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By

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**REACTIONS OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS TO THE INTRODUCTION OF A
NEW COURSE IN THE CORE CURRICULUM**

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by

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Dedication

This work is for my mother, who always encouraged, supported, and indulged my intellectual pursuits.

Thanks to my dad, who helped so much during this time by his words and his presence.

Thanks to Adam, my fearless husband, who put up with my craziness surrounding the dissertation, and even did some long-distance editing in Iraq.

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Southwest University, a pseudonym for a Tier One 4-year public institution in the Southwest United States, introduced major curricular reforms in 2005. The most prominent of these reforms was a course required of all first-year students with the goal of transforming them from high-school students to college students.

Research for this dissertation asked a group of first-year students about their experience in all of their courses but focused on the perceptions of this new first-year course. Currently, universities are devoting a great deal of resources and energy to curricular reform, but students are not often asked how they experience those curricular changes.

First-year students discussed the role this course played in their first-year college experience. In order to assess student perceptions and reactions to the course, first-year students were interviewed twice. Additional qualitative data in the form of surveys and

journals were also analyzed with an inductive analytic approach to provide supportive evidence for the themes that emerged in the interviews.

The findings suggest that student perceptions of the course were positive and that the course had helped them achieve their first-year goals. However, the findings also suggest that additional research or a cost-benefit analysis of the program needs to be conducted to determine if the high cost of the program is worth the outcomes it is achieving.

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Prologue

I began thinking about this dissertation by looking backward. Nearly every professional job I have held in higher education has required some type of curricular reform that I was involved in implementing. However, I had little idea of the beginnings, the original purpose, and the original aims of the curriculum I was reforming. I had no philosophical or historical context for curriculum, and only based my recommendations on what the faculty could or would teach and what I believed students found interesting and relevant. This made me wonder how aware students were of the purpose of their academic courses and what content in those courses was compelling, memorable, and influential to them.

I recognized that a practitioner has the opportunity to reform curriculum and make programmatic changes, but he or she is offered little opportunity to reflect on curricular reforms of the past. I believed that this dissertation was a chance for me to not only learn more about the history of curriculum but also to examine a reform with which I had a great deal of involvement with at Southwest University.

I had the opportunity to work with the *Introduction to College* course nearly from its inception, and saw it grow from three courses a year to nearly two hundred. I believed that Southwest needed something like the *Introduction to College* course. I thought it would go a long way to producing a better-developed undergraduate curriculum and would bring more coherence to the core curriculum. I thought the

students would embrace the reform and that it would be a major factor in the experiences of their first year of college.

The results of this research surprised me, but through the journey of this dissertation, I learned a great deal about the process of curricular reform and the challenge of translating an idea into practice. I also learned a great deal about myself and was surprised to find that I did not have as full a picture of the college students of today as I had originally assumed.

My goal for this project is that it will help scholars and practitioners to think about the importance of involving students in curricular reform assessment. More importantly, I hope readers are inspired by the students in this study. They were an amazing group, and I learned a great deal by listening to them.

Chapter One: Introduction

Since the advent of the American University, curriculum has been reforming (Lucas, 1996). More than five years ago, Southwest University, a pseudonym for a large, public institution in the southern United States, commissioned a task force on curricular reform to focus on the undergraduate curriculum at the university. The task force was formed as a result of the findings from another committee that indicated that Southwest needed to improve its undergraduate experience to ensure that the institution retained its reputation as a research institution of the highest caliber.

The opinions and recommendations of the task force at Southwest took a view of undergraduate education that embodied the encyclopedia's definition of college as a "community of teachers and scholars" (Chisholm, 1911). The task force believed it was essential to introduce a more structured curriculum in the first year to help integrate students into an "intellectual community" that was very different from the academic community presented to them in high school (Task Force, 2004).

To that end, the task force recommended a new course called the *Introduction to College* that would be required of all Southwest students in their first year at the university. The task force report described the new required course as:

. . . a course [that] will thus expose each entering student to the broad goals and possibilities of a university education, while promoting a greater sense of intellectual community among undergraduates. They will make students aware of the high standards necessary for college-level academic work and help students cultivate skills to meet those standards. . . all sections must satisfy three common criteria: They must negotiate the intersection of disciplines across a major divide. . . They must require students to communicate effectively, both in writing and in speech. . . Finally, the courses must require students to use evidence to

corroborate or refute a theory in various disciplines, such as art, literature, natural science, or social science. (2004, p. 6)

The focus on community and increased communication between the students reflected the words of the eminent education philosopher, John Dewey, who described education as:

. . .what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life. This education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. (1964, p. 9)

However, the task force also listed tangible skills (writing, speech, critical thinking) that the students would be exposed to in the course. The introduction of skills went beyond the “community of teachers and scholars” and reflected the idea that a university education should have some vocational qualities to ensure that students will be marketable for employment after graduation.

A Gallup Poll study taken in March 2010 found that the unemployment rate for a college graduate was 6.4%, almost half that of a high school graduate, at 12.3% (2010). Furthermore, a recent *Time* study stated that while 2012 will see increased job growth, 37.6% of those jobs are reserved for students with a bachelor’s degree or higher (Saporito, 2011).

Based on these studies, there is still great value placed on higher education in society. College graduates, according to these statistics, have an advantage in the job market. The requirements in the *Introduction to College* course were meant to “train students in important skills and expose them to experiences that will prepare them for

the complex world confronting them” (Task Force, 2004). This could indicate that the task force was conscious of and sensitive to the expectations that the students and society would place on the value of the degree after graduation.

With a budget of over \$5 million and the participation of over two hundred faculty members to serve nearly 10,000 students per year, the *Introduction to College* course was ambitious in concept and execution. This dissertation examines how the course has been received over the last two academic years (2009-10 and 2010-11) by analyzing the reactions of a group of first-year students to the course.

Background

Two of the most important curricular reforms in the history of American higher education were the Yale Report (1827) and the Morrill Act (1862). The Yale Report sought an expanded list of academic disciplines in order to sharpen communication and institutionalize a common experience. This line of thought resembled Aristotle’s early views of education, in which he believed an educated man to be more virtuous and well-rounded (Ross, 1984).

The genesis of America’s second major movement took place nearly 40 years later with the introduction of the Morrill Act (1862), which sought to democratize higher education by extending its reach. The Morrill Act was passed so that universities would teach subjects that related to the agricultural and mechanical trades of the time. The country was expanding and there was a growing need for jobs relating to harvesting land and creating machinery. There was a move away from the classical education of the

past because it was believed to be reserved for the elite. The Morrill Act took the point of view that there was little time for learning the value of the Socratic Method when there is a country to (quite literally) build.

The knowledge about these two reforms is essential to an understanding of the origins of higher education curriculum in the United States and the subject of this study. These two reforms best exemplify the dual purpose of the *Introduction to College* course. A goal of the course is to enhance and define the first year of college with exposure to new ways of thinking and to academic disciplines that were not present in the high school curriculum. The other goal is to begin to equip students with skills that will allow them to “be leaders in our communities” (Task Force, 2004). With the economy and jobs constantly changing and the student population having the kind of economic and social diversity that has not been seen since the Morrill Act, are vocationally based degree plans more valuable to students? Or, is the building of an intellectual community to create an educated citizenry of more value? The *Introduction to College* course sought to do both.

Purpose

This study focused on a recent high-profile curricular reform at Southwest University. The course is required of all first-year students and has the goal of helping them make the transition from being high school students to being college students as well as teaching them tangible skills that they can use during the rest of their coursework and when they enter the job market after graduation.

This dissertation studied how a sample of students reacted to the course and whether or not they perceived it as an important component of their first-year curriculum. In addition, the research discovered what *knowledge* the students found most valuable, where the *learning* took place, and whether or not the new course played a major role in that knowledge and learning.

Statement of Problem

Currently, universities are devoting a great deal of resources and energy to curricular reform, but students' reactions to the curricular changes are often just a small piece of the assessment of those reforms. Students enter college with many expectations about the opportunities the experience will bring. Research for this dissertation asked a group of students about their experiences in all of their courses, but focused on their perceptions of the new first-year course at Southwest. The study examined whether or not the goals of the students, as defined by them during their initial interviews, were met and if the new course was part of that achievement. The problem of interest was what type of impact the new course had on their first-year experience.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

- (1) What do first-year students expect they should be learning in college?
- (2) Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course match the stated goals of the course?

(3) Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course differ from their perceptions of their other first-year courses?

The goal of the questions was to evaluate how much of an effect the new first-year course had on the students and if it introduced them to the "distinctive" (Task Force, 2004) education of Southwest.

Theoretical framework. The work of Ralph Tyler (1949) provided the theoretical framework for this research. Tyler's book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, is considered a definitive source for examining the effectiveness of curriculum. The book offered a framework for evaluating curriculum that included goal setting and evaluation. Tyler believed those elements were essential in curriculum development.

In this dissertation, Tyler's theory has been reworked to use it in the study of a single course. Instead of curriculum specialists doing the evaluation, this research asked students to assess the new required first-year course at Southwest.

Tyler was the primary influence for the research of this study. Even though *Basic Principles* was published in 1949, it is still a fresh and compelling theory for evaluating curriculum.

Research Setting and Participants

This study used four sources of data: journals, two interviews, a survey, and the university-administered course surveys. The journals were used in determining the goals of the students and their general attitudes toward college. The first interviews

asked the students about their experience in all of their first-year courses. The second interviews focused only on the *Introduction to College* course. The survey asked the same questions asked in the second interviews, but to a different and larger sample of students. The course surveys were used to see if any trends that appeared in the other measures could also be identified in this larger sample.

For the interviews and journals, the student participants were enrolled in University College, the division for students who have not yet chosen a major (undeclared) at Southwest University, a large public research university. The university is nationally recognized, with competitive admissions and a rigorous academic program. Selection of the participants was based on the students enrolled in University College's first-year learning communities. The study targeted a group of students who would experience the new first-year course in a similar way. This type of sampling is called *purposive sampling* (Patton, 1990).

Participants were asked to write their goals for their first year of college, as well as what being a college student meant to them. They were also asked to participate in two one-on-one interviews. The interviews occurred in October of their first semester at the university, and the second interviews occurred in December and January, at the end of their first semester.

A survey was sent to a larger group of students in order to provide some comparison for the smaller group that participated in the more in-depth interviews and journaling. This survey asked students to evaluate their perceptions of the new first-year

course.

In addition, data from the course surveys, a survey that is administered by the university and distributed to every student in each Southwest course, was analyzed to compare with data collected through the journals, interviews, and surveys. The surveys from the *Introduction to College* course were also compared with the results of the surveys from courses in the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Natural Science. The results were analyzed and comparisons were made about the way the students evaluated the courses.

Assumptions and Limitations

There are several assumptions and limitations of the study. Tyler's theoretical framework was meant to be applied by curriculum specialists and not by students. In addition, the six students who participated in the journals and interviews and the 18 students who participated in the survey may not represent the entire first-year population at Southwest (7,000 first-year students; 2,500 transfer students). Though the course surveys were completed by a large sample of students, these surveys were used for comparison rather than as a primary source. Also, since the course surveys evaluated different types of courses, there could be no direct comparison.

The personal interviews and the journals served to give the most in-depth answers to the research questions and the stated problem. The surveys used a slightly larger sample to verify those answers. A larger sample size would provide more data. More participants may make the themes discovered more conclusive. However,

collecting stories from more students would have been an enormous endeavor, outside the depth and breadth of this introductory analysis.

Significance

Currently, many universities are engaged in curricular reform, which requires time, energy, and university resources. There are studies and assessments that can point to initial effectiveness of these changes. However, fundamental curricular reform is rare and can be difficult to sustain without substantial and consistent pressure. Curricular reform must be seen to provide benefits to students, and those benefits must be valued in the market for graduates (Bobinski, 2011). This study gauged how a group of students reacted to the new core course and whether or not they believed it was a valuable addition to the curriculum.

This research is significant because it asked for student perceptions about a high-stakes reform within their university. The research examined the influence the course had on their experience of the first year of college.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter one provides a brief introduction, definitions, and a conceptual overview of the research. The chapter identifies the research questions and outlines the purpose and significance for a research project based on gauging the reactions of students to a new required first-year course at Southwest University. Tyler's theory of curriculum evaluation (1949) was defined as the theoretical framework for the project's research.

Chapter two is divided into three sections designed to provide a complete picture

of the history and philosophy of higher education and curricular reform. Section one provides a brief history of the philosophy of higher education. Section two focuses on the history of colleges and the evolution of the modern American university. Section three gives a history of curricular reform.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology for this project. The data collection phase of this research draws from the work of Tyler as well as critical ethnography. There are four phases of data collection in this research design: (a) student journaling, (b) interviews, (c) surveys, and (d) comparison with course surveys collected for the overall assessment of the course. Each data point gives an opportunity for the student to explain his or her reaction to the *Introduction to College* course and how it has influenced (or has not influenced) the first-year college experience.

Chapter four presents the research findings and summary. The words and opinions of the students are presented in order for the reader to hear and understand the experiences of the students in the study.

Chapter five is an analysis of the research findings. The codes that emerged from the journals and interviews are presented. A conclusion is drawn about how students reacted to the new course at Southwest and recommendations for further research are made.

Summary

The goal of chapter one was to give a general introduction of the study and its purpose. This inductive study examines how students experience one curriculum reform

at their institution. In the observations of the students in the following pages, their stories will describe what experiences have shaped their first-year experience.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Education is a social process. ... Education is growth. ...

Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.

--John Dewey, Education & Experience, 1938

This study focuses on how students reacted to a new required first-year course called the *Introduction to College* course. The course was developed as an introduction to the intellectual community of Southwest University. This literature review introduces the history of curriculum reform to give the reader a sense of the purposes and history of teaching and learning in higher education. This discussion of history and philosophy provides context for understanding the development of the *Introduction to College* course at Southwest.

To be successful, curricular reform must be rooted in classical ideas, while at the same time be relevant in a world of constant social, political, economic, and agricultural change. The seeds of curricular reform are planted by politicians, business professionals, and academics. This study examined the first semester of students involved in a high stakes curricular reform. This study intended to better understand the student perspective: to find out how students perceived the new course.

Traditionally, research on curriculum has focused on student persistence, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a new course, or measures of how well the students *learn*. This project takes a different view by moving away from the traditional

classification system and instead focusing on the individual's experience with the *Introduction to College* course.

Background

Oakeshott (2003) describes the university community as "the scholar, the teacher, and lastly those who come to be taught, the undergraduate" (p. 27). Oakeshott defines the undergraduate as having:

. . . distinctive character. First, he is not a child, not a beginner. He has already had his schooling elsewhere, and has learned enough, morally and intellectually, to take a chance with himself upon the open sea. He is neither a child nor an adult, but stands in a strange middle moment of life when he knows only enough of himself and of the world which passes before him to wish to know more. He has not yet found what he loves, but neither is he jealous of time, of accidents, or of rivals. Perhaps the phrase from the fairy tale suits him best—he has come to seek his intellectual fortune.

But, further, he is not the first who has passed from school to university, he is not like a stranger who knows nothing of what to expect, so that everything has to be explained to him on his arrival in words of one syllable. And if the tradition to which he belongs has already taught him anything, it will have taught him that he will not find his intellectual fortune, once and for all, in three years at a university. He is, therefore, we may suppose, in tune with what he is to find and is prepared to make use of it. (p. 27)

The point here is that the undergraduate is not a *tabula rasa*. He or she comes to the university with specific expectations as well as a level of experience.

In 1918, John Franklin Bobbitt, a university professor and writer, defined curriculum as the course of deeds and experiences through which students become adults and learn the tools to become successful in adult society. He believed that the curriculum should encompass the entire scope of intellectual and experiential development occurring in and out of school. Curriculum was not limited to experiences

that occurred in school. He believed that unplanned and undirected experiences were just as essential as planned experiences intentionally directed for the purposeful formation of adult members of society (Bobbitt, 1918).

In Bobbitt's definition, there is no mention of specific skills or knowledge that is essential to achieving success in society. Instead, he alludes to the idea that curriculum should be thought of as a guideline that is ever changing, based on the needs of the society it is serving. Bobbitt indicated that curriculum reform is essential and inevitable because what is learned must change to meet the needs of an evolving society.

In the United States, curriculum has been *reforming*, mostly to reflect economic changes in society rather than addressing intellectual concerns. There are two major movements in curriculum reform that keep emerging every decade or so. First, society and policymakers demand that curriculum be more responsive to the job market to ensure that students graduate with skills that make them employable. After a period of a few years, there is another movement to return to a classical curriculum that would have all students study from classical texts in order to increase communication and a common experience between all college students. *New York Times* Columnist David Brooks (2010) defended classical education in a recent piece. Brooks said:

Studying the humanities will give you a wealth of analogies . . . People who have a wealth of analogies in their minds can think more precisely than those with few analogies. If you go through college without reading Thucydides, Herodotus and Gibbon, you'll have been cheated out of a great repertoire of comparisons.

Over the past century or so, people have built various systems to help them understand human behavior: economics, political science, game theory and evolutionary psychology. These systems are useful in many circumstances. But none completely explain behavior because deep down people have passions and drives that don't lend themselves to systemic modeling. (p. A27)

This chapter focuses on examining the past to analyze curricular reform today.

Levine (1988) stated that American education always looked to the future and never to the past. Levine argued that understanding the evolution of the university was essential to evaluating and understanding how effective and innovative our present-day reforms are.

Chapter Outline

First is the brief introduction, followed by a discussion of the origins of education and curriculum through the philosophies of Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Dewey, who are considered to be some of the most important voices in the philosophy of education (Phillips, 2008). Each philosopher has a clear, yet very different, idea about curriculum. The views of Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey were very influential in shaping the universities of the United States. Section two is a brief history of higher education emphasizing the evolution from the ancient schools of the Nile River Valley to the present-day 21st-century American university. Section three highlights the major movements of curricular reform at U. S. universities, including information on the Morrill Land Grant Act, the Yale Report, and the influence changing demographics have had on curricular reform. The section ends with the controversy surrounding education during the Cold War and the more recent return to a classical education. Finally, the

focus on the first-year student, the first-year experience, and the emergence of college mission statements are analyzed. The chapter ends with the theoretical framework, which is based on the work of Ralph Tyler (1949).

Examining Educational Philosophy

There are a number of philosophers who had influential views on how and what to teach. For the purposes of this review, the three philosophers who are considered historical giants in the field—Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey—have been included (Phillips, 2008).

Plato: The first curriculum. Plato developed one of the first frameworks for defining education. He believed that education played a very important role in the structure of society. Plato continued his mentor's, Socrates', unique method of teaching students and continued to write in Socrates' voice in order to carry on Socrates' wisdom. The Socratic method of teaching engaged the student in a series of basic questions where the teacher pretends not to know the answer. Gulley (1968) said of the Socratic method: "Socrates' profession of ignorance is an expedient to encourage his interlocutor to seek out the truth, to make him think that he is joining with Socrates in a voyage of discovery" (p. 69).

Plato's most influential work was *The Republic* (380 BCE), in which he outlined a blueprint for the ideal society. Plato proposed one of the first social class systems and seemed to be an early supporter of eugenics, something the Spartans, whom he admired, actively endorsed (Robinson, Groves, & Appignanesi, 2000). Plato's highest class in his

utopian society was called the *Guardians*, and he conjectured that they would be the holders of all knowledge. Their lives were completely regulated, but they would have absolute power, and it was assumed that their complete power would make up for such a controlled and unadorned life. Plato also asserted that his Guardians should indoctrinate future Guardians to perpetuate a perfect republic (Robinson et al., 2000). Plato also suggested supervising the stories the Guardians hear as children:

Then we must first of all, it seems, supervise the storytellers. We'll select their stories whenever they are fine or beautiful, and reject them when they aren't. It will persuade nurses and mothers to tell their children, the ones we have selected, since they will shape their children's souls with stories much more than they shape their bodies by handling them. Many of the stories they tell now, however, must be thrown out. (Grube, 1974, p. 53)

The other two groups in Plato's utopia were soldiers and slaves (Grube, 1974).

He knew that the majority of the population would fall into one of these two categories. The slaves were the workers who produced goods and services for the society. The soldiers were the protectors of the society from outside invaders. The Republic would be harmonious because everyone in the society would always perform his or her allotted tasks without question (Robinson et al., 2000).

Plato was clear that in order to secure an ideal society, there must be some deception. Plato asserted that education could accomplish this deception. The lower classes, soldiers and slaves, should be educated into believing in their role in society. Plato had no objections about presenting the society as a lie that would lull these lower classes into submission. He acknowledged that only the Guardians would know the lie

and perpetuate it (Robinson et al., 2000). Controlling the knowledge of the three classes perpetuates the lie of the Republic.

Therefore, in Plato's Republic, education was not reserved only for the Guardians. Plato developed an educational plan for the republic based on a Spartan method designed to produce an army that won wars and created a stable and efficient society (Robinson et al., 2000). This educational plan would be used to give soldiers a limited, but controlled, education. Plato argued that education for the soldiers was important because of the intrinsic dangers of maintaining a professional standing army. To control his guard dogs, Plato believed the soldiers should be indoctrinated so that they would know their civic responsibilities. Traditional Greek education at the time focused on the great myths, but Plato argued that the Military and Administrative Class should instead be educated in a way that resulted in absolute loyalty to the state. The education of the soldiers would be a brainwashing of sorts to ensure their dedication.

Plato said:

I really know not how to look you in the face, or in what words to utter the audacious fiction . . . I'll be trying to convince the rulers themselves and the military, and secondarily the rest of the community that all the nurture and education we provided them happened to them in a kind of dream-world; in actual fact, they were at that time being formed and nurtured deep inside the earth. . . (Jowett & Campbell, 1894, pp. 414a-d)

Plato knew that education for the military class was vitally important because the Guardians with absolute political power would need an army with selfless dedication to maintain the state (Robinson et al., 2007). This concept was Plato's "noble lie." Sissela Bok (1978) stated: "Plato first used the noble lie for the fanciful story that might be told

to people in order to persuade them to accept class distinctions and thereby safeguard social harmony" (p. 167).

Plato's ideas of education are contrary to the role of education in today's society.

Some scholars argue that Plato's strict class system should not be taken so seriously.

Burch (2007) says:

Most anti-Platonic prejudices are traced to the assumption that the Republic was a text intended to be practically implemented. This assumption is belied, however, by the many times that Socrates repeats to his interlocutors that their dialogue is a series of conversations about a "city-in-speech." "But we weren't trying to discover these things in order to prove that it's possible for them to come into being," Socrates says. Again he queries: "So do you think that our discussion will be any less reasonable if we can't prove that it's possible to found a city that's the same as the one in theory?" (p. 115)

Burch saw the "noble lie" in a more positive context. Burch does not consider Plato's curriculum to be a manipulation of society or an attempt to permanently categorize the citizens of the Republic in a social caste. Instead, the noble lie can be helpful in creating national identity, especially in a time of war. According to Burch (2007):

Civic educators committed to a democratic vision of the future—in the US and throughout the world—would be well-served by revisiting Plato's noble lie and by re-conceptualizing it to challenge the values and ways of knowing that uphold today's nascent warrior-ethos. The stakes are high: Whether young citizens will learn to accept the legitimacy of a permanent war environment—a legitimacy derived largely from the work that noble lies do to sustain notions of American innocence and moral superiority—or whether they will learn to criticize their own myths and traditions in ways that modify their sense of what it means to be an American. (p. 116)

Plato's rigid class system seems extreme by today's standards. However, Plato's description of Socrates' method of teaching, the Socratic method, is still widely used in

classrooms today, and the idea that classical education will create a society of citizens is the basis for core curricular requirements across the U.S. And indeed, the idea of the common experience is a tenet of the *Introduction to College* course.

Rousseau: The natural education. Wokler (1995) argued that Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) exerted the most profound influence on modern European intellectual history, "perhaps even surpassing anyone else of his day" (p. 2). For Wokler, *Emile* is "the most significant work on education after Plato's *Republic*" (p. 2). Allan Bloom rated *Emile* as "one of those rare total or synoptic books. . .a book comparable to Plato's *Republic*, which it is meant to rival or supersede" (Rousseau & Bloom, 1979, pp. 3-4) and argued that Rousseau himself was at the source of a new tradition. "Whatever else Rousseau may have accomplished, he presented alternatives available to man more comprehensively and profoundly and articulated them in the form which has dominated discussion since his time" (Rousseau & Bloom, 1979, p. 19). Even renowned author and professor Peter Gay (1964) called it "probably the most influential revolutionary tract on education that we have" (p. 15).

Emile (1892) outlined a libertarian method aimed at developing the child without destroying his natural state. Rousseau maintained that "pre-societal" beings like children are morally superior because they have not yet been corrupted by society. Rousseau inspired the "back to nature myth" that spawned the Romantic era (Robinson et al., 2007). In his introduction to *Emile*, Payne (1892) said:

The ideal man was a savage isolated from human society and untainted by the leaven of civilization the ideal life was in defense of custom, freedom from their strains of other wills, and obedience to nothing but thing; the ideal religion was spontaneous to him, a direct communion with unseen powers without the intervention of creeds or priest, and artless and childish wonderment produced by natural phenomena, and a reverent fear produced by the incomprehensible; and the ideal educational experience resulting from personal contact with matter and force, and thus converted into print. (p. xxviii)

Rousseau's central idea was that man is naturally good and only by institutions did he become evil. Throughout *Emile*, Rousseau recapitulates his criticism on civilization. He suggested that the framework of society alienated man from himself and man's consciousness was shaped by a system of conventions and ideologies that paralyzed his critical thinking and made him accept social reality without question. Finally, Rousseau theorized that the uniform and unalterable rules of conduct forced man into conformist behavior and suppressed his individual personality (Rosenow, 1980).

Terence Cook (1975) summarized Rousseau's philosophy of education by saying:

Rousseau's teaching regarding education and democratic theory can be epitomized as follows. Development of moral character is the paramount goal. He would denounce modern man for failing to teach a coherent ethical code in the schools; reliance on private associations is no compensation. Rousseau wants citizens who subordinate the less inclusive interest to the more general interest while adhering to universal rules of conduct. We must master psychology to understand why actual men are unjust. In his view, there is no inherent evil in man. The viciousness we see arises when external, social causes of corruption create imbalance between desires and powers to satisfy either by excessively expanding desires or by leaving powers undeveloped or unfree. Therefore, educational reform requires looking beyond the schoolroom to those corrupting factors. If unwilling or unable to purge them from the whole society, we must abandon public education in favor of domestic education. (p. 128)

Although Rousseau believed it was society that corrupted man, he did believe that the educated child would have to rejoin society. Incorporated into *Emile* was the idea that practicality and occupational skills should be eventually worked into the child's education. He said:

In proportion as the child advances in intelligence, other important considerations oblige us to be more careful in the choice of his occupations. As soon as he comes to have sufficient knowledge of himself to conceive in what his welfare consists, as soon as he can grasp relations sufficiently extended to judge of what is best and is not best for him, from that moment he is in a condition to feel the difference between work and play, to regard the second merely as a respite from the first. Then objects of real utility may enter into his studies, and may invite him to give to them a more constant application than he gave to simple amusements. (Rousseau & Payne, 1892, p. 154)

Rousseau believed that the educated child would begin to differentiate between work and play and would be able to apply those concepts to living in an organized and corruptive society.

