mission is addressed by supporting students and promoting study skills the students have learned. Community partners will benefit from the success of the program when the students get involved and contribute to their community.

### **Importance of the Project to Local Stakeholders**

**Students being mentored.** The students being mentored are the students struggling with their self-efficacy and self-regulation that may be limiting their academic success. This project has been developed specifically for these students, which make them stakeholders. The successful development and implementation of the recommendations for this project impact the students being mentored. Being a stakeholder means that these students need to take an active role in participating to help the project succeed. A lack of participation, or a lack of proper development, could put financial stress on students if they cannot graduate and attain a job to repay any loans.

**Mentors.** The mentors are also key stakeholders for the project. They will have an impact on the success of the students they work with. The mentors are being asked to properly use the skills they will develop during mentor training. The success of the mentoring program will depend on how involved the mentors are in the development of their mentees' self-efficacy and self-regulation. The feedback mentors provide will help in future improvements to the project and may lead to a mentoring program that other campuses use in the future if it is successful.

**Bridge Directors.** Despite the low graduation rate of students in previous years, the Bridge Program is seen as a success because it gives students the opportunity to attend a post-secondary institution. Many students are not accepted at other institutions, based on GPA or ACT scores, but the University of Asdorf gives these students the opportunity to attend with a requirement of the Bridge Program. The new directors are stakeholders as the program further develops and achieves more success. The decisions

made and trainings developed will impact students now and in future years. The directors want to see more success, and that makes them fully invested stakeholders in this project.

**University of Asdorf Administration.** This project is asking for many changes to occur in the form of new programming, space, money for funding, and more staff. The administrators are key stakeholders because the decisions they make in these areas will impact students' success. Administrators will want a full plan of success in place before they show willingness to invest time and money into the project. They will have the final say in how to proceed with all recommendations, and they will have to explain any failures to the Board of Trustees.

### **Importance of the Project in the Larger Context**

The study focused on minority students in the Bridge Program. These students struggled with self-efficacy and self-regulation. Some of these struggles existed as a result of family members and teachers that worked with the students, and influenced how they saw themselves and their academic potential. Students will be able to take what they have learned to be successful and apply their skills and knowledge in the cities that they live in after graduation. They can use their knowledge of building self-efficacy and how to self-regulate themselves to help others develop the same skills. This may include their family members, or others who face similar challenges they have overcome. An example may be if one of the current Bridge students becomes a teacher. He or she will be able to see students in their school who face similar struggles he once faced. As a teacher, he or

she will be able to help the struggling students work on ways to overcome problems and be successful as he or she was able to do with the help of others.

The university can be a leader in the post-secondary area in developing a successful mentoring program. Our staff can help other post-secondary schools create similar mentoring programs that can assist more of their students achieve their goals of graduation. The university can conduct training for other campuses on how to develop their own mentoring programs, or they can go to the campus and conduct training that they have developed. This will allow for the ideas from the University of Asdorf to be used by other campuses, and possibly be improved upon. The relationships established between campuses can make the mentoring program better and affect change in students across all campuses involved in mentoring.

### **Conclusion**

The Bridge participants in the study identified self-efficacy and self-regulation as weaknesses of the program. The policy recommendation addresses these issues through the creation of a mentoring program, required use of the university academic support services, and the hiring of co-directors to implement these policies for Bridge students. The policies will be implemented in the fall of 2017 to allow time to properly develop the mentoring program for the benefit of the students and to allow faculty to adjust to requirements for students to use the support services. The recommendations are for the Bridge students, but these policies will affect social change by being implemented across campus for all students who need assistance to experience post-secondary success. Upon

graduation, students from the University of Asdorf will take their improved skills, increase in self-efficacy and self-regulation, and use those strengths in the workplace.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This section will provide the reader with an understanding of the project strengths, its limitations, and my development as a scholar. This project has been a time consuming undertaking over the past several years, but the time spent has allowed me to affect change at my campus and start to create social change on other campuses. I have faced challenges in developing a strong project to address self-efficacy and self-regulation problems and to overcome challenges when it comes to time, money, and people as resources. This section will also address my own development in leadership and how this area of study can continue in the future.

### **Project Strengths**

The problems participants identified in the study related to their self-efficacy and self-regulation. Along with those identified problems, participants experienced transformations. These transformations took place as students believed they could be successful in college, experienced some turmoil that questioned their confidence in being successful, and then overcoming that turmoil to gain confidence in their ability to succeed. The transformation students experienced were in their ability to succeed in college. Most participants in the study had experienced a time in the first semester where they doubted their abilities and contemplated dropping out. The participants made a transformation to being confident because of the influence their peers had on them.

The strengths of this project developed with the help of Bandura's work. Bandura (1995) discussed how success leads to success. This can be done through social modeling, verbal persuasion, and reducing stress and anxiety (Bandura, 1995). The recommendation of a mentoring program will address each of these areas during the training workshop. Another strength of this project addresses the wavering in their confidence and belief by providing a mentor to the students once they are into their second year of college. The second year of college will represent the student's first year without the Bridge Program. The mentor will provide guidance and assist the student in maintaining the successes experienced in year one. Another strength is with the new directors of the program. Students have ongoing correspondence with the directors throughout their first year on campus and little to none after that year. The policy recommendations allow more interaction beyond that first year with directors they know and may have built trust with. The directors can provide the positive verbal persuasion described by Bandura. They are the ones who develop and implement the mentoring program, so they are in regular contact to check on the progress of the students. If mentors are needed beyond the second year, then they can be provided. A successful mentoring program will see the mentee stay enrolled at the University of Asdorf and eventually graduate, which will help the low graduation rate of the Bridge students.

The success of this project depends on the stakeholders. The developed project requires all stakeholders to be fully vested in helping it succeed. The vested stakeholders are a strength of the projects. Each stakeholder will want success to help them achieve



goals they have personally and institutionally. Multiple levels of feedback and evaluation are an asset that will allow for improvements and changes in future years.

