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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

HELPING STUDENTS SUCCEED IN COLLEGE:  
THE ROLE OF A FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Learning Technologies

by

Kurt Laudicina

July, 2014

Monica Goodale, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Kurt J. Laudicina

under the guidance of a faculty committee and approved by its members, has been submitted and accepted by the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Monica Goodale, Ed.D., Chairperson

Kay Davis, Ed.D

Jack McManus, Ph.D.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Camille. Throughout this program she has stood by my side and has been my biggest supporter. Her continued reassurance and patience over the past few years mean the world to me and I am forever grateful.

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To my family: Thank you for believing in me.

## VITA

**ACADEMIC HISTORY**

Montana State University Billings, Billings, MT  
**Master of Science in Public Relations** May, 2009

Montana State University Billings, Billings, MT  
**Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Option in Marketing** May, 2003

**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE**

Montana State University Billings, Billings, MT  
**Assistant Director of First Year Experience & Retention** December 2013 – Present

Montana State University Billings, Billings, MT  
**College Success Specialist, College of Business** August 2012 – December 2013

Montana State University Billings, Billings, MT  
**New Online Student Specialist/e-Communications Coordinator/  
Publications Designer** January 2006 – August 2012

**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Service Learning Advisory Board 2013-Present  
Member, Montana State University Billings Recruitment Team 2009-12  
Member, Montana State University Billings Alumni Advisory Board 2008-12  
Appointed member, Montana State University Billings Chancellor's Hiring Committee 2009-10  
Chair, Montana State University Billings Staff Senate 2009-10  
Senator, Montana State University Billings Staff Senate 2008-09  
Member, eLearning Advisory Board 2007-09

**PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

Member, Association for Computing Machinery 2010 - Present  
Member, American Educational Research Association 2010 - Present

## ABSTRACT

Student retention has been a mystery within colleges and universities for decades. Administrators continue to devote resources to increase student persistence within their institutions. The first-year seminar is a popular intervention found at many colleges and universities. The purpose of this study was to explain how a first-year seminar affected the retention rate of first-time, traditional aged freshman at a medium-sized, 4-year, public university. Using the fall cohort of 2012 students ( $N=665$ ), this study used a two-phase, sequential, explanatory mixed methods design. Using a stratified random sample and Tinto's (1987) theory of individual departure as the theoretical framework, this study found the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took the first-year seminar reenrolled at a higher percentage (63.49%;  $n=160$ ) than the other strata. Furthermore, it was found the students who completed the first-year seminar had higher levels of academic skills and social integration than those who did not take the seminar. All of the strata were concerned about finances including tuition and fees, other costs associated with college, and disposable income. It was further concluded the university should offer more social options for students. It was also recommended that the university should consider requiring the first-year seminar for all freshman students. Moreover, given the level of financial strain it further recommended the university increase financial education to all students. The low response rate (8%;  $n=48$ ) may have been due to the medium selected for data collection. Further discussion of the viability of the medium is considered.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

College student persistence has intrigued administrators at institutions of higher education for decades. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) commissioned a report indicating that of the students enrolled at four-year colleges or universities with open registration policies, only 31% persisted through to graduation to complete a bachelor's degree in six years (Aud et al., 2013). This number represents the importance of retaining students in the education industry. The administration has been left with a pursuit to determine why the other students leave. This has been a journey with few answers. The reasons students leave may be different for each person, however, they can be grouped together to help identify predictive factors. Generalizing these populations seems to be difficult but institutions consistently devote resources to help keep their students in college.

The reasons students leave has been an issue in higher education for many years because it is complicated. Studies identifying college student retention can be found as early as the 1930s (McNeely, 1937); furthermore, the focus on the freshman student can be traced back to Harvard University in the 1800s (Upcraft & Gardener, 1989). Several scholars have studied the phenomenon (Astin, 1975; Bean, 1980; McNeely, 1937; Noel, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1993), yet there is no single reason identified to explain attrition rates in college students.

McNeely (1937) wanted to determine why students withdrew from school. He found a small relationship between student mortality the size of a campus community. The students who attended college in large communities often had more stopouts, however, he also found that these schools in large communities also had less dropouts (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). He also found financial issues and failure in academics to be issues as well in his study. Astin (1975) discovered two predictors of college student retention – personal and environmental. Personal

factors included previous grades, degree commitment, college expectations, and demographic elements such as age and marital status. Environmental factors comprised of where a student lived, worked, and their educational atmosphere. Spady (1970) sought to find the reasons students dropped out of college. He suggested the connections students have between academics and their social lives could further explain students' reasons for withdrawing from an institution. Tinto (1975, 1987) developed a theory of individual departure drawing from these and other scholars researching retention, claiming that students who are academically and socially integrated into an institution will persist. Bean (1980) disagreed with previous theorists and built his model based on worker turnover. He argued that students left college for reasons similar to those who left their jobs.

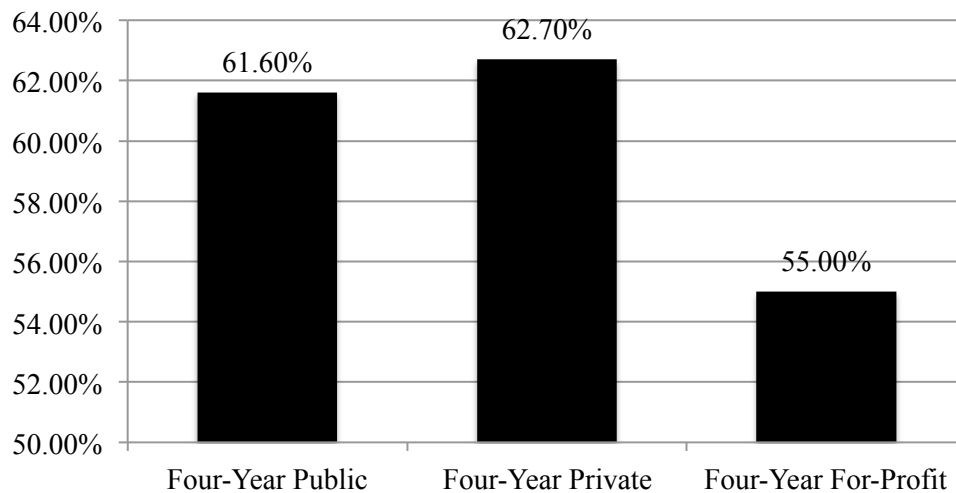
### **Retaining the Student**

Retention clearly affects the graduation rates of institutions and has an impact on day-to-day activities. Colleges and universities need tuition monies from students to sustain their operating costs. However, the implications of students not completing college are greater than the enrollment and funding to the university. A college degree is worth more to a student than acquiring subject knowledge. Retention rates affect society as a whole. Students who complete college earn more money and see the increased likelihood they will become productive citizens in civic engagements. College-educated citizens are more productive in their jobs than those with high school educations (Hill, Hoffman, & Rex, 2005).

**Retention in today's higher education institution.** In its simplest definition, retention is keeping students in school. For the purposes of this study, retention refers to the number of students who stay enrolled from one semester to the next. Retention has long been an issue for administrators, arguably, in all institutions of higher education. Furthermore, in this study it is

also imperative to distinguish between *dropout* and *stopout*. Dropouts leave college permanently whereas stopouts return to college at some point. While the two terms differ in definition, they are typically calculated the same in an institutions retention rate. For example, if an institution receives funding based on its retention rate, a student who stops out will look the same in reports as a dropout. The two are not distinguished.

To determine retention rates, administrators identify students who reenroll in college the following fall semester from when they began their studies (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). The type of university can also have an effect on the persistence of students. Public institutions with open enrollments saw average retention rates of 61.60% in 2011 (NCES, 2013) whereas private institutions with the same admissions policies experienced retention rates slightly higher at 62.70%. For-profit institutions had an average retention rate of 55.00% (NCES, 2013).



*Figure 1.* Retention rates for different types of institutions in 2011. Bar graph illustrating the retention rates for different types of institutions in 2011 (NCES, 2013).

**The current landscape.** Administrators of colleges and universities are trying to keep freshmen students enrolled because students who stay through the first year are more likely to

persist through the rest of their collegiate career than those students who do not complete their first year (Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999). The risk of attrition is reduced by 50% after the student persists to the second year of college. Due to the possibility of attrition being reduced, it is imperative that college and university administrators, as well as faculty, create interventions to help their students succeed. Moreover, freshmen students are arriving to college underprepared for academics (ACT, 2013; Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Conley, 2007; Hill et al., 2005).

Approximately half of all freshmen college students take at least one developmental course (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). These students begin their education unprepared for college and the remedial courses they take do not adequately prepare them for success in college. The first-year seminar has been an intervention that 87.3% of four-year colleges and universities have adopted into their programs (Padgett & Keup, 2011).

### **The First-Year Seminar**

The first-year seminar has been a popular intervention to combat low retention rates among first-time freshmen. The first year of college is the most influential in a student's life and, therefore, receives the majority of focus from administrators at colleges and universities (Cox, Schmitt, Bobrowski, & Graham, 2005; Levitz et al., 1999; Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1999). Appealing to freshmen is not novel; in 1888, Boston University introduced one of the first freshman orientation courses (Gordon, 1989). The University of South Carolina developed University 101, a freshman seminar that has become one of the most popular for colleges and universities to model their own after (Upcraft & Gardener, 1989). It was in the early 1980s when the first-year seminar saw resurgence and became a movement (Barefoot, 2000). In 30 years, five different types of the first-year seminars have been identified and commonly offered. They are as follows: (a) extended orientation seminars; (b) academic seminars with similar content; (c) academic



seminars with different content; (d) pre-professional seminars; (e) basic study skills seminars. Some institutions also mix the types to create a hybrid option (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992).



*Figure 2.* First-year seminar formats.

Research has indicated that a successful first-year seminar can help reduce the attrition of their students. Schnell and Doetkott (2003) found in their survey of 1,853 students that the first-year seminar had an impact on the retention rate. Their study was longitudinal in nature and found greater persistence over four years for those students enrolled in a first-year seminar. Seminars are intentional in their early direction of students towards academic and social success. Even with the success of first-year seminars, not every institution offers them. Furthermore, if colleges and university administrators could determine why students leave college, they could potentially increase their rate of retention. Padgett and Keup (2011) identified the two top objectives of first-year seminars regardless of the format – help students develop academic skillsets and create connections to their colleges or universities. These course outcomes are important as they blend into what Tinto (1993) has described in his theory of individual departure of being academically and socially integrated.

At Central Mountain State University, some form of a first-year seminar has been offered since 1991 (J. McIsaac-Tracy, personal communication, January 29, 2013). The course was titled Arts & Sciences (AS) 101. In 2008, the Student Success Coordinator took over the planning of

the course. Up until that time it was a seven-week, one-credit elective course. AS 101 went through a transition period and in the fall of 2010, it became a different piloted course titled Arts & Sciences (A&SC) 294.

A&SC 294 was piloted in the fall of 2010 and was introduced as a two-credit, 15-week elective course. During the fall of 2010 semester, the course went through brief modifications and a committee decided the course should be taught in teams comprised of a faculty member and a staff member. A&SC 294 was offered the following fall semester and again in the spring of 2011. In the fall of 2012, the seminar was officially offered as a two-credit, 15-week elective course. Although the seminar was not required, it was highly recommended to incoming freshmen students. In 2012, the teaching structure of the seminar went through a transition as well. The course sections were to be taught by four designated student affairs staff members, College Success Specialists. The course numbering was changed again once the seminar was approved and titled A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar.

### **Purpose of Research**

Central Mountain State University is a medium sized, four-year public university. Overall enrollment is approximately 5,000 students. In the fall of 2012, the university had an annual freshmen retention rate of 52.69%. Over the past five years that rate has remained between 52-57%. Although the retention rate is calculated and reported annually, it has not been determined if the addition of A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar has an effect on persistence. In 2010, a retention team was formed to address the issue of student persistence. After the team developed a retention plan, they set a short-term goal to increase freshman retention to 57% for the fall-to-fall freshmen cohort of 2012.

The purpose of this study was to address the retention of first-time, traditional aged freshman students at Central Mountain State University. A two-phase, sequential mixed methods design was used to explain how the first-year seminar affects the retention rate at Central Mountain State University. The first phase collected survey data using a combination of two instruments: the College Persistence Questionnaire (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009) and a first-year supplement. The data were used to divide the responses from the surveys into 15 total factors; 10 that were validated in affecting student persistence, such as social integration, academic integration, and financial strain. The other five were themes developed from first-year seminar topics at Central Mountain State University. The survey was distributed to four different strata from the 2012 freshman cohort including those who did and did not complete A&SC 111.

The second phase of the study involved interviewing volunteer participants from the first segment in order to provide more insight to the questions from the survey. The data collected from the interviews was used to strengthen the explanations derived from the initial surveys. All of the data was used to answer the research question:

RQ 1: How does a first-year seminar affect the retention rate of first-time, traditional aged freshman at Central Mountain State University?

### **Theoretical Focus**

The top two goals of the first-year seminar are to help students develop academic skillsets and to create a connection to their college or university (Padgett & Keup, 2011). These goals are relative to the theorists' implications of academic and social integration. Tinto (1975, 1993) argued that students must be academically and socially integrated into the college community in order to persist to the next semester or year. Students are academically integrated when they have in-class and outside-of-class interactions with faculty, enjoy the quality of the instructors in their

classes, and experience intellectual growth. Social integration encompasses interactions with peers at the institution, feeling accepted, and personal growth (Davidson et al., 2009). Tinto (1993) discussed in order for students to persist, the level of academic and social integration does not have to be equal. A student may be overly academically integrated and yet not very socially incorporated and still persist. Conversely, a student may be overly socially integrated, however, and not very academically and end up withdrawing. There are other challenges in discovering why students withdraw. Administrators must determine the external pressures on students and their type (residential vs. commuter). Residential students are more likely to persist (Astin, 1975). Commuter students may have different external pressures such as employment, household support, and family obligations. Therefore, the approach taken by college and university administrators should vary from those living on-campus.

Tinto (1993) posited it was the characteristics of each student combined with these external pressures that factor into why they withdrew from the institution. Even though the individual characteristics are unique to each student, they can still be divided into categories such as financial support and degree commitment. However, it is the academic and social engagement with the college or university environment that is the most important aspect of Tinto's theory. His work draws from and expands upon the research of earlier scholars who studied retention. In addition, Tinto's (1993) theory of individual departure uses two sociological theorists as a foundation for his theory, van Gennep and Durkheim. Through the first-year seminar, these two avenues of academic and social integration are addressed in order to help students persist. It is through this lens the first-year seminar at Central Mountain State University is examined.

## Key Definitions

- Academic integration: from Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, academic integration describes the in-class and outside-class interactions with faculty that build a connection with the student. Also included are intellectual growth and quality of instruction.
- Adult student: adult students are those above the age of 24.
- Attrition: attrition describes the decrease in enrolled students. A high rate of attrition would indicate the university losing students.
- Commuter student: a commuter student is one who travels back and forth between his or her residence and the college or university.
- Dropout: a dropout is a student that is no longer enrolled in any institution of higher education.
- External forces/pressures: these outside pressures can include, family obligations, financial stress, and employment.
- First-year experience: the first-year experience describes any courses freshman are required to take and activities they may participate in pertaining to their academic and social integration.
- First-year seminar: the first-year seminar at Central Mountain State University is an extended orientation type course. Topics covered include finding students strengths and using them to their benefits, time management, study skills, community building, and wellness. The course is a two-credit course.
- For-profits: for-profit institutions operate to make money. They are unlike the public, state university or private non-profit institutions that hold a 501(c)(3) classification.

- Full-time student: a full-time student is one who is enrolled for 12 or more credit hours in a semester.
- Institutional commitment: the level the student is dedicated to the college or university. Students with low commitment levels may not persist.
- Residential student: a residential student is one who lives on-campus.
- Retention: in higher education, retention describes the number of students who reenroll from one year or one semester to the next.
- Retention rate: this is calculated by taking the number of current enrolled students and determining how many of them reenrolled the following consecutive semesters.

A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. (NCES, 2013)

- Social integration: from Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, social integration describes the out-of-classroom activities that build a connection with the student. This includes involvement in extracurricular activities, connections with peers, and acceptance by those peers.
- Stopout: a stopout is a student who takes a break from higher education. A stopout might enroll in fall, but not in spring, and again the following fall.
- Theory of individual departure: Vincent Tinto's (1993) theory in which he determines to increase the rate of student persistence, students must be academically and socially integrated into a college or university.
- Traditional-aged freshman: traditional-aged freshman are described as students between the ages of 18 and 24.

- Traditional education: a traditional education includes courses of study at both public and private two and four-year institutions of higher learning and takes place in-person.
- Withdrawal: withdrawal occurs when students remove themselves from a college or university.
- Virtual schools: virtual schools offer courses strictly online from a distance.

### **Significance of the Proposed Study**

Retention and first-year seminars have been researched for decades. Almost every angle has been covered on the two subjects. However, at Central Mountain State University, the phenomenon had not been exhaustively researched. The contribution will be to test Tinto's (1987) theory and determine if the seminar does affect the retention rate. Furthermore, most colleges and universities do not have full-time employees teaching their seminars. Of the schools that offer any type of first-year seminar, 43.7% have the course taught by teams (faculty-staff; upper classman-staff; upperclassman-faculty). Moreover, academic advisors teach 31.20% of seminars (Padgett & Keup, 2011).

In 2012, Central Mountain State University employed four College Success Specialists who are responsible for instructing almost all sections of A&SC 111; a staff member of the Office for International Studies taught one international section. This research provided insight into the first-year seminar and its relationship to the retention rate at Central Mountain State University. The university needs to increase its retention rate. Higher education institutions rely on students to fund their services. Many college and university funding models are based on the number of students enrolled in an institution (Sav, 2013). In the state Central Mountain State University inhabits, the Board of Regents is transitioning into performance funding. In this new funding model retention is factored in (Montana University System, 2013). Furthermore, Central

Mountain State University is seeing a consistent decrease in college enrollment. This comes at a time when the number of high school graduates in its state remains at low levels that are not predicted to increase for another decade (Western Interstate Commission of Higher Education, 2012). In addition, to declining high school graduates, the region around Central Mountain State University is seeing low unemployment rates with projections to keep decreasing (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The focus on retention at this university is at a crucial point.

### **Key Assumptions**

It is assumed the class will have an effect on the retention rate at Central Mountain State University. In 2007, a version of this class was introduced into the university's curriculum. The retention rate in 2007 was 54%. Over the past six years, adjustments were made to the seminar but the curriculum has remained the same. The most significant change was in the fall 2012 when the course moved from a team-teaching structure to one where the sections were divided amongst the College Success Specialists.

### **Limitations**

This study is not without limitations. The extent of the research is limited – only one year is observed. A longitudinal study that tracks students until graduation may provide different results. Another limitation is that survey respondents may not be entirely truthful. There is a possibility that some may fear repercussions from the university for providing honest answers, although no such risk exists. This study does not take into account other interventions that may also have an effect on the retention rate at Central Mountain State University.

### **Summary**

Retention has been an on-going issue in higher education for decades. With 4,599 colleges and universities in the United States alone (NCES, 2013), institutions are continually



trying to maintain their student population. As the population of some states grows older and the number of high school students decline, it is imperative these schools keep their students through graduation. Determining why students leave their college or university is important to administrators at these institutions. Equally important is determining why students persist and if the first-year seminar has any impact on the retention rate.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

There have been many studies over the past few decades seeking to discover the underlying causes of student withdrawal from institutions of higher education (Bean, 1980; Bennett, 2003; Braxton, Brier, & Hossler, 1988; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Ishitani, 2006; MacKie, 2001; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1975, 1993), many utilizing the theory of individual departure (Tinto, 1993) as their conceptual framework. The present study also seeks to find an answer to the issue of student retention using Tinto's theory, however, it does so by observing the first-year seminar as a medium for implementing the framework and evaluating its impact on retention rates at Central Mountain State University. In addition to increasing retention rates, two goals of the first-year seminar are to help students cultivate academic skillsets and to create connections to their college or university (Padgett & Keup, 2011). These goals are relative to the theorists' implications of academic and social integration. Tinto (1975) argues that students must be academically and socially integrated into the college community in order to persist to the next semester or year.

Retention efforts must begin early on in order for students to persist. Several colleges and universities utilize aspects of Tinto's theory in their version of a first-year seminar to help combat some of the issues arising in retention (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). The issues in retention are encompassed in the seminars curriculum with activities to support students to get involved in their academics as well as socially in college. The first year of college is recognized as the most important in regards to the persistence of students (Cox et al., 2005; Levitz et al., 1999; Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1999). The concentration on the first year is not novel; the emphasis on freshmen can be dated back to the 1800s at Harvard University and Boston College (Upcraft &

Gardener, 1989). It is through this review of literature that Tinto's theory is explored and the relationship between it and the first-year seminar is corroborated.

### **Leading Up To Departure**

The theory of individual departure, in a succinct definition, explains student persistence. The theory explains that if a student can become academically and socially integrated into his or her college, they will persist. Therefore, if a university can identify effective ways for students to properly engage in these two areas, according to Tinto's (1987) theory, the students should persist through to graduation. This theory draws inspiration from sociological disciplines and focuses on how students need to development social and academic skills to foster their success. To understand why students reenroll, it is necessary to recognize what leads up to the student wanting to withdraw.

**Academic incongruence.** Tinto (1993) suggests that there are two main avenues students take on the road to departure – incongruence and isolation. Incongruence is the incompatibility between the needs of the student and those of the institution. Incongruence causes students to leave because they are dissatisfied with the institution in some respect. In a study by Hale, Graham, and Johnson (2009) the advising styles of academic advisors were pitted against the style the student preferred. They found the students who were matched closer to their preferred style were more likely to persist. The congruence between student and advisor had an effect on their social and academic integration. In a report compiled by Yorke and Longden (2008) about student expectations and retention, students gave a variety of responses – lack of personal engagement, the lack of contact with their professors, and their degree program not being what they expected - as reasons for not returning to their schools. These examples illustrate how a student can experience incongruence. A lack of contact with professors indicates incongruence in

the area of academic integration. Furthermore, the student may also have differences in learning styles from the faculty of the institution.

Academically, it may be that the student is unable to meet the demands of college intellectually as many students come to college underprepared. The *Enrollment Management Trends Report 2012* indicated that of the 1.6 million students of the 2011 graduating class that had taken the ACT, 28% of them met none of ACT's college readiness benchmarks (ACT, 2013). Being underprepared can lead to a breaking point where the student can no longer handle the course load and academic withdrawal takes place. In contrast to those who find themselves underprepared, some students withdraw because they find their program not being intellectually stimulating enough (Tinto, 1987).

[Academic incongruence] is also very often the result of a wide variety of informal interactions, which occur daily outside the formal boundaries of that system between the individual and the institution, especially faculty and staff. In either case, it often leads departing persons to cite the irrelevance of academic life as a prime reason for their leaving. It also gives rise to the repeated observation that voluntary withdrawals frequently are intellectually deviant from the rest of the institution. (Tinto, 1987, p. 57)

The term deviant is not used to define the individual's behavior but rather to describe the difference between the student and the majority of those in attendance at the institution.

The onus of incongruence is not only on the institution. The student also bears substantial responsibility in the situation. Campus resources, which are introduced in some first-year seminars, are widely available to university students; however, they are often underutilized. Nearly half of the colleges and universities offer the extended orientation format of the first-year seminar that introduces students to an array of campus resources. However, students do not fully take advantage of what is available to them (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992; Padgett & Keup, 2011).

**Social incongruence.** A student may also become socially incongruent with an institution. This can occur when a student has different values than the other members of the

college or university. Social incongruence tends to reflect on the daily interactions of a student and his or her peers, which is important in the full integration of the social communities of an institution. If a student is unable to connect with their peers, they may have difficulty connecting to the university. Some colleges and universities have implemented learning communities in an effort to increase student-to-student interaction. In learning communities, students take two or more classes together. Scholar Betsy Barefoot (2000) postulates, “Students participating in learning communities experience greater social connection and, if the courses are conceptually linked, less academic fragmentation than their peers who don’t participate in learning communities” (p. 15). Peer support among students plays a vital role in whether or not they succeed. This was found in a 2007 study of students’ perceptions of supportive relationships in college settings (Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). Furthermore, peers provide academic and social support and having a group of friends to socialize with gave them a greater sense of attachment to the university (Yazedjian et al., 2007). The study also found it was advantageous for students to surround themselves with likeminded peers academically and that it helped with their success. It may be evident to assume peer interaction occurs in the living communities of an institution; however, these communities are not the only environments where social incongruence can arise. Social incongruence can begin in any environment where there is interaction.

**Academic isolation.** Tinto (1993) identifies isolation as another root cause of student departure. Isolation occurs in an institution when there are inadequate contacts between the student and the communities of the college or university. Similar to incongruence, two types of isolation exist – academic and social. Students need interactivity with other members of the college or university in order to avoid withdrawal. Studies have shown the lack of contact

between the student and others to be the “single most important predictor of eventual departure” (Tinto, 1987, p.65). The deficiency of peer interaction is a powerful force in persistence. In addition to students cultivating strong relationships with their peers, the development of relationships with their instructors has also been indicated in preventing withdrawal. Scholars Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) confirmed that relationships with instructors do prevent withdrawal in their study along with identifying the importance of interacting with faculty members outside of the classroom. They surveyed college students and collected data from 344 freshman. They found the more interaction the students in this sample had with the faculty, the more the students increased the likelihood of their persistence in college. The study also found in the instances of student-faculty interactions the topics of academic interests held weight. Furthermore, the researchers mention the freshman year experience as a venue to help foster such interactions. They also discuss how some institutions may be able to be more intentional in providing opportunities for faculty and student relationships to grow.

Faculty-student interactions are so crucial that they can be used as a predictor of persistence institutionally. Traditionally, schools with higher rates of faculty interactions with students see better rates of retention than those with less interfacing between student and faculty (Tinto, 1993). Some universities include their faculty in roles that offer them the opportunity to interact with freshman before they have them in class (Barefoot, 2000). Barefoot gives an example of how one major university offered an academic seminar to increase interaction between the student and upper-division faculty. Friedman and Marsh (2009) completed a study comparing two different types of first-year seminars and their effect on retention rates and grade point averages, finding that “First-year seminar students...experience greater interaction with faculty,” (p.31).

**Social isolation.** The first year of college is crucial in student retention, and more specifically the first semester, as identified in several studies (Cox et al., 2005; Levitz et al., 1999; Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1993, 1999). This is when social isolation can have the biggest impact. For traditional-aged freshman students coming from high school, the transition into the new environment can be intimidating. When a student is in a new environment with unfamiliar people, the risk of isolation increases. Some universities take initiative in setting up programming opportunities for students to interact with each other and try to avoid isolation.