Philips (2008) said of Rousseau,

Out in the countryside, rather than having a set curriculum that he is forced to follow, Emile learns when some natural stimulus or innate interest motivates him—and under these conditions learning comes easily. . . Although Rousseau never intended these educational details to be taken literally as a blueprint (he saw himself as developing and illustrating the basic principles). . . over the ages these principles also have proven to be fertile soil for philosophers of education to till. (p. B7)

Instead of emphasizing the role of education in societal improvement like Plato, Rousseau focused on the education of the individual, and he defined how individual growth could benefit and improve society.

John Dewey: The democratic education. John Dewey's name receives the most recognition of any educator for his philosophy of education textbooks (Ediger, 1997). Dewey advocated pupils solving lifelike problems relevant to society, not hypothetical ideas presented in textbooks (Ediger, 1997). Dewey believed that intelligent behavior and knowledge could change the world, and therefore, education was crucial to shaping society (Osborne & Edney, 1992). Unlike Rousseau, he believed that being philosophical really meant being critically intelligent and maintaining a scientific approach to human problems. Dewey favored the successes of science and its methods of inquiry (Robinson et al., 2007). He wrote:

. . .an educated person is the person who has the power to go on and get more education. Just what do we mean by growth, by development? Some of the early educational philosophers, like Rousseau and his followers made much of the analogy of the development of a seed into the full-grown plant...there are latent capacities...will ultimately flower and bear fruit...natural development as opposed to directed growth which they regarded as artificial. (Dewey & Archambault, 1964, p. 4)

Because Dewey believed in the natural development of students, he eschewed traditional education and textbooks. He added:

There is nothing more blindly obtuse than the convention which supposes that the matter actually contained in textbooks of arithmetic, history, geography, etc., is just what will further the educational development of all children. (p. 9)

Dewey's theories encouraged more collaboration between professor and students. He asserted that the instructor should become a guide and motivator to the student, not a lecturer of information (Ediger, 1997). Dewey said:

What is true of the skills acquired in school, is true also of the knowledge gained there. The educational end and the ultimate test of the value of what is learned is its use in application and carrying on and improving the common life of all. (pp. 11-12)

Dewey viewed education as democratic, but he noted that it was important to understand the history of education. To that end, he stated:

It should never be forgotten that the background of the traditional education system is a class society and that the opportunity for instruction in certain subjects, especially literary ones and in mathematics beyond the rudiments of simple arithmetical subjects, was reserved for the wellborn and the well-to-do. Because of this fact, knowledge of these subjects became a badge of cultural superiority and social status. For many persons the possession of knowledge was a means of display, almost of showing off. Useful knowledge, on the other hand, was necessary only for those who were compelled by their class status to work for a living. A class stigma attached to it and the uselessness of knowledge for all purposes save purely personal culture was proof of its higher quality. (pp. 11-12)

For Dewey, the primary purpose of education was not to satisfy some need or goal outside of the individual's experience or educational endeavors. Instead, the primary purpose was to help the learner develop. To be sure, the consequences of this development would benefit the learner's family, community, employer, and nation. These were secondary concerns and were not the primary objective of adult learning (Harbour & Day, 2009).

Dewey believed that education for all citizens would result in a better society. He said that the school environment should develop individuals (Dewey & Archambault, 1964). Further, Dewey asserted that reading and writing were developed for the purposes of furthering human interactions and should not be treated as if they were

subjects unto themselves. Because practical application is not taught in schools, reading and writing become subjects that are kept in the school rather than becoming subjects applicable to a life outside the school (Dewey & Archambault, 1964).

Dewey differed from Plato because he focused on the individual differences between students. He believed Plato's theories "had no perception of the uniqueness of individuals" (Phillips, 2008, p. B7). He believed that student must actively participate in order to learn.

History of Higher Education

Historical context is very important in examining education. Advanced education did not spring from the minds of ancient philosophers, but rather developed based on the needs of society over time. The history of higher education is disjointed and rambling, meandering through political and religious conflicts while reflecting the changes of society. A basic understanding of the history of post-secondary education is essential to understanding the role of universities in contemporary society.

Early higher learning: The Nile River Valley, Mesopotamian Valley, and China. The early history of higher education reflects the growth of the urban cultures of the Nile River Valley, Mesopotamia, and China. Growth of population in urban areas led to the abandonment of agriculture as the sole means of earning a living and produced a need for differentiation of occupations. This differentiation led to the rise of arts and crafts to meet the demands of an increasingly complex culture and later, the emergence

of a class of learned professionals in a wide variety of fields (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

The maintenance, transmission, and refinement of these skills led to the establishment of the school, where knowledge was passed on from one generation to the next. Although institutions of higher education (in the modern sense) were lacking in the ancient cultures, higher education was definitely present in the civilizations (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

The Nile River Valley. As one of the oldest urban areas in ancient civilization, the Nile River Valley is an important part of the history of higher education. In Egypt, there was a very close association between advanced learning and the temples. The temples, and to a lesser degree, the Royal Palace, were the centers of instruction, not only in the lower school subjects like writing, recordkeeping, and introductory sciences, but also in more advanced educational pursuits (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

Higher education in the professions of architecture, sculpture, irrigation, and embalming was probably carried on outside the formal instructional framework of the great temple schools. However, because religion permeated almost every phase of Egyptian life, even those professional fields were under ecclesiastical influence (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

Mesopotamia. The rise of an urban civilization in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley was pioneered by the Sumerians (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). In Mesopotamia, there seemed to be an association between schools and temples, but the influence of the

temple was less pronounced. Specific information on the nature of higher education of the Sumerians is lacking. However, the growth of an important literary tradition and contributions to the sciences, engineering, and legal studies all would have been impossible without the presence of some form of higher education (Lucas, 1996). The tradition of scholarship, established by the Sumerians before the fall of the civilization around 1900 BCE, was preserved by subsequent cultures (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

China. From earliest times, education in China emphasized the importance of the virtuous behavior of the citizen and the preference for an educated person in the administration of state. Instead of relying on an oral tradition, the Chinese developed script, which was one of the basics of their education. The period from the eighth to the third century BCE was one of the most fruitful periods of Chinese intellectual history. There was a marked increase in literary activity and a great freedom of intellectual inquiry. This age saw the rise of the scholar-philosopher and the development of a number of important schools of thought, most importantly, Confucianism (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

In the Han Dynasty (third century BCE to third century ACE), Confucianism emerged as the most important school of thought, and literary scholarship reached new heights. Higher education consisted of instruction in Confucian thought, familiarity with other major schools of philosophy, literary criticism, study of the classical writings, and history. Upon completion of the prescribed course of study, those who planned to enter

government service were given state examinations; thus an elite group of scholars assisted the rulers in the administration of the realm (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

The Academy and the Lyceum. Plato's school, The Academy, is considered one of the first universities, and still serves as the prototype for universities today. The institution's aim was to train the minds of elite men in order to enable them to think for themselves (Osborne & Edney, 1992).

A star pupil of Plato's Academy was Aristotle, who studied at the Academy for 20 years (Osborne & Edney, 1992). Aristotle challenged Plato's idealism most directly in his approach to the study of nature (1992). In 334 BCE, he founded his own school in Athens, the Lyceum (Robinson, Groves, & Appignanesi, 2007). Aristotle was the first person to attempt classification of knowledge (Osborne & Edney, 1992). In that sense, Aristotle was the first to create academic disciplines or departments.

Aristotle's formula for political stability was a strong middle class. This middle class would create a balance between tyranny and democracy (Osborne & Edney, 1992). Aristotle believed that education was "practical wisdom" (Barker, 1962). Aristotle said:

Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g., about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to good life in general. This is shown by the fact that we credit men with the practical wisdom in some particular respect when they have calculated well with a view to some good end, which is one of those that are not the object of any art. It follows that in the general sense also the man who is capable of deliberating has practical wisdom. (Ross, 1984, pp. 142-143)

Aristotle asserted that education was an important component in the pursuit of the "good life."

The rise of Christianity. Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum continued as models for the university for many years. Only when the Roman Empire fell and Christianity rose did education begin to change significantly. The intent of universities then became to train clergy and indoctrinate its students into Christian thought (Lucas, 1996).

The medieval university. The institutions we now call universities first arose in Europe during the late Middle Ages (1150–1500). Because Western Civilization was developing rapidly, the creation of the Western institution resulted from a combination of socio-economic trends. Cobban (1992) named these trends: the revival of mercantilism, growth of cities and the urban middle class, bureaucratization of civil and church administration, as well as the 12th-century intellectual renaissance. In short, European society was becoming more complex. The primary employers, the Catholic Church, secular governments, and municipalities, required educated priests, administrators, lawyers, physicians, and clerks to operate. The universities fulfilled these demands by training students who would enter these professions (Gibson, Smith, & Ward, 1992, pp. 227-228, 231-232).

The northern European universities were patterned after the University of Paris, where there was a system of faculty governance. The southern universities were patterned after the University of Bologna, which was student-controlled. In the south,

students were older and more financially secure than their northern counterparts. However, by 1500, the student-controlled type of university structure lost popularity. Since that time, the faculty model, where the teachers run the institution, has dominated Europe. Scott (2006) characterized the medieval institution by "its teaching mission and Scholasticism; the later Middle Ages society evolved rapidly, and higher education was required for administration in the church, secular states, and municipalities, as well as for the traditional professions" (p. 5).

The teaching of undergraduates and graduate students was the focus of the medieval institution. The students were diverse and came from a variety of social classes. They were primarily older boys and men, but there were a few female students and professors in southern Europe. Most alumni went into the clergy or served the state or municipality in various ways. A few hoped for a career in academia; others became teachers in the lower schools. By the end of the Middle Ages, there were at least 80 universities operating throughout Europe (Thompson, 1934), attesting to their importance within society.

Organizationally, the medieval university is remarkably similar to the institutions of today. It was a legal corporation with the power to grant the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees; the master of arts was universally recognized as a teaching license. Other important features were curriculum, examinations, commencement, and faculties (Haskins, 1927). These features originated in Paris (e.g., the Sorbonne) and later dominated student and faculty life at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The Reformation. The role of schools remained much the same during the Reformation. There was still a strong focus on religious teaching. All the religious turmoil did not change the pedagogy of the schools. Instead, the notion of one true faith was strengthened, a development which limited academic freedom. The result was mutual intolerance and repression and nearly two centuries of constant warfare and bloodshed. During this time, maintaining universities of any sort became nearly impossible (Lucas, 1996).

Enlightenment and scientific discovery. It was only with the development of scientific discovery that academics and colleges finally became the epicenter for the advancement of human knowledge (Lucas, 1996). During the mid 1600s, tensions grew between the church and the university. Enlightenment thought, with its emphasis on natural law, universal order, and confidence in human reason, influenced the teaching methods and curricula of the universities and eroded dependence on ecclesiastical authority. The effects of the Enlightenment included an ongoing challenge to traditional Christian thought, and the founding of colleges in the American colonies reflected the powerful influences of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment (Adrian, 2003).

The first American university. Though William and Mary received the first royal charter for a university in 1693, most historians consider Harvard to be the first colonial college. Harvard was incorporated in October of 1636 in the General Court of Massachusetts. The University was established in Newtown (which was later named

Cambridge), and the untimely death of a benefactor some months later decided the question of a name for the new college.

In Harvard's earliest published rules, the aim of the institution was clear. "Everyone shall consider the main purpose of his life and studies to be to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life. . . and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom is the foundation of all sound knowledge and learning" (Lucas, 1996, p. 104). The primary goal of Harvard was to produce a well-educated clergy. That goal made the American universities' student populations slightly more diverse than their counterparts in Europe.

Colonial students. The socio-economic class restrictions that appear to have hampered the enrollments at the universities in Europe were not as large an issue in the United States. Even though colleges were shaped by aristocratic traditions of scholarship and learning, colonial colleges in the 17th century were never at the monopoly of a single economic class. The colonists found privilege suspect and poor students who aspired to the ministry were strongly encouraged to attend college. Between 1677-1703, Harvard admitted students from all segments of society, including the sons of artisans, ordinary seamen, servants, and poor farmers (Lucas, 1996).

However, college was still a rarity for the great majority of the population. In fact, it is estimated that probably no more than one in every thousand colonists attended any of the colleges in existence before 1776; fewer still completed a bachelor of arts degree (Lucas, 1996).

Harvard was founded to avoid leaving "an illiterate ministry to the churches when our present ministers shall lie in the dust" (Hofstadter & Smith, 1961, p. 83). Yet, it was a relatively short time before Harvard strayed from its orthodox Puritan roots and severed its ties to the church. At the end of the 17th century, the earliest American universities seemed to make a stronger commitment to a liberal education.

18th century and 19th century colleges in the United States. After the Revolutionary War, there was a great expansion of colleges across the United States. However, it is important to note that the colleges were still reserved mostly for young White men. There were women's colleges, but many were not true post-secondary institutions. Admission standards were low and required preparatory training was almost nonexistent. Almost all institutions lacked sufficient endowments to insure their permanent survival. This was because most of the population believed that serious scholarship lay beyond female capabilities. Likewise, co-education was virtually unheard of until 1833, when Oberlin opened its portals to both women and men (Lucas, 1996).

Not surprisingly, very few African Americans were afforded the opportunity to pursue higher learning. Throughout the southern United States, it was a crime to teach reading and writing to anyone of African American ancestry. In 1826, the first Black college graduate was awarded an A.B. degree, and there were no more than 27 others who received college degrees prior to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation (Lucas, 1996).

The 20th century American university. Higher education continued to grow in the early 20th Century, and was stimulated by the joining together of economic, social, and intellectual development that appeared for the first time in the Progressive Era and gathered more momentum after World War I. Economic expansion created a need for professional and service-oriented jobs. Determined educators sought to establish institutions that catered to the creation of an emergent white-collar middle class. After World War I, institutions of higher learning were no longer content just to educate. During this period, universities and their curricula became inextricably tied to the nation's economic structure (Levine, 1988).

Between 1950 and 1960, American educational institutions reinforced the barriers that kept all but the young people from the best homes to strengthen their numerical predominance at the "best schools" and in the most prestigious professions. This stimulated an unprecedented demand for higher education of any kind as a symbol of economic and social mobility and also created the demand for status. Because of the high demand for admission, some colleges were able to select their students for the first time. Before World War II prompted the passage of the G.I. Bill and the establishment of President Harry Truman's commission on higher education, access to American higher education remained open only to a privileged few (Levine, 1988).

Summary. Universities and curricula have been most influenced by two factors: religion and economics. From the humble beginning in the Nile River Valley to the American veterans served by the G. I. Bill, the need for a skilled work force is clear.

Likewise, the influence of the church is a constant throughout the history of the university. Both the influence of economics and the role of religion can be directly connected to Plato. The Republic stressed the need for an educated citizenry that had not only practical skills but who also shared similar beliefs and maintained loyalty to society.

History and Theory of Curriculum Debate

What should be taught at a university has been a controversy that began during Plato's time and has continued through today. Curricular reform is ongoing. This section introduces the historical context of college curriculum and the theories that apply to curriculum development.

Trivium and quadrivium. As early as the fifth century ACE, scholars divided the curriculum into the trivium and the quadrivium, forerunners of the humanities and the sciences (Francl, 2009). The terms described the seven branches of learning: the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.) The trivium and quadrivium formed the first categorization of disciplines with the study of the trivium that resulted in a Bachelor of Arts degree, while the study of the quadrivium led to the Master of Arts. The Renaissance interpreted the terms more broadly to mean all of the studies that impart a general, as opposed to a vocational, education (Machiavelli, 2007).

Sayers (1947) described the trivium and quadrivium in her book, *The Lost Tools of Learning*. She wrote:

The (medieval) syllabus was divided into two parts: the Trivium and Quadrivium. The second part- the Quadrivium- consisted of "subjects. . ." The interesting thing for us is the composition of the Trivium, which preceded the Quadrivium and was the preliminary discipline for it. It consisted of three parts: Grammar, Dialectic, and Rhetoric, in that order. . . The whole of the Trivium was in fact intended to teach the pupil the proper use of the tools of learning, before he began to apply them to "subjects" (quadrivium) at all. (p. 4)

Sayers' quotation defines the significance of the trivium and quadrivium, because this was the first time subjects were categorized, and teaching and advanced learning in each subject required some basic, introductory skills. It could be said that the trivium served as the first pre-requisite for advanced study.

Conflict over Paris/Bologna models of governance. The University of Bologna was founded in 1100. Bologna was unique because the students largely controlled the institution. Students collected tuition, paid the faculty, and determined how faculty lectures were organized. Students charged faculty members fines for violating classroom rules created by students. The faculty could also be disciplined for being absent from class and/or giving a lecture that was attended by five or fewer students. Only control of graduation and admission standards were left to the faculty (Levine, 1978).

The University of Paris was founded in 1150, from the merger of three cathedral schools, and used a faculty governance model. Paris was best known for its teachings in theology, and maintained strong religious ties. The basic arts curriculum emphasized the Latin language and grammar. There was no science or laboratory study. Also, the entire trivium was omitted. There were three primary forms of instruction: lectures by

licensed teachers or masters, informal lectures by bachelors and other non-licensed teachers, and reviews in student lodgings (Levine, 1978).

The original purpose of these medieval universities was not as a refuge for the pursuit of knowledge. Rather, universities began for the sons of the wealthy and the rising middle class for the purpose of wielding economic power and generating financial leverage against the host towns and cities. For instance, the University of Paris threatened to leave the city in 1200, and successfully extorted significant legal and economic concessions from it. The events leading up to the threats centered on the already classic type of town and gown altercation. The catalyst was when the servant of a university student was allegedly thrown out of a Paris tavern after insulting the innkeeper (Rudy, 1984). A group of students rushed into the establishment and attacked the innkeeper. A few inebriated locals responded to the innkeeper's call for help by hunting down and beating the students to death. In outrage, the University community demanded justice from the sovereign and threatened to relocate the university to another city. The King sided with the university, imprisoned the city provosts, and granted a charter that gave the students and masters of the University the privileges of clergy, freeing them from local taxes and prosecution. The town's violent attack on the students resulted in an increase in the rights and privileges of the University, and the power struggle resulted in a radical realignment of local power (Boren, 2001).

In Bologna, protection from violence was officially granted to those participating in scholarship in 1158. The University's power over Bologna was primarily economic.

In 1217, for example, the students moved the University from Bologna to a nearby city to protest the farmers' unfair economic practices and did not return until 1220, when city officials agreed to tax reform to force decreases in local costs of room and board (DeConde, 1971).

It is difficult to imagine a world where students control universities. The shift from a university run by students to faculty and administrative control was due to the carefully orchestrated re-organization of power relations within the universities by administrators and professors. In 1562, for example, Pope Pius IV donated a building to the University of Bologna. The gift was generous enough to neutralize the threat of students moving the University from the city (Boren, 2001).

Early American curriculum. Early higher education in the United States emphasized the classical curriculum, which trained the moral and mental proficiencies of young men (Urofsky, 1965). Basically, the curriculum was a combination of medieval learning: devotional studies, arts and literature, and Greek and Latin. Taken as a whole, the course of studies was regarded not as an introduction into various branches of learning, but instead, as a fixed body of absolute truths. In other words, education was a repository of knowledge to be absorbed and committed to memory, not to be criticized or questioned (Lucas, 1996).

The other colonial colleges had similar missions. Sanford (1962) said:

Harvard was founded to help the Puritans escape Anglican Oxford and Cambridge, and Yale appeared in 1701 when a group of New Haven ministers influenced in part by distrust of the liberal heresies that were coming to dominate

Harvard, established a competing college to preserve the old social and religious order in Connecticut. (p. 89)

Although most American universities were primarily focused on religious training, they also served the higher socio-economic classes, focusing on preparing them for leadership roles in the colonies.

A classical curriculum for the elite. In the 18th century, many academics decided that classical learning was essential for success in the various learned professions, like medicine or theology (Lucas, 1996). Classical training was for those who would conduct affairs of state and church.

It was not until well into the 18th century that colleges began to gain the reputation as elitist, as rising costs began to restrict college attendance to the wealthy. Even then, however, so-called charity scholarships that offered a degree of access for the non-affluent were devised to allow some poor students to work their way through college on a part-time basis (Lucas, 1996).

The Yale Report. It was not until the Yale Report (1828) that curriculum reform began to take shape in the United States. In his address at Harvard, President Francis Wayland (1855) of Brown University asked,

In a free country like our own, unembarrassed by precedents, and yet not entangled by the vested rights of by-gone ages, ought we not to originate a system of education, which shall raise to high intellectual culture the whole mass of our people? (Lucas, 1996, p. 133)

However, anything resembling a consensus of opinion on what was to be done proved difficult to achieve (Lucas, 1996).

The 1820s were a decade of lively campus discussions on the subject of curricular reform. The stakes were high. The study of Latin and Greek traditionally constituted the core and bulk of college education. It was time for a change (Pak, 2008). In September 1827, President Jeremiah Day of Yale met these seemingly irresolvable issues head-on.

The report iterated that new studies in chemistry, mineralogy, geology, political economy, and other subjects, should have been added to older courses, but the report rejected outright the criticism that colleges were not adapted to the spirit and wants of the age. The authors did not believe the dire predictions that colleges would soon disappear completely if they were not revamped to better accommodate the business characteristics of the nation (Lucas, 1996). The Yale Report (1828) stated, "The two great points to be gained in intellectual culture, are the discipline and the furniture of the mind; expanding its powers, and storing it with knowledge" (p. 8).

The report argued that undergraduate education should not attempt to include professional studies:

The great object of a collegiate education, preparatory to the study of a profession, is to give that expansion and balance of the mental powers, those liberal and comprehensive views, and those fine proportions of character, which are not to be found in [one] whose ideas are always confined to one particular channel. (p. 11)

Furthermore, they believed that it was not the purpose of an education to be confined to preparing students for jobs (Lucas, 1996). The Yale Report encouraged students to foster "padeia" or common learning (Lucas, 1996). Sloan (1971) said the report was "actually a thoughtful, responsible attempt to consider the place of the undergraduate college in the totality of the American educational scheme" (pp. 242-247).

Morrill Land Grant Act. The first land-grant act was passed in 1862. The act authorized the sale of federal lands to provide funds for the support of coeducational state colleges offering instruction in agricultural and mechanical arts without excluding sciences, classics, and military study. Every state was given 30,000 acres for each of its senators and congressional representatives. The proceeds from the sale were used to establish one or more colleges. Some states used their land-grant funds to upgrade existing colleges or high schools. Other states gave the land-grant money to existing state universities to augment their offerings, while other states established new colleges (Levine, 1978). Before the Morrill Act, there were only six colleges of agriculture, manufacturing, merchandising, or mechanics. The Morrill Act supported 69 such institutions (Krug, 1966). The curriculum at land-grant schools was shaped in response to changes in the economy and the nation.

The Land Grant act also reinvigorated the classical colleges by providing them with healthy competition, causing most of them to follow the land-grant lead in combining academic and practical study (Levine, 1978).

Cornell University is often described as the jewel of the land-grant movement (Levine, 1978). Cornell began operation in 1868 and was only partially supported by land-grant funds. The other half was a private, Ivy League institution. Cornell was the first major institution to treat the classical curriculum and work-related programs with equality, and emphasized scholarship along with a quality faculty. However, the University also had a mechanics shop and emphasized manual labor. Cornell was popular from the start, opening with 400 students. The school rejected at least 30 applicants for the first class. This was a luxury for few colleges at the time (Levine, 1978).

The public attitude toward land-grant schools was somewhere between apathetic and hostile. The students at the institution were often ill-prepared for college work. Many had only completed elementary school. Nonetheless, most educational historians identify the creation of these new multipurpose colleges as a major turning point in the development of American higher education curricula and the university system in the United States. Land grants also provided colleges on the rapidly expanding frontier, and they were also co-educational. By offering both liberal arts and a job-skills-oriented education, the comprehensive university was created (Levine, 1978).

Between 1870 and 1890, nine federal land-grant colleges were established in the South, and by 1915, that number had reached 16. Passage of the second Morrill Act in 1890 gave new impetus to the founding of public Black colleges. Money was made

available for the founding of separate institutions that were deemed to be of "like character" (Lucas, 1996, p. 170).

Elective/required course debate. The land-grant colleges offered many courses and programs of study as compared to those at the traditional liberal arts colleges. However, through the sheer expansion of academic courses and programs, it became impossible for other colleges to continue to offer their students a single common curriculum. Therefore, the elective movement swept higher education in the last third of the 19th century.

Many universities abandoned their requirements in favor of allowing students to choose more courses in their degree program (Rehnke, 1987). As a result, the definition of the educated person changed gradually and by degrees. In part, this was an adjustment to new social and work conditions, but it was also a response to new academic realities: a continually expanding body of knowledge. As well as recognizing the need to train for new vocations, educators saw the limits of the classical core study that sought to embrace all knowledge and all people. There was too much to learn and not enough room for specialized pursuits. Some specialization choice was necessary (1987).

In 1869, Harvard University President Charles Eliot announced his support for electives as a way of illuminating nontraditional subjects that had traditionally been ignored in the required curricula. Six years after this statement, most of the mandatory courses in the Harvard curriculum were required in the first year. This pattern of

courses remained until 1909, when the new president introduced a system of majors (specialization) and general education (classical) distribution requirements. After that, electives represented about one-third of the total curriculum. In 1969, according to the Carnegie Surveys Foundation, a majority of American undergraduates (53%) agreed that undergraduate education would be improved if all courses were electives. Twenty percent of the faculty also agreed that a curriculum free of requirements would facilitate the design of a self-created, individualized undergraduate education (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977).

Curricular revisions, early 1900s including the Flexner report on medical education. Medical education was a major area of reform in the early 20th century. Breakthroughs in science had improved reviews of the medical profession by the public. The rationality of approaches in medicine was well understood, and the groundwork had been laid for the scientific basis of modern medical practice, including antiseptic surgery, vaccination, and public sanitation (Beck, 2004).

In the 19th century, medical schools fell into one of three basic categories: an apprenticeship program, proprietary schools run by physicians who owned the medical college, or a university system in which students received some combination of didactic and clinical training at a university-affiliated school (Halperin, Perman, & Wilson, 2010). The American Medical Association (AMA) mandated an evaluation of proprietary and university affiliated medical schools, led by Abraham Flexner, a medical researcher. The study was divided into two parts. The first part was a review of the

historical evolution of medical teaching in America and descriptions of the minimum requirements for academics, equipment, and finances. This section also included recommendations for requiring more stringent admissions policies, mandating a required length of study, and requiring proprietary schools to affiliate to universities. Second, every medical school in the United States and Canada was surveyed. Flexner visited all the medical colleges and checked the accuracy of the claims in the school catalogs and reports to the AMA (Halperin et al., 2010).