### **Project Limitations**

Study Participants identified peer mentoring as a success of the Bridge Program. Even though mentors will be trained how to work with their assigned mentees, this strength could also be a limitation. Bandura (1995) discussed that social modeling and verbal persuasion can help lead to success. The mentors are expected to be positive role models and provide positive verbal reinforcement and persuasion. The mentor program recommendation will not be effective if mentors do not display these skills with their mentees. This has the potential to limit or facilitate the success of the program.

A second limitation to this project is resources. These resources are in the form of people, time, and money. It has been recommended that co-directors be hired to help address the identified problems. More money will be needed to pay for this newly created position that has never existed in the program before. In the past, there has been one director and one lab coordinator. It is possible to make the lab coordinator a co-director and a new position will not need to be created. Additional responsibilities will be given to the lab coordinator and in turn require the person to be paid more money, but a third person will not need to be hired.

Time is another limitation to the recommendations. The director has spent several hours each semester meeting with Bridge students individually and would now have more responsibilities with the mentoring program. The hiring of co-directors would help with the time limitation, but creating a mentoring program would add additional time to the

job. The university has other resources that may be able to assist in the development of a mentoring program. It currently has a person in charge of first-year student experiences. This person may be able to assist in the development of a mentoring program.

The success of the project depends on feedback provided from all steps of the evaluation. All stakeholders will have an opportunity to provide feedback, but not all may choose to participate, which is a limitation to the project. Not all students may respond to emails they receive with evaluations or invitations to meet, so alternative ways need to be developed to reach those students.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

#### **Addressing the Problem Differently**

**Curriculum.** The problems of self-efficacy and self-regulation will still exist in the Bridge Program if these policies are not able to be implemented. Another way to address these problems is to change the curriculum that is delivered to the students in the Bridge Program. Some participants expressed concern about how repetitive the information was during the first semester class. New curriculum would help address this concern, and the problems of self-efficacy and self-regulation could also be addressed in new curriculum. Participants in the Bridge Program use a textbook that focuses on developing good study habits. Lab time early in the semester is spent testing student skills in reading, writing, and math. Students then participate in computer-based tutorials to strengthen these skills. A change in this curriculum could address the problems of self-efficacy and self-regulation. Changes could occur in how the lab is run for students. Currently students attend lab as if it is a study hall to complete work. Developing

specific curriculum for this time and maybe extending lab from an hour to two hours each time may be an alternative way to address the self-efficacy and self-regulation problems identified by students.

**Staff professional development.** Another option to address the problem is to provide professional development to faculty and staff at the University of Asdorf. The University of Asdorf has a large population of students that qualify for the Bridge Program and TRIO. Each program supports about 150 students, and the University of Asdorf has about 1,000 students eligible for such services (T. Smith, personal communication, August 15, 2016). Faculty and staff are the next level of help for students not in the Bridge or TRIO programs. Training faculty and staff on how to support students who need to strengthen their self-efficacy and self-regulation skills would also address the problems. Students would hear the same message from multiple faculty, and this would help students transform their thinking.

### **Alternative Definitions of the Problem**

The main problem I identified prior to the study was the low retention rate of minority students at the University of Asdorf. The study looked at students in the Bridge Program and identified successes and challenges of the program. The implication is that what is being done during the first year of the Bridge Program has a major impact on student success. An alternative problem may lie in the faculty at the University of Asdorf. The faculty consists of about 200 people, and a majority of them are Causcasion. The student population is about 33% minority students and the 2015-2016 class had a 51% minority population (Anderson, 2013). The faculty may not possess the proper

understanding of how to work with this population of students since they are not of the same ethnicity. Students in the Bridge Program attend other classes across campus, and problems in those classes may lead to the self-efficacy and self-regulation challenges study participants identified. Professional development for faculty and staff may address this alternative problem. This professional development focus would help faculty and staff understand different cultures, and how they may need to adjust their instructional methods to help students of other cultures succeed.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

#### **Scholarship**

Scholarship has been a challenge for me. My first challenge was to speak in a scholarly voice when writing. I like to be clear when I am talking about something and I feel there are times when others question what I mean by some of the things I say. An example of this would be self-efficacy. If I use that word when talking to peers from a previous job, they would not understand what the word meant. Someone would question the word, and I would have to explain it. This is why I would just simply say what it means right away.

Scholarship also involves conducting literature reviews to support the need for research and to find gaps that may need to be filled. My challenge when conducting literature reviews was finding where the gap was and how I could fill it with my research. Presenting these findings and research findings also provided a challenge. I would often say something once and not repeat it later in the paper. It is necessary to do this to show connections throughout the paper.

By conducting this study, I have learned about the amount of time it takes to develop an effective study. It would be easy to just type up some questions and ask participants for their responses and make adjustments. Research may show a way to address the problem without having to conduct the study. It is important to add to the body of research to give back and help create social change both locally and on a broader spectrum. I also felt like I collected good data with the questions I developed, but found myself wanting to ask more questions once the interviews were completed. This showed me the importance of conducting trial interviews with the questions to see if the questions needed to be changed or expanded upon.

### **Project Development**

Project development is time consuming and important when trying to implement an effective change in current practice. Sometimes there are things, like money and other resources, that are out of your control that limit the plan you have created to address problems. Flexibility and alternative ideas are important to still address the problems at hand. Evaluation of programs is also key. Self-evaluation is important, but it is also important to seek feedback from those having the problem. Allowing them to have a voice can bring validity to solutions that are suggested for change. The Bridge Program has evaluated students quantitatively each semester, but has not collected any qualitative data. The additional collection of data from my study has provided administration with a new perspective on what problems exist and need to be addressed. This shows the importance of multiple forms of evaluation for any program or project that is developed and implemented.

