

2019

Effects of a Student Success Course on Retention of First-Year Community College Students

Deatrice Allen Willis
Walden University

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Deatrice Allen Willis

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the review committee have been made.

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Dr. Laura Siaya, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

The Office of the Provost

Walden University
2019

Abstract

Effects of a Student Success Course on Retention of First-Year Community College

Students

by

Deatrice Allen Willis

MA, University of Phoenix, 2008

BS, University of Phoenix, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2019

Abstract

Low retention rates among 1st year students plague many community colleges in the United States, including the study site used for this research. Preparing 1st year community college students both academically and socially are key aspects of combating this issue and enhancing student success and persistence. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the influence of the First-Year Experience (FYE) course in improving student retention and promoting student success. Rodger's student development theory and Tinto's theory on retention guided this study. A causal-comparative design was used to examine the difference in retention rates and GPA between students enrolled in the FYE course and students who were not enrolled in FYE. A total sample of 19,511 1st year students were enrolled in 3 academic semesters in fall 2011, spring 2012 and fall 2012 of which 761 were FYE students and 18,750 were non-FYE students. A series of *t* tests and chi-square tests were conducted to compare the 2 student groups for the 2 dependent variables. Results showed no statistically significant difference between FYE participation and retention rates for the 2 semesters spring and fall 2012 ($p = 0.69$ and $p = 0.32$ respectively) but there was a statistically significant difference for the fall 2011 semester ($p < 0.001$). The GPA was significantly higher for the 1st year students who completed FYE compared to those who were not enrolled for all three semesters fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012 ($p < 0.001$, $p = 0.15$, and $p = 0.94$ respectively). The results indicate that the FYE course can improve students' GPA consistently but not their retention. A more detailed investigation into the influence on retention is needed. This study promotes social change by encouraging further research that will benefit the development and improvement of FYE courses.

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Dedication

To a number people who encouraged me to go the distance: First and foremost, to my children, Brandon, Brenton, and Brianna; without their love, encouragement, and support, I would not have gone this far. To my parents, who continue to be my biggest cheerleaders. To my husband, Ronald, who has always been understanding and supportive during this entire process.

To a friend who left way too soon, Réjer Finklin, may she rest in peace. She inspired me to obtain my degree, and we often gave each other encouragement in our doctoral programs. Although Réjer did not have a chance to formally complete her program, I completed my doctoral program in her honor.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
The Local Problem.....	1
Rationale	2
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level	2
Evidence of the Problem Within the Professional Literature	4
Definitions of Terms	8
Significance of the Study	9
Research Questions and Hypotheses	10
Review of the Literature	11
Community College Student Characteristics	13
Admission Testing	14
Developmental Courses in Community Colleges	16
First-Year Programs and Their Effectiveness.....	19
Implications.....	25
Summary	25
Section 2: The Methodology.....	27
Research Design and Approach	27
Setting and Sample	29
Instrumentation and Materials	29
Data Analysis Results	30

Descriptive Analysis	30
Research Question 1	31
Research Question 2	34
Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations	36
Protection of Participants' Rights	37
Conclusion	37
Section 3: The Project	40
Rationale	40
Review of the Literature	41
Importance of First-Year Experience Curriculum	41
Reasons for a Program Evaluation	42
Effective Program Evaluation	43
Variables Needed for an Effective Program Evaluation	46
Project Description	47
Potential Resources and Existing Support	52
Potential Barriers	53
Project Evaluation Plan	53
Project Implications	55
Local Community Implications	56
Far-Reaching Implications	56
Conclusion	56
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions	58
Project Strengths and Limitations	58

Project Strengths	58
Project Limitations.....	59
Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change	59
Scholarship.....	59
Project Development and Evaluation.....	60
Leadership and Change.....	60
Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	61
Reflection on Importance of the Work	61
Analysis of Self as Scholar	61
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	62
Analysis of Self as a Project Developer.....	62
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	63
Conclusion	63
References.....	65
Appendix A: The Project	78
Appendix B: Example of Faculty Survey	90
Appendix C: Example of Student Survey.....	91
Appendix D: Example of Topics for Faculty Focus Group.....	93
Appendix E: Example of Student Focus Group Questionnaire	95
Appendix F: Descriptive Statistics and Additional Information Regarding the Used Data.....	97

List of Tables

Table 1. LS Course Enrollment at the Study Site, Fall 2011 and Fall 2012	3
Table 2. FYE Student Summary	31
Table 3. T-Test Results for Comparison Between Intakes	32
Table 4. Mean GPA for Each Semester	32
Table 5. Distribution of Students per Intake, FYE Group, and Retention	34
Table 6. Chi-Square Test for Each Intake	35

List of Figures

Figure 1. Persistence, combined fall 2007 to spring 2008 and fall 2008 to spring 2009, by first-year experience status and ethnicity.....	7
Figure 2. Tinto’s model of student retention	13
Figure 3. Boxplot for GPA for FYE and non-FYE students.....	33
Figure 4. Example of my recommendation of a faculty survey.....	49
Figure 5. Example of my recommendation of a student survey	50
Figure 6. Example of my recommendation of topics for faculty focus group.....	51
Figure 7. Example of my recommendation of topics for student focus group.....	52

Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Many community colleges in the United States struggle with issues related to student retention, including the study site. Windham, Rehfuss, William, Pugh, and Tincher-Ladner (2014) found that most students enrolled in community colleges leave before they graduate. In Section 1 I define and discuss the problem of retention among first-year community college students and how student success courses have been used as interventions to counter the retention issues that plague many 2-year colleges. The section also highlights measures that some community colleges have taken to address challenges students often encounter during their first year of college.

Student success courses often help students prepare for the rigors of postsecondary education. At a 2-year institution located in the South that served as the site for this study, the student success course for first-year students was called First-Year Experience (FYE). The objective of FYE was to provide students attending college for the first time with an introduction to academic skills needed to succeed in higher education. At the time of study, the FYE course was a revision of a previous course called Higher Education Seminar (HEDS), which was developed to assist students enrolled in learning support (LS) courses in their first semester. HEDS was intended to support students in their adjustment to college and to increase their academic success. The administration decided to revise the HEDS course to improve retention among first-year students. However, the study site had been unable to determine the effectiveness of the revised FYE course and at the time of this study, had conducted no formal research to

evaluate the effectiveness of the revised FYE in improving retention and promoting student success (Director, personal communication October 12, 2012). The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the FYE course in improving student retention and promoting student success at the study site.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The study site was a 2-year college located in the South with multiple campuses and more than 20,000 students. The study site had implemented changes to both its FYE course and LS programs with the objective of addressing retention issues among first-year students. The FYE course was created to assist first-year LS students in developing the academic and study skills they would need to persist to the next year. Generally, LS programs are composed of courses such as English, math, and reading that are designed to assist students who may not be as proficient in those collegiate areas and who may not be able to handle their academic rigor. The FYE course was designed to complement the LS courses for first-year students. Although LS courses are curriculum specific, FYE was designed to educate students on how to prepare for, study for, and navigate these courses as well as future college courses with the goal of developing necessary skills to persist to the next year.

As summarized in Table 1, the study site experienced an increase in total enrollment between fall 2011 and fall 2012. As a result of the implementation of new admission/testing requirements beginning in fall 2012, the number of admitted first-year students declined, which reduced the percentage of students enrolled in LS. Although this

decline represented 8.3% of the total enrollment, the reduction in students enrolled in LS as a percentage of total enrollment was only 7.5%. Because the number of students enrolled in LS was not classified by status in available reports, it was not possible at the time of the study to determine the percentage of first-year students in LS. However, there was a strong presence of these students enrolled in LS who were not academically prepared for the difficulty and expectations of higher education (Director, personal communication, October 12, 2012).

Table 1

LS Course Enrollment at the Study Site, Fall 2011 and Fall 2012

	<i>Fall 2011</i>	<i>Fall 2012</i>	<i>Change</i>
Total enrollment	20,466	23,619	+3,153
First-year students	4,632	3,383	-1,249
First-year students as % of total enrollment	22.6%	14.3%	-8.3%
LS enrollment	6,039	3,780	-2,259
LS as % of total enrollment	15.4%	7.9%	-7.5%

Note. The information in this table is based on fall 2011 and fall 2012 student enrollment data available on the study site's website.

The FYE course is required for all first-year students who placed into one or more LS courses through testing, or for students who have declared general studies or health science as their program of study. The study site modified the previous LS companion course (HEDS) to increase retention among first-year students. The intent of this study was to determine whether FYE at the study site was effective in improving the retention of first-year students and promoting student success.

Evidence of the Problem Within the Professional Literature

Enrollment is important for community colleges, but retention and graduation are equally important: “We spend so much of our time recruiting students that it’s easy to lose sight of what’s important ensuring that our students finish what they start” (Law, 2014, p.10). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), the first-year retention rates for full-time students returning to the institution in fall 2014 was 61%, while for part-time students it was 48%. Retention of first-year students is an issue that plagues higher education, especially community colleges. In 2010, the average retention rate for first-year students entering a 2-year institution in the United States was 53%, and for the state of Georgia the average was 49.3% (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2015). Cullinan, Rutzchow, and Welbeck (2012) noted that student success courses are popular, and most colleges have developed at least one student success course to assist students in navigating their way through higher education.

Many first-year students applying to 2-year institutions are unprepared for higher education and face other nonacademic challenges, such as employment, family obligations, and long travel commutes, which may affect persistence. Rath, Rock, and Laferriere (2013) maintained that community colleges must develop sound strategies for enhancing awareness of outside challenges in addition to student unpreparedness to develop student success courses that address all of these barriers.

In 2017, the Southern Regional Education Board reported that only 40% of students who had been accepted to attend college were ready academically for

postsecondary studies. Furthermore, Southern Regional Education Board (2015) reported that more than 50% of students test into one or more developmental study course. One way that community colleges have attempted to address this issue is by requiring students to participate in orientations or student success programs. Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, and Oestreicher (2017) stated that the goal of the FYE curriculum is to assist first-year students who are transitioning from a high school environment to a postsecondary environment. According to a report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2012), at-risk students who completed a new student orientation utilized more student support resources, which led to an increase in retention. Mayo (2013) indicated that to increase retention and achieve higher graduation rates, colleges must create more structured environments with measurable goals for students required to attend first-year programs. Clark and Cundiff (2011) found that college administrators understood that the successful implementation of interventions was vital to increasing retention among first-year students.

Although there has been relatively little research on the effectiveness of FYE in a 2-year college setting, Acevedo and Zerquera (2016) focused on the effects of an FYE program that consisted of interviews with 110 low-income students from three community colleges in California between December 2010 and September 2012. The participants reported how FYE provided valuable resources to assist them with adjusting to a postsecondary education and persisting beyond their first year (Acevedo & Zerquera, 2016). The participants also expressed lack of communication regarding the admissions processes, such as placement exams and financial aid, which prevented them from

enrolling in other critical courses that were not identified until after enrolling in FYE (Acevedo & Zerquera, 2016). The participants expressed that having the information before enrolling in FYE could have assist them in making an informed decision concerning their academic progress (Acevedo & Zerquera, 2016). Acevedo and Zerquera recommended increasing the visibility of advisors outside of FYE, offering courses that teach how to adjust to the rigor of higher education, and having instructors supporting and being available to all students especially low-income students. Acevedo and Zerquera emphasized the need for FYE programs at 2-year institutions for first-year students to persist and graduate.

Barnes (2012) used a mixed-method quasi-experimental approach to investigate differences in academic success between developmental studies students who had enrolled in FYE and those who had not. To be eligible for the FYE program, which was voluntary, the students had to be enrolled in developmental math and developmental English (Barnes, 2012). Once students were in the program, however, full-time enrollment for at least two semesters was required of each participant (Barnes, 2012). As shown in Figure 1, persistence among all ethnic groups was higher for FYE students compared with non-FYE students (Barnes, 2012). Although the persistence rates for each of the three groups enrolled in FYE were higher than for groups not enrolled, the Latino groups showed the most significant difference between FYE and non-FYE students (Barnes, 2012). These FYE students attributed their success to the structure and support of the program (Barnes, 2012).