Students must navigate new territory and engage with their peers. The students who do this are more likely to persist; those who segregate themselves and retreat into seclusion risk withdrawal. Cox et al. (2005) studied retention to design and evaluate their first-year seminar at a Midwestern university. In doing so, the researchers identified four components that would promote academic success and increase retention. One of the four components was increased interaction with faculty, staff, and peers. Although the study included all four factors, the course helped increase contact with faculty as well as peers. In measuring the impact of the course on the retention rate of the university, the return was positive. In a survey of college presidents conducted by the Pew Research Center, the majority described college as a transformational process of self (Taylor et al., 2011) and students will either survive social isolation or not. More than half of the college presidents surveyed expressed that, “it [college] is to help them grow intellectually and mature as a person” (Taylor et al., 2011, p.15).

From both an institutional and student standpoint, isolation is avoidable. The institution can provide opportunities for students to become involved in. Kuh (2004) recommends institutions stitch together academic and social functions. He discusses the intentionality of

combining the in-class to the out-of-class activity tends to be more successful. Students can take advantage of the opportunities provided by the institution to interact with their peers.

### **External Financial Pressures**

College students face external pressures during their time in school including stress from employment, financial strain, and familial obligations. The pressures do not always cause withdrawal. There are cases when the support from a student's outside peers, coworkers, and family can aid in persistence if those parties are a source of encouragement for the student. In all cases of student persistence, the external factors must be taken into consideration in determining why students leave.

**Educational cost.** The cost of an education is steadily on the rise. Writer Michelle Adam (2012) interviewed Paul Taylor, director of the Pew Social and Demographics Trend project who spoke of the cost of a college education being at record levels and more than tripling since the 1980s. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE, 2012) released a report of tuition across the western states that indicate the percentage of increase in only a decade. Table 1 illustrates the increase in tuition from states within the WICHE region.



Table 1  
*Average Undergraduate Tuition and Fees in the WICHE Region, 2012-13, 2011-12, 2007-08, and 2002-03.*

	2012-13	2011-12	2007-08	2002-03	Percent Change		
					2011-12 to 2012-13	2007-08 to 2012-13	2002-03 to 2012-13
<b>FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS</b>							
Resident Undergraduate	\$7,465	\$7,169	\$4,770	\$3,003	4.1%	56.5%	148.6%
Resident Undergraduate (w/o CA)	7,037	6,645	4,825	3,208	5.9%	45.8%	119.3%
Resident Graduate	9,042	8,674	6,188	3,800	4.2%	46.1%	137.9%
Resident Graduate (w/o CA)	8,869	8,347	6,351	4,238	6.3%	39.6%	109.3%
Nonresident Undergraduate	19,315	18,570	14,638	10,614	4.0%	31.9%	82.0%
Nonresident Undergraduate (w/o CA)	17,776	16,990	13,431	9,987	4.6%	32.4%	78.0%
Nonresident Graduate	20,165	18,993	15,962	11,576	6.2%	26.3%	74.2%
Nonresident Graduate (w/o CA)	19,367	18,423	15,137	11,256	5.1%	27.9%	72.1%
<b>TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS</b>							
Resident In-District	2,364	2,239	1,636	1,075	5.5%	44.5%	119.9%
Resident In-District (w/o CA)	3,319	3,119	2,414	1,680	6.4%	37.5%	97.6%
Nonresident	7,548	7,320	6,419	5,179	3.1%	17.6%	45.7%
Nonresident (w/o CA)	8,426	8,041	6,893	5,643	4.8%	22.2%	49.3%

*Note.* From “Tuition and Fees in Public Higher Education in the West, 2012-13: Detailed Tuition and Fees Tables,” by WICHE, 2012. Reprinted with permission.

The rising costs have been difficult for colleges and universities to justify to their students. The cost of tuition has increased 500% since 1986 (Willie, 2012) and more students are borrowing money to fund their education. Student loans can create additional stress on a student and have an impact on persistence, particularly if a student fails to see the cost benefit of a college education. For instance, it had been reported the Bakken oil boom in eastern Montana/western North Dakota has had an impact on college enrollment (Pickett, 2013). Instead of going to college, students are enrolling in Williston State College in Williston, North Dakota for other reasons than obtaining a degree; they are enrolling for housing (Ellis, 2011). This oil boom is affecting Williston State College’s retention rate among students who enroll in college for affordable housing but do not attend classes. Steeply rising housing costs are causing people to look for alternative living options. Furthermore, employment in the oilfield pays twice the average rate of jobs in the area (Mayda, 2011).

## **Financial Aid**

Financial aid is a significant concern for incoming students in higher education. With the increasing costs of a college education, many students rely on some sort of financial aid to pay for their education. Burdening debt can cause financial stress for students and thus have an impact on retention. External pressures can have an impact on persistence (Tinto, 1987).

Financial services company Sallie Mae (2012), reported a 9% increase in student loan borrowing since 2008. In 2010, student loan debt hit \$800 billion (Avery & Turner, 2012).

## **Financial information**

Pleskac, Keeney, Merritt, Schmitt, and Oswald (2011) developed a detection model for college withdrawal. In testing their model, they found one of the six critical issues affecting student withdrawal was the loss of financial aid. Students may leave for various reasons but it may be easier to cite finances than it is to say there was trouble with math or that outside influences were too great. Tinto (1993) discussed that a student who reports finances as his or her reason for departure may not portray the entire reasoning:

...the citing of financial problems as reasons for departure is often merely an end product of decisions regarding departure. It reflects the weighing of benefits as well as costs and as such mirrors the nature of the student's academic and social experiences on campus. (Tinto, 1993, p. 67)

Many college students persist despite the financial burden created by college because to them the opportunity cost is worth getting a degree. For the students who take on the burden of student loans, many persist through to graduation. Completing college is often the long-term goal kept in sight for students and the finances needed are found.

This is not to say students do not leave for financial reasons; certainly, some of them do. Ross et al. (2012) found that 31% of students surveyed left due to financial reasons. Although it has not been tracked if those students have returned to finish their degree, some are at a

disadvantage more than others if they withdraw. Kim (2007) found that although federal regulations have increased access to student loans, those students who are not able to get enough aid to pay for their education end up withdrawing. Furthermore, they then have to pay back the debt they accrued and are in a worse spot than before they started college (Kim, 2007).

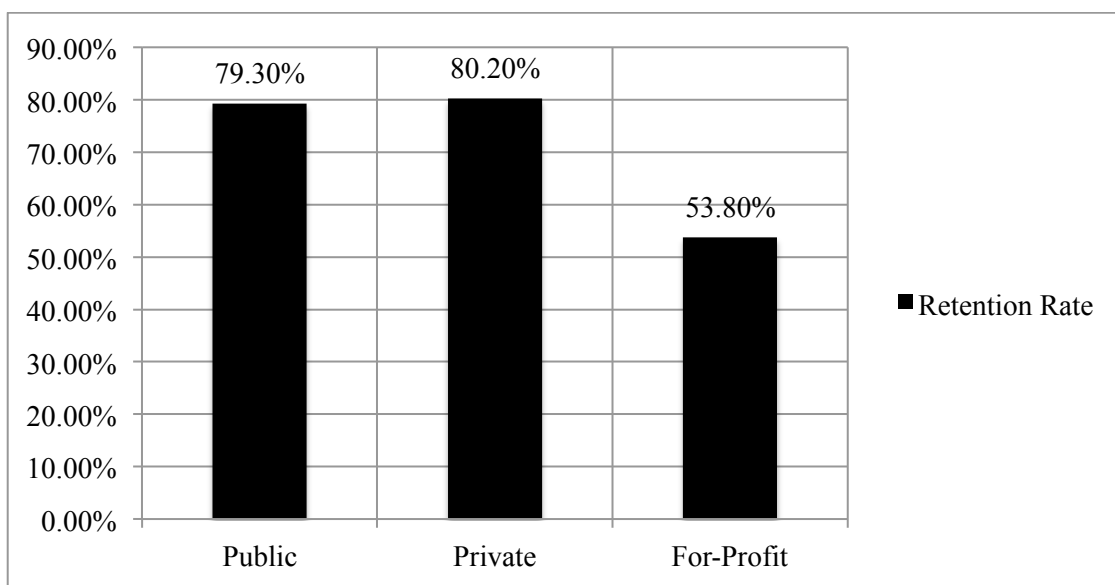
Further federal regulations set forth by the Department of Education states when a student is receiving financial aid they must maintain satisfactory academic progress (SAP). Each college or university is responsible for developing its own policy in accordance with federal regulations. Under SAP a student must meet requirements in three different measures: quantitative, qualitative, and maximum timeframe to complete a degree (Satisfactory Academic Progress, 2013).

At a four-year public university with open enrollment, SAP might look like this: the quantitative measure is a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0. The qualitative measure requires students to pass 67% of their attempted credits each semester. If students were to not attend their math class because they were struggling, they might fail to meet SAP (“SAP Policy,” 2013). Failing to meet SAP will result in the student being on academic probation or suspension. In this instance, the student has voluntarily withdrawn from school. Although the school is revoking their funding, the student willingly made the choice to not attend class.

### **Rates of Departure at Different Types of Institutions**

There are three main types of classifications of institutions of higher education in the United States: public, private, and for-profit (NCES, 2012). Each type of institution experiences different rates of departure than others. From the fall of 2010 to the fall of 2011, public institutions had an average retention rate of 79.30% in their first-time, full-time freshmen

students, whereas private institutions saw an 80.20% rate and for-profit institutions experienced a significantly lower rate at 53.80% (NCES, 2012).



*Figure 3.* The retention rates at public, private, and for-profit institutions, 2010-2011 (NCES, 2012).

### **Dropping Out**

Students who leave a college or university do so for two different reasons. They do so voluntarily, which is the most common, or they are academically dismissed. To generalize across a population of students may not give the depth of answers an institution needs to combat a declining retention rate.

Dropout has a negative connotation, one implying failure. However, in institutions of higher education, students do not leave due to failure alone. Each case of withdrawal may be different, yet colleges and universities refer to all of these as dropouts. Students may leave because they are transferring to another institution; others stopout or leave for a period of time before returning to school. Some students voluntarily withdraw because of academics; classes may be too easy or too difficult. These students are still calculated into a retention rate of an

institution and affect the numbers negatively. A portion of an ACT survey focused on factors that relate to attrition among students of their institutions. Out of 42 characteristics, the top factor identified by college administrators was the under preparedness for college of their students (Habley, Valiga, McClanahan, & Burkum, 2010). Students being underprepared for college could cause them to not attend class, therefore voluntarily withdrawing themselves from college.

**Academic dismissal.** Forced departure occurs when a student is asked to leave the institution, whereas academic dismissal is when a student cannot meet the demands of the subject matter and courses they are enrolled in. The reasons for academic dismissal can vary; however, one reason stems from being unprepared for college. In their study on developmental education, Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez (2012) estimate that half of all college students have taken at least one remedial course in college. Their findings corroborated what others researchers found – that remedial education does not increase the frequencies of college success. Students who are unable to pass developmental education classes find it difficult to manage their course load (Lau, 2003). However, there are instances when academic dismissal imitates voluntary withdrawal.

**Voluntary withdrawal.** Voluntary withdrawal occurs upon the student's own will. A student may withdraw voluntarily if they find the coursework not rigorous enough for their standards. If a student becomes bored in a class, they may choose not to attend. If they do not complete the work of these courses, they will receive failing grades and be dismissed from college. Although it imitates academic dismissal, the student made the choice not to attend class, therefore, withdrawing voluntarily.

If a student has negative interactions with faculty, staff, and peers at this institution, this can influence voluntary withdrawal. Even though faculty contact is imperative, if it is negative in

nature, the student may choose to withdraw. The impact can be minimized with widespread contact between students and faculty and staff. When the contact is spread out over more areas of the institution, the student may solidify their level of commitment to their school. Without interaction, the student can become isolated and therefore, voluntarily withdraw. “Though the presence of interaction does not by itself guarantee persistence, the absence of interaction almost always enhances the likelihood of departure” (Tinto, 1993, p. 117). A format that tends to lack these interactions is the online college or university.

### **Online School Growth**

Online colleges & universities have grown to become an alternative to traditional education. Results from a 2011 survey of 2,512 colleges and universities indicated over 6.1 million students were enrolled in online courses in 2010 (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Students are drawn to the faster, accelerated courses and programs offered by for-profit, online institutions. These institutions are often more costly than public options and most for-profit institutions offer strictly online programs, which has an impact on student persistence. Due to their online model and accelerated courses, for-profit institutions see lower rates of retention than that of traditional institutions. In a study designed to identify strategies to help online learners persist in the classroom, researchers found the attrition rate increased 10-20% for distance learners (Angelino, Williams, & Natvig, 2007).

For-profits continue to grow at a rapid pace with the promise of faster completion rates. A report published in 2011 identified that in the past decade, for-profit institutions saw exponential developments, increasing 539%, whereas public, four-year institutions saw substantially less growth at 32% (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2011). Online learning is the sector growing the fastest in higher education industry (Deming, Golden, & Katz, 2012).

Aggressive growth trends in the for-profit sector impose a serious threat to the increasingly expensive state school, despite the increase in attrition rates. The private, for-profit model is advantageous because it allows for less bureaucratic overhead, which can be a hindrance in the public institution.

### **Student Types**

The majority of institutions have a type that makes up their student population. Overall, the students tend to fall into three categories. Colleges and universities have different types of students: commuter, residential, and online. Each consists of students of all ages, traditional and adult. Many institutions will have all populations in their student body, while some may only have one type. Depending on the majority type of student an institution has, a different retention strategy may be used.

**Commuter students.** If a student is primarily off campus with the exception of attending classes, they will have a harder time making a solid connection to campus (Rice, 1989). In Rice's review of commuter student literature, he found this type of student and their relationships situational. The students have the same opportunities of integration that residential students have; however, due to their living off-campus, their access is more limited. Interestingly enough, past friendships can also hinder persistence. Commuter students who relied on their high school friendships saw difficulty becoming socially integrated into college life (Tinto, 1993).

Jacoby (1989), an author of several titles involving commuter students, defines commuter students as, "all students who do not live in institution-owned housing" (p. iii). Commuter students live off campus and travel to and from classes. Residential students live on-campus and online students live remotely. Jacoby & Garland (2004) found no matter what level the commuter student is at in their collegiate career the fact that they travel to and from campus for

classes has an intense impact on their college experience. They argue that the statement made against commuter students that they tend to not get heavily involved socially with the campus, if at all, is misleading. Many care about their education as much as a residential student, however, they have more external pressures, which prohibit them from being involved. Moreover, Jacoby and Garland (2004) posit that a campus should take this into consideration when developing commuter student programming.

**Residential students.** Residential students are “those who live in institution-owned housing on campus” (Jacoby & Garland, 2004, p. 62). These students are more prone to becoming socially involved, since the majority of activities tend to be held on-campus. Students who are involved with their peers and faculty members outside of class have an increased likelihood of persistence (Pascarella & Terrezini, 1977; Yazedjian et al., 2007).

**Adult students.** The gender, age, and race of a student have a role in persistence within colleges and universities. These attributes of each individual contribute to their differing motivations for their attending college. For example, adult students, although they are classified as freshman, have varying external demands on their lives from the traditional-aged student. These students are more likely to have jobs, families, and live off-campus. The end-result of college is very important to this student population. While the commitment level may be the same as a traditional-aged student, the adult student is more heavily influenced by their external demands. Flint (2005) discusses how their needs and priorities differ from traditional-aged college students and that administrators at institutions need to make sure their characteristics and external pressures receive support.

**Gender roles.** The role gender plays in student withdrawal is not because of the external influences, but rather of the type of withdrawal experienced by men and women. Men are most



likely to be asked to leave by not meeting satisfactory academic progress and women are more likely to leave voluntarily. Moreover, in every year since 1980, more traditional-aged freshman females have enrolled in college than men (Ross et al., 2012). These results were found in a study completed by the National Center for Educational Statistics, which looked to identify gaps in higher education.

### **The Theoretical Foundation of Departure**

“There is little evidence to suggest that departure is simply the absence of persistence or that one can be understood solely as a mirror image of the other” (Tinto, 1993, p.91). Tinto’s theory of individual departure draws inspiration from van Gennepe’s (1960) rites of passages and Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide. Both van Gennepe and Durkheim are used to help build Tinto’s theory. Students proceed through the rites of passage when entering college. The tie-in of suicide is not that students are committing the act to leave but rather that the students see no other choice but to leave their new society.

Van Gennepe’s (1960) work must be looked at in determining why students leave. He posits, “The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another” (pp. 2-3). Looking into the life of a freshman student at any college or university the stages from van Gennepe’s theory, separation, transition, and incorporation, become not only evident, but also relevant.

**Rites of passage.** The temporary communities colleges and universities provide for students allow them to pass through the three stages of separation, transition, and incorporation (van Gennepe, 1960). The rites of passage theory provides a perspective of assimilation of student persistence in a more longitudinal manner. Although each student will enter into these phases, the rate and length of each will vary by individual (van Gennepe, 1960). Some students may blend

in seamlessly and quickly while others may take much longer and the phases may then become more identifiable (Tinto, 1993).

Colleges and university environments are much different from most high school communities. They differ in not just the physical aspects, but the principles, customs, social and academic styles that ebb and flow through them daily are unlike those of high school. In this sense the student has to reject any previous notions of what school was and start to adapt to what college now is. In these situations, students can experience senses of isolation (Tinto, 1993; van Genneep, 1960).

*Separation.* This term refers to the parting of a former community. Depending on the student and institution type, separation from former communities may not occur and this phase may not have a great impact on the student. At residential colleges, the student may incorporate into new communities through on-campus housing. In virtual or commuter schools, the students may remain in close contact with their prior communities. As Tinto (1993) argues, the commuter student may not “reap the full awards that membership in college communities brings” (p. 96). However, this could also be relevant for the residential student that chooses to remain in close contact with their former communities. External forces also play a role.

If the student has supportive parents or family members the constraints of separation can become loosened. Other student populations, according to Tinto (1993), may also have difficulty in separating and adjusting to college life. Students who are far away from home, such as international students, or students from rural communities who may end up with more people in one class than their hometown, are at risk for a harder to deal with separation.

Students who do not build a connection with campus tend to miss out on opportunities on the whole college experience. Almost all individuals go through this when entering a new

community. “The basic procedure is always the same... they must stop, wait, go through the transitional period, enter, be incorporated” (van Gennep, 1960, p. 28). Furthermore, those students who commute or who do not sever their bonds with their former communities may have a harder run in the long term in regards to persistence. Separating from one community can aid persistence in another.

*Transition.* College and high school are vastly different in several aspects. In high school, students arrive at school in the morning and stay until the afternoon, attending classes throughout. The teachers take attendance and grades are distributed quarterly. The classrooms may look the same, however, in college, the professors rarely take attendance, class size has grown, and what is covered in the book or in a lecture may or may not be on an exam (Conley, 2007). The goal of higher education is different than that of high school. In high school, students must attend. In college, students choose to attend. These students, after separation, face a transitional period where they begin to adapt to their new environment. It is this period where they make their passage from one community to the next (van Gennep, 1960).

Different types of students have more or less difficulties than others depending on their prior communities. If a student came from a conservative small town, they may have a tough time transitioning into the customs of a large, liberal institution. Transition can be made easier depending on when it begins. Some college and university communities have established class social media pages for students to join and begin to communicate with their peers (Parnell & Parmley, 2009). Depending on the type of institution, this may have limited success. At larger institutions, this may have little effect on the majority of incoming freshman. The diverse student population may also be prohibitive for a majority of students to become involved in the group.

The rites of passage aspect of Tinto's (1993) theory assures that almost every student will go through a period of transition.

Though most students are able to cope with the problems of transition, many voluntarily withdraw from college very easily in their first academic year, less from an inability to become incorporated in the social and academic communities of the college than from an inability to withstand the stresses that such transitions commonly induce. (p.98)

The stress of transition and separation can be impacted by the student's response to the situation. If a student is able to cope, the more likely it is the student will persist. If the student is not, then the student is a candidate for withdrawal. Colleges and universities typically house resources for these students to help them cope. These resources vary, usually come in the form of counseling and in a more casual manner, the first-year seminar. Meanwhile, colleges and universities are increasing their offerings of first-year seminars. Padgett & Keup (2011) reported 73.6% of responding institutions offer a first-year seminar. These courses can also help students fit into the campus community and culture.

*Incorporation.* The third phase of van Gennep's rites of passage theory is incorporation. In this stage, the student becomes a full participant in the college community. A full participant in a college community may look like a student who has integrated well with their peers and is doing well academically. The college community may a different look depending on the institution. However, for a freshman student it could include a first-year seminar. The goal of a first-year seminar is to ensure students can become incorporated in college (Erickson & Stone, 2012). Without these programs, students are left to navigate their collegiate landscape on their own, as many before them have done. If the students cannot incorporate, they are at increased risk of withdrawal.

**Suicide.** The second half of the theory of individual departure pulls from Emile Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide. Tinto is not using this theory to claim that students are

taking their own lives but rather as leaving school and suicide are both instances of a person leaving a community of by their own will. In Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, he identified four different types of suicide that occur in society; however, the fourth type, egoistic, is where the theory of student departure finds a connection.

*Egotistic.* Egoistic suicide occurs when members of a community cannot become established in society. In this type of suicide there are two different forms; one involves the social membership into a community and the second has to deal with knowledge (Durkheim, 1951). Social membership involves the interactions a person faces with others in their community on a daily basis:

In a cohesive and animated society a constant interchange of ideas and feelings from all to each and each to all, something like a mutual moral support, which instead of throwing the individual on his own resources, leads him to share in the collective energy and supports his own when exhausted. (Durkheim, 1951, p. 210)

The intellectual aspect of Durkheim's (1951) theory is in regards to shared values, morals, and beliefs from within the communities. When a person does not hold the same values, morals, and beliefs as the majority they tend to isolate themselves from all aspects of society. When they isolate themselves, they have increased difficulty in creating a membership within their community. "Both conditions [social and intellectual integration] are needed to account for the occurrence of egotistical suicide" (Tinto, 1993, p. 102). Durkheim argued that for an individual to survive they must become integrated within these two avenues of society; the social and the intellectual. It is this type of suicide where Tinto draws upon for his own theory of student departure.

If a student cannot become integrated into the communities of a college, whether they are academic or social, the student may choose to leave the institution. This is the connection between egotistical suicide and student withdrawal. If students isolate themselves due to the lack

of membership, they increase their risk of departure. The connections between egoistical suicide and student departure are clear. Tinto (1993) determines successful students are integrated into college academically and socially whereas Durkheim (1951) determined people must integrate socially and intellectually into society to be successful members.

### **A Theory of Individual Departure**

In the development of the theory, Tinto (1993) posits that in order to determine why students are leaving, colleges and universities must look at the conditions of both the social and academic sides of their institutions. Voluntary withdrawal from college by a student can look like a form of academic suicide. Through van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage theory and Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, the foundation is built for a theory of individual departure. Colleges and universities are macro societies (smaller communities within larger ones), albeit temporary communities for their students. In this manner, external forces upon the student, for example, employment, family obligations, or finances, must be taken into account when considering reasons for departure. Colleges and universities will have sub-communities that exist within their culture. Each one of these houses its own values, moral, and norms within it (Tinto, 1993). The sub-communities offer opportunities for integration for the students.

As each student finds membership within the college or university, they are able to find their place in their new society. Students become active participants in their transition and incorporate into their new environment. It is in this new environment where students must integrate in order to persist.

**The domains of an institution.** Colleges and universities have two sides – the academic and the social. Each side has its own characteristics, players, and structures – both formal and informal. A student participates in the academic activities in pursuit of their end goal of receiving

a degree. The formal aspects of the academic side include going to class, completing assignments on time, and receiving passing grades. The classroom is traditionally a formal environment. The informal part of the academic side includes interactions with faculty outside of the classroom and with peers. These interactions are critical in student persistence and include conversations with faculty (Tinto, 1993). These conversations were found to aid in persistence (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1977). The social side includes all of the activities the students participate in daily as well as the interactions they have with their peers.

It is possible for a student to integrate into one side of the institution and not the other and still reach their goal. In order to avoid forced withdrawal, a student is expected to maintain a minimum grade point average to persist in college. If the student is unable to comply with this requirement, they can be academically suspended. However, a student could succeed academically and not integrate into the social portion of college and still reach their goal. A social requirement does not exist in college. However, “social isolation may undermine one’s academic performance” (Tinto, 1993, p. 108). This is evident in the isolated student’s lack of the ability to perform within group settings. Conversely, peer support among students has a fundamental role in persistence (Yazedjian et al., 2007).

Commuter students face many of the same issues as residential students at a college or university, yet many in this student population also face external forces. External forces or other obligations these students face may prohibit them from persisting in college. These external forces include jobs, families, and other pressures the student faces outside of the institution. Jacoby and Garland (2004) find these students simply are unable to make on-campus life their first focus, no matter their commitment level. Therefore, the social integration may not be as important to commuter students. Commuter students might not dropout of school but rather

stopout as they may put a hold on their education due to these external pressures. This is not an implication of the level of the student's commitment to their goals. If a student's level of commitment to the institution is high, the more likely they are to persist (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1993) theoretical model is longitudinal in nature. The main goal of the theory or model is to allow institutions to identify where they can improve and increase their rates of retention.

**Social and academic integration.** It is possible for a student to gain membership academically and not socially and persist. For example, a student attending an academically rigorous institution may sacrifice attending many social activities in order to focus on their academic studies. The commitment level for this student is high enough that persistence is likely. On the other hand, if a student integrates in the social realm too much and the academic side suffers as a result, the student may not persist. Academics have minimum requirements in order to persist, however, the social side does not. Therefore, each student must find their own balance of academic and social integration within the college community.

Each college or university has a community culture and sub-communities. A student must find membership in at least one of these in order to persist (Tinto, 1993). Without membership, the student is more at risk to depart prematurely. A new student faces an unknown geography of a college campus and is left to navigate it solo. It is during this time they may seek out a more knowledgeable other to help them in their quest. The potential lies in the integration into these sub-communities. A student may gain membership into a campus organization and through that, may find a mentor to help guide their journey. The organizational type, recreational or academic, is not of matter; it is the membership into this that helps the student succeed. Social and academic integration, as defined by Tinto, are over-arching terms, which underneath involve the



membership into various communities within the college or university. Ross et al. (2012) found in their survey that 72% of males and 77% of females had an instance of academic contact with an advisor and a significantly lower number, 33% of males and 37% of females, had joined some form of a campus organization. The findings Ross et al. report show a significant level of contrast between academic integration and social integration. The freshman year experience is an intervention used by some schools to increase academic and social integration.

