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# First-Year Seminars and Student Expectations: A Correlational Study of Retention and Success

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First-Year Seminars and Student Expectations: A Correlational Study of  
Retention and Success

by

Cynthia Edwards

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in  
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College of Education  
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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Radford Janssens, an outstanding statistics instructor, amazing teacher, and my wonderful husband. Your patience, support, and unconditional love made this work possible. You are my perfect partner.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Research Design.....	8
Significance of Study.....	9
Limitations.....	10
Delimitations.....	10
Definition of Terms.....	10
Organization of the Study.....	12
Chapter 2: Review of Literature.....	14
Involvement and Motivation Theories.....	14
Astin's theory of student involvement.....	15
Expectancy-value theory.....	16
Student Engagement.....	18
Behavioral engagement.....	19
Emotional engagement.....	20
Cognitive engagement.....	20
Student Expectations.....	21
First-Year Seminars.....	24
A brief history.....	25
Purpose of first-year seminars.....	26
First-year seminar models.....	27
Effectiveness of first-year seminars on student success.....	29
First-year seminar at USFSP.....	33
Measuring First-year Expectations.....	35
Summary.....	37
Chapter 3: Methods.....	38
Research Design.....	38
Population and Sample.....	39

Variables .....	40
Independent variables.....	40
Dependent variables.....	41
Instrument.....	41
Reliability and validity of data source.....	42
Data Collection .....	46
Data Analysis.....	47
Summary .....	49
Chapter 4: Results.....	50
Characteristics of Samples.....	51
Research Question 1 .....	53
Research Question 2.....	54
Research Question 3.....	55
Research Question 4.....	588
Summary .....	61
Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations .....	64
Summary .....	64
Conclusions.....	66
Implications.....	68
Recommendations for Further Research.....	71
Concluding Remarks .....	73
References.....	75
Appendices .....	86
Appendix A: Permission to Use Institutional Data.....	87
Appendix B: USFSP University Success Syllabus.....	88
Appendix C: 2014 Paper Version of the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement .....	95
Appendix D: Copyright Permission to Include Copy of Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and BCSSE Scales.....	99
Appendix E: USFSP Orientation Letter to Students Taking the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement.....	100
About the Author .....	End Page

## List of Tables

Table 1 The Nine BCSSE Scales and Corresponding Survey Items.....	43
Table 2 Predictors of Retention for Summer Admits Based on High School GPA, First-Year Seminar Completion, and BCSSE Scale Scores.....	57
Table 3 Predictors of Retention for Fall Admits Based on High School GPA, First-Year Seminar Completion, and BCSSE Scale Scores .....	59
Table 4 Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of Institutional GPA for Summer Admits.....	61
Table 5 Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of Institutional GPA for Fall Admits.....	62

## Abstract

Performance-based funding is becoming the norm in higher education. High-impact practices like first-year seminars hold promise for improving some of the key metrics in the funding model, such as first-year retention rate and first-year institutional GPA.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of retention rate and institutional GPA between first-time-in-college (FTIC) students who completed a first-year seminar and those who did not. Additional data regarding pre-college experiences and expectations for college were investigated to gain insight into retention and academic success behaviors of FTIC students. Three years of data including institutional Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) scores, high school GPAs, enrollment data, and student grades were collected. Due to a significant difference in high school GPA between summer and fall admits, all analyses were conducted separately for each group.

For both summer and fall admits, results from the chi-square tests of homogeneity and independent samples *t* tests indicated no significant difference in retention rates or mean institutional GPA between FTIC students who completed a first-year seminar and those who did not. Logistic and multiple linear regression tests were conducted to determine whether FTIC student retention and institutional GPA could be predicted by pre-college experience and expectations as measured by the BCSSE. For fall admits only, two of the nine BCSSE scales, expected academic perseverance and



perceived academic preparation were significant predictors for retention. For predicting institutional GPA, summer and fall admits shared two significant predictors from the BCSSE: high school learning strategies and importance of campus environment. For fall admits only, there were three additional significant predictors: high school quantitative reasoning, expected collaborative learning, and perceived academic preparation.