**Leadership**

Completing this study has helped my leadership abilities in a couple of ways. One relates to leadership in scholarship, and the other is my overall leadership skills. As I reflect on my leadership abilities and this project, I see a direct correlation between developing this study and my growth as a leader. As I established a topic for this study, I looked around at my campus and started asking questions about areas that needed to be studied. Once I found the area of the Bridge Program, I sought out others with more experience than myself to see what direction they would like for my study. Through those discussions and my research on the topic, I started to see my leadership skills develop. Instead of taking the route others wanted me to go, I used my research and understanding of the program to develop my project and not someone else's project. My ability to learn about a program and use research demonstrates my development as a leader. I have proven that I understand how to apply my knowledge and my comprehension of research to affect change. I believe I have established my leadership in scholarship by adding to the body of work that already exists on the topic of minority student retention of students in a support program.

**Change**

An educational goal of mine has always been to have a positive impact on others. I started working on this goal by becoming a teacher and impacting 25-30 lives each year. I had a desire to affect positive change in a broader perspective and achieved this by earning higher degrees. I now feel I am in a position to influence growth in a positive manner across the broadest spectrum. Research that I conduct will affect change for

anyone who reads it. Our society is always evolving, and by adding to the research, I can affect that change in a positive manner.

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

My journey has helped me grow as a scholar. In all of the positions that I have held, there has always been one person that would say something like, “Research shows that....” or “.....based on research.” I did not understand why it really mattered what the research showed and just wanted to know what I needed to do. The development of my project has shown me the importance of research and helped me grow as a scholar. Being a scholar involves using research. I have learned to use research to discover gaps and then conduct my own research that will add to the overall body of a topic and fill in those identified gaps. I have learned that it takes time and patience to read over research and to discover this missing information. It does not happen in a short amount of time, and I have the ability to do this.

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

When I see the word, “practitioner,” I think of one practicing in their field of work. My field is education, and as mentioned above, I have always wanted to have an impact on those I have taught. To me, education goes in cycles. I am referring to curriculum that I have taught in past years. Something seems to work for a period of time, and then change occurs, and that works for some time. The key in this change is that it is led by research. Research must be ongoing to understand what is happening, and then a way needs to be developed to address the change. I have practiced that with the project that I have developed. I showed I am able to identify a problem, conduct a review

of previous research, develop my own study, analyze the data from that study, and then develop a way to improve the identified problem. Adding to my field of study is going to help others become successful in their career pursuits. It would be easy for me to just go back to a classroom and teach students curriculum, but that would not allow me to add to my field of education like I have with this project.

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

Developing a project seemed easy to me at first. I had ideas in my mind about how to address the problems that I identified in my study. I put these ideas down and had a project ready until I started looking at the feasibility of what I had proposed. My project involved developing a mentoring program, hiring co-directors, and requiring the use of support services campus wide. I ran into issues of money, time, and people as resources when looking at the practicality of implementing what I had proposed. These resources are not unlimited, but what I proposed is an idea to address the problem.

I also saw importance in asking others what they would like to see done to address problems. I had not run the program before, so I could not see all of the limitations that existed with the Bridge Program. Gathering this information allowed me to work ideas into my project that may not otherwise have been addressed.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

The work on this project has been important both to myself, the student body, and to the institution. A problem existed with the current Bridge Program. Steps had been taken to get feedback from faculty and staff, but only in a quantitative way. My work on this project allowed an alternative perspective on the problem. The qualitative study



allowed students to verbally express themselves, instead of only answering questions on the quantitative evaluation each semester. This project was time consuming, but offered feedback that allowed me to further develop ways to address the problem that had gone unidentified in past evaluations.

Research drives change, and I learned the importance of research as I conducted literature reviews to understand previously identified problems that this population faced. I learned that many of these problems still existed with the study participants, which brought more validity to past research. These literature reviews allowed me to find gaps, and my study can add to the body of research that exists. This work has helped me to further expand on my leadership skills at my institution and has allowed me to affect change with the developed project.

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

Where I live and work, minority retention has always been an issue. This is why I chose this topic. It is important to address problems that exist. Sometimes the challenge may be to identify the problem and get others to see that a problem is there. My research and study showed that a problem existed and needed to be addressed. This research and project have led to the development of ways to provide assistance to the students in need. My research will have a great impact on my university as they see the data collected directly from the students during interviews, instead of on the paper evaluations that are usually completed. I found students to be more open during interviews than they would have been, or are allowed to be on evaluations, or surveys with set questions. The mentoring program developed with this project has the potential to have great impact. It

will be effective in educational institutions where it was developed for, but there is potential for any field to implement a similar mentoring program to help its students or employees achieve success. At the local level, there is potential for each department to develop a similar program to help struggling students.

The work conducted with this study is important as it addressed a need at my institution and addressed a gap in the overall research. I had learned that the University of Asdorf established a program to provide support for minority students, and it seemed to be successful. At least for the first year, the students were required to be in the program. The problem was developing once that first year ended. Students were not maintaining that level of success, and that needed to be addressed.

Future implications for this study would be to evaluate the success of the changes made past that first year. Research on such support services like the Bridge Program are limited and more research needs to be conducted in this area. It is possible that there is a more successful program than the one on my campus.

When it comes to higher education and the education field, in general, there are some issues. In public education, the teachers are trained to educate students. Teachers in higher education are not necessarily trained to educate students. Some come from other fields of work and talk about knowledge needed to complete the job. An example of this might be an accountant coming in to teach students how to be accountants. Does this person understand the importance of engaging students in learning and how to best present the material? My research may not help these people, but it has developed ways

to help the students understand what they need to do to be successful. Students can then self-monitor themselves to success, instead of depending on others to get them there.

