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THE INFLUENCE OF A NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION PROGRAM:

FIRST SEMESTER STUDENT SUCCESS IN A SUBURBAN COMMUNITY

COLLEGE

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THE INFLUENCE OF A NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION PROGRAM: FIRST SEMESTER STUDENT SUCCESS IN A SUBURBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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Treatise

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

The University of Texas at Austin

August, 2011

Dedication

In memory of my parents, Lawrence A. "Red" and Josephine B. "Jo" Lewis, neither of

whom had the chance to graduate high school, let alone attend college. Yet, both

remained firmly committed to the belief that their only child would have the educational

opportunities they never enjoyed.

And

For my dear wife Katherine, for her love, support, and unending encouragement. She

will always be my love.

Acknowledgements

It has been said that education is a journey and not a destination. As we proceed on this journey, we may not always know where the road will lead us. On my educational journey over the last three years, I have been truly blessed with the nurture and support of my family, friends and colleagues. Without their assistance and guidance, I could not have succeeded in my goal to complete a doctorate.

To my loving wife, Katherine, I gratefully appreciate her support and constant encouragement that I could succeed. She unselfishly placed her needs on hold, as a "widow" of a graduate student over the last few years to help me reach my goal of completion. I am indeed fortunate that she came into my life. She will always be my love.

To my supervisors at Lone Star College-CyFair, Dr. Christal Albrecht, Dr. Feleccia Moore-Davis, and soon to be Dr. Deana Sheppard, I appreciate their support of my educational goals. Over the past three years, they worked with me and allowed me to develop flexible work schedules so that I could continue to work fulltime while pursuing a doctorate. I am grateful to Dr. Diane Troyer, the founding president of Lone Star College-CyFair who developed and shared a vision of "a living laboratory for the future" and who encouraged me to enter the Community College Leadership Program. To our college president, Dr. Audre Levy, I thank her for her support of my participation in this program and inviting me to serve as her intern during my studies. Dr. Levy continues to

mentor me in my growth as an administrator by meeting with me regularly to discuss my goals and progress.

To the best, most dependable dean's staff that an administrator could ever work with: Tricia Limon, Lisa Cougot, Debbie Seidel, Sony Simon, Miriam Whitsitt, and Kerrah Cain. They have kept me informed of all issues while I am away. I knew that I could always trust them to provide excellent service, address challenges, and meet student needs in my absence. To Tim Sebesta, who served on the Deans' Council, represented me in countless college and system meetings, and made divisional decisions in my absence. Tim has the skills to become an exceptional administrator. Should he choose to move into that role, I am eager to assist him.

I am indebted to Christine Timmerman, the director of outreach and retention at Lone Star College-CyFair for sharing all information about the new student orientation program with me and providing me with full access to every session and to all participants. I hope to one day return the favor by assisting her with her research when she enters the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin. I also want to express my appreciation to Robert Ricks, Campus Office of Research & Institutional Effectiveness (ORIE) Analyst at Lone Star College-CyFair for providing me with student retention, success, and persistence data.

To my classmates in CCLP Block 64 (Abdul, Anthony, Beth, Christopher, Christy, Dana, Erika, Marie, Eva, John, Kenna, and Pamela). We entered the program as a group of diverse and disparate individuals, but developed into an effective team. Thank

you for the opportunity to work with you. I look forward to future collaborations as we progress along our leadership journeys. I also want to express my appreciation to the members of Block 63 (who came before us and helped us understand expectations of this truly incredible program) and Block 65 (who I have enjoyed collaborating and developing friendships with). Of all of my classmates and friends, I especially want to express my appreciation to Abdul Tamimi. Over the last three years, Abdul has become the brother I never had. We have lived together, laughed together, cried together, and grown as leaders together. Most importantly he has always been there to support me or lend an empathetic ear. I could not ask for a better friend. He will always be my brother.

I am indeed privileged to have been a student in the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin under the leadership of Dr. John Roueche. To Dr. Roueche, I extend my deepest heartfelt appreciation for his mentorship. Good mentors see the potential in their students and help direct their paths. Dr. Roueche has continued to provide me with the guidance, encouragement, and motivation to succeed. I have the deepest respect for him. His faith in my abilities inspires me to always put forth my best efforts. I am also privileged to have been mentored by Dr. Walter Bumphus as my faculty advisor. To Dr. Bumphus, I express my gratitude for taking the time to work with me and always provide meaningful feedback of my work and progress in this program. His leadership skills and positive attitude in working with others are traits I strive to emulate. I count among the best experiences in

my doctoral program the times that Dr. Roueche and Dr. Bumphus welcomed my classmates and me into their homes.

The world-class faculty who I have studied under at the University of Texas at Austin is among the most dedicated professionals I have had the privilege to know. Dr. John Roueche, Dr. Walter Bumphus, Dr. Norville Northcutt, Dr. Louis Harrison, Dr. Richard Reddick, Dr. Bill Lasher, Dr. Edwin Sharpe, Dr. Martha Ovando, Dr. George Veletsianos, Dr. Paul von Hipple, and Dr. Don Rippey set high standards and always demanded the best in their students. To each of them, I am deeply grateful.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the donors who established the endowments that provide financial assistance from which I have benefitted in my graduate studies: Dr. John Roueche, Dr. Don and Dr. Gwen Rippey, and the Greater Houston Endowment. The financial assistance provided by these awards significantly defrayed the costs of my education and made it possible for me to complete my degree.

To the extended CCLP family at the University of Texas at Austin, I am deeply grateful. Dr. Evelyn Waiwaiole, Dr. Byron McClenney, Dr. Kay McClenney, Dr. Coral Noonan-Terry, Dr. Margaretta Mathis, Dr. Suanne Roueche, Ruth Thompson, Reid Watson, Beverly Hurbace, Christy Lewis, Sheryl Powell, Gloria Herrera, Hortensia Palomares, Linda Overton, and Sarah Cale always greeted me with a smile and inquired about my progress in the program with the encouragement to succeed.

I will forever be indebted to the members of my treatise committee for working with me on my research and providing suggestions and recommendations as to how I

may improve it. As the supervisor of my research, Dr. John Roueche always found time to meet with me and provide me with guidance and support through this process. I am thankful that Dr. Walter Bumphus committed to serve on my committee and work with me although he would soon be leaving the University of Texas at Austin as the new president of the American Association of Community Colleges. I am grateful to Dr. Norville Northcutt for his advice about gathering and analyzing data as well as his advocacy for this study's approval by the Institutional Review Board. He provided a practical approach to addressing procedural challenges in approval of data collection. I sincerely appreciate Dr. Louis Harrison's willingness to serve on my committee even though I had not yet completed a course with him. He provided keen insights and advice about adding control focus groups to my research, enabling me to make the study more robust. Having worked with Dr. Earl Campa at Lone Star College-CyFair, I am grateful that he agreed to serve on my committee. Dr. Campa first greeted me on my initial visit to the college, welcoming me onto campus and sharing his vision for student-centered student services. Once I was hired he took the time to better acquaint me with the Houston area and introduce me into the Cy-Fair community. His mentorship, support, and generosity have continued with his service on my committee. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Christal Albrecht. Dr. Albrecht is the reason I first decided to join the Cy-Fair family, and the reason for my success as a founding member of it. I have learned so much under her leadership. I sincerely appreciate her continued mentorship, support, and

encouragement of my success through her friendship as well as her service on my committee.

    To everyone that has helped and encouraged me on this journey, I thank you. I would not be here without your kind support.

THE INFLUENCE OF A NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION PROGRAM:

FIRST SEMESTER STUDENT SUCCESS IN A SUBURBAN COMMUNITY

COLLEGE

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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Despite a long history of providing open-door access to students who might not otherwise have an opportunity to attend college, community colleges have not been as effective in fostering student success. To counter this trend, early intervention programs have been developed to facilitate academic and social integration for first semester students to improve student success. However, there is much that is not known about the influence of orientation programs at community colleges as an intervention strategy. Therefore, this study examines the influence of one new student orientation on first semester student success.

Grounded in frameworks developed by Astin (1984, 1993, 1999), Tinto (1975, 1993), and Bean and Metzner (1985), this study examines the ability of a new student orientation to academically and socially integrate students into the culture of the institution.

The following research questions are posed:

- Does new student orientation influence student retention;

- Does new student orientation influence student success;

- Does new student orientation influence student persistence;

- Does new student orientation facilitate a student's social integration into the institution?

- Does new student orientation facilitate a student's academic integration into the institution?

The focus of this case study is a publicly supported, two-year, comprehensive community college that is part of a multiple college district located in a suburban area outside of a major city in Texas. Participants are students who attended a new student orientation session. Employing a mixed methods research approach, data is gathered on student success, retention, persistence, and through interviews.

Findings demonstrate that there was no significant difference in first semester retention for students who participated in a new student orientation and for those who did not. However, students who participated in orientation were more likely to be successful in their first semester in college and much more likely to re-enroll for their second semester at the institution. New student orientation also facilitated students' social and academic integration into the institution. This study concludes with recommendations for program improvement, recommendations for further research, and a discussion of implications for community college policy and practice in developing new student orientation programs.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Community colleges, as open door institutions, have historically focused their efforts on providing students with access to higher education (Roueche, Johnson, & Roueche, 1997). As a result, they have been remarkably successful in providing educational opportunities for at-risk students who otherwise, might not have access to college (Achieving the Dream, 2006). Currently, over 11.8 million students attend one of the nation's nearly 1,200 2-year institutions. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), these 11.8 million students represent 43% of all U.S. undergraduates and 40% of first-time freshmen (AACC, 2010). However, access alone has not ensured that students achieve their individual goals, which may include earning a community college certificate or degree, attaining a bachelor's degree, and/or obtaining a better job (Achieving the Dream, 2006). Fewer than half of community college students meet their educational goals. The first year of college is the most critical to degree completion. Nearly one-third of all first-year students who enroll at America's postsecondary schools this year will not return to college next fall (Lumina Foundation, 2008); and less than six out of 10 first-time, full-time, degree-seeking college freshmen will graduate within six years (United States Department of Education, 2009).

Critical to a student's retention and persistence in college is his or her integration into the academic and social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration involves academic performance as well as interactions with the

faculty and staff. Social integration includes student participation in extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. Research has shown that many first year students have difficulty adjusting to new academic and social environments, leading to failure their first semester in college (Cuseo, 1991; Lewington, 1996; United States Department of Education, 2007).

This chapter introduces the nature of this study, discusses the problem addressed by this study, and identifies the purpose of this study. Additionally, research questions, the methodology employed, and significance of the study are presented. Delimitations, limitations, assumptions, and a summary are also included.

Statement of the Problem

Institutions of higher education have designed interventions, including freshman orientation programs, to support first-year students and help them adjust to the academic demands and social environment of the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993) as well as to address the problem of low retention among first year students. As a result, community colleges have designed and implemented orientation programs for incoming students. Effective orientation programs provide clear institutional expectations for students (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Tinto, 1993; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). They are designed to help new students connect with the campus community and prepare for success by providing essential information about academic programs and requirements, student services, student organizations and activities, and both academic and non-academic resources available to students. Such programs also

2

encourage students to meet their future classmates and build relationships that will serve as an informal support network for their success.

Historically, universities have been more effective than community colleges in providing meaningful orientation programs (O'Banion, 1997). New Student Orientation programs continue to be the most widely used form of early intervention at colleges and universities (Tinto, 2006-2007). Many 4-year universities hold week-long orientations to introduce incoming students to the college environment. Because most community college students work (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2007), this option may not be available to all incoming students. However, community colleges can offer intensive one or two day orientations for incoming students, at a variety of times, including evenings and weekends to facilitate student integration into the academic and social systems of the institution. Research has examined how participation in orientation programs affect student learning at 4-year institutions of higher education (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Colton, Connor, Shultz, & Easter, 1999; Fidler, 1991; Horton, 1987; Miller, 1985; Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001; Stupka, 1986; & Tinto, 1993). While several community colleges offer orientation sessions and spend resources to create the most promising experiences and activities, little is known about the influence of these programs on first semester student retention and success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of a publicly supported, 2-year, comprehensive suburban community college's new student orientation on the academic performance and retention of first time college students. This study examines the student success indicators of persistence, retention, and success during the first semester of college for those students participating in a new student orientation session, and compares these indicators against those for first semester students not participating in a new student orientation session.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Does new student orientation influence student retention?

2. Does new student orientation influence student success?

3. Does new student orientation influence student persistence?

4. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's social integration into the institution?

5. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's academic integration into the institution?

Methodology

To assess the influence of a community college's new student orientation sessions on the academic performance and retention of new community college students, this case study uses a mixed (or combined) methods approach, examining

both quantitative and qualitative data. In gathering quantitative data, the overall retention rates, success rates, and persistence rates of students who have participated in a new student orientation is compared against those measures for students who have not participated in a session.

For qualitative data, students who participated in a new student orientation session were interviewed. Additionally, students who did not participate in a new student orientation session were interviewed and responses were compared for each group. Interviews have been described as "conversations with a purpose" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 85). In creating the protocols for the interview, a semi-structured interview was conducted using open-ended questions and a fairly open framework to allow for a focused conversation (Maxwell, 2005). The semi-structured nature of the interview allows the researcher to "explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate a particular subject" (Patton, 2003). Additionally, the qualitative inquiry technique of semi-structured interview allows for the wording and sequence of questions to "happen naturally through the interview process, while maintaining relevance to the predetermined topic" (Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008, p. 5). The interview was "fairly conversational and situational" (Patton, 2003, p. 349). Semi-structured interviews must be fully planned and prepared. Compared with fully-structured interviews, successful semi-structured interviews require as much preparation before the session, more discipline and creativity during the session, and more time analysis and interpretation after the session (Wengraf, 2001).

5

Participants were selected based on criterion sampling techniques. In criterion sampling, a group is selected because they meet certain criteria (Patton, 2003). In this case study of an Achieving the Dream College, a sample was drawn from students who participated in a new student orientation session and those who did not prior to the fall 2010 semester. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant, explaining the purpose of the study and ensuring anonymity. Non-threatening questions were used at the beginning of the interview so that each participant could develop a level of comfort and rapport with the interviewer. The interviews were open and conversational. Interviews were conducted with selected students following the fall semester.

Significance of the Study

From the sociological tradition, the findings of this study may lead to grounded theory of new student orientation. As Lewis and Ritchie have identified, grounded theory develops "emergent theories of social action through the identification of analytical categories and relationships between them" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 12). Although the inductive nature of grounded theory is most appropriate to this research, as Maxwell notes,

> The activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing on research questions, and identifying and addressing validity threats are usually all going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others. (2002, p. 2).

Identifying what topics (if any) addressed during a new student orientation session contribute most to a student's success can add to the body of literature related to new student orientations in community colleges, lead to a theory about new student orientations in general, and promote deeper discussions about this program in particular. Additionally, the information gleaned from this study may assist educators to more effectively design orientation sessions to improve student success. Finally, data gathered can provide a framework for determining program expansion, with the potential of making new student orientation sessions mandatory or lengthening the orientation sessions for all entering community college students.

Definition of Terms

In keeping with accepted definitions of these terms (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1993; Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002; Hagedorn, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), the following terms are defined for this study:

- *Academic integration* – factors that influence students' ability to become a part of an educational environment, including academic performance (persistence, retention, success) as well as interactions with the faculty and staff.

- *Achieving the Dream* – a national initiative developed to help more community college students succeed. This initiative is based on the principle that "broad institutional change, informed by student achievement data, is critical to significantly improving student success rates" (LSCS, n.d.a.).

- *At-Risk Students* - students who are less likely to be successful in college and are potential dropouts. These students are usually low academic achievers who exhibit low self-esteem. A disproportionate number of them are males, minorities, and from low socioeconomic status families.

- *First Time in College (FTIC) students* – students entering college with zero (0) credit hours. This includes students who have accrued no college credit hours at other institutions or through high school dual credit programs.

- *First year seminars* - courses offered within the first year of a student's experience on college and university campuses to help first-year students transition to the institution. Designed specifically as an orientation to the college experience, both socially and academically, these courses assume a variety of formats and institution specific names, including "the freshman experience," "freshman seminars," "new student seminars," and "student success courses."

- *Influence* – the power or capacity of causing an effect based on a particular action.

- *New Student Orientation* - voluntary sessions for incoming students, designed to ease transition into college by preparing students for academic, social and personal success.

- *Persistence* – the percent of students who re-enroll from the fall to the spring semester.

- *Retention* – the percent of students who remain in class from the twelfth day (the official date of class reporting in Texas) through the last day of the term.

- *Social integration* – both formal and informal interactions students experience in college "resulting from personal affiliations and from day-to-day interactions among different members of society" (Tinto, 1993, p. 101), including student participation in extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. "Social integration refers to the extent of congruency between the individual student and the social system of a college or university" (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997, p. 111).