### **The Freshman Year Experience**

**Freshman beginnings.** The institutional focus on freshman could be traced back to Harvard University in 1864. Henry Dunster, the president of Harvard at the time, decided freshman students should have an older student as a mentor. Later on, they also developed the first freshman counselors to help this student demographic (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). At Boston University, in 1888, one of the first freshman orientation courses was introduced to help assist first-year students (Gordon, 1989).

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) discuss how student retention has been an issue in higher education for quite some time, and the first college year improvement campaign began around 1980 with a grassroots movement. The focus on freshman is not novel, but it was at the National Conference for the Freshman Year Experience in 1987, which a presenter, Lee Knepfelkamp, described as a freshman year revolution (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). This was in response to the many schools starting up freshman programs for their freshman students to increase retention. These freshman programs had paths based on institutional survival, self-interest, and becoming more student success focused.

Over the past 30 years, many different types of first-year seminars have emerged from colleges and universities. As tends to be the nature of higher education, colleges and universities

want their first-year seminar to be effective. However, how these institutions define effectiveness is key. A scholar in the area of the first-year experience, Barefoot (2000) indicates that the way most colleges and universities measure the effectiveness of a first-year programs is by whether or not student retention numbers have increased. As of 2000, Barefoot found only a fraction of first-year initiatives are subject to an objective test in order to determine whether or not the outcomes set forth at the genesis of the program were met.

**University 101.** The University of South Carolina offers a course titled University 101 (UN101). The success of it is so abundant that the majority of the colleges and universities offering a first-year seminar model their course after it (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). University 101 places an emphasis on an “orientation to college and teaching students survival and academic success skills” (Kuh, 2005, p. 105).

University 101 scholar Elsie Watts (1999), provides an extensive history of how UN101 got its beginnings in 1972. The president of the University of South Carolina, Thomas Jones, decided he wanted to bring back the humanistic component of higher education. After he secured private funding, he went forward and developed a course, which was called UN101. The course was for freshmen at the university and to begin had no real structure to it. The first days of the class were spent in dialogue between the instructor and the student deciding how the class would continue for the duration of the semester. It was originally taught by a combination of faculty and staff. Today, some universities have a combination of faculty and staff instructing their first-year seminar (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). After going through intense scrutiny by the university’s administration, the course stayed.

John Gardner, who replaced Jones in directing the program, fought to keep UN101 going. He provided assessment to the administration, although previously, another had shown that as a

result of UN101 it formed positive relationship between the students who had completed the course and those who had not (Watts, 1999). Through further evaluation of UN101, it had been shown there was a substantial impact on the retention of freshmen for those who completed the course. Furthermore, the students who completed the UN101 course had vast knowledge of the university resources available to them. In 1974, university administration had determined UN101 was to be a permanent addition to the catalog; the course is now in its 40<sup>th</sup> year of being offered (University of South Carolina, 2013). In addition to the benefits of the course to students, the instructors also saw benefits:

...the survey found that UN101 instructors were more likely than total faculty to seek personal development of students, interact with students and discuss non-academic matters with them, teach through discussion and collaborative methods, require less structure, desire a relationship of mutual trust and respect, spend time and gain satisfaction from student advisement and committee work, and pursue development of teaching, committee, and advising skills. (Watts, 1999, p. 284)

One of the main principles of Vincent Tinto's (1993) theory of individual departure was academic integration and the informal contact with faculty. The instructors of UN101 at the time of this study displayed this characteristic through their interactions with students.

After successful development of this course at the University of South Carolina, Gardner and other administrators at the University of South Carolina decided to hold an annual meeting on the Freshman Year Experience. The meeting was extremely popular; the next year, 1983, it became the Annual Conference on the Freshman Year Experience (Kelly, 2006). The conference held its 32<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting in 2013. As momentum grew stronger, in 1986, the National Resource Center was established and in 1998 it was renamed the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2013a). Although the University of South Carolina

was not the first institution to address the freshman student, they are certainly the most benchmarked institution in the industry.

**The first-year experience.** First-year experience courses or programs are intended to introduce the students to different communities on campus. They provide the students with the resources to enable them to seek out social and academic communities in the campus culture. Even the students enrolled in the class are in a community of themselves. These courses are typically based off of Tinto's (1993) model focusing on social and academic integration, or of a different model in which skills and strategies are introduced to students to set them up for academic success as described in a study by Erickson & Stone (2012). In many instances, course developers blend the two models in the same course (Damminger, Potter, & Pritchard, 2009).

Barefoot (1992) defines the course as:

The freshman seminar is a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students by introducing them (a) to a variety of different topics, which may vary by seminar type (b) to essential skills for college success, and (c) to selected processes, the most common of which is the creation of a peer support group. (p. 49)

Therefore, students are becoming academically and socially integrated through the course curriculum. Through this approach the goal is to increase the student's commitment to the university. This in turn, should increase the university's retention rate.

The course is usually the cornerstone of a more extensive, yearlong program. In a national survey of first-year seminars, researchers Padgett and Keup (2011) found 87.3% ( $n=890$ ) of colleges and universities in the United States offered a type of first-year seminar. Thousands of first-year programs had been created between 1980-2000 (Barefoot, 2000). Keup and Petschauer (2011) provide additional guidance for institutions desiring to implement first-year seminars. They found through their research that with the growing number of classes being

offered at colleges and universities across the United States, some standards developed. First-year seminars are offered for-credit, count towards graduation, earn a grade, and have an enrollment limit to keep class sizes down. First-year experience programs are offered in a variety of different formats, varying by institution depending on their culture and mission (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). Researchers Griffin and Romm (2008), in their study on the evidence of the effectiveness of the first-year program found some universities focus their program on the entire first year using different strategies. A popular strategy colleges and universities choose is the first-year seminar.

**Types of first-year seminars.** The first-year seminar is delivered in different varieties and sizes. There are the extended orientation-type classes or programs and there are the academically orientated classes or programs. First-year experience researcher Jamelske (2009) found through his research the basic first-year experience course is a graded, credit bearing course and taught by a faculty or staff member and sometimes co-taught with an upper classman. The course covers assignments and activities designed to help the freshmen adjust to campus and covers topics such as time management, study skills, and faculty expectations (Jamelske, 2009; Griffin & Romm, 2008). Through the class and the programs, the overall goal is to increase student retention by allowing the students to integrate academically and socially within the institution.

Barefoot and Fidler (1992) conducted a survey to colleges and universities offering first-year seminars in order to determine which different types existed. Through their research, they found there were five different types of first-year seminars. They are identified as: the extended orientation; academic seminars with similar content across all sections; academic seminars with content focused on various topics; professional seminars within a specific discipline; and

seminars focused on basic study skills (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992; Griffin & Romm, 2008). It is not unlikely that these seminars are offered non-exclusively and a combination of any of the versions may be offered.

*Extended orientation.* This type of seminar can be found to have different names. It may be known as New Student Orientation or a student success course. Staff and administration in addition to faculty typically teach this class. In some instances, this course may be co-taught by a combination of faculty and staff or an upperclassman. Course content covers time management, study skills, major selection (for undecided students), and resources available to students on campus (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992; Friedman & Marsh, 2009). Friedman and Marsh (2009) completed a study on the most effective type of first-year seminar. In their survey of 177 first-time freshman students, they found no significant difference in type of seminar. It has the oldest and most common of all first-year seminars offered at colleges and universities (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). The goal of this type of seminar is to provide students with the resources and tools to be successful and effective in not only their first year, but also their entire collegiate career. Whereas strategies vary from institution, the main goals of this type of class are the same and can be found at institutions of all sizes (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). The 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars reported student affairs professionals delivered the majority of extended orientation versions of the first-year seminar (Padgett & Keup, 2011). The survey data also showed that faculty who do teach these seminars do it in addition and outside of their course load. The student affairs division was also the home of the course.

It is not surprising that extended orientation courses reported positive outcomes for a greater number of assessment activities than other seminar types, but most notably increased

persistence to the sophomore year, enhanced student connection with peers, and greater use of campus resources. (Keup & Petschauer, 2011, p. 8)

*Academic seminars with similar content across all sections.* These courses focus on a specific discipline, for example, business. The main focus on the subject area and opportunities to practice the nuances of the discipline but also covers critical thinking and expressive writing (Lamb, Lee, & Vinton, 1997; Keup & Petschauer, 2011). Scholars Lamb et al. (1997) reported on the development and challenges of an academic seminar. The course was designed by faculty to create the best possible learning environment with the goals of increasing commitment to the business college and reducing dropout.

The academic seminar usually takes two different shapes: those with similar content spanning across all sections and others with varying content (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). The academic version is the second most common seminar (Padgett & Keup, 2011). As seen in the Lamb et al. (1997) research, this type of seminar is used to help bridge a gap and help foster academic skills. “National data show that developing academic skills is among the top three course objectives for both types of academic first-year seminars” (Keup & Petschauer, 2011, p.9).

*Academic seminars with content focused on various topics.* Comparable to the academic seminar with similar content across all sections, this type takes a more interdisciplinary route and plays off of the faculty skills and interests (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). A college or university offering this type of seminar could benefit from engaging multiple departments into one area, giving the student a full spectrum of experience. Since this and the latter type of first-year seminar are almost identical, the course objectives remain the same for both. In addition to developing academic skills, a common first-year experience and increasing faculty-to-student

interaction were other course outcomes. Fish and Romm (2008) conducted a survey on institutions offering first-year seminars across the United States and found these two academic seminars, in contrast to the extended orientation format, give much attention to critical thinking in the discipline area as well as writing.

*Pre-professional seminars within a specific discipline.* The purpose of the pre-professional version of the first-year seminar is to introduce students to the various aspects of the field they are interested in. This type of seminar is common within colleges of business, education, and health fields as well as in professional schools (Tobolowsky, 2008; Barefoot & Fidler, 1992). They are dual-focused to not only to aid in the transition of the student into college but also into the career path they have chosen. They do share some of the same course objectives as the academic seminars; however, they also focus on introducing the student to the discipline. In Lamb et al. (1997) report, the development of this type of course was based on upperclassman business students being disconnected to the reality of the business world. After defining the need, the faculty revised the curriculum to incorporate this discipline-specific academic based course (Lamb et al., 1997). In contrast to the academic-focused seminar, the pre-professional format covered topics such as career exploration and academic planning over critical thinking (Keup & Petschauer, 2011).

*Basic study skills.* Students are arriving to college underprepared in an increasing rate. ACT reported 28% of the graduating class of 2011 did not meet any of their college readiness benchmarks (ACT, 2013). Taylor et al. (2011) provide research on the value of a higher education and found college presidents are reporting the same issues – 56% of those surveyed claim in a 10-year span high school students are arriving less prepared. As colleges and universities brace to combat this, many do so by offering a basic study skills format of the first-



year seminar. The basic study skills format covers remedial skills such as grammar, note taking, how to read a textbook, and time management (Tobolowsky, 2008; Barefoot & Fidler, 1992). The colleges and universities that reported offering this type of course indicated study skills development ranked in importance amongst students (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). As the number of underprepared college students arriving on campus increases, so does the number of colleges and universities offering this type of first-year seminar. In 2011, Padgett and Keup reported 22.4% of surveyed institutions offering basic study skills first-year seminars. This is an increase of 16% in only a few decades (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). Unlike the other types of seminars, the basic study skills seminar is usually a pass/fail course rather than receiving a letter grade. Also in contrast to the other seminar formats, the basic study skills major course outcome is to have the students prepared academically as well as to have them familiar to the resources on campus that are available to them (Keup & Petschauer, 2011).

**The first-year focus.** Lee Noel (1985) is the scholar most noted with identifying the first year as the most critical time frame to reach students. He has indicated that within the first year, the first six weeks of the term are most important since this is the identified timeframe of when the majority of students withdraw. Since this book was released, other scholars have corroborated with Noel's research. Other scholars have identified the first year of college for a freshman student the most vital to persistence in a student's collegiate career (Cox et al., 2005; Levitz et al., 1999; Tinto, 1999).

Vincent Tinto (1999), in this instance, calls out colleges and universities for not taking retention seriously, and not recognizing how vital the first year is to freshman success. Levitz et al. (1999) take it a step further in communicating the importance of the first year in their study on retention success. They posit that by reaching students in their first year, institutions can help

reduce their attrition rate. They also discuss how the first to second year attrition rate is the best determinant a college or university has in predicting their graduation rate. After the first year, the risk of attrition is cut 50% each consecutive year thereafter (Noel, 1985). Therefore, if more first year students are retained, then they are more likely to persist. Cox et al. (2005) call the first year at a university the most formative in a student's life. The majority of students withdrawing from college do so within their first year and to help combat this, many universities are offering a first-year seminar.

The first-year seminar attempts to help ease the transition from high school to college and make new students aware of the academic and social encounters of the new environment, according to Upcraft and Gardner (1989). The researchers provide institutions with a guide for freshman success in examining the freshman student and first-year seminar while providing exhaustive information on both topics.

Students are coming to college underprepared. Half of all undergraduate students take at least one remedial course during their collegiate career (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). Furthermore, these researchers found that remedial classes do not develop the skills that attribute to collegiate success in students. Through the offering of a first-year seminar, colleges and universities have the goal of student success in mind, as evidenced by Upcraft and Gardner (1989).

Through the offering of a first-year seminar, colleges and universities are making an effort to increase their student retention rates (Cox et al., 2005). A first-year seminar can have an impact on the retention rate of an institution (Barefoot, 1992; Cuseo, 1991; Lang, 2007; Schnell & Doetkott, 1993; Weissman & Magill, 2008; Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989).

Barefoot (1992) completed a compilation of 34 schools offering first-year seminars

observing their outcomes and indications of their effectiveness. Cuseo (1991), a scholar who has written several articles on the freshman year, discusses, “Early and intrusive support for students is one institutional characteristic known to enhance retention; the freshman orientation seminar can provide this early and intrusive support” (p. 1). Cuseo offers guidelines for administrators at institutions implementing the freshman seminar. A study completed by researchers Schnell and Doetkott (2003) found in their survey of 1,853 students that the first-year seminar had an impact on the retention rate. Their study was longitudinal in nature and found greater persistence over four years for those students enrolled in a first-year seminar. They also found the students who enrolled in the first-year seminar had greater numbers of retention than those that did not over the four years. Even as students withdrew, the group enrolled in the first-year seminar persisted in greater numbers. Weissman and Magill (2008) found the students who took the first-year seminar were found to be successful in college according to grade point average and retention after surveying 1,166 full-time, freshmen students attending college for the first time at the University of South Carolina. Lang (2007), of the University of Buffalo, found similar results in his study of the impact of a first-year seminar. His results substantiated what other studies reported; those who took a first-year seminar persisted in subsequent semesters. Wilkie and Kuckuck (1989) also found students taking first-year seminars have greater retention rates than those who did not enroll in the course.

### **Freshman Year Experience Conclusion**

The first-year seminar continues to be offered at institutions of higher education across the United States. With the variations in the economy, colleges and universities are doing what they can to recruit a declining class of freshman and retain the students that are already enrolled. As the research indicates, offering a first-year seminar can impact the retention rate if offered in

one of the five formats. Administrators at colleges and universities will need to decide which format is best for their student body.

### **The Value of a College Education**

Colleges and universities have received media attention for the rising cost of tuition and the increasing amount of student loan debt in the United States. This, in turn, has caused speculation over the value of a college education. In the United States, college has become a norm for many. After a student completes high school, they are often asked where they are going to college. It could be argued that college is not just about learning, but rather it is about the experience. Students go through rites of passage in college and higher education produces a fully rounded whole human being – 50% of college presidents reported the goal of college was not just to learn but to “help them mature and grow intellectually” (Taylor et al., 2011, p.3). The value of college, therefore, is more than a degree, but rather to become better citizens of society.

**Rising tuition.** A considerable amount of public and private institutions across the United States have endured recent tuition increases. Decreasing state budgets and a declining amount of high school graduates have left some colleges and universities to find other sources of revenue and to innovate on how to retain their current classes. In response to their depleting funds, colleges and universities resorted to increasing tuition to sustain their operations. Meanwhile, the amount of the student debt continues to escalate and some institutions are continuously pricing their students out of an education.

Reports about increasing costs have brought the attention of the news media. Students in Indiana went on strike to oppose further increases in tuition (Slaper & Foston, 2013). In 2009, California State University schools saw an increase of 32% in fees alone (McClanahan, 2011). Furthermore, in California, the university system tuition has increased 300% since 2000.

California is not the only state to see tuition increases. Overall, tuition costs are on the rise up to three times the rate of inflation (Slaper & Foston, 2013). These constant tuition increases seem to be difficult for colleges and universities to justify to their students. Typically, price increases for specific reasons such as improvements to facilities, new technologies, or additional student services (Wood, 2011). These colleges and universities are raising costs to sustain their current state, forcing students to weigh their options. If colleges and universities expand their learning offerings and delivery methods to their students, they could potentially justify some of the increases.

**Return on investment.** Although the cost of tuition continues to rise, there is still value to be had with a college degree. Some students may want a steady job or financial security; however, some benefits may not be easily quantifiable (Porter, 2002). The benefits can be personal, financial, societal, and lifelong.

A college degree can be expensive; especially with the cost of tuition continuing to rise at many universities (Slaper & Foston, 2013). Furthermore, 94% parents expect their child to attend college (Hill et al., 2005). Even though tuition costs have risen, students continue to seek out and complete college degrees. Just fewer than 86,000 people in the United States over the age of 18 possess a bachelor's degree (United States Census Bureau, 2013). Julian (2012) reported on the lifetime earnings a person will make depending on their level of education attainment. Having a bachelor's degree increases the likelihood of an increase in salary and lifetime earnings of approximately \$2.7 million over someone without a degree. It has been reported that those with a bachelor's degree earn more than those who have only completed high school. Educational attainment is related to individual lifetime earnings and on average, is 75% higher than those who stopped their education at high school (Hill et al., 2005). Hill et al. (2005) researched the

value of higher education. They examined the benefits of not only to the recipient but the societal benefits as well. Based on these reports, college still remains a sound investment when put in those terms.

Hill et al. (2005) calculated the return on investment of a college degree and determined the return was around 12% per year, “over and above inflation” (p. 31). This is 5% higher than the annual return on stocks. Despite 57% of Americans claiming that colleges and universities do not provide a good value for the money spent on an education and 75% reporting the college is too expensive, 86% of college graduates claim that going to college was a sound investment for them (Taylor et al., 2011). Even as 48% of college graduates reported finding it more difficult sustaining the debt they accumulated, an overwhelming majority still see value in higher education. However, monetary investments are not the only benefit of a college education.

The benefits to society are plentiful. Those citizens with an education and skills above a high school level is linked to heightened worker productivity. These productivity benefits translate into an improved economy. Thus the economy benefits from increased production and higher incomes (Hill et al., 2005). In area where there are a high proportion of college-educated citizens, there tends to be a lower rate of crime, as well as an increase in civic engagement. In addition, students who come from parents with college degrees are more likely to pursue a degree themselves.

### **Research Methodology**

The mixed methods approach of research combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative inquiry according to Dr. Creswell, a leading scholar in research methods (2008). In a study where the researcher desires to collect diverse data to help understand a problem, the mixed methods approach works well. “The study begins with a broad survey in order to

generalize results to a population and then, in a second phase, focuses on qualitative, open-ended interviews to collect detailed views from participants” (Creswell, 2008, p. 18).

In studies in the social or health sciences mixed methods research becomes a popular mode of inquiry. The study is at the researchers discretion and if it is determined that qualitative or quantitative strategy alone would not be sufficient, both can be combined in the mixed methods design approach to provide the best understanding. A large sample can be surveyed and then the researcher can follow up with a smaller sample of the larger population to “obtain their specific language and voices about the topic” (Creswell, 2008, p.19). Another benefit to this method is how one side can support the other. Quotations from interviews can be used from statistical analyses pulled from qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Creswell (2008) presents three general strategies along with several alternatives within each one; sequential mixed methods, concurrent mixed methods, and transformative mixed methods. Sequential involves the researcher wanting to elaborate on the results from one method with another. Concurrent deals with the researcher combining the two types for widespread purposes. He further states that:

Transformative...procedures are those in which the researcher uses a theoretical lens as an overarching perspective within a design that contains both quantitative and qualitative data. This lens provides a framework for topics of interest, methods for collecting data, and outcomes or changes anticipated by the study. Within this lens could be a data collection method that involves a sequential or a concurrent approach. (Creswell, 2008, pp. 14-15)

In conclusion, the mixed methods researcher must be familiar with quantitative and qualitative research alike. The scope becomes much larger with mixed methods and it is imperative the researcher has the time to collect the data.

## **Chapter Summation**

The focus on freshman students in college can be traced back centuries. In the changing landscape of higher education colleges and universities are trying to retain their students. Tinto's (1993) theory of individual departure offers a model to try to detect the reasons students withdraw from these institutions. To help in the students' transition into college, institutions have developed first-year experience programs to help ease students into their new homes. These freshman interventions have been shown to help colleges and universities increase their rates of retention. The first-year experience typically involves an offering of one of the types of first-year seminars at many colleges and universities in the United States. By utilizing first-year seminar, these institutions engage their students in activities that allow them to integrate academically and socially into their new communities, increasing the students chance of persistence within the institution.



### **Chapter 3: Methods**

This study addressed the retention of first-time, traditional aged freshman students at Central Mountain State University. This two-phase sequential mixed methods explanatory design study used a quantitative segment followed by a qualitative phase. In this design, survey data was collected first. The sequence allowed the second phase to be initiated where the researcher collected and analyzed interview data to expand upon the first phase responses. Data from each of the phases was triangulated. The survey data provided a general understanding of the factors affecting retention at Central Mountain State University. The interview data helped enhance the survey data by providing more in-depth answers to questions. In addition to the quantitative survey data, the retention rate from the fall 2012 cohort of freshman students from Central Mountain University was used.

The following research question was posed:

- RQ1: How does the first-year seminar affect the retention rate of first-time, traditional aged freshmen at Central Mountain State University?

#### **Research Design**

A mixed-methods design was chosen for this study because mixing the data can deliver a better understanding of the research problem than using one single method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Retention and first-year seminar studies using pure quantitative data have limitations in providing a clearer picture of why students are leaving one particular institution and if enrolling in the course had any impact on the decision. There is a lack of qualitative data at Central Mountain State University on the topics of withdrawal and the first-year seminar. This lack of data offers limitations on discovering the impact of the first-year seminar on the retention rate. Therefore, in order to bring a broader representation into perspective, a mixed methods

approach was utilized, which allowed the students to provide a narrative about the responses they provided.

Mixed methods are a relatively new research design to both social and human sciences and were first used in the field of psychology in the 1950s (Creswell, 2008). If the researcher feels the evidence from one method alone will not convey a complete story, the use of mixed methods is employed.

Mixed methods focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 33)

### **Sources of Data**

*Target population.* The target population included traditional aged freshmen students enrolled in the fall 2012 semester at Central Mountain State University. Central Mountain State University is a four-year, public institution with a near open enrollment admissions policy.

*Sampling method.* The sampling method used was a stratified random sample. In this type of method, the population was stratified by a criterion and then a simple random sample was taken from each of the identified strata. This sampling method offered an advantage in that it ensured the sample would have the same distribution as the entire population in terms of the criteria set from the stratum (Bryman, 2008).

The sample consisted of traditional-aged freshman students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 semester who completed the first-year seminar. Students who did not enroll in the course, but also persisted to the following fall term were also included in the data gathering. In addition to these two data sets, the students who both did and did not enroll in the first-year seminar but did not persist to the following fall semester were also included.

The researcher was one of the instructors who taught three sections of the Arts & Sciences (A&SC) 111 course. The phases of the research were administered after the commencement of the course and the researcher had no ability to affect the students' grades for these sections.

*Existing data.* Central Mountain State University reports its annual retention rate as well as other institutional data to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) in accordance with the Higher Education Act of 1965. The retention rate data used in this study included the students who were enrolled between fall 2012 and fall 2013. This was the same data reported to IPEDS. This point in time reflects the last of the changes in the A&SC 111 curriculum and was the most recent data reported.

A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar was a freshman success-strategies course offered as a two-credit elective at Central Mountain State University. The class followed the criteria of an extended orientation course as defined by Barefoot (1992). It covered topics such as time management, academic strategies, and campus resources. The official course description from Central Mountain State University was as follows:

The mission of the first-year seminar is to provide resources, strategies, and learning environments that actively engage students in meeting their educational goals while increasing their knowledge of community, civic engagement, and service learning (Central Mountain State University, 2012).

**Data collection and strategies.** To help determine the effectiveness of A&SC 111, the sample groups were administered a self-completion questionnaire via the Internet. Individuals from each group received an email asking them to participate in the study and were provided a

link to the survey. Web surveys offer an abundance of customization features for questions (Bryman, 2008).

*Phase one – quantitative.* The first web-based surveys went out to each of the four strata samples. One email was sent to the recipients notifying them of their selection for the survey. This email included a brief synopsis of the survey, a sample question, and a link to participate (see Appendix A). Individuals were given two weeks to complete the survey via Qualtrics, a web platform that allows its users to create and circulate online surveys. A follow-up email was sent to the each person who had not yet completed the survey after one week. In order to increase the response rate, the students who completed the questionnaire were asked if they would like to be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 Amazon.com gift card. The survey was confidential and only the researcher had access to the data.

*Phase two – qualitative.* The second phase of the study was also administered via Qualtrics. The students who completed the survey were asked to volunteer their time to be interviewed and provided their contact information. After the completion of the survey, the students who volunteered to complete the second phase were contacted via email to receive the follow up web-based interview portion of the study. If a student chose the telephone option, he or she was called or emailed to schedule a time to be interviewed. From this group of volunteers, a convenience sample was used. The students that completed the interview portion also had the opportunity to win an additional \$25 gift card to Amazon.com.

### **Tools/Instruments Used**

The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) was used with permission from Beck & Davidson. The CPQ was utilized and included additional questions regarding the first-year seminar. The qualitative interviews were based on questions from the questionnaire in order to

go into further depth on the answers. In addition to the CPQ, the researcher developed 22 additional questions to specifically incorporate topics covered in the first-year seminar (see Appendix B). These additional questions were referred to as the First-Year Supplement (FYS).

**Quantitative phase.** During the quantitative phase of the study, students were given access to complete the entire questionnaire. According to Davidson et al. (2009), the purpose of the CPQ is to allow colleges and universities to:

(a) Identify students at risk of dropping out, (b) discover why an individual student is likely to discontinue his or her education, and (c) determine the variables that best distinguish undergraduates who will persist from those who will not persist at their institution. (p. 374)

The tool was developed to help college and university administrators identify the main reasons for student withdrawal and determine proactive measures for reducing attrition rates. (Davidson et al., 2009).