Ethnicity	FYE status	Persistence status			
		Did not persist	Persisted	Total	
African American	Non-FYE	Count	5	21	26
		Percent	19.2%	80.8%	100.0%
	FYE	Count	4	23	27
		Percent	14.8%	85.2%	100.0%
Latino	Non-FYE	Count	18	58	76
		Percent	23.7%	76.3%	100.0%
	FYE	Count	11	87	98
		Percent	11.2%	88.8%	100.0%
All other ethnicities	Non-FYE	Count	8	38	46
		Percent	17.4%	82.6%	100.0%
	FYE	Count	1	22	23
		Percent	4.3%	95.7%	100.0%

Figure 1. Table of persistence, combined fall 2007 to spring 2008 and fall 2008 to spring 2009, by first-year experience status and ethnicity. Reprinted from Barnes, J. (2012). The first-year experience impact on student success in developmental education. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 20(1), 23-31. Copyright 2012. Julianna Barnes.

Fowler and Boylan (2010) suggested that retention and persistence can be successful if academic and nonacademic issues are addressed for students who lack preparation for their first year of college. Unlike Barnes (2012), Fowler and Boylan focused on nonacademic issues experienced by college students, including motivation, self-confidence, employment, and access to additional college resources. Fowler and Boylan investigated the effectiveness of Pathways to Success (PWAY), a retention program developed at a rural public 2-year college, by focusing on the nonacademic issues of first-year students and comparing the success rates of first-year students enrolled in the program with first-year students who were not enrolled. Fowler and

Boylan found that students in the PWAY program boosted their academic standing (as measured through GPA) from 46% percent to 70%, student success in developmental programs increased from 55% to 76%, and the percentage of students retained for one year increased from 29% to 52%.

Another student success program offered students needed supports for matriculation and academic success (Law, 2014). The program consisted of five methods for improving student retention and success, including expanding supports outside of the classroom, such as tutoring; combining departments, such as career and academic advising; initiating student coaching and early alerts; and improving a tool (Law, 2014). This tool, called My Learning Tool, helped students plan their academic courses and meet graduation requirements (Law, 2014). After 18 months of implementing this five-point strategy, the institution made significant gains in the success rate of first-time students (Law, 2014). Overall, students' successful completion of their courses increased from 69.4% to 74.4% (Law, 2014). Among African American and Hispanic populations, the increase was 8% from fall 2012 to fall 2013, and course completion among African American males increased 13.8% (Law, 2014).

Definitions of Terms

Grade point average (GPA): The calculation of students' average points earned after completion of the courses enrolled for each of the semesters attended (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

Learning support (LS): A course required for students who did not test into a college level on the placement test (University System of Georgia, 2019).

Persistence: A student's continued enrollment each semester (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015).

Retention: remaining enrolled at the same school one year after entry (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study may be used to assist the study site in analyzing retention among its students. Historically, the study site has had no difficulty enrolling students. However, retention and persistence were low among first-year students. In 2011, the site revised its FYE course and its LS program with the intent of better preparing students for the college experience and increasing retention among first-year students. This study was requested by the administration as an objective assessment of the progress made with FYE programs at the institution.

The study contributed to the overall understanding of FYE's effectiveness from its inception as a method for promoting and increasing retention among first-year students. The results of this study may also be used by academic administrators in deciding how the FYE curriculum can better serve first-year students at the study site. The findings may also be used to inform other programs designed to improve retention so that more students will persist to the second year.

The FYE course represents an opportunity for the study site to improve the retention of first-year students by providing them with a means for adapting to a college environment and succeeding academically and socially. To improve retention, the site was considering expanding its FYE course to include all first-year students to provide

them the opportunity to develop their academic and social skills. Given the high expectations placed on the FYE course to increase student retention, a study to determine the effectiveness of the course was warranted.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the FYE course in improving student retention and promoting student success at the study site. I used archival data of first-year students from all five campuses who enrolled in fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012 to examine efforts to improve retention. I compared retention and GPA for first-year students who completed the FYE course and first-year students who were not enrolled in the course in fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012. Retention and GPA after FYE course completion were the dependent variables, and the independent variable was FYE instruction. Results may provide the study site with information to make informed decisions about the current FYE curriculum. The study was guided by the following research questions (RQs) and hypotheses:

RQ1: To what extent is there a significant difference between those students who are enrolled in FYE and those who are not with respect to their GPA?

H_a1 : There is a significant difference between students who completed the FYE course and students who did not with respect to their GPA.

H_01 : There is no significant difference between students who completed the FYE course and students who did not with respect to their GPA.

RQ2: To what extent is there a significant difference between those students who are enrolled in FYE and those who are not with respect to retention?

H_{a2} : There is a significant difference with respect to retention between students who completed the FYE course and students who did not.

H_{02} : There is no significant difference with respect to retention for students who completed the FYE course and students who did not.

Review of the Literature

The theoretical framework for this study was student development theory, which addresses the ways in which students develop and progress in higher education environments (Rodgers, 1990). According to Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010), student development theory provides a basis for determining what environmental conditions facilitate development. In addition, I used Tinto's (1987) retention theory to guide the study. Tinto (1993) upheld the importance of academics and socialization in student learning and retention. As shown in Figure 2, Tinto's (1975) model of student retention explains how student success depends on levels of academic and social integration. A student's level of academic and social involvement will, according to the model, influence the student's persistence to the next year (Tinto, 1975). Other factors contribute to persistence, such as financial and/or family issues, but the choice to persist or drop out depends on the level of commitment made by the student and the support the student receives from the institution (Tinto, 1975). According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2012), students enrolled in first-year experience programs were more engaged in campus activities, made better use of their time, and took advantage of more available resources than students who were not enrolled in first-year programs. Furthermore, the Center for Community College Student

Engagement (2014) indicated that strengthening student success requires focusing on relevant academic practices along with integrating them with career pathways to increase student retention. In the current study, I examined whether the FYE course is effective in improving retention and promoting student success at the study site.

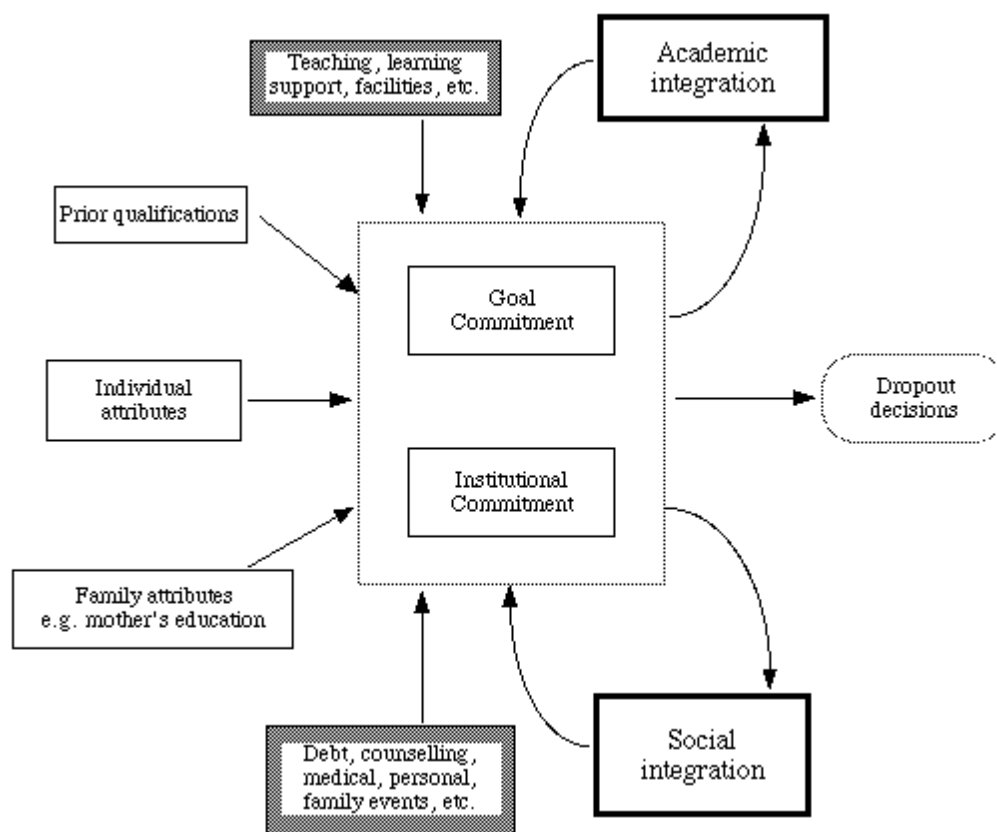


Figure 2. Tinto's model of student retention. Reprinted from Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125. Retrieved from <http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/localed/tinto.html#TOP>. Copyright 2003, Steven Draper. Reprinted with permission.

In this literature review, I explore characteristics of community college students and examine how these characteristics relate to retention among first-year students. The

review consists of two sections: an assessment of admissions testing and developmental studies courses, and a comparison of student success courses and their effectiveness in increasing retention of first-year students. The literature search was conducted using the ProQuest and ERIC databases, as well as other educational organizations such as the Center for Community College Student Engagement, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, and Research in Developmental Education. Most articles reviewed for this study were published within 5 years. I used search terms including *student success programs*, *admission testing*, and *effective first-year programs in community colleges*.

Community College Student Characteristics

Many incoming freshmen, especially those at community colleges, do not fully understand how higher education courses will be more challenging than courses offered in high school. According to Burns (2010), first-year students enrolled in college courses must be able to think critically and to work and read at a more rigorous pace. Bonet and Walters (2016) stated that community college students face more challenges that could affect their academic progression than students at 4-year institutions. Hughes, Karp, and O’Gara (2011) observed that students who are challenged academically and socially most often attend community colleges rather than other types of postsecondary institutions. Typically, the student population at community colleges is very diverse and includes working adults and part-time, low-income, and/or first-generation students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Alamuddin and Bender (2018) indicated

significant literary research gaps based on student characteristics in the application of the FYE programs at 2-year institutions.

For many students, community colleges are attractive because of their affordability, location, and open-access policies. Asera (2011) defined *open access* as an institution's policy of accepting all students who apply. Many community colleges, such as the study site, have attempted to change the perception of open access by ensuring that students meet certain admission and graduation requirements. Courses like FYE seek to prepare first-year students who have LS requirements in hopes of increasing their retention at the institution. Smith, Baldwin, and Schmidt (2015) indicated persistence has become the focus and primary concern for student success at 2-year institutions. Though many community college students are unprepared academically and socially for postsecondary education, faculty often accept the responsibility of preparing these students. Natale and Jones (2018) stated that the characteristics of a community college student should be an important factor when considering student success programs. Students at the study site were tested before admission to determine their academic skill level.

Admission Testing

To attend community college, prospective students who did not take a national achievement or performance test, such as the ACT or SAT, typically must take an admissions test. Admission testing is one of the first encounters students have with a post-secondary institution (Ngo & Melguizo, 2015). At the study site, the admissions test was the Accuplacer Placement Exam (College Board, 2016), an important part of

the admissions process. The exam is used to place students in courses appropriate to their skill levels, including LS courses, starting in the first semester. Barnett and Reddy (2017) stated that students who score in the low percentile on the Accuplacer exam typically are placed in developmental courses before they can begin college-level coursework. At the study site, developmental education courses such as LS reading, LS English, and LS math were offered to students who had been admitted to the college but who were not fully prepared for the college-level curriculum. Those required to take one or more LS courses were also required to take the FYE course. According to *Achieving the Dream* (2016), 50% of students enrolled at a community college will place in at least one or more developmental studies courses, and 72% of those students will not graduate. Venezia and Jaeger (2013) indicated that only 25% of all ACT-tested high school graduates met the College Readiness Benchmarks in all four subjects.

In their 2014 study, Windham et al. related retention interventions to enrollment in a student success course by analyzing the first-semester coursework of first-year students who were required to take the placement exam to determine whether factors such as ethnicity, age, gender, and enrollment in a study-skills course affected retention. Windham et al. found that students who passed the course had a 63.6% higher probability of being retained than students who never enrolled in the course (Windham et al., 2014). There was also a higher probability of females being retained than males (Windham et al., 2014). In addition, Windham et al. found that students 40 years of age and older had a 70.7% percent higher probability of being retained than students 18 or younger.