Flexner was critical of the curriculum of faculty-led lectures that he discovered in most schools. Instead, Flexner was an advocate for active and contextual learning: "The prescribed curriculum is a staff upon which those lean who have not strength to walk alone" (Flexner & Pritchett, 1910, p. 76). He acknowledged that there was no single way to study medicine, but asserted that it was very important to learn via textbook, lecture, and hands-on experience. Flexner said, "The student no longer merely watches, listens, memorizes; he does" (p. 53).

Flexner also stated that the medical curriculum should have planned redundancies so that apparent deficiencies in one subject would be corrected in another. He was an advocate for multiple pedagogies (bedside teaching, casework, laboratory, and clinical experiences). Finally, he believed that students should also be trained in the research literature to supplement their knowledge and clinical skills (Halperin et al., 2010).

The Flexner Report was influential largely due to its timing (Halperin et al., 2010). The report was published in the middle of the Progressive Era of American politics. Created between the presidential administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the report rode the crest of public opinion seeking reform of the country's educational system, tax structure, food and drug supply, labor laws, and corporate oversight. The Flexner Report arrived at the right place and at the right time, and has been an important influence on curricular reform for 100 years, as it is still the foundation of our nation's medical schools (Halperin et al., 2010).

A return to liberal education: The Great Books movement. During the 1920s, the college curriculum moved back towards its classical roots. This is when the Great Books program at the University of Chicago was created. St. John's College followed with their Great Books program in 1937 (St. John's College, 2009). One of the founders of the Great Books program at Chicago, Mortimer Adler, philosophy professor, became a prominent voice in curriculum reform.

Adler subscribed to the belief that in a true democracy, the best education is the best education for all (Adler & Van Doren, 1988). He is best known for his work on the Padeia ('common learning') Proposal, a system of education designed for everyone in society. Adler thought that a classical, liberal arts education would give society "What we need to know and know how to do in order to enable us to earn a living, to perform the studies of citizenship, to live decent lives, and to improve ourselves and our lives" (Adler & Van Doren, 1988, p. xiii).

Adler assumed that the foundation of a great education is in the Great Books of Western Civilization. He espoused the belief that those books would introduce students to the scholarly ideas of truth, goodness, beauty, liberty, equality, and freedom. Adler insisted that his concern for great books was not elitist. He implied that education was vital for all citizens and asserted that a democracy require an educated citizenry among all members of society (Malcolm, 1999).

Allan Bloom was another proponent of the Great Books Movement, but had a very different interpretation of the goals of a classical education. Bloom said that in a democracy, the university must function to "preserve the freedom of the American mind" (1979, p. 164), and he argued that the university no longer served that function in America. He predicted that this put American society in grave danger (Edington, 1990).

Bloom claimed that there was an "aimlessness" in American higher education because colleges and universities had lost sight of their mission. Bloom thought that curriculum lacked purpose because it was not comprehensive and was devoid of any real coherence. He said of the decline of the American University:

Presidents and deans say that faculty have retreated within their disciplinary walls and care too little about the work of colleagues or the fate of the university. Parents say that their children are not learning enough, that the university is not preparing students for careers, and college is costing too much. Legislatures, hearing the parents, say that state universities are too expensive, cannot demonstrate the value that they add to the life of students, and must either reform themselves or accept greater control from the government. (Edington, 1990, p. 136)

Bloom's focus was not on the private colleges, but state universities, especially the flagship institutions that received the bulk of federal research grants and whose faculty produced much of the disciplinary literature (Edington, 1990). Bloom's comments are extremely controversial, but his overall message and influence can be seen in current literature and curricular reforms.

Post WWII vocationalism and the G. I. bill. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (popularly known as the G. I. Bill) (1947) sent 25 million veterans to approximately 2,000 institutions of higher learning at a cost of about \$5.5 billion (Olson, 1974). Surprisingly, the presidents of Harvard and the University of Chicago opposed the G. I. Bill. James Bryant Conant of Harvard hypothesized that "we may find the least capable among the war generation. . . flooding the facilities for advanced education" (1974, p. 25). Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago was equally apprehensive that "colleges and universities will find themselves converted into educational hobo jungles" (1974, p. 25).

The impact of the veterans on curricular structure and subject matter was relatively small. Major requirements and divisional requirements were somewhat weakened while electives were strengthened, but on the whole, colleges and universities converted themselves from wartime programs back to the prewar curriculum without questions being raised about the course of study (Olson, 1974). However, the veterans did leave their mark on the institutions. For many universities, the influx of veterans was their first experience with crowded classrooms, and resulted in a lower quality of

instruction (Rudolph, 1977). Unfortunately, these conditions foreshadowed the invasion of the baby boomers.

Sputnik and the return to science-based education. In 1957, the Sputnik space launch literally invaded space and the minds of the American people. Once the world realized that Sputnik was not a swindle, U.S. leaders had to explain how a seemingly technologically backward nation such as the Soviet Union could have accomplished such a feat. A surprising theory emerged: the Russians beat us into space because they had better schools. Some critics blamed themselves for allowing progressive educators to "fool the American people into believing that education can safely be left to the 'professional' educators. . . The mood of America has changed . . . I doubt we can again be silenced" (Rickover, 1963, p. 19).

Because of the panic caused by Sputnik, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 was passed. With this Act, the federal government, for the first time, subsidized higher education directly rather than through government contracts for specific research (Levine, 1988).

Before Sputnik, public support to students was limited to state funds. After the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), the primary funding from the government came from the U.S. Defense Department (Levine, 1988). The NDEA was designed to fight the cold war with "brain power rather than weaponry" (Freedman, 2004, p. B7). The act distributed federal money into stimulating the study of mathematics and science and other disciplines most relevant to the arms race (Freedman,

2004). The result was that by 1968, 62.2% of male high school graduates were going on to college. Then, in the mid-seventies, the Golden Age of higher education came to a halt. The student draft deferment was abolished, and American involvement in the Vietnam War ended; the college-age population leveled off; the country went into a recession; and the economic value of a college degree began to fall (Menand, 2001).

The Higher Education Act of 1965. President Johnson labeled the 88th Congress (1963) the "Education Congress." Strach (2009) wrote that the work of the 88th and 89th Congress far surpassed that benchmark. The major accomplishment was to pass The Higher Education Act of 1965. This law was intended "to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education" (Johnson, 1965, speech at Southwest Texas State University).

At the bill signing, President Johnson said:

This bill, which we will shortly make into law, will provide scholarships and loans and work opportunities to 1 million of that 1.3 million that did not get to go on to college. And when you, the first year, with the first bill, take care of 1 million of that 1.3 million through this legislation, we are hopeful that the State and the local governments, and the local employers and the local loan funds, can somehow take care of the other 300,000. So to thousands of young people education will be available. And it is a truism that education is no longer a luxury. Education in this day and age is a necessity. (Speech, November 8, 1965)

Johnson continued:

Where a family cannot afford that necessity:

We can now make available scholarships up to \$1,000 a year, awarded on the basis of need alone to an individual.

We can award part-time jobs so one student can earn as much as \$400 a year.

We can provide loans, free of interest and free of any payment schedule until after you graduate, to worthy, deserving, capable students.

And in my judgment, this Nation can never make a wiser or a more profitable investment anywhere.

(Speech, November 8, 1965)

Congress passed the Higher Education Act with broad bipartisan support, and it was signed into law on November 8, 1965 (Strach, 2009). Although Johnson carefully targeted the plan to low-income Americans, Congress expanded it to low- and moderate-income families, authorizing even more than Johnson had originally requested. The new law was a major part of the federal government's guarantee to open the doors of higher education facilities to low- and moderate-income students (Strach, 2009).

The 1990s: Focus on the first-year experience. One of the most popular curricular reforms of the late 1980s was the focus on ~~the~~ first-year students. First-year students had been previously relegated to large courses taught by graduate students, and in some cases had no class with fewer than 100 students until their third year. It was theorized that this marginalization of students in their first year negatively affected graduation rates and left students with negative feelings about the university (National

Resource Center for the First-year Experience, 2009). In response to those issues, the focus on the first-year student began.

The First Year Experience movement, closely associated with the University of South Carolina, was established in the early 1970s after a student protest on campus where USC then-President Thomas Jones began to think, "Why does it have to be like this?" (National Resource Center for the First-year Experience, 2009). Jones recognized that the University had failed its students in some fundamental way. Two years later, the first group of entering college students signed up for a new course, University 101, and a national movement to improve the educational experiences of first-year college students (National Resource Center for the First-year Experience, 2009) took root. The movement grew significantly in the next 20 years, and most of the programs in the Policy Center database were established in the late 1990s.

In 1998, the University of Texas established a pilot Freshman Interest Group, a program matching small groups of students in common classes and co-curricular enrichment. By the fall of 2001, nearly 40% of UT's first-year students were in these groups. A similar concept, with common residence hall features, has been in place at the University of Delaware since 2000. This focus could arise from "consumer" demand, legislative scrutiny, economic concerns that heighten worries about retention, negative media coverage of service to undergraduates, or a variety of other circumstances. The focus may be attributable to the 1998 report from the Boyer Commission on Educating

Undergraduates. The report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*, examined the development of undergraduate education in Research Universities (Katkin, 2003).

The emphasis on first-year programs included programs that could facilitate students in their quest to develop workable and supportive friendship networks. Special attention was also paid to social support, including relationships with staff (especially personal tutors) and relationships with other students in the course. Students' relationships with academic staff are an important part of their integration into academic life. Students found this early introduction to an academic staff member and a small group of students very helpful. They commented on the high standards of teaching they experienced and identified the importance of having approachable academic staff, particularly personal tutors (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005).

Present Day: The Rise of the Mission Statement

Today, universities are making an effort to be more transparent about their purpose (Fung, Graham, & Weil, 2008). Currently, most institutions have a "mission statement." Mission statements are often based on the triad mission of the university: teaching, research, and public service. Particular institutions will add to these fundamental goals their own educational, social, political, or spiritual aims (Scott, 2006). Fenske (1980) gives this definition of mission as a management concept:

mission is often used to express the aspirations, often unstated, that society has for institutions of higher education. These aspirations are consensual and represent the most general level of hopes and expectations people in general hold for colleges and universities. (pp. 178–179)

Peeke (1994) asserts that the fundamental problem with mission statements is the fact that their creation lacks involvement by the majority of the organization's members and has little impact upon the actual management of the institution. Often, the mission statement and a university's curriculum do not intersect. Oakeshott (2003) said, "A university is not a machine for achieving a particular purpose or producing a particular result; it is a manner of human activity" (p. 24).

Summary. Curriculum reform appears to be an ongoing process in American universities. In examining the major movements of curricular reform, it is important to notice the difference between those reforms that promote a skills-based, vocational education and those that focus on a classical, common education for all. Recently, it seems as if both sides of the argument are trying to be accommodated in universities.

Ralph Tyler and Curriculum Evaluation

The work of Tyler (1949) will provide a theoretical framework for this research. Ralph Tyler was formerly Professor of Education, Dean of the Division of Social Science at the University of Chicago. In 1949, he wrote a book called *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* that attempted to explain the rationale for viewing, analyzing, and interpreting the curriculum of an instructional program at an educational institution. The book asked four fundamental questions which Tyler felt must be answered before developing any curriculum or plan for instruction. The questions are:

- a. What educational purposes should the schools seek to attain?
- b. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
- c. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- d. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (Tyler, 1949, p. v)

Tyler defined education as a process of changing the behavior patterns of students. He defined behavior in the broad sense to include thinking and feeling as well as overt action. Tyler suggested that when educational objectives were clear, those objectives would bring about the kind of changes in behavior that the educational institutions sought to bring out in their students. The study of the learners themselves and the search to identify needed changes in behavior patterns of students should result in the behavioral changes that the institution seeks to produce (Tyler, 1949).

Tyler believed that many educational programs did not have a clearly defined purpose. He supposed that teachers often do not know the objective of what they are teaching. He said:

The teacher may say in effect that he aims to develop a well-educated person and that he is teaching English or social studies or some other subject because it is essential to a well-rounded education. No doubt some excellent educational work is being done by artistic teachers who do not have a clear conception of goals but do have an intuitive sense of what is good teaching and what materials are significant, what topics are worth dealing with and how to present material and develop topics effectively with students. Nevertheless, if an educational program is to be planned and its efforts for continued improvement are to be made, it is very necessary to have some conception of the goals that are being aimed at. (p. 3)

Tyler also proposed that educational planning should consider the nature of the learner. College educators need to understand the nature and personalities of undergraduate and graduate students. In 1949, he saw that students entering college were vastly different than those who entered college 15 to 20 years before that time. Current students have grown up in homes and communities quite different from that of their professors. Students are more sophisticated socially than those decades ago. Yet in other ways, they are less prepared for the rigors of college and deep learning (Feldmann, 2005).

The problem of over-specialization. Tyler stated that school and college textbooks were usually written by subject specialists and largely reflected their views. Tyler made it clear that one textbook alone would not suffice. He suggested that area specialists and the students should contribute to the curriculum's objectives and purposes. Tyler criticized the use of subject specialists on the grounds that the objectives they propose are too technical or are in other ways inappropriate for a large number of school students.

Tyler (1949) asserted that learning experiences could be meticulously selected and organized so that together they would provide the greatest cumulative effect for the students. Students and teachers would then reflect on the learning process to determine if the desired learning had taken place (Feldmann, 2005).

Tyler said schools are likely to assert in their mission that they do not accept the contemporary emphasis on materialism and that they do not believe financial, personal,

or social success are usually defined as desirable educational values. However, such a decision immediately has implications in the selection of educational values (Tyler, 1949).

Tyler believed that it should be clear that a satisfactory formulation of objectives, which indicate both the behavior aspects and the content aspects, provide clear specifications to indicate just what the educational value is (Tyler, 1949).

Simpson said:

The ideas of Ralph Tyler are as relevant today as they were fifty years ago. A competent educator at any level is one who considers the nature of the society in which he or she works, the nature of the learners to which he or she has been entrusted, and the nature of the discipline or profession in which the instruction is occurring. Once these broad goals are realized then refinement occurs by making adjustments based on philosophical and psychological considerations deemed to be important. (1999, p. 85)

Tyler suggests methods for studying these questions, although he does not attempt to answer them. Instead, he gives an explanation of the procedures by which the questions could be answered. He believed his theories constituted the rationale by which to examine problems of curriculum and instruction (Tyler, 1949).

The Tyler rationale. This idea came to be known as the *Tyler Rationale*, and launched a new era in behaviorist theory. In learning, Tyler stressed the roles of the students rather than teachers in the classroom. He concluded that if the criteria of the four-step evaluation procedure in the curriculum were met, then the curriculum could cause a change in the behavior of the students. Tyler also thought that there should be skills present after the teaching that were not there before (Feldmann, 2005).

The role of behavioral objectives that Tyler highlighted in his rationale have not always been well received . The objectives have also caused controversy by creating various performance-based or competency-based curricula that have been implemented in schools, promising mastery rates of achievement (Hlebowitsh, 2005).

Summary

To understand the evolution of the college curriculum in the United States, it is very important to have a philosophical and historical background of the system of higher education. To evaluate the curricular reforms of today, it is always important to look to the past.

Ralph Tyler's recommendations (1949) for curricular reform were geared towards administrators who could use them as a guide to see if the curriculum was effective. However, most of the time, it is the students who are most affected by curricular reform. Rarely do students get the opportunity to influence their own curriculum. How does curricular reform affect students? In chapter three, a modified version of Tyler's theory for evaluating curricula will be used, but the evaluation will come from the students. The new required first-year course at Southwest University will be the focus to determine if the course is meeting the goals of the task force. Incorporating Tyler's theory as a theoretical framework will give more insight into how students perceive the course.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study presents the perspectives of students in their first year of college and examines their experience in a new required course, the *Introduction to College*. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes the research setting, sample selection, and the data collection process. The second section describes the sources of data and the processes used to analyze the data. The study focused on a new required course that all first-year students must take. The goal was to determine how students were reacting to the course and to see if they perceived it to be an important part of their first-year experience.

Background: Curricular Reform at Southwest University

This study focused on the curricular reform at a public research institution in the Southern United States, assigned the pseudonym “Southwest University.” Southwest's curricular reform began in 2005, and was an effort to comply with statewide curricular requirements to improve the curriculum of the University. Changes to the University's core curriculum were one of the primary goals of the reform, and the addition of the *Introduction to College* course was the most high-profile change. Therefore, this study focused on the reactions of a group of students to that new course.

The components of the course. The goal of the *Introduction to College* course is to expose university students to the "broad goals and possibilities of a university education, while promoting a greater sense of intellectual community among undergraduates" Task Force, 2004). The course was envisioned as a large enrollment

course that would cover a similar theme each year and would expose undergraduate students to both a common intellectual experience and interdisciplinary learning. The suggested value of the course is that it brings first-year students together as students of the University rather than simply as students of a particular college or major. The task force's plan was that the *Introduction to College* course would be an anchor to curricular reforms by providing a common experience to all first-year students. They also believed that the course would be a major contributing factor in developing a stronger core curriculum by having clear learning outcomes and by specifying that the instructors must be permanent faculty with good teaching records.

The *Introduction to College* course also requires students to communicate effectively, both in writing and speech. The course requires students to attend group sessions and to prepare at least one formal speech. In addition, students are required to use inquiry to corroborate or refute a theory. All students are required to attend a lecture series, and students must investigate one museum, collection, library, or other resource unique to the University as part of the course.

The original model proposed by the task force was revised, and the course evolved into two different formats. One version of the course is called "large format." This version is the format that is closest to the original vision of the task force. The large format courses have at least 40 students, and are taught as large lectures. To ensure students get a small-class experience, there are small discussion sections within

each large lecture course that meet for one hour each week with a specially trained teaching assistant.

The *Introduction to College* course is also taught as a seminar with no more than 18 students. The seminar format was created because the administration of Southwest found the small course size more appealing to first-year students. Also, they were able to take an existing first-year seminar and re-envision those courses with the goals of the new *Introduction to College* course.

In 2009-10, the inaugural year of the *Introduction to College* courses, 4,000 students enrolled. In academic year 2010-11, over 9,000 students were enrolled, and this was the first academic year that all first-year students at Southwest were required to enroll in the course.

Methodological Research Design

Theoretical framework. Ralph Tyler created one of the first theories on curriculum evaluation when he presented *The Tyler Rationale* (1949). Tyler insisted that curricula needed to be organized around certain objectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Tyler theorized that objectives were important because they were the basis for planning. The objectives also represented a basis for the systematic and intelligent study of an educational program (1981).

Lincoln and Guba summarized Tyler's process for evaluation as:

1. Derive a pool of objective candidates by examining learner studies and contemporary life studies and by soliciting suggestions from content specialists.
2. Pass this pool of objective candidates through a series of three screens: philosophical, psychological, and experiential.
3. Cast the survivors of this screening process into a matrix whose rows stipulate the various areas of content involved and whose columns stipulate the behaviors of students expected in relation to those content areas. The individual cells of the matrix represent individual objectives.
4. Identify situations in which students can express the behaviors stipulated in the objectives.
5. Examine or develop the instruments capable of testing each objective. These instruments need not be paper-and-pencil tests, but they must be capable of meeting conventional standards of objectivity, reliability, and validity.
6. Apply the instruments, usually in a before-and-after paradigm, so that changes in behavior that can be imputed to the curriculum may be measured.
7. Examine the results to determine areas of strength and weakness in the curriculum.
8. Develop the test hypotheses that seem to account for the observed pattern of strengths and weaknesses.
9. Make the appropriate modifications in the curriculum and recycle the process. (pp. 4-5)

Walker and Soltis (2004) observed that the Tyler rationale is "the paradigm, the dominant model of 20th century thought about curriculum design" (p. 55). Dwight and Garrison (2003) note that "Nothing has changed in the 21st century largely because the

Tyler rationale has all the ingredients characteristic of modern structuralist thinking" (p. 699).

With this study's emphasis on the philosophy of higher education as well as the evolution of curricular reform, using Tyler's work as a theoretical framework seemed a natural choice. The research was approached using qualitative methods. Instead of specialists and instructors evaluating the curriculum, the students did the evaluations.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

- a. What do first-year students expect they should be learning in college?
- b. Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course match the stated goals of the course?
- c. Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course differ from their perceptions of their other first-year courses?

The goal of the questions was to evaluate how much of an effect the new first-year course had on the students in the sample and whether it introduced them to the "distinctive" (Task Force, p. 5) education of Southwest.

Research Setting

The research setting for this study was within a learning community of undeclared students at Southwest University. Discussions with the director of the program indicated that a group of undeclared first-year students who were enrolled in various sections of the *Introduction to College* course would be ideal candidates. The

students who had not yet declared a major were more likely to be influenced by the curriculum, according to Polkinghorne (2005), who said, "The experiential life of people is the area qualitative methods are designed to study" (p. 138). Thus, qualitative methods are superior in researching the students' experiences in the class.

The six students who participated in the journaling and interviews were selected from the learning communities of undeclared students. To recruit the students, visits were made to the learning communities, and I spoke to the students about the project. From those visits, 24 consent forms were collected, and six students completed their journals and participated in the interviews. The six students were from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Four students of the six students were female and two were male. Two students were Asian American, one was White, one was biracial, and two were Latino. Two of the students were first generation college students.

The students who participated in the survey were also from learning communities, but included students with declared majors. These students were recruited by sending an email to 45 students recommended by the first-year student office. Eighteen total students responded to the survey.

For both studies, no payment was offered for participation. For the students who participated in the interviews, lunch or snacks were provided at each meeting, but that was the only incentive.

Selection of Participants

According to Patton (1980), "human relations specialists tell us that we can never fully understand the experience of another person" (p. 98). Based on limited time and resources, Patton implies that a researcher can study "a broader range of experiences for a smaller number of people" with case interviews (p. 98). Because of the need to examine a broad range of experiences, a "purposeful sample" was selected (p. 100).

A purposeful sample is used "when one wants to learn something and come to understand something about certain cases without needing to generalize to all such cases" (Patton, p. 100).

Polkinghorne (2005) said of sampling:

Participants and documents for a qualitative study are not selected because they fulfill the representative requirements of statistical inference but because they can provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation. (p. 139)

Selection of participants for this analysis focused on a group of students who were most likely to be engaged in the curriculum due to their status as first-semester students. This type of sampling provides the most information-rich cases for in-depth analysis (Polkinghorne, 2005). Generalization of the experience for all students was not a goal of the study.

Before the purposeful sampling was chosen, the appropriate institutional review boards approved the study. The students were made aware of their rights as participants before they began the study. All of the information they provided was treated anonymously, and the researcher protected their identities. Each student was asked to create a pseudonym to protect his or her anonymity. I used the pseudonym for

interactions with the students, and referred to the students by their chosen pseudonyms in all audio recordings.

Sources of Data

There were four phases of data collection in this research design: (a) student journaling, (b) interviews, (c) survey, and (d) comparison with data collected from the university's course surveys. Each data point provided an opportunity for the student to explain his or her reaction to the *Introduction to College* course and how it affected (or did not affect) his or her first-year experience.

The six students who participated in the journaling and interviews were asked to write their goals for their first year of college and to participate in two one-on-one interviews. The first interview occurred early in their first semester, and the second interview occurred at the end of the semester or early into their second semester. The intent of this approach was to analyze the students' development throughout their first semester of college. Having the students write about their goals and intentions as well as interviewing them twice allowed me to gain valuable details about them over the course of a semester. By having three separate contacts with the students, a picture of how the *Introduction to College* course benefitted them academically and emotionally emerged. The study identified trends in the responses and surveys in order to best formulate a theory on the how the course was received.

In addition, a qualitative survey answered by 18 students was collected in order to compare the responses with the data collected through the journals and interviews. The survey was administered in February 2011. The survey included students who had taken the course in Fall 2010, Spring 2011, and two students who had not yet enrolled in the course.

To see if trends discovered in the journals, interviews, and surveys could be found in an even larger sample, the university's course surveys were used. Each semester, the university administers surveys to assess the effectiveness of the *Introduction to College* course and all other courses that the University offers. The survey results were analyzed to see if any themes that were present in the other measures could be compared with the results of the larger survey.

Phase 1: Writing goals for the first year and what it means to be a college student in journals. Once the subjects agreed to participate, they signed consent forms and chose pseudonyms. After that, students were provided with the following writing prompt: What does being a college student mean to you? To your family? To society? Do you have specific goals for this year? Please discuss your goals or discuss why you have not set goals. What do you believe is the most important skill you will need to be successful in college?

The students had one month to complete their journal entries. I made contact with them several times over the month to see if they had questions or concerns about their writing. The writing took place outside of class. The journals were collected via an

online secure survey site and stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's home computer.

Bruner (1960) said of autobiographies:

When somebody tells you his life—and that is principally what we shall be talking about—it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something unequivocally given. In social research in the end, it is a narrative achievement. There is no such thing psychologically as "life itself." At very least, it is a selective achievement of memory recall; beyond that, recounting one's life is an interpretive feat. Philosophically speaking, it is hard to imagine being a naive realist about "life itself." (p. 692)

Analyzing the students' perspectives about college life and what their goals were was the first step in connecting the research back to the research questions. Chase (2003) suggested, "When we listen carefully to the stories people tell, we learn how people as individuals and as groups make sense of their experiences and construct meanings and selves" (p. 80). By asking the students about what it means to be a college student, the research attempted to ascertain if the educational goals of the new course were in line with students' goals. Tyler (1949) asked: What educational purposes should the schools seek to attain?

By using an autobiographical narrative, this study could gauge in terms of student satisfaction how students were reacting to the new course. The autobiographic narrative also gave insight into whether the goals of the *Introduction to College* course were reflective of what the students defined as their goals for the first year.

Phase 2: Interviews. Willis (2007) said that "much of qualitative research involves forming questions and asking them. The result is often powerful stories that both inform and inspire" (p. 244). Macoby and Macoby (1954) stated that the "unstructured, nonstandardized interview is best suited for exploratory studies, while the

structured, schedule standardized interview is best suited for hypothesis testing and rigorous qualification of results" (p. 499). The student interviews provided a great deal of insight into the students' experience in the *Introduction to College* course and the influence it had (or did not have) on their education. The interviews followed up on the stories told in the journals written by the participants, and served to elicit more details of the students' college experience. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) define this approach as "narrative inquiry." They said, "narratives involve human experience, although they can be construed from a variety of sources. . .most often they are generated by individuals in the course of talking about or recording their life experiences" (p. 87).

The first interview, which lasted for one hour, focused on the student's goals as well as his/her philosophy of education. The second interview lasted 30 minutes and focused on the *Introduction to College* course. The interviews took place outside of class and were audio-recorded.