The instrument focuses on factors derived from retention theorists, including Tinto. The primary purpose of the study was to create a validated instrument to measure persistence and giving the questionnaire to a group of first-semester freshmen assessed it. The researchers then took the results to forecast the rate of return to their sophomore year (Davidson et al., 2009). Although the CPQ provides researchers with vital attrition predictors, the researchers created a new version through exploratory factor analyses.

The ten factors used in the CPQ version 3.0 are: academic integration, academic motivation, academic efficacy, financial strain, social integration, collegiate stress, advising, degree commitment, institutional commitment, and scholastic conscientiousness (Beck & Davidson, 2010).

The first-year supplement was developed to include questions covering different topics included in the course. There were no indicators in the 22 questions that they were specifically

about topics covered in the first-year seminar. Therefore, a survey participant would be indifferent to the questions if they had or had not taken the seminar.

*Procedures.* The questionnaire was administered via Qualtrics. The students in each strata sample were emailed a message (see Appendix A) with a sample question and a link to the survey. The survey was open for two weeks before it is closed. A reminder email was sent out after one week to each stratum asking to complete the survey if they have not already done so. When the student reached the landing page of the survey, they were given the instructions for completion as well as informed consent. The 69-question CPQ took approximately 30-35 minutes to complete and students were given the option to not respond to any question they did not want to. The 22-question FYS took an additional 5-10 minutes to complete. Those who completed the survey were asked to provide their email address to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon. There was also an option for the student to opt out of the survey. At the completion of the survey they were asked if they would like to volunteer for the qualitative phase of the study and they were thanked for their time. The student selected whether they would prefer a web-based interview or a telephone interview. In addition to the survey data collected, email addresses and phone numbers of the volunteers were gathered.

**Qualitative phase.** The students in the interview phase were given open-ended questions. Depending on if the student took A&SC 111 or not, only certain questions pertained to them. There were eight questions in the interview (see Appendix C). The goal of this phase was to elaborate upon the answers given in the quantitative phase. In order to validate the questions, the qualitative phase underwent a pilot phase. The questions were given to a panel of three doctoral students who validated them.

*Procedures.* The virtual structured interviews were administered via Qualtrics. The students received an email with a link directing them to the interviews. The landing page had instructions on how to complete the interview as well as the informed consent. The students were informed that the interview required 30-35 minutes of their time. When the interview was complete, the students will received a Thank You and were asked if they would like to participate in the drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com. The interview portion of the study was accessible for one week.

The telephone interviews were given to two volunteers. One participant was called to schedule an interview time and the other was emailed. After the interview was scheduled, they were emailed a copy of the informed consent. At the beginning of the interview, each participant was asked if they agreed to the informed consent and were asked if the interview could be recorded. The same questions were asked as in the web-based interview. Follow-up questions were asked to help clarify points.

**Human subjects consideration.** Central Mountain State University and Pepperdine University both required approval from each university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Therefore, the researcher submitted IRB applications for Exempt Review to both Central Mountain State University's Office of Research Compliance and Graduate and Professional Schools of Pepperdine University. This study qualified for exempt review because it was low-risk human subjects research. It explored the involvement in the students' first-year seminar and factors of their experience at Central Mountain State University.

This study had minimal risks to the students involved. The researcher did not have student identification numbers in the population data received from Central Mountain State University. The only information the researcher had was the name, email address of the student,

strata identifiers, and phone numbers of those who chose the phone interview method. There may have been minimal psychological risk, including discomfort or embarrassment associated with the study. The questions may have caused a student to have adverse feelings about their first year of college. Predicting what a student or former student may feel emotionally cannot be avoided; however, the description sent to the student provided information about what the survey asked of them and included a sample question. In an effort to minimize risk, participants were presented with an informed consent prior to beginning the questionnaire and interview in each phase. Furthermore, participants were informed that they could exit the study at any time if they became uncomfortable.

A breach in confidentiality was also a risk. In order to minimize this risk, *Qualtrics* offered survey authentication, data encryption, password protection, and anonymity. The data files were stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer in which only the researcher had access. All data reporting excluded any identifying characteristics and pseudonyms were used, when appropriate.

Since some of the students were in the midst of their semester at the time of data collection and others may have work and/or families to work about, a concern for the participants may have been the time involved for the study. In order to alleviate the extra time this study took, the student was informed their participation in completing the study qualified them for a voluntary drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com for each phase, if they chose.

**Informed consent.** Participants of the survey were provided with informed consent prior to their completion of each phase. The informed consent (see Appendix D) was on the landing page within *Qualtrics* and outlined the risks of the study. By clicking “I Accept,” the participant agreed to the informed consent form and was able to proceed to the questionnaire.



**Anonymity and confidentiality.** A list of student's email addresses was used to distribute the questionnaire via *Qualtrics*. Those students who desired to be included in the gift card drawing submitted their email address at the end of the questionnaire. Amazon.com only needs an email address to send an electronic gift card to the recipient, so no additional information was needed. The survey data, however, were not connected to any identifiers of the completed surveys.

Those participants who volunteered for the second, qualitative phase submitted their name and email address or phone number. Participants had the option of completing the web-based interview or completing a phone interview. If the phone interview option was used, the researcher recorded the interview after being granted permission. Recorded interviews were then transcribed by the researcher. Only the researcher had access to the data in held in *Qualtrics*. Data stored in *Qualtrics* was secure as the platform offered Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption (HTTPS), password protection, and HTTP referrer checking. The data was hosted offsite at third party SAS 70 certified data centers. The user of the platform controlled the permissions of the accounts and surveys. Thus, only the researcher had access to the *Qualtrics* account. All *Qualtrics* accounts were password-protected and data was replicated in real-time to ensure security (Qualtrics, 2011).

Data reporting remained anonymous. All questionnaire data was reported in aggregate with no identifying characteristics of any student. Any data found from the second phase of inquiry did not include any identifying characteristics and each student response was identified as *Student*. Data was stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer. All data was destroyed through the deletion of files three years after the study is completed.

**Analysis strategies.** Quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies were developed to answer the proposed research question. A two-phase inquiry process was used to explain the situation. The quantitative data was analyzed using mean ratings and t-tests. Volunteers were asked follow up, open-ended questions via a web-based interview or telephone interview.

**First phase – quantitative data.** Quantitative data were collected to provide validation for existing theories. Through the CPQ combined with the FYS, the quantitative data received determined if there was a relationship between students who took the first-year seminar in 2012 at Central Mountain State University and their retention rate. The CPQ “employs a 5-point Likert-type scale. A sixth option, ‘Not Applicable,’ is included for students who feel that a particular item does not pertain to them” (Davidson & Beck, 2013, p.8). The data collected was analyzed using a mean score analysis. T-tests were also used to compare different identifying factors in some of the strata to others. This method was used to see which of the four groups had an impact on the retention rate after the CPQ and FYS were administered. The statistical analyses were run using the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

**Second phase – qualitative data.** The second phase of data collection was qualitative in order to expand upon the responses collected in the first phase. The researcher collected participant’s answers to open-ended questions in an internet-based interview. The data collected in this phase helped elaborate on quantitative data and further explain whether or not the course had an effect on students persisting. The interview text was coded and explored after it is exported into HyperRESEARCH, a software program that expedites qualitative analysis by organizing coding; however, the researcher was responsible for analyzing the data and developing codes.

Two cycles of coding were used in the analysis of the interview text. The first phase of qualitative coding was completed to develop descriptive themes from the questions. It is in this phase that the data was segmented out of the text and then coded for analysis using a priori and descriptive codes. In coding, the segment was given a label. During the second phase of coding, the data was coded down further to condense or eliminate labels.

**Study validity.** The CPQ has been tested and retested by the authors and proven to be valid and reliable. The current study had taken measures to ensure reliability and validity on its own.

Validity was assessed by administering the questionnaire to a sample of first-semester freshmen and then using scale scores to predict whether these students returned for their sophomore year. The results of a logistic regression were statistically significant, correctly classifying 66% of the students. (Davidson et al., 2009, p. 384)

The developers of the CPQ initially tested the survey with two study groups. “Taken together, the results of Studies 1 and 2 establish the validity of the CPQ for predicting retention” (Davidson et al., 2009, p. 385).

The quantitative validity is established with triangulation of the data with the other responses. “The inquirer builds evidence for a code or theme from several sources or from several individuals” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.135). In addition, the researcher employed the help of doctoral colleagues to review the findings to further ensure validity of the data.

The First-Year Supplement (FYS), developed by the researcher, was distributed to three doctoral level colleagues for validation. Each person took the survey and provided feedback on the instrument. All concluded the survey was valid. Both phases were pilot tested by the three doctoral level colleagues to ensure correct functionality of the questionnaire and the interview portion.

**Reported findings.** The data collection phases produced myriad raw data that was analyzed thoroughly. After the statistical analysis was completed, the findings were reported to answer the posed research question. Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, the results were interpreted to provide the clearest answer to the question.

## Chapter 4: Review of Findings

Central Mountain State University is a public, four-year university with just under 5,000 students. It is located in a medium-sized city and is considered an urban university. Due to the location of the university and its situation in the community, retaining students has been an issue. Unemployment projections for the next year are forecasted at 3.9% within the county it resides (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). There is an oil boom in part of the state that seems to be drawing students away from higher education and higher paying jobs with little or no education (Mayda, 2011). Furthermore, there has been a steady decline of high school graduates in a state that sees its population graying. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) projects that high school graduates in the state will continue to be at low levels until 2023-24 (2012). A decline in high school graduates has an impact on enrollment at Central Mountain State University, which has been declining over the past two years. Enrollment numbers are factoring into the new funding model beginning in 2014-15. The state's authorities on higher education are implementing a performance based funding model (Montana University System, 2013). Funding for the university system will be based on enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. Retention for Central Mountain State University has become very important for the future success of the institution.

In 1991, the university introduced a first-year seminar-type course into its curriculum (J. McIssaac-Tracy, personal communication, 2013). Since that time, some form of the seminar has existed at Central Mountain State University. After going through a pilot period, the seminar transitioned away from being team-taught in 2012. The fall of 2012, it was moved to four staff members under the responsibility of teaching 16 sessions of the extended orientation format of

A&SC 111. The goal of the first-year seminar was to help transition students into college by helping them integrate academically and socially into university life.

The framework for this study was based on Vincent Tinto's (1993) theory of individual student departure. In Tinto's theory, he posits that if students can be academically and socially integrated into college, they are more likely to persist. However, all integration is not equal; a balance is needed. A student may be more socially engaged than academically and voluntarily withdraw. Conversely, a student may be more academically integrated and not as socially and still persist.

This study addressed the retention of first-time, traditional aged freshman students at Central Mountain State University. This two-phase sequential mixed methods explanatory design study used a quantitative segment followed by a qualitative phase. In this design, survey data was collected first. The sequence allowed the second phase to be initiated where the researcher collected and analyzed interview data to expand upon the first phase responses. Data from each of the phases was triangulated. The survey data provided a general understanding of the factors affecting retention at Central Mountain State University. The interview data helped enhance the survey data by providing more in-depth answers to questions. In addition to the quantitative survey data, the retention rate from the fall 2012 cohort of freshman students from Central Mountain University was used.

The following research question was posed:

- RQ1: How does the first-year seminar affect the retention rate of first-time, traditional aged freshmen at Central Mountain State University?

## Data Collection Procedures

A traditional-aged freshman is between the ages of 18-24. In the fall of 2012, 813 students were enrolled at Central Mountain State University. Of those 813, 665 were traditional-aged freshmen. In the sub-population of 665, 413 did not reenroll in the fall of 2013. There were 252 students who did enroll in the fall of 2013.

After approval was granted from Pepperdine University and Central Mountain State University, the researcher was provided with a dataset from the fall 2012 cohort of freshman students with a total population of 665 ( $N=665$ ). The dataset was separated into four groups. The four groups were divided by: students who took A&SC 111 and reenrolled in the fall ( $n=160$ , 24.06%), those who did not take A&SC 111 and reenrolled in the fall ( $n=92$ , 13.83%), those who took A&SC 111 and did not reenroll in the fall ( $n=204$ , 30.68%), and those who did not take A&SC 111 and did not reenroll in the fall ( $n=209$ , 31.43%). With the exception of email addresses, all other personal identifying characteristics were removed from the data before it was sent to the researcher.

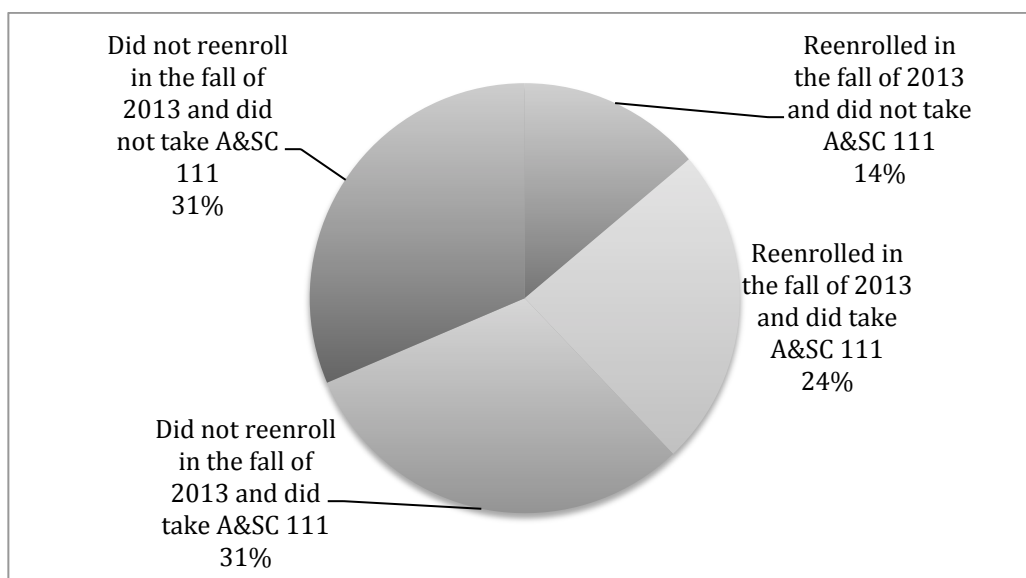


Figure 4. The breakdown of fall 2012 traditional-aged freshman cohort by stratum and percentage.

The distributed survey was a combination of the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) and 22 questions about topics covered in A&SC 111 – First-Year Seminar. To maximize the response rate, the survey was delivered to 600 students from the population. Each stratum was divided proportionally to the full population ( $N=665$ ,  $n=600$ ). The four strata were divided as follows: those students who took A&SC 111 and reenrolled in the fall ( $n=144$ , 24.06%), those who did not take A&SC 111 and reenrolled in the fall ( $n=83$ , 13.83%), those who took A&SC 111 and did not reenroll in the fall ( $n=184$ , 30.68%), and those who did not take A&SC 111 and did not reenroll in the fall ( $n=189$ , 31.43%).

A stratified random sample was taken from the population and an email with a description of the survey was sent to 600 students. One survey given to the students was comprised of the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) and a First-Year Supplement (FYS). If the student agreed to participate, a link took them to the self-administered survey, delivered via *Qualtrics*. Of the 600 students sent the email, 48 responded for a response rate of 8.0%.

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to volunteer for an interview to follow up on questions from the survey. Five total participants completed the interviews – two via telephone and three web-based interviews.

**Data preparation and recoding.** The CPQ covered ten factors: academic integration, academic motivation, academic efficacy, financial strain, social integration, collegiate stress, advising, degree commitment, institutional commitment, and scholastic conscientiousness. Scoring of the CPQ was administered by changing the 5-point Likert-type scale into a favorability scale (-2: very unfavorable to +2 – very favorable). Responses of not applicable were offered as a sixth option and were not included in the scale for scoring. The mean scores were taken for each factor.



The FYS covered five factors: college success skills, campus resources, social engagement, faculty interaction, and health and wellness. The FYS was also changed to a favorability scale ranging from not at all (0) and significantly (2). After the FYS was categorized, the mean score was taken from each factor as well.

### Descriptive Statistics

From these data ( $N=665$ ), 62.11% ( $n=413$ ) of the traditional-aged freshman in the fall 2012 cohort did not return in the fall of 2013, whereas 37.89% ( $n=252$ ) of the students from the fall 2012 did persist. Of those students who did reenroll in the fall of 2013, 63.49% ( $n=160$ ) took A&SC 111. Out of the 252 that returned in the fall, 36.51% ( $n=92$ ) did not take A&SC 111. Furthermore, of the 413 students who did not return, 49.39% ( $n=204$ ) took A&SC 111. Within this population of non-returners, 50.61% ( $n=209$ ) did not take A&SC 111.

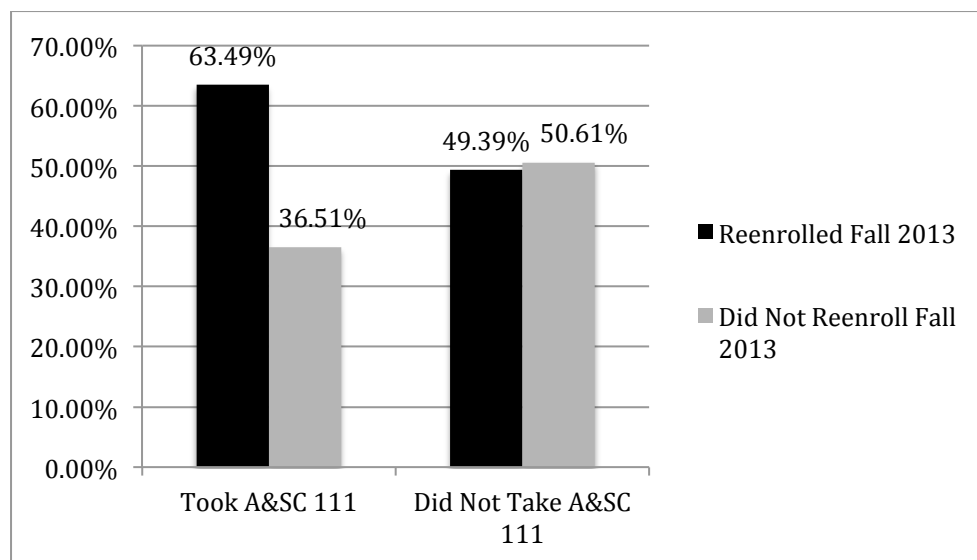


Figure 5. The percentage of students that did and did not reenroll by taking or not taking A&SC 111.

## Quantitative Data

The survey distributed was a combination of the CPQ and the FYS. Total respondents for CPQ were 48 ( $n=48$ ). The CPQ covered the ten factors of: academic integration, academic motivation, academic efficacy, financial strain, social integration, collegiate stress, advising, degree commitment, institutional commitment, and scholastic conscientiousness.

The FYS covered the five categories of: college success skills, campus resources, social engagement, faculty interaction, and health and wellness. There were 36 participants that completed the FYS. Table 2 represents the number of students who completed the survey by stratum. Table 3 denotes the number of participants for the FYS.

Table 2

*Participants Who Completed the CPQ Survey, by Stratum*

Enrolled in the Fall of 2013		Did Not Enroll in the Fall of 2013	
Took A&SC 111	Did not take A&SC 111	Took A&SC 111	Did not take A&SC 111
$n=22$	$n=16$	$n=3$	$n=7$

Table 3

*Participants Who Completed the FYS Survey, by Stratum*

Enrolled in the Fall of 2013		Did Not Enroll in the Fall of 2013	
Took A&SC 111	Did not take A&SC 111	Took A&SC 111	Did not take A&SC 111
$n=18$	$n=12$	$n=2$	$n=4$

**College persistence questionnaire.** The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) is an instrument developed by Davidson and Beck (2013) and is used to help predict whether a student will be retained or not. Through this tool, areas are identified where students may be at-risk of withdrawal. The CPQ was given to students retrospectively. By giving this survey after the students had decided to persist or withdraw, the researcher was able to see areas that might have caused the result. The 10 factors the CPQ uses to determine a student's probability of persistence is useful in determine issues that affect the retention rate at Central Mountain State University.

*Academic integration.* This area of the CPQ measured academic involvement at the university. For example, the survey asked about the quality of instruction at the university as well as the connection between a student's learning and career goals. Academic integration was part of the theoretical framework of this study.

*Academic motivation.* The factor of Academic Motivation covered a range of questions related to the ambition and enthusiasm of the student. Questions asked involved time commitment of courses, study habits, and if assignments were enjoyable.

*Academic efficacy.* The description of Academic Efficacy included study skills and techniques. The factor also encompassed questions in regards to the student's confidence to be able to get the grades they want.

*Financial strain.* The CPQ factor of Financial Strain addressed money concerns during college. This includes for the student and for the student's family in terms of tuition and fees as well as disposable income.

*Social integration.* The connection between a student and the university is covered in the Social Integration factor. The CPQ factor also inquired about the connection between a student and their peers and their personal growth. Social integration was part of the theoretical framework used in this study.

*Collegiate stress.* The factor of Collegiate Stress covers the pressure felt from tests and homework. In addition to classroom stress, overwhelming pressure from the various aspects of college life was inquired about.

*Advising.* This factor is directly related to academic advising. The questions in this factor asked about the satisfaction of academic advising, receiving answers to questions on education-related topics, academic rules, and degree requirements.

*Degree commitment.* This area of the CPQ asked about the student's commitment to obtaining a degree. This is not institution specific and not necessarily connected to Central Mountain State University. It also referred to family support, perception of family and friends if they were to withdraw from school, and the intention of degree completion.

*Institutional commitment.* This factor of the CPQ addressed the types of questions regarding the students fit with the institution. Included in Institutional Commitment were questions concerning confidence of fit, the thought of transferring, and the probability of reenrolling in the next semester.

*Scholastic conscientiousness.* The questions asked in regard to the factor of Scholastic Conscientiousness referred to academic habits. This factor covered going to class, turning in assignments on time, and remembering academic responsibilities.

**First-year supplement.** A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar was a two-credit, extended orientation format seminar covering an array of topics. The seminar combines academic course work with social activities. The first-year supplement (FYS) was an instrument developed by the researcher. The questions included in the survey were from the topics covered in the first-year seminar. The questions were categorized into five themes and scored using a favorability rating from zero to two. The five themes developed from the FYS were: College Success Skills, Campus Resources, Social Engagement, Faculty Interaction, and Health & Wellness.

*College success skills.* Under the theme of College Success Skills, topics covered included note taking, study strategies, time management, goal setting, being prepared for class, major selection, and financial budgeting. These topics were indicative of an extended orientation first-year seminar.

*Campus resources.* In A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar, campus resources and facilities were introduced to students throughout the semester to get them familiar with services available on-campus. This included campus buildings and student services.

*Social engagement.* Social engagement referred to activities outside of the classroom. These activities included participating in clubs and student organizations, engaging in the community, and attending university athletic events.

*Faculty interaction.* Faculty interaction included all encounters with faculty outside of the classroom. As noted in the literature, this was part of the theoretical framework.

*Health and wellness.* This category covered stress management and the awareness of the importance of the health and wellness of college students.

**First-year supplement mean scores.** The mean scores from all of the strata that completed the FYS were calculated and organized by theme.

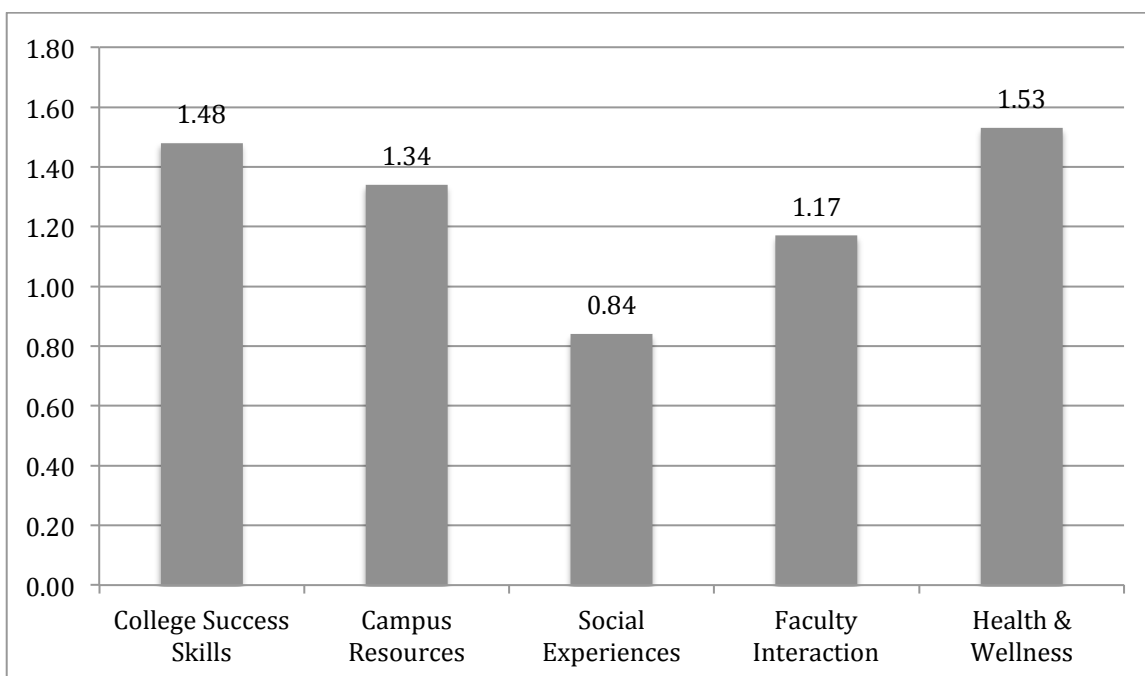
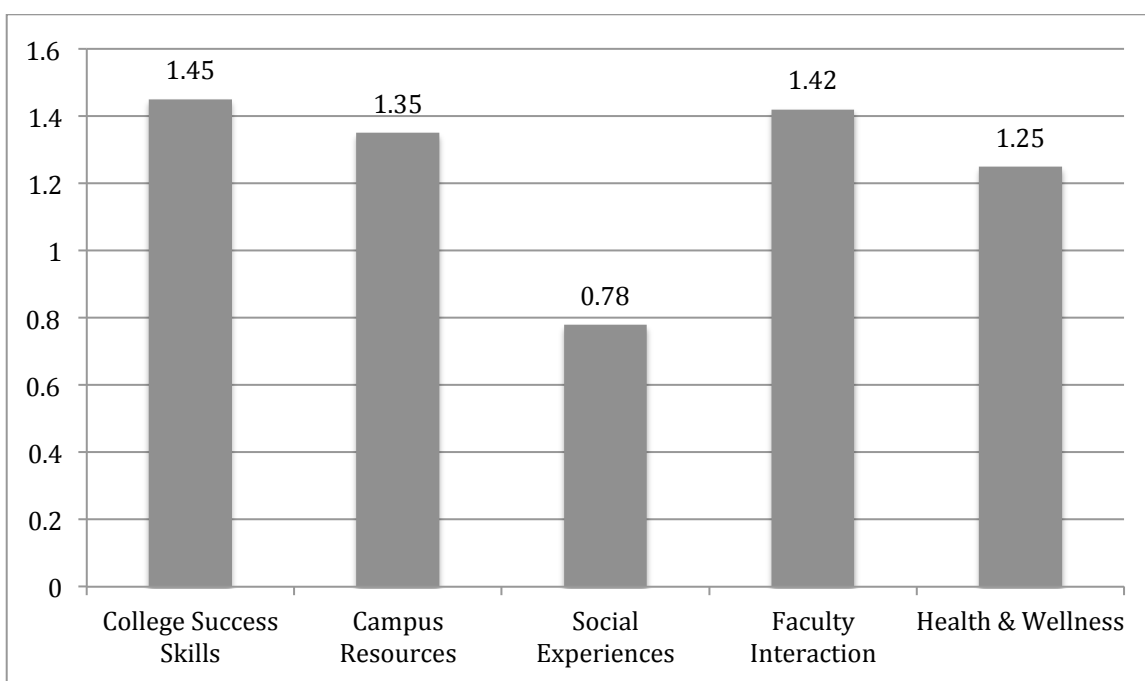


Figure 6. Mean scores and categories for students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the FYS ranged from 0.84 to 1.53 (“not at all” to “significantly”). From these data of the FYS, *Health & Wellness* and *College Success Skills* had the highest mean scores. If all the students in this stratum had the same knowledge of health and wellness after their first year, they would have been significantly familiar with health and wellness. If all the students in this stratum had the same level of knowledge of college success skills after their first year of college they would be somewhat knowledgeable. The range of mean scores on the FYS indicates the students were somewhat knowledgeable of most of these categories after their first year.