Developmental Courses in Community Colleges

Student success courses are essential to students who are also enrolled in developmental courses to increase retention and graduation. Crisp and Delgado (2014) stated that one of the challenges community college students face is being placed in developmental education. Furthermore, Cafarella (2014) indicated that developmental education is crucial for students to be successful in a postsecondary environment. Maimon (2018) stated that students in developmental education should have available resources to increase their strengths academically while also improving their weaknesses. Over half of the students enrolled in community colleges in the United States are considered developmental studies students (Barnes, 2012) and are not academically prepared for basic curricula such as reading, writing, and/or mathematics (VanOra, 2012). Developmental studies students generally are required to complete one or more noncredit courses before they are permitted to enroll in college-level courses. According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2016) 67% of community college students are placed in at least one developmental studies course. The number of students enrolled in developmental courses is a direct indicator of how many students are unprepared for higher education curricula (Barnes, 2012).

Hodara and Jaggars (2014) stated that many community colleges are exploring various opportunities such as accelerated developmental courses to assist students with successfully completing developmental studies requirements. The study consisted of combining developmental studies courses at six community colleges in the City University of New York to give students an opportunity to complete the developmental

studies requirement while developing and maintaining the skills necessary for postsecondary courses (Hodara & Jaggars, 2014). The results indicated that although the students completed the development studies requirements faster, there still was a need to design a curriculum that was rigorous and would complement and support such a combination (Hodara & Jaggars, 2014).

Developmental studies courses are more commonly offered at community colleges than at other postsecondary institutions (Chambers, Ferlazzo, Ho, Pearson, & Radford, 2012). Developmental studies courses help acclimate students to the academic rigors of higher education. VanOra (2012) conducted a qualitative investigation of the challenges developmental students encounter and how those barriers affect their persistence from term to term. VanOra concluded that for these students to persist to the next year, they would need to take a first-year success course focusing on study and time-management skills to support their engagement with the postsecondary curriculum.

Noble and Sawyer (2013) studied the effect of developmental courses on retention and student success, and compared students enrolled in developmental courses with those who were not. The results indicated an increased retention of students who had successfully completed the developmental studies courses, but the findings did not indicate whether those students were also enrolled in a freshman success course (Noble & Sawyer, 2013). The goal of developmental education is to assist students who are not fully prepared for higher education with the skills and resources necessary to succeed in a postsecondary setting (Finkel, 2018).

Unlike Noble and Sawyer (2013), Scrivener et al. (2018) conducted a study that focused only on developmental education at the City University of New York (CUNY) called CUNY Start. This program focused on first-year students who were identified to enroll in one or more developmental studies program (Scrivener et al., 2018). The premise of the program was to enroll these students in CUNY Start for one semester to reduce or eliminate the developmental studies requirement (Scrivener et al., 2018). The program consisted of preparing students for college-level courses, weekly seminars on skills needed to be successful students, and improving academic outcomes (Scrivener et al., 2018). Scrivener et al. assessed the effectiveness of the program and found that CUNY Start assisted students in the completion of their developmental studies requirements faster than first-year students not enrolled in CUNY Start. Findings also indicated that first-year students matriculated at a higher rate to the second semester than first-year students who were not enrolled in the program (Scrivener et al., 2018). Although first-year students enrolled in CUNY Start earned fewer credits than those who were not enrolled, findings indicated that enrolled students had a higher matriculation rate that led to improved graduation rates (Scrivener et al., 2018). According to Bailey, Jenkins, and Smith Jaggars (2015) community colleges have modified their developmental education programs to ensure students can be successful and persist to the next year. Developmental education works in conjunction with student success courses (like FYE) to promote retention by providing resources necessary for students to become better prepared for the rigors of higher education curricula.

First-Year Programs and Their Effectiveness

There are various types of first-year courses offered by 2-year institutions to improve student retention. Bers and Younger (2014) indicated that there is a need for further research on the impact of first-year courses in community colleges. Kimbark, Peters, and Richardson (2017) stated that although more research is warranted, within the last 10 years student success courses seem to have been the chosen strategy to increase retention and completion rates for community colleges. Bashford and DeAngelis (2008) reported on case studies exploring the outcome of first-year seminars at 22 institutions. One of these studies was conducted at Miami Dade College (MDC), the nation's largest open-access institution, with eight campuses in southeast Florida (Bashford & DeAngelis, 2008). MDC students are similar to those at the current study site in that they consist of daily commuters. According to Bashford and DeAngelis, "81% work, 66% attend part-time, 61% are female, and 35% are over the age of 25" (p. 49). Bashford and DeAngelis focused on first-year students from fall 2005 to fall 2006 who tested into remediation and compared students who successfully completed the Seminar Life Skills (SLS) course to those who were not enrolled. The findings showed that students who took SLS and successfully passed were 63% more likely to enroll the next semester compared to students who had not enrolled in SLS (Bashford & DeAngelis, 2008).

The results of Goomas' (2014) research placed more emphasis on identifying students who might be in jeopardy of not succeeding than on addressing the issues of retention, persistence, and overall student success. The study revealed that 65 percent of students in face-to-face classes and 52 percent of students in online classes were

successful. Although half of the online students who enrolled were successful, there were still a great many online students who were at risk of not succeeding. Goomas and Clayton (2014) recommended creating or updating a performance-excellence model in community colleges that includes online classes to identify more students who enroll in student success programs.

Other student success programs at community colleges have been effective in increasing persistence and retention. ATD (2011) showed a positive relationship between enrollment in first-year courses and retention was conducted at Durham Technical Community College, a member of Achieving the Dream (ATD). According to the Lumina Foundation (2015), ATD is a “multi-year national initiative aimed at improving the success of community college students, particularly those groups that have been underserved in higher education” (p. 1). “In order for an institution to participate in an ATD initiative, they must have an enrollment of at least 33 percent minority students or 50 percent first-time, first-year Pell Grant recipients” (Lumina Foundation, 2015 p. 1). Although not all colleges are able to participate in the Achieve the Dream initiative, most of the various programs are available to most colleges (Burns, 2010). Durham Technical Community College credits its retention success with a combination of orientation and student success courses and an early alert system (ATD, 2011). The three-year retention rate among students who were enrolled in the college success course at Durham was 30 percent higher than the retention rate of students not enrolled in the course (ATD, 2011). Furthermore, at Roxboro Community College, ATD 2016, reported by initiating a First-

Year Seminar to target 25% - 60 % of a 3000-student body population it increased its students' persistence from one year to the next.

Lee College is another ATD campus that has demonstrated an effective relationship between first-year courses and retention. Located in Baytown, Texas, Lee College consists of two campuses that enroll approximately 7,000 students each semester (Lee College, 2013). According to the CCSSE (2012), the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) concluded that Lee College's student engagement course data were critical for student completion in developmental education. SENSE surveys are usually administered to first-year students in the fall semester, while CCSSE surveys are administered in the spring. Both surveys gather information to determine the level of student engagement and persistence among first-year students. Lee College required a learning strategy course for all new students who needed at least two levels of remediation courses. The learning strategy course was an eight-week remediation in reading, writing, and math (covering 16 weeks of curriculum) before the actual semester began. By implementing this policy, late registration was eliminated for these students, and faculty could introduce various engagement activities during orientation, which is required of all new students (Lee College, 2013). As a result, between 2006 and 2011, the rate of developmental-course completion at Lee College increased 15 percent in writing, eight percent in math, and three percent in reading skills (CCSSE, 2012).

Likewise, Virginia Community College (VCC) also implemented a number of initiatives to help students succeed academically, as highlighted in Cho and Karp's (2013) study. One such initiative was the implementation of a student success course

designed for students with no prior college history. According to Cho and Karp, the students enrolled in the student success course at VCC were provided information on academic and career planning, as well as other skills needed to be successful. The study consisted of 23,822 first-time students enrolled in summer or fall 2004, including part-time students as well as students who may have earned credits at another institution. Students took a success course their first semester or within their first 15 credits. Using a regression model, the researchers concluded that students enrolled in the course were 10 percent more likely to earn college credit in their first year than students who did not enroll. In addition, those students who enrolled in the student success course their first semester were more likely to return the following year (Cho & Karp, 2013).

At California Community College, Nguyen, Hays, & Wetstein (2010) studied how students' completion of an orientation course affected retention. The study consisted of 5,427 first-time enrolled summer and fall students. The average persistence rate of those who had enrolled in the orientation course their first year was 67.7 percent compared to 32.3 percent for the students who had not enrolled. The variables employed in the study included age, ethnicity, gender, financial status, disability status, first-generation college student status, initial skill level (reading and math assessment scores), academic performance (first-year cumulative GPA, total units attempted in the first year), and a proxy measure of engagement (i.e., number of counseling appointments students had during their first year). The analysis indicated that the effects of the orientation course were significant after controlling for student demographic variables including

ethnicity, age, and GPA. Of the demographic variables, age was the best predictor of persistence followed by GPA.

In another study, Cullinan et al. (2012) evaluated the student success course at Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown, North Carolina, which was a participant in the ATD initiative. Nine hundred eleven students participated in the study. The course enrollment included 458 students who were required to take a developmental course and who had enrolled in the student success course that was part of the program group. The remaining 453 students were eligible to take the regular college courses and comprised the control group. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative model included the collection of specific demographic and background data from students. The researchers analyzed the similarities and differences between students in the program and control group (Cullinan et al., 2012). The qualitative model of the study relied on interviews with all individuals who assisted in the development of the student success course. Although 30 percent of the first group of students to enroll in the course withdrew during the drop/add period, the findings revealed that the remaining students in the course had higher grades and increased retention (Cullinan, et al., 2012). Cullinan et al. (2012) suggested that student success courses in colleges could help to improve the retention of developmental-studies students as well as other first-year students.

In their study conducted at Bronx Community College (BBC), Karp, Efthimiou, Raufman, and Ritze (2015) observed a new course called First Year Seminar (FYS), which was designed to better assist students during their first year. The study used a

mixed-methods approach, and results aligned positively with other studies involving a student success course that focused on student development and engagement. The study revealed that students were more engaged and used skills learned from the FYS course to persist to the next year. Similarly, Hanley-Dafoe and Bruce (2018), discussed a study from a student and faculty perspective of the impact of introducing first-year experience to first-year students at a liberal arts community college. The study indicated how faculty expressed being an instrumental part of introducing students to higher education and the connections students developed with other students, departments, and the institution through FYE. The students indicated the support received from faculty during their first semester. There were also several challenges such as class size, engagement of students, and academic support from both perspectives. The study overall assisted with faculty wanting to know how to best support first-year students and students searching for extra guidance to assist them their first semester and persist to the next semester.

The previously discussed studies highlighted successful attempts to improve retention of students enrolled in some type of student success course. However, different strategies were employed to achieve that success. All studies addressed the academic issues that plague first-year community college students, but only some addressed the outside influences that can impede retention and student success. Common to all the studies mentioned was the importance of student success courses and how they could be used to improve retention and student success. Yan and Sendall (2016) stated that the main focus of FYE is to ensure students are successful and persist to the next year. Clearly, there was a need to research retention and persistence of first-

year students at the study site to determine if the FYE student success course was an effective intervention for increasing retention and promote student success.

Implications

The literature review discussed several community college student success programs and their effects on student retention. Since all community college students are not the same, by researching the FYE course and identifying students with diverse characteristics, it may be possible to identify retention and student success issues among the various types of students who enroll in and complete the FYE course. AACC (2014) stated, “If community colleges take bold action to improve college completion, they not only will better serve their students, but they also can help rebuild the U.S. workforce and improve its global competitiveness and address income inequality, reverse the decline of the U.S. middle class, and restore the promise of the American Dream.” (p. 4). In addition, my study may assist the administration in determining if there is a need to alter the FYE course to enable all students to be academically successful and to persist to their second year. Possible projects that could result from this study include promoting FYE as a course for all students which could mean new curriculum development for FYE. Barnes (2012) stated more community colleges are offering first-year programs to improve retention and student success.

Summary

Initiating a study to determine if a relationship exists between various first-year students enrolled in student success courses (such as FYE) and retention may assist in stimulating the retention and graduation rates in community colleges. Overall, the study

should identify if student success courses for various first-year community college students are effective in promoting retention and graduation.

Section 2: The Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the FYE program in improving retention and promoting student success by exploring the relationships between FYE instruction and first-year students' retention and GPA. Because the FYE programs were developed with the objective of addressing the problem of students' retention and academic performance, the assumption was that the additional instruction and guidance provided by the FYE programs would improve both retention rates and academic performance for the FYE students to satisfactory levels. In the context of this study, satisfactory level meant that the gap in academic performance and retention rates between FYE and non-FYE students was closed to the extent that FYE students were not significantly different (with respect to the two main outcome dimensions of evaluation) than non-FYE students.