According to Polkinghorne (2005), the express purpose of interviews is to elicit a full and detailed account of experience. The interviews conducted for this study were designed to help the researcher explore the students' experiences.

During the first meetings, the students engaged with the researcher by identifying issues and themes that appeared in their journals. The format of the interviews was informative and unstructured. It was meant to be an exploration of the students' initial impressions of university life.

The second discussion, via e-mail or in person, provided the participant with the opportunity to affirm or disaffirm the themes raised in the first interview as well as offer a finer-grained analysis of his or her experience in the *Introduction to College* course and how that journey might inform his or her future progress through higher education.

Phase 3: Survey. The survey was conducted via an online survey site and only queried the students about the *Introduction to College* course. The responses were coded and compared to the information collected in the interviews and journals. The survey was an effort to compare the responses of the six participants with a larger population.

Phase 4: Course surveys. This final phase focused on data collected by the University as part of course evaluation. The survey was administered in class with the rules set forth by the Southwest course survey office. Surveys were distributed to all students enrolled in the *Introduction to College* course at the end of semester. The researcher used published results of the survey for comparison purposes. Access to the survey data is public and available on the Southwest website.

The prompts from the survey that were used were: 1) The instructor encouraged me to get to know him or her on an academic level outside of class. 2) The written assignments in this course challenged me to improve my writing skills. 3) As a result of this course, I have become more aware of the resources to help me on campus. 4) The instructor encouraged the use of campus resources to help me complete assignments. 5) The instructor challenged me to examine ideas or concepts from different perspectives.

6) The instructor helped me draw connections between different fields of study. 7) The course enhanced my ability to apply academic knowledge to real life issues. The overall course rating and the overall instructor rating were also analyzed and compared with the results from the surveys from the Liberal Arts College and the Natural Science College in order to provide a basis for comparison of how students were rating the course.

The results of the surveys were analyzed and then compared with the themes and issues that presented themselves in the students' journals and interviews.

Field notes. Electronic files have been maintained of all written correspondence between researcher and participants, including information about journaling, interview transcriptions and notes, and notes made about survey analysis. Willis said that field notes can "summarize what has happened during the observation periods. These are generally rich, or thick, descriptions of what is going on" (p. 236). For this project, field notes were an important source of contextual information.

Coding and Analysis

A modified grounded-theory approach was used for coding all data. The correspondence with participants, field notes, memos, and survey data were included in the analysis. As per Strauss and Corbin (1998), three levels of coding were employed in a traditional, grounded-theory approach to analyze qualitative data: (a) open codes, (b) axial codes, and (c) selective codes.

During the analysis, the interview transcripts were first coded using the open codes. The large codes were further broken down into smaller themes (axial codes).

Finally, the document was coded for selective themes. The selective themes examined the participants' attitudes towards being a college student.

The open codes. Ralph Tyler (1949) asked four fundamental questions in order to evaluate curriculum: (a) What educational purposes should the schools seek to attain? (b) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? (c) How can these educational experiences be effectively organized? (d) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? These questions informed the first level of coding and were assigned open codes. The results of the open coding create selective codes.

The axial codes. These open codes developed from Tyler's theory influenced the content analysis of the journals, interview transcripts, and survey data from which more focused themes emerged in what Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to as axial coding.

The selective codes. The final selective coding identified aspects of college life that the participants demonstrated through their journals and interviews. These entries represented the students' idea of what it means to be a college student. The selective codes represented the individual experiences presented in their interviews and journals.

Triangulation of the Data

As an exploratory study, I used three types of interpretive analysis to develop themes from the journals. The overarching analysis allowed the researcher to explore what the students' experience with the *Introduction to College* course was. The results

of the data analysis shaped the questions asked in the interviews the overall themes examined in the second phase of the research, and the first round of interviews with the students.

In the third phase, more complex themes from the first interviews were explored in the final interviews, surveys, and course surveys. This overarching analysis validated the codes that were used for the interviews and journals. The comparison with the survey and course survey served to find trends that had surfaced in the other measures.

Denzin (1978) described triangulation as:

. . .the multiple-paths-to-theory approach. If it is appropriately employed, it will yield firmly grounded formal theory of wide relevance. Instead of formulating single empirical definitions of key concepts, the investigator works with several different empirical definitions of his central concepts. (p. 74)

Using the students' responses to formulate the codes ultimately shaped the analysis and provided different ways to examine the key concepts that emerge from the data. The four phases of analysis provided the opportunity to create the redundancy necessary to ensure triangulation.

Assumptions and Limitations

Having the primary data collection with six participants in a population of over 7,000 first-year students and 2,500 transfer students might appear to limit the ability to translate the subjects' experiences with the *Introduction to College* course to not only the wider population of first-year students, but also to first-year students nationwide.

Generalization of experience was not the goal of this study. However, while the

individual stories expressed in the interviews and journals cannot be applied to every first-year student, the themes that came from the analysis of the surveys (especially when combined with the themes from the interviews and journals) can be used at the program level to begin conversations regarding the merits of curricular reform and how those reforms are influencing or not influencing students. In this case, this exploratory protocol was designed to give curriculum specialists insight into which reforms might make a difference to students and which reforms seem to have little or no effect.

Summary

This chapter presented Tyler's model, a classic theory of curriculum assessment, as the theoretical framework for students to assess a course in their required first-year college curriculum. The four phases of research were designed to capture the students' transitions into becoming college students and to determine if the first-year course is an integral part of that transition.

In summary, this chapter presented the research design, collection procedures, and data analysis processes used to examine and understand how students experience the new required first-year course. This chapter provided background information on the study, a description of the methodological analyses used, sample and site selection protocols, and validity information.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Chapter four presents the findings from the study by presenting the words of the students in their own voices. Whenever possible, the students' writings are presented just as they wrote in their own words, and the quotations from the interviews are direct quotations, so that their style of speech and inflections come through on the page.

The Journals

In this section, the journals of the six student participants, Fry, Johan Julius, Kay, KiKe, Shiloh, and Villia, are presented. The purpose of the journals was to examine the goals each student had for his or her first year in college. Therefore, since collecting the data in the first two months of school was crucial, the journals were kept in September and October. Understanding the students' ideas about what college should be, what they should be learning, and why that learning was important was the purpose of the questions. For the journals, the students were asked to write about the following questions:

- What does being a college student mean to you? To your family? To society?
- Do you have specific goals for this year? Please discuss your goals or discuss why you have not set goals.
- What is your favorite course (so far) this semester? Why? What are you learning in this course that you believe will be valuable in your life after college?
- What do you believe is the most important skill you will need to be successful in college?

Most of the journals submitted were fairly brief in length. However, the exercise was informative and set the tone for all of the research presented in the study. The students' responses were similar, and each participant believed his or her program of courses (curriculum) played a crucial role in his or her college experience.

Before the students submitted the journals, they were asked to select pseudonyms for themselves, and if they mentioned the names of family members, instructors, or administrators at Southwest University, those names were changed to aliases. The setting for the research, a large research university in the south, is referred to as Southwest University to further protect against identification.

What does being a college student mean to you? Each student reflected a sense of hopefulness and viewed college as a promise for a life with more options and higher status. The participant with the pseudonym "Fry" wrote:

When I think of college, I envision opportunity. Is college the only route to success, no, but it does make the process easier. Each time the word college is spoken, there are usually two reactions that I see quite often in society. There is the stunned respect and there is the joyful congrats. As to why that is I can't say. I don't want to speak for society. But if I can see anything, it is that society holds college as something great. I can't say I've always envisioned myself going to college; it was more of a recent idea. A former close friend of mine was really the inspiration behind it. She lived a great life. In my point of view she was perfection. I always wanted something better for myself, but it wasn't really until I saw a manifestation of what it was that I wanted in life that caused me to become inspired to take my education further.

In addition to the promise of "bettering" oneself, some of the students mentioned that college was an opportunity to experience independence and growth. KiKe said:

Well, being a college student means to me, that I am an adult in search of furthering my education and trying to obtain as much knowledge as possible. It means that I am willing to go above and beyond to achieve the goals I have in life. I feel that being a college student also means that I have many responsibilities as an independent individual. I am responsible for my schoolwork, social life, and health while being away at college. Being a college student means to me that I have accepted the challenge of competing for a higher paying job and this is a huge step toward achieving my goal.

Participant Johan Julius sees college as a purely individual experience. He said, "It is an opportunity to prove your might, a chance to show how hard you are willing to work to get what you want."

Each of the student participants approached the meaning of college with an inspiring hopefulness and a closely held conviction that the experience would be good for them. They mentioned individual growth, societal status and respect, and the promise of a better life. No student mentioned specific courses or outlined specific knowledge that needed to be learned in college. In fact, academics were not mentioned at all in their definition of college. Based on the first prompt in the journals, it seems that college has taken on an almost mythical status in the life of these students.

What does being a college student mean to your family? Fry said of his family:

To my family, college is a mystery. From the very start it was clear that my family couldn't really help me. They didn't know what college was or even how to get the process started. To my family college is a good thing, but they are content with where they are at and they don't see college as something that deserves the drive that I give it.

Fry's response is certainly full of hope and optimism, but it can be inferred that college is a still bit of a "mystery" to him as well. Fry sees college as a promise for a better life even though he never mentions the details of what a better life would mean to him or how college would deliver it. As indicated in a previous quotation, Fry mentioned his friend and his admiration of her and that he wants to model his life after hers. This is the inspiration that made him interested in higher education. However, he does not mention any subject matter, courses, or academic experience that motivated him to attend college.

To Villia, the idea of college was much more practical. She said:

To my family, I was going to college regardless. We all had to adjust to me being 7 hours away from home. I think college means to society that someone values education enough that they go away to college.

Shiloh explained that her family was even more practical and that they see college as necessary for financial success. She said:

My family believes it's important to establish a good education and going to college is the way to get a successful career.

What does being a college student mean to society? The final prompt of this question asked for an opinion of what education means in our society. This question yielded many similar answers among the students where they cited class mobility, success in general, and financial success as a few of the ways society rewards college graduates.

KiKe took a lofty view and maintained that his presence in college would help to break the stereotype of minority students in higher education. He said:

To society, my being a college student means that I am determined to be above the stereotype of minorities not being able to attend college. It shows to my race that I am willing to represent them well in society by attending college, something that before was not possible, nor attainable, and now I am here proving that we can do it! To society it means that I want to acquire as much knowledge needed to impact society and the world in a positive way. It means that I am a responsible, determined, goal-setting individual with the highest aspirations to rise to the top through the most challenging means, attending college.

Shiloh said:

...society views you differently if you only have a high school diploma, it's also good to get a degree and strive to be somebody in this world by going to school.

Kay said:

To society, depending on where you look or ask around, a college student can mean many different things. From my background, a college student means getting a degree to earn more money in the long run while going through struggles.

From the journals, all the student participants believed that the decision to go to college and earn a degree was a valuable, even vital, exercise necessary to succeed in society. The students' answers reflected differences in backgrounds and in parental attitudes. However, even though there were different responses supplied by the students for the meaning of college, all were positive.

The goal of these journals was to begin with broad questions and then narrow to specific questions that would ask about the students' experiences with courses and course material. In the first question, none of the students mentioned specific academic courses in their definition of what the college experience means. To the students, it

seemed that the act of being admitted to and then successfully completing college would allow them to reap the benefits they describe in the answers contained in the journals.

Do you have specific goals for this year? Please discuss your goals or discuss why you have not set goals. One of the primary goals for the *Introduction to College* course was to assist students in finding an area of study and to help them formulate academic goals. This question examines whether or not the students had set their own goals when they entered the institution and if they did not, the question asks, "Why?" The idea of goals and the influence of the *Introduction to College* course on those goals were examined in the interviews conducted with all the participants.

All six students had set clear and specific goals for themselves, but the group was split into two areas. Half the group simply wanted to make good grades. The other half hoped to find an area of study and declare a major. These goals are not surprising, because all the students in the study were undeclared (had not yet selected a major) and were enrolled in University College, an entity of Southwest University where all students with no major enroll until they have successfully completed 60 credit hours.

Some of the participants were enrolled in the University College because they wanted the freedom to explore different courses of study. Others were there because they were not admitted into the degree plan and major of their choice. It is important to understand these circumstances, which could explain their focus on academic success, using the *Introduction to College* course as a way to explore academic options.

Villia is on a journey of self-exploration. She came to college thinking she knew what she wanted to major in, but after not gaining admission to that program has decided to think more broadly. She said:

This year, I want to figure out what I'm going to major in. I want to do something with computers. I'm not sure which major will incorporate that. I tried out for a certain college within this university that had selective admission, but didn't make it; and now I don't really want to be that major anymore. I hope to make some new friends. I've made a couple, but I want to make more.

Kay's answer expressed a desire for self-exploration, academic exploration, and a focus on health and wellness. She said:

For this year, I really want to figure out who I am and my purpose. There are a lot of things I want! I want to find a major that I see that fits. I want to make new friendships and continue old ones. I want to beat the freshmen 15! I want to succeed in, if not all, then most things I attempt. I want to be satisfied with my choices and decisions.

The most striking answer came from Fry, who has clear academic goals but talked about much more. Fry represents the new college student. He is someone who is not only trying to succeed academically but also supports himself financially. He has a full-time job, a tenuous living situation, and a great deal of responsibility to his family, who have high hopes for him to succeed in college. He says:

. . . I have many goals for this year. For one, it is to belong to a school. Another is to be able to carry my own weight since I'm living life for my own now. I need to keep and maintain a job to live at the apartment. . . It will be difficult but I guess to summarize my goals, I want to live my current life with a healthy balance of school, work, maintaining whatever little standard of living I have, and to take my health successes even further. Deep down inside I know I've always wanted to get into the Art School. Art is something that I live for, it's really the only thing in this world that I never get tired of. I am always wanting to experience new art, learning how to make it, and I always want to understand why things work and why they don't. I need to keep up with my job at

McDonald's, at least for now until I find something better. I need to be able to pay rent and bills. I won't survive if I don't. I'm starting to see just how hard it is to try to live responsibly for yourself. There are times where I have to stretch out food or wear dirty clothes because I don't have gas or the quarters to wash my clothing. I wish I didn't have to work while I was at school, I feel like I could do better in my classes if I didn't work. It all gets really stressful but I need to. I'm hoping to find a better job that is art oriented. That would be a dream. I am living with my Uncle who is going through a lot of financial issues and his roommate who is worse off than my Uncle. Being homeless is a real possibility at this moment. I've been thinking about maybe finding student roommates, I feel like it will make my life easier that way. I don't feel comfortable at this apartment. I'd rather be out and about than at the apartment. I've made tremendous progress, went from 250 pounds and am now down to 205. I have massive goals to achieve when it comes to my body. I am a firm believer in "Strong mind, strong body, strong life." I want to be able to run marathons and to feel no limitations in the things I could do.

The goals of the students indicated that academic success is foremost on their minds. However, there is more to these students than simply the desire to learn. They seek overall success. They want to be intellectually fulfilled, healthy in mind and body, and able to prove to themselves that they deserve to be in college. Empowering students in this way was one goal of the *Introduction to College* course.

What is your favorite course (so far) this semester? Why? What are you learning in this course that you believe will be valuable in your life after college?

This question addresses how students are experiencing the first-year curriculum. At the time the journals were collected, four of the six participants were taking the *Introduction to College* course and the other two were planning to take the course in the spring semester. Since the goals of the course (major exploration, self-discovery, knowledge of campus resources), also seemed to align with the goals of the students, it was important

to compare the answers of the students enrolled in the course with those who are postponing the course until the spring semester.

The participants who took the course in Fall 2010 were Kay, Johan Julius, KiKe, and Villia. Both Kay and KiKe mentioned the *Introduction to College* course as a favorite. KiKe said:

So far, my favorite course would have to be [*Introduction to College*]. I like it because it's interesting how the books we read can be analyzed to the nitty gritty. There are things in the books I would have never noticed if it was not for this course. The professor is awesome because he's so knowledgeable! I believe the techniques on how to analyze certain words or phrases or any piece of information in general will be extremely beneficial to me in business. I will be able to decode the most important pieces of information and have a detailed mind-set since I have to pay close attention to all aspects of the literary work.

From this answer, it seemed that KiKe is having a new and enriching intellectual experience. His observation that he was surprised at the skill and knowledge level of his instructor whose own cultural experience is different from the subject he is teaching would be in line with the goal of the task force that students learn subjects from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. He also indicated that he has learned analytical skills that he believed he could apply to other coursework and to a career in business.

Kay said:

I don't necessarily have a favorite course so far. I really enjoy my [*Introduction to College*] and [*Introduction to Communication*] classes. My *Introduction to College* is [about education], with Dr. X. I think I like that class because I feel comfortable being in there with a lot of "1st timers." The professor actually keeps my interest seeing how he has shown us clips and is willing to having us students engage with his lectures. I like the [Communication] class because it's actually keeping my attention. I am really into the media as it is now, seeing how all my friends back home know I follow all that "garbage media" like PerezHilton.com and TMZ. I believe these courses are teaching me things that will temporarily

affect me. I feel like it's good to know the history of schools for now so I can pass the class but it probably won't be too useful in the future. Maybe if I'm a teacher, specifically in history, then this class would help but other than that I don't see the long term affects.

Kay mentioned that the reason she enjoyed both the *Introduction to College* course and her communication course is because both courses "keep her interest."

Another goal of the *Introduction to College* course is to present the material in a way that students can apply it to the contemporary issues they face. This seemed to apply to what Kay was experiencing in her courses, but only in a limited way. She liked the information she was learning, but believed it will only go so far. She believed the material presented in the *Introduction to College* course would only be useful to her if she selects a specific career.

Johan Julius did not mention the *Introduction to College* course as a favorite. He said:

I am really enjoying my computer programming class, this is because I have always been a tech-maniac and I really enjoy seeing how complex machines work. I believe this is important to know as our world becomes ever more computerized

Johan is an aspiring engineer. It will be important to examine the subject matter of his *Introduction to College* course to see if his affinity for technical courses hampered his ability to see the usefulness of nontechnical courses and if that was what influenced his decision not to mention the *Introduction to College* course.

Villia said, "So far my favorite classes are my electives: Choir and Theatre and Dance. I have always been a more creative person, so I like the Arts."

Villia's favorite courses were in her comfort zone, and even though she stated earlier in the journal that she had decided against a major in theatre, it appears that singing and the fine arts will still be part of her area of academic interest.

The participants who were not enrolled in an *Introduction to College* course at the time of the journals are Shiloh and Fry. Fry listed courses that were geared to an area of study that interests him: art. Fry said:

Contemporary Art is the greatest class I've ever taken so far. From kindergarten to now, this course is at the top. I love art, and being able to learn about a style of painting that I hold so dear and personal only makes it better. I'm learning a lot in the course. But really it's more of a personal gain. It motivates me to want to get into the Fine Arts School more.

This course was fulfilling some of the goals the *Introduction to College* course would also fill for Fry. The course taught him about an area of study where he had great personal interest. It is also helped him select a major, as it solidified his interest in art.

Only Shiloh chose a course outside her area of interest as her favorite. She said:

I'm not a history person but I'm a strong believer of good teachers. So if I have a good teacher then I'll most likely like that class. That's the case of my history course. He makes history less boring and more interactive. He even said, "I want to make history interesting for you so you can learn more about it." I look forward to his class.

Shiloh cited the teaching as being the reason she enjoyed the course. Her interest has nothing to do with what she was learning, but rather how she was being taught. Like Kay, she mentioned how the professor kept the course interesting and interacted with the students. This relationship with the professor was also mentioned in KiKe's response. These answers indicated that in many cases, while subject matter was important to the

students, good teaching and a clear relationship of the material and how it intersected with their lives often determined how they felt about a course.

What do you believe is the most important skill you will need to be successful in college? This question asked the student to identify specific skills that they believed would be needed to be successful in college. The *Introduction to College* course strives to teach first-year students how *to be college students* and concentrates on the developmental skills that will help them make the transition from high school. The course focuses on specific academic skills such as writing and oral presentations as the primary ways for the students to become successful in college. According to the journal responses to this question, the students have a different idea of the goals needed to be successful in college.

Shiloh, Villia, and Kay mentioned time management and avoiding procrastination. Villia said, "Not procrastinating! Finding time to study when it seems like there is none. Also, being able to balance friends, school work, church, etc." Shiloh expressed it as, "I think being independent and having time management skills are the key attributes in being successful in college." The idea of work/life balance figured prominently in the responses from the female students in the study.

For Fry, Johan Julius, and KiKe, goals, determination, and a good work ethic were what they believed would determine success in college. KiKe wrote:

The most important skill will definitely be determination along with execution of my goals. I first have to be determined and most importantly execute whatever it is I am determined to do, graduate from college and earn a degree.

Fry's answer reflected the hardships he experienced as a college student and how being focused will help him be successful. He wrote:

How to utilize drive is the most important skill. There are times where it seems impossible and pointless but you have to be able to break free from those thoughts and keep battling the uphill fight.

All the students seem focused on what they consider the endgame: the degree. They are working for that credential. They were not approaching college as a chance to gain specific skills in certain areas but rather as a challenge to get a degree that they perceive will alter their lives for the better. None of the students mentioned any of the skills the task force had outlined as necessary to be a successful college student. They were focused on grades. Good grades equal success, and their objective was to rise to the challenge to achieve the good grades that will earn them their degree.

Summary of Journals

The journals brought some clarity to what these six students expected from their college experience. All six were very focused on academic success. However, the meaning of academic success was different for them than what the task force has designed for the *Introduction to College* course. Of the four students taking the course, two mentioned it as a favorite. However, the reasons they cited for the course being their favorite had more to do with the instructor's teaching and their level of engagement with the material than the goals that are unique to the course. In fact, the two students who had not taken the course gave almost identical reasons as to why they enjoyed their favorite courses.

The journals were collected within the first month of the students' first semester at the University. It was interesting to examine how their goals and perceptions continued to take shape as they went through the one-on-one interviews for this study.

The Interviews

First interviews. The first interview with the subjects took place during the first week of October. This was a month after their journals were collected. The purpose of the first interview was twofold. The first goal was to follow up on the journals by getting more details and more clarification. The second goal was to use Tyler's methods to have the students evaluate what they were experiencing in their courses in the first semester. The questions asked of all the students were:

- What is your favorite course and why? What information in that course is interesting?
- What is your least favorite course and why?
- What do you want to know by the time you graduate? Do you feel like the content in your courses is helping you to achieve what you want to learn?
- What do you think the purpose of going to college is?
- What experiences do you think the universities should provide?

The interviews were conducted in an informal atmosphere. Food was served at each meeting in an effort to make the participants comfortable with the interviewer. Before each interview began, confidentiality was discussed and the participants were reminded that they were free to end their participation in the project at any time.

Because of the informal nature of each interview, the questions were not always asked of the participants in the same order. The same questions were always asked, but were shifted to assist with the conversational nature of the interview. The interviews ranged in length from 40-65 minutes.

What is your favorite class and why? What information in that course makes it interesting? This question is taken directly from the journal prompt. The purpose of this question was to follow up on the students' answers to see if anything had changed in the month after the journal was completed. All the students except Kay still favored the classes they had mentioned in the journal, but all gave more detail on why they were enjoying the course. Kay had originally mentioned her *Introduction to College* course as one of her favorites, but in her answer to the first question she only mentioned her *Communication* course. When asked why the *Introduction to College* course had fallen out of favor, she said:

Well, the titles don't do the class justice. Like whenever I read [the title], I was like okay...I figured both my parents were teachers. . .I figured how hard can it be? And I get in there and it's more like the history of it, which I didn't mind the history of it but there's a point of going too far in the history. I'm okay with a couple years before I was born but not way back.

A follow-up question got more to the heart of the issue. The course focused on race issues and Kay, who is not White, was starting to feel uncomfortable.

They mainly focus on race. I thought it was just gonna be kinda like not really compare the public education history with the history of everybody in the class but I thought it was gonna be like the different structures of it and there it's a lot about race. I think we're, uh, talking about discrimination with immigrants and things like that and I'm like okay, it's okay but I think he's trying to design his course to keep us interested but it's not really well, it's not keeping my interest.

But the professor is really good, I like how he lectures but he just uses really big words.

We were working on that and some groups they were talking about W.E.B. DuBois how he feels and all that stuff. It's kinda awkward 'cause we're all different but I really stand out. I'm the only [underrepresented] person in there and when [the TA] says things, I'm like that's not really...you can't really make that generalization for everyone...The school I went to is mainly White so I don't have an insight that [the TA] was looking for but to a point. . .but [the TA] just made an insight...made a generalization and I was like, okay, I'm ready to leave. And [the TA]. . .I guess she travels a lot and so any time I feel like instead of trying to get on our level and understanding us, she really tries to take that "teacher" role. I think this guy was presenting and he did not know how to pronounce the word that was in Spanish so he said it just like any other person would say it and she's trying to correct him and she's using the accent and we're kinda like okay, can you let him present?

I mean I know she doesn't know our names and I have my name written on the top of the paper and I know that she kind of glanced over and then said how about you, Kay? I was like okay. Maybe she was just uncomfortable or she wasn't sure.

Kay's answer gave a great deal of insight into the reason why her *Introduction to College* course had dropped off of her list of favorites. In this answer, Kay outlines how she believes she was targeted and asked to represent the experience of the underrepresented minority group. Kay believed that she was labeled in the course and that she does not fit that label.

The instructor of the course alienated her by using a number of words she did not understand. She elaborated on his lectures by saying, "Cause my [*Introduction to College*] professor, he goes on and on [about] all of our readings. I feel like I have to use the dictionary to understand half of it."

Then she was further alienated by a teaching assistant who did not know her name but who, Kay believed, stereotyped her as having a certain kind of background and experience based on her skin color. Kay felt stigmatized and put up as an example in a course that by definition was supposed to have the opposite effect. Instead of making Kay feel that diversity was embraced, the course made Kay feel that she was an outsider who had a different kind of experience from all of her other classmates. She was made to feel that she "stood out" in a negative way.

Fry, who did not take the *Introduction to College* course in the fall, elaborated on why *Contemporary Art* was his favorite course:

I've always been heavily into art. I like learning where everything comes from. I also like the vibe in the room. Everyone is really mellow, really chill, not so intensely focused.

When asked to elaborate on what he meant by "mellow" and "really chill," Fry explained that he believed that because students came into the class with some prior knowledge of the subject matter, participation and engagement was increased in the course.

I like to think everyone is in the class because they like [paintings], but I think they thought it would be a blow-off class. I think everyone is calm and mellow because of common interest [about the subject matter].

[The class] is really relaxing... Everyone that came into the class knew something.

Fry also was very complimentary of the professor. He said:

[The professor] is really good... She hits on strong points and how [art] progressed. She's really lenient. She gave a two-week extension [on an assignment]... I see [that] more or less as positive.

Fry seemed to like this course for the same reason Kay liked her communication course. In both cases, the students believed they have some connection to the material and each thought that he or she could make a contribution to the course. This was a common theme for the students when they discussed what made a course successful for them.