- *Success* – the percent of students who earn a letter grade of A through C in their coursework.

Delimitations

- Given the nature and scope of this study, only one comprehensive, non-residential, suburban community college in a suburban area outside of a major city in Texas was examined.

- Further, the focus of this study is on first semester students and the measures of persistence, retention and success for these students during the fall 2010 academic term only.

- Similarly, recognizing that there are several successful intervention strategies that may positively influence student success, this study examines the influence of new student orientation sessions on first semester student success only.

Limitations

This study is limited by the methodology used in the collecting and analysis of the data:

- As with all mixed methods studies, the nature of the qualitative data collection and subjective analysis limits the extent to which the findings may be generalized to a wider population.

- This case study presents a one semester "snapshot" of student success. Similar to the challenge posed by qualitative data analysis, it is problematic to generalize findings from a one semester case study to a wider population. There may be intervening variables impacting student success present during the semester studied that are not present during other semesters. Such was the case in both 2005 and 2008 in which the participant college was forced to close for a week due to Hurricanes Rita and Ike, respectively.

10

Assumptions

In the conduct of this study, there are several assumptions made:

- All orientation sessions during the period studied provided similar content. To verify this assumption, the researcher observed three different new student orientation sessions to assess the similarity of the content delivered.

- All students participating in a new student orientation receive the same benefits from their attendance. The student interviews conducted as part of this study should provide a more robust analysis of this assumption.

- Students were honest and forthcoming in their responses during interviews.

Summary

This study explores the influence of a new student orientation program on first semester student success. Using a mixed methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered and analyzed. Retention rates, success rates, and persistence rates of students who participated in a new student orientation were compared against those measures for students who did not participate in a session. Additionally, student interviews were conducted. Understanding how a new student orientation program contributes to student success can lead to a theory of practice about new student orientations, deeper discussions about the program studied, help community college administrators design new student orientation programs, and foster a discussion about requiring orientation sessions for all entering community college students.

11

Chapter two reviews existing research on student retention and persistence for first-year students, identifies and examines theoretical frameworks for investigating student retention and persistence, and explores the effectiveness of two early intervention strategies in facilitating student success. Chapter three presents the research design, description of the sample, procedures for data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four presents detailed analyses of findings pertaining to each research question. Chapter five presents and discusses the findings of the study, and offers recommendations for future research and implications for policy and practice concerning new student orientation programs at community colleges.

<p style="text-align: center;">**Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**</p>

Introduction

This literature review examines the transition of community colleges from providing students access to higher education to facilitating student success once they arrive to the institution. It reviews both internal and external demands for accountability and how those demands have required colleges to examine the programs they develop to improve measures of student retention, persistence and completion. A theoretical framework is identified for investigating student retention and persistence. Studies demonstrate that early experiences and student engagement are critical to a student's successful transition to college. Two early intervention strategies (first year seminars and new student orientation programs) are explored as to their effectiveness in facilitating student success.

Moving From Student Access to Student Success

The role of colleges in establishing student success measures. Historically, community colleges have provided educational opportunities for at-risk students who might not otherwise have access to college (Roueche, Johnson, & Roueche, 1997). However, in recent years, the focus has turned from increasing student access to demanding accountability by ensuring student success. With declining state revenues, and pressure from external constituencies, "community colleges have been called upon to 'prove' their efficiency and effectiveness to accreditation bodies, legislators, taxpayers, and parents" (Cress, 1996, p. 1).

Assessment of higher education is not a new idea. Roueche, et al. (1997, p. 5) point out, as early as the 17th century, the governor of Massachusetts examined the first graduating class of Harvard University (Harcleroad, 1980). However, since the 1980s, there has been increased emphasis on accountability and assessment of student success. In what was described as a path to "authentic accomplishment," in 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk,* recommending "that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, pp. 401-402). This report "triggered a series of major reform efforts in education that are still evolving" (O'Banion, 2007, p. 713). Although it addressed the state of higher education, the primary focus of *A Nation at Risk* was on public education. In 1993, the Johnson Foundation released *An American Imperative* focused exclusively on higher education in the United States (The Johnson Foundation, 1993; Hawker, 2007) and offered disturbing evidence of unprepared and underprepared students. This report argued that only by assessing skills of undergraduate students, can the decline in higher education in the United States be reversed (Wingspread Group, 2003; Hawker, 2007).

In 2000, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education released the first of its biennial reports, examining higher education at the state and national levels. With the release of *Measuring Up 2000* (and subsequent reports, *Measuring Up 2002, Measuring Up 2004, Measuring Up 2006*, and *Measuring Up 2008*) the Center

has provided policymakers and the general public information about college performance indicators to assist in assessing and improving higher education (Hunt, 2000). In its inaugural report, all 50 states earned an incomplete in the student learning category (Dwyer, Millett, & Payne, 2006).

The accountability movement was given increased attention in 2006 by the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education under the direction of United States Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Often referred to as "The Spellings Commission," this 19-member panel recommended a national strategy for reforming higher education with a focus on how effectively colleges and universities were preparing students for the 21st century workplace. The report, in part, found that institutions of higher education were not meeting student needs, stating "although the proportion of high school graduates who go on to college has risen substantially in recent decades, the college completion rate has failed to improve at anywhere near the same pace" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p.1). The Commission recommended that,

> To meet the challenges of the 21st century, higher education must change from a system primarily based on reputation to one based on performance. We urge the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education. Every one of our goals, from improving access and affordability to enhancing quality and innovation, will be more easily achieved

if higher education institutions embrace and implement serious accountability

measures. (2006, p. 21)

A link must be established between success and engagement measures and program

outcomes that increase student success.

Linking assessment to outcomes. For community colleges to develop effective

strategies that address and improve student success they must establish a framework for

effective assessment. One very successful initiative designed to help colleges create such

a framework was developed in 2003 by *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges*

Count. Funded by the Lumina Foundation, this national initiative has been designed to

help more community college students succeed, especially those of color and low-

income, who have been less likely to achieve their educational goals (Achieving the

Dream, 2005). To accomplish this task, community colleges must be transparent

regarding student performance, establish measurable goals and performance indicators

for all students, and commit to lasting institutional change to positively affect student

success (Achieving the Dream, 2007b).

Institutions are encouraged to move toward a "culture of evidence" in which

critical decisions affecting student success are driven and evaluated based on empirical

data, rather than on anecdotal evidence. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005),

"as pressures have grown on public and private institutions to increase retention and

degree completion, so has the research examining the effectiveness of programmatic

interventions designed to promote outcomes" (p. 398). This collective body of evidence

of what is effective for student success (Astin, 1996; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh,Whitt, &

Associates, 2005; McClenney, 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005) drives future program review, planning and budget activities (Walker, 2008). As

a result, several models of student success have emerged and merit discussion and

analysis.

Models of Student Success: A Theoretical Framework

Student retention in higher education has been researched for over 80 years

(Braxton, 2000). Competing models have been developed to provide a framework for

investigating this phenomenon and creating interventions to improve retention.

Astin's models.

Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O). First identified in 1968 (Astin, 1968), the

"Input-Environment-Output" (I-E-O) model established a framework for assessing

student persistence in college. According to Astin, "any educational assessment project

is incomplete unless it includes data on student inputs, student outcomes, and the

education environment to which the student is exposed…" (Astin, 1993, p. 18).

Inputs are "personal qualities the student brings initially to the education

program (including the student's initial level of developed talent at the time of entry)"

(Astin, 1993, p. 18). These qualities include such characteristics as race, gender,

ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational background, political orientation, behavior

pattern, degree aspiration, financial status, disability status, career choice, major field of

study, life goals, and reason for attending college (Astin, 1993). Input data is essential

to build a successful learning environment because it directly influences both the environment and outputs. Input assessment provides valuable insight about the outside influences students bring to their college experience.

Environment refers to the student's "actual experiences during the educational program" (Astin, 1993, p. 18). Environmental factors may include programs, personnel, curriculum, facilities, institutional climate, friends, roommates, extra-curricular activities, and organizational affiliations (Astin, 1993). The environment stage of assessment gives an opportunity to critically evaluate the overall dynamics of a student's college experiences. Astin notes, however, that defining and assessing environmental characteristics can be an extremely challenging endeavor.

Outputs "refer to the 'talents' we are trying to develop in our educational program" (Astin, 1993, p. 18). Outcome measures of student success include course performance, retention, persistence, grade point average, degree completion, and overall college satisfaction.

Taken together, student input and students' outcome data are meant to represent student development–changes in the student's abilities, competence, knowledge, values, aspiration, and self-concept that occur over time. Because the notion of change is so basic to the purpose of higher education, we need to have at least two snapshots of the student taken at different times in order to determine what changes have actually occurred. At the same time, knowing what particular

environmental experience each student has had helps us to understand why some students develop differently from others. (Astin, 1993, p. 21)

Astin's I-E-O model has been used by educational researchers to evaluate relationships among student inputs, environmental factors, and student outcomes. Knight (1994) used this model as a guide in examining student enrollment data to explain and predict the amount of time required for degree completion. Kelly (1996) examined the outcome variable of retention in conducting a longitudinal study of persistence to graduation at a military academy. Using the I-E-O model, Campbell and Blakely (1996) found that early remediation influenced persistence and performance of those students who were under-prepared for school. Astin and Sax (1998) examined the influence of the environmental variable of participating in service programs on undergraduate student development. House (1999) used the I-E-O model to investigate students' satisfaction and degree completion. Haber and Komives (2009) explored the extent to which co-curricular involvement, holding formal leadership roles, and participating in leadership programs contributed to students' capacity for socially responsible leadership.

Theory of involvement. In developing a theory of involvement, Astin (1984, 1993, 1999) argued that student engagement and persistence are greatly affected by the level and quality of their interactions with peers as well as with faculty and staff. An involved student is one who devotes considerable energy to academics, spends a significant amount of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations and

activities, and interacts often with faculty (Astin, 1984). The more involved students are in the academic and social aspects of the institution, the more likely they are to be successful in their collegiate experience (Astin, 1985, 1993).

Astin's theory of involvement places a greater emphasis on the role of the student in retention and success than does his "input-process-output" model (Pascarella, 1991, P. 50). This model identifies the student as an integral part of determining his or her own degree of involvement in college classes, extracurricular activities and social activities, whereas the I-E-O model viewed the student as passively developed by college programs and personnel. However, Astin notes that the more quality resources an institution makes available to students, the more likely those students who are involved will be successful.

The theory of involvement theory contains the following five postulates: first, involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in highly generalized objects (e.g., the student's overall college experience) or very specific objects (e.g., test preparation). Second, involvement occurs along a continuum. Students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given subject (e.g., some students have an aptitude for science much more than others do), and one student can manifest different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times (e.g., one week he or she may be more involved in student club activities whereas another week he or she may be more focused on homework). Third, involvement may be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Fourth, the degree of student success

20

associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program. Fifth, the effectiveness of any educational policy or program is directly related to its capacity to increase student involvement (Astin, 1984, pp. 297-298).

Student involvement requires the investment of energy in relationships, academics, and activities related to the institution. The most important resource is time: "the extent to which students can be involved in the educational development is tempered by how involved they are with family friends, jobs, and other outside activities" (Astin, 1984, p. 301). Central to the theory of involvement is the need for educators to be aware of how motivated students are and how much time and energy they are devoting to the learning process (Astin, 1984). According to Astin, all institutional policies and practices can be judged by the degree of involvement they foster in the student. Also, all college personnel should share the goal of increasing student involvement in the institution to enable them to become better learners (Astin, 1984).

Tinto's model of student attrition. Tinto's (1975) model of student attrition is based on two important factors: academic integration and social integration. According to Tinto (1993), colleges consist of both academic and social systems. The academic side concerns itself with the formal education of students. Academic systems include classroom settings and student services. Social systems, by contrast, focus on the daily life and personal needs of students. Social interactions occur informally outside the

21

classroom, in the dormitories, at the cafeteria, or when joining in activities with peers.

Students arrive at college with a number of pre-college attributes, experiences, and family backgrounds, which have a direct or indirect impact on their college performance, educational expectations, and commitments. Given students' varying backgrounds, it is their academic and social integration into the institution that most directly relates to their college persistence.

> The process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems as measured by his [or her] normative and structural integration continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (Tinto, 1975, p. 94)

Tinto (1975, 1982, 1998) does not reject the influence of other external factors. He argues that the external factors manifest themselves through the constant reevaluation of commitment to the institution and to the goal of college completion that the student engages in once inside the institution. He asserts that institutional commitment plays a large role in determining whether a student will remain in college. It is the "interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out from college and the forms of dropout behavior the individual adopts" (Tinto, 1975, p. 96). Therefore, a student who is not committed to

the goal of completing college is more likely to voluntarily withdraw. Likewise, a student with high institutional commitment may decide to remain in college even though he or she doesn't have much commitment to the goal of completing a college degree.

Although it is accepted that individuals have much to do with their own leaving, part of their decision to leave might be contextual, based on the institutional environment (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, the role of the institution in shaping and supporting academic and social systems for students is important.

Tinto's model of student attrition has been used extensively to examine factors that affect the persistence of students at 4-year colleges and universities (Ennis, 2005; Geeham, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1982). Beil, Reisen, Zea, and Caplan (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of the effects of academic and social integration and commitment on retention and found that greater academic and social integration were related to greater commitment to college in the first year and predictive of retention three years later. Summers (2003) found community college students are more likely to drop out if they have no specific academic goal, work full-time and attend college part-time. Hagedorn (2005) explains that Tinto's integration model suggests the need for aligning institution environment and student commitment.

Braxton and Lee (2005) concluded that the degree of social integration affects the level of commitment to the institution, the initial level of commitment affects the student's overall commitment to the institution, and commitment to the institution

23

positively affects the probability of student persistence in college. They stressed the significance of social integration and recommended that orientation programs for freshman students are essential to student success by providing opportunities for new students to experience social interaction among friends. Fowler and Zimitat (2008) found that opportunities to interact with college personnel and peers, the sense of social support experienced, and the opportunity to develop academic skills and knowledge was particularly important to social and academic integration into an institution for low-socioeconomic first year students.

Limits to Tinto's model. Although Tinto's model of student attrition has been used extensively to identify factors affecting the persistence of university students, fewer studies have utilized this model to study persistence at the community college level (Bers & Smith, 1991; Cofer & Somers, 2001; Nora, Attinasi, & Matonak, 1990; Summers, 2003); and some researchers are skeptical about this model's applicability to students enrolled at a 2-year institution. In fact, Tinto (1982) explains one of the limitations of his model is that it is insensitive to the persistence problem experienced by 2-year institutions although he believes social integration and academic experiences are both variables that impact first year community college attrition.

Cabrera et al. (1992) view the inadequate attention paid to the influence of external factors as one of the limitations of the Tinto model. Such external factors usually play a more significant role in shaping the experiences of community college students. Community colleges attract high proportions of low-income, first-generation

college students and students of color, and those typically underserved by higher education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2008; Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

One case study conducted at a 2-year institution, found there was no correlation between academic or social integration and withdrawal rates (Borglum & Kubala, 2000). Geeham (2004) reported that efforts to employ the student attrition model to the community college population have resulted in inconclusive results because of the diversity of the student population and the various goals held by community college students.

Bailey and Alfonso (2005), argue that applying the Tinto (1975) model to community college students is problematic. They found issue with the social integration aspect of Tinto's model because many community college students study part-time and do not have a high level of social interaction with the institution. For many of these students the environment, in terms of "availability of classes, advisement, convenient transportation, high-quality online education, applied pedagogies, and well-designed internships," may play a greater role (Bailey & Alfonso, p. 14).

Bean & Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition. Although previously identified student retention models were based upon research of students at 4-year institutions and provide a basic framework from which to build, studies of community college student retention require an orientation toward nontraditional students. Similar to Tinto's model of student integration, Bean and

Metzner's model of nontraditional student attrition views persistence as a longitudinal process. However, this model measures persistence from semester to semester. Bean and Metzner (1985) base student attrition on four sets of variables: poor academic performance, intent to leave, background and defining factors, and environmental factors (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Bolton, 2004). Because the student attrition model (Tinto, 1975) was not developed to study attrition of nontraditional students, Bean and Metzner (1985) focus their research on this category of students. They assert that one of the most significant differences between traditional and nontraditional students is the influence of external environment. External factors tend to be more important than social integration to a nontraditional student's persistence. Nontraditional students engage less in the social and academic environment at community colleges because these students are usually older, commute to school, and/or enroll part-time. Furthermore, compared to fulltime traditional students, nontraditional students have greater interactions with the environment beyond college that revolves around employment, family commitments, and financial responsibilities (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Convergence of models. Jacobi (1991) identified that Astin's I-E-O Model and Tinto's Student Integration Model had common characteristics that were often used interchangeably (e.g., relationships among student inputs, environmental factors, and student outcomes). However, Jacobi also emphasized that Astin's I-E-O model focused on student behavior, with attitude and affect being secondary concerns. In contrast, she explained how Tinto's Integration Model focused on students' attitudes and feelings

26

about their college experiences with behavior being a secondary concern.