The results of this study may encourage higher education institutions to consider assessment of their own first-year seminars. The impact of a first-year seminar may be improved by developing curriculum that addresses the skills, experience, and expectations unique to each institution's first-year students.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*Institutions cannot change who students are when they start college. But with the right assessment tools, colleges can identify areas where improvements in teaching and learning will increase the chances that their students attain their educational and personal goals. (Kuh, 2009, p. 14)*

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2014), “of all students who started college in fall 2012, 68.7 percent returned to college at any U.S. institution in fall 2013, and 58.2 percent returned to the same institution” (“Persistence Rates Slip,” para. 2). In other words, nearly 42% of first-year students do not enroll the following fall at their original institution, and over 30% do not return to higher education at all. Over the past three decades, higher education researchers in the United States and abroad have expended great amounts of time and effort developing and designing programming and initiatives to help abate the attrition of first-year students and encourage their retention and success (Baars & Arnold, 2014; Barefoot, 2000; Crisp et al., 2009; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001).

One may ask, “What is so important about this group of students? Why are they so special?” A rather pragmatic answer might be that they are the monetary lifeblood of many state and public universities in the United States, as first-year and first-time-in-college (FTIC) retention and graduation rates have become popular metrics in state and federal funding models (State University System of Florida, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Zusman, 2005). Beyond the indispensability of direct institutional

funding, strong FTIC retention rates factor into lucrative college rankings and program accreditation requirements (Howard, 2016; Morse, Brooks, & Mason, 2017; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2012).

Retaining first-year students has spurred colleges and universities to develop numerous programs and services aimed at engagement and retention. The most educationally effective are referred to as *high-impact practices*, which Kuh (2007) defines as those that “make a claim on student time and energy in ways that channel student effort toward productive activities and deeper learning” (p. 7). Research behind these efforts has examined numerous factors that are associated with student persistence and retention. The range of factors comprises not only academic aspects such as ability and skill level, but psychosocial and affective influencers as well (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005). Ideally, colleges and universities could identify these factors before their FTIC students stepped foot in class.

A type of tool used to learn more about pre-matriculating students is surveys such as the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) and the Beginning College Survey of Student Expectations (BCSSE). These surveys are typically administered to FTIC students over the summer during the orientation process, prior to starting the fall semester. Items on these surveys frequently ask students to report on activities associated with their high school behaviors such as how many hours they studied each week or how many hours they worked each week at a paid job.

Researchers have found that students’ behaviors in high school can be indicative of their behaviors in college, especially during their first year (Astin & Lee, 2003; Cole, Kennedy, & Ben-Avie, 2009; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005).

As the survey names suggest, these instruments also collect feedback on FTIC student expectations for their first year of college. Students are queried on topics such as how much time they anticipate preparing for class, participating in co-curricular activities, or interacting with faculty (BCSSE, 2018b). In studies that compared students' pre-matriculation expectations to their actual behaviors over the course of their first year in college researchers found that there were discrepancies between expectations and actualities (Crisp et al., 2009; Kuh, 2005a; Schilling & Schilling, 2005; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). An analysis of the 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) revealed that "three-fifths [of students] expected to spend more than fifteen hours a week studying, but only two-fifths did so. . . . Even so, nine out of ten first-year students expected to earn grades of B or better" (Kuh, 2007, p. 6).

Some researchers have found areas where students' expectations do align with their experiences. Kuh et al. (2005) reported that first-year students with high expectations tend to avail themselves of these expectations in terms of engaging in academically purposeful activities. Likewise, Könings, Brand-Gruwel, van Merriënboer, and Broers (2008) found that first-year students' expectations of dissatisfaction were positively related to actual dissatisfaction during their first year of college.