*Figure 7.* Mean scores from the stratum of students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the FYS ranged from 0.69 to 1.45 (not at all to somewhat). From these data of the FYS, *College Success Skills* and *Faculty Interaction* show the highest mean scores. If all the students in this stratum had the same knowledge of college success skills after their first year, they would have been somewhat familiar with college success skills. If all the

students in this stratum had the same level of comfort when talking to their professors outside of class they would all be somewhat comfortable speaking to their professors outside of class. The range of mean scores on the FYS indicates that even though this stratum of students did not take A&SC 111, they were knowledgeable of the categories after their first year of college. The lowest mean score was social experiences. The social experiences of the FYS is close to the mean of the social integration portion of the CPQ, which indicates that the students in this cohort are somewhat socially engaged in campus and with others.

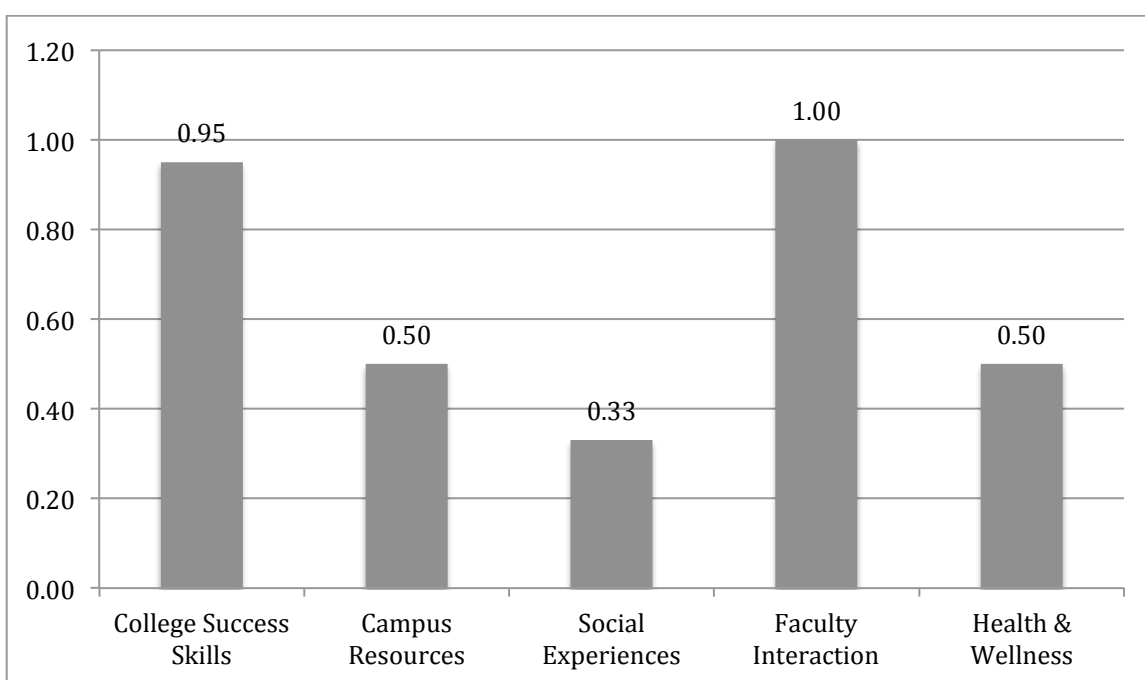
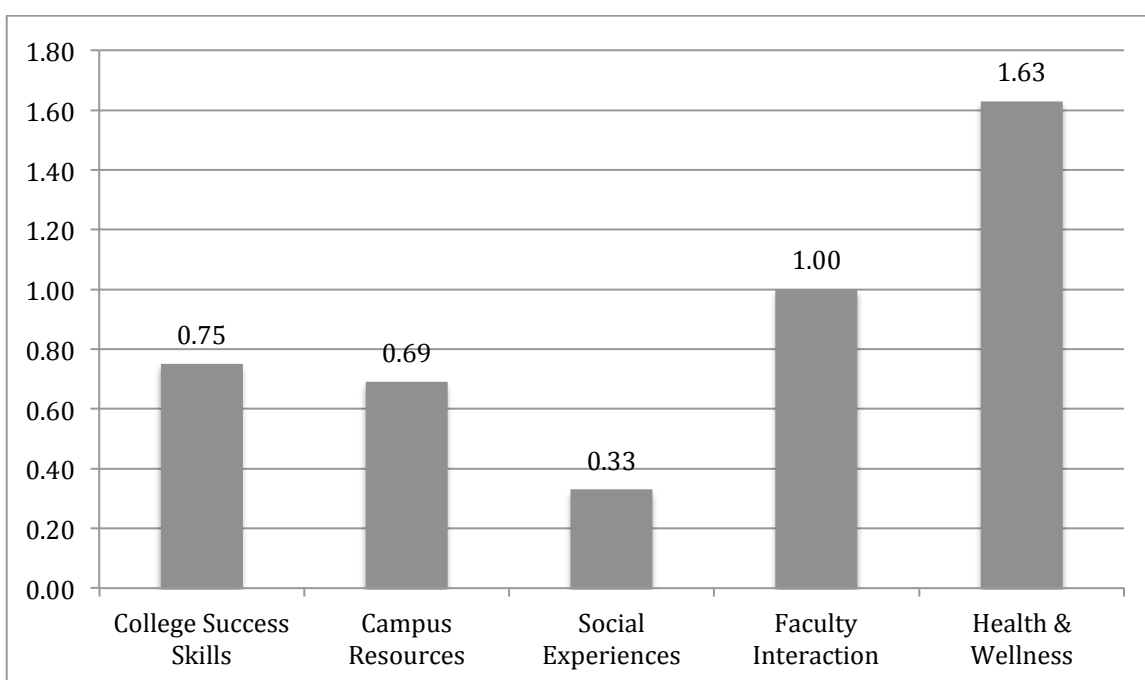


Figure 8. Mean scores from the stratum of students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the FYS ranged from 0.33 to 1.00 (not at all to somewhat). From these data of the FYS, *College Success Skills* and *Faculty Interaction* show the highest mean scores. If all the students in this stratum had the same knowledge of college success skills after their first year, they would have been somewhat familiar with college success skills. If all the students in this stratum had the same level of comfort when talking to their professors outside of

class they would somewhat be comfortable speaking to their professors outside of class. The range of mean scores on the FYS indicates that even though this stratum of students did not take A&SC 111, they were somewhat knowledgeable of the categories after their first year of college. The lowest mean rating was *Social Experiences*. The *Social Experiences* of the FYS are the same as the mean score of the *Social Integration* portion of the CPQ, which indicates that the students in this cohort are close to neutral when it comes to social engagement with campus and with others.



*Figure 9.* Mean scores from the stratum of students who did not enroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the FYS ranged from 0.33 to 1.63 (neutral to somewhat favorable). From these data of the FYS, *Health & Wellness* and *Faculty Interaction* show the highest mean scores and what students felt more knowledgeable about after their first year of college. If all the students in this stratum had the same knowledge of health and wellness after their first year, they would have been significantly familiar with health and wellness. If all the students in this stratum



had the same level of comfort when talking to their professors outside of class they would somewhat be comfortable speaking to their professors outside of class. The range of mean scores on the FYS indicates that even though this stratum of students did not take A&SC 111, they were somewhat knowledgeable of most of the categories after their first year of college with the exception of social engagement. The lowest mean score is social experience, which indicates the students were neutral in this area. Table 4 offers a summary of the mean scores from all of the strata that completed the FYS.

Table 4  
*Mean Scores of Each Stratum in the FYS (n=36)*

	Enrolled in the Fall of 2013		Did Not Enroll in the Fall of 2013	
	Took A&SC 111 (n=18)	Did Not Take A&SC 111 (n=12)	Took A&SC 111 (n=3)	Did Not Take A&SC 111 (n=4)
College Success Skills	1.48	1.45	0.95	0.75
Campus Resources	1.34	1.35	0.50	0.69
Social Engagement	0.84	0.78	0.33	0.33
Faculty Interaction	1.17	1.42	1.00	1.00
Health & Wellness	1.53	1.25	0.50	1.63

There is a very slight difference (0.03) in the *College Success Skills* category between those students who reenrolled in the fall 2013 and did and did not take A&SC 111. Those students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and who both did and did not take the class experienced a slightly larger difference between the two strata (0.20). The difference between the groups that took the class, however, is greater. These students took the same class but there is a 0.53 gap between the two strata. Moreover, there is an even larger gap between the two strata that did not take the class (0.70). This suggests the groups that reenrolled had more knowledge of *College Success Skills* than those who did not reenroll.

Likewise, between these two strata of students who reenrolled, there is little difference (.01) in the category of *Campus Resources*. Those who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 who both did and did not take A&SC 111 had a slight difference (.19) between them in *Campus Resources*. Therefore, students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 were more knowledgeable of *Campus Resources* after their first year. Moreover, the students who did not reenroll in the fall 2013 and took A&SC 111 had a 0.84 difference between their strata and those who did reenroll and took A&SC 111.

In the category of *Social Engagement*, the students who did not reenroll in the fall semester of 2013 (0.33) did not participate in many extracurricular activities such as clubs or organizations, community events, and athletic events. Furthermore, of those students who did take the class and reenrolled, they were less than somewhat involved in social activities.

According to the data, the one stratum that felt the most knowledgeable about *Health & Wellness* topics after their first year of college was the stratum who did not enroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111. The group that did not reenroll and did take A&SC 111 was the least knowledgeable on the topic. *Health & Wellness* is a topic covered in A&SC 111.

**College persistence questionnaire mean scores.** The mean scores of the CPQ for each stratum are identified. Through the mean score analysis, differences in factors are identified and reported.

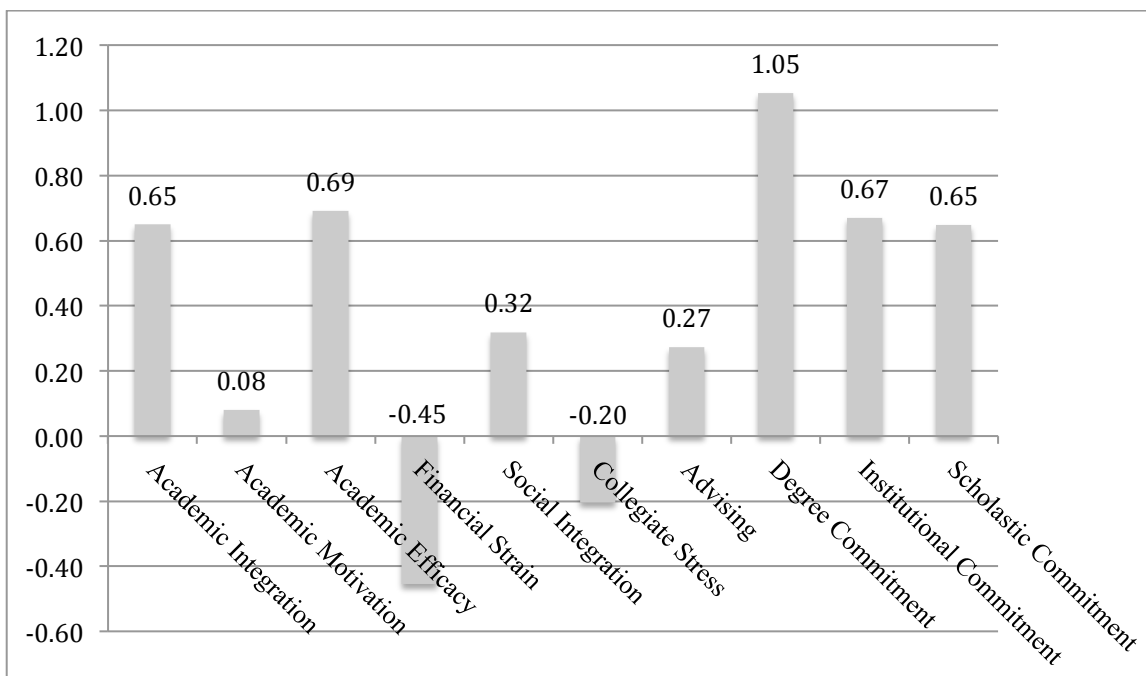


Figure 10. The CPQ mean scores for students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and who took A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the factors for the CPQ ranged from -0.45 to 1.05 (neutral to somewhat favorable). This indicates the students ranged from neutral to somewhat favorable, while *Degree Commitment* (1.05) is the most noticeable of the factors, it is somewhat favorable to participants. If all the students had the same level of degree commitment, they would all be somewhat favorable. The range of mean scores on this scale for the CPQ indicates that *Degree Commitment* is the most favorable to this stratum of students. *Financial Strain*, however, is somewhat unfavorable to students (-0.45). This indicates that students within this cohort are concerned with the costs associated with being in college, in addition to tuition and fees.

The mean scores for this stratum of the CPQ indicated that *Financial Strain* (-0.45), *Collegiate Stress* (-0.20) and *Academic Motivation* (-0.08) could be of concern. Although these areas are mostly hovering around neutral, they could still be factors against persistence.

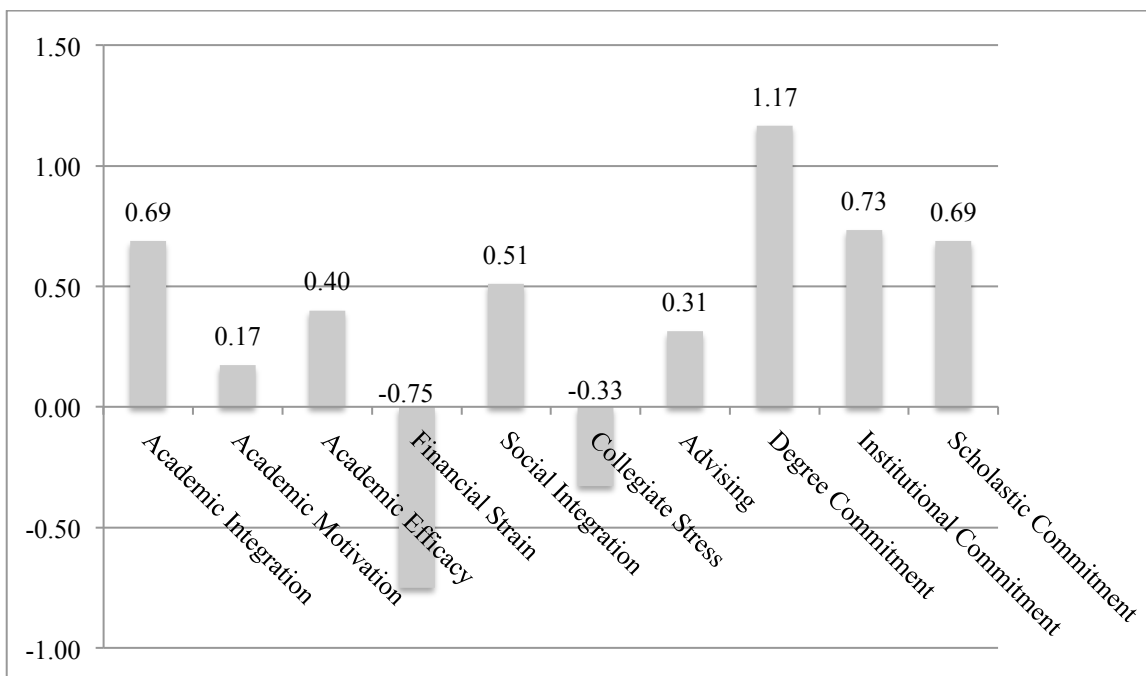


Figure 11. The mean scores of the factors of the CPQ from the students who reenrolled but did not take A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the factors for the CPQ ranged from -0.75 to 1.17 (somewhat unfavorable to somewhat favorable). This indicated the students ranged from somewhat unfavorable to neutral, while *Degree Commitment* seems to be the most noticeable of the group (1.17), it is somewhat favorable to participants. If all the students had the same level of degree commitment, they would all be somewhat favorable. The range of mean scores on this scale for the CPQ indicates that *Degree Commitment* is the most favorable to this stratum of students. This group of students rated *Academic Integration*, *Social Integration*, *Institutional Commitment*, and *Scholastic Commitment* as somewhat favorable. *Degree Commitment* was the highest mean for students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013, while *Financial Strain* was rated the lowest as somewhat unfavorable. This suggested that students in this stratum are concerned with the extra costs of being in college, in addition to tuition and fees. The mean scores for this stratum

indicated financial strain (-0.75) and collegiate stress (-0.33) are the biggest factors against persistence.

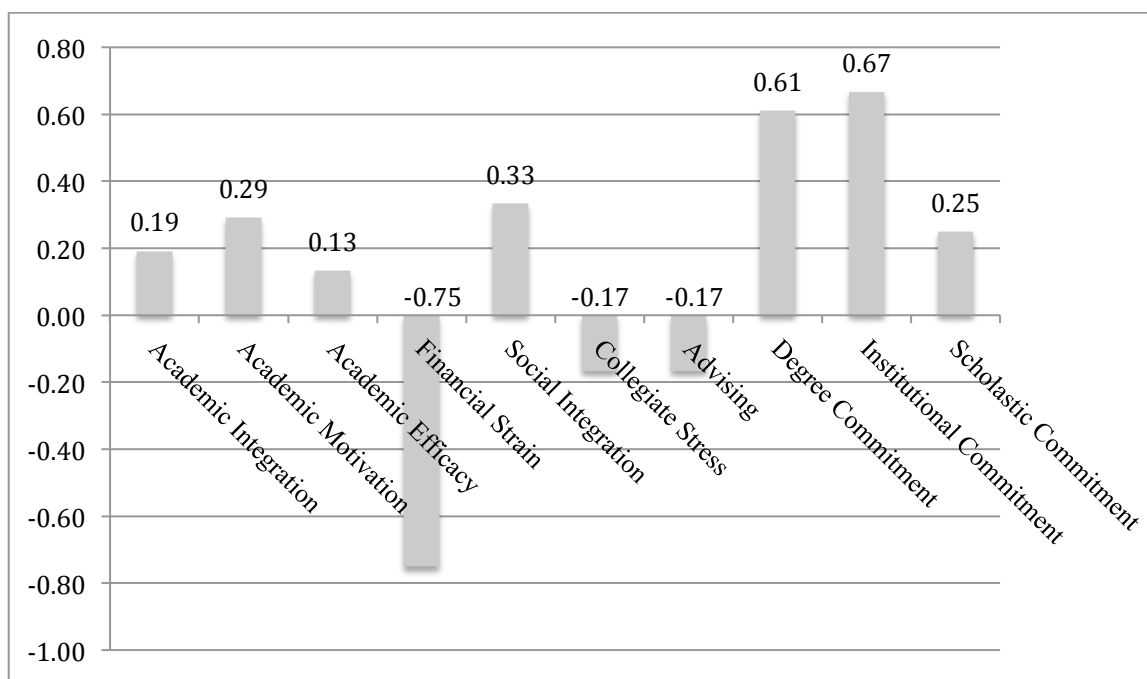


Figure 12. The mean scores of students who did not enroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the factors for the CPQ ranged from -0.75 to 0.67 (somewhat unfavorable to somewhat favorable). This indicates the students ranged from neutral to somewhat favorable, while *Financial Strain* seems to be the factor that is the most noticeable, it is somewhat unfavorable to participants. If all the students had the same level of financial strain, they would all be somewhat unfavorable. The range of mean scores on this scale for the CPQ indicates that *Financial Strain* is the most unfavorable to this stratum of students. This indicated that students within this cohort are concerned with the costs associated with being in college, in addition to tuition and fees.

The mean scores for this stratum indicated financial strain (-0.75), collegiate stress (-0.17), and advising (-0.17) are factors that could have impacted this group's decision not to

return. Motivation in this stratum is at (0.29), is higher than the two groups of students that persisted.

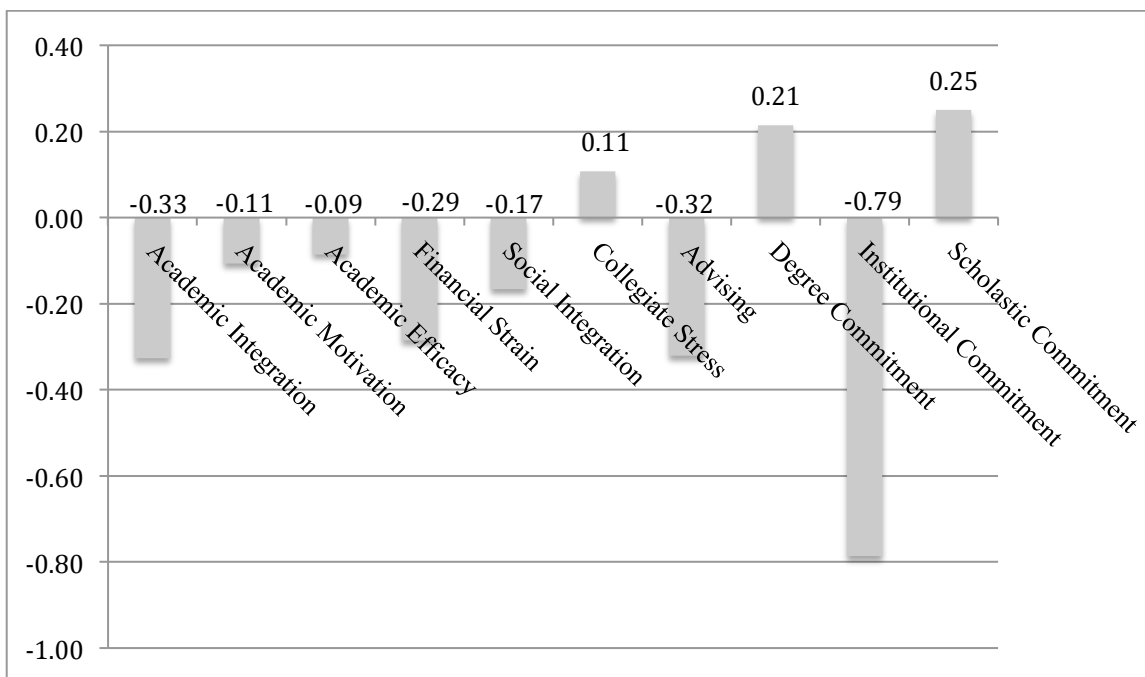


Figure 13. The mean scores of students who did not enroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111.

The mean scores for the categories for the CPQ ranged from -0.79 to 0.21 (somewhat unfavorable to neutral). This indicates the students ranged from somewhat unfavorable to neutral, while *Institutional Commitment* seems to be the factor much lower than the rest, it is somewhat unfavorable to participants. If all the students had the same level of institutional commitment, they would all be somewhat unfavorable of the institution. The range of mean scores on this scale for the CPQ indicates that *Institutional Commitment* is somewhat unfavorable to this stratum of students. The data indicates students have a low commitment level to Central Mountain State University.

The mean scores for this stratum indicated that *Institutional Commitment* (-0.79), *Academic Integration* (-0.33), and *Financial Stress* (-0.11) are possible explanations as to why

this group of students did not return. *Motivation* in this group is near the same as the students who persisted and did take the first-year seminar.

**Mean scores summary.** The mean scores of the CPQ are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5  
Mean Scores For All of the Strata For the CPQ (n=48)

	Enrolled in the Fall of 2013		Did Not Enroll in the Fall of 2013	
	Took A&SC 111 (n=22)	Did Not Take A&SC 111 (n=16)	Took A&SC 111 (n=3)	Did Not Take A&SC 111 (n=7)
Academic Integration	0.65	0.69	0.19	-0.33
Academic Motivation	0.08	0.17	0.29	-0.11
Academic Efficacy	0.69	0.40	0.13	-0.09
Financial Strain	-0.45	-0.75	-0.75	-0.29
Social Integration	0.32	0.51	0.33	-0.17
Collegiate Stress	-0.20	-0.33	-0.17	0.11
Advising	0.27	0.31	-0.17	-0.32
Degree Commitment	1.05	1.17	0.61	0.21
Institutional Commitment	.67	0.73	0.67	-0.79
Scholastic Conscientiousness	1.48	0.69	0.25	0.25

There was a very slight difference (0.03) between those who reenrolled who took and did not take A&SC 111 in *Academic Integration*. The strata that reenrolled were fairly close in mean scores in all 10 factors except for *Scholastic Conscientiousness*; there was a 0.79 difference.

Although both strata were somewhat favorable, those who reenrolled and took A&SC 111 were more confident in their *Scholastic Conscientiousness*. The students who reenrolled and did not take A&SC 111 are somewhat favorable in the *Social Integration* factor whereas the strata that reenrolled and took A&SC 111 were neutral. *Degree Commitment* was also slightly higher (0.12)

for the students who reenrolled and did not take A&SC 111. This alone could help explain why they persisted without the aid of the class.