Both models have some validity in community college student persistence studies (Frank, 2010). Cabrera et al. (1992) suggest studying postsecondary student retention using an integrated model that combines the student integration factors proposed by Tinto (1993) and Astin (1975) with the non-traditional student factors proposed by Bean and Metzner (1985). An integrated model of postsecondary student retention would include factors such as pre-college characteristics, academic integration, institutional commitment, attitudes, institutional fit, and external factors. For community colleges, the nontraditional student attrition model has some appeal because it emphasizes the importance of the external environment on students' decisions to persist (Summers, 2003). Most of the other variables of the nontraditional student attrition model can be easily incorporated into a category in the student integration model.

To varying degrees, similarities exist among each model. A common element to each is that persistence involves successful early interaction between the student and the institution and actively engaging students in the institution's academic and social cultures (Cabrera et al., 1992). To that end, we now turn our attention to first year student and student engagement studies.

Overview of Student Retention Studies

First-year experiences. The first few weeks of a student's experience are critical to his or her adjustment and successful transition to college (Levitz & Noel, 1989;

27

Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and the first year of college is the most critical to degree completion (Tinto, 1993). A recent commentary in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* noted of the entering fall-term community college students, less than 15% complete a single credit in their first academic term, at least 25% of incoming students do not return for the subsequent spring term, and approximately 50% do not return for the second fall term (McClenney, 2009). Due to the large number of students who leave college within their first six weeks, student success efforts must be focused on integrating and retaining new students (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

Research indicates that a student's initial college experiences have an impact on success and retention (Astin, 1996; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh,Whitt, & Associates, 2005; McClenney, 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In reviewing three decades of research assessing the student success, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) conclude that, "academic achievement during a student's first year of college may be a particularly powerful influence on subsequent retention and degree completion" (p. 397). In a study of 20 diverse colleges and universities with higher-than-predicted graduation rates and effective practices for fostering student success, an effective strategy frequently employed was that of "front loading" resources to help students learn how to succeed as independent and interdependent learners (Kuh et al., 2005; El Khawas, 2005). Front loading refers to the strategies and interventions used by a college or university to positively impact student success early in a student's collegiate experience. As McClenney (2007) points out, "College must address the …loss of new

28

students by focusing on the front door engagement efforts that capture students'…first interactions with college" (p. 13). Understanding that the freshman year is critical to student success, the University of South Carolina established the *National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition* to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education (University of South Carolina, 2009).

Student engagement research. Instruments such as the *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* and *Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)* have been designed to measure the extent to which students are engaged in their learning. The *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* measures student participation and engagement in college and university programs designed to improve learning and development (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). More than 1,200 different colleges and universities in the United States and Canada have participated in *NSSE* since it was first administered in 2000 (NSSE, 2009). Findings from these annual surveys "produce a set of national benchmarks of good educational practice that participating schools are using to estimate the efficacy of their improvement efforts" (Kuh, 2003, p. 1).

The *Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)* assesses student engagement at 2-year institutions. Funded, in part, by grants from the Houston Endowment, the Lumina Foundation, the MetLife Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts, *CCSSE* was established as the community college counterpart to *NSSE*, which

measures engagement at 4-year institutions. First administered in 2001, *CCSSE*'s survey instrument, *The Community College Student Report,* provides information about community and technical college quality and performance to assist institutions "in their efforts to improve student learning and retention, while also providing policymakers and the public with more appropriate ways to view the quality of undergraduate education" (McClenney, 2007, p. 138). A study of freshman experiences (CCSSE, 2007), found that students who participated in activities that require interaction with peers, faculty, and other professionals reported higher satisfaction and levels of engagement and academic fulfillment than do their counterparts.

The *Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)*, under the direction of *NSSE*, and the *Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE)*, under the direction of *CCSSE*, have been designed to collect and analyze "data about institutional practices and student behaviors in the earliest weeks of college" (SENSE, 2009). Data gathered by *BCSSE* and *SENSE* can help colleges better "understand students' critical early experiences and improve institutional practices that affect student success in the first college year" (SENSE, 2009). Results from the surveys administered by these organizations, which are publicly reported, can provide institutions and external stakeholders data for improving institutional performance, setting accountability standards, and strategic planning (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Several studies detail the relationship between student engagement, and student success (Astin 1984; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Kuh, 2001b; Kuh et al., 2005; McClenney

& Marti, 2006; McClenney, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Pike, & Kuh, 2005; Tinto 1993; Voorhees, 1987). Rendon's (1995) study concluded that constructive engagement between students and college personnel during their first term facilitated persistence. Kuh and his colleagues have demonstrated that student engagement in educationally purposeful activities has been shown to positively impact academic outcomes as represented by first-year student retention, grades, and persistence (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2007).

Intervention strategies designed to increase engagement and improve student success. This study identifies two early intervention strategies (first year seminars and new student orientation programs) designed to increase student engagement and improve student success during a student's first semester college experience. Research has shown that orientation programs and positive relationships with college personnel during their first term of enrollment are critical to students' ability to successfully make the transition to college (Rendon, 1995). Tinto and Goodsell note that, "for institutions, the freshman year is a period during which programs have the greatest impact on subsequent student development and persistence" (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993, p. 8). Several studies demonstrate the effectiveness of early interventions strategies (ongoing orientation programs, first-year seminars) in facilitating the transition experience and student success outcomes for new students (Barefoot, 2000; Barefoot & Gardner, 1993; Barefoot, Warnock, Dickinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Gardner, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Muraskin & Wilner, 2004; Reason,

Terenzini, & Domingo, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Upcraft, Mullendore, Barefoot, & Fidler, 1993).

Although many institutions have designed orientation and first year programs (Brawer, 1996; Hunter, 2006), "unfortunately, most institutions have not been able to translate what we know about student retention into forms of action that have led to substantial gain in student persistence and graduation" (Tinto, 2006-2007, p. 5). Early intervention programs must be strategically designed to accomplish their objectives of facilitating the transition experience for new students and improving student success outcomes. Two such programs that have demonstrated success are first-year seminars and new student orientation programs.

First-year seminars. Most colleges and universities offer some variation of a "first-year experience" (Gardner, 1997) or first-year seminar (Gardner, 2001) to assist first year students in making a successful transition from high school to college (NSSE, 2005). Most first-year seminars have been designed to increase student-to-student interaction, increase faculty-to-student interaction, increase student involvement and time on campus, link the curriculum and the co-curriculum, increase academic expectations and levels of academic engagement, and assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college (Barefoot, 2000).

Common to most first-year seminars are lectures, skills/strategies, and discussions and assignments that address academic and social adjustment. Davig and Spain (2003-2004) point out that first-year seminar topics and activities supporting

study skills, academic engagement, social networking, and integration into the institution offer support for Tinto's Model of Integration.

Several studies have demonstrated that students who have successfully completed first year seminars have persisted from the first to the second year and maintained higher grade point averages (Barefoot, 2000; Barefoot & Gardner, 1993; Barefoot, Warnock, Dickson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Carstens, 2000; Fidler, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot 2005).

New student orientation programs. Orientation programs are not necessarily new. Kentucky's Lee College introduced the nation's first college orientation program in 1882. Subsequent orientation programs were established at Boston University in 1888, Harvard University in 1909, and Stanford University in 1910 (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993). New Student Orientation programs continue to be the most widely used form of early intervention at colleges and universities (El- Khawas, 1984; Fidler & Fidler, 1991; Tinto, 2006-2007). In 2005, NSSE reported that 87% of first-year students attended an institution-sponsored orientation program (NSSE, 2005).

An orientation program may involve "any effort to help freshmen make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and enhance their success" (Perigo & Upcraft, 1989, p. 82). Formats vary but typically provide information to entering students about facilities, programs, and college services as well

as providing them an opportunity to meet faculty, staff, and other students (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984).

Effective orientation programs facilitate transition to college by helping students understand academic and social expectations (Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). They provide first year students an opportunity to build social networks (Pascarella , Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986) and interact with their peers (Braxton & McClendon, 2001- 2002). Such programs may positively affect student persistence through their ability to develop a student's commitment to the institution (Dunphy et al. 1987; Fidler & Hunter 1989).

First year student orientation programs play a strategic role in facilitating students' transition from high school to college and have positive effects on student retention (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Colton, Connor, Shultz, & Easter, 1999; Fidler, 1991; Horton, 1987; Miller, 1985; Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001; Stupka, 1986; Tinto, 1993). One study demonstrated that institutions that provided the most extensive orientation and advising programs had higher graduation rates (Forest, 1985). Another study found that first-year students who attended an institution-sponsored orientation program participated in more educationally enriching activities, perceived the campus environment to be more supportive, reported greater developmental gains during their first year of college, and were more satisfied with their overall college experience (NSSE, 2005). Programs that have been designed to

34

integrate students (academically and socially) into the fabric of the institution have promoted both persistence and degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

However, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) report that when controlling for other factors, including educational goals, commitment to graduation, academic aptitude, and socioeconomic status, student participation in orientation may only have a trivial, statistically insignificant direct effect on persistence. Despite this limitation, their research still demonstrated the positive direct influence of comprehensive orientation programs and positive indirect influence of short summer orientation programs on student persistence.

Previous studies do not provide a complete picture about the influence of new student orientations on student success. As studies have shown, the first semester is most critical to a student's success at the institution (Lumina Foundation, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh,Whitt, and Associates, 2005; McClenney, 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997; Levitz & Noel, 1989; Tinto, 1993). However, these studies focus on measuring student success longitudinally. In contrast to these studies, which have examined student success over several semesters, the present study examines the influence of new student orientations on student success during a student's first semester in college.

Summary

This review of the literature has provided an examination of community colleges' transition from merely providing students with access to higher education to facilitating their success once they arrive at the institution. Internal and external

demands for accountability have forced colleges to take a deeper look at the programs they develop to improve measures of student retention, persistence and completion. Competing models have been developed to provide a framework for investigating this phenomenon and creating interventions to improve retention. Astin's I-E-O and Theory of Involvement, Tinto's Model of Student Attrition, and Bean and Metzner's Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition each examine the phenomenon of persistence and agree that persistence involves successful early interaction between the student and the institution and actively engaging students in the institution's academic and social cultures. Studies have shown that a student's early experiences are critical to his or her adjustment and successful transition to college. Among the most effective intervention strategies that influence a student's earliest college experiences are first year seminars and new student orientation programs.

As research has demonstrated, the first few weeks of a student's experience are critical to his or her adjustment and successful transition to college (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Several studies have measured the efficacy of early intervention programs such as first year seminars (Barefoot, 2000; Barefoot & Gardner, 1993; Barefoot, Warnock, Dickson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Boudreau & Kromrey,1994; Carstens, 2000; Fidler, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot 2005) and new student orientations (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Colton, Connor, Shultz, & Easter, 1999; Fidler, 1991; Horton, 1987; Miller,1985; Moxley, Najor-Durack, &

Dumbrigue, 2001; Stupka, 1986; Tinto,1993) on student retention and persistence.

However, these studies have measured such interventions longitudinally. If a student's

first semester is critical to his or her success, research must be conducted to measure the

effectiveness of interventions performed during a student's first semester in college.

This study examines the influence of a new student orientation program on first

semester student success at a suburban community college.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Procedures

Introduction

Despite a long history of providing open door access to students who might not otherwise have an opportunity to attend college (Roueche, Johnson, & Roueche, 1997), community colleges have been less effective in fostering success for first semester college students. Less than 60% of students who attend a community college will complete their first year (McClenney, 2009). Community colleges have developed early intervention programs (including new student orientation sessions) to address student attrition. This study examines the influence of one new student orientation program on first semester student success.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the purpose of this study, presentation of research questions, and hypotheses addressed in this study. The research design, description of the sample, procedures for data collection, data analysis, and a summary are also included.

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of a new student orientation program at a publicly supported, 2-year comprehensive suburban community college on the academic performance and retention of first semester college students. This study examines the student success indicators of persistence, retention, and success during the first semester of college for those students who have participated in a new student orientation session and compare these indicators against those for first semester students who have not participated in a new student orientation session.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Does new student orientation influence student retention?

2. Does new student orientation influence student success?

3. Does new student orientation influence student persistence?

4. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's social integration into the institution?

5. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's academic integration into the institution?

Research Design

To assess the influence of new student orientation sessions on the academic performance and retention of new community college students, a case study was used, applying a mixed (or combined) methods approach, examining both quantitative and qualitative data. A case study has been defined as "an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit as an individual, group, institution, or community" (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 108). It offers a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon as well as insights that can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research. In this respect, case studies play an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base and "have proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programs, and informing policy" (Merriam, 2009, P. 51).

Mixed methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches are not mutually exclusive. They represent different ends along a continuum (Newman & Benz, 1998). A study might be more qualitative than quantitative (or the reverse). Mixed methods research is located in the middle of this continuum, incorporating elements of both approaches. It may be argued that by relying solely on one approach, one can miss a more in-depth view of the phenomenon studied or introduce biases. Quantitative research may not fully explain the context of a phenomenon, whereas the personal interpretations made by a researcher using qualitative methods results in a bias as well as difficulty in generalizing or replicating findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Mixed (or combined) methods research incorporates both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a study so that the overall strength of the research is greater than either the qualitative or quantitative research. Mixed methods research provides more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem and helps answer questions that cannot be answered by qualitative or quantitative research alone. It provides a more complete picture of a phenomenon and encourages the use of multiple paradigms in research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Limits to a mixed methods approach. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, p. 10) note, despite its value, conducting a mixed methods study is not a simple task. It requires both time and resources to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. Researchers must provide a clear presentation of research procedures for the reader to understand. Additionally, most researchers are trained in only one form of inquiry. A

mixed methods approach requires researchers to understand and be able to apply both forms of research (quantitative and qualitative). The value of mixed methods research, however, outweighs the potential difficulty of this approach.

Quantitative research. Quantitative research has been described as a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among measurable variables (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). Quantitative research is often associated with the postpositivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Phillips & Burbles, 2000). According to this "world view" (Guba, 1990, p. 17), research can be based on determinism or cause and effect thinking; reductionism, by narrowing and focusing on select variables to interrelate; detailed observations and measures of variables; and the testing of theories that are continually refined (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Quantitative strategies of inquiry include survey research (describing trends, attitudes or opinions of a given population by studying a sample of that population) and experimental research (seeking to determine if a specific treatment influences an outcome) (Creswell, 2009).

This study measures the influence of a new student orientation program (independent variable) on student success, retention, and persistence for first semester college students (dependent variables). Using quantitative research methods, the first three research questions (Does new student orientation influence student success? Does new student orientation influence student retention? Does new student orientation influence student persistence?) are answered by testing the following null hypotheses:

41

H$_1$. First semester retention rate is no higher for students who participate in a new student orientation session than for those students who do not participate;

H$_2$. Students who participate in a new student orientation session are no more likely to successfully complete their first semester courses than students who do not participate; and

H$_3$. Students who participate in a new student orientation session are no more likely to enroll in second semester courses than students who do not participate.

Qualitative research. Qualitative research may be seen as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). As Maxwell (1996, p. 17) explains, qualitative research allows one to "understand the process by which events and actions take place." Qualitative research is often associated with the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2003). This paradigm asserts that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their experiences (von Glasersfeld, 1990). Qualitative strategies of inquiry include developing emerging questions and procedures, inductive inquiry, and interpretation of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009, Maxwell, 2005). Whereas quantitative researchers explore deductive measures of inquiry (testing hypotheses or assumptions) qualitative researchers use an inductive style that focuses on individual meaning and the importance of understanding the complexity of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Using qualitative

research methods, this study answers research questions four and five:

4. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's social integration into the institution?

5. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's academic integration into the institution?

Description of Sample

The focus of this study is a publicly supported, 2-year, comprehensive community college, part of a multiple college district located in a suburban area outside of a major city in Texas. In fall 2010 the institution enrolled a record 18,107 students. The number of students enrolled at the institution grew by 19.3% from the fall 2009 semester (15,175). The retention rate in fall 2010 remained relatively stable at 89.3%. However, the retention rate for FTIC students during this period was 71.1%. The persistence rate for FTIC students continuing into the spring 2011 semester was 69.3%, representing a loss of 1,108 students at the institution.

As an early intervention strategy to address student retention and success, the institution initiated orientation sessions for new students beginning in 2006. The college conducts a 3-hour voluntary orientation session for incoming students, in which faculty, counselors, librarians, and administrators provide campus tours and meet with students to discuss college life and explain institutional expectations. Approximately 34% (1,232) of the entering 3,611 students participated in one of the college's new student orientation session prior to the fall 2010 semester. This study assesses the

effectiveness of this program by assessing the success of all students who have

participated in an orientation session through quantitative analytical measures.