### **Conclusion**

It is important always to reflect. Self-reflection allows for growth to occur. In my field of training and education, I have found that if growth does not occur, then you are limiting the growth of others you teach. I have conducted my research through a long process of identifying a problem, looking at other research to identify gaps, conducting a study to address the identified problems and gaps, and then using the study findings to develop a project. I have also learned to look at the obvious problems that exist, but also look for some deeper underlying problems that may be causing the identified problems. Thinking about why these problems exist and have not been addressed has put me in a leadership position to affect change. I have found the importance of leadership in trying to implement positive change locally and globally. I have increased my role on campus by taking on leadership roles within my department and across campus as the head of our curriculum committee. Throughout this process, I have also grown as a scholar and practitioner in education. I understand the process that I need to undertake in order to be a scholar in my field, and the importance to contribute to the ongoing research needed to address change. I understand that I can add to research through writing for journals, or presenting at conferences on topics I know a lot about. My research has led to suggestions for changes through my project development and left suggestions to future research needed to be conducted to continue adding to the topic.

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**Appendix A: The Project Products**

Chadwick Biermeier

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Dear Administrators,

I would like to thank you, the administration at the University of Asdorf, for allowing me access to resources, and for allowing me to conduct my research on the Bridge Program. A key goal of this project has been to complete research that would lead to social change. This study has guided me to create policy recommendations that may lead to social change across your campus and other campuses with similar programming.

These documents will provide you with a quick picture of the identified problem, the process followed to collect the data, the analysis of the data, themes discovered from that analysis, and most importantly, the policy recommendations that will assist in social change. These policy recommendations include documents that will assist in implementation to address the challenges students face. I believe you will find that some policies can be used specifically with Bridge students, while others can be applied campus-wide with all students.

I would like to present my findings and these policy recommendations to the administration and other interested faculty members on campus. I will contact the Vice President of Academic Affairs to find a time that is convenient for this meeting.

Please contact me with any questions you may have about this study and its recommendations. I look forward to meeting and presenting my findings.

Sincerely,

Chadwick J. Biermeier  
Doctoral Candidate  
Walden University

**Policy Recommendations Report**

Walden University

An Academic Recommendation Paper

by

Chadwick Biermeier

### **Objectives of the Policy Recommendations Report Summary**

- To provide administration and faculty with a summary of the study and findings resulting from this project focused on the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf
- To offer policy recommendations that will directly affect the students in the Bridge Program, and in some cases students campus-wide
- To share documents that will help with the implementation of these policies and their evaluation

## **Policy Recommendation Report**

### **Retention of Minority Students in a Bridge Program: Student Perceptions on Their Successes and Challenges**

#### **Introduction**

The policy recommendations report provides an overview of the successes and challenges that students face in the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf. Data analysis indicated a low graduation rate of students in the Bridge Program. The results of the data collection showed that students struggled with self-regulation and self-efficacy. Students in the Bridge Program enrolled in a Bridge class that covered content to help with the adjustment to college expectations. Students also enrolled in a lab that was designed to build basic skills in both math and reading, and also used lab as a time to complete homework. Students only stay in the Bridge Program for a year and then need to be self-motivated to continue receiving help.

The purpose of the policy recommendation paper is to suggest ways to continue to support and motivate students in the Bridge Program beyond that first year. The recommendations serve to continue to support the development of self-regulation and self-efficacy in Bridge students. I built the study and recommendations around Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory. This theory revolves around a person's ability to transform their beliefs and attitudes (Baumgartner, Caffarella, & Merriam, 2007). The students in the Bridge Program are primarily first-generation students who are developing beliefs and attitudes towards post-secondary education and are building a foundation to

be successful. These recommendations support the development and transformation of self-regulation and self-efficacy.

### **The Problem**

The problem addressed by this report is the retention rate of minority students in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program. The Bridge Program admits students who have low ACT scores or a low high school GPA. The administration has expressed concern over the low graduation rate for students enrolled in the Bridge Program. The Bridge Program actively looks for students who are minorities that may also be first-generation students. The current graduation rate of Bridge students is 25%. A concern of this number is how it may affect future enrollment of first-generation minority students.

The research questions developed for this project are:

- What successes and struggles do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program?
- How do these successes and struggles influence minority student retention after their first year?

In order to collect data to address these questions, I completed a qualitative case study.

The Bridge Program currently collects data using the quantitative approach through end of the semester evaluations. The qualitative study interviewed nine students enrolled in their second semester of the Bridge Program. An analysis of these interviews showed that participants struggled in the areas of self-efficacy and self-regulation, while peer mentoring and time management were successes identified by participants. The project resulting from this study is the policy recommendation report. The report summarizes the

study and recommends ways to address the struggles participants experienced. The recommendations include the creation of a mentoring program beyond the student's first year in the Bridge Program, hiring co-directors, and requiring the use of Student Support Services. Continued data collection and evaluation is needed to support these recommendations.

### **Evidence from the Research and Literature**

**Minority Retention Trends.** I conducted a review of literature related to minority retention trends, first-generation students, the meaning of retention, and research reasons for discontinuing education. Szelenyi (2001) stated that by the year 2050, the minority population in the United States would be 47%, and post-secondary schools would see a similar increase. Many of these students will be considered first-generation students, which are defined as the first members of the immediate family to attend college (Roman, 2007). Minority retention was heavily studied prior to 1988, and many of these studies were of the quantitative nature. These studies identified ability to adjust to college, performance, finances, loneliness, a lack of role models, and poor previous education as reasons for dropping out (Terrell et al., 1988). A lack of family support and lack of university support were also cited as reasons for leaving school without graduating (Guillory, 2009). Fike et al. (2008) found a relationship between the retention rate of minority students and their lack of basic skills. Students lacking in their basic skills were less likely to complete their programs. The Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf takes students lacking in basic skills and teaches them how to be successful at the post-secondary level.