Johan Julius elaborated on what he said in his journal about his computer course:

I have always been really interested in how computers work so it's really interesting to see what goes on behind the scenes. I've had computers all around me, have always played video games, have always wondered how they worked. . . [The class] is a little over a hundred students. It's very hands-on. She doesn't discuss a lot of the arithmetic behind it. She just describes the problem and tells us to do it. Everybody does it and then we discuss it. I like it because, primarily, there is no memorizing. . . The class is set up with basically a lecture board with chalk. It's fun.

Johan's response reflected the same points that Kay and Fry mentioned in their answers. Johan enjoyed this course because he could relate the material to something in his own life. He has always loved computers and is interested to learn more about how they work. Even though the course was taught in a very traditional way, the material came through. Johan also indicated that the enthusiasm and teaching style of the instructor contributed a great deal to his enjoyment of the course.

Shiloh's answer pleaded an even stronger case that a good teacher is vital in getting students engaged in the material. In her journal, Shiloh mentioned that history, a subject she had not enjoyed in high school, was her favorite course. In the interview, she said:

So far, I really like history. It's still my favorite class. The professor is really like interactive and I don't feel like there's a dull moment in that class. He also mentioned that he was at the White House and he saw Obama. He has all these cool stories that he says in class that really catch my attention. So, I feel like, before I really hated history and now, that I am taking this class, I feel like I am actually enjoying it and I'm excited to learn about it. So the fact that he's really fun and a good speaker helps.

KiKe also cited that his instructor was the primary reason that his *Introduction to College* course was his favorite. KiKe said that the professor's passion for the texts had taught him to read "attentively." The professor gave a very "detail-oriented" test and the way KiKe needed to prepare for the test, he believed would help him in other courses.

Villia also liked her *Introduction to Communication* course (this is the same course Kay mentioned) because there were "cool professors" and she is interested in the subject. She is interested in advertising and believes the course helps to "connect ideas" and "see things differently."

The themes of the answers given by the students when asked to name their favorite course are strong and consistent. All the students liked a course where the professor was engaged and passionate. Five of the six students said they also had a personal interest in the subject matter and that made the material more tangible and applicable to their everyday lives. Only Shiloh mentioned that she did not like history before taking the course in her first semester of college.

Only KiKe mentioned his *Introduction to College* course as his favorite. The primary reason was the professor, who had a strong impact on KiKe.

What is your least favorite class and why? This question was important as a baseline for the participants. Based on the first question and the journals, information can be collected about what is important to them in a course. However, it is also very important to find out what kinds of issues alienate them from a course. The participants gave predictable answers. The courses they disliked were in direct opposition to the courses they liked. In the courses they disliked, they cited uninteresting material and a disengaged professor.

KiKe said:

[I am not enjoying] science. I am not a math person at all. If I could, I would just avoid it. Actually, I kind of struggled with it in high school. It's not my strongest subject. I'd rather do calculus than [my science course].

I think [my dislike of it] has to do with both [the professor and the subject matter]. Sometimes it's hard to understand what the professor really means. It's hard to understand his point.

KiKe also mentioned a negative experience with an advanced math course where the instructor and an academic advisor made the difference in him sticking with the course.

About the course he said:

I was not doing well and dropped it. I was intimidated [by the] whole new environment and was intimidated by the professor. I was going to change my major but I talked to an academic advisor and he talked to me and generally told me sometimes we need to do things we don't want to do but have to do to achieve our goals. I went and got [the course] back. I really like this professor and I am doing really good in the class.

[The new professor] made it a more welcoming environment. Like the first day, [the professor in his previous class] was like, "If you are not good at math, you can't be in this class so get your act together." This professor is more relaxed. She explains things more clearly. I felt comfortable and ready to learn.

The environment KiKe experienced in this new section of the course made a difference for him. He describes himself as a non-math person, but when paired with a compassionate instructor who used patience when explaining the material, he found himself enjoying the course.

Fry had similarly negative things to say about his math course:

Calculus is my biggest fear. I got my first test grade and now it's a downward spiral. My professor is kind of angry when she teaches. [One] student asked about the location of the exam. As soon as she said this she told him to check his syllabus and stormed off. Everyone was scared. It was like thunder.

I sit in the front to focus on it. . .but half the time I am not following her. I learn from the TA. . .After the first test came out, the class average was failing. Since then, I have noticed she is calmer [when she teaches].

I've always been horrible at math. My high school teacher, he was such a cool guy. I liked the class because I knew him personally. It got to the point where I could tease him [and] he could tease me. He made the class easier because he was easier to approach.

Fry had a very similar experience to KiKe's. When Fry connected with the instructor and got to know him personally, he was better able to understand the course material. The personal connection made all the difference in both of these cases.

Kay also mentioned the lack of connection with her instructor as the primary reason for disliking a course:

The ones that I don't really enjoy are kinda like a waste of time. I was just in Astronomy, and I really just felt like turning in my paper and leaving. But—It's how the information is presented. For one test, it seems like [the professors] are so into it, they don't know how to relay the information back. All through public education, kindergarten through 12th grade, it's like the teachers are kind of formatted a certain way and here, they know it, they love it but they don't know how to teach it, if that makes sense. So maybe it's that they are overspecialized

so it can't translate. They want to get you excited about it as much as they are but it's not [working].

Kay mentions the idea of overspecialization, which is a key concept to this research. One of the goals of the *Introduction to College* course was to pull the course material out of departmental silos to make it more tangible to students. Kay indicated with this comment that in her science course, the professor was enthusiastic, but could not make the material relevant to her students.

Johan Julius mentioned his *Introduction to College* course as his least favorite:

The *Introduction to College* course is my least favorite course mostly because I just don't like writing, to be honest. It's a Political Science course. To be honest, I don't dislike much else about the course. I like the kind of thoughts behind it. It's a lot of, you know, getting to examine the problems of the world and how you can solve them and I just, I don't know, I 'm not really a big guy on writing so that's why I don't like it.

It's about two papers a week, sometimes three but they are short. They are only like 200-300 words. They are more essays, just quick essays; not really long papers with research. I am better at vocalizing my opinions than I am writing [them] down on paper, I guess. I wish I had more of a chance to talk in class.

The [Teaching Assistant-led] discussion sections of the course are alright but sometimes I feel they are a little quiet just because it's. . . Sometimes I feel like the questions are kind of rhetorical 'cause everybody kind of knows it and nobody kind of wants to be the person to sound like a smart ass or something like that.

I think the questions [asked of us] could be a little higher on the intellectual level, myself. For some people, I mean there's probably other people [who] are fine with the intellectual level they are at. . . [People don't talk in there because] we're all thinking the same answer, it's just nobody kind of wants to say it out [loud] and be the person to, you know, always answer the question. The TA is a nice person. She's kind of quiet but. . . I don't know if there's much of a relationship really there. She kind of asks a question and then it's kind of dead silence and she'll kind of whisper something else and then it's dead silence for a little bit longer and then it's just kind of drawing out the process. Sometimes she

almost leads herself into some of those questions. She kind of explains what's going on and then asks the question, "What's going on?" Everybody is kind of sitting there going, "You kind of just told us."

Johan Julius also mentioned a lack of connection between student and instructor.

It was very interesting that he did not mention the professor for the course at all. She seemed to play no role in his opinion of the course. His description of the TA mirrored what the other participants have said. But in this case, the material was made too easy for the students to engage. Johan believed that the students chose not to participate in class because they would look like they were showing off.

Villia went further with her answer. She mentioned that she finds the topic of her *Introduction to College* course interesting but that she did not like her professor.

She said:

I am taking an *Introduction to College* course on the brain. I think it's like an interesting course, the concept but my teacher isn't very good. He obviously understands the concepts, like really well. He does seminars all over the world but whenever he explains something, it's not like everybody can understand what he's saying really.

I just think certain people are good at teaching and some people, aren't good at communicating what they are thinking. He is disconnected from us.

What do you want to know by the time you graduate? Do you feel like the content in your courses is helping you to achieve what you want to learn? This question was important to ask the participants in relation to the success of the *Introduction to College* course because a primary focus of the course is to get students academically engaged in their first year. Ideally, the students enrolled in the course

would have a better idea of what kinds of things they would like to focus on by the time they graduate.

Villia said:

I feel like I should learn to be an adult. I live seven hours away in the Panhandle so my family is really far away. So, being here I've had to learn how to budget my time and my money and stuff like that.

I was like pretty independent when I lived in my other town [so the transition has been okay].

I would say my *Introduction to College* course is in Psychology and even though I don't like it, the teacher is teaching me about coding and I think that is so interesting. Before the summer ended, I really didn't know what I wanted to do but I was thinking about computer science. I think sort of being exposed to that world has like helped me sort of see what I like and what I don't. . . . I am thinking about computer science and I also want to minor in music. [Music is still] a really important part of my life. It's just that music doesn't really have good job opportunities and I feel like Computer Science does.

Villia's goals were mostly developmental. Her coursework was helping her discover what she likes and what she does not like. As a result, she was using that information as a way to find a major. She connected that major to a career. She hoped that her coursework in college would help her find that career. She has selected Computer Science based on her perception of increased career options for her in that field.

Johan Julius said:

If I do go the Engineering route, I'd like to, you know, start from scratch and create a product get it to market, get it past the FDA and stuff like that because both my parents are biomedical engineers. I've grown up around . . . they did a lot of implant stuff and I've always been interested in that. And it's just--I mean it's really cool how they just bring it up from nothing and their company just got bought up for \$72 million.

When I asked Johan if this was what he thought he would be learning as an undergraduate, he said:

. . . probably not as an undergraduate. Undergraduate will probably be more the basics of how you go about making products. You know, getting the idea of what you need . . . [You need this information because] you definitely need to build up from the bottom. You need to know how everything is going to function; how everything is going to work together.

Johan was certain about what he will learn if he is admitted into Engineering but that was the only aspect of his education that he mentioned in this answer. He did not consider his other coursework at all. And like Villia, he is very career-driven and sees college as career training.

Kay sees college as a way to develop personally and also to find a major/career:

Personally, I want to figure out exactly what I am supposed to do. There are so many things I came in interested in and now, taking classes, about the things, now I'm like, okay, that's not really what I want. I knew I didn't want to study rocks but I need the science credit so I thought, well, Geology can't be that bad. And now, I am like, hurry up and get it done and school-wise, I want to know enough to be successful in whatever I do. And, I feel like I came to a good place for that.

The idea of success came through in all the answers. Finding a career is Fry's primary focus. He said:

I see college as a step up to a better career. . . Most professions require you have some knowledge behind it and a lot of [the resources on this] campus specifically get you prepared. I don't question myself. I know what I am doing. I know this is a good school. I did not see much going in but when I started developing and saw the development around here, I thought it was a good school.

As a first-generation college student, Fry did not have the same expectations as some of the other participants. However, he knew what he wanted out of his college experience. He mentioned that he was already seeing his own personal development as well as the development of his peers. He sees college as an opportunity for a better career and a better life.

Shiloh hoped to learn "people skills" by the time she graduates. She said:

Communication skills are very important. I really want to be able to learn how to communicate with people or be better at it because I think it's important. (My current classes are not helping me with this) because they are mostly reading and writing not really communicating. Actually, there is less communication in college than there was in high school. It's just so big. It's hard to get personal attention.

I plan to get these communication skills by taking communication courses. Joining groups and clubs may also help.

Shiloh's skills were also developmental but academic in nature. She believed she had fewer opportunities to develop communication skills than she did in high school and was seeking courses in the School of Communication to remedy this.

KiKe also said that the knowledge he will need to know by graduation will come from his courses. He said:

I think the variety of courses (will provide the knowledge). I think that the university has a core curriculum that is very important. In my case, I don't like science but I have to be in it because it's a requirement and I think that is an important aspect in helping succeed. We are exposed to other necessary knowledge in life. Core curriculum is very important.

KiKe was the only participant who mentioned core courses as those that he was looking forward to taking. Further, only he and Shiloh have said that their favorite courses are

outside of the professional schools. KiKe spoke further about the importance of the core curriculum. He talked about how he thought the knowledge would fit into his everyday life:

I think there is a set thing that everybody should know, to help inform them and communicate with more specific people. Definitely helps with communication. More general information.

[About the choices within the core at Southwest] it has its pros and cons. Let's say a majority chooses one course and a small group chooses another one. The variety has its cons because you won't be able to communicate with others on a subject but then again you have the fact that one group knows one thing and another group knows another and you bring them together and they share knowledge.

I like the core.

KiKe's enthusiasm for the core was unique among the participants. All the others mentioned that they did not understand why core requirements were needed and they did not see how the core fit into their future plans. KiKe mentioned the idea of "common knowledge" among students. He thought that there were things "that everybody should know." This idea of a common learning experience is one of the primary goals of the *Introduction to College* course. However, only KiKe thought a common experience was important to his college development.

The next four questions in the interview were taken directly from Ralph Tyler's work. These questions were designed to get the students to evaluate their first-year curriculum as a whole.

What do you think the purpose of going to college is? Fry gave an insightful answer, saying:

Definitely there are many ways to approaching it...I did a lot of my growing up in high school. Immediately I was thrown, [at college. I was on my own here. What I noticed in high school was the arrogance of the smart people. They would look down on a lot of people. I would be like, "Okay, you are no better than they are you just happen to understand better than others." They were not the nicest people.

I noticed among my friends that they have changed a lot. They have grown up. This is the real world. If you want to be an adult, do it. If you want to be a kid, keep doing what you are doing and suffer consequences. University rushes you through growing up.

I have a lot of friends who are not going to school. All they talk about are "poo-poo" jokes. I definitely see the differences with employees [at my job at a fast food chain]. At a university you need to see things from a bigger stand point. You are no longer in the spotlight. You are one of many. . .

Fry touched on many points in this answer. The most poignant was his allusion to class differences and how those differences divided the students in his high school. He said that in college, those divides have been lessened, but he still encounters class differences in trying to balance his school life and his work life.

To Fry, the purpose of college was to break down these class barriers. The "smart people" who were previously "not the nicest people" have now become "one of many." They are no longer special. In his opinion, that has brought them some needed maturity.

Conversely, he saw his friends who are going to school "growing up." He characterized those who are not going to school as immature, even infantile.

Kay's answer was much more straightforward and focused more on her academic goals. However, her own personal development figured heavily into her answer. She said:

[The purpose of going to college is] first off, just the education. Just make sure you have what you set out to do. Just being a freshman, a lot of people came here for pride. It is a good school with a good reputation. I know that's part of the reason I came here, because it's going to look good on a resume. And you feel the pride once you're here but people, I don't know exactly how to say it. Um, for educational reasons... What am I here for? (It) makes me think. The ultimate goal would be, just graduating. You know you're here for the classes but it's so much deeper than that. You're meeting people, new experiences. I think college is definitely the struggle for freedom. Like the breaking point to see if you can handle it because there is definitely a lot of stress. Decision making, time management, all of that stuff is so much deeper than coming here just for school.

Kay's answer was academically focused. While she believed the purpose of college was simply to fulfill the requirements and graduate, she had a more compelling goal: the "struggle for freedom." Can she really succeed on her own? Will she be able to balance everything college throws at her? If she does, she will pass the tests that have been presented to her and then be truly "free," a mature adult. This signified a higher level of thinking in Kay where she can see more than just the degree. Instead, she saw college as a passage to becoming an adult.

KiKe's answer was simple but insightful. He said:

[The College is] trying to help us succeed in life. You can get a job [with less education] but having further detailed knowledge of certain things or areas you are better off and can provide for others. I think they are here to guide us through that and make us more knowledgeable in life and serve a purpose.

KiKe's answers always related back to the curriculum more than any of the other participants. He was looking to his professors and courses for the knowledge he needed to be successful. He saw the entirety of the university as a support mechanism for his

academic work. His final purpose, success in life, was defined not only by getting a better job but also by "providing for others."

Shiloh built on her idea of better communication and said that the purpose of college was to provide a personalized experience for its students. She said:

I think they should try to be more personable. I feel like, it's so big they need to just make it [a] more individualized experience and they can't do that because there's so many people here. . .[I think there should be opportunities to] get to know your professors, understand the way they think or maybe have more tutoring sessions available. I know some of my TAs just don't have time. . . [In] my theater class, I have a great teacher. She's really interactive. It's a 400 student class but she does, like, "Oprah" time and she walks around to make sure that every section in that whole room is contributing. She [also] made our [test] review into a game. That's something you do in elementary school. You don't imagine people doing that now in college but it's good because it makes me learn. . .

Shiloh believed the purpose of the college was to serve the students. By serving the students, she meant finding ways to make the material in courses tangible and to show a personal interest in each individual student.

Villia said the purpose of college was to allow students to experience "the value of education." She said:

Where I'm from, the high school wasn't the best school. Our academics were . . .we were almost [rated] "academically unacceptable" so I think coming here was like a big change for me 'cause the classes were at a higher standard and so the students around me value education also because this is such a good school so I think that's been the biggest change.

Villia's answer was similar to the other participants. She believed the purpose of college was to provide a "community of scholars" that would help her grow academically to achieve her goals.

Johan Julius was the only student who saw the purpose of college as training for a career. As he is interested in engineering, he knew how the degree would benefit him. He said that college would help him "build up from the bottom." He believed that the purpose of college was to prepare him for work in his field of choice. His answer was the only response that did not focus on personal development outside the classroom. He thought that the purpose of the institution existed only within the classroom.

What experiences do you think the universities should provide? This question taken from Tyler's work provided a range of answers from the participants. Most took the question literally and answered with concrete experiences that they believed were important to the college experience. Kay talked about the importance of living on campus and how she felt the university should require that. She said:

I think a really good requirement for freshmen would be for freshmen to live on campus. 'Cause there are a lot of people I know who live in off campus apartments but I know that this is such a large campus and it has so many students that it's hard for them to accommodate everyone but I feel like they're doing a good job having, well at least in my dorm, we have a whole bunch of wing meetings, wing dinners, stuff like that. So for the social aspect, they could do that.

She went on to talk about her desire for students to stay safe on campus. She thought the university should make more of an effort to discourage partying.

They can't really stop people from going out but they provide the resources. They have buses that take people so if they could limit that because it's really disturbing hearing people come home like early Friday morning. Like on the weekends, you know you have to study and you are trying to get some sleep and people try to be quiet but drunk people can't control themselves. [The university should promote more studying and academics, as a whole.]

The experiences Kay described are located exclusively outside the classroom. She did not mention coursework, academic opportunities, or skills. She thought the university should provide a safe, controlled environment to assist its students in their transition to adulthood.

KiKe focused more on the personal responsibility of the student. He said the university was providing many experiences and resources that would result in the success of its students. However, it was up to the student to take advantage of those experiences. He said:

It's the initiative of the students. . . The university does all it can to help us. If you don't want to do it, you are lost and it's your fault. They provide everything for us. These are helpful tools in life. It's up to the students [to take advantage of them]. But I think that [they] do a really good job. Student responsibility plays a big role.

KiKe believed the responsibility of the institution stopped with providing experiences and resources. The institution cannot compel students to take advantage of them. KiKe mentioned specific resources like the school's writing center as an experience and resource that he appreciated but has not yet taken advantage of it. Unlike Kay, he believed student responsibility was more important than having rules and requirements that all students must follow.

Fry's answer was similar to KiKe's. He also talked about the personal responsibility of the students. He said:

The university should provide [the tools] to reach goals and to serve the purpose of being marketable and able to transition to the work force.

He went on to speak about the particular experiences that should be provided to attain that purpose. He said:

This university does a lot. In my high school, we relied on each other. Here it is the resources. They have libraries, tutoring, study groups, certain times, certain tables. . . The university is doing everything, it's just a matter [of] if you want to do it.

Fry mentioned the idea that the university would provide skills to make him successful in the job market, but like KiKe, he assigned the responsibility of taking advantage of all the university has to offer to him and his fellow students.

Villia referred (for one of the first times in the interview) directly to her experience in the classroom. She said:

I know that some courses are just, like, based on your test. Whereas in my Theater/Dance class, she's having us write like different essays and I like that sort of approach better just because I feel like I am a stronger writer than I am a test taker. So, I guess like, I wish there was more of that in my curriculum.

Villia wanted the opportunity to write in her classes rather than simply take tests and regurgitate information. This related back to her need for a more individualized experience from the university.

Johan Julius looked at the experiences the university should provide from a personal viewpoint. However, the experience he mentioned reflected a trial by fire. He said:

I guess that the big classes, you know the experience of having those big classes kind of gets you to be self-reliant on your education, not having somebody spoon feeding it to you the entire time.

Johan believed that dealing with big courses and competing against other students is valuable preparation for life after college. Some students would look at this as a negative aspect of their education, but Johan saw it as an opportunity for personal development.

Finally, Shiloh cited good teaching as the most important experience the university can provide. She said:

Really, honestly, teachers make all the difference. They really can touch lives. I know my friend wants to be an English major because of her teacher. My mom's a teacher and she touches little kids' lives.

Shiloh talked more about her favorite course of the semester, history. Ironically, it was her most difficult course and the subject matter was not her area of interest; however, because of the connection with the instructor, she enjoyed it the most.

Summary of first interviews. The primary theme that came through in the first interview was that the students all believed that good teaching was the key to their academic success. Their interest in course material was important but not essential. All the students spoke in detail about their instructors and how important the instructor and student relationship was to them. In the classes they rated as unsuccessful, the reasons for the failure of the class were poor teaching and a failure to connect with the students. Shiloh had chosen history as her favorite course even though she was not very interested in the subject. She liked the course because of the excellent professor.

The task force for curricular reform (2004) at Southwest emphasized a number of areas that it believed the *Introduction to College* course should expose students to, including college-level writing, public speaking, exposure to interdisciplinary material, and contemporary content of course material. The students were most interested in how the course material related to them in their own lives (contemporary content). Unfortunately, the contemporary content was not mentioned in conjunction with the *Introduction to College* course. Kay cited it for her communication course; Fry for his rock music course; Johan for his computer programming course; and Villia for her theatre and dance courses.

The other area of importance where the students agreed with the task force was in the area of writing. KiKe, who was the only student participant who mentioned his *Introduction to College* course as a favorite, said that he was developing better writing skills and believed that those skills were important. On the contrary, Johan did not understand the value of the writing experience his *Introduction to College* course was giving him. The papers were short, reflection-type essays, and he believed the points he made in his paper would be better argued orally.

For the students not taking the *Introduction to College* course, Shiloh and Fry, there was not a marked difference in their remarks or their first-year experience. They seemed to be experiencing the university in very similar ways to the students who were enrolled in the course.

Second interviews. The second interviews began the first week of December and were completed by mid-February. The interview format was the same. The questions focused primarily on the *Introduction to College* course and related back to the overarching research questions for this dissertation.

The questions were:

- What was your biggest accomplishment in your first semester?
- Did the *Introduction to College* course have a role in any of the goals you achieved?
- Was the most valuable thing you learned inside or outside the classroom?
- Do you understand why you had to take the *Introduction to College* course?
- Do you think the *Introduction to College* course should continue to be a requirement for all students?

These interview sessions were shorter than the first and ranged anywhere from 20-40 minutes. Because of scheduling conflicts, Shiloh's final interview was conducted over the phone with a follow-up via email. The rest of the interviews were conducted in person.

What was your biggest accomplishment in your first semester? Kay said, "Making it through the first semester without wanting to give up." KiKe's response was similar in that he felt pressure in the first semester and had just hoped to survive. He said:

I think I did. I was a little stressed since last time we met, but I think I met my goals. [My goals were good] study habits. I wasn't getting much done but I motivated myself to study. I spent some long hours at the library, which helped a lot.

Johan had hoped for excellent grades. He said in December, "I already have two letter grades and both are As."

Shiloh was also grade-focused, but she had goals for her professional development as well. She said, "I wanted to make a 4.0 but I ended up making a 3.75. I also wanted to be more mature and independent. I feel like I accomplished half of that." Shiloh was successful grade-wise even if she did not achieve her goal of a 4.0. She did believe that she had made valuable personal gains.

Fry answered that he did not accomplish what he had hoped, and gave some insightful reasons why he had fallen short. He said:

I definitely wanted better grades than I got. And also I wanted to know the campus a little bit better by getting into clubs and an organization or something. I never really got around to that. Kinda just be sort of organized and I was far from that.

I definitely learned my lesson. [I] talked to some friends and I am starting to keep track with a planner. I've never done that, actually. Like in high school, I've never kept a planner. It was just me being cocky saying, Oh, I can do that. It's like, when is this due? And now, I have a visual on my computer. Also, I am asking a lot of questions, I didn't do that first semester and that's why my grades were kind of not so good.

I thought I could figure it all out. . . Last semester, I was a solitary person. The reason why I was so unorganized [was] because I did not ask anyone [for help]. All my studies were by myself. If I didn't have something, then I would never know it. Now, I am starting to learn the whole study group thing.

What got me to reach out was that I just kind of got tired of playing lone wolf. I decided it doesn't have to be this way. I am starting to mingle more with groups.

Villia's answer was similar to Fry's in that she believed that joining a student organization was the biggest factor in achieving her first-semester goals. She said, "I think so. I just wanted to make new friends, get to know the campus and just sort of make it more like home, I guess. I guess that's accomplished. That came from joining organizations."

Did the Introduction to College course have a role in any of the goals you achieved? Fry did not enroll in the *Introduction to College* course in the fall semester but he was taking it this spring. So far, it has been a positive experience for Fry, and he elaborated on what he had learned in the class:

Right now, I am taking *Introduction to College*. I like it but it reminds me a lot of my economics course, I think the concept of [the *Introduction to College* Course] is that they take a higher level professor and put them into a freshman course and I could definitely tell that he was an upper level professor. I love the way he's organized. He keeps up with things. His TAs are a little stricter but I will say this course definitely kind of shaped things for me. It's really where I started to get organized. His syllabus was up to date and was perfect. I loved it. I kinda did wish I had taken it earlier just because I probably would have gotten the idea that this is what organization looks like or this is what a college paper looks like. You know, how to be in a class.

You know my first class was calculus and I feel like I really didn't get what I needed out of it . . . This class I like a lot. I also like the books. We got like 5 or 6 textbooks for the class and I'm like, okay, it's a little intimidating but . . . I like the material a lot. It took me a while to understand what he was doing. He didn't come out with it straight 'cause first when I read "Spirituality and Self," I thought it would be you know like atheist/theist and then I thought maybe it's like meditative psychology. Then he started to get into it and I was like, oh, it's a philosophy course and I was like, oh, I really like this a lot. This is really [up] my alley. He's a great professor. I honestly love him.

Fry, like KiKe, mentioned a transformative experience in his *Introduction to College* course. He said his biggest problem in his first semester was a lack of organization, and his *Introduction to College* professor showed him how to be organized. This inspired the use of a daily planner and a more systematic approach to his studies.