Additionally, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted using purposive

criterion sampling techniques. Thirteen students were selected through convenience

sampling and snowball sampling methods.

Procedures for Data Collection

This research was conducted following approval by the Institutional Review

Board at the University of Texans at Austin (the sponsoring institution of this study).

To begin this study, three separate new student orientation sessions at the institution

studied were observed. Session observation enabled the researcher to more fully

understand the presentation of college expectations and services available to students;

concepts designed to facilitate academic integration (Tinto, 1993). Through

observation, student engagement in each session, interaction with college personnel and

other participants, and other dynamics that foster social integration into the institution

(Tinto, 1993) can be assessed. By observing three different new student orientation

sessions, consistency in information delivered and group dynamics among participants

can be better assessed.

The Director of College Office of Outreach and Retention, the administrator

charged with conducting new student orientations at the institution, was interviewed.

Additional interviews were conducted with other college administrators, counselors and

faculty who have taken an active role in the development and/or delivery of these new

student orientation sessions. Although it is not the purpose of the present study to assess faculty and administrator perceptions of new student orientations, the researcher's conversations with them provide a deeper understanding of the purpose and nature of these sessions.

In gathering experimental quantitative data for this study, the overall retention rates (the percent of students who remain in class from the 12th day through the last day of the term), success rates (the percent of students who earn a letter grade of A through C in their coursework), and persistence rates (the percent of students who re-enroll from the fall 2010 to the spring 2011 semester) for the 1,232 students who participated in a new student orientation are compared against those measures for the 3,611 students who did not participate in this program.

For qualitative analysis, although several approaches could be used, interviews were selected as the most appropriate approach to gathering and analyzing the data. Described as "conversations with a purpose" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 85), interviews provide the most appropriate format to gain a more robust understanding of the experiences of the new student orientation participants. In creating the protocols for the interview, semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions and a fairly open framework to allow for a focused conversation (Maxwell, 2005, p. 85). The semi-structured nature of the interview allows the researcher to "explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate a particular subject" (Patton, 2003, p. 343). This qualitative inquiry technique also allows

for the wording and sequence of questions to "happen naturally through the interview process, while maintaining relevance to the predetermined topic" (Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008, p. 5). The interviews were "fairly conversational and situational" (Patton, 2003, p. 349).

A misconception about conducting semi-structured interviews is that these are less demanding. However, these types of interviews must be fully planned and prepared. Compared with fully structured interviews, successful semi-structured interviews require as much preparation before the session, more discipline and creativity during the session, and more time analysis and interpretation after the session (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5).

Participants were selected based on criterion sampling techniques. In criterion sampling, a group is selected to study because they meet the necessary criterion (Patton, 2003, p. 243). In this case, the participants were students who participated in a new student orientation session and those who did not prior to the fall 2010 semester. Because over 2,000 students participated in an orientation session prior to the fall 2010 semester, interviewing each participant would have posed practical problems. Therefore, a more feasible approach involved taking a sample of students who participated in one of these sessions. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant, explaining the purpose of the study and ensuring anonymity. Non-threatening questions were used at the beginning of the interview so that each

46

participant could develop a level of comfort and rapport with the interviewer. The interviews were open and conversational.

Validity Considerations

This study is limited by the methodology used in the collecting and analysis of the data; in particular, common validity concerns are posed by the use of qualitative analysis. As with all personal interviews, one must avoid leading questions, inaccurate transcriptions, and faulty analysis (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008, p. 52). Due to the open nature of the interview, data can be misinterpreted. Additionally, researchers might not be properly trained to observe body language and other non-verbal cues. Weighing these validity concerns, the researcher conducted all interviews. This single interviewer technique also reduced the potential for conflicting interpretations of the data. The researcher summarized information gathered with each participant to ensure that important points are captured. Additionally, establishing open lines of communication with the participants, allowed for the possibility of follow up discussions with participants so that their responses could be more fully understood. This type of member checking allows each respondent an opportunity to "clarify or refine certain aspects of the interview" (Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008, p. 5).

To ensure accurate coding of the data, the researcher examined the transcribed interview narratives and field notes for conceptual and recurring common themes (Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008). By personally transcribing each interview, vocal inflections and pauses, not caught during the initial interview or recorded in the initial

47

field notes taken, could be more easily detected and recorded. Transcripts were reviewed several times and codes were reorganized and renamed, if warranted, following additional comparison with other responses. As categories became firm, core themes emerged.

As with all mixed methods studies, the nature of the qualitative data collection and subjective analysis limits the extent to which the findings may be generalized from the study sample to a wider population. However, Adelman, Jenkins, and Kemmis (1980) argue that the knowledge generated by qualitative research is significant in its own right. While the aggregation of single studies allows theory building through tentative hypotheses testing of single findings, the generalizations produced are no less legitimate when about a single finding (Myers, 2000). The goal of this research is to focus on a selected phenomenon (new student orientations), where in-depth descriptions are an essential component of the process. In this respect, a qualitative study can provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon and the results can potentially contribute valuable knowledge to the field.

This case study presents a one semester "snapshot" of student success. Similar to the challenge posed by qualitative data analysis, it is problematic to generalize findings from a 1-semester case study to a wider population. There may be intervening variables impacting student success present during the semester studied that are not present during other semesters. Such was the case in both 2005 and 2008 in which the participant college was forced to close for a week due to Hurricanes Rita and Ike,

respectively. Despite this limitation, case studies are often a preferred research method in the fields of education and social work due to their ability to study innovations, evaluate programs, and inform policy in greater detail (Stake, 1980; Merriam, 2009).

An additional validity consideration concerns the nature of the new student orientation at the institution studied. Because these new student orientations are voluntary, students who choose to participate in them may be more likely to be engaged prior to their college experiences than students who do not attend a new student orientation session. A student's choice to attend a new student orientation session may be a result of what research has referred to as pre-college attributes or external factors students bring with them to their college experience (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; & Bean &, Metzner, 1985). The institution focused upon in this study employs the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CSSE) and the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) to assess student engagement. Additionally, these instruments allow member institutions to add customized questions and measures. However, in customizing an assessment of new student orientations and student engagement, it would be difficult to determine whether students who are more engaged are more likely to attend a new student orientation (cause) or whether students are more engaged as a result of their participation in a new student orientation (effect).

Data Analysis

Quantitative, non-experimental, correlation data was analyzed by utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0 (SPSS, 2010). A multiple regression analysis was used to test each hypothesis presented in measuring the influence of a new student orientation program (independent variable) on student success, retention, and persistence for first semester college students (dependent variables). Descriptive statistics were performed to determine the means, percentages, and standard deviations (SD) of participants and nonparticipants.

Qualitative semi-structured interviews (using open-ended questions and a fairly open framework) were also used to collect data from first semester students using purposive (non-random) criterion sampling techniques. Qualitative semi-structured interviews facilitate focused, conversational, two-way communication. Unlike the questionnaire framework, where detailed questions are formulated in advance, the majority of questions asked in semi-structured interviews are created during the interview, allowing both the interviewer and the respondent the flexibility to probe for details or discuss issues. Purposive (non-random) criterion sampling techniques require subject selection based on an identified characteristic (Given, 2008; Patton, 1990). In this study, two samples of students who participated in one of the institution's new student orientation sessions prior to the fall 2010 semester were interviewed. Additionally, students who did not participate in a new student orientation were interviewed. Students were selected for the sample through convenience sampling and

snowball sampling methods. Using accepted convenience sampling methods (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2009), 13 students were chosen based on their relative ease of access. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2009). Although neither convenience sampling, nor snowball sampling techniques secure a random sample, the selection of students need not be random. The purpose of interviewing students for the qualitative component of this study is to provide greater depth to the hypotheses tested through quantitative analysis.

Interviews were conducted following the fall 2010 semester. All interviews were transcribed, with transcriptions reviewed several times and codes organized, reorganized and renamed (if necessary), following additional comparison with other responses. As categories became firm, core themes emerged concerning the influence of new student orientation sessions on student success. Findings from this study may lead to a theory of practice about new student orientations, deeper discussions about the program studied, help community college administrators design new student orientation programs, and foster a discussion about requiring orientation sessions for all entering community college students.

Summary

Chapter three delineated the research design, description of the sample, procedures for data collection, and data analysis. Using accepted methods of both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study's research questions will be addressed.

Chapter four presents detailed analyses of findings pertaining to each research question. Chapter five discusses the implications of the study and provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents detailed analyses of findings pertaining to each research question. Through observations of three new student orientation sessions, the researcher provides a description and analysis of information disseminated and the social interactions that occur within orientation sessions. Using quantitative analysis, the researcher assesses whether new student orientation influences student success, student retention, and student persistence. By examining student responses provided in focus group interviews, the researcher examines the role new student orientation plays in fostering student social and academic integration into the institution.

New Student Orientation Sessions

Prior to the fall 2010 semester, 1,232 students participated in one of the 58 new student orientation sessions offered at the College studied. This number of participants represents 34.1% of the 3,611 First Time in College (FTIC) students entering this institution. The large percent of participants for a non-mandatory new student orientation demonstrates that students were aware of orientation sessions. The College publicized new student orientation sessions on its website, flyers posted around the campus, and on large banners students passed by when entering the campus. Advisors and counselors also encouraged all FTIC students to attend a new student orientation session prior to their enrollment. To gain a better understanding of information disseminated and social interactions present at new student orientation, the researcher

observed three separate orientation sessions and met with the College's Director of Outreach and Retention, the person charged with developing and delivering the new student orientation program.

Each new student orientation session was approximately two and one half hours in duration and was divided into five segments: a welcome message and background information about the College ("Did You Know"), advice from faculty ("Academic Life"), an introduction to college resources and services ("Student Life"), a tour of the campus conducted by Student Outreach and Retention (SOAR) leaders, and a discussion of course planning ("Course Planning"). Most of the information was presented through PowerPoint slides.

In the first segment of each orientation session, "Did You Know," students were provided with a brief background and demographic information about the College. Presenters discussed the number of enrollments at the institution and how this size compares to that of other institutions of higher education in the state. Students were also informed about the organizational structure of the institution; that it is one of five colleges (and six centers) that comprise a multiple college district. Presenters identified the College's ranking, both nationally and state, in associate degrees awarded. Students were provided with a brief history of the institution as well as the current and future size of the campus. The College's workforce programs and academic transfer courses were also briefly discussed with students.

The second segment of orientation, "Academic Life," provided students with certain expectations for class. A faculty member explained the contents of a generic syllabus to students and informed them that the course syllabus functions like a contract. Students are expected to carefully read the syllabus for each course and understand the requirements put forth in it. Students were also informed that each course has different requirements and that faculty have different teaching styles. During this segment of orientation, the faculty member explained that instructors may require class projects, discussions, case studies, and/or small group work. Faculty present in each of the three orientation sessions observed provided personal examples of these pedagogies.

Faculty also discussed the College's "Learning Signatures" with orientation participants. Learning signature courses involve pedagogies and delivery styles that have been intentionally designed to actively engage students. Such offerings include honors courses, learning communities, service learning, online courses, and study abroad. Students were provided with examples of study abroad opportunities offered by the College, including trips to China, Costa Rica, Italy, and Sri Lanka.

Faculty discussed the importance of communication with instructors. Students were informed about accessing faculty office hours, instructor e-mail addresses, and office phone numbers. Orientation participants were also encouraged to contact their instructors about any questions or concerns they may have in regard to a class.

Faculty identified behavioral expectations of students. Participants were informed that they would be treated as (and should act like) adults and that they should be on time and prepared for each class. Students were also advised against the use of cell phones in class, leaving class early, academic dishonesty, class disruptions, and other inappropriate behaviors. Presenters explained that the strategies students use in high school may not be the same strategies used in college. Students were also introduced to effective study habits such as understanding what to study, the use of flashcards, self-testing, and the importance of study groups.

In two of the new student orientation sessions observed, the College's Director of Outreach and Retention identified resources and services available to students. In the third session observed, this information was provided by the Coordinator of Student Services. During this segment ("Student Life"), students were introduced to College resources and services, including the police department and emergency services, the library, the Enrollment Services Center (where student enrollment, financial aid and payment, academic advising, and other related activities are addressed), the Tutoring Center, theatre facilities on campus, the Child Watch Center (a partnership with a local YMCA that provides onsite child care for students), the Fitness Center, sports club teams, intramural competitions, college-wide events, student organizations, and the bookstore on campus. Presenters also explained the role of college advisors and college counselors and how these two positions differ. Students were informed about the processes to meet with these college personnel.

In the fourth segment of orientation, students were divided into groups of seven to ten participants and provided with a tour of the campus. Tours were conducted by SOAR leaders; carefully screened and trained student leaders who work with the office of Outreach and Retention as well as Student Activities in facilitating the adjustment of new students to college. Campus tours provided new students with an opportunity to meet other students, hear different perspectives, and learn more about the College. Each tour was approximately 45 minutes in duration. New students were shown College facilities that had been discussed in one of the previous segments of their orientation session (e.g., the police department, the library, the Enrollment Services Center, the Tutoring Center, the open computer lab in Tech 104, theatre facilities, the Child Watch Center, the Fitness Center, food services, the Student Activities area, and so forth). Showing students the location of resources and services presented in their orientation sessions served to reinforce this information.

During the final segment of each orientation session, "Course Planning," students were provided with advice about planning their courses and their work schedules. Participants were advised that if they were enrolled in 12 or more credit hours per semester, they should not be employed more than 20 hours per week. New students were also advised to study a minimum of two hours outside of class each week for every class hour in which they were enrolled. Presenters discussed various components of the College catalog, including student policies, course descriptions, core requirements, course numbering, calculating credit hours, and course pre-/co-requisites.

Students were also instructed about calculating grade point averages (G.P.A.), adding/withdrawing from courses, repeating courses, financial aid, and payment options. Academic calendars containing information about start dates for the semester and payment deadlines were also identified.

Similar to information provided in the "Academic Life" presentation, students were provided with information about how they could communicate with college personnel, through individual e-mail addresses they were given, by signing up for text messaging, and logging on to the College's Facebook and Twitter pages.

In a separate meeting with the researcher, the College's Director of Outreach and Retention identified learning outcomes for new student orientation. Following each session, participants were expected to:

- understand the purposes of higher education and the mission of the College district;
- understand the institution's expectations (e.g., scholarship, integrity, conduct, financial obligations, ethical use of technology) and will be provided information that clearly identifies relevant administrative policies and procedures and programs to enable students to make well-reasoned and well-informed choices;
- identify opportunities to access academic and personal self-assessment;
- learn about campus and electronic resources, services and programs;

- be able to utilize the online scheduling, registration, and access personal

   information;

- have a basic understanding of laws and policies regarding educational

   records and other protected information (FERPA);

- have a basic understanding of the student code of conduct and

   academic/administrative policies and procedures of the institution;

- be able to navigate the campus;

- develop a sense of connectedness through interaction with fellow students, as

   well as faculty and staff members; and

- understand the importance of, and be prepared to, contribute to the history,

   traditions, and culture of the College.

Quantitative Data

      Research protocols. Employing quantitative research methods, this study
examines the influence of the College's new student orientation program on measures of
student success, retention, and persistence for first semester college students. Common
to experimental research, this study examines the influence of the independent variable
on the dependent variable. The independent variable is the presumed cause or
antecedent, whereas the dependent variable is the presumed effect or consequent. The
independent variable is manipulated by the researcher and is hypothesized to influence
the dependent variable. The dependent variable is measured to determine the influence

of the independent variable (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Guba &

Lincoln, 2005). New student orientation is treated as the independent variable and

student retention, success, and persistence are treated as dependent variables. Retention

is identified by end of term student completion. Success is identified as an end of term

letter grade of A through C. Persistence is identified by spring re-enrollments.

Data for FTIC students was provided by the College's Office of Research and

Institutional Effectiveness and analyzed using SPSS 19.0. A decision was made to

measure the dependent variables of retention and success through course enrollments

rather than by headcount. The concern with using headcount to assess these variables is

that headcount does not provide a complete picture of course completion. For instance,

a student may enroll in five courses in his or her first semester in college and withdraw

from four prior to the end of the semester. Using headcount as a measure of retention,

the student would be considered a completer. However, this measure does not provide

as accurate a description of the student's overall achievement as course enrollments do

during this critical first semester. Total course enrollments of FTIC students in fall

2010 were 26,994. Course enrollments of FTIC students who attended a new student

orientation that semester were 11,977, and course enrollments of FTIC students who

did not attend a new student orientation were 15,017.

Initially, retention, success and persistence were measured using the descriptive

statistic of percent for students who attended a new student orientation session and

those who did not. More in-depth analysis was provided by examining the data using a

Pearson chi square (X^2) test of independence and standardized residuals. Standardized residuals are measures of practical significance, indicating the importance of the cell to the chi-square value. They can be interpreted like a z-score, demonstrating the number of standard deviations above or below the expected count a particular observed count is.