Könings et al. (2008) recommended that "if at all possible, disappointing perceptions [expectations of dissatisfaction] should be prevented" (p. 547) through careful and deliberate preparation of students. Programming that helps align students' pre-matriculation expectations with what they are likely to experience during their first year can improve their overall satisfaction with college leading to higher retention rates and improved academic performance (Howard, 2005; Moneta & Kuh, 2005).

Among such programming is the high-impact practice of the first-year seminar. It is designed to help incoming students transition academically and socially into higher education. Barefoot (2000) described six primary objectives of first-year programs:

a) Increasing student-to-student interaction, b) Increasing faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class, c) Increasing student involvement and time on campus, d) Linking the curriculum and the co-curriculum, e) Increasing academic expectations and levels of academic engagement, and f) Assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. (p. 14)

Hunter and Linder (2005) tout the first-year seminar as “a celebrated approach employed by institutions of all types in their efforts to ease the transition to college for new students and systematically address unacceptable rates of student attrition” (p. 275). First-year seminars take on many different formats and their focuses vary based on the institution’s primary concerns for its first-year students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While ample in size, the body of literature on first-year seminars is inconclusive on whether these courses improve retention or academic success. Assessments of first-year seminars have been fraught with inconsistencies and poor analytical methods. What is notably lacking in the literature on first-year seminars is research into how pre-matriculation survey data can be used to identify characteristics and expectations of students who take the course and those who do not. In an effort to make an informed recommendation to a university committee regarding its nascent first-year program, it is the hope that this research might provide a thoughtful assessment of its program and generate new insight into which FTIC populations, based on their BCSSE scores, may be best served by the course.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the study explored the relationship of retention rate and institutional first-year GPA between FTIC students who completed a first-year seminar and those who do not. Secondly, this study investigated whether factors such as high school learning experiences and expectations for college (as measured by the BCSSE), high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar could predict retention and institutional first-year GPA.

Traditional FTIC students entering higher education are at the cusp of what developmental researchers would refer to as the first phase or stage of adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1959; Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1986). Levinson (1986) named this period *early adulthood*. This period is marked by the conflicting desire to become fully independent adults while at the same time wanting to conform to society's expectations, to *fit in*. The literature on first-year seminars states that one of the purposes of these first-year programs is to help FTIC students make smoother transitions to their new role as college students and adults.

Historically, higher education has been modeled around the teaching of adults, with longer class periods, a heavy reading load, and the expectation that the majority of work would be done outside of the classroom. College courses are designed for adult learners. As Merriam (1984) noted:

Probably the best developed theoretical link between adult development and learning can be found in the assumptions underlying andragogy. . . . The assumptions upon which andragogy is based posit the adult as self-directing, independent, and defined by an accumulation of unique, personal experiences. (p. 27)

In this sense, colleges expect their students to be adult learners. However, very few FTIC students enter their first semester of college with the expectation that their academic success hinges on their ability to be self-directed, autonomous learners. There is a hazardous misalignment between student and institutional expectations for success. Crisp et al. (2009) surmised that institutions of higher education wanting to improve student retention rates needed “better alignment between student expectations and the reality of the first-year experience” (p. 14). If alignment of expectations can be accomplished through a first-year seminar, then it may be likely that FTIC students who complete the seminar will have higher retention rates and institutional GPAs than their peers who do not take the course.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year retention rates between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?
2. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year institutional GPAs between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?
3. For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict student retention?

4. For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict institutional first-year GPA?

### **Conceptual Framework**

A single conceptual or theoretical framework was insufficient to frame the scope of this study. Instead, two theories direct this research. The first was Astin's (1999) student involvement theory, which posits that active engagement in the academic experience enhances student learning. Astin (1999) defined involvement as "the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that the students invest in the college experience" (p. 528). He also emphasized that what students feel or think has less of a role in determining involvement than what students do or how they behave (Astin, 1999). The student involvement theory supports current research in the field of student engagement (Kahu, 2013; Kuh, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) that is driving high-impact practices such as first-year seminars.