Fry had an immediate and strong connection with his professor, and that is helping him in the class as well. He looked up to his teacher and wanted to emulate him. Fry identified his professor as a senior member of the faculty and recognized that he usually teaches more advanced students. Fry seemed pleased to be part of his class.

Shiloh also took the course in the spring semester and was having a positive experience, but felt it was too early to tell how much of an impact the course was having on her. She said,

I like my [*Introduction to College*] course and I do believe it would have been helpful if I took it in the fall. I like the topic of problem solving because it will help me in my future but it is not helping me learn more about Southwest I feel like, yes, it's writing intensive. I feel like it's too early to tell if it's helping me.

Shiloh was enjoying the course and believed the critical thinking skills she was learning will be helpful to her. She was also writing a great deal. However, she was still unsure of the overall benefit of the course.

KiKe, who had a very positive experience in the course, said, "The way he told us how to read, I applied those skills to other homework and I focus more on detail now. I actually pay attention to what I am doing." From the beginning, KiKe saw real value in his *Introduction to College* course and really appreciated the skills his professor was

teaching him. The ability to read at the college level was a tangible skill he took away from the course.

Johan Julius, who had not been positive about his *Introduction to College* course in the journals and interviews, had a change of heart in the second interviews. He said that the course did not directly help with his goals for the first year, but:

it definitely helped. It was more short writing and not long papers. I really liked that because it helped me get my ideas down. It made my writing more structured and to the point.

In our first meetings, Johan had mentioned that writing was the primary reason that he did not like his *Introduction to College* course. Upon reflection at the end of the semester, it seemed that he found more value to the writing in the course.

Kay who also mentioned a negative experience in her *Introduction to College* course in the first interview, also had changed her point of view. She said:

At the beginning I thought [the course] was pointless. Towards the end when we talked about more current things we have to look back and it taught me the benefits of campus. Every Friday he had someone new come into the classroom. I would not have ventured out and found out about this stuff on my own. The most beneficial thing was the writing center.

Kay, who said in the first interview that she did much better with more current material that she could relate to her own life, found that type of material in her *Introduction to College* course at the end of the semester.

She also mentioned the importance of the exposure to campus resources that the course provided. She believed that she would not have been aware of the resources or

would not have explored them if it were not for the exposure she received to them in her *Introduction to College* course.

Villia, who had the most negative experience of all the participants in her *Introduction to College* course, said that the only thing she felt that she had learned was that the subject of the course was not of interest to her. She said, "The course taught me that I didn't want to go into psychology."

She did add later that because of the *Introduction to College* course, "I am definitely a better writer. I can write really long papers now so I guess that's an advantage. I also appreciated visiting (a campus museum) and seeing the archives there. That was cool."

Was the most valuable thing you learned inside or outside the classroom?

Kay, Johan, KiKe, and Fry all believed that outside of the classroom was where they had learned the most. Kay and Johan referred to time management skills as the most valuable learning experiences they had in the first semester. Kay said the most important thing she learned was:

Time management. Outside of class, making appointments and knowing where to go. . . My roommate inspired me to get my stuff done or I would check my syllabus to see when stuff was due. I wanted to knock work out early because of Thanksgiving. I wanted to be done with everything before finals.

Johan's response was similar. He said that the most valuable learning experiences were outside of class because "it was more structured to self-learning, more self-discipline. Studying by yourself. It was how I was raised: work hard first and play hard later. I learn by trial and error."

KiKe mentioned the value of study groups. He said, "I learned the material in class but I applied it outside of class and interacting with my classmates made for study groups." KiKe found that applying the knowledge that he had learned inside class with his study groups was his most enriching experience.

Fry's response was more personal. He believed the most valuable learning experience had come from the student group he had recently joined. He said:

First semester I didn't really do anything. It was just me, myself, and I. This semester is where it started to change and I feel like the attitude on campus is a little different because everyone has an idea kind of what it is like now. . . . However, learning inside or outside the classroom, I would definitely say outside. With the group [Rock Solid], I have already gone to church, already had these discussions and you know, like I personally can't say I'm a Christian. I did it more or less to kind of get a perspective on things and um, they're really open to that so it kind of changed my perspective on the way I feel about certain things.

It was Fry's exposure to this group, with which he had some different philosophical views, that had opened Fry's mind. This occurred outside the classroom, where Fry got a chance to express himself and discuss his opinions with other students who were open to discussing their own beliefs and ideas as well as listening to his.

Villia also mentioned a religious organization as what had shaped her most valuable experience in her first semester. She said, "I'm in a fellowship called Students' Christian Ministries. It's a small group so it's just like me and four or five other freshman girls and then we have a leader. I've just made friends through that."

Villia said that her chorale group provided her with the chance to visit and sing at another campus. She was enrolled in a choir course, but the experience that she believed

was most meaningful occurred outside the classroom. She said, "For choir, we went to a choir festival-thing. It was at Baptist University and we sang with a bunch of other choirs from Baptist University and State Tech so that was a good experience."

Shiloh was the only student who thought her most valuable educational experiences occurred inside the classroom, and she credited that experience to her history instructor. She said, "My history teacher made me enjoy history a lot more than I thought I did."

Do you understand why you had to take the Introduction to College course?

Johan, who of all the participants seemed to best understand the college curriculum and the purpose of his courses said, "It makes you a more rounded person. You get different perspectives rather than focusing on one area of study. Definitely valuable." When asked if the *Introduction to College* course had met his expectations, he said, "Surpassed my expectations. I expected it to be low key, but she [the professor] really hammered on the importance of knowing this stuff." Though Johan had a rocky start with the *Introduction to College* course, by the end, he found the course to be a valuable experience.

Kay shared the same sentiments. She said,

It took a while to adjust and then when I did, I realized I had an easy class and it was far less stress. It was structured but wasn't really in depth in a certain subject. It got in-depth at the beginning and toward the end it was a lighter load and then we figured out what he was talking about.

Kay initially found the course to be rigorous and full of material that held no interest for her. As the semester progressed, she saw the structure of the course emerge and figured

out where it was leading. By the end of the semester, the material was more interesting to her and she found that the course had become easy.

The impact of the course on Fry was strictly based on the teacher. Fry, who had been in the course a little over a month, said:

Going into it, I didn't really know what it was about. I was like, what is this thing? Some of my friends had the *Swedish Film* and there's all these really crazy topics. I was like what is this? And then, I looked up my course description and honestly, it still did not give me a good description. I still did not know what I was in but it filled the timeslot so let's see what happens. In comes the professor, he's dressed all formally, he reminds me of that guy from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He reminds me of Atticus Finch and I'm like, Atticus Finch! He even talks like Atticus Finch, it's ridiculous. He even has a little bowtie. . .I thought this is going to be a really interesting class. He's such a stereotypical professor but then he started talking and at first I was really humored by it because I could tell he was really deep-thinking just because of the way he talks. . .I thought this guy probably has a lot of interesting things to say. . .

Fry did not understand the purpose of the class and did not have a good grip on the topic, but the instant connection with the professor made it a class where he believed he was going to learn something valuable.

Shiloh, like Fry, was new to the course. When asked if the course was meeting her expectations she said, "Yes and no. I like the topic. I wish the teacher was more engaging." Shiloh enjoyed the topic of the course but had not yet made a connection with the instructor.

Even though KiKe had a wonderful experience in the course, when asked if he knew why he had to take it, he said, "I'm not too sure." He did elaborate on his experience in the course. He said, "I like the idea of picking a class and not taking

boring stuff. It's a topic that I am intrigued by. It's like an elective where you are not being dragged to class."

Villia said the course had not met her expectations. However, her reasons did not place blame with the instructor or the course. She said:

Well, I came in thinking that it would be a blow-off class and it wasn't. I read a lot and the material was hard. And like, it was like a really broad topic, we covered a lot of things in very little time. (I thought the course would be a blow-off course) because they just barely made us take the *Introduction to College* course. I thought since it was new it wouldn't be that hard but I was wrong...I think that maybe because I didn't take a topic that was of interest to me that maybe it was harder. I don't really have that kind of thinking style.

Villia saw the course as one that did not match her interest. That mismatch caused her to struggle with the material and made it difficult for her to connect with the instructor. She believed if she had taken a different topic, her opinion of the course would likely be different.

Do you think the Introduction to College course should continue to be a requirement for all students? Fry, who was taking the course in his second semester, thought that if he had taken the course first semester, it would have been very helpful. He was finding the requirement to be valuable to everyone, but especially to first-semester, first-year students. He said:

...I would suggest that they take it first semester because I feel like that class is the most formal out of all my other classes. Like when I envisioned college, that is kind of what I envisioned and everything was at a pace... like a big overview with all my other courses, it's kind of like a little dabble and it's still just out there...

Fry appreciated the structure and formality of the course and appreciated how it was a broad overview rather than a narrowly focused course. He said that in his other courses, the information could be so narrow that he was not sure what he is even studying. In his *Introduction to College* course, he believed that since it was geared to first-year students, the course is doing a good job of teaching him what it meant to be a college student.

Kay's final summation of the course was that while she found some value in the course, she was not sure if it was worth the expenditure of resources for the university.

First, she discussed how she felt disconnected from the material. She said:

Just reading [the course description] I didn't think Public Education could be hard, but after taking it, it was not anything I would want to learn about. Then slowly over time, and we talked public versus private [education and] it was what I expected. I wish we would have done it the whole time.

When asked specifically if her experience led her to believe that the course should continue as a requirement for everyone, she said, "Not really. It's nice they transition you in, but that money (the program cost) could have helped more if it went toward a class. But I guess in a way it did benefit. Because it forced me to take classes I otherwise wouldn't." Kay did see the benefit of the course because it got her out of her comfort zone, but she did not see much benefit beyond that.

Villia shared a similar point of view. She thought the course was a tremendous amount of work and should only be taken when the student had a lighter course load. Overall, she did see a benefit to the course. She said, "I think it was a good course just to expose you to different things because I would not have been exposed to that material if I had just taken whatever I was interested in." Even though she did not have a positive

experience in the course, her overall position was that she did learn some valuable information. She even mentioned that she had learned about a psychological theory that could be applied in a variety of different disciplines. She thought she would use the theory in the future.

Johan was more positive than Kay, although his point of view was similar. He saw the *Introduction to College* course as a worthy effort of the university, and thought that it was a requirement that should continue. He said, "I think it helps people who have one only one view of education." At the beginning of the semester, Johan was very resistant to the writing in his *Introduction to College* course and especially did not like writing opinion pieces for the course. By the end of the semester, he could see the value in doing something that could not be scientifically tested.

KiKe also gave a final positive review of his experience in the *Introduction to College* course. He said:

When I first got the reading and did not think I could do it. I thought I would be forced to read. But through the semester I found the book to be very interesting and going over the books in class and having long discussions actually helps a lot...I was a little too shy to get involved in conversations. Back in high school I was timid but he gave me that sense of confidence. He let us know that there was no right or wrong. I felt very comfortable. I did pretty well in my oral presentation. I have done presentations before, but he boosted my confidence by telling me I did really good... I would not have known of other [campus] resources if not for the course. [If I were the university president], keeping the *Introduction to College* course would be my priority.

Shiloh gave another vote of confidence to the course, but clarified that her recommendation had much to do with the choice of topic. She said, "I like the course

because of the topic, I believe if there's a good topic and helps benefit you [in] the future, I say take it!"

Surveys

Open-ended surveys were sent out to 45 first-year students in an effort to compare the results of the interviews and journals with a slightly larger population. Forty percent of the surveys were returned (n=18). The students surveyed came from the same learning communities as the six interview participants. Instead of focusing on just undeclared students, this survey was open to all students in all majors at Southwest University. The questions in the survey, like the second interviews, were focused on the *Introduction to College* course.

The survey questions were:

- Did you take an *Introduction to College* course in Fall 2010?
- If you did not take an *Introduction to College* course in Fall 2010, are you taking one in Spring 2011?
- What were your academic goals for your first year? Have you achieved them? Did any of your courses help you achieve your goals?
- Do you believe the most valuable educational experiences occur inside or outside of the classroom? Please give examples.
- If you have taken or are taking the *Introduction to College* course, what were the most valuable educational experiences in the course?
- Why do you think you have to take the *Introduction to College* course? Do you think it is a good requirement? Why or why not?
- If you are taking the *Introduction to College*, has that course lived up to your expectations?

Of the 18 students, 11 had taken the course in fall 2010, five were taking the course in spring 2011, and two students had not enrolled for the course in the 2010-11 academic year.

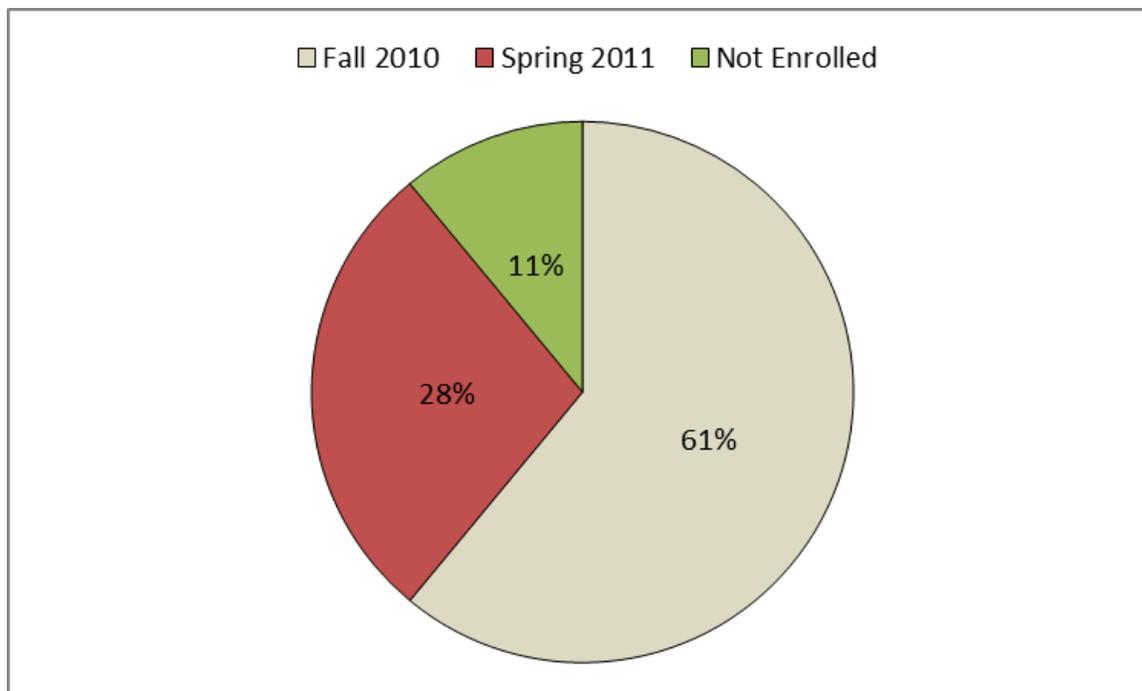


Figure 1. Enrollment for Survey Participants

The enrollment percentages were very similar to the six students who participated in the survey and interview portion of the study. The enrollment figures for "the six" are four students enrolled in fall 2010 and two enrolled in spring 2011.

What were your academic goals for the first year? Did you achieve them? Did any of your courses help you achieve your goals? The survey participants were focused on grades. Sixteen of the 18 students mentioned good grades or academic

success as their primary goal for the first year. One student said, "My academic goals were to make good grades in college level classes! I achieved them last semester and hopefully will be able to keep that going into this semester." Another offered the more colorful answer of, "My goal was to have a 4.0. This goal was not achieved. All of my professors helped me to achieve this goal except for one pompous asshole."

The other category that came up the most was that of making the adjustment to college. Five out of the 18 students mentioned that as a primary goal. However, it was almost always mentioned after an academic goal. Only in the case of one student did the adjustment to college precede the desire for good grades. The student said,

My goals for my first year at Southwest were to make friends, get involved, and do well in my classes. I believe I have accomplished this. My (first engineering) class helped me do well in Chemistry, and my learning community helped me make friends and learn more about the campus.

This student was one of the two who had not yet registered for the *Introduction to College* course.

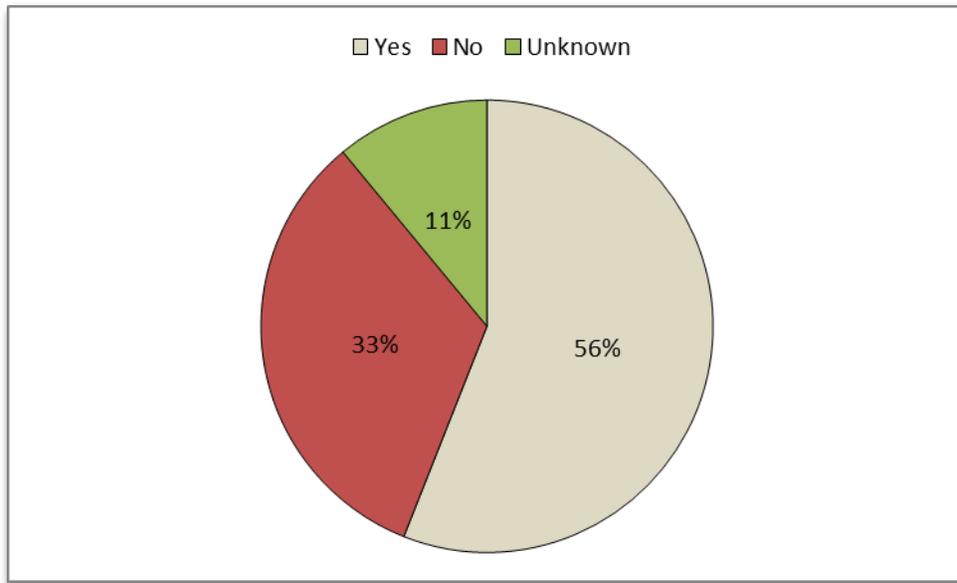


Figure 2. Survey Participants: Did you achieve your first semester goals?

Do you believe the most valuable educational experiences occur inside or outside of the classroom? Please give examples. Fourteen of the 18 surveyed participants believed that the most valuable educational experiences occurred outside of the classroom. One student said, "Being lectured is generally not the best way to learn. Getting your hands on something or helping out another student helps you learn things better." Another commented, "You may be able to learn math and science in a classroom, but no amount of studying will give you success if you can't learn outside of the classroom. Things like people skills, confidence, and ambition cannot be learned in a classroom."

Four students thought an equal amount of educational experiences take place inside and outside the classroom. One comment was, "I believe that it is a combination

of both, because there are so many factors that could cause it to vary." Another student who thought it was both said, "I believe that the most valuable experiences occur within interaction, not necessarily in the class or out, more like it can be in the class but it may not always be the material that gives us the valuable educational experience."

The lone student who felt that the most valuable interactions occurred inside the classroom said, "I think once a class is comfortable with each other (especially in a small class) and they can share their ideas." Even though the student believed the most valuable interactions were inside the classroom, the student qualified the answer to say that learning experiences happen more easily inside small classes.

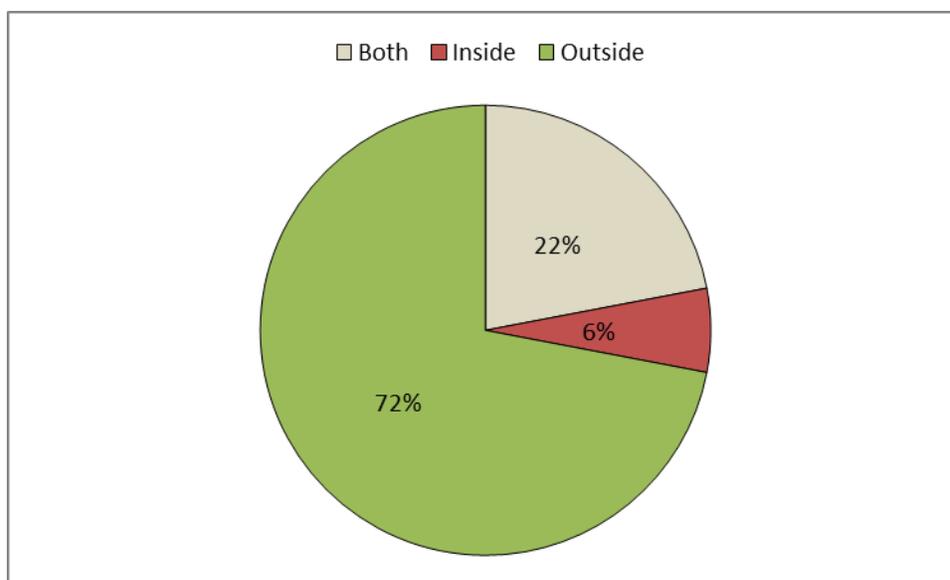


Figure 3. Survey Participants: Do the most valuable educational experiences occur inside or outside the classroom?

If you have taken or are taking the Introduction to College course, what were the most valuable educational experiences in the course? The answers from the

participants to this question were more diverse. However, one area was listed by six students and that was coded "new perspectives." These students listed an example of how something they had once believed in had been changed as a result of this course or how they had a new perspective on an area because of their experience in the course.

One student said, "[From the course I learned] different perspectives from the professor as well as students, such as during discussions we all had different ideas." Another student's experience was more personal. The student said, "Well, I am taking a philosophy course, and this class helps me to understand myself better. It forces me to look at myself for my strengths and weaknesses and appreciate myself as a whole."

The second most popular answer was writing. Two students mentioned that their writing had been improved by the course. One student said that because the writing required, he/she had also been introduced to research: "I learned writing skills and the background of a field of research."

Other areas that contained one answer included "Interested professor." Another student said, "Having a professor that was teaching it because he took an interest in it." Also, one student mentioned that it was helpful to be introduced to campus resources by saying, "I think I learned a lot about the resources..."

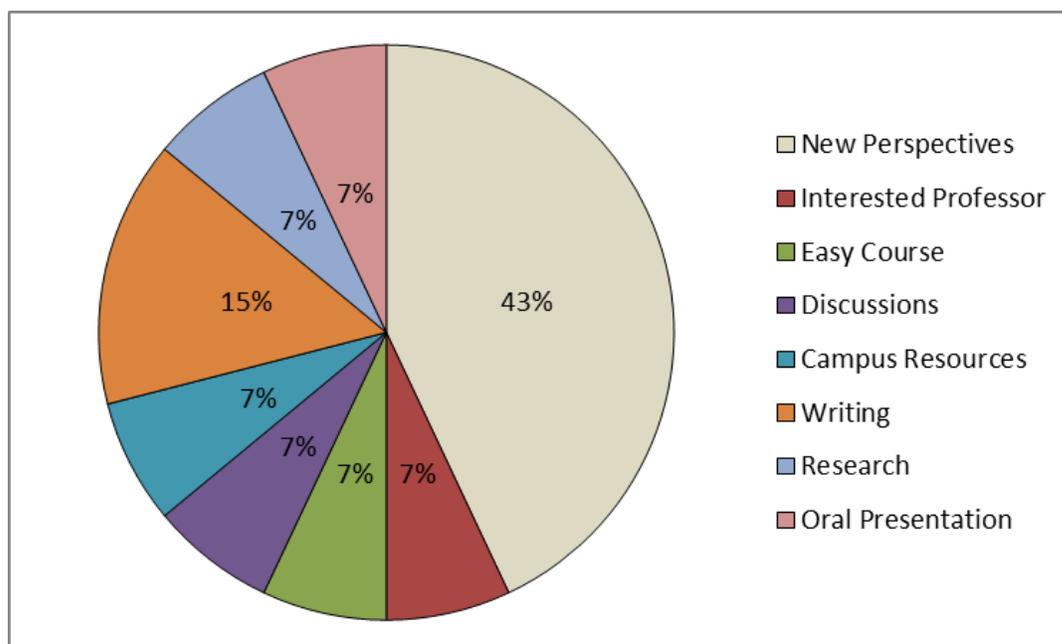


Figure 4. Survey Participants: What was the most valuable thing you learned in your *Introduction to College* course?

Why do you think you have to take the Introduction to College course? Do you think it is a good requirement? Why or why not? Forty-one percent of the students believed the requirement was a good addition to their required courses. One student said,

[The *Introduction to College*] classes are a good idea. I think we have to take the course in order to expand our boundaries in the classroom. Other than my *Introduction to College* class, I just had math and science classes for engineering. *Intro to College* forced me to become a better writer and researcher.

Another student who believed the requirement was valuable commented on how it gave students exposure to various campus resources. The student said:

(I think the reason for the course is) to get a rough idea on what college is like and what it is that you can do. It has taught me the value of resources and most importantly that things are real now and I can make anything happen.

Some students were not sure how they felt about the requirement. There were aspects they thought were valuable, but they were not sure if it should be a course required of all first year students. One "undecided" student said:

[I think the idea of the course] may be just to be a well-rounded student. I feel that is a huge goal of this university. It's okay, I'd rather have the option of taking it any year and not just freshman because they get full so fast.

Three students commented on how quickly the courses filled up and cited not being able to choose a topic because of the high demand for the course as a negative aspect.

Finally, six students out of 17 believe that the course should not continue as a requirement for Southwest students. One of the strongest criticisms of the course was:

I believe this is an idea that had high hopes but has executed miserably. It is unnecessary; being forced to take a class full of useless work to supposedly assimilate you into college is ridiculous. I learned absolutely nothing about the class I took, and it certainly didn't teach me about what Southwest had to offer.

Another student criticized the sometimes obscure topic of the course. This student said:

I honestly don't see the point in taking an [Introduction to College] course. I guess it is fun and all, and there is the whole "a lot of writing" thing, but subjects like "Eastern European Sci-Fi" and "Swedish Cinema" I mean, who comes to Southwest saying, "man, I really hope they have a class where I can learn about science fiction movies from Eastern Europe. No, and many of the course titles are too vague, "Globalization and You" and things like that and kids sign up for a random class 'cause they have to take one and they see a catchy name and then hate the class, this happens all too much.

Overall, only seven students of the 17 who answered the question believed that the *Introduction to College* course should continue as a requirement. Ten students were either undecided or believed the course should not be a requirement.