Research Question 1: Does New Student Orientation Influence Student Retention? The descriptive statistics (see Table 1) revealed that the percent of completed course enrollments for students who participated in a new student orientation session and the percent of completed course enrollments of students who did not participate was practically the same. Of the 11,977 course enrollments for FTIC students who participated in a new student orientation, 8,557 course enrollments were completed in fall 2010 (71.4%). Of the 15,017 course enrollments for students who did not participate in a new student orientation, 10,646 course enrollments were completed (70.8%).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for FTIC Student Retention, Fall 2010

Status	Course Enrollments	Retention (numbers)	Retention (percentage)
Participants	11,977	8,577	71.4%
Non-Participants	15,017	10,646	70.8%
Total	26,994	19,201	71.1%

The inferential statistics employed a chi-square test of independence to determine whether there was a significant relationship between new student orientation session participation and course completion. The following null hypothesis was tested:

Ho_1. First semester retention rate is no higher for students who participate in a new student orientation session than for those students who do not participate.

The chi square test of independence (see Table 2) revealed no significant difference in retention between the two variables, X^2 (1) = 1.21, P =.14. Given these findings, the researcher was unable to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 2

Inferential Statistics for FTIC Student Retention, Fall 2010

Status	Count	Success	No Success	Row Total	Row %	X^2	df	P
Participants								
	Observed	8,564	3,413	11,977	44.3			
	Expected	8,523	3,454	11,977	44.3			
	Residual	1	-1					
Non-Participants						1.21	1	.14
	Observed	10,646	4,371	15,017	55.7			
	Expected	10,687	4,330	15,017	55.7			
	Residual	-1	1					
Total		19,210	7,784	26,994	100			

Research Question 2: Does New Student Orientation Influence Student Success? For this study, student success is measured as a subset of student retention. The descriptive statistics (see Table 3) revealed that the percent of success (A-C) in course enrollments for students who participated in a new student orientation session

was more than two points higher than the percent of success in course enrollments for students who did not participate in a new student orientation session. FTIC students who participated in a new student orientation were successful in 6,696 of the 8,557 completed course enrollments for the fall 2010 semester (78.2%). FTIC students who did not participate in a new student orientation were successful in 8,050 of the 10,646 completed course enrollments for that same semester (75.6%). The overall percent of success for FTIC students completing course enrollments for the fall 2010 semester was 76.7%.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for FTIC Student Success, Fall 2010

Status	Course Enrollments	Success (numbers)	Success (percentage)
Participants	8,557	6,696	78.2%
Non-Participants	10,646	8,050	75.6%
Total	19,203	14,746	76.7%

The inferential statistics employed a chi-square test of independence to determine whether there was a significant relationship between new student orientation session participation and course success. The following null hypothesis was tested:

Ho_2. Students who participate in a new student orientation session are no more likely to successfully complete their first semester courses than students who do not participate.

The chi square test of independence (see Table 4) revealed a significant relationship between the two variables, $X^2 (1) = 17.61$, $P < .01$. Given these findings, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

Table 4

Inferential Statistics for FTIC Student Retention, Fall 2010

Status	Count	Success	No Success	Row Total	Row %	X^2	df	P
Participants								
	Observed	6,696	1,868	8,564	44.5			
	Expected	6,574	1,990	8,564	44.5			
	Residual	4	-4					
Non-Participants						17.6	1	<.01
	Observed	8,050	2,596	10,646	55.5			
	Expected	8,174	2,474	10,646	55.5			
	Residual	-4	4					
Total		14,746	4,464	19,210	100			

Research Question 3: Does New Student Orientation Influence Student Persistence? Persistence for fall 2010 FTIC students re-enrolling for classes in the spring 2011 semester was measured by headcount. As opposed to the measures of retention and success, which examined course enrollments for the fall semester, headcount was used to identify the number of students that persisted into the spring semester. The descriptive statistics (see Table 5) revealed that the percent of students continuing into the second semester was more than 17 points higher for students who participated in a new student orientation session than for students who did not participate in a new student orientation session. Of the 1,232 FTIC students who participated in a new student orientation in the fall 2010 semester, 997 returned to the institution in the spring (80.9%). By contrast, only 1,506 of the 2,379 FTIC students who did not participate in a new student orientation session returned for their second semester at the institution (63.3%).

64

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for FTIC Student Persistence, Fall 2010 to Spring 2011

Status	FTIC Students	Persistence (numbers)	Persistence (percentage)
Participants	1,232	997	80.9%
Non-Participants	2,379	1,506	63.3%
Total	3,611	2,503	69.3%

The inferential statistics employed a chi-square test of independence to determine whether there was a significant relationship between new student orientation session participation and student persistence. The following null hypothesis was tested:

Ho$_3$.   Students who participate in a new student orientation session are no more likely to enroll in second semester courses than students who do not participate.

The chi square test of independence (see Table 6) revealed a significant relationship between the two variables, X^2 (1) = 130.49, $P < .01$, and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. The magnitude of both the chi square statistic (130.49) and standardized residual (11) demonstrate the large difference in persistence for students who attended an orientation session over those who did not.

Table 6

Inferential Statistics for FTIC Student Persistence, Fall 2010 to Spring 2011

Status	Count	Persistence	No Persistence	Row Total	Row %	X^2	*df*	*P*
Participants								
	Observed	997	235	1,232	34.1			
	Expected	863	369	1,232	34.1			
	Residual	11	-11					
Non-Participants						130.49	1	<.01
	Observed	1,506	873	2,379	65.9			
	Expected	1,664	715	2,379	65.9			
	Residual	-11	11					
Total		14,746	1,108	3,611	100			

Findings. Although this study found no significant difference between retention rates for students who participated in a new student orientation and for those that did not, first semester success rates for these students was significantly higher than for their counterparts. Most striking was the magnitude of difference in student persistence for these two groups. Students who participated in a new student orientation were much more likely to enroll in classes their second semester than students who did not attend a new student orientation session. Given these findings, focus group data provides a greater understanding of whether new student orientation facilitated FTIC students social and academic integration into the institution.

Qualitative Data

Using qualitative research methods, this study answers the remaining questions:

4. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's social integration into the institution?

5. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's academic integration into the institution?

Three separate focus groups were conducted. In two sessions, students who participated in a new student orientation were interviewed. The third session consisted of students who had not participated in a new student orientation.

The first focus group consisted exclusively of FTIC students enrolled in their first semester at the College, whereas the second focus group consisted exclusively of FTIC students enrolled in their second semester at the College. All participants in both focus groups participated in a new student orientation session prior to the fall 2010 semester. The third focus group consisted exclusively of FTIC students who were enrolled in their second semester at the College and had not participated in a new student orientation session. By conducting separate focus group interviews with these three sets of students, the researcher could more effectively validate and triangulate student responses with regard to the information provided in new student orientation sessions.

Research protocols. Using accepted convenience sampling methods and snowball sampling methods, focus group participants were recruited by the College's Office of Outreach and Retention through their individual college e-mail addresses. To guard against any bias or undue influence the researcher may have due to his position at the institution, the researcher removed himself from the recruitment process so that he would have no knowledge of participants' identity. To preserve students' privacy and confidentiality of information, participants remained anonymous in the interview sessions. Data was recorded in writing through notes taken by the researcher and audio taped to maintain an accurate record of the interview sessions. Interviews were conducted on campus in groups of three to six participants. The first two focus groups were approximately 50 minutes in duration each. The third focus group was approximately 30 minutes in duration. For purposes of coding, participants were identified by race, gender and age. Age was coded as either Traditional (college freshman between 18 and 21 years of age) or Non-Traditional (college freshman over the age of 21).

First semester students who participated in new student orientation. Six students participated in the first focus group. Two participants were Latino, two participants were Anglo, one participant was African-American, and one participant was Asian. Five participants were female. One participant was male. Five participants recently graduated from high school whereas one participant was of non-traditional age, entering college after several years in the workforce.

68

Table 7

Focus Group 1: First Semester Students Who Participated in New Student Orientation

Participant	Race	Gender	Age
A	African-American	Female	Traditional Age
B	Anglo	Female	Non-Traditional Age
C	Anglo	Female	Traditional Age
D	Asian	Female	Traditional Age
E	Latino	Male	Traditional Age
F	Latino	Female	Traditional Age

Second semester students who participated in new student orientation. Four students participated in a second focus group. Two participants were international students: one, a Panamanian citizen and one, an Indian on a study abroad program (Community Colleges for International Development). Because both of these students indicated that they were returning to their home countries following their studies, rather than identify them by race, both were coded as international students. A third participant was African-American and a fourth participant was Anglo. Three participants were male and one was female. Three participants were of traditional age, having recently graduated from high school. One participant was coded as non-traditional, as he entered college after having been out of high school for four years.

Table 8

Focus Group 2: Second Semester Students Who Participated in New Student Orientation

Participant	Race	Gender	Age
A	International Student	Male	Traditional Age
B	International Student	Male	Traditional Age
C	African-American	Male	Non-Traditional Age
D	Anglo	Female	Traditional Age

Second semester students who did not participate in new student orientation.

Following the second focus group interviews, a third focus group was convened with students who had successfully completed their first semester at the institution but had not participated in a new student orientation. Convening this focus group enabled the researcher to assess how these students successfully transitioned to college. Responses were then compared with responses from students who had attended an orientation session to more effectively assess the influence of orientation sessions on students' academic and social integration into the institution. Three students participated in this third focus group session. Two participants were Anglo and one was African-American. Two participants were female and one was male. All three participants were of traditional college age.

Table 9

Focus Group 3: Second Semester Students Who Did Not Participate in New Student Orientation

Participant	Race	Gender	Age
A	Anglo	Female	Traditional Age
B	Anglo	Female	Traditional Age
C	African-American	Male	Traditional Age

Research Question 4: Does New Student Orientation Facilitate a Student's Social Integration into the Institution? Social integration refers to both formal and informal interactions students experience in college "resulting from personal affiliations and from day-to-day interactions among different members of society" (Tinto, 1993, p. 101). Such affiliations include peer group interactions and student participation in extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Interaction with peers. New student orientation sessions provided students with an opportunity to meet faculty, staff, and peers. Such social interactions served to build support networks and foster a greater sense of connection between the student and the institution. It has been argued that peers are "the single most potent source of influence," affecting virtually every aspect of a student's development–cognitive, affective, psychological, and behavioral (Astin, 1993, p. 398). Further, student interaction with peers has been demonstrated to positively influence overall academic development, knowledge acquisition, analytical and problem-solving skills, and self-esteem (Kuh 1993, 1995).

Astin's theory of involvement asserts that student engagement and persistence are greatly influenced by the level and quality of student interactions with peers (1984, 1993, 1999). Tinto's model of student attrition (1975) demonstrates the importance of a student's social integration as well as his or her academic integration into the institution as critical to student success. Social interactions often occur informally outside the classroom in peer groups or by participating in student activities.

For most focus group participants, orientation sessions were not solitary experiences. Five students reported that they attended an orientation session as a result of information and encouragement they received from either a family member or a friend. However, to gauge the level of interaction students had with their peers during orientation, respondents were asked if they met other students during an orientation session and, if so, whether they remained in contact with them since. Although one may reasonably question the degree to which a student can establish lasting relationships as a result of participating in an orientation session that occurs over a few hours at a nonresidential campus, four participants reported that they met other students at their orientation sessions with whom they remained in contact. Of those respondents, one student described how she remained in contact with other students she met during orientation through a Social Media Site (Facebook). Another respondent reported that two students with whom he partnered during his orientation session had helped him with his classes.

Two respondents reported meeting orientation (SOAR) leaders who conducted their campus tours: "I met a SOAR leader that was guiding my tour, she's actually my friend now" and "I met Abraham. He was my (SOAR) leader and he really like helps me out so much. He's a really good friend." Both students commented that their orientation leaders helped them in their transition to college. For these students, their relationships with orientation leaders appear to have developed as a form of peer mentorship. This connection may contribute to increased student engagement and self-empowerment (Cuevas & Timmerman, 2011).

The three students who participated in the third focus group reported that, within their first few weeks at the College, they met people with whom they remained in contact. However, none of the responses indicated a mentoring relationship with other students, similar to the responses found in the first two focus group interviews with students who had participated in a new student orientation session.

Understanding of, and involvement in, student activities. Astin's theory of involvement posits that, in addition to devoting considerable energy to academics and interacting with faculty, an involved student spends a significant amount of time on campus and participates actively in student organizations and activities (Astin, 1984, p. 292). To assess the level of information provided in orientation sessions about student activities and whether this information provided students with a better understanding of student organizations and activities on campus, focus group participants were asked about what student activities they were made aware of in their orientation sessions.

Students were also asked whether they participated in any student activities as a result of the information they received in their orientation sessions.

Each student who participated in a new student orientation session was able to identify at least one student activity or social resources offered at the institution. Responses included comments about the Fitness Center, club sports, games students can play (e.g., ping pong, pool) in the student activities area on campus, food services (pizza, Starbucks), Child Watch, fine arts/theatre productions, festivals, and celebrations.

Seven (of eight) students participating in the first two focus groups reported that they were informed about student organizations in their orientation sessions. One respondent also reported that one of the expectations presented at her orientation session was the need to become involved in campus activities and to consider joining a group. Student involvement in college life outside the classroom through student organizations has been shown to increase student engagement, provide students with an opportunity to meet other students, increase their connection and commitment to the college, and improve their chances for college success (Gardner, Jewler, & Barefoot, 2008, p. 128).

One student who participated in the first focus group reported that she had joined two student organizations and a club sports team (the tennis team) as a result of information she received at her orientation session. Another first semester student

indicated that she attended a club rush and would most likely join a student organization.

Two students who participated in the second focus group reported that they had joined student organizations as a result of information they received during their orientation sessions. One student reported "I was told that there were clubs in orientation and the campus president told us that it is good to join clubs. She said that people who join clubs, it's easier for them in school." Another student replied, "going to orientation I learned, you know, just to involve yourself. And that's what I did. I got involved in the school. I got involved with Crusade for Christ. I got involved in the Art Society." One second semester student reported that although he had learned about student organizations during orientation, he was unable to join any in which he was interested (the math club and the chess club) because their meeting times conflicted with his class schedule. However, he explained that he later helped organize a new student organization (the science and engineering club) with the help of a SOAR leader he met at orientation.

Three students who participated in the first focus group explained that they preferred to concentrate on academics before becoming involved in student activities. One student remarked "this semester…I wanted to study and concentrate, focus on my grades. So I haven't participated in any student activities or joined any clubs yet." Another student reported "I work, so for me it's hard to find the time this semester to get more involved….Next semester, I can join one (a student organization) and get

more involved in everything." A third respondent commented "I wanted to concentrate more on my studies right now, so I didn't have time to join any clubs this semester."

Similar to responses received in the first focus group session, one student who participated in the second focus group reported that he had learned about student organizations during his orientation session but chose not to join one during his first semester in college, preferring to concentrate on academics. This respondent also reported joining a student organization (the toastmasters club) during his second semester at the institution.

Participation in student organizations can facilitate students' social integration into the institution (Astin, 1975; Bean 1980; Spady 1970; Tinto 1975, 1987). Students are more likely to remain in school when "they feel comfortable and connected to other students with similar interests and aspirations (social integration)" (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh,Whitt, & Associates, 2010, p. 165). One respondent who participated in the second focus group described the benefits he received by being a member of a student organization. He reported that membership provided him with a support group of peers, helped him relax, and enabled him to perform better in college. He noted

> I like the club and I think my grades are higher because I've asked people in my club for help and they've offered to help. It just helps me personally relax….I know…when the meeting comes we can all get together do things…fun activities. It's helped me a lot. After class, I relax and go into club meetings.

I've improved. Grades are higher. People in the club help with resources and it

helps me relax outside of class.

Two students who participated in the third focus group (those not attending a

new student orientation session) reported that they had also learned about student

organizations on campus. One respondent reported that she learned about student

organizations through information on campus flyers and was told about a student

organization by one of her instructors who served as the organization's sponsor.

Another respondent reported that she was informed of a campus "Club Rush" by a staff

member, "so, I checked it out and got interested in a couple of clubs; the drama club

especially. And, then I looked online for information on it."

Findings. New student orientations at the college studied facilitate a student's

social integration into the institution. Student responses from the three focus groups

demonstrate that several students who participated in a new student orientation

established relationships with other students at their respective sessions. These

relationships began to develop before the first day of class and, for many, served to

provide a support network or a type of peer mentorship for these students. Although

each of the students who did not participate in a new student orientation session also

reported meeting other students and establishing relationships within their first few

weeks in college, none reported a supportive relationship with their peers similar to the

responses from students who participated in a new student orientation session.

The purposeful discussion of student organizations in new student orientation sessions serves to integrate students socially into the institution by providing them with an understanding of some of the social resources and services available to them. Focus group participants who did not attend a student orientation session could also identify student organizations. However, the students who participated in a new student orientation were able to provide a greater depth of response (including membership benefits) when queried about their knowledge of, and participation in, student organizations.