In my research design, the main independent (predictor) variable (i.e., the factor assumed as contributing to the effectiveness of FYE programs) was the FYE instruction, which had two main modalities: the presence of FYE instruction (for the FYE students' group) and, the absence of FYE instruction (for the non-FYE students' group). The two outcome/dependent (predicted) variables were operationalized as overall GPA (DV1) and retention rates (DV2).

Research Design and Approach

Selecting the type of data, considered with the possibility of manipulating the independent variable, is important for the research design to provide evidence in support of the hypothesized causal mechanism. However, collecting data throughout the duration

of the implementation of a program such as FYE would have been beyond my capabilities because of the time constraints and the number of participants that would have been considered, in addition to the costs and the necessary permissions. To design a true experiment, I would have needed to randomly allocate the participants to each research group corresponding to the modalities of the independent variable. This would not only have been impossible for practical reasons but also would have defeated the purpose of delivering FYE courses to students who needed them. Randomization would have leveled the differences between the groups, whereas the main purpose of FYE is to identify and deliver the FYE instruction to students in need of it (i.e., at risk of lower academic performance and of dropout).

Therefore, I needed to consider a research design that could accommodate the use of established participants groups and secondary (historical) data. Such a design, although it may include longitudinal data along a certain period of time split into several measurement stages/points, is at its core a causal-comparative design. However, in cases like my study, this design may develop into a causal-comparative design known as *ex post facto* (see Salkind, 2010).

With respect to the planned comparisons, even though the available data did not provide information to determine the students' level of academic performance before the start of the FYE courses, the testing done to place students in the FYE program indicated at least a risk of lower academic performance and higher dropout rates for the FYE students compared with the non-FYE students. Approval for the study and data collection was obtained from Walden University's institutional review board (Walden IRB 01-20-

17-0286967). Approval was also obtained from the study site's institutional research department to use relevant archival data for the study, including student records from all first-year students who entered the college from fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012 to 1 year after enrollment.

Setting and Sample

The study site has five campuses throughout the metro area. First-Year Experience is a required course for all first-year students who have a learning support course requirement. Due to the continuing evolution of first-year programs at the study site, I collected past freshman enrollment data to justify the need to formally assess FYE to establish an effective curriculum to improve retention and promote student success. The sample population for the study included all first-year students who enrolled in fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012 and were tracked up to 1 year after entry without assuming equal variances within the two groups of first-year students at the study site. I compared first-year students from all five campuses who had enrolled in and completed the FYE course to first-year students who had not enrolled in the FYE course.

Instrumentation and Materials

The research design did not require special or sophisticated instrumentation or materials. The dependent variables were measured directly using secondary data. There were no examination or test papers used to measure academic performance; instead, the GPA for each student in the participants' sample was provided by the research site. Similarly, the retention status of each student was indicated by a simple binary indicator (yes or no).

Data Analysis Results

I collected archival data related to first-year students who had enrolled from fall 2011, spring, 2012, and fall 2012 to 1 year after entry. The data did not include any first-year students who had withdrawn or had enrolled in but did not complete the FYE course. The archival data included secondary data obtained from each student as part of the admissions process.

The data included in the quantitative analysis were:

- The status of the student as enrolled or not in FYE courses (FYE_ENROL), construed as the independent variable (IV)
- overall GPA (GPA), construed as the first dependent variable (DV1)
- retention after one year (RET), construed as the second dependent variable (DV2).

Additionally, data regarding age (AGE) and gender (GENDER) were provided by the research site and have been used for the descriptive statistics.

Descriptive Analysis

A sample of the data file used in the research, including records for the variables used, is presented in the Appendix F. In total, 19,511 first-year students were included as participants in my study. Table 2 shows the demographic statistics of gender and age. Among this sample, 8,291 participants belonged to the first intake in fall 2011, 4,173 corresponded to the second intake in spring 2011, and 7,047 belonged to the third intake in fall 2012.

Table 2

FYE Student Summary

Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean age	<i>SD</i> age
Female	11,523	23.20	7.99
Male	7,985	21.55	6.58
Neutral	3	27.33	17.90

Research Question 1

RQ1 addressed the influence of FYE instruction (IV) on academic performance (DV1). A total of 761 participants (4.1%) took part in FYE. Three comparisons between the FYE and the non-FYE student groups had to be made, one for each intake (fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012). The reason for having to perform one comparison for each intake was there was no direct control over the FYE program from one year to another. Although the program was assumed to be the same in each intake, its identical delivery could not be guaranteed.

The Levene tests for equality of variances (homoscedasticity) showed significant differences between the FYE and non-FYE groups for all three intakes. The *t* tests for independent samples, which were used for comparison on DV1, also showed statistically significant differences between the FYE and non-FYE groups for all three intakes, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

T-Test Results for Comparison Between Intakes

Intake	Mean diff	Mean FYE	Mean non- FYE	<i>t</i>	<i>p.value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CI</i> low	<i>CI</i> high
Fall 2011	0.81	2.89	2.09	10.61	0.00	172.39	0.66	0.96
Spring 2012	0.68	2.64	1.97	5.61	0.00	78.05	0.44	0.92
Fall 2012	0.41	2.68	2.26	9.25	0.00	727.23	0.33	0.50

Note: The method used was the two-sided Welch Two Sample t-test

Table 4 presents the mean GPA per intake stage and FYE group.

Table 4

Mean GPA for Each Semester (fall 2011, spring 2012, and, respectively, fall 2012)

Intake	FYE_ENROL	<i>n</i>	Mean GPA	SD GPA
Fall 2011	FYE	158	2.89	0.93
	NONFYE	8133	2.09	1.46
Spring 2011	FYE	73	2.64	1.01
	NONFYE	4100	1.97	1.53
Fall 2012	FYE	530	2.68	0.95
	NONFYE	6517	2.26	1.38

Figure 3 shows the boxplots of GPA depicting the mean GPA differences between groups by intake. As Figure 3 shows, the FYE students outperformed the non-FYE students for each intake considered, and the mean GPA of the FYE students was higher than the mean GPA of non-FYE students for each intake.

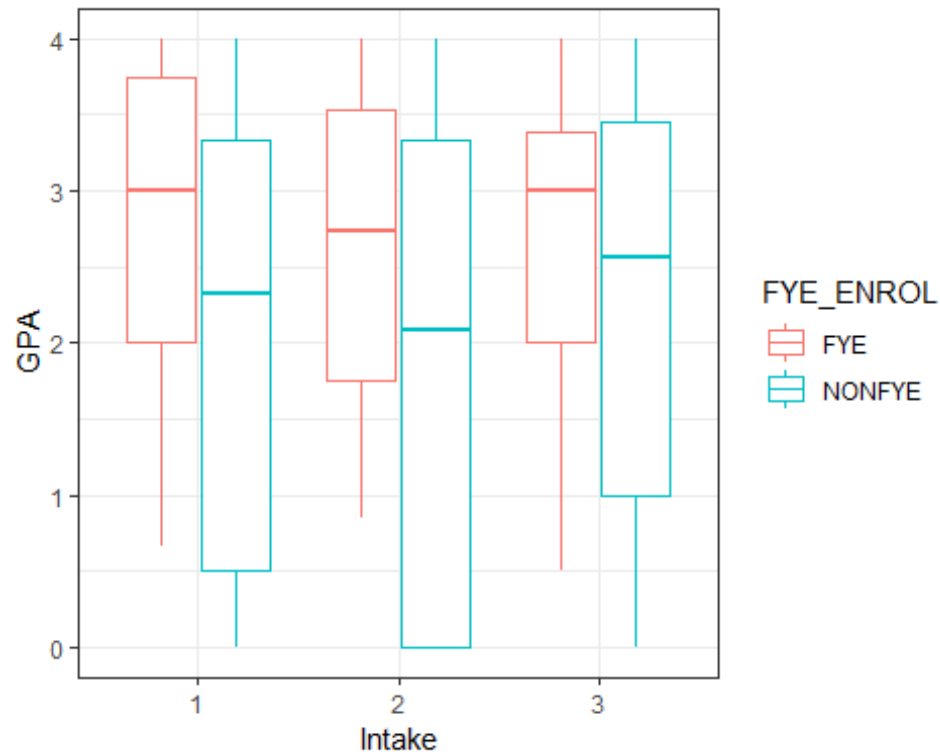


Figure 3: Boxplots of GPA for FYE and non-FYE students.

The meaning of these differences is indicated by the statistical significance (observed for each intake) and by the practical significance provided by the Cohen's d , which were high to medium for all three comparisons (0.85 for first intake fall 2011, 0.66 for the second intake spring 2012, and 0.42 for the third intake fall 2012). The results suggested that the FYE program contributed to mitigating the risks for academic failure among FYE students. The Cohen's d formula for independent samples t test used in my study was the following:

$$d = (M_2 - M_1) / SD_{pooled}$$

where

$$SD_{pooled} = \sqrt{(SD_1^2 + SD_2^2) / 2}$$

Research Question 2

Although comparing the success rates in terms of academic performance was possible using t tests, this was not the case for RQ2, which addressed retention rates. The retention rates were computed at the individual level by using a single binary indicator (yes or no) and at the group level as the raw number and percentage of successfully retained students from the total student intake in their respective groups (FYE versus non-FYE). Using chi-square for this data analysis was appropriate to determine whether the number of students in retained versus non-retained groups was consistent with chance or was a statistically significant departure from randomness. Table 5 show the distribution of students per intake.

Table 5

Distribution of Students per Intake, FYE Group, and Retention

Intake	FYE_ENROL	No	Yes	Total per intake	%No	%Yes
Fall 2011	FYE	73	85	158	46.20	53.80
	NONFYE	4826	3307	8133	59.34	40.66
Spring 2012	FYE	42	31	73	57.53	42.47
	NONFYE	2480	1620	4100	60.49	39.51
Fall 2012	FYE	296	234	530	55.85	44.15
	NONFYE	3789	2728	6517	58.14	41.86

Chi-square tests were conducted, one for each intake, to compare the FYE and non-FYE students' retention figures. The formula for computing Chi-square was the following:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Table 6 shows the chi-square result for each intake.

Table 6

Chi- Square Test for Each Intake

Intake	χ^2	p	df
Fall 2011	10.526	0.001	1
Spring 2012	0.153	0.696	1
Fall 2012	0.964	0.326	1

Note: The method used was the Pearson's chi-squared test with Yates's continuity correction.

The results of the chi-square tests showed a statistically significant difference between the retention figures for FYE students and non-FYE students in the first intake (fall 2011). No statistically significant differences were observed for the second and third intakes (spring 2011 and fall 2012). Also, the percentage of retained FYE students was lower (46%) than that of retained non-FYE students (59%).

In summary, the outcome of my data revealed there was not a significant relationship between FYE and retention despite the sample size of my data. However, based on the data presented for FYE students, there was a relationship between GPA and FYE. The strength of my data was the large sample size, which indicated there was more than enough data to analyze and increase the validity of my study. The weakness of my data was the small sample size for FYE compared to that of the sample size for Non-FYE. Despite the FYE sample size not being as large as the sample size for Non-FYE, the outcome showed there was definitely a need to research further the relationship between FYE and GPA which could possibly improve the relationship with FYE and retention.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

This study was conducted under the assumption that all data obtained were accurate and free from errors. The causal-comparative methodology was limited in that the research occurred after the fact, the archival data were related to students who had already enrolled in and completed the FYE course. Therefore, there was no way to control for the different variables within the data or control for randomly chosen groups of participants (for the sake of comparison). Another limitation is the use of archival data with the limited ability to extrapolate results to a broader audience and current assumptions without more current data. The findings were limited to the data already provided. There are, however, different ways to avoid such limitations when using this type of method. For instance, the archival data can be used to determine if a relationship exists between the chosen variables. Each of my research questions could also be answered by analyzing data from various sample populations provided to determine if relationships exist among the various sample populations. The delimitations to my study were the population samples of my participants. The FYE participants were a smaller population sample than the Non-FYE participants due to the requirement for enrollment to the course for the study site. Although my data had more first-year students enrolled in FYE, my study focused on the completion of the FYE course to determine the effectiveness of the course, therefore my study was limited to the first-year students who completed the FYE course.