Between the strata who did not reenroll, the largest gap in mean scores was in *Institutional Commitment* (1.46). There was also a gap between the factors of *Academic Integration* (0.52) and *Social Integration* (0.49). Between these two strata, there was also a gap in the factor of *Financial Strain* (0.46). The stratum that did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 was somewhat unfavorable to those who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take the class who fell into the neutral. The strata that did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 that did not take the class had the highest mean score for the factor of *Collegiate Stress* (0.11).

**Frequencies for the CPQ.** Mean scores show the most common rating of each factor.

The frequencies report offers a different perspective on the data. The frequencies of the CPQ are listed in Table 6.

Table 6.  
*Frequencies of College Persistence Questionnaire (n=48)*

	Very Unfavorable (< -1.50)	Somewhat Unfavorable (-1.49 – -0.50)	Neutral (-0.49 – 0.49)	Somewhat Favorable (0.50–1.49)	Very Favorable (>1.50)
Academic Integration	0 (0%)	5 (10%)	21 (44%)	15 (31%)	7 (15%)
Academic Motivation	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	33 (69%)	11 (23%)	0 (0%)
Academic Efficacy	0 (0%)	4 (8%)	20 (42%)	21 (44%)	3 (6%)
Financial Strain	6 (13%)	22 (46%)	15 (31%)	5 (10%)	0 (0%)
Social Integration	1 (2%)	9 (19%)	15 (31%)	19 (40%)	4 (8%)
Collegiate Stress	0 (0%)	17 (35%)	26 (54%)	5 (10%)	0 (0%)
Advising	3 (6%)	9 (19%)	19 (40%)	10 (21%)	7 (15%)
Degree Commitment	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	8 (17%)	24 (50%)	14 (29%)

(continued)



	Very Unfavorable ( $< -1.50$ )	Somewhat Unfavorable ( $-1.49 - -0.50$ )	Neutral ( $-0.49 - 0.49$ )	Somewhat Favorable ( $0.50-1.49$ )	Very Favorable ( $>1.50$ )
Institutional Commitment	2 (4%)	11 (23%)	9 (19%)	11 (23%)	15 (31%)
Scholastic Conscientiousness	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	17 (35%)	25 (52%)	5 (10%)

*Academic integration.* The factor of Academic Integration consists of seven questions of the CPQ. From the data in Table 6, the majority (44%;  $n=21$ ) of the population ( $n=48$ ) fell into the neutral category in this theme. From the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 stratum ( $n=22$ ), 41% ( $n=9$ ) fell into the somewhat favorable category. From the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ), 50% ( $n=8$ ) fell into the neutral category. For the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ), the answers were equally split between somewhat unfavorable, neutral, and somewhat favorable. In the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 cohort ( $n=7$ ), 71% ( $n=5$ ) of the respondents fell into the neutral category.

*Academic motivation.* The factor of Academic Motivation covers eight questions from the CPQ. From the data in Table 6, 69% ( $n=33$ ) of the participants felt neutral in terms of their motivation academically. In the students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 stratum ( $n=22$ ), 64% ( $n=14$ ) of the students answered neutral in terms of their motivation. Of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ), the majority (69%;  $n=11$ ) also answered neutral. In the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 stratum ( $n=3$ ), 67% ( $n=2$ ) of the students answered somewhat favorable. In the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 cohort ( $n=7$ ), 100% of the students answered neutral.

*Academic efficacy.* The factor of Academic Efficacy includes five questions. From the data in Table 6, the majority of students answered somewhat favorable (44%;  $n=21$ ) to this category. The participants in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ), answered mostly somewhat favorable (55%). From the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ), the majority of students answered somewhat unfavorable (56%). The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 participants ( $n=3$ ) answered with a majority of neutral (67%). Likewise, the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=7$ ) answered mostly neutral as well (43%).

*Financial strain.* From the data in table 6, the majority of participants (46%) in the study answered somewhat unfavorable to the factor of Financial Strain, meaning that the students do not feel financially secure in their college experience. Of the students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ), 32% ( $n=7$ ) answered neutral to the questions connected to this theme. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 cohort ( $n=16$ ) answered somewhat unfavorable (38%;  $n=6$ ) to the questions in the Financial Strain category. The majority of the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ) answered somewhat unfavorable (67%;  $n=2$ ) to the questions from this theme. For the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=7$ ), the majority also answered somewhat unfavorable (46%;  $n=3$ ).

*Social integration.* The factor of Social Integration includes six different questions. The majority of participants ( $n=19$ ) in the study fell into the somewhat favorable (40%) category. The students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ) responded somewhat favorable (41%;  $n=9$ ). The stratum of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not

take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ) also responded with somewhat favorable in their majority (50%;  $n=8$ ).

The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ) had a majority of respondents provide neutral answers (67%;  $n=2$ ). The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 cohort ( $n=7$ ) had a split majority of 43% ( $n=3$ ) each in the neutral and the somewhat unfavorable category.

*Collegiate stress.* Four questions comprised the factor of Collegiate Stress. Of the students that completed the CPQ, the majority responded neutral (54%;  $n=26$ ). For the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ), 50% ( $n=11$ ) responded neutral. Of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ), the majority of students (63%;  $n=10$ ) responded neutral. Of the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ), the majority response, 67% ( $n=2$ ), was somewhat unfavorable. The majority response of the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 cohort ( $n=7$ ) was neutral at 71% ( $n=5$ ).

*Advising.* The Advising factor saw a majority of participants responded neutral (40%;  $n=19$ ). The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ) answered neutral (50%;  $n=11$ ) in this category. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ) also responded neutral (31%;  $n=5$ ) to the questions of this theme. The stratum of students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ) was split between all participants (33% each) between somewhat unfavorable ( $n=1$ ), neutral ( $n=1$ ), and somewhat favorable ( $n=1$ ). The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=7$ ) also felt neutral on the topic (71%;  $n=5$ ).

*Degree commitment.* In the factor of Degree Commitment, six questions were assigned. The majority of participants responded in the somewhat favorable category (50%;  $n=24$ ). Of the

students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ), the majority of participants placed their answers in the somewhat favorable category (45%;  $n=10$ ). In the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ), the majority of responses fell into the somewhat favorable category (50%;  $n=8$ ). Likewise, the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ) answered in the somewhat favorable category (67%;  $n=2$ ). The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=7$ ) were split evenly with their majority between neutral (43%;  $n=3$ ) and somewhat favorable (43%;  $n=3$ ).

*Institutional commitment.* The four questions in the Institutional Commitment factor were answered with a majority of responses in the very favorable (31%;  $n=15$ ) category. Of the students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ), the majority answered very favorable (36%;  $n=8$ ). Of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 group ( $n=16$ ), the majority of participants responded in the very favorable (38%;  $n=6$ ) category as well. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ) were split evenly between somewhat unfavorable ( $n=1$ ), somewhat favorable ( $n=1$ ), and very favorable ( $n=1$ ). All were at 33.33%. Of the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=7$ ), the majority was somewhat unfavorable (86%;  $n=6$ ).

*Scholastic conscientiousness.* The Scholastic Conscientiousness factor had the majority of responses fall into the somewhat favorable (52%;  $n=25$ ) category. The students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=22$ ) reported somewhat favorable (59%;  $n=13$ ). The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=16$ ) answered somewhat favorable (56%;  $n=9$ ) as well. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=3$ ), however, answered most of their answers in the neutral (67%;

$n=2$ ) category. Likewise, the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=7$ ) also saw the majority of their answers fall into the neutral category (71%;  $n=5$ ).

**Frequencies for the FYS.** The frequencies of the FYS were used to gain a different perspective from the data. Table 7 displays the frequencies for the FYS.

Table 7  
*Frequencies of the Questions From the FYS*

After my first year in college...	N	Not at all (0–0.49)	Somewhat (0.50–1.49)	Significantly (1.49–2.00)
College Success Skills	36	3 (8%)	7 (47%)	16 (44%)
Campus Resources	36	8 (22%)	13 (36%)	13 (36%)
Social Experiences	36	16 (44%)	15 (42%)	5 (14%)
Faculty Interaction	36	7 (19%)	14 (39%)	15 (42%)
Health & Wellness	36	4 (11%)	9 (25%)	23 (64%)

*College success skills.* College Success Skills consisted of ten questions that were derived from topics cover in the first-year seminar. From the data in Table 7, the students who most often answered significantly (44%) to the College Success Skills questions persisted to the fall semester, both that took A&SC 111 ( $n=18$ ) and those who did not ( $n=12$ ).

Out of all of the CSS questions, the majority of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=18$ ) answered significantly to all but one of the questions. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=12$ ) cohort, 58% answered somewhat ( $n=7$ ). The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 cohort ( $n=2$ ) answered somewhat (100%). Of the respondents in this cohort, on the question of setting long and short-term goals, 100% answered not at all. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=4$ ) answered not at all on 70% of the questions from this portion of the survey. Of the questions answered not at all, the topics included goal

setting, major selection, missing class, being prepared for classes, and help from academic advisors.

*Campus resources.* Out of all of the campus resources questions, the majority of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=18$ ) answered significantly to all of the questions in this category. There was an even split on question three, I was familiar with campus resources available to me, between somewhat and significantly. Of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=12$ ), there was an even split with 50% of the questions being answered significantly and the other half answered somewhat. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=2$ ) were evenly split between not at all and somewhat with all questions in this category. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=4$ ) answers in this category were also split. The majority of the respondents answered not at all to question six, I knew who my academic advisor was. The group was also split evenly when answering the question about their academic advisor helping them choose their classes.

*Social experiences.* The majority of the participants in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=18$ ) answered not at all to all questions in this category. These questions are related to clubs and campus organizations, connectedness to the campus community, and attending campus athletic events. The majority of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 cohort ( $n=12$ ) answered not at all to 66% of the questions and somewhat to 33%. This cohort felt somewhat more connected to the community after their first year. The breakdown of answers in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=2$ ) answered similar to the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 in that the respondents felt more connected to the community

after their first year of college. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=4$ ) answered similarly to the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 in that the majority of respondents answered not at all to all the questions in this category.

*Faculty interaction.* This category covered feeling comfortable talking to professors outside of the classroom. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=18$ ) were split between somewhat (39%) and significantly (39%), with four participants answering not at all. Of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=12$ ) the majority of students (58%) answered significantly to this question. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=2$ ) majority (100%) felt somewhat more comfortable. A majority of the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=4$ ) cohort answered somewhat (100%) to this question of faculty interaction.

*Health and wellness.* Of the questions listed in this category, the majority (78%) of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ( $n=18$ ) answered significantly to knowing the importance of Health & Wellness after their first year of college. They felt somewhat (61%) more knowledgeable of how to manage their stress. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 ( $n=12$ ) were on opposite ends with the questions related to Health & Wellness. The majority (67%) felt they significantly knew the importance of Health & Wellness after their first year of college whereas the majority answered not at all (42%) when it came to managing stress. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 cohort of students were split equally between the questions with answers of not at all and somewhat. The students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did

not take A&SC 111 ( $n=4$ ) were split with knowledge of health and wellness between somewhat (50%) and significantly (50%). In regards to managing stress, the majority (75%) of this group felt they knew how to manage their stress after their first year of college.

**Analyzing the differences.** Because of the low number of responses in each stratum, a Chi-Square test was unable to be used. In order to test differences between groups, the mean scores of certain factors were taken and placed into a t-test. Therefore, independent samples t-tests were run on those variables that showed differences in mean scores to determine if they were statistically significant. Alpha was set at 0.05.

*Reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 and reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111.* *College Success Skills* were analyzed in the reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata and the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *College Success Skills* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.48, SD = .39$ ) and those who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.45, SD = .33$ ),  $t(28) = 0.213, p = .833$ .

*Academic Efficacy* was analyzed in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Academic Efficacy* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .69, SD = .64$ ) and those who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = .40, SD = .59$ ),  $t(36) = -0.562, p = .578$ .

*Financial Strain* was analyzed in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Financial Strain* between the



students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = -0.45$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) and those who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -0.75$ ,  $SD = .75$ ),  $t(36) = 1.256$ ,  $p = .217$ .

*Degree Commitment* was analyzed in the students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Degree Commitment* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.05$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) and those who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.17$ ,  $SD = .55$ ),  $t(36) = 1.425$ ,  $p = .163$ .

*Did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111.* *Institutional Commitment* was analyzed in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students that did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was a statistically significant difference in *Institutional Commitment* between the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.79$ ,  $SD = .44$ ) and those who did take A&SC 111 ( $M = .67$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ),  $t(8) = 3.255$ ,  $p = .012$ . Therefore, the students who took A&SC 111 had a higher level of institutional commitment.

*Health and Wellness* was analyzed in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Health and Wellness* between the students not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.63$ ,  $SD = .48$ ) and those who did take A&SC 111 ( $M = .50$ ,  $SD = .71$ ),  $t(4) = -2.384$ ,  $p = .076$ .

*Financial Strain* was analyzed in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Financial Strain* between

the students not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.29$ ,  $SD = .55$ ) and those who did take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.75$ ,  $SD = .50$ ),  $t(8) = 1.254$ ,  $p = .245$ .

*Academic Motivation* was analyzed in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Academic Motivation* between the students not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.011$ ,  $SD = .26$ ) and those who did take A&SC 111 ( $M = .29$ ,  $SD = .36$ ),  $t(8) = 1.982$ ,  $p = .083$ .

*Degree Commitment* was analyzed in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Degree Commitment* between the students not enrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = .21$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) and those who did take A&SC 111 ( $M = .61$ ,  $SD = .51$ ),  $t(8) = .856$ ,  $p = .417$ .

*Reenrolled in the fall and did not take A&SC 111 and did not reenroll in the fall and did not take A&SC 111. College Success Skills* were analyzed in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not enroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was a statistically significant difference in *College Success Skills* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = .17$ ,  $SD = .47$ ) and those not reenrolled who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.11$ ,  $SD = .26$ ),  $t(14) = 3.180$ ,  $p = .007$ . Therefore, the students who did not take A&SC 111 and reenrolled had more knowledge after their first year of college success skills than students who did not reenroll and did not take the class.

*Degree Commitment* was analyzed in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was a statistically significant difference in *Degree Commitment* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.17, SD = .55$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = .21, SD = .72$ ),  $t(21) = 3.469, p = .002$ . Therefore, the students who did not take A&SC 111 had a stronger level of degree commitment than those students who did take the class.

*Financial Strain* was analyzed in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Financial Strain* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.75, SD = .75$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.29, SD = .54$ ),  $t(21) = -1.463, p = .158$ .

*Academic Motivation* was analyzed in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Academic Motivation* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = .172, SD = .47$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who did not take A&SC 111 ( $M = -.11, SD = .26$ ),  $t(21) = 1.461, p = .159$ .

*Reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 and did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111. College Success Skills* were analyzed in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *College Success*

*Skills* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.48, SD = .39$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .95, SD = .21$ ),  $t(18) = 1.865, p = .079$ .

*Institutional Commitment* was analyzed in the reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Institutional Commitment* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .67, SD = 1.22$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .67, SD = 1.04$ ),  $t(23) = .005, p = .996$ .

*Social Integration* was analyzed in the reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Social Integration* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .32, SD = 1.06$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .33, SD = .50$ ),  $t(23) = -.24, p = .981$ .

*Academic Motivation* was analyzed in the reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Academic Motivation* between the students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .08, SD = .63$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .29, SD = .36$ ),  $t(23) = -.563, p = .579$ .

*Degree Commitment* was analyzed in the reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 strata. There was not a statistically significant difference in *Degree Commitment* between the

students reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = 1.05$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) and those not reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 ( $M = .61$ ,  $SD = .51$ ),  $t(23) = 1.115$ ,  $p = .276$ .

Overall, many of the factors in the survey were not statistically significant against each other, with a few exceptions. Web-based and phone interviews were given to help explain the answers provided in the survey.

**Interviews.** In order to help expand on answers given in the survey, an interview opportunity was provided to participants at the end of the survey. The interview was not required and volunteers were given the option of a web-based interview or a telephone interview. The web-based option was completed via *Qualtrics*. The participants of the interviews were given a series of open-ended questions. The questions were related to retention or the first-year seminar depending on which group they identified with (reenrolled in the fall of 2013 or not). Five students participated in the interview process; three completed the web-based interview and two completed the phone interview. The interviews were analyzed and coded to help answer the research question. Student 1 and Student 2 reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111. Student 3 and Student 4 reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111. Student 5 did not reenroll in the fall off 2013 and did not take A&SC 111.

The qualitative analysis software HyperRESEARCH was utilized to aid in the process of coding. Interviews were coded in two stages using a priori and descriptive codes. A priori codes were developed based on the literature reviewed in chapter two and are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

*A Priori Codes and Definitions Used in Qualitative Analysis*

A priori code	Definition
Faculty Interaction	Includes all instances of faculty contact both in and out of the classroom.

(continued)

A priori code	Definition
Incongruence	Being at odds with the institution in some regard. Involves both academic and non-academic domains.
Social Integration	Refers to all social activity outside of the classroom.

*Faculty interaction.* The literature addresses faculty interaction as an important part of academic integration. Academic integration is part of Tinto's (1993) theory of individual departure. Faculty interaction both in and out of the classroom has been shown to have an effect on retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977). From the data, students discuss the positives and negatives of their faculty interactions.

Student 1: I worked closely with faculty and they have all been great. This has also been true within my classes.

Student 2: Some teachers don't seem to really care about the students and they don't really like to teach. In some cases, they're extremely friendly and willing to help, but my major is biology and some of the teachers are just hard to deal with.

Student 3: I have been in classes and have always felt welcome, or missed when I wasn't in class. I also began a great relationship with my college success specialist through this class and the service learning class I took after it.

Student 4: I think one time it was because he was sick, which is understandable, and there was a few times were he just did it and there was no reason [cancelled class], he would say, "That's pretty much all I have to say for today," and that's it, class was over. There was one instance that was really irritating. Another student had brought in a question from the online homework and asked him if he could do it in front of the class because everyone was getting it wrong. You know, he couldn't do it. He couldn't do the problem right there in front of us. He was trying to do it and kept getting it wrong. He told us he would take it home and work on it and then get it back to us next lesson. I thought that was a display of incompetence in my opinion.

Student 5: The art instructor there came from a little bit of a larger college and in more of a city environment and he kind of had this competition that he'd brought with him. He would tell us when you leave this college to go on to do what you're going to do...a lot of times he would put into perspective that you're not just competing with people at this college. Remember, you're competing with people in very large cities doing this degree and paying three times as much. You got to remember that these people have been doing art all their lives and that is who you're going to be working for. That is who you're going to be working with.... He put it in perspective. Art isn't a degree or class that you

kind of slack your way through, it's something that really requires a lot of work and you really have to want to do it. I thought that that instructor was awesome.

Overall, the students had instances of positive and negative interactions with faculty. The CPQ category of academic integration included faculty interactions.

*Incongruence.* Tinto (1993) states that incongruence in a student's college experience is inevitable. At some point, they will be at odds with the institution. As the data below implies, it sees different levels.

Student 4: I had a teacher that was, in my opinion, not the greatest instructor on the material he was teaching. There were also times where he would end class 45 minutes early for no reason. He would do this three class days before an exam. We're all trying to learn the material cause hardly anyone understood it before the exam and we're ending class, half an hour early or fifteen minutes early. It just seemed like I wasn't getting anything out of the class.

Student 5: I just really didn't like the teaching plan of math and the way it was taught. That wasn't on the faculty or the teacher that was just the new program they have.

The incongruence seen from these students is academically situated. One had an issue with the faculty and the other was a technological concern.

*Social integration.* This refers to all activities outside of the classroom. Social integration includes the interactions with peers at the university, the participation in clubs and student organizations, intramural sports, and all other extracurricular activities. As part of Tinto's (1993) theory of individual departure, social integration is important to student persistence.

Student 1: I am a part of the Experience Leadership Project, ASMSUB, Potters Guild, and have been employed as an orientation leader.

Student 2: I play a sport for the university, so besides that, I don't have time for anything else. There's not much to do in the city and the college doesn't really provide much for the students either.

Student 3: I am very involved in Jacket Student Ambassadors where we are led to create future leaders of Central Mountain State University. We are very involved in community service and also in helping prospective students get orientated to the campus.

Student 4: I don't really do much extracurricular stuff because I have such demanding classes.

I am actually part of the Hispanic Club on campus and we do events every once in a while. I think that sometimes the school doesn't really do much for the students on the weekends because everyone seems to leave so it gets kind of boring around here on the weekends, cause there's just really there's nothing to do. There really isn't, without going off campus.

Student 5: I kind of volunteered a little bit for some of the Native American events but other than that I didn't.

Overall, most of the students had some type of social interaction during their first year.

*Advising.* At the end of each interview, students were given the option to expand on any topics or make any additional comments about their experience at Central Mountain State University. During this portion of the interview, one student brought up their academic advisor as shown in this excerpt:

Student 5: I think that they could just give you a little bit more info being a person who hasn't been to school since high school. I just got out of the military and then setting me up with three accelerated five-week classes within a month over the summer. I thought it was going to be easy going in, but they didn't really explain to me that this is actually going to be pretty hard because you're condensing a whole class down into five weeks. They didn't explain to me you're going to school less but you're getting a lot more homework. They didn't let me know that before, so I almost ended up failing out of a class or a dropping out of a class when I was in summer school but I made it through. But I wish they had given me a little bit of warning before that.

*Benefits of A&SC 111.* For the students who took A&SC 111, they were asked to explain the effect the course had on their college success and how the topics helped them. Two of the students who completed the survey had taken the course. The students said:

Student 1: It has given me helpful study skills and taught me the importance of going to class. It has been helpful with helping me discover what my strengths are.

Student 3: I learned a lot from this class, from taking notes to learning how to step out of my comfort zone. This class helped me become who I am today with being so excited about college. I have also discovered a lot about myself in this class.



Overall, the two students that took the class were satisfied and felt the class was useful to their success.

*College experience.* For students to persist, according to Tinto's (1993) theory, they should be academically and socially integrated into college life. The university plays a role in helping student's transition into this new environment.

Student 1: It has allowed me to further myself both academically and personally in a great setting.

*College preparation.* A&SC 111 is not a required course for new freshman at Central Mountain State University. One of the courses goals is to help students be prepared for what lies ahead in college. One student who was interviewed who did not take the class had this to say about why he/she felt he/she was successful in college:

Student 4: Why I do well without it [A&SC 111] is that in high school, I kind of took a similar class, not really, but it's kind of the same thing...I can really say that my high school teachers prepared me very well. And some of it has to do with me learning as I go. You miss an assignment and you go, ok, next time I'll just do it right when I get it and then I don't have to worry about it anymore.

*College success skills.* The first-year seminar provides students with tools to help them throughout their collegiate careers. The topics in the class cover a range of academic skills to help the students with their academic integration.

Student 3: I have learned how to take better notes in class and actually pay attention rather than falling asleep. It has also helped me to become more involved in class discussions.

*Cost.* Students are concerned about the price of tuition. In regards to Central Mountain State University, one student reported that the price of tuition was good. This implies that as reports of tuition rising in parts of the country, this university's rates are still fair.

Student 5: The tuition is absolutely amazing there [Central Mountain State University]. It's not too expensive, at least I don't think it is, not for the average person. Compared to the other schools that we could be going to, it's really amazing.

*Expectations.* Students were asked how their expectations were exceeded or met when interviewed.

Student 5: It wasn't that I was overloaded. It was, I was overloaded as to what my expectation was. My expectation was pretty mild. I will be going to school during the summer. It's going to be a little bit of work everyday, but I wasn't overloaded that this was more than I could do, it was more this was what I expected and this is what I did.

*Food concerns.* Part of living on-campus is dining in the café for the majority of meals. Although a specific question was not directed towards food, the matter came up. Students voiced their opinions on the topic of food.

Student 2: The cafeteria food is actually not bad but there's no place to get food unless you go to fast foods restaurants past 7.... The cafeteria is definitely hit or miss. There are some nights when it's really, really good and there are some nights where it's just completely awful and I have to go off-campus to eat somewhere else.

Student 4: The kitchenette is way too small. I feel like there need to be improvements made on it. It gets difficult trying to cook for yourself, especially on the nights when the cafeteria food isn't all that great.

*Motivation.* The motivation to succeed is a factor in student persistence. A student needs to want to persist in order to do so. Student 5 seems to have had a break in academic efficacy.

Student 5: I just kind of lost my motivation after the math transferability issue. It kind of lost my motivation as well because I didn't feel like I was learning anything useful...I think it was just a loss of motivation, because I did have a passion for math at one point. I can't tell you when I lost it, if that was before college or during college, but I know I've always had a passion for math. It just kind of turned off when I went to that college for some reason.

*On-campus living.* At Central Mountain State University, there are students who live on-campus in the residence halls. During the interview portion of the study, students had comments in regards to the living situations on-campus although no question specified the residence halls.

Student 4: I do like the fact that the buildings are secure. That makes me feel safer at night knowing that you have to have a card or a handprint to get into the dorms. No one can just walk in.

*Returning.* The literature discusses withdrawal and dropping out of college. When students were asked to provide any other comments, this is what was said:

Student 5: I don't really want to go back; unless I was going to go for an art degree, I would probably not go back to Central Mountain State University.

However, the sentiment was a bit conflicting with this statement by the same student:

Student 5: Tuition was amazing. I may go back if I decide to go into an art degree.

The student had said earlier how the art instructor had made an impact on them in class. This ties well into the literature about faculty interaction playing a factor in persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977).

*Stress.* External pressures such as stress, family obligations, and employment can be factors in student retention. One student experienced variations in stress levels. For example:

Student 4: As far as last semester goes, last semester was all was average because I didn't do that great. It's no ones fault, it's only my own. I was taking a pretty tough course and I missed class for a week because I had the flu. I just couldn't catch back up and so the rest of the semester after that was just trying to catch up in the class and I couldn't, so I was just really stressed out. My freshman year was very relaxed. It just didn't feel as busy as expected.

*Transferring.* Students may withdraw from the university with the intention of furthering their education elsewhere. This information is not usually reported as to why a student leaves but rather only that a student left.

Student 2: I don't know if I'm going to stay yet or not, but the reason I'm still here is because I play on the women's sports team.

Student 5: I was doing the pre-engineering plan so I was going to transfer, probably within two years. I was going to plan on transferring within two years and I also heard that the other college, Mountain State University, was where I was going to transfer. I didn't feel when it came to math parts that it was very transferable. I'd say the biggest reason was the transferability of actual skills that I was learning.

Overall, the analyzed qualitative data provides insights to the experiences students had during their first year at Central Mountain State University.