Research Question 5: Does New Student Orientation Facilitate a Student's Academic Integration into the Institution? Academic integration refers to the factors that influence a student's ability to become a part of an educational environment. Such factors include academic preparation, study habits, academic norms, and understanding one's role as a student (Tinto, 1975, 1993). In each of the new student orientation sessions, students were introduced to college and classroom expectations as well as provided with information about college services and resources.

College expectations. Research has demonstrated that effective orientation programs facilitate a student's transition to college by providing clear institutional expectations (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Tinto, 1993; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). To gauge students' understanding of these expectations, students who participated in the first two focus groups were asked about college expectations presented at their respective orientation sessions and whether orientation helped them better understand those

expectations.

One expectation that was evident from responses was the need for students to take personal responsibility for their success. All six respondents who participated in the first focus group reported that this expectation was presented in their sessions. One student reported that she was advised to "take time to study and read and review all of your materials before class and after class every day." Another student remarked that, "it's very important that you are prepared for class." A third respondent commented that "you are responsible for your success. You work for your grade." A fourth student explained that she was informed that, "you don't make the grade, you earn the grade."

Although the theme of personal responsibility was not as pronounced in the responses provided in the second focus group, the understanding that college requires different skills sets from high school was evident. One student reported that she was informed that college "would be challenging. That there would be a lot of homework." Another said that, "I knew when I left the meeting that it would be different from high school. I knew that it would take an effort on my part in order to make it through college." A third respondent remarked that she was told, "this will be different from high school. It's a college…we're looked upon as adults now."

Seven of the respondents who participated in the first two focus groups reported that articulating college expectations during orientation assisted them in their transition to college. One student reported that she found the time management advice presented in her orientation session helpful. She was advised to "work hard…study… manage

your time. The biggest thing was: manage your time. That's been real important."

Another student found the discussion of work/life balance particular useful. She

explained

> The work/study balance was important for success. They said that…to be
>
> successful as a student, you need to plan your schedules and that you should be
>
> prepared to…balance your work with your classes and studies. They explained
>
> the workload versus the course load. Coming back to college after several years,
>
> I didn't know what to expect. The information the speaker gave about balancing
>
> your work and your study was helpful. I can now devote fulltime to college, so I
>
> try to schedule my time for classes, and for preparing for class and for class
>
> work.

Faculty expectations. Understanding faculty and classroom expectations early in

an FTIC student's experiences is critical to student success (Barefoot, 2000; Kuh, 1999;

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2010, McClenney & Greene, 2005; Tinto, 1975,

1993, 1998). Yet, six of the 10 students participating in one of the first two focus groups

were unable to determine whether a faculty member was present in their orientation

sessions. Although faculty members presented information about classroom expectations

in 46 of 58 new student orientation sessions offered prior to the fall 2010 semester, the

lack of awareness about faculty presence could pose a threat to the understanding of

classroom expectations. Classroom expectations may effectively be presented by a non-

faculty member. However, it is essential to the success of any orientation program that

faculty play a significant role in communicating classroom expectations with those who develop and disseminate this information.

Although the majority of participants in the first two focus groups were unable to identify whether a faculty member was present, eight (of 10) respondents recalled faculty expectations that were discussed in their orientation sessions. One respondent reported that she was advised to "come to class prepared. Know when to study and when things, assignments, homework are due in your classes." Similarly, another student recalled that he was informed to "be on time and prepared. These are the rules of the college which were in the orientation."

The eight respondents who identified faculty expectations that were presented in their orientation sessions also reported that they were informed about the importance of class attendance and punctuality. One respondent confirmed the usefulness of this advice.

> I think that's really important because both of my classes people that drop, they usually stopped coming to class a few weeks after the class started…. And, there are some classes that you can just simply not afford to skip. Like in my case, I would say calculus and chemistry this semester.

Seven respondents recalled that they were informed about faculty's willingness to work with students and help them succeed. One said "they told us…'don't worry. We have faculty members to help you with everything you need.' And, definitely they're always there and like every need, we can always contact one of them and they

usually solve my problem." Similar comments included "talk to your professors about any concerns you have," "professors are here for students and can build a rapport with them," and "teachers will work with you…." Faculty can assist in student achievement through encouragement, creating a positive learning environment, and establishing clear expectations for student success (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper 1999; Roueche & Roueche, 1985; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar 2005; Tierney & Hagedorn 2002). Providing students with this teacher expectation/college resource in an orientation session can help lay the groundwork for greater student success in college.

Several respondents (five) explained that they were informed of expected student behaviors such as academic integrity and were cautioned against academic dishonesty. Similar to college expectations that were presented in their orientation sessions, four students identified that they were informed that faculty expected them to take personal responsibility for their success. One student reported that she was told that, "it's up to us to be responsible."

From student responses, there appears to be a variance as to which faculty member presented at an orientation session and the information he or she provided to students. One respondent who recalled that an English professor presented information at the session she attended reported that the instructor provided her with general advice regarding teacher expectations and encouraged her to reach out to her professors if she needed assistance. The respondent found this information useful: "In my experiences here I have…reached out to my teachers. Every time…they have been helpful. It has

made me…develop a closer relationship between the student and teacher." By contrast, a respondent who reported that an accounting professor presented information in an orientation session which she attended indicated that the information provided was much more specific to students who wished to pursue a career in accounting: "But, I didn't want to be an accountant. So I didn't really think that applied to me…" As a result, the student was not as focused on the professor's advice: "so I didn't pay that much attention to what he had to say." Although the College's Office of Outreach and Retention provided faculty with guidance as to what expectations should be addressed in new student orientation sessions, it appears that some faculty used the forum to promote their courses or encourage students to pursue a major in particular disciplines.

Although students who participated in the third focus group did not attend an orientation session, each could identify faculty expectations of them. Respondents reported that they had learned to be prepared for class, read their textbooks and bring them to class, and be involved in class discussion. One respondent noted,

> All of my professors have really emphasized coming to class as often, you know every day. Be there. You're going to have to put in the work to get the grade. All of my professors, I believe, have always taken attendance and always emphasized that is part of your success; that you've got to be here to learn.

When asked how they learned about these expectations, respondents in the third focus group reported that they had learned them through class lectures, instructors' syllabi, and personal experience. Respondents also explained that they had learned these

expectations incrementally, over a period of time. One student commented: "because you learn a little bit more from each professor."

College resources. Research has demonstrated that the more quality resources an institution makes available to students, the more likely those students who are involved will be successful (Astin, 1985, 1993). Knowledge of institutional support mechanisms that facilitate support services are important to a student's academic integration, institutional commitment, and (ultimately) decision to remain in college (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2010; Tinto, 1993). New student orientations can help students transition to college by introducing them to available college resources before they enter the classroom.

Students who participated in the first two focus groups were asked about college resources presented in their orientation sessions, whether the information provided helped them better understand the resources available, and which resources they found particularly helpful. Students reported learning about such college resources as the Tutoring Center, the open computer lab in the Technology Center, the campus library, counseling, and the Assessment Center.

Seven respondents reported that the College's Tutoring Center was discussed in their orientation sessions. However, only two of these respondents (one in the first focus group and one in the second focus group) reported having utilized this resource. Both of these respondents found the Tutoring Center helpful. One student explained "I've gone to the Tutoring Center a lot of times already this semester. I've been there to

help me with my math class. They've always been there…to help me understand things in class." Although five of the respondents who identified the Tutoring Center as a resource presented in their orientation sessions had not utilized it yet, each indicated that it was important to understand that this resource was available to them. One student pointed out "I haven't gone there yet. But, it's upstairs and students can go there to get help…when they need extra help in a class. It's good to know about it." Another student remarked "I haven't used it yet, but it is good to know it's there if I need it."

Five students reported that they were informed about the College's open computer lab in the Technology Center during their orientation sessions. Each respondent had utilized this resource and found it to be a quieter alternative to the library for students to study and do class work. Additionally, students reported that this lab also has greater availability to computer access than the library. One respondent reported,

> They told me about the Tech Lab, which is some special lab just for students. Which is real nice, because usually the library is crowded with students playing Facebook or whatever. And the Tech Lab is actually a place that we can study and do your homework and stuff.

Another respondent said,

> The computers are really useful for me because sometimes I have a hard time getting access to computers outside of school. So, using the school computers has helped me out a lot. I've been going there lately, just 'cause you know, it

helps me focus. It's more quiet. Most of the times, when I do use

computers…it's after class. I stay here longer to study.

Similar student comments regarding the open computer lab included "you can go there

to study when there are too many people in the library…it's sometimes hard to get on

the computers there…you can go to get on a computer in the Tech Center and study,"

and "it's real quiet there and easy to get on a computer."

Four respondents who participated in the first two focus groups identified the

College's library and its resources as being discussed during their orientation sessions.

One student commented, "there's a lot of things to help us there: librarians and

counselors and tutors. Oh, and the advisors have been real nice and helpful anytime I

have any questions about anything. They're there for you when you need them."

Another student reported, "we learned about the different databases in the library and

how we could go there and do research for different classes."

One student identified an additional college resource presented at the orientation

session that she attended. "I also learned about the testing area where a person can go

and take tests in different subjects. And in the counseling area in the back of the library,

I learned about the resources for how to find jobs."

Students who participated in the third focus group also identified college

resources about which they had learned. Two respondents reported learning about the

Tutoring Center during their first semester in college. Both indicated that they had

learned about this resource from their instructors. One student noted,

I know when I have taken especially like science or math courses, my professors

have always talked about tutoring being available; the science corner in the library

or upstairs tutoring for math. They've always emphasized that. Because they are a

little bit more difficult for the average student to learn. It takes a lot of time,

especially when you're learning every bone in the body or you're learning a new

math concept or something. So they talked about tutoring.

A third respondent reported that although he had learned about the Tutoring Center, he

had not done so until his second semester at the institution: "tutoring for me wasn't

really publicized until this spring. Teachers never really talked about it either…the ones

that I had previously."

Two respondents who participated in the third focus group reported that they

had toured the library in one of their classes. Both students identified resources

available, including online databases and the library catalog. Although a third

respondent had not formally toured the library, he reported an awareness of the

textbooks which the library places on reserve for students who are unable to afford

textbooks for their classes: "I like the fact that…the students who don't have a book or

able to buy it for the first week or so; they can come to the library and take it out for

two hours. That's really nice."

Findings. New student orientations offered at the College studied facilitate a

student's academic integration into the institution. By purposefully introducing students

to college expectations, faculty expectations, and college resources in a more

comprehensive manner prior to the start of a student's college experience, new student orientations have laid the groundwork for student success, academically.

Focus group participants who did not attend a new student orientation session were able to identify several of the same college expectations, faculty expectations, and campus resources as the students who had attended an orientation session. However, their responses were not as comprehensive as the responses for students who had participated in an orientation session. For these students, their knowledge of expectations and resources was incremental, based on information they had received from their instructors. As a result, the information they received was often limited to the expectations and resources, which would be beneficial to their success in a particular course in which they were enrolled. Notably absent in the responses of focus group participants who did not attend a new student orientation was the encouragement and expectations for success with which students who attended a new student orientation were provided. Although instructors may provide encouragement in class to their students, there appears to have been no independent method to relate this information.

Summary

Using quantitative analytical measures, Chapter four assessed the impact of new student orientation on student retention, success and persistence. Findings demonstrated that there was no significant difference in first semester retention for students who participated in a new student orientation and for those who did not. However, students

who participated in a new student orientation were more likely to be successful in their first semester in college and much more likely to re-enroll for their second semester at the institution. Through focus group interviews, respondents reported that new student orientation facilitated their social and academic integration into the institution. Chapter five reviews the findings of this study and offers recommendations for program improvement. Additionally, it provides recommendations for further research and discusses the implications for policy and practice for community college administrators, faculty, and staff working in developing new student orientation programs.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the major findings of this study and provides recommendations for policy, practice, and research. The first section reviews the purpose of this research, the quantitative and qualitative methods used to address the research questions, and the findings of the study. The researcher also offers an assessment of the new student orientation program at the College as well as recommendations for program improvement. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and implications for policy and practice for community colleges that wish to develop new student orientation programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of a publicly supported, 2-year, comprehensive suburban community college's new student orientation program on the academic performance and retention of FTIC students. This study examines the student success indicators of persistence, retention, and success during the first semester of college for those students who have participated in a new student orientation session and compares these indicators against those for first semester students who have not participated in a new student orientation session.

This study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Does new student orientation influence student success?

2. Does new student orientation influence student retention?

3. Does new student orientation influence student persistence?

4. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's social integration into the institution?

5. Does new student orientation facilitate a student's academic integration into the institution?

To assess the influence of a community college's new student orientation sessions on the academic performance and retention of new community college students, this case study uses a mixed (or combined) methods approach, examining both quantitative and qualitative data. In gathering quantitative data, the overall retention rates, success rates, and persistence rates of students who have participated in a new student orientation are compared against those measures for students who have not participated in a new student orientation session.

Findings

Using quantitative research methods, this study finds that there was no significant difference between first semester retention for students who participated in a new student orientation and for those who did not. However, the study also demonstrates that students who participated in a new student orientation were more likely to be successful in their first semester in college and much more likely to re-

enroll for their second semester at the institution. Using qualitative research methods of conducting separate focus group interviews with students who participated in a new student orientation session and those who did not, this study finds that new student orientation session facilitate a student's social and academic integration into the institution. Students who participated in a new student orientation reported that they learned about students' activities and developed relationships with other students they met at their orientation sessions. They further reported that the students they met at their orientation sessions (especially SOAR leaders) have assisted them in their transition to college. Additionally, students who attended a new student orientation session were able to identify college expectations, faculty expectations, and campus resources in greater detail than students who did not attend a new student orientation session. Additionally, students who did not attend a new student orientation session reported that information they had received about college expectations, faculty expectations, and campus resources was usually from their instructors and often incremental.

Effective Elements of the College's New Student Orientation Program

While this study finds that new student orientation at the College facilitates students' social and academic integration into the institution, focus group interviews reveal that the orientation program is particularly effective in generating high attendance, involving peer (SOAR) leaders in the delivery of information, and providing FTIC students with the encouragement that they can succeed.

Participation in orientation. Although participation in new student orientation was not mandatory for FTIC students, with 1,232 of 3,611 entering FTIC students (34.1%) attending one of the College's orientation sessions, information about orientation was well disseminated. The College provides information about new student orientation sessions through its website, flyers, and on large banners placed at the campus entrance. All FTIC students are also encouraged by advisors and counselors to attend a new student orientation session prior to their enrollment at the institution.

To measure the effectiveness of the College's marketing of new student orientation to FTIC students, participants who attended an orientation session and took part in a focus group were asked how they learned about orientation and why they chose to attend a session. Respondents explained that they were informed about orientation sessions through a variety of mechanisms. Five respondents reported that they learned about orientation from the College's website and that they chose to attend to have a better understanding of the institution. Three students reported that they were informed about orientation sessions by one of the College's advisors before they registered for a class. One student also reported seeing information about orientation on a flyer that was posted on campus.

For several students, families and friends played a role in their decision to attend an orientation session. Five students reported that they participated in an orientation session as a result of information and encouragement they received from either a family member or a friend. Their responses further underscore the importance of

93

encouragement by family and friends in increasing student access to, and success in, college (Bean & Metzner, 1985**;** Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Cabrera, Burkum, & LaNasa, 2005**;** Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999**;** Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Understanding the role families play in facilitating a student's transition to college and building upon this, 12 orientation sessions were offered for family and friends of FTIC students. In each session, participants met with college personnel, separately from students, to learn about the College's policies, procedures, resources, and expectations.

Interestingly, four focus group respondents indicated a belief that attendance at an orientation session was mandatory for them. Although the College has not yet mandated new student orientation sessions for all FTIC students, the (mis)understanding that it has, no doubt, has increased the level of participation and has established attendance at orientation as an expectation for many FTIC students.

The role of SOAR leaders in facilitating student success. The selection, training, and purposeful use of SOAR leaders in the delivery of new student orientation sessions have positively contributed to student success. Several students who participated in focus groups indicated that SOAR leaders played an important role in their orientation experiences and transition to college. Nine (of 10) participants interviewed in the first two focus groups reported that the campus tour, conducted by SOAR leaders, was of value to them. When asked what they found particularly valuable about the campus tours, respondents indicated that that they enjoyed having their tours led by campus SOAR leaders and that the tours provided them with a better

understanding of where college resources were located from a student's perspective. One student commented, "I really liked how the students gave us the tour and showed us where everything was and told us about it." Another remarked, "Teachers see the school different from students. It's good to get the student's view of everything here."