The second theory guiding this study was the expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Oxford and Shearin (1994) classify the expectancy-value theory as an *instrumentality* motivational theory that "emphasize[s] cognition and the process by which an individual answers the question, 'Should I expend the energy or not?'" (p.18). A student's choice to act reflects the relative costs associated with a task and the likelihood of success. Student expectancies and values of college are associated with task-specific beliefs such as ability, perceived difficulty, personal goals, and affective memories (Eccles et al. 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Components of the expectancy-value theory are



strongly reflected in the BCSSE questions such as, “What do you expect most of your grades will be during the coming year?” and how confident students feel that they will be able to “Finish something you have started when you encounter challenges?” (BCSSE [Measurement instrument], 2014).

This study viewed the first-year seminar as a potential means to engage FTIC students in their new academic environment. The study also considered the possibility that incoming students carry with them a set of expectations for themselves and the institution, and within those expectations may be keys to who persists and succeeds and who does not. The two theoretical frameworks, student involvement theory and expectancy-value theory, addressed constructs of student success that are presumed to be malleable, such as engagement, self-efficacy, and expectations (Fredricks et al., 2004).

### **Research Design**

This study used pre-existing data collected from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and institutional data including enrollment information and grade point averages obtained from the Institutional Research Office at University of South Florida St. Petersburg (USFSP). See Appendix A for a copy of the permission letter for use of this data. The samples for this study were FTIC students at USFSP who enrolled for Fall 2014, Fall 2015, and Fall 2016 and who completed the BCSSE prior to starting their respective fall term. USFSP is a part of the larger University of South Florida system, which includes USF Tampa and USF Sarasota-Manatee. All three campuses are separately accredited. USFSP is a small, metropolitan campus located in downtown St. Petersburg. It serves approximately 4,700 students with 24

Bachelor's programs and 17 Master's programs. The FTIC student has an average high school GPA of 3.79, an average SAT score of 1142, and an average ACT score of 26 (University of South Florida [USF] Office of Decision Support, 2016).

### **Significance of Study**

The literature on the first-year student experience touts the first-year seminar as a high-impact practice, and Barefoot (2005) noted that “80 percent of four-year and 62 percent of all two-year institutions” (p. 56) offer some type of first-year seminar. Even though this course is highly prevalent in higher education as a program designed to assist first-year students persist and succeed, researchers have asserted that evidence of its effectiveness is unclear at best (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). The lack of clarity as to whether first-year seminars are effective in improving retention and academic success partially stems from a lack of rigorous assessment of these programs. In a national survey of over 800 higher education institutions that offered a first-year seminar, Tobolowsky and Associates (2008) reported that “only 60.2% of all participating institutions stated that they had done a formal assessment or evaluation of their seminar since 2003. Student course evaluations were the most common form of assessment” (p. 87).

The reality is that first-year seminars are a substantial financial investment for an institution. Colleges and universities are willing to fund these programs because they believe that they will improve FTIC student retention and academic success, two key metrics in the performance-based funding model. Without knowing the effectiveness of their first-year seminars concerning these metrics, institutions could be risking the loss of state and federal funding. This study offered a process by which higher education

institutions can formally assess their current first-year seminars, identify the unique expectations of their incoming FTIC cohorts, and combine those two pieces to provide targeted intervention and support for FTIC students.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations of this study. First, this study only addressed student data for USFSP, strongly restricting the generalizability of its findings. Secondly, the study used pre-existing data from the BCSSE instrument, which is comprised of self-reported data acquired during the orientation process. Instruments such as the BCSSE purport to measure incoming first-year students' expectations on topics such as engagement in collaborative learning, academic perseverance, and academic preparation. Students may have responded to the survey with answers they believed were expected or socially acceptable. It is also possible that students did not put adequate thought into their responses. A final limitation of his study was the use of pre-existing data that the researcher was not involved in collecting or compiling.

### **Delimitations**

This study only considered FTIC students from three USFSP cohorts who took the BCSSE in the summers of 2014 through 2016 and were enrolled in the respective fall semesters. This delimitation minimizes the generalizability of the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions of terms are used.