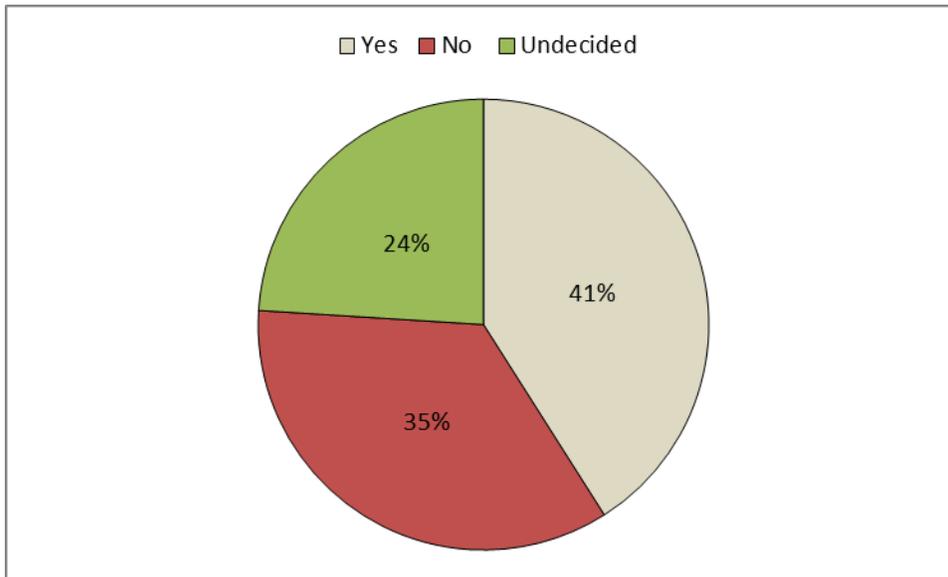


Figure 5. Survey Participants: Is the *Introduction to College* course a good requirement?

If you are taking the Introduction to College course, has that course lived up to your expectations? One hundred percent of the students who answered (n=11) the question said they had no expectations for the course. Of those 11 students, eight reported that despite the lack of expectations, they found the course interesting. Two students expressed that the course did not meet their expectations and two provided answers that were unclear.

The positive responses often included the word "interesting." Three students called their course "interesting." In the most detailed response, one student said:

My *Intro to College* course is so much more interesting than I imagined. I figured we would study works of art and write about them. But we perform works of art and write about them. It is much funner to write about works of art that you are involved in rather than discuss dead artists' random drawings.

The other responses were simple and lacked enthusiasm from the students. One student commented, "I was actually dreading the course and it hasn't been that bad and is kind of interesting subject material." Another student had the similar response of, "I did not have many expectations for my *Intro to College* course, but it was a nice break from my engineering classes."

The two students who believed the course was not meeting their expectations answered "no" and "not really."

Course Surveys

The Course surveys are an evaluative measure put together by the assessment team at Southwest University. The surveys are distributed to each student in each Southwest course and are used for student information, faculty promotion, and general interest. The survey is a comprehensive tool that is well-respected across campus.

The *Introduction to College* course has a specialized form that was developed by the program administrators to evaluate the special features of the course. Those questions, unique to the *Introduction to College* course, as well as the overall course instructor and course rating, will be analyzed. The surveys that were analyzed were from fall 2009 and spring 2010.

The first question was whether or not students were encouraged to meet with faculty members outside of class. In both semesters analyzed, over 50% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed. In both semesters, around 30% were neutral.

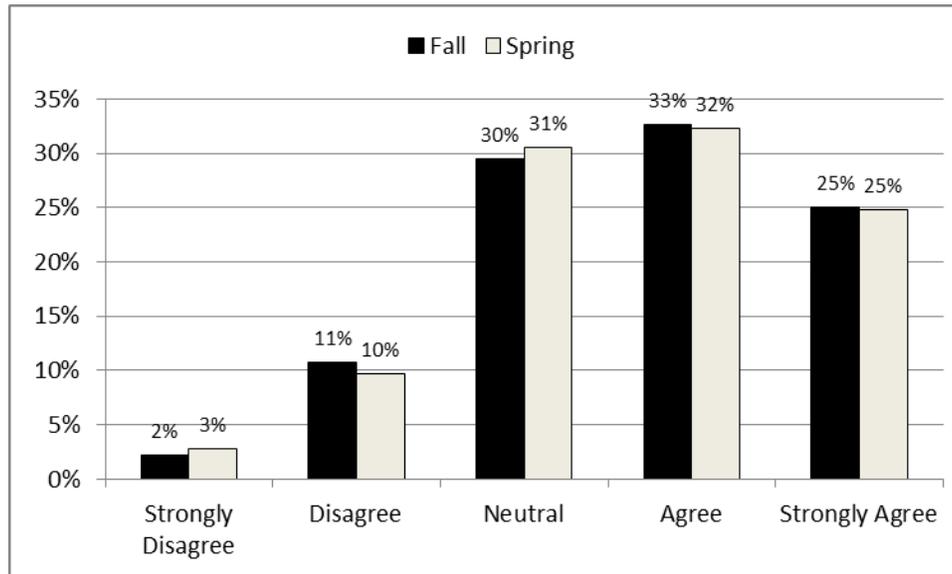


Figure 6. The instructor encouraged me to get to know him/her on an academic level outside of class.

The second question refers to the quality of writing instruction in the *Introduction to College* course. Over 75% of the students surveyed in the fall believed their writing had improved. In the spring, the number was just over 65%. Overall, the students indicated that they believed their writing had improved as a result of the *Introduction to College* course. However, only 23% of the students in the spring strongly believed their writing had improved versus 30% in the fall. This may indicate that spring students had received some training in writing in a course that was taken in

the fall semester. Or maybe, the spring students were weaker students who had put off the course and therefore, felt they had not progressed as much in their writing skills.

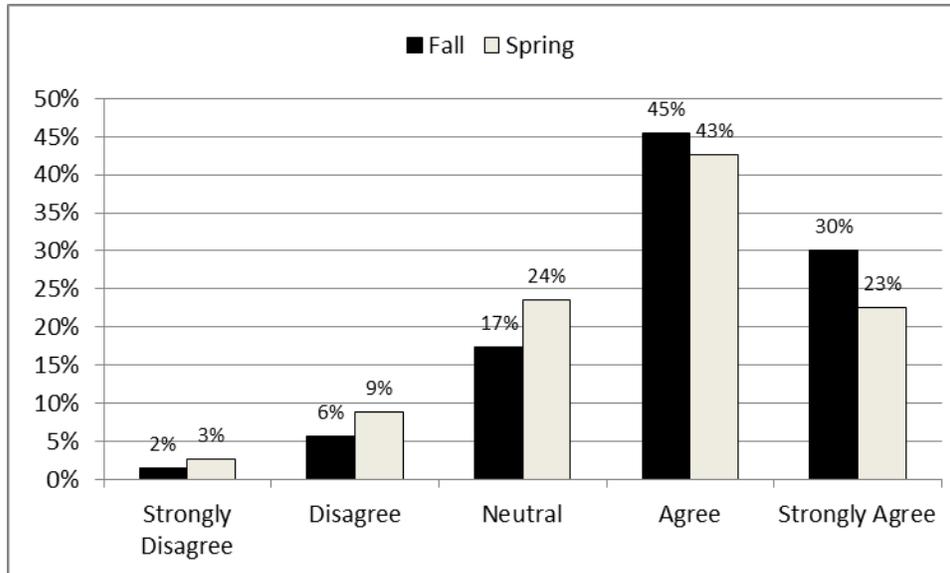


Figure 7. The written assignments in this course challenged me to improve my writing skills.

The next question concerned the introduction to resources on campus and then asks the follow-up question: Were the resources used by the students after they were introduced?

Similar to the writing question, the fall students were more enthusiastic about what they had learned regarding campus resources. The percentages in both semesters are over 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing. However, the spring students continued to rank the course lower than the fall students.

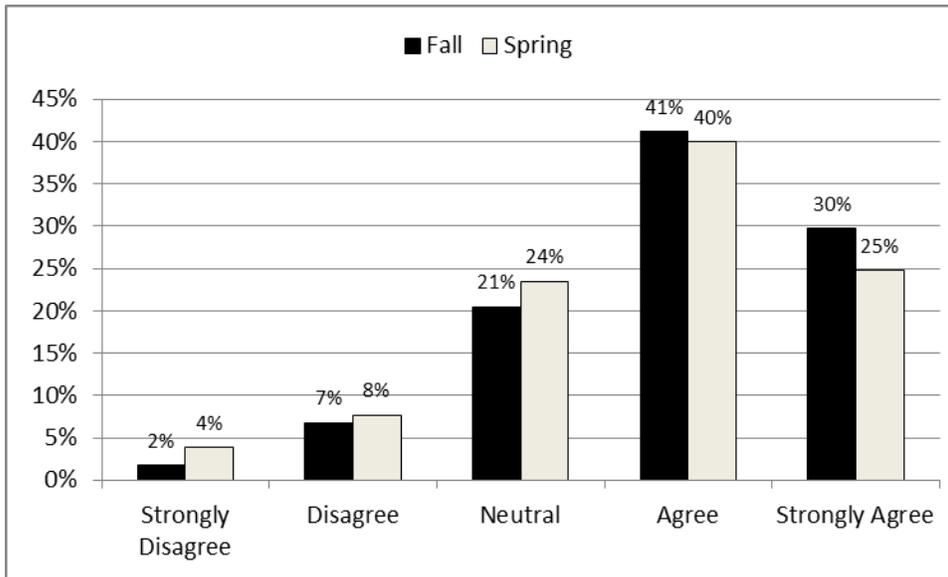


Figure 8. As a result of this course, I have become more aware of the resources to help me on campus.

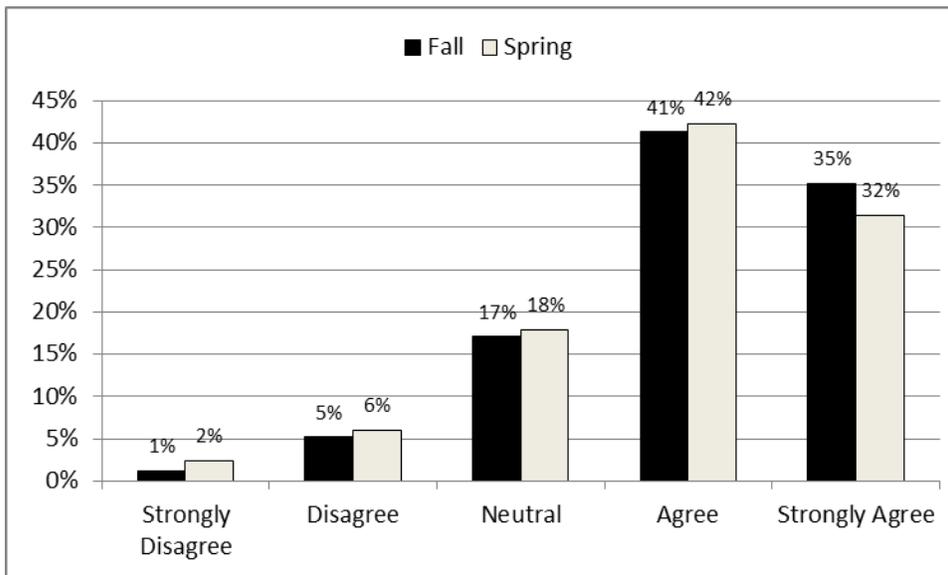


Figure 9. The instructor encouraged the use of campus resources to help me complete assignments.

The final two course-specific questions concerned the academic prowess obtained by the students in the course. The first question asked the students if they were better able to "examine ideas or concepts from different perspectives." This question was meant to address the interdisciplinary nature of the *Introduction to College* course.

The fall and spring students had very similar answers, and over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that the course had been successful in this area. The ratings in the "strongly agree" category were the highest yet in the survey, with 48% in the fall and 47% in the spring.

The final question asked the students to rate how well issues in the course related to their lives outside the classroom. Both spring and fall students believed the course had been very successful in this respect. Nearly 80% of the students answered in the strongly agree or agree categories. The "disagree" or "strongly disagree" came in at less than 10% in the spring and around 6% in the fall. This was an aspect of the course that was resonating with the students.

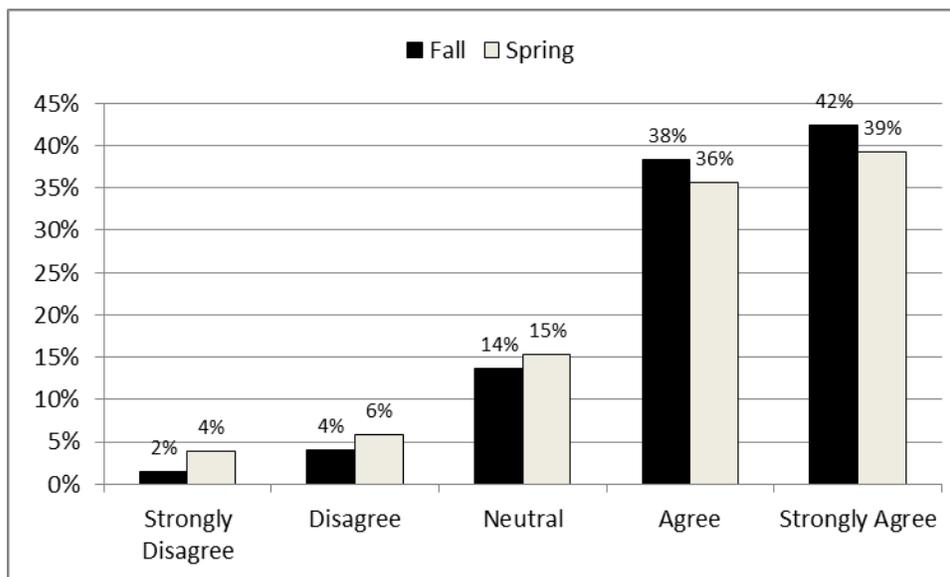


Figure 10. The course enhanced my ability to apply academic knowledge to real life issues.

The overall ratings for the course and the instructor were also analyzed. Overall course ratings and overall instructor ratings are included in all course surveys distributed at Southwest. For comparison purposes, the figure shows the ratings for the *Introduction to College* course as well as the overall course and instructor ratings for the Liberal Arts College and the Natural Science College.

The scores were compared with the overall scores from the colleges of Liberal Arts and Natural Science to get a sense of how the course was being rated in comparison to other courses at Southwest. The courses from the other colleges are not completely comparable to the *Introduction to College* surveys because they contain the survey results from both upper division and lower division courses. However, comparing the results gives a perspective of how students are reacting to courses across the university.

Overall, of the three colleges, the *Introduction to College* course was similarly ranked to the courses in other colleges. The highest score a course can receive is 5. The average score for the *Introduction to College* course was 4.3. For Liberal Arts, it was 4.2 and for Natural Science, it was 4.

The instructor ranking assigns a score to the quality of teaching and instruction in the course. In this category, the *Introduction to College* course had a score of 3.9. Natural Science had a score of 3.7 and Liberal Arts came in with the highest overall score of 4.

Discussion

Throughout the journals, interviews, and surveys, the theme of communication with faculty was ever-present. In the students' minds, the success or failure of a course was based on their interactions with the faculty. Both Kay and Johan had negative interactions with a teaching assistant. These experiences had a profound effect on their overall experience in the *Introduction to College* course. In both cases, the students assessed that the teaching assistant was inexperienced and had trouble connecting with the students. This made Kay and Johan question the teaching assistant's authority. This questioning of authority alludes to the idea that Kay and Johan may be in a more advanced stage of student development and are ready to begin to question their instructors.

Two students who had a positive experience with faculty took an almost reverent view of that faculty member. KiKe was impressed with his professor's knowledge and

commitment to his subject. Shiloh believed her history professor was the best teacher she had ever had because of his ability to engage the students in a topic that she had previously found boring. KiKe and Shiloh may be in an earlier stage of student development because they believed that these professors represented truth and also saw them as authority figures rather than partners in the "community of teachers and scholars."

The instructors that the students labeled as unsuccessful were those that seemed to focus on overspecialized course content and could not communicate well with the students. Villia stated that her *Introduction to College* instructor was very knowledgeable, but his inability to generalize that knowledge into a form that students at her level could understand made her skeptical of his teaching ability. Overall, in whatever the stage of development of each student, a genuine connection with the faculty members and teaching assistants was desirable to the students.

Conclusion

The research presented in this chapter had several themes. In all measures, the students indicated that they value good teaching. In fact, there were several examples (Shiloh's interview, especially) where good teaching was valued over interest in subject matter.

Although most of the students had positive things to say about the *Introduction to College* requirement, most were unsure why they were taking the course and did not

recommend it, or were undecided as to whether it should continue as a requirement.

Further, the overall course scores were similar to the scores of courses in other colleges.

In chapter five, a detailed analysis of the research with coding and themes will be presented.

Chapter Five: Research Analysis

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine a recent curricular change at Southwest University to see if the students believed that it was improving not only their academic skills but also their overall first-year experience. This research began by asking students what they expected to be learning and what they hoped to gain by going to college. The study ended by asking the students to examine their experience in the *Introduction to College* course.

Statement of Problem

Southwest University has put a considerable amount of resources and energy into the creation of a new first-year required course, *Introduction to College*. The course has several important goals, including improved writing and oral presentation skills, introduction to inquiry, and introduction to interdisciplinary learning. This study examined the reactions of a group of students to the course. The problem of interest was to gauge the influence the new course has had on their first-year experience.

Research Questions

My research questions for this study were:

- a. What do first-year students expect they should be learning in college?
- b. Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course match the stated goals of the course?
- c. Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course differ from their perceptions of their other first-year courses?

The goal of the questions was to evaluate the reactions to the new first-year course by the students in this study to determine whether or not it is introducing them to the "distinctive" (Task Force, 2004) education of Southwest.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was based on the work of Ralph Tyler, whose book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949) is the definitive work in curriculum evaluation. Tyler's framework was the starting point for the study. His theory of curriculum assessment was incorporated into the two interviews.

Tyler's model for curricular assessment is timeless and provides a robust theoretical framework for the students' evaluation of the course. By empowering the students to evaluate the course based on Tyler's theory (1949), the answers to the research questions began to emerge.

Method

This study was a qualitative research study designed to evaluate experiences of a group of students in the *Introduction to College* course.

Journals and interviews: The six. Six students were identified and asked to participate in the journals and interviews. The students wrote journals within the first few weeks after they arrived at the university. The journals focused on their "educational philosophy" by asking them to write about the purpose of college and their goals for the first year.

After journaling, the six students participated in an hour-long interview where

they were asked about their first-year curriculum as a whole. They were asked to think about their coursework and describe it based on the theoretical framework. The students examined their first-year program of courses as a whole, to identify what they believed was important and effective in their courses. This provided a comparison to their reactions to the *Introduction to College* course.

Finally, the six students participated in a second interview where they only discussed the *Introduction to College* course. Four of these interviews took place in December and January. Most of the students had finished their fall coursework when the interviews occurred. Because two of the six students had not enrolled in the *Introduction to College* course until the spring semester, their interviews took place in January and early February.

Survey. A survey was distributed to a larger group of students (45) to make a comparison to the perceptions of the course made by "the six." Eighteen students returned the survey (n=18). The survey asked the students to answer the same questions posed to the smaller sample of students in the second interviews. The data were then coded and analyzed.

Course surveys. Data from the course surveys were analyzed to see if any trends from the journals, interviews, and surveys could be reflected in the course survey results. The *Introduction to College* course has a specialized survey form that analyzes the unique aspects of the course. The overall instructor and the course ratings were also analyzed and compared to courses in the colleges of Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences

to make comparisons, if possible. The *Introduction to College* surveys had a sample size of 4,054.

Summary of Findings

The journals. The journals started the research project with the six students who elected to participate in both the journals and interviews. The journals asked broad questions that began to narrow at every meeting until pictures of their academic experiences emerged. By analyzing the *Introduction to College* course in combination with their other courses, the study became more than a satisfaction survey. By using journaling and doing two interviews, I sought to get to know the participants and find out what college experiences were relevant and important to them. This allowed for a deeper study of the students, their needs, and their perceptions.

The journals gave insights into the students' expectations for college. The analysis of those ideas gave insight into how they evaluated the *Introduction to College* course. The journals also gave more context to the *Introduction to College*-specific questions that were posed in the second interviews.

The open codes used for the journals were the definition of college, personal goals, and skills needed for success in college.

The definition of college. The axial codes for the definition of college were opportunity, financial success, and independence. These codes all created a similar theme: a feeling of hopefulness surrounding college. All of the six students portrayed

college as an achievement that will be rewarded in society. The students each thought that college was particularly valuable and saw it as a way to better opportunities.

Fry talked specifically about the opportunity attending college would create for him. He said any time the word "college" is mentioned "there is the stunned respect and there is the joyful congrats." Fry, as a first-generation college student, had high expectations for the college experience and felt that it would create a number of opportunities for him.

Shiloh and her family believe that college is the best way to achieve financial success. She said that "college is a way to get a successful career." Even though Shiloh's answer was more blunt and practical than Fry's, they both were coming from the same place. While Fry's answer was geared more to creating opportunities to better himself (in whatever form that takes), Shiloh's was based on a better job to achieve financial success. Both have high hopes for college. Though not mentioned explicitly, students also made reference to class mobility in their answers.

KiKe's answer personified the idea of personal independence by saying, "that being a college student also means that I have many responsibilities as an independent individual."

All six of the students mentioned college as some type of opportunity that would result in personal growth and societal respect. Three of the six students mentioned financial success. They believed that college would create more job opportunities at a higher pay rate. Three of the students stated that college meant a chance to make the

transition to adulthood and become more independent.

The journals gave information about how the students perceived their college experience. When the students listed their goals, they mentioned nothing about academic coursework, the field of study that interested them, or what they hoped to learn. The college experience was about opportunities and a chance for a better life.

Personal goals. The axial codes generated related to their personal goals: academic growth and wellness.

Academic growth. For the six students, academic growth was defined in two ways. For half of the students, their goal was to simply make good grades. This reflected their definition of college as a way to achieve a credential that would lead to opportunities of all types.

The other three students were more concerned with finding a course of study (major). The focus on major declaration was more implicit for these students because they were undeclared majors at the time they wrote in their journals. Fry mentioned a desire to get into the art school because he had great passion for art, but specifics about other academic areas of interest were not mentioned.

Overall, the mention of the search for the academic major had more to do with the students finding themselves. Kay said, "For this year, I really want to figure out who I am and my purpose. There are a lot of things I want! I want to find a major that I see that fits." For Kay, her major did not tie to her academic curiosity. Instead, she looked at her major to help her find out who she is and what her purpose is. This was also true

for three other students.

Wellness. Wellness was one surprising code from the journals. Two students mentioned maintaining their health, and in the case of Fry, to better himself physically and mentally. Fry said,

I've made tremendous progress, went from 250 pounds and am now down to 205. I have massive goals to achieve when it comes to my body. I am a firm believer in *strong mind, strong body, strong life*. I want to be able to run marathons and to feel no limitations in the things I could do.

The students described college as a kind of mental and physical test where all their resources would be tapped.

The skills needed for success. This was an important question to form a basis for their evaluation of the *Introduction to College* course. The course focuses on basic skills that the task force believed were essential for student success in college, including college-level writing, interdisciplinary learning, and public speaking.

In the journals, the students did not mention the skills defined by the task force. This could be because the students take for granted that they will be developing skills like writing and public speaking in their courses. Or, it could be that the students have very different ideas of what is needed for success and what they should focus on to be good college students.

Time management was mentioned by three of the students. Villia defined that as "finding time to study when it seems like there is none." The idea of multitasking seems to be a staple of the Millennial Generation. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) said, "They (Millennials) are joined by a set of common practices, including...their tendency to

multitask..." (p. 4).

A good work ethic was the skill that the three other students deemed most important for success in college. KiKe said, "The most important skill will definitely be determination." KiKe, Fry, and Johan believed that working hard would be the skill that made them successful in college.

The three students did not mention that they would need to work hard on writing papers or in math class because those skills were important to their future success. Instead, they mentioned work ethic in terms of a way to get the degree.

Summary of Journals

The journals gave an interesting composite of the six student participants' ideas about college when they entered in the first semester. Their focus was on personal improvement and growth as well as academic success, which they defined as graduating and getting a degree.

These six students came to college from very different backgrounds. Some are first-generation students, some are underrepresented minorities, some come from privileged backgrounds where college was always expected, and yet, they all had the same types of observations. The goal is the degree. The degree is needed to increase opportunities. To get the degree, they expected to work hard and push themselves physically and mentally. They understood it would be a struggle.

The First Interviews

The first interviews were coded with Tyler's original four questions in mind. The three open codes that came out of the first set of interviews were: (a) What constitutes a successful course? (b) What constitutes a course where it is difficult to learn? (c) What is the purpose of college?

What constitutes a successful course? The question, "What constitutes a successful course?" yielded the following axial codes: good teaching, connection with students, and relevant course material. All of the students reflected on at least one of these codes in their answer. Good teaching was present in all the students' answers, and all of them cited specific examples of how the professor had connected with them, which led to a connection with the material.

The second most popular answer was relevant course material. This was defined as course material that the students believed was relatable to their everyday lives. All but one student, Shiloh, who loved her history course strictly because of her teacher and not because of the subject matter, mentioned this as an important aspect in creating a successful course.

The final code that was most prevalent in these answers was connection to the student. This was also a very important component of a successful course to the students. Data on the Millennial student have indicated that these students currently desire, even expect, a tremendous amount of communication and guidance from educational institutions and professors. Millennial students desire teachers who care and

who are willing to spend time with them inside and outside of class (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Five of the six students mentioned that the connection of the professor with the students was an extremely important part of a successful course.

What constitutes a course where it is difficult to learn? “What constitutes a course where it is difficult to learn?” produced the axial codes of disengaged professor and uninteresting course material. These codes are not surprising, and are the exact opposites of the attributes listed for a successful course.

A disengaged professor. Both KiKe and Fry described difficult experiences in calculus where the teacher seemed "angry" and intimidating. The professor suggested that many of the students did not have the skills to persist in the course, and she suggested that they drop the course. KiKe actually did drop the course and added a different section with a different instructor who created an environment where he could learn, even though he found the material very difficult. Fry was not so lucky. He called calculus his "biggest fear" and did not connect with the professor at all.

Kay had a negative experience in her *Introduction to College* course because she believed that the teaching assistant had pushed her to speak in class about her experiences because Kay is a member of an underrepresented minority group. The lack of sensitivity caused the course to go from being one of Kay's favorites to being her least favorite.

Kay also brought up the theme of over-specialization. She described her science professor as well-versed in the material, but "he was so into it" that he had a hard time

relaying the material to the students in a way they could understand. This concept of over-specialization is a very important term in Tyler's work. Tyler speaks about "subject specialists" in terms of those who develop curriculum for the public schools, but the idea can also be applied to higher education. He says, "many people have criticized the use of subject specialists on the grounds that the objectives they propose are too technical, too specialized, or in other ways are inappropriate for large groups of students" (1949, p. 26). All the courses the students mentioned are core courses, and therefore, the material is taught to large groups of students.

Uninteresting course material. Uninteresting course material produced the axial codes "Why do I have to learn this stuff?" and "They treat me like I'm stupid!"

Why do I have to learn this stuff? These answers indicated that the students did not understand how the course material was relevant. This was the most prevalent code mentioned when discussing courses that the students did not enjoy.

Kay said, "The ones that I don't really enjoy are kinda like a waste of time. Like I was just in [science class], and I really just felt like turning in my paper and leaving." KiKe, who also did not like his science class added, "[I am not enjoying my science class]. I am not a math person at all. If I could, I would just avoid it."