Three focus group participants identified SOAR leaders who had helped them both academically and socially. Two respondents reported that they had developed lasting relationships with SOAR leaders who they had met in their orientation sessions. An additional respondent explained that with the help and encouragement of a SOAR leader, he organized a new student organization on campus. Focus group responses indicated that, for these students, SOAR leaders had become peer mentors. This relationship may contribute to increased student engagement and self-empowerment, manifesting itself in greater student persistence and success (Cuevas & Timmerman, 2011).

Social integration may be more difficult for students who attend non-residential community colleges because social interaction occurs less frequently at these 2-year institutions (Maxwell, 2000; Roueche & Roueche, 1999). Because these students commute and must often achieve a balance between academics, family, and work, one study suggests that colleges should look for ways to provide students with structured opportunities in which to interact with their peers (Tinto, 1998). The use of SOAR leaders in working with new students, both during and following orientation,

successfully facilitates these new students' integration into the institution both academically and socially.

Recruitment, selection, and training of SOAR leaders. The position of SOAR leader was created to support the Office of Outreach and Retention and the Student Activities Department in facilitating the adjustment of new students to the College as well as to retain returning students.

Students are recruited through a variety of mechanisms: faculty referrals, student referrals, information tables, flyers, and communication with student organizations. Students are carefully selected through a multi-step process. Interested students complete an application in which they identify their employment history, the number of hours they have completed at the College (as well as the number of hours for which they are currently enrolled), their grade point average, activities, organizations, and volunteer work with which they are involved. They are also required to list two professional references who are either faculty or staff at the institution. Applicants are interviewed by a panel consisting of the Director of Outreach and Retention, the Assistant Director of Outreach and Retention, and the Student Activities Coordinator. Successful applicants must be in good standing academically, maintain a minimum G.P.A of 2.5, have completed a minimum of 12 credit hours by the time they have been selected, not been found in violation of any disciplinary infractions, exhibit excellent communication skills, function as a team player, exhibit a positive attitude and pride in the institution,

demonstrate an ability to work with diverse groups, and be available to participate in orientation sessions and staff meetings.

Once selected, SOAR leaders undergo approximately 24 hours of training. Training sessions include meetings with orientation session presenters and advice as to what they should and should not say to participants. The Director of Outreach and Retention provides SOAR leaders with a 2-hour tour of the campus and explains expectations for conducting new student tours. New SOAR leaders are paired with more experienced SOAR leaders when conducting their first two to three campus tours before they lead a tour on their own. The Assistant Director of Outreach and Retention "shadows" new SOAR leaders as they conduct their initial tours, providing them with feedback afterward. Given the careful selection process and extensive training of SOAR leaders, these students have the potential to assume a more significant role in orientation sessions. This concept is explored in greater detail, as a program recommendation below.

Encouragement to succeed. The encouragement and expectation to succeed, as provided in new student orientation sessions, has been demonstrated to positively contribute to student success. Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda (1993) tested Tinto's (1975, 1985) and Bean's (1980) models of student attrition, and added the concept of "encouragement" as an environmental variable. When added to these models, encouragement was found to be a significant predictor of student persistence. Six focus group respondents who participated in a new student orientation session at the College

97

reported that they were provided with encouragement that if they worked hard, they would be successful in college. One respondent reported that he was informed, "you don't need to worry. Just be on top of everything and everything is going to be OK." Another student reported that this was one of the most useful bits of advice that she was given in orientation that assisted her in her transition to college. She was encouraged to "just keep going no matter how tough it gets in college. Just don't stop. Just keep going."

Seven focus group participants who attended a new student orientation session reported being informed of faculty's willingness to work with them and help them succeed. As reported in Chapter four of this study, one student explained "they told us…'don't worry. We have faculty members to help you with everything you need.'" Other students reported similar information that was provided in their orientation session: "talk to your professors about any concerns you have," "professors are here for students and can build a rapport with them," and "teachers will work with you…."

Research demonstrates that faculty plays an important role in student persistence and can foster greater student success through encouragement, creating a positive learning environment, and establishing clear expectations for student success (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper 1999**;** Roueche & Roueche, 1985; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar 2004; Tierney & Hagedorn 2002). Positive encouragement from faculty can also provide students with a sense of belonging to the institution (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005**;** Nora, 2001). Although new student orientation sessions provided students with positive

98

expectations for their success, faculty must be part of a larger conversation in fostering these concepts. The idea of increased faculty involvement in new student orientation is discussed in greater detail below under recommended areas for new student orientation program improvement.

Recommended Areas for New Student Orientation Program Improvement

New student orientation at the institution studied has demonstrated its effectiveness in facilitating student success and persistence as well as social and academic integration into the institution for FTIC students. However, despite this success, there are suggested areas in which the program can continue to improve and foster greater student achievement.

Recommendation 1: Increase institution-wide (especially faculty) involvement in the new student orientation program. A new student orientation advisory committee should be created and charged with continuous development and evaluation of information provided in new student orientation sessions. Faculty, advisors, counselors, support staff, and administrators must be integrally involved in the development of new student orientation programs that introduce students to college expectations, services, and resources available to them. An advisory committee consisting of the Director of Outreach and Retention, the Coordinator of Students Activities, advisors, counselors, tutors, librarians, students, and faculty representatives from each academic division within the institution can provide greater institutional input into the planning and implementation of the new student orientation program.

99

The College's Director of Outreach and Retention and her staff have worked closely with the Coordinator of Students Activities to develop and deliver orientation sessions that successfully introduce new students to resources available to them. As a result, most focus group respondents could clearly identify campus resources. However, based on student responses, the academic expectations presented in new student orientation sessions appear to vary from instructor to instructor. Clear and consistent outcomes for the "Academic Life" portion of orientation sessions, similar to those developed for "Student Life" and "College Resources," can be created and assessed by an advisory committee that includes faculty representatives. Faculty representatives can serve as a conduit for faculty input from academic divisions. They can integrate information provided by their colleagues into a common list of faculty expectations that will be presented in new student orientation sessions. Likewise, representatives can share student success and orientation outcomes with other faculty members within their academic divisions. This position is explored in greater detail in the second recommendation below.

Too often, student orientation programs are viewed as the province and responsibility of the student services division within a college (Tinto, 1996). As a result, faculty may be disengaged from the orientation process and an informational gap can develop between what is presented in orientation sessions and what is discussed in class. To narrow this gap, studies have suggested that faculty become increasingly involved in the development of student orientation programs (Kuh, 2007; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Although faculty involvement in the development of orientation is critical to program success, faculty need not necessarily be responsible for delivery of this information; a position that is explored in greater detail in the third recommendation below.

Concepts presented during the "Academic Life" segment of new student orientation sessions presented at the College studied were based on input provided at faculty forums. However, in an effort to allow faculty greater flexibility in determining what information to emphasize, the concepts remain broad (e.g., class syllabi, communication with instructors, behavioral expectations, effective study habits, etc.). As a result, comments by focus group participants who took part in a new student orientation reflected differing information and expectations based on which faculty member delivered this part of their sessions. The establishment of a new student orientation advisory committee at the College can create greater institutionalization of the orientation program, secure additional faculty support, and provide more accuracy and consistency in information delivered regarding faculty expectations.

Recommendation 2: Increase faculty understanding of student success. To reinforce concepts and expectations introduced at orientation sessions, faculty must be aware of the College's resources and services available to students. However, they must also have a deeper understanding of how those resources and services impact student success and incorporate them into their curriculum.

Although orientation programs may be effectively designed and delivered, what occurs in the classroom remains one of the most important predictors of student success:

the relationship between faculty and students. Student interaction with faculty is strongly related to student persistence (Astin , 1977, 1984, 1993; Tinto 1975, 1996). Faculty facilitate academic integration into the institution by providing classroom expectations (Tinto, 1996) and encouragement (Roueche & Roueche, 1985). For many students, faculty also serve as the primary source of information about college events, student organizations, institutional deadlines, and educational opportunities (Kuh, 2007).

As Chapter four demonstrates from focus group responses, students who did not attend a new student orientation session at the College learned about institutional resources and services from their instructors. However, their articulation of these support mechanisms was not as comprehensive as that of their counterparts who participated in an orientation session. Additionally, for these students, understanding college resources was often incremental, based on information they had received from their instructors. One student who found the College's Tutoring Center a useful resource reported that he had not learned about it until his second semester at the institution because, "tutoring for me wasn't really publicized until this spring. Teachers never really talked about it either…the ones that I had previously." Tinto's study of student persistence found that college resources and student engagement strategies had minimal impact on retention absent faculty involvement (Tinto, 1996). For this reason, one study recommends that faculty participate in institutional, regional, and national conversations about student success (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Building upon this recommendation, the College studied must ensure that student success is an important part of the dialogue throughout the

institution. Faculty workshops offered by the College's Teaching and Learning Center should introduce pedagogies that promote student success. Administrators must support professional development opportunities for faculty to increase their understanding of student success. Academic division and departmental meetings should include discussions of student success and strategies for incorporating these concepts into the curriculum. Continued reinforcement in the classroom of the College's resources, services, and expectations introduced in new student orientation sessions and implementation of strategies that promote student success may foster greater student retention, persistence, and achievement. An opportunity for such academic alignment is presented by the college district's upcoming reaffirmation of accreditation. This opportunity is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Recommendation 3: Increase the role of SOAR leaders in informational delivery during new student orientation sessions. SOAR leaders may be used to successfully deliver faculty expectations in new student orientation sessions. As identified earlier in this chapter, SOAR leaders have been carefully selected and trained to assist with new student orientations.

Although faculty presented information about classroom expectations in 46 of 58 new student orientation sessions offered prior to the fall 2010 semester, less than half of the focus group participants who attended an orientation session could identify whether a faculty member was present at their session. Several students confused the Director of Outreach and Retention and the Coordinator of Student Activities (both present at the

majority of orientation sessions) with faculty members. By contrast, all focus group respondents could identify SOAR leaders present in their sessions as well as the information with which these student leaders provided them.

As presented in Chapter four, even though most students (six of 10) who participated in one of the first two focus groups could not identify faculty members present in their sessions, eight of 10 respondents could articulate classroom expectations that were presented. From responses provided, it appears that it was the information delivered that students recalled and not necessarily the person who delivered it. Additionally, faculty advice appears to have differed from presenter to presenter. As previously noted one of the four students who recalled a faculty presenter at her orientation also remembered that the advice she was given was specific to one discipline and reported a disinterest in it: "But, I didn't want to be an accountant. So I didn't really think that applied to me…"

As discussed earlier in this chapter, when asked what elements of orientation they found most useful in their sessions, nine (of 10) focus group participants indicated that the campus tours, conducted by SOAR leaders was particularly useful to them because the tours provided participants with a better understanding of where college resources were located from a student's perspective. As previously noted one student commented "the students make the tour a lot more and interesting for me. I like the way they told us about everything here. I felt like I could relate to it better." Another student remarked "teachers see the school different from students. It's good to get the student's

view of everything here." That view should also extend to classroom expectations as well as campus resources and services. Presenting a list of carefully developed faculty expectations, as well as drawing upon personal experiences, SOAR leaders can present this information in a manner to which FTIC students can more easily relate. By using SOAR leaders in this capacity, their information level may also be strengthened and they may develop a greater sense of responsibility and connection to the institution as well as to these new students. Research has demonstrated that the peer mentor and peer mentee mutually benefit from such a relationship (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997**;** Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000)**.**

Recommendation 4: Increase the variety of days in which new student orientation sessions are offered. Over a 4-month period, 58 new student orientation sessions were offered prior to the fall 2010 academic term. Orientation sessions were scheduled at a variety of times to encourage greater student participation (19 morning sessions, 12 afternoon sessions, and 17 evening sessions). Students who participated in at least one of each of the three time offerings were represented in the focus groups. Eight respondents reported that they attended a morning orientation session, one respondent reported that he attended an afternoon session, and one respondent reported that she attended an evening session. Three respondents also indicated that they enjoyed having a variety of times available for them to attend an orientation session. One student remarked "it was really nice to have flexible scheduling options to come when I was able to." Another student explained that she chose to attend an evening session because

105

she was planning to enroll in night courses for the fall semester and she wanted to learn about resources and services available for evening students.

> Well, I knew that I was going to take my classes at night. And they give you a choice of when you can go to orientation. So I wanted to go to a night orientation because I work during the day and it would be easier for me to get here for, well at night. Also, I wanted to see if the night orientation was different for students who would be taking classes here at night, like me.

Although new student orientations were divided equitably among mornings, afternoons, and evenings, all sessions were offered on either Tuesdays or Thursdays. Understandably, the dates and times for orientation sessions are limited by the availability of personnel and rooms. However, providing a greater variety of days of the week in which to offer sessions (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays) would create additional access for those students who are unable to attend a Tuesday or Thursday session. Likewise, the College should offer Saturday orientation sessions for those students who can only attend college on weekends. In the fall 2010 semester over 1,400 students were enrolled in a weekend course. Delivering orientation sessions for this student population will also provide them with a better understanding of College resources, services, and expectations.

Table 10

Number of Orientation Sessions Offered Prior to Fall 2010 Semester

Time	M	T	W	TH	F	S	Total
Morning 9:00-11:30	0	12	0	17	0	0	19
Afternoon 1:00-3:30	0	0	0	12	0	0	12
Evening 5:00-7:30	0	17	0	0	0	0	17
Total	0	29	0	29	0	0	58

Recommendation 5: Increase the variety of orientation sessions and breakout sessions for different student populations and publicize these specialized sessions. Students who make connections with peers that have similar characteristics to themselves are more likely to persist in college (Tinto, 1998). To increase these connections between different FTIC student populations and provide additional information to these groups, six orientation sessions were designated for special populations: three for students who were transferring from another institution and three for adult learners. Although these sessions were designated for special populations, they were open to all students to attend. Additionally, six orientations included breakout sessions for veterans, to provide them with additional information about veteran's services on campus and within the district.

107

None of the students who participated in a focus group took part in one of these specialized orientation sessions. However, when asked about the one area of new student orientation they would like to see improved, three students indicated that they would have enjoyed participating in a customized session for their cohort. These responses indicate that additional specialized orientation sessions should be created and, in the case of one respondent, existing specialized sessions should be better promoted. A nontraditional aged student expressed a desire for the College offer orientation sessions for older students. Although three orientation sessions were designated for adult learners, she was unaware of these offerings.

Two focus group participants (both international students) explained that they would have preferred that orientation sessions been organized around common student characteristics. Both respondents indicated that orientation sessions should be delivered, in part, based on a student's primary language. One respondent requested that orientation sessions be delivered in Spanish. Similarly another respondent thought that separate sessions should be delivered in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

A variety of orientation opportunities should be provided for students based on common student demographics and characteristics. Separate orientation sessions should be delivered in English for Speakers of Other Languages to assist students who come to the institution with limited knowledge of the English language. Additionally, either orientation sessions or breakout sessions within an orientation may be designed for

students with common interests or majors. Orientation sessions for different racial populations, first generation students, online learners, and other student groups may provide these students with additional social capital upon entering the institution. Majors-based orientation sessions may also be arranged by academic or workforce clusters (e.g., business management, computer technology, health science professions, service professions, manufacturing and industrial professions, and so forth) to provide specialized information as well as career advice to students wishing to pursue a career in one of these fields. Majors-based orientation sessions should also include program directors in their delivery. As discussed in the previous recommendation, offering orientation sessions on Saturdays may create greater access to orientation for weekend students. Additionally, if the information provided at a Saturday orientation session also includes a list of services and resources available to students on weekends, the session can provide these students with a greater understanding of ways in which the institution may assist them.

Recommendation 6: Make new student orientations mandatory for all FTIC students. The institution has established a goal of mandatory orientations for all FTIC students. Although this has not yet occurred, a high priority must be given to implementing this goal. Community college students need orientation more than any other group of FTIC students (Roueche & Roueche, 1998) and colleges should offer orientation programs to help new students transition to a college environment (McClenney, 2007; Perrine & Spain, 2008). While participation by FTIC students in one

of the College's new student orientation sessions was high (34.1%), over 65% of FTIC

students entering the institution (2,379) did not participate in an orientation session.

Requiring all FTIC students to attend a new student orientation session provides all

entering freshmen with a common understanding of resources, services, and

expectations prior to their first day in class and facilitates greater social and academic

integration into the institution.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation: An Opportunity for Alignment of Student Success

Initiatives

In 2011, the college district for the institution studied will seek reaffirmation of

accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). A

requirement for reaffirmation is the development of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

> Engaging the wider academic community and addressing one or more issues that
>
> contribute to institutional improvement, the plan should be focused, succinct, and
>
> limited in length. The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of
>
> action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) related to enhancing student
>
> learning. (SACS, 2011)

The district has selected the theme of "Best Start" for its QEP. "Best Start" is designed

to increase student success for FTIC students through a specific set of instructional

activities. Beginning in the fall 2011 semester, activities will be piloted within a small

number of designated EDUC 1300 (Learning Framework: 1st Year Experience) sections.