## Key Findings

The analysis of the quantitative survey combined with the web and telephone interviews produced a wide range of data to help explain the effect the first-year seminar had on the retention rate. The data provided showed that a higher percentage (63.49%;  $n=160$ ) of students enrolled in A&SC 111 reenrolled in the fall of 2013. The responses to the survey yielded answers for the students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ranging from *neutral* to *somewhat* in the CPQ section while the FYS saw answers of *somewhat more knowledgeable* to *significantly*. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 fell in the range of *somewhat unfavorable* to *somewhat favorable* for the CPQ section. The responses for the FYS all remained in *somewhat*. Answers to the CPQ sections for the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 ranged from *somewhat unfavorable* to *somewhat favorable*. The responses to the FYS fell in the range of *not at all* to *somewhat*. For the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 stratum, the answers to the CPQ were *somewhat unfavorable* to *neutral*. The same stratum had a range of *not at all* to *significantly* for the FYS.

According to the data from the survey, the students who enrolled in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 were concerned with financial strain and collegiate stress. The same students were more knowledgeable of the FYS topics after their first year of college. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 group were even more concerned with financial strain and collegiate stress. They also have a higher level of degree commitment. This group of students is also somewhat more knowledgeable of the FYS topics after their first year of college. All of the students in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 showed concern with financial strain, collegiate stress, and advising. These students

did not get socially involved after their first year. Institutional commitment ranked the lowest for the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 students whereas all other topics in the CPQ remained neutral. For the FYS topics, the students did not increase their social experiences but had greater knowledge of health and wellness after their first year of college.

The results from the statistical analysis did not show statistical significance in the majority of groups tested ( $p = 0.05$ ). However, there was statistical significance between the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 in the factor of institutional commitment,  $t(8) = 3.255, p = .012$ . This indicated the students who took A&SC 111 had a higher level of institutional commitment. There was also statistical significance between the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 in the themes of college success skills and degree commitment. The results from this test denote the students who did not take A&SC 111 and reenrolled had more knowledge after their first year of college success skills than students who did not reenroll and did not take the class,  $t(14) = 3.180, p = .007$ . It further showed the students who did not take A&SC 111 had a stronger level of degree commitment than those students who did take the class,  $t(21) = 3.469, p = .002$ . In addition, the data gained from the interviews supported the responses received in the survey portion of the study. The interview data also showed some areas of contrast from the responses in the study. For example, financial strain was an issue, however, one student reported that tuition was favorable. Furthermore, instances of incongruence were found with faculty in teaching styles. In addition to

incongruence, isolation was found, though it was institutionally created. Chapter 5 will provide a summarization of the results and implications as well as the limitations and recommendations.

## Chapter 5: Research Study and Conclusions

The National Center for Education Statistics (2013) reported that of the students enrolled at four-year colleges or universities with open enrollment policies, only 31% persisted through to graduation to complete a bachelor's degree. This number represents the importance of retaining students in the education industry.

Research on student retention can be traced back as far as the 1930s in McNeely's (1937) publication on college student mortality. Work on the issue was revitalized in the 1970s. Astin (1975) discovered two predictors of college student attrition – personal and environmental. Spady (1970) also sought to find the reasons students dropped out of college. He suggested the connections students have between academics and their social lives could further explain students' reasons for withdrawing from an institution. Bean (1980) disagreed with previous theorists and built his model based on worker turnover. He argued that students left college for reasons similar to those who left their jobs. Tinto (1975, 1993) developed a theory of individual departure drawing from other scholars researching retention, claiming that students who are academically and socially integrated into an institution will persist.

Administrators at colleges and universities are left with the challenge of retaining students. There is not one solution, however, implementing a first-year seminar has been a popular intervention. Appealing to freshmen is not novel; the first year of college is the most influential in a student's life (Cox et al., 2005, Noel, 1985; Levitz et al., 1999; Tinto, 1999). It was in the early 1980s, however, when the first-year seminar saw resurgence and became a movement (Barefoot, 2000). In 30 years, five different types of the first-year seminars have been identified and commonly offered. They are as follows: (a) extended orientation seminars; (b) academic seminars with similar content; (c) academic seminars with different content; (d) pre-

professional seminars; (e) basic study skills seminars. Some institutions also mix the formats to create a hybrid option (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992).

Central Mountain State University is a medium-sized, four-year public university. The university is located in an urban setting with just fewer than 5,000 students enrolled. Some form of a first-year seminar has been offered at the university since 1991 (J. McIsaac-Tracy, personal communication, January 29, 2013). The most recent iteration is o.

Retention is a priority at Central Mountain State University. The county it resides in is experiencing a low unemployment rate that was at 3.9% at the end of 2013 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Declining student enrollment has also been an issue for the university the past two years. The Western Interstate Commission of Higher Education (2013) is projecting high school graduates to remain at lower levels until 2023-24. Furthermore, the state has changed to a performance based funding model, which is based on enrollment, retention, and graduation rates (Montana University System, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect the first-year seminar has on the retention rate at Central Mountain State University. One research question was posed:

- RQ1: How does the first-year seminar affect the retention rate of first-time, traditional aged freshmen at Central Mountain State University?

### **Theoretical Focus**

Tinto's (1993) theory of individual departure was the basis of the theoretical framework of this study. It aligned most with what is covered in the first-year seminar at Central Mountain State University.

The foundation for his theory was based on two sociological theories. Van Gennep's (1960) Rites of Passage and Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide. The rites of passage have three



stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. Students leave their homes and come to college (separation). Then they transition into college and into new communities. As they gain membership into these communities, they become full participants (incorporation). In building on the theory of suicide, Tinto is not inferring that students are committing suicide in order to leave the institution but rather they see no other option. The student is unable to establish his or her self in the new community and does not share the same morals, values, or beliefs. They then see no other option but to withdraw.

From these two theories Tinto builds the premises of his own theory. Tinto's theory claims that students need to be integrated socially and academically in order to persist. He found that if students are academically and socially involved in their collegiate experience they are more likely to persist.

In integrating socially, students work their ways into meeting new friends, participating in clubs or organizations, and getting involved on campus or off in order to build a connection to the university. In integrating academically, students take and attend their courses and build relationships with faculty. Tinto (1993) claims that faculty interaction outside of the classroom is important to student persistence.

## **Methods**

This study employed a two-phase sequential mixed methods design. The first phase was quantitative and involved the usage of two survey instruments. The following qualitative phase was designed to retrieve more in-depth answers to the topics covered in the survey. A stratified random sample was used and the population was divided into four strata. The following are the different strata:

- Enrolled in the Fall of 2013 and Took A&SC 111
- Enrolled in the Fall of 2013 and Did Not Take A&SC 111
- Did Not Enroll in the Fall of 2013 and Took A&SC 111
- Did Not Enroll in the Fall of 2013 and Did Not Take A&SC 111

**Survey instruments.** Participants from each stratum were invited to complete a self-administered web-based questionnaire that was a blend of two surveys. The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ), developed by Davidson and Beck (2009), was used with permission from the authors. The 69-question CPQ covered ten different themes: academic integration, academic motivation, academic efficacy, financial strain, social integration, collegiate stress, advising, degree commitment, institutional commitment, and scholastic conscientiousness. The CPQ utilized a five-point Likert-type response scale was measured using a favorability scale ranging from *very favorable* to *very unfavorable*.

The CPQ was supplemented by a shorter survey developed by the researcher. The first-year supplement (FYS) included specific topics covered in the first-year seminar. The 22-question supplement included five themes: college success skills, campus resources, social experiences, faculty interaction, and health and wellness. The participants responded to the statement, “After my first year of college...” with *significantly*, *somewhat*, *not at all*, and *not applicable*. The internet-based tool *Qualtrics* was used to deliver this phase.

**Web-based and telephone interviews.** At the conclusion of the survey in phase one, respondents were given the option of volunteering to participate in the interview phase of the study. The goal was to be able to gain more insight on the topics covered in phase one. The participants were given the option of completing a web-based interview or a telephone interview. The interview topics covered questions for the students who did not return and the students who

took A&SC 111. Participants who opted for the telephone interview were given follow-up questions to elaborate on their answers. The web-based interview was delivered via *Qualtrics*.

**Data analysis.** The analysis process for each phase was determined by how it would help answer the research question. Quantitative data was divided by stratum and analyzed for differences between the groups. There were insufficient respondents to run a Chi-Square analysis; therefore, t-tests were used to discover variances in the data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The qualitative data collected from the interviews was analyzed and coded. HyperRESEARCH, a qualitative analysis software, was utilized to aid in the coding process. Both a priori and descriptive codes were used in the analysis procedure. A priori codes were developed from the literature review and included faculty interaction, incongruence, and social integration. Descriptive codes were then applied to the interviews transcripts.

### **Key Findings**

The analysis of the quantitative survey combined with the web and phone interviews produced a wide range of data to help explain the effect the first-year seminar has on the retention rate. The data provided showed a higher percentage (63.49%;  $n=160$ ) of students enrolled in A&SC 111 reenrolled in the fall of 2013 than those who did not take the seminar. The responses to the survey yielded answers for the students who reenrolled and took A&SC 111 ranging from *neutral* to *somewhat favorable* in the CPQ section while the FYS saw answers of *somewhat more knowledgeable* to *significantly*. The stratum enrolled in the fall 2013 who did not take the class had responses fall in the range of *somewhat unfavorable* to *somewhat favorable* for the CPQ section. The responses for the FYS all remained in *somewhat* range. Although the

students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 that did not take A&SC 111 had similar scores overall, a greater proportion of students that persisted took A&SC 111.

Answers to the CPQ for those who did not reenroll and took A&SC 111 ranged from *somewhat unfavorable* to *somewhat favorable*. The responses to the FYS fell in the range of *not at all* to *somewhat*. For those who did not reenroll and did not take A&SC 111 stratum, the answers to the CPQ were *somewhat unfavorable* to *neutral*. The same stratum had a range of *not at all* to *significantly* for the FYS.

According to the data from the survey, the students who reenrolled for the fall 2013 and took A&SC 111 are concerned with financial strain and collegiate stress. The same students are more knowledgeable of the first-year seminar topics after their first year of college. The students in the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 group were even more concerned with financial strain and collegiate stress. They also have a higher level of degree commitment. This group of students is also somewhat more knowledgeable of the first-year seminar topics after their first year of college. All of the students in the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 showed concern with financial strain, collegiate stress, and advising. These students did not get socially involved after their first year. Institutional commitment ranked the lowest for the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 students whereas all other topics in the CPQ remained neutral. For the FYS, the students did not increase their social experiences but had greater knowledge of health and wellness after their first year of college.

Students do come in conflict with their institution at some point. Of the students who participated, many had some issue of incongruence during their first year. The instances varied in advising, faculty interactions, and food service.

The results from the statistical analysis did not show statistical significance in the majority of groups tested ( $p = 0.05$ ). However, there was statistical significance between the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and took A&SC 111 in the factor of institutional commitment,  $t(8) = 3.255, p = .012$ . This indicated the students who took A&SC 111 had a higher level of institutional commitment. There was also statistical significance between the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 and the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 in the factors of college success skills and degree commitment. The results from this test denote the students who did not take A&SC 111 and reenrolled had more knowledge after their first year of college success skills than students who did not reenroll and did not take the class,  $t(14) = 3.180, p = .007$ . It further showed the students who did not take A&SC 111 had a stronger level of degree commitment than those students who did take the class  $t(21) = 3.469, p = .002$ . In addition, the data gained from the interviews supported the responses received in the survey portion of the study. The interview data also showed some areas of contrast from the responses in the study.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of the data has led to three conclusions on how the first-year seminar has an effect on the retention rate at Central Mountain State University. These conclusions are based on the key findings from the data in this study.

**Conclusion one.** Students who take the first-year seminar are more likely to persist than others. The data indicate that 63.49% ( $n=160$ ) of students who took A&SC 111 reenrolled the following fall semester compared to lower numbers across the other strata. Furthermore, students who take A&SC 111 have better academic skills. After their first year in college, the students

who returned and who had taken A&SC 111 felt they had better study skills, time management, test taking abilities, and received the grades they wanted. They were also able to understand their professors and what was being said in class more than the others. Moreover, the students who persisted and took A&SC 111 were more satisfied with the quality of their academics. These students also had high institutional commitment.

The students who persisted had a high level of understanding of college success skills and degree commitment than other strata. However, students that did not take A&SC 111 had a higher level of degree commitment than those who did. This could indicate a drive to persist. The stratum of students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 had low levels of college success skills.

Many of the skills mentioned above are taught in the first-year seminar. Students were introduced to the topics of academic strategies, time management, note taking skills, and the importance of speaking with professors as well as others. In contrast, some of the students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 who took A&SC 111 reported not being very socially active. This coincides with the theoretical framework for the study. Tinto's (1993) theory of individual departure posits if a student is academically and socially integrated into college, they will persist. Tinto also mentions that it is possible that a student can be more academically integrated than socially and still persist.

The skills taught in A&SC 111 are valuable to a college student and aid in their persistence through their freshman year, which is the most important in terms of retention (Cox et al., 2005; Levitz et al., 1999; Tinto, 1999). Central Mountain State University should consider recommending some type of first-year seminar be required of all first-time freshmen. This will

give the students the tools they need to succeed. Multiple formats of first-year seminars should be offered to cover the diverse levels of education students have.

**Conclusion two.** All freshmen students at Central Mountain State University are concerned with financial strain. The ability to pay for college and the debt accrued is an issue with this population. Likewise, not being able to have disposable income to participate in social activities is another concern. The financial strain, however, does not seem to be the lone factor in persistence or withdrawal from the institution. Students under financial pressure who both have and have not taken A&SC 111 still persisted. Moreover, students who did not reenroll also felt the financial strain, regardless if they took A&SC 111 or not.

Tinto (1993) claimed that students do not leave an institution for financial reasons only. He argued that although the student may cite financial difficulties as reason for withdrawal, typically there is a more pressing underlying issue. Looking at the data found in this study, this seems to be true. Even though half of the population surveyed reported financial strain as a concern, they were still retained. In contrast, one student interviewed who withdrew from Central Mountain State University reported positively about the cost of tuition. Although the students who did not reenroll in the fall of 2013 and did not take A&SC 111 reported financial strain as a concern, a bigger issue for the stratum was institutional commitment. This theme rated very low with the non-persisting students who did not take A&SC 111.

The first-year seminar at Central Mountain State University does cover financial literacy in its curriculum. Because the seminar is not required for students at the university, not everyone receives financial education. Central Mountain State University should consider increasing financial literacy efforts and expand accessibility to financial education.

**Conclusion three.** In addition to academic integration, social integration does matter in persistence. The students, who persisted regardless if they took A&SC 111, had better social integration scores than those who did not persist. This implies these strata that withdrew had low levels of participation in activities and integrating into the social fabric of the university. However, this differs for the students who live on-campus than off. The students who lived on-campus expressed views that there were not a lot of activities for them to participate in. Although social integration alone does not predict persistence, it does play an important part in the equation (Tinto, 1993). Students who lived on-campus felt Central Mountain State University offered little entertainment options on the weekends when the local students went home.

Central Mountain State University should implement social options on the weekends for students in an effort to create more social integration. Although isolation can happen to students, it should be of their own accord, not institutionally created.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations associated with this study. The FYS was given to participants after their first year of college and covered general topics included in the curriculum of the first-year seminar in order to gauge their knowledge. However, there was no baseline set to accurately assess the level of knowledge the students had coming into their first year of college. Secondly, the survey was given a year after the participants completed their first semester of college. The length of time between the completions of the course may have negatively impacted the accuracy of the responses. Furthermore, students who withdrew may have done so after their first semester.

A small response rate of 8% ( $n=48$ ) made it difficult to generalize to the entire population. The small response rate could have been because of the medium. The sample



population was sent the survey through email. The email addresses provided were the preferred email address the university had on file for the student. The preferred email address at Central Mountain State University is rarely a school email address. Therefore, many of the emails went to a student's personal email address. This implies students do not check or use email frequently for communication.

This study was only after the first year and was not longitudinal. A longitudinal study may provide different results if the participants are tracked through to graduation. Lastly, these results should be treated with caution. The students who reenrolled in the fall of 2013 and did take A&SC 111 may be more driven towards completing a degree than the other strata. The reasons why students selected the seminar are unknown and therefore are not taken into account in this study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The first-year seminar as an intervention is not a novel idea; it has been around for decades (Barefoot, 2000). Like any program, it can constantly be revised to meet the needs of students at any institution if necessary. The instruments used in this study provide some interesting insights not directly related to the first-year seminar. For example, in the stratum of students who did not reenroll and did not take A&SC 111 the majority of students had a low institutional commitment score. At face value, this seems evident. However, the same cohort of students had a higher level of degree commitment. This may indicate that the student had intentions to transfer. Further research could be conducted to determine students' levels of institutional commitment prior to departure. This could not only help Central Mountain State University identify a risk factor, but it could also help identify areas of incongruence and attempt an intervention.

Future research could also be conducted on the entire population of the freshmen class. This study focused on the traditional aged freshman student, which is between the ages of 18-24. Although this represents the majority of the freshmen class (87%), the other demographic of learner could also provide valuable insight to additional student services that may be needed.

Institutional commitment aids in the recognition of an allegiance to the organization. Further research should be conducted to determine if social integration has an impact on the commitment level to the institution.

Lastly, as the incoming classes of traditional-aged freshmen enter Central Mountain State University become more technologically oriented, further research could identify the affect social media has on the communications between inter-collegiate relationships, particularly between student-student, student-faculty, and student-staff. This type of study could look into whether or not social integration increases or decreases based on the media used.

### **Implications and Considerations for Future Researchers**

For any researchers that may want to run this study at his or her own institution, or for anyone at Central Mountain State University who may want to continue this study, there are some considerations to make note of. Researchers should close the gap of the time span between giving the survey and when the class was taken. One possible alternative is to give the assessment at the end of the term during which the first-year seminar was taken.

Email did not appear to be the best medium for the distribution of the survey. The survey was distributed to 600 students. Of the 600 students, only 48 (8%) participated. This low response rate might indicate that email is not the best way to communicate with college students. Future researchers should consider using a different tool for completing the study. Many times, email is used because the cost is cheaper than paper surveys. Given the age group (18–24) of the

participants in this study and the prevalence of smart devices in society today, a mobile option should be considered. If using a mobile option, the survey would need to be paired down for the format. However, this may have the potential to increase the response rate to the survey.

Even with the response rate being low (8%;  $n=48$ ), this speaks to a bigger issue within student services, especially at Central Mountain State University. Frequently, email is used to communicate messages to both prospective and current students. As technology progresses at a fast rate, professionals must diversify the mediums used to facilitate the delivery of these messages. From this study, it appears email is no longer the most viable way to reach these students.

### **Closing**

The first-year seminar is not the only solution to battle attrition. However, it has proved to be an effective tool and should not be discarded. In an environment where keeping students enrolled is of vital importance in a recovering economy, administrators at colleges and universities need to remain open in their retention approaches. Introducing freshman students to the first-year seminar is providing them with the opportunity to succeed and reach their goals.

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APPENDIX A  
Email Cover Letters

**Cover Letter One: First Strata**  
**Traditional aged freshmen that enrolled in the fall of 2013 that completed the first-year seminar.**

Hello,

My name is Kurt Laudicina and I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a study on student retention at Montana State University Billings involving students who were enrolled in A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you were enrolled in a fall 2012 section of A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar and re-enrolled in the fall of 2013.

This involves a survey that takes about 40-45 minutes to complete. The survey will be open for two weeks and will close on (enter date). The questions asked are in relation to your first year of college at MSU Billings. A sample question has been provided:

*After beginning college, students sometimes discover that a college degree is not quite as important to them as it once was. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of the degree, here or elsewhere?*

*very strong / somewhat strong / neutral / somewhat weak / very weak / not applicable*

Your participation in this study is voluntary. In no way will participating in this study affect your grades, records, or academic standing at Montana State University Billings. All records are kept confidential and off-site from MSU Billings. I am the only person who will have access to the data from the study and no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data.

Those who complete the survey will have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com.

To participate in this study, please follow this link:

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Kurt Laudicina  
Doctoral Candidate, Learning Technologies  
Pepperdine University

**Cover Letter Two: Second Strata**  
**Traditional aged freshmen that did not enroll in the fall of 2013 that completed the first-year seminar.**

Hello,

My name is Kurt Laudicina and I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a study about student retention at Montana State University Billings.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you were enrolled in the fall of 2012 and took A&SC 111: First-Year Seminar but did not re-enroll in the fall of 2013.

This involves a survey that takes about 30-35 minutes to complete. The survey will be open for two weeks and will close on (enter date). The questions asked are in relation to your first year of college at MSU Billings. A sample question has been provided:

*After beginning college, students sometimes discover that a college degree is not quite as important to them as it once was. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of the degree, here or elsewhere?*

*very strong / somewhat strong / neutral / somewhat weak / very weak / not applicable*

Your participation in this study is voluntary. In no way will participating in this study affect your grades, records, or academic standing at Montana State University Billings. All records are kept confidential and off-site from Montana State University Billings. I am the only person who will have access to the data from the study and no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data.

Those who complete the survey will be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com.

To participate in this study, please follow this link:

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Kurt Laudicina  
Doctoral Candidate, Learning Technologies  
Pepperdine University

**Cover Letter Three: Third Strata**  
**Traditional aged freshmen that enrolled in the fall of 2013 that did not complete the first-year seminar.**

Hello,

My name is Kurt Laudicina and I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a study on student retention at Montana State University Billings.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you were enrolled in the fall of 2012 and re-enrolled in the fall of 2013.

This involves a survey that takes about 30-35 minutes to complete. The survey will be open for two weeks and will close on (enter date). The questions asked are in relation to your first year of college at MSU Billings. A sample question has been provided:

*After beginning college, students sometimes discover that a college degree is not quite as important to them as it once was. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of the degree, here or elsewhere?*

*very strong / somewhat strong / neutral / somewhat weak / very weak / not applicable*

Your participation in this study is voluntary. In no way will participating in this study affect your grades, records, or academic standing at Montana State University Billings. All records are kept confidential and off-site from MSU Billings. I am the only person who will have access to the data from the study and no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data.

Those who complete the survey will have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com.

To participate in this study, please follow this link:

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Kurt Laudicina  
Doctoral Candidate, Learning Technologies  
Pepperdine University

**Cover Letter Four: Fourth Strata**  
**Traditional aged freshmen that did not enroll in the fall of 2013 that did not complete the first-year seminar.**

Hello,

My name is Kurt Laudicina and I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a study on student retention at Montana State University Billings.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you were enrolled in the fall of 2012 and did not return for the fall of 2013.

This involves a survey that takes about 30-35 minutes to complete. The survey will be open for two weeks and will close on (enter date). The questions asked are in relation to your first year of college at MSU Billings. A sample question has been provided:

*After beginning college, students sometimes discover that a college degree is not quite as important to them as it once was. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of the degree, here or elsewhere?*

*very strong / somewhat strong / neutral / somewhat weak / very weak / not applicable*

Your participation in this study is voluntary. In no way will participating in this study affect your grades, records, or academic standing at Montana State University Billings. All records are kept confidential and off-site from MSU Billings. I am the only person who will have access to the data from the study and no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data.

Those who complete the survey will have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com.

To participate in this study, please follow this link:

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Kurt Laudicina  
Doctoral Candidate, Learning Technologies  
Pepperdine University



**Cover Letter Five: Qualitative Phase  
Volunteers**

Hello,

My name is Kurt Laudicina and I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a study on student retention at Montana State University Billings.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the second phase of this study. This involves a web-based interview that takes about 30-35 minutes to complete. The web-based interview will be open for one week and will close on (enter date). The questions asked are in relation to your first year of college at MSU Billings.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. In no way will participating in this study affect your grades, records, or academic standing at Montana State University Billings. All records are kept confidential and off-site from MSU Billings. I am the only person who will have access to the data from the study and no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data.

Those who complete the web-based interview will have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com.