All the students mentioned that in the courses they did not like, they believed the information presented was unimportant or they could not figure out how it would fit into their lives. They could not find any connection to the material, and therefore, the class was not worthwhile.

They treat me like I'm stupid! The next code was paraphrased, but was a sentiment expressed by many of the students. As Oakeshott (2003) observed in the quotation included in chapter two, undergraduate students are often not given the credit they deserve when they enter college. The students perceived that courses were being taught below their skill level in several of their answers.

The six participants found this type of attitude off-putting and noted it as a primary reason that they did not enjoy a course. In all, five of the six students made direct reference to it or alluded to it, but Johan Julius made the strongest point when describing the environment in his *Introduction to College* course.

He said:

I think the questions [asked of us] could be a little higher on the intellectual level, myself. For some people, I mean there's probably other people are fine with the intellectual level they are at...(People don't talk in there because) we're all thinking the same answer, it's just nobody kind of wants to say it out [loud]and be the person to, you know, always answer the question.

The teaching assistant probably assumed that the students were not speaking in the discussion section because they did not know the answers to the questions she was posing. However, Johan pointed out that he believes just the opposite situation happened. The discussion section was pitched at a level so far below the students' knowledge level that the students responded by disengaging. In Johan's opinion, the questions were too easy to answer without looking like a showoff to his peers. The lack of communication between the teaching assistant and the students caused bright, talented students like Johan to disengage.

Summary of First Interviews

The overall purpose of the first interviews was to build on the journals and give some context to analyze the students' reactions to the *Introduction to College* course.

The first interviews illuminated that the most important aspects to make a class successful for the students was how engaging the professor was. The students expected the professor to make attempts to connect with them or to show a personal interest in them, and when he or she did not, the students found that off-putting.

The students also believed that the course material should be engaging and that the professor should be able to find ways to make it relatable to the contemporary world and their own lives. When the students listed the courses they liked, they found ways to mention how the course related to them as individuals. In some cases, they were interested in majoring in an area with similar courses. In other instances, the course contained material that was a personal passion. Overall, the students disliked the core courses where their choices may have been more limited.

While the journals clarified the students' philosophy of education and their purpose for attending college, the first interviews gave detailed information about how they perceived their courses. Their focus on good teaching dominated the comments. The students believed that good teaching was the antidote to courses that were required but, in their opinion, boring. In the cases of KiKe and Shiloh with calculus and history, they found that they could conquer a topic they disliked with good teaching.

The *Introduction to College* course should have an advantage over other courses because to teach in the program, the professors were reviewed and recommended by their deans and selected by a committee. In addition, the topics the professors taught were ones of their own choosing. However, in these first interviews, only one student, KiKe, mentioned the course as a favorite, and three students, Villia, Kay, and Johan, mentioned it as one of their least favorites. Shiloh and Fry did not take the course in the fall semester.

In the first interviews, the students perceived the *Introduction to College* course in a similar way to how they reacted to their other courses. From the answers they gave in the first interviews, it appeared that they did not see anything unique or different about the requirements of the course. None of the students mentioned that the course was introducing them to what was unique about the educational experience at Southwest. At this time, they saw the course as just another requirement they had to take. With the exception of KiKe, they did not indicate that the teaching or the topics made a significant difference in their skill set. In the first interviews, their evaluation of all of the courses was about their own satisfaction and their level of interest in the subject matter. However, it was early in the semester. The second interviews evaluated whether or not their opinions changed after finishing the course.

The Second Interviews and Surveys

The second interviews and surveys were used to explore the reactions of students to the *Introduction to College* course. The second interviews with “the six” participants were done in person or by email, and the surveys were all sent out via the Internet.

The purpose of sending out the survey was to get a larger sample of student reactions to the *Introduction to College* course. Since both the six participants and the survey respondents were asked the same questions, their results were analyzed together. These results will be compared to the results of the course surveys administered by Southwest University to see if any trends can be identified.

The questions that were analyzed for this summary from the survey and second interviews are: 1) Did you achieve your first semester goals? 2) Did the *Introduction to College* course have a role in any of the goals you achieved? 3) Was the most valuable thing you learned inside or outside the classroom? 4) Do you think the *Introduction to College* course should continue to be a requirement for all students?

Enrollment Demographics

The overall demographics of the sample and each student's enrollment status in the *Introduction to College* course are: 15 (63%) of the 24 students enrolled in the course in Fall 2010. Seven students (29%) enrolled in Spring 2011 and two students (8%) had not yet enrolled in the course.

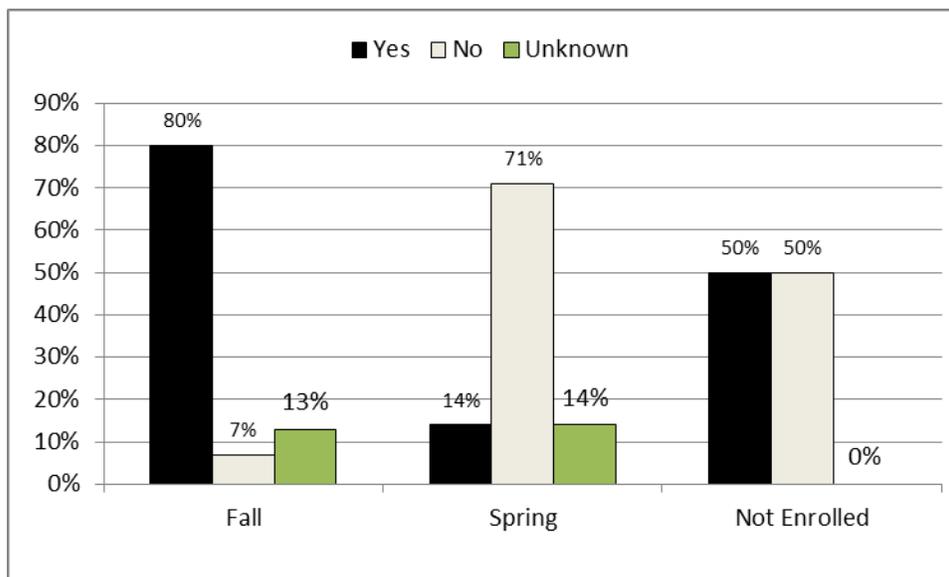


Figure 11. Did You Achieve Your First Semester Goal?

Did you achieve your first semester goals? Eighty percent of the students who enrolled in the *Introduction to College* course in their first semester achieved their intended goals for the semester. Seventy-one percent of the students who enrolled in the spring did not achieve their goals. This is especially important to this study because 19 (79%) of the students stated that their goals primarily had to do with academics and grades. Perhaps, the *Introduction to College* course had some role in the students achieving their goals. However, most of the students in this study did not credit the course with helping them to achieve their first semester goals.

Did the *Introduction to College* course help you achieve your first-year goals? Eighteen (84%) did not mention that the *Introduction to College* course had played any role in helping them to achieve their goals. Four (16%) of the students mentioned that the course had helped them with their goals. They all participated in the

journaling and interviews, so their perceptions may have been influenced by interactions with the researcher. Kay believed that the course had introduced her to more campus resources. Fry, who had just started the course, said it helped him to be more organized. KiKe loved his course and thought it had made him a better writer and reader. Finally, the undeclared Villia had such a negative experience in the course that it ruled out that academic discipline as a major course of study.

Was the most valuable thing you learned inside or outside the classroom?

Seventeen students (71%) believed the most valuable learning occurred outside the classroom. The answers they gave can be coded into three categories: social (making friends), applied learning (what's really important cannot be learned in a classroom), and real-life experiences (learning to live independently and responsibly). Five students (29%) said that the most valuable thing they learned outside the classroom had to do with their social development. Four students (23%) stated that the most valuable things they learned had to do with becoming an adult and living responsibly. Eight students (33%) suggested that the most important knowledge cannot be taught in a classroom.

One student said, "Hands-on experience outside the classroom can teach you so much more than any test ever could. I honestly wish classes existed where EVERYTHING occurs outside the classroom." This student believed that applied learning was superior to theoretical learning. In order to gain a "hands-on" experience, she wished there were a way for classes to move outside the classroom, suggesting that she perceived experiential learning as the most effective. The other students in this

category were not quite as extreme, but three students perceived that outside of classroom was a better place to reflect on material and to discuss it with peers without judgment.

Do you think the *Introduction to College* course should continue to be a requirement for all students? Overall, 11 (46%) of the 24 students believed the course should continue as a requirement. Eight (33%) believed the course should not be a requirement. Four (16%) were undecided. Johan Julius, who had not been a fan of the course throughout the semester, ironically, was one of the most supportive. He saw the course as a chance to become well-rounded. KiKe was the course's most enthusiastic supporter, saying that if he were president of the university, the course would be his priority.

The surveyed students' positive comments were constructive, but could be interpreted as indifferent. Most who indicated the requirement should continue thought the course was well-intentioned, but was too easy or did not meet its stated or implied goals.

Summary of Second Interviews and Surveys

The second interviews and surveys gave a picture of how the students reacted to the *Introduction to College* course. The majority did not believe that it had helped them achieve their first-semester goals. However, it was clear that the students' goals did not always match the goals for the course. One-third of them believed that it should continue as a required course.

The second interviews and surveys were important because they allowed for a comparison of comments between "the six" and 18 additional survey participants. Both groups answered the questions in similar ways. These results could indicate that the interviews and journals reflect opinions representative of Southwest's first-year class.

Analysis of Course Surveys

The course surveys provided the study with a large sample of students who were asked to evaluate the course through an institutionally mandated survey. The surveys provided only a rough comparison that would be used only for informational purposes.

To give some context to the course surveys, the *Introduction to College* courses were also compared with courses in Liberal Arts courses and Natural Science. This is not a direct comparison, because the surveyed populations as well as the courses surveyed have some distinct differences. The Liberal Arts and Natural Science courses include courses that were taught by adjuncts, assistant instructors, teaching assistants, and full-time faculty. The *Introduction to College* course was taught only by full-time faculty. The *Introduction to College* course has many different topics selected by the professor, and students are allowed to select the course in which they enroll. The Liberal Arts and Natural Science courses contain courses required of majors, electives, and higher-level seminars, but they also include almost all of the "service" courses that make up the bulk of the core curriculum.

Even though the surveyed populations are different, all the surveys contain some of the same questions, "the common questions." The *Introduction to College* course

form has additional questions that are relevant only to that course. The questions particular to the *Introduction to College* course were analyzed separately and were not compared with the results from the other colleges.

The responses for the common questions are similar in all three samples. The *Introduction to College* only had the top score in one category in fall 2009, but all of the scores were very close. The question, "The Instructor showed interest in the progress of students" scored a 4.4 out of 5. The other colleges both scored a 4.2.

In spring 2010, the *Introduction to College* course had the lowest score or tied for the lowest score in every category.

The results do provide some additional support for the opinions of the student participants who had both positive and negative things to say about the course. Few listed it as their favorite, and most found their courses in other areas to be at least as satisfying and in some cases more satisfying than the *Introduction to College* course.

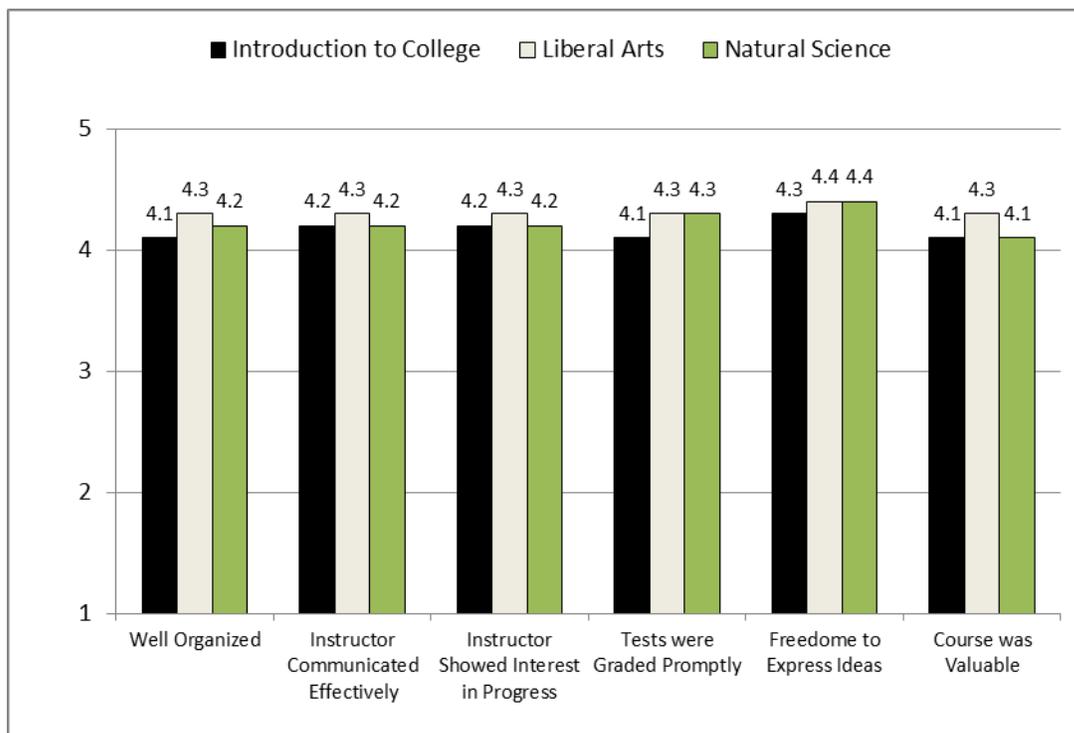


Figure 12. Average Score out of 5 for Common Questions, Spring 2010

The Overall Course and Instructor ratings yielded similar results. In fall, the Instructor rating was the highest ranking in the group, with a 4.3. Liberal Arts scored a 4.2 on instructor rating and a 4 on the course rating, where the *Introduction to College* course scored a 3.9. In this ranking, Natural Science College courses dip a bit with a 4.0 instructor rating and a 3.7 overall rating. However, all the scores are within .3 of each other.

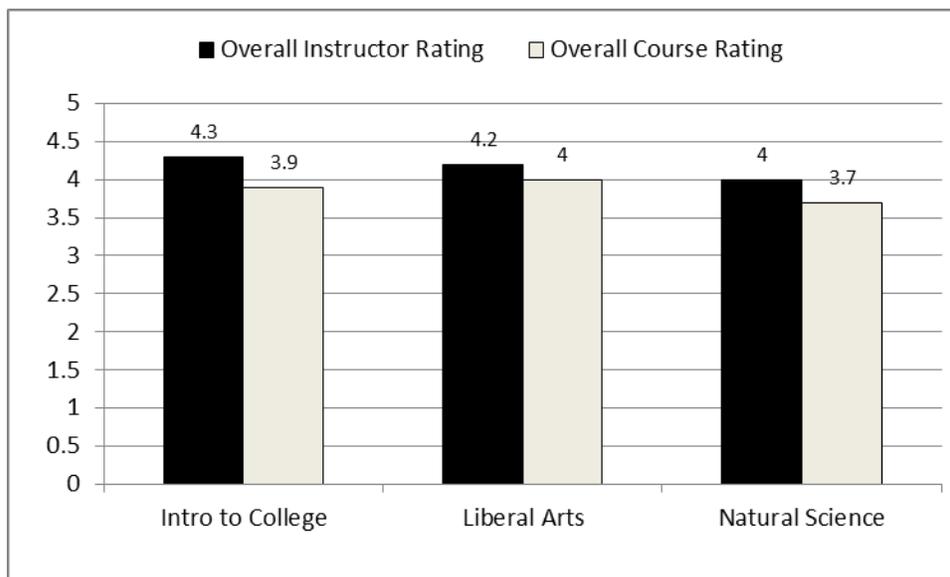


Figure 13. Overall Ratings Out of 5, Fall 2009

The spring ratings were not as strong as the fall scores for the *Introduction to College* course. With a 4.1 instructor rating and a 3.8 course rating, the scores are identical to the scores in Natural Science College. Liberal Arts College courses had a 4.2 instructor and 4 course rating.

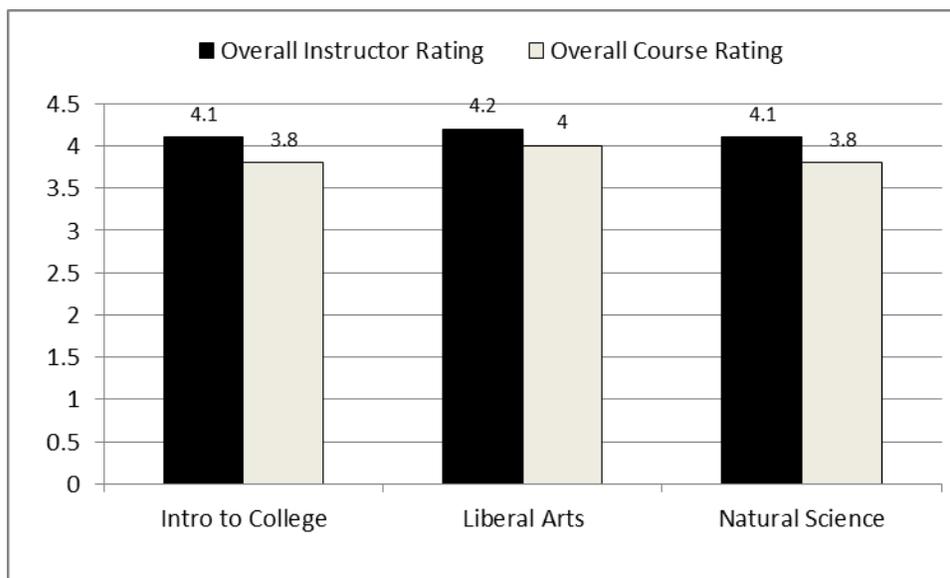


Figure 14. Overall Ratings Out of 5, Spring 2010

Finally, the questions specific to the *Introduction to College* course were analyzed. These questions cannot be compared with the other colleges because they only appear on the *Introduction to College* surveys. The spring semester yielded five questions in the high 3 range, and two questions scored in the 4 range. In the fall, the scores were 4 and above in five categories. Most interesting are the two scores of 3.7 in the "instructor encouraged me to get to know him outside of class." Getting to know faculty is a primary goal of the *Introduction to College* course.

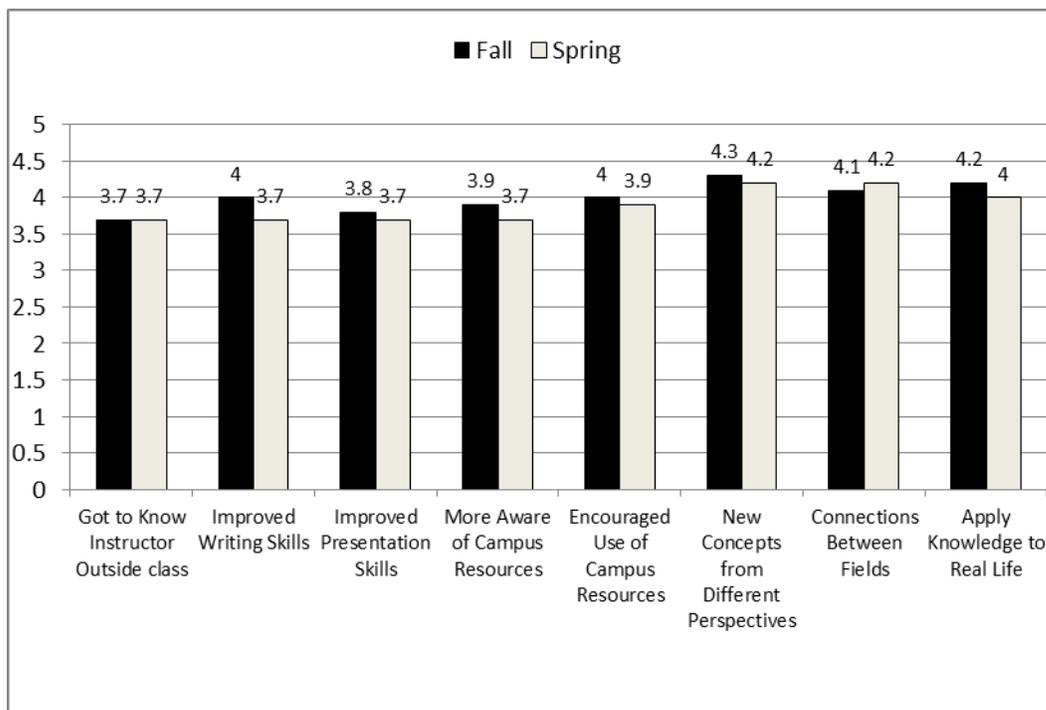


Figure 15. Average Scores of *Introduction to College* to Specific Questions

Summary of Course Surveys

The results of the overall score and the overall instructor rating for the *Introduction to College* course are almost identical to the surveys in the Liberal Arts and Natural Science Colleges. The course-specific questions had high scores, but had some areas that indicated the need for attention and possible improvement.

Overall, the spring course scores are also consistently lower. This may be because students have more of a basis for comparison or are more experienced in filling out the survey. However, the differences are not so large as to indicate that a different experience is happening in the spring semester.

Answering the Research Questions: The Reactions of The Six

Research Question 1: What do first-year students expect they should be learning in college? It was evident from the students' answers about their expectations of college that they believed the most important thing they were going to learn was how to make the transition from being a child to being an adult.

They mentioned that they wanted to learn how to live independently, manage their finances, and keep in good mental and physical health. They cited the most valuable skill they would learn in college would be "time management," which reflects the idea of the transition from the structure of high school and their parents to learning how to do it all themselves at the university.

The goal of the *Introduction to College* course is to help students make the transition from being a high school student to being a college student. In that sense, the course is very much in tune with the students' personal goals for the first year of college. However, the course focuses on academic rather than personal development. Therefore, even though the students made the transition with the help of the course, it was clear from their answers that they were not really conscious of the *Introduction to College* course or any other course's role in this transition.

William Perry, the author of *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (1970), and famed student development theorist, would say that this is because first-year students are in the "late dualistic" or "late multiplicity"

stage of their development and cannot understand the association between their personal goals and their coursework (Rapaport, 2010).

Research Question 2: Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course match the stated goals of the course? The *Introduction to College* course has many stated goals. There are the skills-based goals: improved writing skills, improved presentation skills, and exposure to interdisciplinary study. There are also the more classically based goals: assistance with the transition from high school to college, increased communication between students, and an introduction to the "unique" educational experience offered by Southwest.

In the first interviews, the students did not perceive the course in the way the task force had hoped. Three of the six mentioned it as one of their least favorites, with Johan saying that the course was beneath his skill level and that he was not enjoying the writing. Villia complained of weak teaching and a topic that did not seem to be interdisciplinary. Kay brought up an experience with a teaching assistant where she felt marginalized and stereotyped, which she believed was far from reflecting the unique and diverse environment at Southwest.

However, the four students of "the six" who took the course in the fall had very different feelings about the course in the second interviews. Johan, who was most negative about the course, said that by the end he saw its value and that the course even surpassed his expectations. Kay appreciated being exposed to campus resources that she would not have been aware of otherwise. Villia, who disliked the course, cited a

concept introduced in the course that she thought she would use in other courses and in her personal life. She also said the course had helped her rule out a major course of study that was of interest to her before. Based on these results, it could be concluded that initially, the students did not perceive that their own goals matched those of the task force. By the end of the semester, however, they had come to appreciate the course. The reasons they cited to describe why the course was valuable were all mentioned in the stated goals of the course (writing, campus resources, museum visits). Based on the reactions of these students, it is possible that students will come to appreciate the course more at the end of the semester than they did initially.

Research Question 3: Do the student perceptions of the *Introduction to College* course differ from their perceptions of their other first-year courses? In the second interviews, the students acknowledged that The *Introduction to College* course is having an impact on them, but based on their answers, it cannot be concluded that they view it as an integral part of their first-year curriculum. Fewer than half of 24 students in this study thought it should continue to be a requirement. However, 100% of the six who participated in the longer study thought the course should remain a requirement.

Those six students in this study had an overall positive reaction to the course. However, most of them (with the exception of KiKe) had negative comments, too. From this study, it is not clear that the course is exposing students to what is unique about an education at Southwest University, as the task force had envisioned. The students in this study seem to treat the course as they would any other. All are aware that it is a new

course and it is in its first few years of being a requirement, but few were aware of its origins or why they were taking it.

The results of this study also do not indicate that the course was creating a more common experience among the first-year students. The students in this study only see a common course number with widely varying topics. They did not seem aware that they were asked to fulfill the same requirements in all sections through the unique features of the course.

And finally, the way they evaluated this course was almost identical to the way they evaluated their other courses. This study does not indicate that they perceive this course as being any different than any of their other courses.

Recommendations

The recommendation is for the administration of Southwest to continue to evaluate the course with a larger sample over a longer period of time to see how effective the course is and if it begins to distinguish itself from the other courses already required in the curriculum.

Second, the university might work to "tease out" the cost of the program. The current budget for the program may overestimate or underestimate the cost. As with any program, the psychic benefits should also be considered.

The third recommendation is to refine the marketing plan for the course. The students in the study had no idea that distinguished members of the university community had recommended the course or that it was a new requirement designed to

bring them together and enhance their first-year experience. The students in this study first heard of the course when they enrolled, and most were still unsure of why it was required until the end of the semester. If the course is going to establish itself as something integral to the first-year experience, outreach to high school counselors, admissions counselors, and academic advisors is essential in order to craft a message that will excite the students about the unique aspects of the course.

The final recommendation is to examine other innovative curriculum reforms that might be incorporated into the *Introduction to College* course. This might distinguish the course as a more unique experience and cause it to become something more exciting to the students. A majority of the students in this study indicated they were doing more learning outside the classroom. It would be important to find out why and see how some of those techniques can be enhanced.

Recommendations for Further Research

The first recommendation for further research is a longitudinal study of at least four years to examine how the students rate the *Introduction to College* experience as they move through programs at Southwest.

Southwest University has committed to a long-term assessment of the *Introduction to College* course, which includes both quantitative and qualitative methods and evaluates students' work to see if it has improved as a result of the course. The results of that study will be important. This study would suggest that a series of student interviews, where students could reflect on their experience over time, would be useful.

Another valuable study would be to compare the results of the *Introduction to College* course with other typical first-year courses. The students in this study indicated that the goals of the *Introduction to College* course were also being met in some of their other first-year courses. A study of this kind may find that efforts are being duplicated, and that the goals for the *Introduction to College* course may need to be revised.

Conclusion

This research was an inductive and exploratory analysis that examined the reactions of a sample of students to a new required first-year course at Southwest University. The students' reactions to the course were both positive and negative. The stated goals of the course did match the goals of the students, but most of the students were not able to realize this until they had completed the course. One concern indicated by the research was that the students did not find the *Introduction to College* course to be much different than the other first-year courses they were taking. In order for the course to be distinctive to students, more research must be done to study if there is any overlap between courses and if there is need for the course in the overall curriculum.

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