**Theoretical Framework.** I used Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory to guide the study. Transformative learning is defined as a transformation of beliefs or attitudes (Baumgartner, Caffarella, & Merriam, 2007). Every individual develops a perspective based on their experiences in any given situation (Taylor, 1998). Role models are able to help individuals understand their experiences by discussing their own experiences in similar circumstances. If a student has a negative perspective of college, and future experiences reinforce that perspective, then that student has less of a chance of succeeding. In order to transform their perceptions, these individuals need help from role models who can be positive influences.

**Retention.** Retention is measured as when a student does not return to the school where they are currently enrolled. Students are considered drop outs if they take a semester break from college, or if they transfer to another institution (Breier, 2010; Currie, Hagel, Horn, & Owen, 2012). Even though students may return to the college after the break, or complete a degree at another institution, they are still counted as drop outs. Reasons for dropping out are job responsibilities, family responsibilities, weaknesses in core subjects such as math or reading, lack of study skills, and stress (Soria et al., 2012). Remediation and faculty availability are ways to support these students (Baker, 2010). Tinto (2007) discussed how high faculty expectations, support, and involvement could help increase student retention.

### **Summary of the Current Project**

The purpose of this qualitative study was based on the guiding questions of identifying the successes and challenges of the Bridge Program, and how those successes and challenges affected retention of the students. Students are only required to be in the Bridge Program for one year and are then on their own to achieve success. Some students still need a support system to continue transforming their beliefs and attitudes. The policy recommendations offered here will offer continued support for students, past the initial year in the Bridge Program, helping them to develop stronger self-efficacy and stronger self-regulation skills.

### **Methodology**

The research methodology was a qualitative study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with nine students from the Bridge Program. This study focused on each student and the feedback they provided on their year spent in the Bridge Program. The population consisted of all 140 students enrolled in the Bridge Program for the 2014-2015 school year. I completed the selection of participants for the study through purposeful sampling, which involved selecting participants based on their ability to help understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The target audience was minority students in the Bridge Program, so those students were eligible to participate. Participants gave consent through the Informed Consent form before interviews were conducted. Interviews took place in either a study room in the university library or my office, depending on where the student was the most comfortable. I took notes during the interviews to identify key words or phrases that could be used to develop follow-up

questions. Upon the completion of the interview, I noted additional thoughts to help when analyzing the data. I transcribed the interviews and member checked them for accuracy. Then, I analyzed the data by open-coding the transcripts from the interviews. Themes were developed from the transcripts and aligned with the following research questions, which remained the focus of the study:

1. What successes and challenges do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program?
2. How do these successes and challenges influence minority student retention after their first year?

### **Data Analysis**

I used an inductive approach for data analysis, keeping an open mind to all responses and developed themes based solely on participant feedback. I transcribed interviews using hyperTRANSCRIBE and allowed participants to complete a member check on their own transcript to allow for accuracy and clarification of what was said. I open coded the transcripts after the member check. Open coding allowed for the development of themes across all interviews.

### **Findings**

During data analysis, several themes began to emerge that aligned directly with the research questions. Participants identified successes and challenges that they faced while being a part of the Bridge Program at the University of Asdorf. Research question 1 asked: What successes and challenges do minority students experience in the University of Asdorf's Bridge Program? Peer support/mentoring, time management and flexibility,

and guest speakers were the successes that students discussed during their interviews.

The challenges that participants identified were self-efficacy and self-regulation.

The second research questions asked: How do these successes and challenges influence minority retention after their first year? Participants identified study skills and their peers as successful influences on their decision to enroll for future semesters. Self-efficacy and self-regulation were challenges participants identified as influencing their decision to enroll for future semesters.

### Summary of Findings

The themes that emerged from the analysis aligned with the research question and theoretical framework. The outcome of the analysis indicated a need for policy recommendations. I developed the policy recommendations to build on the successes and to address the challenges that resulted from the data analysis. The following policy recommendations are suggested to the University of Asdorf:

1. Develop a peer-mentoring program for students beyond the first year of the Bridge Program.
2. Continue to require students to use the Student Support Service program on campus.
3. Hire co-directors for the Bridge Program.

### **Recommendations**

I have made the following recommendations, based on the findings of the study and the use of Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. The first recommendation is to develop a peer mentoring program for students beyond their first

year in the Bridge Program. Students receive individualized attention during their year in the Bridge Program, but are then left on their own beyond that first year. This recommendation will provide continual assistance to students in the transformation of their thinking about what it takes to be a successful college student. The second recommendation is to continue to require students to use the Student Support Services on campus. Students in the Bridge Program are required to use these services during their year in the Bridge Program, but use it on an as needed basis beyond that year. This recommendation again supports the continued transformation as students see the usefulness of this support in their success. The third recommendation is to hire co-directors of the Bridge Program as the current director has retired. This recommendation will allow for duties to be split between two people, instead of overloading one person. The direction of the lab and tracking students can fall under the duties of one director. The other director can be in charge of training, curriculum, and orienting students.

**Recommendation 1: Develop a peer mentoring program.** Bandura (1995) broke his self-efficacy theory into four parts. One of these parts is social modeling and the second one is verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1995). This recommendation gives the mentor the chance to accomplish both of these things, while helping their mentee increase their self-efficacy. Study participants experienced mentoring in many ways during their year in the Bridge Program. Participants first experienced mentoring as they attended class and lab sessions, and the instructors were the mentors. Participants also experienced tutors who provided mentoring during the lab sessions. Tutors helped participants with math and writing homework during the lab time. These tutors provided

guidance and tips on how to successfully complete work. A final form of mentoring came directly from their peers in class. The peer providing the mentoring felt an increase in confidence in their ability to be successful. The peer receiving the mentoring was more receptive to the help because it came from a peer. This led to the recommendation of a peer mentoring program. This recommendation asks that Bridge students be assigned a peer mentor after their first year in the Bridge Program. Ideally, the mentor would be a person who is an upperclassman that has participated in the Bridge Program and has shown an ability to be successful. Students interested in being a mentor would need to be recruited and trained during the fall semester of the first year of implementation. The following pages will include documents that support the mentoring program. These documents include the mentoring application, PowerPoint slides suggesting ideas to discuss at the training workshop, a quantitative evaluation, and a qualitative evaluation.