As stated previously (see the introduction to the Methodology and the Research Design), the main limitation of this study consisted in its limited power to bring direct

evidence of causality, as opposed to true experimental designs. However, while the final results cannot be attributed directly to the influence of FYE programs on the FYE students' academic performance and retention rates, logically, their implementation is associated with the lack of evidence for the contrary. More specifically, with specific respect to the end of the year results (GPA and retention), the FYE students were at least as proficient as the non-FYE students.

Another limitation consisted in the use of rather few measures of operationalizing the FYE effectiveness. A thorough assessment of the effectiveness of a program should be considered on many more dimensions than simply the final figures of retention and GPA. However, considering the basis and the original intentions behind the implementation of the FYE program, my two chosen outcome variables are directly relevant for its effectiveness.

Protection of Participants' Rights

Since this study relied on archival data, there was no need to secure consent from the students involved in the research; only IRB approval from Walden University and the study site were required for this study. However, the data obtained from the study site were coded to protect the identity of students. No identifying information—other than the variables specified—was disclosed in the archival study-site data. Thus, the participants' confidentiality was fully protected through the research process.

Conclusion

This quantitative, causal-comparative study was completed at a 2-year community college in the South. The study sought to determine if a relationship existed

between retention and enrollment in the FYE course among first-year students at the study site. The proposed research questions were designed to examine whether the FYE course was effective in improving retention and promoting student success among first-year students. The literature review offered strong evidence that student success courses are helpful in assisting students during their first semester of college. However, study site did not have access to any formal research on whether the FYE course enhanced, measurably, the persistence of first-year college students to the next year. Thus, a retention study of the FYE course at the study site seemed imperative. The data analysis and findings did not definitively answer both research questions. However, the analysis did suggest that first-year students who enrolled in and completed the FYE did perform better academically than those first-year students who had not enrolled in the course.

With regard to RQ1, however, statistically significant differences between the FYE and the non-FYE student groups were observed with respect to GPA, for all three intakes. Moreover, these differences were in favor of FYE-student, *i.e.* these students' academic performance as measure by the GPA was higher than their counterparts' academic performance. The practical meaning of these differences was provided by the Cohen's *d*, which were high to medium for all three comparisons (0.85 for first intake, fall 2011, 0.66 for the second intake, spring 2012, and 0.42 for the third intake, fall 2012).

With respect to RQ2, the results of the Chi-square tests showed that the FYE students in intake one (fall 2011) still lagged significantly behind their counterparts non-

FYE students with respect to the retention rates, but this lag lost statistical significance in the following intakes (spring 2011 and fall 2012).

Overall, considering both RQ1 and RQ2, the results are consistent with the original assumption, *i.e.* the FYE program contributed to mitigating the risks for academic failure, with the notable exception of retention rates for the first intake. Moreover, the loss of significance of the gap between FYE and non-FYE students with respect to retention is consistent with an increase in the effectiveness of the FYE program.

Section 3: The Project

I examined whether the First-Year Experience (FYE) course was effective in improving retention and promoting student success at the study site among first-year students. I used archival data of all first-year students enrolled at the study site from fall 2011 through fall 2012 to 1 year after entry. The data were grouped by enrollment and non-enrollment in the FYE course. The analysis of the data revealed no significant relationship between FYE and retention. However, data analysis did reveal a slightly significant relationship between FYE enrollment and GPA. These findings suggested that the student success course, which had been designed to promote retention, may have had a positive influence on students' GPA instead. To explore why a difference exists between retention and GPA of first-year students, a program evaluation was recommended. A main objective of my project study was to recommend a program evaluation that would assist the study site in addressing issues of retention and academic success through a review of the FYE curriculum for first-year students. The director of student success at the study site would decide whether a detailed program evaluation is warranted.

Rationale

Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015) defined *program evaluation* as the “application of systematic methods to address questions about program operation and results” (p. 8). My rationale for recommending a program evaluation of the FYE program was to determine whether gaps in the FYE curriculum were impeding retention of first-year students enrolled in FYE even though the program appeared to be promoting their

academic success. My study findings indicated that the FYE program had very little impact on retention of first-year students. Therefore, my recommendation of a program evaluation seemed warranted as a means for improving the FYE curriculum and increasing the persistence and graduation of first-year students at the study site.

Review of the Literature

This literature review highlights other program evaluations at institutions focused on improving academics and retention. Although the FYE course at the study site did not promote retention among first-year students, further evaluation of that relationship was justified due to the documented ability of student success courses to enhance academic success. The data from my study revealed a significant relationship between GPA and FYE: Students who enrolled in and passed the FYE course showed a higher mean GPA than students who were not enrolled in the course. This review of the literature addresses the following question: How might a program evaluation of the FYE curriculum explain the gap between retention and academic success? The ProQuest and ERIC databases were the primary resources for articles reviewed. Search terms included *advantages of program evaluation, program evaluation at two-year colleges, effectiveness of program evaluation, improving persistence through program evaluation, retention, community college students, and student success curriculum.*

Importance of First-Year Experience Curriculum

Although the outcome of my study indicated a significant relationship between the FYE course and academic performance, retention may also be bolstered if adjustments are made to the FYE course. Padgett, Keup, and Pascarella (2013) stated that

FYE programs have gained popularity over the years and are tools used to assist first-year students academically to persist to the next year. First-year programs influence best practices in studying, learning communities, and becoming familiar with vital resources to persist to the second year. In addition, Padgett et al. indicated that first-year programs strengthen a student's academic development.

All of the academic benefits of FYE are critical in increasing retention of first-year students, especially students enrolled in 2-year institutions. The Higher Education Research Institute (2014) conducted a survey that indicated 37% of first-year students found it difficult to adjust academically to the rigor of higher education. Hatch, Mardock-Uman, Garcia, and Johnson (2018) conducted a study that focused on students enrolled in a student success course. Findings revealed that the more the students became engaged and participated in class activities, the more motivated and inspired they were to persist to the next year (Hatch et al., 2018). The study further revealed that it is important to learn how student success courses impact student achievement to improve or maintain the course curriculum to ensure the student success curriculum is effective in promoting academic success and retention (Hatch et al., 2018).

Reasons for a Program Evaluation

A program evaluation is a valuable resource to determine the effectiveness of the FYE program. As indicated by Patton (1987), a program evaluation involves analyzing critical information about the processes of a program and making informed suggestions to sustain or improve the program. There are critical steps in performing program evaluations. Moore (2018) stated that program evaluations involve more than analyzing

data of students; program evaluations should also involve processes that address other contributing factors and outcomes. My study led to a recommendation of a program evaluation because the quantitative analysis did not yield significant results regarding the relationship between the FYE course and student retention. My recommendation involved evaluating the program and developing an outcomes-based process that included faculty and student perspectives. This process should assist with identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the program and determining whether it is achieving the goals set during implementation.

For the local community college, a program evaluation would be an excellent tool to assist with decisions related to increasing retention while maintaining the academic success of the FYE program. One of my recommendations would be to conduct an annual program evaluation to ensure the curriculum was meeting the established set of expectations. The program evaluation should include focus groups and surveys from faculty and students at the beginning and end of each semester. Analysis of the outcomes from these methods would help program administrators evaluate the FYE program at the study site and reveal possible gaps between retention and academics of first-year students.

Effective Program Evaluation

For any program to be effective, it must receive feedback to determine whether improvements are needed. At the study site, the proposed program evaluation would be an effective method for assessing the FYE curriculum. This evaluation should be able to assist with identifying gaps and barriers that exist between retention and academic

success. Fairris (2012) detailed a program evaluation conducted at the University of California Riverside (UCR) and described how the evaluation was used to emphasize student success. Specifically, the assessment was a multivariate evaluation of various programs at UCR, specifically first-year learning communities on first-year retention (Fairris, 2012). Multivariate program evaluations focus on the relationship between two or more variables; the evaluation at UCR addressed the programs' impact on the students whom UCR served (Fairris, 2012). The program evaluation conducted at UCR proved to be a valuable resource for the college because, as Fairris indicated, it helped to establish programmatic goals and identify factors influencing those goals, thereby reinforcing student success.

Program evaluations can also be cost effective. A program evaluation addresses the supports, including financial resources that are necessary for program success. Farrington and Koegl (2015) researched the cost savings associated with Stop Now and Plan—Under 12 Outreach Program, an early-prevention program developed to reduce crime among young adults. Farrington and Koegl assessed the cost of defending participants in the program compared to the cost of the crime prevented as a result of participation in the crime-prevention program. The findings indicated that the benefits of the program outweighed the monetary cost of the program (Farrington & Koegl, 2015). Initiating a similar program evaluation at the current study site may allow the administration and faculty to adjust the budget, if necessary, and give FYE the support needed to improve student retention and promote student success.

Program evaluations can be used to generate and enhance ideas for programs that are not performing as expected. At the study site, a program evaluation has the potential to benefit students, faculty, and the administration. Students can contribute to the program evaluation by offering insights about what they expected and what they learned from the FYE curriculum. Instructors can contribute by sharing their expertise regarding the FYE curriculum and offering thoughts about its effectiveness in reaching the target audience of first-year students. Administrators can contribute by using the necessary resources to ensure that the FYE curriculum promotes retention, such as through a program evaluation. Praslova (2010) explained that program evaluations can provide stakeholders with valuable feedback on the effectiveness of a program. The stakeholders at the study site, such as administrators and faculty, could use such feedback to determine whether the FYE program is effective in achieving its objectives and, if not, to make necessary adjustments. Pruitt and Silverman (2015) noted that program evaluations within higher education institutions can not only reveal students' academic growth, but also assist in faculty development initiatives, thereby adding validity to the program.

Waters (2011) discussed the importance of program evaluations in the context of a case study of a human services program that involved parents encouraging their children to read over the summer so they would not lose any of the knowledge gained during the school year. This program had been expected to be effective, but after a program evaluation was conducted, it was determined the program needed improvement (Waters, 2011). The evaluation indicated weaknesses in the program and allowed the program to be modified (Waters, 2011).

Variables Needed for an Effective Program Evaluation

In a program evaluation, a focus on specific variables is helpful in determining whether the goals and expectations set for the program are being met. Frye and Hemmer (2012) maintained that a program evaluation is only effective if the program is focused on change, which should be included in the goals and objectives of any program. Frye and Hemmer also suggested that a program evaluation can be used to assess the intentional and unintentional changes within a program. The FYE curriculum at the study site should be evaluated regularly to ensure that the program is evolving the way the study site intended and to make sure the study site is prepared to make necessary changes to ensure the success of FYE program. Understanding the program's logic is another vital component of any program evaluation. Olson (2014) stated that once an organization gains a clear understanding of the program and how an evaluation might support the program, a program evaluation can be created. There are several different methods for conducting an effective program evaluation, including surveys, focus groups, demographic data analyses, interviews, and record data analyses (Frye & Hemmer, 2012). The study site administration, with input from faculty and students about specific data needs, will determine the method used for the program evaluation of the FYE curriculum.

In summary, program evaluations are valuable tools. Program evaluations ensure all expectations of the FYE curricula are being met. At the study site, a program evaluation may identify the strength and weaknesses of the FYE program and allow the administration to make informed decisions about the program. The literature review

revealed that program evaluations not only assist with possible changes within the program, they are also cost-effective measures that may allow the study site to make the necessary adjustments to ensure the success of the FYE program.

Project Description

The program recommendation will consist of a detailed proposal to initiate a yearly program evaluation, which will be submitted to the study site's director of student success. The proposal will then be disseminated to campus leaders at a monthly meeting for additional feedback. My proposal indicates how a program evaluation of the FYE program would dictate a course of action to address the retention issues of first-year students at the study site. Surveys and focus groups would be the most appropriate method for gathering the data needed to make informed decisions regarding the FYE curriculum. End-of-course surveys from faculty and students could provide objective, relevant, and sufficient data for a comprehensive picture of the strengths and limitations of the FYE program. These data could assist administrators in addressing any issues with retention while maintaining the academic success of the program. In addition to the surveys, end-of-course focus groups could assist with improving retention and promoting academic success as they would provide valuable data that the survey may not have captured. Administering surveys and focus groups at the end of each semester could provide administrators with relevant data related to the FYE course, including a range of perspectives from faculty and students to make the necessary adjustments to the course. The end-of-course surveys and focus groups would ask students and faculty about their expectations and the possible barriers of the FYE course, including whether the course

had met their expectations. The office of institutional research can assist this process by also reporting predictive data on these students.