**Academic success.** Measured here as improvement in GPA.

**Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE).** This instrument “measures entering first-year students’ high school academic and co-curricular

experience as well as their expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during the first year of college” (Cole & Dong, n.d., p. 1).

**Engagement.** Participation in “educationally purposeful activities” (Kuh, 2005a, p. 87).

**Expectations.** Beliefs and anticipations FTIC students bring with them regarding what they think they will experience while at college. These beliefs “serve as a filter, or screening mechanism, through which students evaluate and make sense of the information they are presented . . . inside and outside the classroom” (Kuh et al., 2005a, p. 34).

**Fall admits.** This term refers to USFSP FTIC students who started college in the fall term.

**First-Time-in-College (FTIC) Student.** This study used the Florida Board of Governors’ definition of an FTIC is “a student who has never attended a postsecondary college or university or who has attended an institution and earned less than twelve (12) semester credit hours of academic credit after high school graduation” (State University System of Florida, “First-Time-in-College Students”, 2014, para. 1).

**First-year seminar.** A first-year seminar is “centered on and concerned with the individual needs of entering students, as well as their expectations of the particular institution . . . [and] aims to assist students in their academic and social development and in their transition to college” (Hunter & Linder, 2005, p. 275). For this study, the first-year seminar is a 3-credit hour elective course.

**Institutional GPA.** For the purposes of this study, the institutional GPA was the cumulative GPA of USFSP courses at the end of spring semester of the students' first year in college.

**Pre-matriculation.** Describes the period of time prior to enrollment as an FTIC at an institution of higher education.

**Retention.** Enrollment from term to term, semester to semester, particularly between freshman and sophomore year. For this study, retention referred specifically to FTIC students who enrolled in college full-time in the summer or fall semester and returned to the same school the following fall semester.

**Retention rate.** This is the percentage of FTIC students who enrolled full-time in the summer or fall semester and returned to the same school the following fall.

**Summer admits.** This term refers to USFSP FTIC students who started college in the summer term.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study, the statement of the problem, a discussion of the purpose of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, and research design. This is followed by the significance of the study, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and a section defining relevant terms. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to this research including the following topics: involvement and motivation theories, including engagement and expectations; characteristics of first-year seminars and their role in retention and academic success; and a review of several instruments used to measure student expectations. Chapter 3 presents the research methods of the study including the

research sample, instrumentation, process of data collection, and the data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents a summary of the analysis and results of the research, and Chapter 5 explores the implications for practice as well as recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the study explored the relationship of retention rate and institutional first-year GPA between FTIC students who completed a first-year seminar and those who do not. Secondly, this study investigated whether factors such as FTIC student high school learning experiences and expectations for college (as measured by the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement), high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar could predict retention and institutional first-year GPA.

The relevant literature related to this research is presented in several sections. First, research on involvement and motivation theories are discussed, including engagement and student expectations. The second section addresses the literature on the role of the first-year seminar in student success and retention. Also addressed are various programmatic models of first-year seminars. The last section provides a review of instruments designed to measure pre-college engagement and expectations of first-year students, specifically the Freshman Survey, the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ), and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE).

#### **Involvement and Motivation Theories**

This study considered the first-year seminar as a potential means to engage first-year students in their new academic environment. The study also considered the

possibility that incoming students carry with them a set of expectations for themselves and the institution and within those expectations may be predictors of who persists and who does not. Theories of student involvement and motivation are of interest to this study as research has indicated that external factors can influence student involvement and certain aspects of motivation such as expectancy and value (Astin, 1984; Fredricks et al., 2004; Pintrich & Zusho, 2007). Kuh (2005a) claims that institutional policies and programs, like first-year seminars, can serve as external factors that help align student involvement behavior and expectations more closely with those of the institution.

**Astin's theory of student involvement.** According to Milem and Berger (1997), Astin's theory of student involvement is among the most frequently cited research in the field of student development in higher education. Astin's interest in student development and specifically the effects of involvement on that development began with his early research on college persistence (Astin, 1984).