The following document is a recommended application that potential mentors must complete. The mentoring program needs willing volunteers to achieve success. This application is a way to start identifying potential mentors.

**Student Application to Become a Mentor**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in School: \_\_\_\_\_

You are applying to become a mentor to another student at the University of Asdorf. By becoming a mentor you are assuming a lot of responsibility. Carefully consider each question below and provide a complete response to each question. You will be contacted once this application has been received and reviewed. Email completed applications to \_\_\_\_\_.

1. Describe what a mentor is in your own words.
2. What do you believe your responsibilities will be as a mentor?
3. How do you get to know a person you know nothing about?
4. What skills do you possess that will make you a great mentor?
5. What does your daily schedule look like? (classes, athletics, work, other)
6. How much time do you have to commit to mentoring each week?

The slides below are suggested topics to discuss during the training workshop that the

director of the Bridge Program will conduct. Mentors will need to be trained on how to be effective communicators and how to be resourceful. This training supports the mentoring recommendation. It has been organized to line up with the three goals of developing a relationship, reducing stress, and strengthening study skills. Working on these three goals will increase student self-efficacy and self-regulation, which were identified as challenges that students faced. Below you will see three sets of PowerPoint slides to be used as a recommended guide when delivering this workshop. The Bridge Director will lead this workshop and can further develop ideas and activities as needed.





## Building a Relationship

### Suggested Schedule

- Ice Breakers
- Initial contact with your mentee
  - What to discuss
- Face-to-face meeting
- Getting to know your mentee
- Plan of contact for future needs
- Setting up a plan to check in regularly
- What to do when you don't know what to do

## Initial contact with your mentee

### What to discuss

- Your name and email will be shared
  - During their Bridge class
- Email student with a short introduction
  - Activity
    - COMPOSE EMAIL
    - PARTNER SHARE
    - GROUP SHARE
- Suggest a meeting over lunch for coffee
- Give student 2 days to respond
  - Bridge teacher will discuss importance of responding

## Face-to-face meeting

- Try to schedule one week after the initial reply by email
- Use Ice Breaker to engage your mentee

## Ice Breaker

- Need to get to know your student
- They may be hesitant to trust you
- Introduce self
  - Major
  - Hometown
  - Family
  - Interests
  - Experiences in the Bridge Program

## Ice Breaker

- Activity
  - Practice introducing your to three other students in the room
- Whole group share
- Group feedback

## Getting to know your mentee

- Ask questions
- Key information to find out
  - Share the same information about yourself as you ask the student
  - Name
  - Major
  - Currently enrolled classes
  - Areas student believes they need help in
    - Academic, Time management, Study Skills Development, Stress management, other

## Getting to know your mentee

- Establish Role and Responsibilities
  - Do this collaboratively
- Establish some short term and long term goals
  - Short Term
    - Specific to assignment or skill development
  - Long Term
    - Final grade in class
  - Provide feedback as student progress to goal

## Getting to know your mentee

- Activity
  - Develop short term goals
    - Example: Creating a study schedule and following it
  - Develop long term goals
    - Example: Achieve a C or higher in my English Composition class
  - Feedback on goal progress
    - Timeliness
    - Read mentee and know if it is appropriate to praise or criticize
    - Be honest
- Whole group sharing of examples

## Plan of contact for future needs

- Create a plan for contacting each other
  - Suggest sharing phone numbers
  - Set acceptable hours of contact unless an emergency arises
  - Set a 24 hour response requirement
    - Sooner if possible
  - Contact Bridge Director if problem arises

## Setting up a plan to check in regularly

- Force regular check in communication
  - Even if the student feels it is not necessary
- Suggested weekly
  - Want to see progress towards goals
  - Need regular discussions and feedback on goals

## What to do when you don't know what to do

- Seek assistance from Bridge Director or other appropriate faculty
  - Counseling-see.....
  - Financial Assistance-see.....
  - Advising-suggest assigned advisor
  - Library/research-see.....
  - Tutoring-see.....

## Mentoring Workshop

These are suggested topics of discussion and will need further developing

# Stress

- What is stress?
  - Any mental or emotional strain resulting from demanding circumstances (Merriam-Webster, 2016)

# Causes of Stress

- Organization
  - Use a planner, color code, folders
- **Activity**-groups of 3-4
  - Take planner
  - Discuss ways to code
  - Discuss other ways to organize

## Causes of Stress

- Food/meals
  - Schedule times to eat, encourage eating breakfast, explore places to shop for good deals
- Competition
  - Grades for graduate school or admittance to programs
    - Set goals and discuss progress regularly
- Work load
  - Discuss importance of classes
  - Look at assignment load
  - Lay out a schedule of when all assignments are due
  - Create a plan with organization and time management when to address assignments

## Causes of Stress

- Social pressures (friends, family)
  - Ask regularly, listen-listen-listen
- Money
  - Visit and work with work study coordinator on campus
- Time Management
  - Group this with the organization and encourage planning
  - Make sure they plan time for friends, self, and sleep



## Dealing with Stress (Scott, 2010)

- Get sleep
  - Suggest 7-8 hours each night
  - Plan this
- Eat healthy
  - Fast food is tempting
  - Choose healthy options sometimes
- Exercise
  - Intramurals
  - Go with a friend
  - Take an activity class or a class at the YMCA