EDUC 1300 is three-hour credit course in which students learn the "1) research and

theory in the psychology of learning, cognition, and motivation, 2) factors that influence learning, and 3) application of learning strategies" (LSCS, 2011, p. 219). Individual topics addressed in EDUC 1300 classes include learning styles, reading and memorization techniques, note taking and test taking strategies, and career exploration.

The "Best Start" program is designed to be gradually implemented over a 4-year period. Initially, FTIC students who test into two or more upper-level developmental courses will be required to participate in the "Best Start" program. By 2013, "Best Start" activities will be incorporated into all EDUC 1300 courses and FTIC students who test into one or more upper-level developmental course will be required to participate in the "Best Start" program. Starting in 2014, all FTIC students with less than 12 college credits will be required to participate in the "Best Start" program. Additionally, "Best Start" activities are scheduled to be piloted in other freshman level courses.

Although "Best Start" is a district-wide initiative, there is an opportunity to customize information disseminated for the College studied in an effort to provide a more thorough explanation of instructor expectations, college resources, and services that have been previously covered in a new student orientation session. Additionally, College courses that offer specialized pedagogies and delivery methods may be discussed in greater detail within these sections.

Built as the first college in the 21st Century, the institution studied incorporated the principals common to a learning college (O'Banion, 1997; Roueche, Kemper, & Roueche, 2006-2007) into its framework as "a vibrant laboratory for engagement in

111

learning and innovation" (Troyer, 2005, p. 4). The College established a "learning signature," that incorporates values and beliefs of active engagement in the learning process. Although each course is expected to contain elements of active engagement, some courses have been specially designated as "learning signature" courses, involving pedagogies and delivery styles that have been intentionally designed to actively engage students. These offerings include honors courses, learning communities, service learning environments, online courses, and study abroad. The ability of these pedagogies to improve student success is well-documented (O'Banion, 1997; Kuh, et al., 2010; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Jacoby, 1996; McCarthy, 2003; Tinto, 2000). The College's learning signature as well as the learning signature course offerings are discussed in new student orientation sessions. However, despite this information, no focus group participant identified either learning signature courses or the concept of active engagement when asked to discuss areas covered in an orientation session. Because these concepts may be new to students, an introduction to them in an orientation session should also be accompanied with a more thorough explanation of each through "Best Start" activities in EDUC 1300 courses. Additionally, the College's resources and services designed to facilitate student success (advising, counseling, tutoring, financial assistance, library services, and so forth) that were introduced to students in new student orientation sessions may be successfully integrated into class assignments as "Best Start" activities in EDUC 1300 courses.

112

Because a QEP is designed to engage the institution in broad conversations of institutional improvement, the concept of first semester student success which is at the core of "Best Start" will become a part of the College's dialog. The opportunity the College's QEP provides faculty, administrators, and college personnel to engage in this discussion can lead to a greater understanding of student success. The College's new student orientation program may be viewed as a gateway to student success by providing FTIC students with an introduction to expectations, resources, and services that can later be reinforced and explored in greater detail in "Best Start" student success courses. These concepts may then be further reinforced and applied in the academic transfer courses and workforce programs in which students enroll.

Limitations

There are limitations that one should be made aware of when reviewing the findings of this study. This study is limited, in part, by the methodology used in the collection and analysis of the data. Similar to other studies that employ qualitative data methodologies, the nature of the data collection and subjective analysis limits the extent to which the findings may be generalized to a wider population. Student attributes, experiences, and the dynamics present in new student orientation sessions may be unique to the institution studied. Projecting these finding onto other institutions and assuming that the same characteristics are present would be unwise. However, it is fair to say that the findings presented in this study accurately depict the student success outcomes for this institution during the semester studied.

Similarly, this case study presents a one semester "snapshot" of student success. Like the challenge posed by qualitative data analysis, it is problematic to generalize findings from a 1-semester case study to a wider population over several semesters. There may be intervening variables impacting student success present during the semester studied that are not present during other semesters. Taking such "snapshots" can provide a more accurate picture of the influence new student orientation programs have on student success.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this case study demonstrate the need for additional future research. Additional case studies of non-mandatory new student orientation programs offered by non-residential suburban community colleges should be conducted to determine if results are similar for first semester student retention, success and persistence. Collectively, these case studies may provide a greater understanding of "front door' experiences that foster student success.

Each recommendation offered in Chapter five also provides an additional opportunity to conduct further research on the influence new student orientation programs have on student achievement. New student orientation programs that actively involve faculty in the development and implementation of an institution's comprehensive plan for student success may be investigated to assess their impact on student achievement. The role of student leaders in delivering faculty expectations to incoming students may be explored in further detail to determine the degree to which the

information they provide facilitates greater academic integration into the institution. Finally, an investigation of a program that requires mandatory participation of all FTIC students in a new student orientation program may provide additional information about the influence of such programs on student retention, success, and persistence.

Implications for Institutions that Wish to Develop a New Student Orientation Program

Institutions that wish to develop a new student orientation program must start with the understanding that all orientation programs should be designed with the goal of improving student success. As such, these programs do not stand alone, but rather are an integral part of the institution's overall effort to foster student persistence and achievement. Faculty, staff, and administrators should have an understanding of the literature that identifies strategies and pedagogies, which have been demonstrated to foster greater student success, and incorporate those strategies into the fabric of the institution. New student orientations can provide a gateway for entering students to transition to the college's environment by facilitating both social and academic integration into the institution. However, the expectations, resources, and services introduced in new student orientation sessions must be reinforced, both in and out of class, throughout a student's total college experience.

115

Appendix A

Institutional Approval Letter to Conduct Study

LONE STAR
COLLEGE
CYFAIR

February 7, 2011

Dr. Jody Jensen, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
P.O. Box 7426
Austin, TX 78713
irbchair@austin.utexas.edu

Dear Dr. Jensen:

The purpose of this letter is to grant Ted A. Lewis, a student at the University of Texas at
Austin permission to conduct research at Lone Star College-CyFair. The project, "The
Influence of a New Student Orientation Program: First Semester Student Success in a
Suburban Community College" entails conducting focus groups with students who have
participated in a new student orientation at Lone Star College-CyFair. Working with the
Office of Outreach and Retention, approximately 15 participants will be recruited through
their college e-mail address. All focus groups will be conducted on the campus of Lone Star
College-CyFair. The purpose of this research is to understand how this new student
orientation program contributes to student success. Lone Star College-CyFair was selected
because the researcher is an employee at this institution and assists the Office of Outreach
and Retention in assessing the effectiveness of new student orientations. I, Dr. Feleccia
Moore-Davis do hereby grant permission to conduct "The Influence of a New Student
Orientation Program: First Semester Student Success in a Suburban Community College" at
Lone Star College-CyFair.

Sincerely,

Feleccia Moore-Davis, Ph.D.
Vice President of Student Learning
Lone Star College-CyFair

9191 Barker Cypress Road
Cypress, TX 77433-1383
281.290.3200
CyFair.LoneStar.edu

116

Appendix B

Student Recruitment Message

You are invited to participate in a focus group to share your feedback about your experience at Lone Star College-CyFair's New Student Orientation program and about your experience so far at the college in your first few weeks of classes. Please respond "yes" or "no" to this e-mail address and if you are interested in participating, please let us know if you can come on <TIME, DATE> at <LOCATION>. If you are interested in participating in this study, more information will be provided to you.

We look forward to talking with you soon!

Cover Letter for Minimal Risk Studies

Title: The Influence of a New Student Orientation Program: First Semester Student Success in a Suburban Community College

Conducted By: Ted A. Lewis of the University of Texas at Austin: Educational Administration, Community College Leadership Program

Telephone: 281-290-3989

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or Lone Star College – CyFair. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of new student orientation sessions on first semester student success.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:
- Participate with four other students in a focus group in which you will discuss your experiences in one of Lone Star College-CyFair's new student orientation sessions. These discussions will be audio recorded, but your comments will remain anonymous.

Total estimated time to participate in study is one hour.

Risks of being in the study
- The risks from your participation in this study are expected to be minimal and no greater than those you are exposed to in everyday life as a student. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of

this form.

Benefits. There will be no direct benefits for participants. However, the study will contribute to the body of knowledge about new student orientation sessions at community colleges. Understanding how a new student orientation program contributes to student success can lead to deeper discussions about Lone Star College-CyFair's new student orientation program, help administrators design new student orientation programs, and foster a discussion about requiring orientation sessions for all entering community college students.

Compensation:
- You will receive no additional compensation for participating in this focus group.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:
- Data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.
- The audio recordings and notes taken by the researcher will be stored securely and kept confidential in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office in which the researcher has sole access to.
- Data will be labeled by number rather than by student names or any other descriptors which reveal the identity of any student.
- All data collected in and associated with this study will be retained for six months after completion of this study and destroyed thereafter. Audio recordings will be erased and notes taken by the researcher will be shredded.
- Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and members of the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.
- All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject.
- Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top

of this page.

If you would like to obtain information about the research study, have questions, concerns, complaints or wish to discuss problems about a research study with someone unaffiliated with the study, please contact the Office of Research Support at (512) 232-2685. Anonymity, if desired, will be protected to the extent possible. As an alternative method of contact, an email may be sent to orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu or a letter sent to IRB Administrator, P.O. Box 7426, Mail Code A 3200, Austin, TX 78713.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix D

New Student Orientation
Focus Group Questions

- Tell me about your orientation session:
    - How did you learn about it?
    - Why did you decide to attend?
    - Was your orientation session large (many other students) or small (a few)?
    - What time of day, was your orientation session?
    - Was there a faculty member present?

- What college expectations were presented at your orientation session?
    - Did it help you understand the college and its expectations?
    - How?

- What teacher expectations were presented at your orientation session?
    - Did it help you understand teacher expectations?
    - How?

- What college resources were presented at your session?
    - Did it help you better understand the resources on campus available to you?
    - Based on your experiences, what resources have been most helpful?

- Did you meet other students during your orientation session?
    - Have you remained in contact with them since?

- What student activities were you made aware of during your orientation session?
    - Have you participated in student activities as a result of the orientation session?
        - If so, which?

- What was the one thing or piece of information you found most useful in your orientation session?

- What was the one thing that you would like to see changed regarding orientation?

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions
For Students Who Did Not Attend a New Student Orientation Session

- When you first enrolled, did you hear about new student orientation?
  - If yes, why didn't you attend a new student orientation session?

- What college expectations have you learned about?
  - How did you learn about these expectations?
  - When did you learn about these expectations?

- What teacher expectations have you learned about?
  - How did you learn about these expectations?
  - When did you learn about these expectations?

- What college resources have you learned about?
  - How did you learn about these resources?
  - When did you learn about these resources?

- What student activities have you learned about?
  - How did you learn about these resources?
  - When did you learn about these resources?

- Have you met other students on campus with whom you have remained in contact?
  - How did you meet other students?
  - When did you meet other students?

Appendix F

Early Orientation Programs
April – Early June

Tuesday evenings: 5:00 – 7:30 p.m.
- May 4
- May 11
- May 18
- May 25
- June 1

Thursday mornings: 9:00 – 11:30 a.m.
- May 6
- May 13
- May 20
- May 27
- June 3

Regular Orientation Programs
June - August

Tuesday mornings: 9:00 – 11:30 a.m.
- June 8
- June 15
- June 22
- June 29
- July 6
- July 13
- July 20
- July 27
- August 3
- August 10
- August 17
- August 24

<u>Tuesday evenings: 5:00 – 7:30 p.m.</u>
- June 8
- June 15
- June 22
- June 29
- July 6
- July 13
- July 20
- July 27
- August 3
- August 10
- August 17
- August 24

<u>Thursday mornings: 9:00 – 11:30 a.m.</u>
- June 10
- June 17
- June 24
- July 1
- July 8
- July 15
- July 22
- July 29
- August 5
- August 12
- August 19
- August 26

<u>Thursday afternoons: 1:00 – 3:30 p.m.</u>
- June 10
- June 17
- June 24
- July 1
- July 8
- July 15
- July 22
- July 29

- August 5
- August 12
- August 19
- August 26

Appendix G

- *Your first day of class*
  - Covering the syllabus - Like a contract, read it, know it
- *Expectations*
  - What you should expect of your instructor/classes
    - Not all classes will be alike, different approaches/styles (examples of class projects, discussions, case studies, small group work, etc.)
      - Learning Signature: Learning Communities, Honors (covered in next presentation), Service Learning, Study Abroad (Sri Lanka, Italy, China, Costa Rica)
    - Communication via office hours, e-mail, office phone - about assignments, tests
  - What your instructor expects of you
    - Behavioral expectations
      - Top "do's and don'ts" – treated as adults, showing up on time and prepared, reading assignments ahead of time, no texting or phone calls or inappropriate use of laptops, staying for the whole class, not talking to others during class, asking questions
      - Academic integrity
- *Study Habits*
  - Strategies you used in high school will not be the same in college; can study a lot but not study effectively; study outside of class; test themselves; appropriate use of flash cards; study groups

Appendix H

New Student Orientation Learning Outcomes

Created by the New Student Orientation Task Force

December 2, 2009

New Students will:
- o understand the purposes of higher education and the mission of Lone Star College System.
- o understand the institution's expectations (e.g., scholarship, integrity, conduct, financial obligations, ethical use of technology) and will be provided information that clearly identifies relevant administrative policies and procedures and programs to enable students to make well-reasoned and well-informed choices.
- o identify opportunities to access academic and personal self-assessment.
- o learn about campus and electronic resources, services and programs.
- o be able to utilize the online scheduling, registration, and access personal information.
- o have a basic understanding of laws and policies regarding educational records and other protected information (FERPA).
- o have a basic understanding of the student code of conduct and academic/administrative policies and procedures of the institution.
- o be able to navigate the campus.
- o develop a sense of connectedness through interaction with fellow students, as well as faculty and staff members.
- o understand the importance of and be prepared to contribute to the history, traditions, and culture of the LSCS.

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149

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151

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Vita

Ted Adam Lewis is the first member of his family to attend college. After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Texas Wesleyan University, he earned a Master of Science degree in political science from the University of North Texas.

Ted has taught college level political science for over twenty five years, beginning his teaching career as an adjunct faculty member at Brookhaven College in the Dallas County Community College District in 1987. In 1990, he joined the faculty at Collin County Community College as professor of political science at the Central Park Campus in McKinney, Texas. Ted later served as department chair and founding faculty member of the College's Preston Ridge Campus in Frisco, Texas. He held these positions from 1995 until 2003 when he joined the founding team of Lone Star College-CyFair as dean of instruction.

During his time in the classroom, Ted has been practitioner of, and advocate for, student-centered learning strategies. Ted has engaged in the pedagogies of learning communities, service-learning, honors, online educational environments, collaborative environments, and active learning. He has received several teaching awards and is listed in *Who's Who Among American Teachers*. In 1997, Ted became the director of Collin County Community College's learning communities program. Under his direction, the program received the national Bellwether Award.

Ted has delivered more than 30 national presentations on curriculum development, community partnerships, and active learning strategies which promote student engagement. He has also published papers on political science, learning communities, and student centered learning in national journals. Ted is a co-author of *Practicing Texas Politics*, the most widely adopted college level Texas government textbook, now in its Fourteenth Edition.

Since 2003, Ted has been dean of instruction at Lone Star College-CyFair. In this role, he has developed over a dozen programs including fire science, emergency medical services, geographical information systems, environmental science, massage therapy, personal training, Discovery College (a youth program that serves over 2,000 students between the ages of six and sixteen each summer), and ROTC (a partnership with the University of Houston). Additionally, Ted has developed and/or maintained partnerships with the University of Houston-Downtown, Prairie View A & M University, Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, Harris County Citizen Corps, Harris County Emergency Services District 9, and Cy-Fair Volunteer Fire Department. In 2006, the partnership between Harris County Emergency Services District 9, Cy-Fair Volunteer Fire Department, and Lone Star College-CyFair to deliver emergency services programs was recognized as a finalist for the national Bellwether Award.

Professionally, Ted is proud to serve on the board of directors of the National Alliance of Community and Technical Colleges (NACTC) as the secretary-treasurer. He

is also on the editorial board of *Vicissitude, a Journal for College Leaders*, sponsored by the NACTC. For the past three years, Ted is honored to have been a student in the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin under the direction of Dr. John Roueche.

Ted is an active member of the Cypress-Fairbanks community, donating his services to educational and community initiatives. He serves as a member of the board and executive committee of Cypress-Fairbanks Educational Foundation. Ted is a member of the Rotary Club of Cypress-Fairbanks and a Paul Harris Fellow, an award presented to him by his club following his service as president. He serves on several committees of the Cy-Fair Houston Chamber of Commerce, including the sustainability committee, which he co-chairs. Ted and his wife, Katherine, live in Brenham, where they are restoring their 140-year-old home. Their "family" includes four cockatiels, two rescued dogs, and two chickens.

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This manuscript was typed by the author.