To participate in this study, please follow this link:

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Kurt Laudicina  
Doctoral Candidate, Learning Technologies  
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX B  
Survey Questions

*College Persistence Questionnaire*

1. On average across all your courses, how interested are you in the things that are being said during class discussions?  
very interested / somewhat interested / neutral / somewhat disinterested / very disinterested / not applicable
2. What is your overall impression of the other students here?  
very favorable / somewhat favorable / neutral / somewhat unfavorable / very unfavorable / not applicable
3. How supportive is your family of your pursuit of a college degree, in terms of their encouragement and expectations?  
very supportive / somewhat supportive / neutral / somewhat unsupportive / very unsupportive / not applicable
4. Students differ quite a lot in how distressed they get over various aspect of college life. Overall, how much stress would you say that you experience while attending this institution?  
very much stress / much stress / some stress / a little stress / very little stress / not applicable
5. How easy is it to get answers to your questions about things related to your education here?  
very easy / somewhat easy / neutral / somewhat hard / very hard / not applicable
6. In general, how enthused are you about doing academic tasks?  
very enthusiastic / somewhat enthusiastic / neutral / somewhat unenthusiastic / very unenthusiastic / not applicable
7. College students have many academic responsibilities. How often do you forget those that you regard as important?  
very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable
8. How confident are you that this is the right college or university for you?  
very confident / somewhat confident / neutral / somewhat unconfident / very unconfident / not applicable
9. How often do you worry about having enough money to meet your needs?  
very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable
10. How confident are you that you can get the grades you want?  
very confident / somewhat confident / neutral / somewhat unconfident / very unconfident / not applicable

11. Some courses seem to take a lot more time than others. How much extra time are you willing to devote to your studies in those courses?

very much extra time / much extra time / some extra time / a little extra time / very little extra time / not applicable

12. In general, how satisfied are you with the quality of instruction you are receiving here?

very satisfied / somewhat satisfied / neutral / somewhat dissatisfied / very dissatisfied / not applicable

13. How much have your interactions with other students had an impact on your personal growth, attitudes, and values?

very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable

14. How difficult is it for you or your family to be able to handle college costs? very difficult / somewhat difficult / neutral / somewhat easy / very easy / not applicable

15. How inclined are you to do most of your studying within 24 hours of a test rather than earlier?

very inclined / somewhat inclined / a little inclined / not very inclined / not at all inclined / not applicable

16. At this moment in time, how strong would you say your commitment is to earning a college degree, here or elsewhere?

very strong / somewhat strong / neutral / somewhat weak / very weak / not applicable

17. How much pressure do you feel when trying to meet deadlines for course assignments?

extreme pressure / much pressure / some pressure / a little pressure / hardly any pressure at all / not applicable

18. How satisfied are you with the academic advising you receive here?

very satisfied / somewhat satisfied / neutral / somewhat dissatisfied / very dissatisfied / not applicable

19. How well do you understand the thinking of your instructors when they lecture or ask students to answer questions in class?

very well / well / neutral / not well / not at all well / not applicable

20. How often do you turn in assignments past the due date?

very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable

21. How much thought have you given to stopping your education here (perhaps transferring to another college, going to work, or leaving for other reasons)?

a lot of thought / some thought / neutral / little thought / very little thought / not applicable

22. How often do you read educationally-related material not assigned in courses? very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable

23. How strong is your sense of connectedness with others (faculty, students, staff) on this campus?  
very strong / somewhat strong / neutral / somewhat weak / very weak / not applicable
24. How good are you at correctly anticipating what will be on tests beforehand?  
very good / somewhat good / neutral / somewhat bad / very bad / not applicable
25. When you think of the people who mean the most to you (friends and family), how disappointed do you think they would be if you quit school?  
very disappointed / somewhat disappointed / neutral / not very disappointed / not at all disappointed / not applicable
26. How satisfied are you with the extent of your intellectual growth and interest in ideas since coming here?  
very satisfied / somewhat satisfied / neutral / somewhat dissatisfied / very dissatisfied / not applicable
27. When considering the financial costs of being in college, how often do you feel unable to do things that other students here can afford to do?  
very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable
28. When you think about your overall social life here (friends, college organizations, extracurricular activities, and so on), how satisfied are you with yours?  
very satisfied / somewhat satisfied / neutral / somewhat dissatisfied / very dissatisfied / not applicable
29. Students vary widely in their view of what constitutes a good course, including the notion that the best course is one that asks students to do very little. In your own view, how much work would be asked of students in a really good course?  
very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable
30. There are so many things that can interfere with students making progress toward a degree, feelings of uncertainty about finishing are likely to occur along the way. At this moment in time, how certain are you that you will earn a college degree?  
very certain / somewhat certain / neutral / somewhat uncertain / very uncertain / not applicable
31. How often do you feel overwhelmed by the academic workload here?  
very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable
32. How well does this institution communicate important information to students such as academic rules, degree requirements, individual course requirements, campus news and events, extracurricular activities, tuition costs, financial aid and scholarship opportunities?  
very well / well / neutral / not well / not at all well / not applicable
33. How much of a connection do you see between what you are learning here and your future career possibilities?

very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable

34. How often do you miss class for reasons other than illness or participation in school-related activities?

very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable

35. How much have your interactions with other students had an impact on your intellectual growth and interest in ideas?

very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable

36. How often do you encounter course assignments that are actually enjoyable to do? very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable

37. When you consider the techniques you use to study, how effective do you think your study skills are?

very effective / somewhat effective / neutral / somewhat ineffective / very ineffective / not applicable

38. After beginning college, students sometimes discover that a college degree is not quite as important to them as it once was. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of the degree, here or elsewhere?

very strong / somewhat strong / neutral / somewhat weak / very weak / not applicable

39. How concerned about your intellectual growth are the faculty here?

very concerned / somewhat concerned / neutral / somewhat unconcerned / very unconcerned / not applicable

40. How much do you think you have in common with other students here?

very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable

41. This semester, how much time do you spend studying each week relative to the number of credit hours you are taking? Assume each credit hour equals one hour of studying per week. many more hours studying than the credit hours / a few more hours studying than the credit hours / the same number of hours studying as the credit hours / a few less hours studying than the credit hours / a lot less hours studying than the credit hours / not applicable

42. How much of a financial strain is it for you to purchase the essential resources you need for courses such as books and supplies?

very large strain / somewhat of a strain / neutral / a little strain / hardly any strain at all / not applicable

43. When you are waiting for a submitted assignment to be graded, how assured do you feel that the work you have done is acceptable?

very assured / somewhat assured / neutral / somewhat unassured / very unassured / not applicable

44. How much do other aspects of your life suffer because you are a college student?

very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable

45. How often do you arrive late for classes, meetings, and other college events?

very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable

46. How much time do you spend proofreading writing assignments before submitting them?

a lot / some / little / very little / none / not applicable

47. How much doubt do you have about being able to make the grades you want?

very much doubt / much doubt / some doubt / little doubt / very little doubt / not applicable

48. How would you rate the academic advisement you receive here?

excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor / not applicable

49. How would you rate the quality of the instruction you are receiving here?

excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor / not applicable

50. When you consider the benefits of having a college degree and the costs of earning it, how much would you say that the benefits outweigh the costs, if at all?

benefits far outweigh the costs / benefits somewhat outweigh the costs / benefits and costs are equal / costs somewhat outweigh the benefits / costs far outweigh the benefits / not applicable

51. How likely is it that you will reenroll here next semester?

very likely / somewhat likely / neutral / somewhat unlikely / very unlikely / not applicable

52. How likely is it you will earn a degree from here?

very likely / somewhat likely / neutral / somewhat unlikely / very unlikely / not applicable

53. How much does the cost of courses limit how many you take?

very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable

54. When you think about the advantages and disadvantages of attending this school, how much do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, or vice versa?

disadvantages far outweigh the advantages / disadvantages somewhat outweigh the advantages / disadvantages and advantages are equal / advantages somewhat outweigh the disadvantages / advantages far outweigh the disadvantages / not applicable

55. During the first class session, many instructors present students with an overview of the course. In general, how accurate have these previews been in forecasting what you actually experienced in these courses?

very accurate / somewhat accurate / neutral / somewhat inaccurate / very inaccurate / not applicable

56. How much do the instructors and the courses make you feel like you can do the work successfully?

very much / much / some / little / very little / not applicable

57. Based on your current financial situation, how inclined are you to work more hours per week than you want in order to pay bills?

very inclined / somewhat inclined / a little inclined / not very inclined / not at all inclined / not applicable

58. In general, when you receive evaluative feedback from instructors, how useful has it been in figuring out how to improve?

very useful / somewhat useful / neutral / not very useful / not at all useful / not applicable

59. On a typical day, how preoccupied are you with personal troubles?

very preoccupied / somewhat preoccupied / a little preoccupied / not very preoccupied / not at all preoccupied / not applicable

60. How fair are the tests at this school?

very unfair / somewhat unfair / neutral / somewhat fair / very fair / not applicable

61. The life of a college student typically has both positive and negative aspects. At this time, would you say that the positives outweigh the negatives, or vice versa?

positives far outweigh the negatives / positives somewhat outweigh the negatives / positives and negatives are equal / negatives somewhat outweigh the positives / negatives far outweigh the positives / not applicable

62. How clear have the instructors and syllabi usually been in detailing what you need to do in order to be successful in courses?

very unclear / somewhat unclear / neutral / somewhat clear / very clear / not applicable

63. On a typical day, how much do you worry about getting your work done on time?

very much / much / some / a little / very little / not applicable

64. Relative to what you expected when beginning college, how interesting have you found class sessions to be?

much less interesting / less interesting / about as interesting as expected / more interesting / much more interesting / not applicable

65. How much loyalty do you feel to this college, based on your experiences here?

very much loyalty / much loyalty / some loyalty / little loyalty / very little loyalty / not applicable

66. How often do you encounter course work that makes you wonder whether you can do it successfully?

very often / somewhat often / sometimes / rarely / very rarely / not applicable

67. If you are supposed to complete a reading assignment before the next class session, how likely are you to actually do it?

very likely / somewhat likely / neutral / somewhat unlikely / very unlikely / not

applicable

68. How good is your school performance relative to the expectations of your parents or others who are important to you?

far below their expectations / below their expectations / about what they expected / better than they expected / much better than they expected / not applicable

69. How organized are you in terms of keeping track of upcoming assignments and tests?

very organized / somewhat organized / neutral / somewhat disorganized / very disorganized / not applicable

### Scoring Instructions

The Student Experiences Form of the *CPQ* employs a 5-point Likert-type scale. A sixth option, "Not Applicable," is included for students who feel that a particular item does not pertain to them. Verbal labels for the response scales depend on the wording of the question. For example, a question that asks "how satisfied" students are uses a response scale with "Very Satisfied" and "Very Dissatisfied" as end pegs. Another question that asks "how much" students like something is answered with end pegs of "Very Much" and "Very Little." Depending on the content of the question, answers are converted to 5-point "favorability" scores, based on whether the response indicates something positive or negative about the student's college experience (-2 = very unfavorable, -1 = somewhat unfavorable, 0 = neutral, +1 = somewhat favorable, +2 = very favorable). Score each question using the scales below.

*Regular Scoring Items:* 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 56, 58, 61, 65, 67, 69

*Score these items this way:*

Response 1 = +2

Response 2 = +1

Response 3 = 0

Response 4 = -1

Response 5 = -2

\* Do not score "Not Applicable" items

*Reverse Scoring Items:* 4, 7, 9, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 27, 31, 34, 42, 44, 45, 47, 53, 54, 57, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66, 68

*Score these items this way:*

Response 1 = -2

Response 2 = -1

Response 3 = 0

Response 4 = +1

Response 5 = +2

\* Do not score "Not Applicable" items



**FACTORS:**

Academic Integration – 1, 12, 19, 26, 33, 39, 49

Academic Motivation – 6, 11, 15, 22, 29, 36, 41, 46

Academic Efficacy – 10, 24, 37, 43, 47

Financial Strain – 9, 14, 27, 42

Social Integration – 2, 13, 23, 28, 35, 40

Collegiate Stress – 4, 17, 31, 44

Advising – 5, 18, 32, 48

Degree Commitment – 3, 16, 25, 30, 38, 50

Institutional Commitment – 8, 21, 51, 52

Scholastic Conscientiousness – 7, 20, 34, 45

**CALCULATING FACTOR MEANS:**

1. Add up responses (from the +2 to -2 conversions) included in each factor
2. Add up total of Applicable Items (if student responded as Not Applicable, do not include this in the total).
3. Divide the Factor Total (Number from step 1) by the Applicable Items (Number from step 2).

**ITEMS THAT ARE NOT IN A FACTOR:**

A few of the items are not included in the factor scores. Either they are not statistically associated with any of the factors, or they are correlated with more than one factor, which makes them “complex” and ill-suited to be a measure of just one. However, they are included because the content is helpful to advisors.

**First-Year Supplement**

I took the class A&SC 111 – First-Year Seminar.

Y/N

I am enrolled in the fall 2013 semester.

Y/N

Response key for the following questions:

1 – Not at all

2 – Somewhat

3 – Significantly  
NA – Not Applicable

1. I knew how to effectively take notes.
2. I was familiar with the campus facilities.
3. I was familiar with campus resources available to me.
4. I can take good notes.
5. I manage my time well.
6. I know who my academic advisor is.
7. I am involved in a club and/or campus organization.
8. I set long and short-term goals for myself.
9. I feel comfortable talking to my professors outside of class.
10. I am confident in my major selection.
11. I know the importance of health and wellness.
12. I know how to manage my stress.
13. I feel more connected to the community.
14. I know how to keep a financial budget.
15. I know my strengths.
16. I rarely miss class.
17. I am prepared for my classes.
18. I attend campus athletic events.
19. I use specific strategies to study effectively.
20. My academic advisor helped me in choosing my classes.

APPENDIX C  
Second Phase Interview Questions

**Retention**

1. Describe your overall experience at Central Mountain State University.
2. Please describe your involvement in extracurricular activities.
3. Please explain the interactions you had with faculty.
4. Please explain why you decided to withdraw from Central Mountain State University, if applicable.
5. Please explain why you will continue to pursue your degree at Central Mountain State University, if applicable.

**First-Year Seminar**

6. Please explain the effect, if any, A&SC 111 – First-Year Seminar had on your success in college, if applicable.
7. Please describe how the topics covered in A&SC 111 have helped you in college, if applicable.
8. What else should I be asking about?

APPENDIX D  
Informed Consent Forms

**Informed Consent – Phase One – Quantitative**

I authorize Kurt Laudicina, M.S., a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Monica Goodale at Pepperdine University, to include me in the research project entitled “Helping Students Succeed in College: The Role of a First-Year Seminar”. This project is being conducted to satisfy the requirements for the degree of doctor of education in learning technologies. I understand my participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

I have been asked to participate in a research project that is designed to study the affect of a first-year seminar on the retention rate at Central Mountain State University. The study will require 40–45 minutes to complete.

I have been asked to participate in this study because I was a traditional freshman student at Central Mountain State University in the fall of 2012. A traditional freshman student is between the ages of 18–24.

I will be asked to complete a web-based survey that will provide answers about my first year at the school.

I understand that my responses and all data will be confidential if I do decide to participate in this study. The recorded responses will be used for research only and will be stored on a secure, web-based survey platform. Data will also be stored on the researchers password-protected computer, in a password-protected secure file.

The potential risks of participating in this study may include a breach of confidentiality, embarrassment, or discomfort. A secure system is used for data collection. Identification numbers, addresses, and telephone numbers will not be collected to minimize a confidentiality breach. In certain instances, participants may volunteer their phone numbers for a follow-up interview. To further avoid this risk, the software used to collect data, the researchers computer, and data files are password protected. In addition, Internet provider (IP) addresses are not stored. In order to minimize the risk of discomfort, participants are welcomed to not respond to questions they do not feel comfortable with.

I understand there is no direct benefit from the participation in this study, however, the benefits to the university and upcoming freshmen classes include feedback to better help the future delivery of the seminar.

I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or withdraw from, the study at any time without prejudice to my relationship with Central Mountain State University. In no way will my refusal to participate or my withdrawal from the study have any impact on my class standing, my grades, or my relationship with Central Mountain State University. I also have the right to refuse to answer any question I choose not to answer. I also understand that there might be times that the investigator may find it necessary to end my study participation.

I understand that no information gathered from my study participation will be release to others without my permission, unless the law requires such a disclosure.

I understand that no information gathered from my study participation will be released to others without my permission, or as required by law. Under California law, an exception to the privilege of confidentiality includes but is not limited to the alleged or probable abuse of a child, physical abuse of an elder or a dependent adult, or if a person indicates she or he wishes to do serious harm to self, others, or property.

If the findings of the study are published or presented to a professional audience, no personally identifying information will be released. The collected data will be stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer to which only the investigator will have access. The data will be maintained in a secure manner for three years at which time the data will be destroyed.

I understand that I can choose to be placed in a drawing for \$25 gift card to Amazon.com for completing the web-based survey. If I choose to withdraw from the study, or I must end my study participation through no fault of my mine, I will not be entered into the drawing.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding the study procedures, I can contact Kurt Laudicina at \_\_\_\_\_ or at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to get answers to my questions. If I have further questions, I may contact Dr. Monica Goodale at \_\_\_\_\_ or (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If I have further questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact Dr. Thema S. Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, at \_\_\_\_\_ or at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

I understand to my satisfaction the information in the consent form regarding my participation in the research project. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read and understand this informed consent form. By clicking I agree below, I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

### **Informed Consent – Phase Two – Qualitative**

I authorize Kurt Laudicina, M.S., a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Monica Goodale at Pepperdine University, to include me in the research project entitled “Helping Students Succeed in College: The Role of a First-Year Seminar”. This project is being conducted to satisfy the requirements for the degree of doctor of education in learning technologies. I understand my participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

I have been asked to participate in a research project that is designed to study the affect of a first-year seminar on the retention rate at Central Mountain State University. The study will require 30–35 minutes to complete.

I have been asked to participate in this study because I was a traditional freshman student at Central Mountain State University in the fall of 2012. A traditional freshman student is between the ages of 18–24.

I will be asked to complete a web-based survey that will provide answers about my first year at the school.

I understand that my responses and all data will be confidential if I do decide to participate in this study. The recorded responses will be used for research only and will be stored on a secure, web-based platform. Data will also be stored on the researchers password-protected computer, in a password-protected secure file.

The potential risks of participating in this study may include a breach of confidentiality, embarrassment, or discomfort. A secure system is used for data collection. Identification numbers, addresses, and telephone numbers will not be collected to minimize a confidentiality breach. In certain instances, participants may volunteer their phone numbers for a follow-up interview. To further avoid this risk, the software used to collect data, the researchers computer, and data files are password protected. In addition, Internet provider (IP) addresses are not stored. In order to minimize the risk of discomfort, participants are welcomed to not respond to questions they do not feel comfortable with.

I understand there is no direct benefit from the participation in this study, however, the benefits to the university and upcoming freshmen classes include feedback to better help the future delivery of the seminar.

I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or withdraw from, the study at any time without prejudice to my relationship with Central Mountain State University. In no way will my refusal to participate or my withdrawal from the study have any impact on my class standing, my grades, or my relationship with Central Mountain State University. I also have the right to refuse to answer any question I choose not to answer. I also understand that there might be times that the investigator may find it necessary to end my study participation.

I understand that no information gathered from my study participation will be release to others without my permission, unless the law requires such a disclosure.

I understand that no information gathered from my study participation will be released to others without my permission, or as required by law. Under California law, an exception to the privilege of confidentiality includes but is not limited to the alleged or probable abuse of a child, physical abuse of an elder or a dependent adult, or if a person indicates she or he wishes to do serious harm to self, others, or property.

If the findings of the study are published or presented to a professional audience, no personally identifying information will be released. The collected data will be stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer to which only the investigator will have access. The data will be maintained in a secure manner for three years at which time the data will be destroyed.

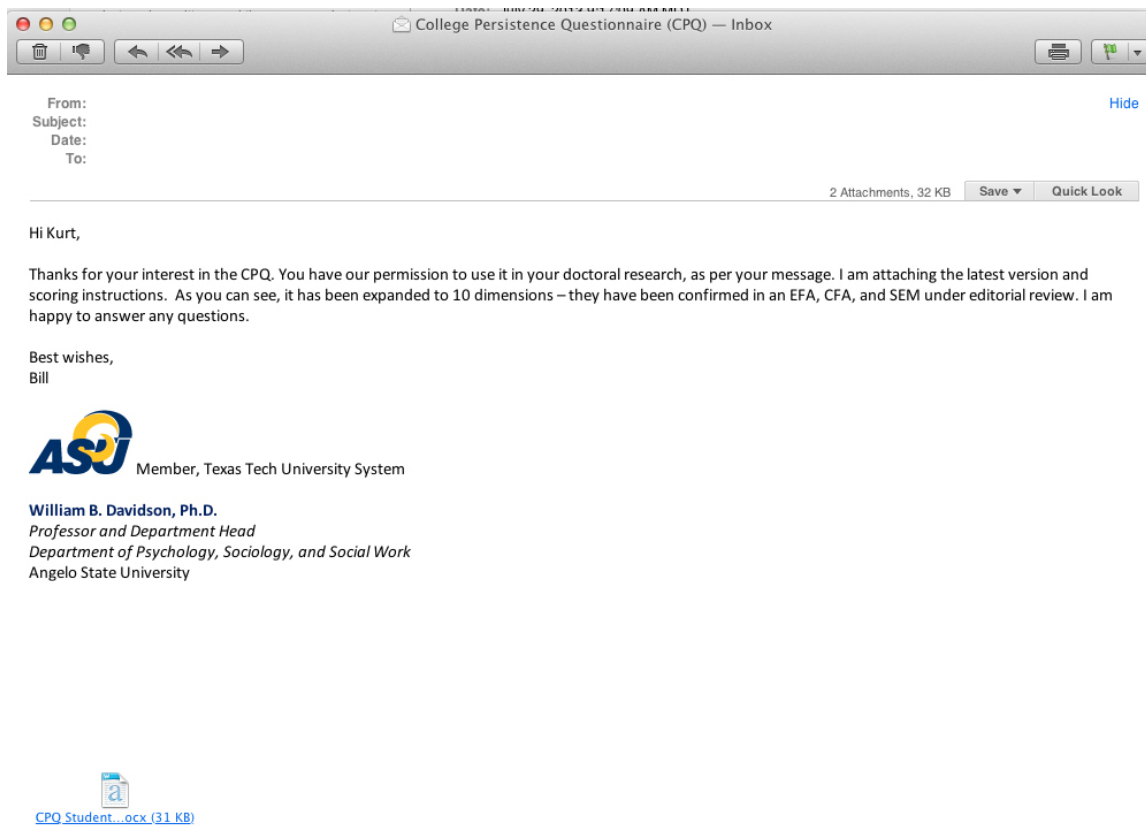
I understand that if I choose to be interviewed via telephone, my responses will be recorded for playback. I can choose to stop or resume recording at any time during the interview. All audio recordings will be maintained in a secure manner for three years at which time the data will be destroyed.

I understand that I can choose to be placed in a drawing for \$25 gift card to Amazon.com for completing the web-based or telephone interview. If I choose to withdraw from the study, or I must end my study participation through no fault of my mine, I will not be entered into the drawing.

I understand that if I have any questions regarding the study procedures, I can contact Kurt Laudicina at \_\_\_\_\_ or at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to get answers to my questions. If I have further questions, I may contact Dr. Monica Goodale at \_\_\_\_\_ or (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If I have further questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact Dr. Thema S. Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, at \_\_\_\_\_ or at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

I understand to my satisfaction the information in the consent form regarding my participation in the research project. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read and understand this informed consent form. By clicking I agree below, I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

## APPENDIX E CPQ Permission





## APPENDIX F Table Permission

**From:**  
**Subject:**  
**Date:** August 19, 2013 11:20:29 AM MDT  
**To:** Laudicina, Kurt (student)

[Hide](#)



Good Morning,

Thank you for your inquiry. All publications, articles, most presentations, etc., are free and available to the general public, private and public institutions, non-profit entities, corporations, and/or any other interested party. You thereby have permission by Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to utilize information available from the website <http://www.wiche.edu> or associated hard cover publications. In addition, please consider this correspondence permission to reference any other articles, publications, newsletters, and any other informational literature, past and present, published by Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

One of WICHE's core missions is to provide educators, policymakers, legislators and other interested parties with the hard data and issues oriented analysis that will help them shape higher education's future. Most of our publications are free of charge, and we encourage sharing our publications to spread information and awareness of issues important to higher education. Please note that our latest edition of TUITION AND FEES IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE WEST will be released sometime in November, 2013.

Thank you, and feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Kindest Regards,

---

Cheryl Graves  
Administrative Assistant III  
Policy Analysis and Research

Email message:  
Good afternoon,

My name is Kurt Laudicina and I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University studying Learning Technologies. I am currently working on my dissertation and I have a section discussing tuition and fees at universities. I am seeking permission to reproduce Table 1a on page 1 in TUITION AND FEES IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE WEST 2012-2013 in my dissertation. Appropriate credit will be given.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kurt Laudicina

The results of this submission may be viewed at:  
<http://www.wiche.edu/node/12735/submission/6321>

## APPENDIX G

### Permission for Study

**Cheri**  
 To: Laudicina, Kurt  
 RE: Permission for Study

November 1, 2013 8:49 AM

Good morning Kurt,

I have verified that we are able to get you the requested data for your study and confirming that you will be permitted to contact the students if IRB approves. I presume part of your process both for IRB and with the student participants will be an informed consent.

It has been our protocol to request a copy of the approved paperwork before releasing the data. Do you have a sense of timeline so we can be sure to get you the information in a timely manner once approved ?

Also, generally for the benefit of the campus when you're using institutional data, we have asked for an opportunity to have you present your findings – are you open to that ?

Cheri,

---

**From:** Laudicina, Kurt (student) [mailto:Kurt.Laudicina@pepperdine.edu]  
**Sent:** Friday, October 25, 2013 1:09 PM  
**To:** Cheri  
**Subject:** Permission for Study

Hi Cheri,

I spoke with Tammi and she suggested I start with you. I want to conduct a sequential explanatory mixed methods study to answer the research question, "How does the first-year seminar course affect the retention rate of first time, traditional aged freshman?"

Target population: Traditional aged freshman students enrolled in the fall 2012 semester at

I plan on distributing a web-based self-completion questionnaire for the first quantitative phase. Students will receive two emails during this time. The first email will inform them of their selection for the study. The second email will remind them to complete the survey if they have not done so after one week. The first phase should take about 35-45 minutes to complete. The second, qualitative phase will involve web-based interviews with volunteers from the each sample strata.

The surveys will be administered via Qualtrics software. I will be the only person to have access to the data held in Qualtrics. Data stored in Qualtrics is secure as the platform offers Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption (HTTPS), password protection, and HTTP referrer checking. The data is hosted offsite at third party SAS 70 certified data centers. The user of the platform controls the permissions of the accounts and surveys. All Qualtrics accounts are password protected and data is replicated in real-time to ensure security. Exported data will be in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer. Data will remain confidential. No identifiers will be used in the reporting of the data.

I am using a stratified random sample and would be splitting the sample up into four different strata. The four strata are as follows:

- Traditional aged freshmen that enrolled in the fall of 2013 that completed the first-year seminar
- Traditional aged freshmen that did not enroll in the fall of 2013 that completed the first-year seminar
- Traditional aged freshmen that enrolled in the fall of 2013 that did not complete the first-year seminar
- Traditional aged freshmen that did not enroll in the fall of 2013 that did not complete the first-year seminar

The data I would need from the university would include student names, email addresses, and which strata from above they would fit in.

I will be seeking IRB approval from both and Pepperdine University. I am seeking permission to get the data needed from the university in order to conduct the study as well as permission to contact these students.

Please let me know if you have further questions or if there is additional information I can provide.

Sincerely,  
 Kurt Laudicina

APPENDIX H  
IRB Approval

# PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

## Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

December 18, 2013

Kurt Laudicina

Protocol #: E1113D04

Project Title: Helping Students Succeed in College: The Role of the First-Year Seminar

Dear Mr. Laudicina:

Thank you for submitting your application, *Helping Students Succeed in College: The Role of the First-Year Seminar*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Monica Goodale, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

**Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101**, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

In addition, your application to waive documentation of consent, as indicated in your **Application for Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent Procedures** form has been **approved**.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an



unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Michelle Blas, Director of Student Success at [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu). On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,



Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.  
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives  
Ms. Alexandra Roosa, Director Research and Sponsored Programs  
Dr. Monica Goodale, Faculty Chair

Institutional Review Board #1  
(IRB00001622)

Wednesday, January 15, 2014

TO: Kurt Laudicina

FROM: Mark Hardt  
Chair,

IRB

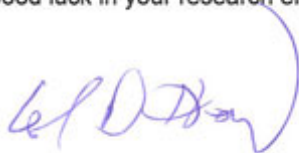


RE: IRB 14-031

Your research protocols have been received by the IRB. Due to the nature and design of the proposed study, it has received an EXPEDITED REVIEW. Everything appears to be in order with your protocol and approval is granted for the study as it has been described.

Please be aware that no modifications can be made without further review. This approval is valid for one year from date of approval; you may apply for a six (6) month extension if necessary prior to that deadline.

Good luck in your research endeavors.



cc: David McGinnis, Cindy Bell