## Dealing with Stress (Scott, 2010)

- Avoid unnatural energy boosters
  - Cuts into sleep
- Emotional support
  - Be the person your mentee can talk to
- Do what you enjoy
  - Find out what they like to do
  - Encourage them to do it
  - Help them find someone who enjoys the same things

## Dealing with Stress (Scott, 2010)

- Say no
  - It's ok to say no when asked to do things
  - Don't take too much on
- Reward self with things other than alcohol or drugs
  - Out to eat with friends
  - Movie with friends
  - Hang out and talk
- Take a deep breath
  - Encourage your mentee to step away and take a breath
- Massage

## References

- Merriam-Webster. (2016). Stress. Retrieved from: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stress>
- Scott, J.A. (2010). College life: 10 ways to reduce stress. Retrieved from: <http://www.everydayhealth.com/college-health/college-life-10-ways-to-reduce-stress.aspx>

# Mentoring Workshop

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THESE ARE SUGGESTED TOPICS OF DISCUSSION  
AND WILL NEED FURTHER DEVELOPING



## Study Skills

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### Defined

- Strategies to help students succeed in academic

### Activity

- Discuss strategies you know

Reinforce what they are learning in Bridge




## Study Skills

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### Reading and understanding what you read

- Highlight key term
- Reread
- Take notes
- Look up what you don't understand
- Read the summary section

### Notetaking

- Vocabulary
  - Teacher notes
  - Review notes for clarification
- 


## Study Skills

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### Listening

- Watch the person speaking
- Ask questions for clarification-others have the same question


### Participating in discussion

- Read ahead or look at notes ahead
  - Develop thoughts before class
  - Be ready to speak
- 

## Study Skills

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### Time management

- This pairs up with discussions you may have when dealing with stress
  - Review what we discussed
- 

## Study Skills

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### Test taking

- Practice problems
  - Study groups
  - Rewrite notes
  - Proper sleep, meals
  - Look over entire exam
  - Read all directions
  - Answer easy questions first, then deal with hard ones
- 

## References

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Dartmouth. (2016). Handouts: study skills. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/handouts.html#Time>

Lynchburg College. (2016). Top 10 study skills. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.lyncburg.edu/academics/tutoring-academic-support/top-10-study-skills/>



**Quantitative Evaluation.** Evaluations of the implemented mentoring program are vital to its success. The purpose of this evaluation is to gain initial feedback at the end of the first semester to see how the mentoring relationship is developing, how students are dealing with stress, and what study skills they have developed. A positive relationship is important for the success of the student being mentored. One of the Bridge Program directors will email and track the questions below to all students involved in mentoring.

### Mentoring Evaluation

To answer questions, Right click on the box you choose, click Properties, click Checked, click OK.

1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly Agree

| <b>Mentor Relationship</b>   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. My mentor has taken steps to get to know me.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I feel comfortable asking my mentor for help.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. We have established a line of communication when there is a need to talk or answer questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I feel like I can contact my mentor at any time and they will take time to talk with me.      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please add any additional comments below.



| <b>Reducing Stress</b>  | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. My mentor has taught me ways to reduce the stress I feel.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have used these strategies to help me cope with my classes.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I have used these strategies to help me cope with problems with my family and friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I need more help in dealing with my every day stresses.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please add any additional comments below.



**Study Skills**

- |   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. My mentor has helped me further develop my study skills to assist with class work. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have used these study skills to be successful in my class work.                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. All of my assignments have been turned in on time.                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I am confident in participating in class discussion.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please add any additional comments below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for the user to provide additional comments. The box is currently blank.

**Qualitative Evaluation-Mentee Questions.** The purpose of this evaluation is to gather an alternative form of feedback than what was gathered between semesters. This evaluation will take place at the end of the spring semester when the mentoring relationship has worked through a full semester. Improvements are likely needed after the first year of this mentoring program, and feedback from these interviews will help determine those improvements. Interviews will be conducted by the Bridge directors. These questions are designed for the mentee to answer. A second list of questions will follow that will be answered by the mentor. The following is a sample of questions aligned with the goals of the mentoring program.

### **Mentoring Relationship**

1. How did your mentor initially contact you? Phone? Email?
2. What was discussed during this initial contact?
3. How long after this initial contact did you meet your mentor face-to-face?
4. What did your mentor do to get to know you? Lunch? Extra-curriculars?
5. How often did your mentor check in with you about your progress?
6. How often did you contact your mentor to ask for help or to have simple questions answered?
7. How helpful was it knowing someone was there to help you?
8. What else could your mentor have done to help you this school year?
9. How comfortable do you feel moving forward without a mentor?
10. Would you consider mentoring a student in the future?
11. Any other thoughts on how to improve the mentoring relationship.

**Reduce stress**

1. How do you define stress?
2. What types of things cause you stress?
3. What specific things in your classes or class work cause you stress?
4. What strategies did your mentor talk about that helped you deal with stress?
5. How often did you use these strategies your mentor talked about?
6. How effective did you find these strategies?
7. How confident do you feel that you will be able to handle stress in the future without a mentor?
8. Any other thoughts on how to improve the way your mentor helped you deal with stress?

**Study Skills**

1. How would you define study skills?
2. Where did you first start learning study skills?
3. Do you feel like you applied those skills during the first year on campus?
4. What new study skills did your mentor help you learn or reinforce?
5. How have these study skills helped you in your coursework this semester?
6. How confident do you feel you will continue using these study skills without the help of the mentor?
7. Could your mentor have done anything else to help you develop your study skills better?
8. Any other thoughts on about study skills and how your mentor work with you on them.

## **Qualitative Evaluation-Mentor Questions**

### **Mentoring Relationship**

1. How did you contact your assigned student?
2. What did you discuss during your initial contact?
3. When did your first face-to-face meeting take place?
4. What did you do to get to know more about your mentee?
5. How often did you initiate contact with your assigned student?
6. How often did the student initiate contact with you?
7. How receptive was your mentee to your advice?
8. Would you consider mentoring a student again next year if you are not graduating?
9. Any other thoughts or suggestions on how to improve the mentor training?