A program evaluation would offer more insight into what is effective within the FYE curriculum. A program evaluation could also reveal whether students have a realistic view of the expectations of higher education and the commitment and determination needed to succeed. By highlighting the students' expectations and barriers, the program evaluation could help the study site determine whether the FYE curriculum was addressing concerns that may affect retention of first-year students. Figures 4-7 show examples of my recommendation of the types of surveys and focus groups to be used to provide insight about the FYE curriculum and to help administrators make informed decisions about how to improve or sustain the current processes at the study site.

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program (FYE). Please circle the best answer based on FYE courses taught and interaction with students in your FYE classes.

5- Agree 4- Somewhat agree 3- Neutral 2- Somewhat disagree 1- Disagree

1. The FYE program overall promotes retention among first-year students enrolled?

5 4 3 2 1

2. The FYE curriculum that is covered is effective in promoting retention?

5 4 3 2 1

3. The FYE program should be covered for all incoming first-year students?

5 4 3 2 1

4. The FYE program prepares first-year students for higher education curriculum?

5 4 3 2 1

5. The students are engaged in the FYE class?

5 4 3 2 1

6. There are some parts of the FYE curriculum could be improved upon?

5 4 3 2 1

7. There need to be more FYE classes offered at various times during the day.

5 4 3 2 1

Figure 4: Example of my recommendation of a faculty survey

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program (FYE). Please circle the best answer based on your enrollment and engagement in class.

5- Agree 4- Somewhat agree 3- Neutral 2- Somewhat disagree 1- Disagree

1. The FYE program prepares first-year students for higher education curriculum?
5 4 3 2 1
2. The instructional method for the FYE program was effective and easy to understand?
5 4 3 2 1
3. I applied what was taught in the FYE program to the other classes I was enrolled in such as Time Management, Organization skills, and Study Skills?
5 4 3 2 1
4. I believe the FYE program need to be required for all first-year students?
5 4 3 2 1
5. The FYE program covers realistic first-year topics that first-year students might encounter?
5 4 3 2 1
6. Some parts of the FYE program can be improved upon?
5 4 3 2 1

Figure 5: Example of my recommendation of a student survey

The purpose of this focus group is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability based on FYE courses taught and interaction with students in your FYE classes.

- 1. Do you think the curriculum covered in FYE is effective enough to promote retention among first-year students? Explain**

- 2. What are the benefits of the FYE program to a first-year student? Explain**

- 3. What are the weaknesses of the FYE program to a first-year student? Explain**

- 4. What can be improved upon with the FYE program? Explain**

- 5. Should the FYE program be required for all students? Explain**

- 6. Do you believe the FYE program prepares the student for what is to be expected in higher education? Explain**

Figure 6: Example of my recommendation of topics for a faculty focus group

The purpose of this focus group is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability based on FYE courses taught and interaction with students in your FYE classes.

1. What are the benefits of the FYE course?

2. What are the weaknesses of the FYE course?

3. Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers while enrolled in the FYE course? Explain

4. What areas of study would you like covered while in the FYE course?

5. Do you believe the FYE course prepared you for what is to be expected in higher education? Explain

6. What are you thinking about doing after completion of this course?

- a. Go to work/military
- b. Transfer colleges
- c. Enroll for classes the next semester
- d. undecided

Figure 7: Example of my recommendation of topics for a student focus group

Potential Resources and Existing Support

Potential resources that could contribute to the success of the project study include the various departments, such as institutional research, that has data readily available, faculty, and students. Since faculty teach the curriculum, they are in a position to offer valuable input about the program. Students can share important insights about the topics covered within the FYE curriculum, their helpfulness, and what other topics could

help students acclimate to higher education. Initiating a program evaluation would also minimize the costs associated with researching the FYE curriculum. Another resource is colleagues in the various student services areas of the study site, who add value to the FYE curriculum and could assist with initiating a program evaluation. Their support of the FYE program and my research has been instrumental in supporting the overarching goal of seeing first-year students persist to graduation.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers to implementing this project study include resistance from faculty, lack of commitment from administrators, and lack of participation from students. However, effective communication and responsiveness can reduce these barriers. Thus, it is my responsibility as the researcher to outline clearly the benefits of a program evaluation and to address all questions and concerns raised by stakeholders. Academic incentives from instructors and students can also improve student participation. Though there are few case studies on evaluations of first-year programs in 2-year institutions, the issue of retention of first-year students in 2-year institutions is widespread. For this program evaluation to succeed, all entities involved must have a clear perspective on what is needed to improve retention and maintain academics.

Project Evaluation Plan

Student and faculty surveys and focus groups will serve as the basis for my recommendation to evaluate the FYE program. The goal of the program evaluation is to determine if the FYE curriculum is effective in improving retention, while promoting academic success (defined as exiting developmental courses). The results of the program

evaluation will give the study site, and the college's department of student success, new insights into the curriculum and offer resources for making necessary changes that could lead to increased persistence and academic growth. The program recommendation will be outlined by summer 2019, and adjustments will be made if warranted. At the end of the fall semester, I will follow up with the director of student success to find out if he or she has deemed a program evaluation an effective measure. A meeting with the director of student success along with other campus leaders will be held prior to the start of spring 2019 to discuss the feasibility of administering a program evaluation.

The project study will be implemented in fall 2020, which will allow the administration an opportunity to make adjustments to the program evaluation if needed. The program evaluation will then be outlined with the director of student success, who will review the evaluation under following proposed timetable:

- July 2019: Develop the full program evaluation proposal.
- August 2019: Schedule meeting with the director of student success to present program evaluation outline.
- September 2019: Meet with director of student success to review program evaluation outline and address any questions or concerns.
- October 2019: Assist director of student success with the implementation of the program evaluation to be able to launch the FYE curriculum at the study site, if approved by fall 2020.
- November 2019: If approved, form a committee that will play an integral part in the success of the program evaluation by evoking valuable feedback of the

FYE program. The committee will consist of individuals from university advising, personal counseling, faculty, and student success leaders.

- December 2019: Meet with the committee to ensure that the outline of the program evaluation captures the necessary components for continuing academic success while increasing retention among FYE students.
- January 2020: Prior to implementation of the program evaluation, make necessary adjustments based on feedback from the director of student success and committee feedback.
- August 2020: Officially implement the program evaluation annual cycle.

Students will play an integral part in the project study; thus, student attendance in the FYE course will be crucial. Students will be asked to address each question on the program evaluation. Faculty will also play an important role in the success of the project study since they must encourage students to participate in the program evaluation in an effort to enhance the FYE curriculum's academic value and to improve retention.

Project Implications

The success of this project study could promote social change not only in the context of supporting academic success within FYE, but also in eventually improving the retention rate among first-year community college students. The recommendation of a program evaluation would address any issues not originally covered in the FYE curriculum to encourage persistence of first-year students.

Local Community Implications

Ryan (2013) suggested that academic success during a student's first semester is an indication of improved retention and persistence leading to graduation. However, many local community colleges face significant challenges in their efforts to improve the academic success and retention of their first-year students. Indeed, 2-year students experience many different barriers compared to students who attend four-year universities. The project study is a way to address these issues through the FYE curriculum with the goal of improving the relationship between academic success and retention.

Far-Reaching Implications

The success of the project study could eventually set a precedent and become a national model for other 2-year institutions. The project study could also inform the design of a new student success course, one that specifically targets 2-year college students. By initiating such a strategy, the recommendation of a program evaluation should be able to assist with identifying specific resources targeted to support 2-year students' and their academic success. The outcome of the evaluation could improve retention and improve student success at the study site and other 2-year institutions.

Conclusion

My research led to a program recommendation proposing a program evaluation of the FYE curriculum, which will be significant to the academic success and retention of 2-year community college students. This chapter discussed the development and implementation of the project study—with a consideration of the relevant literature—the

project's resources and barriers, program evaluation, and how the project could affect the educational community locally and nationally. The success of the project study will depend on the support and guidance of the director of student success at the study site as well as the participation of students, faculty, and administrators.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The purpose of my study was to determine the effectiveness of the FYE course in improving student retention and promoting student success. Though the findings revealed no significant relationship between FYE and retention, they did indicate a relationship between FYE and GPA. First-year students who had completed the FYE course had a higher GPA compared to first-year students who had not enrolled in the course. These results prompted a project study that consisted of recommending a program evaluation to investigate the relationship between FYE and academic success.

Project Strengths

The recommendation to initiate a program evaluation may benefit the study site in several ways. The recommendation may allow administrators of the FYE program to assess my research findings to ensure a program evaluation is warranted. The recommendation of a program evaluation will allow me to outline specific recommendations for supporting the FYE curriculum. In addition, the results of the program evaluation may allow the study site to identify concerns within the FYE program and make necessary changes to enhance the curriculum.

My study revealed a significant relationship between the academic success of first-year students and the FYE curriculum. Even though retention was weak at the study site, the academic success of first-year students enrolled in FYE was strong. The program evaluation recommendation could be used to enhance and support the FYE curriculum by identifying new ways to improve retention at the study site.

Project Limitations

There are limitations to this project. Although the program evaluation has the potential to offer many benefits, it will only succeed with the assistance of students, faculty, and administrators associated with the FYE curriculum. If students and faculty do not participate in the program evaluation process, it could prove detrimental to the overall effectiveness of the project study. Another limitation was the number of students enrolled in FYE. At times, the minimum number of students may be enrolled in an FYE class, which would translate to lower participation in the program evaluation. To overcome these (and other) limitations, there must be clear communication, faculty encouragement of student participation, and unlimited support and cooperation from the administration, resulting in the opening of more dialogue within the institution and with other 2-year institutions about how student success curricula for first year students can be implemented to improve retention and promote student success.

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

In conducting my study, I was exposed to a substantial body of relevant literature, which allowed me to identify similar studies that strengthened and corroborated my own research. The literature review offered insights that helped to form my study. The literature review for my project study was different than the literature review for my original research, and I discovered that few peer-reviewed studies had been conducted on program evaluations of student success courses at 2-year institutions. However, my

project study became clearer as I read more on the concept of program evaluations and their potential effectiveness.

Project Development and Evaluation

The development and evaluation of my project study has allowed me to reinforce research skills acquired during my original study. The more my project study required, the better my research skills became. The development of my project study exposed me to literature related to project development and evaluation, allowing me to formulate processes and procedures for the project. The reviewed literature focused on openness to change and understanding the dynamics of a program to design and implement an effective evaluation. In the context of higher education, although programs are developed for the benefit of the students served, they also benefit the administration and the institution as a whole (Frye & Hemmer, 2012). The development of my project study allowed me to recommend a realistic program evaluation process.

Leadership and Change

Every role I have had in my adult life has involved leadership, and this project study was no exception. My leadership role as the researcher was to develop and implement a program evaluation for this project study. My leadership skills were tested throughout this research—by lack of confidence at the beginning of the study and by the challenges of defining and outlining the project that grew out of the research. However, by assuming ownership of my research and embracing the responsibility of exploring literature that supported my project study, I became more confident in my research skills. With this increased level of confidence in my research and leadership skills, I was able to

develop an effective outline for my project study. As with any leadership role, many uncertainties arose when developing my project study, such as the effectiveness of the program evaluation and buy-in from colleagues, but my research and leadership were bolstered by relevant studies that supported my development and implementation of the project study.

Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

My project study has the potential to change how 2-year colleges view the development of their curricula related to student success and could lead to the development of student success curricula for community college students. Additionally, the outcomes of my project study have the potential to add value to curricula supporting academic success and retention. A student success curriculum commonly covers the same subjects for 2- and 4-year students, such as study skills and time management, but 2-year students may experience other factors not previously identified in the curriculum that prevent them from being successful academically or persisting to the next semester. This project study of a program evaluation recommendation represents a way to start a dialogue about what should be included in the curriculum to support first-year community college students.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Through my research and project study, I became a scholar, a role with which I did not identify initially because there were times I felt defeated, especially when I was faced with several revisions and rewrites. The term *scholar* emerged with my strength of

writing acquired through the many revisions of my study. By my definition, a scholar is someone who perseveres, is dedicated, and is not afraid of hard work. My study and project study required me to understand the rigor of my research base and framework, review and analyze data, and grasp how the data and information informed my decision-making skills. All of these skills, coupled with my motivation, informed the design and implementation of my study and project study. There were weaknesses to my study process, such as writer's block and being unsure of my writing style. There is always room for improvement with my writing, but I emerged from this experience knowing I could navigate scholarly obstacles and obtain my degree.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

The skills I learned during my research were invaluable. The process of questioning and verifying research was time-consuming yet rewarding. As a practitioner, I learned to use my research skills to make informed decisions about future directions for my research and project. The practical application of my research experience has been invaluable because, as a scholar and practitioner, I can collect and analyze data, make informed decisions, and serve on any dissertation committee because of the skills acquired during this process.

Analysis of Self as a Project Developer

My project study allowed me to hone skills I never knew I possessed. To lead a project study from its inception to its conclusion requires dedication, organization, and effective time management. At times, I was amazed by my accomplishments, particularly my use of scholarly research to implement my project. My role as project developer

enhanced my decision-making skills by giving me confidence in my abilities as a scholarly researcher. With my project development skills strengthened, I now have the confidence to take the lead on initiatives to develop new ideas or curricula.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

My project study has the potential to transform the way 2-year institutions view student success curricula. My original study revealed that, although there was no significant relationship between FYE completion and retention, there was a significant relationship between FYE and GPA. This revelation served as the impetus for my project study focusing on further research on academic success and how to establish strong correlations between FYE and retention. A program evaluation was developed to identify other barriers that 2-year college students may face within the FYE curriculum. My project study may be used to support academic success and retention of students at 2-year institutions.

Conclusion

The objective of my study was to determine whether the FYE curriculum promoted retention among first-year college students at the study site. The results indicated no significant relationship between the FYE curriculum and retention; however, findings showed a significant relationship between the FYE curriculum and GPA. This finding initiated my project study, which as a recommendation to the study site to conduct an evaluation of the FYE program. If implemented, the program evaluation could help to support and enhance students' academic success and to identify barriers that limit student persistence.

My experience throughout this entire process has been educational. I have developed research skills that have transformed me from a student into a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. The process was not easy because there were several obstacles I had to overcome, but this study taught me to persevere. The outcome of my study and the development of my project have the potential to change the dynamics of the student success curricula for students not only at the study site but at all 2-year colleges. As a result of my research, the study site has empirical evidence of the need for FYE. The site also has a foundation for policy and programs regarding FYE and student success, and a foundation for future research.

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Appendix A: The Project

Proposal to Increase Retention Among First Year Students by Initiating
A Program Evaluation Designed to Capture a Student and Faculty Perspective of The
Current FYE Curriculum

Prepared by Deatrice Allen Willis, Doctoral Candidate

October 2019

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Importance of Program Evaluations

Overview of my Original Study

Purpose of the Study
Study Design
Purpose of Quantitative Research
Study Participants
Research Questions
Data Collection and Analysis

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1
Research Question 2

Project Proposal

Recommendations
Project Proposed Course of Action

Reference List

Executive Summary

Retention is an issue that plagues many higher education institutions especially 2-year institutions. The First-Year Experience (FYE) course was created at the study site to assist first-year Learning Support (LS) students who are not prepared for the rigor of higher education by developing the academic and study skills needed to persist to the next year. The study site is a 2-year college located in the South with multiple campuses, with more than 20,000 students enrolled college-wide. My original research consisted of archived data from fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012 of first-year students who enrolled in FYE and passed successfully compared to those first-year students who were not enrolled. The data excluded any students that withdrew or did not pass the FYE course. The data was analyzed using t-test and chi-squared methods.

The findings from my original study indicated there was no significant relationship between FYE and retention. However, based on the data presented for FYE students, there was a relationship between GPA and FYE. The gap between the retention and academic success of the FYE curriculum directed my project study to recommend a program evaluation of addressing the relationship between retention and academic success by proposing a detailed program evaluation of the FYE curriculum.

My recommendation to the Director of Student Success and the stakeholders of a program evaluation will assess the FYE program and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program. By assessing the strengths and weaknesses, it will be a way to improve upon and make the necessary changes to close the gap identified between retention and academic success. Therefore, initiating a program evaluation will make the

FYE curriculum more effective by increasing retention while still maintaining academic success among first-year students at the study site.

My recommendation of a program evaluation to the Director of Student Success is outlined in three specific stages:

Stage 1- would consist of two semesters, fall and spring of data collection from the perspectives of first-year students and faculty respectively through surveys and focus groups of the FYE curriculum.

Stage 2- would consist of reviewing the data collected from first-year students and faculty to find commonalities to improve or sustain parts of the FYE curriculum.

Stage 3- would consist of creating a curriculum which would address the issues with retention while maintaining the academic success of the FYE curriculum. My recommendation serves only as a proposal.

Importance of Program Evaluations

Program evaluations are an effective tool to assess whether a program is effective and what measures can be taken if improvement is warranted. Lewallen (2015) indicated in order for a program evaluation to be effective, the program must be monitored routinely. Any new data obtained from the program, must be analyzed and processed. Program evaluations assist with developing or enhancing realistic goals and objectives. Praslova (2010) discussed program evaluations provide valuable feedback to its stakeholders to ensure the program is meeting the needs of the institution. Program evaluations are a valuable tool as it allows input from the student and faculty perspective to better enhance the curriculum.

Overview of my Original Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of First-Year Experience (FYE) curriculum in improving student retention and promoting student success among first-year students at the study site.

Study Design

The research design for this study was a causal-comparative design. Brewer & Kuhn (2010) suggested causal-comparative designs attempt to find commonalities after an incident occurred between the independent and dependent variables. A causal-comparative study would be an appropriate design to determine whether a relationship exists between enrollment in the FYE course at the study site and improving retention and promoting student success of first-year students.

Purpose of Quantitative Research

For this particular study, quantitative data was obtained and analyzed because no formal study had been conducted at the study site to conclude definitively the effectiveness of the current FYE course in improving retention and promoting student success to the next year since its inception.

Study Participants

The quantitative study used archived data from first-year students who were enrolled in fall 2011, spring, 2012, and fall 2012 to one year after entry. The data excluded any first-year students who withdrew or did not complete the FYE course successfully.

Research Questions

The two guiding research questions used for this study were as follows:

1. To what extent is there a significant difference between those students who are enrolled in FYE and those who are not with respect to their GPA?
 - H_a : There is a significant difference between students who completed the FYE course and students who did not with respect to their GPA.
 - H_0 : There is no significant difference between students who completed the FYE course and students who did not with respect to their GPA.
2. To what extent is there a significant difference between those students who are enrolled in FYE and those who are not with respect to retention?
 - H_a : There is a significant difference with respect to retention between students who completed the FYE course and students who did not.
 - H_0 : There is no significant difference with respect to retention for students who completed the FYE course and students who did not.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection used archival data from first-year students who were enrolled in fall 2011, spring, 2012, and fall 2012 to one year after entry. The data excluded any first-year students who withdrew or did not complete the FYE course successfully. The archival data used secondary data that was obtained from each student as part of the admissions process. The data analysis method for this study was multiple logistic regressions for retention. The data will be grouped by FYE students and non-FYE students, then within the different independent variables.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

To what extent is there a significant difference between those students who are enrolled in FYE and those who are not with respect to their GPA?

The hypothesis was there would be significant difference and the null hypothesis is there would be no significant difference. The outcome of this study revealed there was significant difference in GPA. Therefore, we would reject the null hypothesis of there was no significant difference with regard to their GPA of students who completed FYE compared to those not enrolled in FYE.

Research Question 2

To what extent is there a significant difference between those students who are enrolled in FYE and those who are not with respect to retention?

The hypothesis was there would be significant difference and the null hypothesis is there would be no significant difference. The outcome of this study revealed there is relatively no significant difference with regard to retention. Therefore, we would accept the null hypothesis of there is no significant difference with regard to retention of students who completed FYE compared to those not enrolled in FYE.

Project Proposed Courses of Action (COA)

The objective of my recommendation proposing a program evaluation is to develop a curriculum that will address the retention issues that are plaguing the current FYE curriculum at the study site while maintaining the academic success the curriculum currently possess.

COA 1. Continue using the FYE curriculum initiated by the study site and the administration associated with the development and maintenance of the FYE curriculum.

COA 2. Continue using the FYE curriculum using surveys and focus groups of first-year students and faculty respectively for a minimum of two semesters if not more to get their perception of the current FYE curriculum. Organize a credible team to conduct surveys and focus groups

COA 3. Analyze the data collected, develop, implement, and improve the FYE curriculum based on feedback given by first-year students and faculty.

Steps To Achieving Proposed COA 3

My program evaluation requires approval from the study site to implement COA 3. The proposed evaluation can be accomplished in three stages that will require administering surveys and conducting focus groups of first- year students and faculty, analyzing the data collected from the surveys and focus groups and developing and implementing an improved FYE curriculum for the study site.

Stage One: The purpose of a recommendation proposing a program evaluation is to outline and evaluate the effectiveness of the FYE curriculum as it relates to retention

and academics of first-year students. This is stage one of the proposed program evaluation.

Administering surveys and focus groups to first-year students and faculty by a credible team to gather feedback of the current FYE curriculum is crucial. The data collection will focus on subjects from the perception of the curriculum from the perspective of first-year students and the faculty who facilitate the course, to possible barriers students and faculty may encounter within the FYE curriculum, to rating the satisfaction levels of the preparedness of the FYE curriculum for first-year students to persist to the next semester. The team administering the surveys and focus groups will consist of two designated individuals chosen by the Director of Student Success who has experience with program evaluations, instruction, and curriculum development.

Stakeholders:

- Director of Student Success
- Associate Director of Student Success
- Faculty/Staff
- Students in the FYE program

Goals and Objectives: The recommendation of a program evaluation should address the following goals and objectives

- Improving Retention
- Increasing Academic Success
- Program Effectiveness (Pass Rate)

What methods will be used to evaluate FYE program:

- Institutional Research Archived Data
 - Completion Commitment (withdrawal & reason)
 - Status of student (part-time/full-time)
 - End of course grade
- Focus Group:
 - Faculty: Focus Group Questions
 - Is the curriculum covered in FYE effective enough to promote retention?
 - What are the benefits of the FYE program for a first-year student?
 - What are the weaknesses of the FYE program for a first-year student?
 - What can be improved upon with the FYE curriculum?
 - Should it be required of all first-year students?
 - Do you believe the FYE program prepares the student for what is to be expected in higher education?
 - Students: Focus Group Questions
 - What are the benefits of the FYE program?
 - What are the weaknesses of the FYE program?
 - Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers in the FYE program?
 - What are the areas you would like covered with the FYE program?

- Survey: Likert Scale
 - Faculty Survey
 - Student Survey

- **Questions to be addressed with outcome of program evaluation:**
 - Is the program effective enough to promote retention?
 - Can the program be improved upon? If so in what ways?
 - In what ways can the administration assist with the success of the FYE program?
 - Is the FYE program cost effective?

The program evaluation once initiated should involve all stakeholders. There should be an evaluation of data requested from Institutional Research. The surveys and focus groups can be created with the collaboration of Institutional research. It will be suggested to the Director of Student Success, this could be a cost-effective measure of developing an effective measure to evaluate the FYE program.

Administrative Details: Stage One

- Timeline for Stage One: two semesters (Fall and Spring)
- Survey results reported to stakeholders at the end of each semester for comparison to find commonalities in the data collected and analyzed.
- The surveys will be on a Likert scale to be able to process responses more efficiently.

- Each response from the survey will be rated on a 1 to 5 scale, 1 to disagree, 2 somewhat disagree, 3 neutral, 4 somewhat agree, 5 to agree.

Stage Two: Stage 2 would be the analysis of the data collected from stage one to find the commonalities from the surveys and focus groups. There should be two designated individuals one person to collect and analyze the responses from the students' survey and focus group and the other person to collect and analyze the responses from the faculty's survey and focus group responses.

- Surveys should be administered to the students post course and to faculty at the end of the semester. The focus group should take place mid to end of semester.
- The responses to the focus groups would need to be transcribed and sorted according to common responses.
- The responsibilities of these designated individuals will be to determine if commonalities of the responses exist and if so is it significant?
- If 60% or more commonalities in the responses from survey and/ or focus group exist, the designated individuals should report findings with the recommendation to investigate the area(s) of concern from the FYE curriculum further to the Director of Student Success with the possibility of adjusting the curriculum.