### **Reducing Stress**

1. What tips or discussion did you and your mentee have about stress?
2. What types of stress did your mentee discuss with you?
3. How did you help your mentee deal with the different stresses they experienced?
4. What did you do if you felt like you could not help the student?
5. What type of feedback did your mentee give you if and when they used your techniques?
6. How prepared did you feel about helping students deal with stress after the training?

**Study Skills**

1. What tips or discussions did you have about study skills?
2. What types of study skills did your mentee already possess?
3. What types of study skills did you help your student develop?
4. How did you help your mentee if you were not sure how to help them?
5. What type of feedback did your mentee give you about your techniques if and when they used them?
6. How prepared did you feel about helping students develop study skills after the training?

**Recommendation 2: Continued use of the Student Support Services.** This recommendation can be implemented immediately across the entire campus to help create social change. Bridge students are not the only students who struggle during their first year at college. Support services are available for all students to use. This recommendation requires that Bridge students continue using these services, but that all first-year students also be required to use these services. Implementation can take place at the beginning of a semester. Faculty can be notified of this at the first faculty meeting of the academic year. Faculty in the Student Support Services department can track the use of their services and share reports with teaching faculty. The document below helps with tracking how much these services are used by first-year students. This document can be developed in a Microsoft Excel document to make sorting the data easier.

| Name of Student  | Year in School | Meeting Date | Time of Day | Length of Meeting | Content Area | Assignment Due Date |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| <i>Example</i>   |                |              |             |                   |              |                     |
| Taniesha Atwater | Freshman       | Oct 27       | 5:30 p.m.   | 30 minutes        | Writing      | Oct. 28             |
|                  |                |              |             |                   |              |                     |

*Figure 1.* Student Support Service Tracking Document Template.

**Recommendation 3: Hire Co-Directors for the Bridge Program.** This recommendation comes as the result of the added mentoring program and possible tracking system for Bridge students. More time will need to be spent on the development, follow-up, and handling of problems, as a result of this mentoring program. A tracking system of graduated Bridge students will be used to show new Bridge students the success past students have experienced. The following documents are templates to help track graduated students, and an evaluation form that the co-directors would complete for their end of year evaluation. The first document will allow the directors to stay in contact with those students who have graduated and use them as potential speakers in future semesters. Current students in the Bridge Program will see the success that previous Bridge students have achieved upon completion of college. Some students may be motivated by hearing from previous students, and motivation is tied to self-regulation. The second document is a template for instructors to evaluate themselves based on student feedback and work outside of teaching. The following headings are suggestions to use to allow directors of programs to provide feedback for the purposes of evaluation.

| Name of Student | Major    | Year Graduated | Current Employer Name, Location, Phone Number     | Current Job Title | Years at Current Job |
|-----------------|----------|----------------|---|-------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Example</i>  |          |                |   |                   |                      |
| James Hernandez | Aviation | 2010           | American Airlines<br>New York, NY<br>555-555-5555 | Airline pilot     | 2011-current         |
|                 |          |                |   |                   |                      |

Figure 2. Bridge Student Tracking Microsoft Word Document Template.



## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study was designed to uncover the successes and challenges of Bridge students and how they affected the retention of those students. The findings indicated that student challenges fell in the area of self-efficacy and self-regulation. The review of literature, theoretical framework, and findings led to recommendations that would address these challenges and help students transform their thinking. The recommendations of a peer mentoring program, continued use of the Student Support Services, and having co-directors of the program address the challenges. On-going evaluation of these recommendations is needed to continue to address the challenges that students face, and supporting documents have been included to help in the development and evaluation of the recommendations.

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## Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

February 3, 2015

Dear Chadwick Biermeier,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Retention of Minority Students in a Bridge Program: Student Perceptions on their Successes and Struggles within the University of Asdorf. As part of this study, I authorize you to contact me by email, record my interview, allow me to review my transcript, allow me to make corrections or clarify statements I made during the interview, and share my comments anonymously. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: interviews conducted by myself, Chadwick Biermeier, either in my office or in a study room at the library, keeping you anonymous by assigning you a number and referring to that number during interviews and writing of the study. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,  
Authorization Official  
Contact Information

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

### Appendix C: Interview Prompts

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - a. Where are you from?
  - b. Previous college experience in family
2. What kind of academic support was given to you during your time in high school?
  - a. Family influences
  - b. School influences
  - c. Other influences-sports, friends
3. Was there a person/persons who helped you develop a desire to attend college/university?
4. Tell me about the process you went through applying to college/universities.
  - a. Talk about how many colleges/universities you applied to.
5. Why did you decide to apply to the University of Asdorf?
6. Talk about the application process to get into the University of Asdorf
7. Tell me about the Bridge Program that you are part of.
8. What specific requirements do you have as part of the Bridge Program?
9. Tell me about what has been the most helpful part of the Bridge Program.
10. Talk to me about other parts of your time here at the University of Asdorf that have been helpful.
11. Tell me about what you have struggled with in the Bridge Program.
12. Talk to me about other parts of your time here at the University of Asdorf that you have struggled with.

13. What are your plans for the 2015-2016 school year?
14. What influences/experiences have helped you make this decision for the 2015-2016 school year?
15. What would have helped you to be even more successful in your first year?

**Appendix D: Letter of Confidentiality****CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT**

I understand that as an interpreter / transcriber / research assistant (circle one) for a study being conducted by Chadwick Biermeier, Professor at the University of Asdorf and Doctoral student at Walden University under the supervision of Dr. Janet Thomas, I am privy to confidential information. I agree to keep all data collected during this study confidential and will not reveal it to anyone outside the research team.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_