Administrative Details: Stage Two

- Timeline for Stage Two: three months with option to re-evaluate.
- Results reported to the stake holders after each semester.

Stage 3: Stage 3 would be the development and implementation of the new and improved FYE curriculum based on the data collected and analyzed from the students and faculty. It is my recommendation to the Director of Student success to have a series of meetings to review all proposed changes to the curriculum before implementation.

Administrative Details: Stage Three

- Timeline for Stage Three: one to two semesters with the option to re-evaluate
- Introduce the improved FYE curriculum to a limited number of classes at the beginning to make any necessary adjustments before implementing the official curriculum.

By following the proposed program evaluation as proposed, it should determine whether the FYE program can be successful in improving retention while maintaining the academic success the curriculum currently possess.

Appendix B: Example of Faculty Survey

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program (FYE). Please circle the best answer based on FYE courses taught and interaction with students in your FYE classes.

5- Agree 4- Somewhat agree 3- Neutral 2- Somewhat disagree 1- Disagree

1. The FYE program overall promotes retention among first-year students enrolled?

5 4 3 2 1

2. The FYE curriculum that is covered is effective in promoting retention?

5 4 3 2 1

3. The FYE program should be covered for all incoming first-year students?

5 4 3 2 1

4. The FYE program prepares first-year students for higher education curriculum?

5 4 3 2 1

5. The students are engaged in the FYE class?

5 4 3 2 1

6. There are some parts of the FYE curriculum could be improved upon?

5 4 3 2 1

7. There need to be more FYE classes offered at various times during the day.

5 4 3 2 1

Appendix C: Example of Student Survey

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program (FYE). Please circle the best answer based on your enrollment and engagement in class.

5- Agree 4- Somewhat agree 3- Neutral 2- Somewhat disagree 1- Disagree

1. The FYE program prepares first-year students for higher education curriculum?

5 4 3 2 1

2. The instructional method for the FYE program was effective and easy to understand?

5 4 3 2 1

3. I applied what was taught in the FYE program to the other classes I was enrolled in such as Time Management, Organization skills, and Study Skills?

5 4 3 2 1

4. I believe the FYE program need to be required for all first-year students?

5 4 3 2 1

5. The FYE program covers realistic first-year topics that first-year students might encounter?

5 4 3 2 1

6. Some parts of the FYE program can be improved upon?

5 4 3 2 1

7. The FYE program needs to cover more topics?

5 4 3 2 1

8. The FYE program needs to cover fewer topics?

5 4 3 2 1

9. I would recommend the FYE program to all first-year students?

5 4 3 2 1

10. The FYE program does assist with retention of first-year students?

5 4 3 2 1

Appendix D: Example of Topics for Faculty Focus Group

Reviewer Name: _____

Faculty Name: _____

Date: _____

Number of years teaching FYE: _____

Reviewer Read:

I am conducting this research project to gain feedback and understanding of the FYE curriculum in a 2-year setting and the relationship it has with retention and academics.

- Review and sign the Informed Consent Form with faculty
- Remind faculty all responses are confidential
- Remind faculty this focus group is voluntary, and faculty can refuse to participate
- Have faculty to sign Confidentiality of Participants Agreement

Reviewer Read:

The purpose of this focus group is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability based on FYE courses taught and interaction with students in your FYE classes.

- 1. Do you think the curriculum covered in FYE is effective enough to promote retention among first-year students? Explain**

- 2. What are the benefits of the FYE program to a first-year student? Explain**

3. What are the weaknesses of the FYE program to a first-year student? Explain

4. What can be improved upon with the FYE program? Explain

5. Should the FYE program be required for all students? Explain

6. Do you believe the FYE program prepares the student for what is to be expected in higher education? Explain

Appendix E: Example of Student Focus Group Questionnaire

Reviewer Name: _____

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Grade in FYE: _____

Reviewer Read:

I am conducting this research project to gain feedback and understanding of the FYE curriculum in a 2-year setting and the relationship it has with retention and academics.

- Review and sign the Informed Consent Form with students
- Remind students all responses are confidential
- Remind students this focus group is voluntary, and students can refuse to participate
- Have student to sign Confidentiality of Participants Agreement

Reviewer Read:

The purpose of this focus group is to evaluate the current First-Year Experience Program. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability based on FYE courses taught and interaction with students in your FYE classes.

1. What are the benefits of the FYE course?

2. What are the weaknesses of the FYE course?

- 3. Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers while enrolled in the FYE course? Explain**

- 4. What areas of study would you like covered while in the FYE course?**

- 5. Do you believe the FYE course prepared you for what is to be expected in higher education? Explain**

- 6. What are you thinking about doing after completion of this course?**

- a. Go to work/military
- b. Transfer colleges
- c. Enroll for classes the next semester
- d. undecided

- 7. What grade do you expect to earn for the course**

- a. A
- b. B
- c. C
- d. D
- e. F

- 8. What is your program of study?**

Appendix F: Descriptive Statistics and Additional Information Regarding the Used Data

A. Partial view (selection) of the data used in the research

FYE OR NON FYE	ETHNICITY	RACE	AGE	GENDER	ENRL _LS_ ENGL	ENRL_ LS_ MATH	ENRL_ LS_ READ	GPA	RET
NON FYE	Hispanic/ Latino	Unknown	23	male	yes	yes	no	1.50	yes
NON FYE	Not Hispanic/ Latino	Multi- racial	20	female	no	no	yes	0.00	no
FYE	Not Hispanic /Latino	Black or African American	36	female	no	no	no	2.50	no
NON FYE	Unknown	Unknown	19	female	no	yes	no	3.75	yes
NON FYE	Hispanic/ Latino	White	29	female	no	yes	no	1.00	no
NON FYE	Hispanic/ Latino	Black or African American	21	female	no	no	yes	0.00	no
NON FYE	Hispanic/ Latino	Unknown	74	male	no	no	no	3.50	no
NON FYE	Unknown	Unknown	34	female	no	yes	no	0.00	no
NON FYE	Unknown	Black or African American	37	male	no	no	no	4.00	no
NON FYE	Not Hispanic/ Latino	White	20	female	yes	yes	yes	0.00	no

Note: The header row presents the variables' coding.

B. Distribution of Participants by Gender and Intake

Group Tag	female	male	neutral
fall_2011_fye	96	62	
fall_2011_nonfye	4833	3298	2
fall_2012_fye	322	208	
fall_2012_nonfye	3726	2791	
spring_2012_fye	42	31	
spring_2012_nonfye	2504	1595	1

C. Distribution of Participants by Race and Intake

Group Tag	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Multi racial	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Unknown	White
Fall 2011 FYE		8	80	8		25	37
Fall 2011 NON-FYE	22	548	3924	309	18	379	2933
Fall 2012 FYE	3	23	362	19		23	100
Fall 2012 NON-FYE	18	538	2798	288	9	191	2675
Spring 2012 FYE		3	51	2		5	12
Spring 2012 NON-FYE	10	264	2217	161	6	181	1261

D. Mean Distribution by Age and Gender

GENDER	Mean_Age	SD_Age
female	23.20	7.99
male	21.55	6.58
neutral	27.33	17.90

E. Mean Distribution by Intake

Intake	Mean_Age	SD_Age
1.00	22.27	7.29
2.00	24.74	8.43
3.00	21.51	6.85

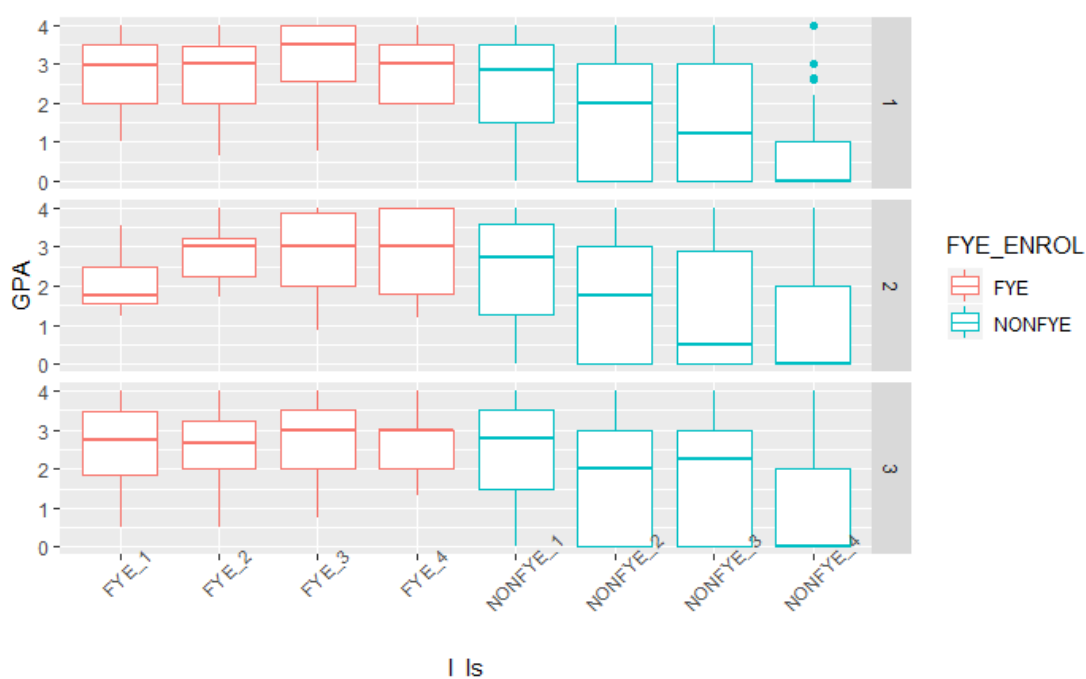
F. Mean Distribution by Gender and Intake

GENDER	Intake	Mean Age	SD Age
female	1.00	23.08	7.92
female	2.00	25.43	8.79
female	3.00	21.95	7.24
male	1.00	21.07	6.05
male	2.00	23.67	7.71
male	3.00	20.92	6.23
neutral	1.00	32.50	21.92
neutral	2.00	17.00	

G. Mean Distribution by Gender and FYE Enrollment

GENDER	FYE_ENROL	Mean_Age	SD_Age
female	FYE	21.70	6.71
female	NONFYE	23.26	8.04
male	FYE	20.52	5.70
male	NONFYE	21.59	6.60
neutral	NONFYE	27.33	17.90

H. GPA by Levels of Support Needed



Legend for the above picture: The level of academic risk as resulted from the LS testing is increasing, from FYE_1 lowest and FYE_4 highest, for the FYE group, and from NONFYE_1 highest to NONFYE_4, lowest, for the non-FYE group. Obviously, at the time of the intake, FYE_1 was deemed more at risk than NONFYE_4. The mean GPA is depicted by FYE group and by level of academic risk, across all three intakes, and shows that, although the non-FYE students were deemed less at risk at the time of the intake, at the end of the academic year, the FYE students scored consistently above the non-FYE students.

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Deatrice Allen Willis | [Curriculum Vitae]

Objective

A highly motivated educator and self-starter focused on using communication skills, encouragement and vast knowledge of learning styles to create a welcoming and interactive learning environment for all students.

Skills & Abilities

Skills: Banner, PeopleSoft, ADP, Microsoft Office

Abilities: Critical thinker, Strong collaborator, Impeccable interpersonal skills, Detail-oriented, Creative learning strategist, Time manager

Experience

Testing Coordinator —Georgia State University (Perimeter College) 05/2009 - Present

Manage, coordinate, administer, and reconcile college testing.
 Schedule and administer CLEP, Accuplacer, and National Testing.
 Manage testing calendar for the campus.
 Supervise testing staff

Adjunct Instructor—Georgia State University (Perimeter College) 1/2014 - Present

Successfully engage students to participate in the classroom by integration of group learning and service projects.
 Assist students to discover their career aspirations through assignments and self-discovery.

Education

Walden University - EdD- Higher Education Leadership

University of Phoenix - MBA

University of Phoenix- BSB/Marketing

Leadership

Staff Senate Chair 2015-2016

President's Advisory Board

Co-Chair - Orientation Event