Serving as the director of the American Council on Education, Astin (1977) led one of the largest longitudinal studies of American postsecondary education, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). The CIRP survey was administered to "some 200,000 students and a national sample of more than 300 postsecondary institutions of all types" (Astin, 1977, p. 3). The survey addressed more than 80 factors associated with student perception of the college experience such as "attitudes, values, behavior, achievement, career development, and satisfaction" (Astin, 1977, p. 4). Entering freshmen completed the survey that included two item types:

(1) pretests on possible outcome measures [e.g. dropping out, going to graduate school, or participating in extracurricular activities] and (2) personal characteristics (age, race, educational background, and so forth) that might affect the propensity to change or to attain certain outcomes. (Astin, 1977, p. 13)



Students received follow-up surveys four years later. The analysis of the data sought to explain the effect of college on “students’ personal, social, and vocational development” (Astin, 1977, p. 2). Astin (1977) found that student development was related to several factors such as the student’s entering characteristics, the type of college (private, public, two-year, four-year, etc.), and the student’s level of involvement in college. Of these factors, student involvement had the greatest impact on development (Astin, 1977).

Defined as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 297), involvement emphasizes the importance of the behavioral aspects of involvement over the motivational ones. Of the theory of involvement’s five postulates, the last two are of particular interest to the outcomes of student learning within higher education. They are:

- The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
- The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (Astin, 1984, p. 298)

In other words, according to Astin (1984), colleges and universities can only expect to impact student development by ensuring that the institutional environment, both in and outside of the classroom, necessitates student involvement. This theory pairs well with the design and purpose of the first-year seminar initiatives that seek to retain first-year students.

**Expectancy-value theory.** Within the broader body of research on achievement motivation resides the expectancy-value theory. Theorists from this tradition see motivation to achieve as stemming from two main constructs, expectancy and value.

According to Atkinson (1957), these two constructs answer the motivational questions of why someone makes a particular choice and how much energy he or she will commit to the choice.

Atkinson's (1957) theoretical model defines expectancy as "a cognitive anticipation, usually aroused by cues in a situation, that performance of some act will be followed by a particular consequence" (p. 360). Expectancy's strength can be expressed as the probability of attaining the anticipated consequence or incentive (Atkinson, 1975). In a later model of the theory, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) described expectancy as an ability belief comprised of two key factors: self-concept and task difficulty.

According to Pajares (2003), the self-concept belief mirrors Bandura's social cognitive construct, self-efficacy. Bandura (2004) stated that "efficacy beliefs determine goals and aspirations; they shape the outcomes people expect their efforts to produce; and determine how environmental facilitators and impediments are viewed" (p. 623). A vast body of research has correlated high self-concept beliefs and high self-efficacy with greater academic achievement (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Eccles et al., 1983; Gore, 2006; Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Murdock, 2013; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005).

The second construct of the expectancy-value theory addresses what Atkinson (1957) referred to as *incentives* or *values*, which represent the relative attractiveness or unattractiveness of an action's consequence. The attractiveness or unattractiveness of a consequence is tied to the value one places on it. Atkinson (1957) saw incentives as a motivational factor in two directions. If the incentive consequence was very attractive,

one would be more motivated to work towards it. Similarly, if the incentive consequence was extremely unattractive, one could be equally motivated to work hard to avoid it.

The modern model of the expectancy-value theory identifies four components of value: *attainment value* or importance; *intrinsic value* or enjoyment; *utility value* or usefulness; and *cost* (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In this model, cost encompasses the negative aspects of a choice, “such as performance anxiety and fear of failure and success, as well as the amount of effort needed to succeed and the lost opportunities that result from making one choice rather than another” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 120). Importance, enjoyment, usefulness, and cost are identified as social cognitive variables where societal influences play a role in their development (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

The expectancy-value theory is useful in understanding what students may anticipate from themselves and from their college and how these expectancies and values affect their choice of behavior, performance, persistence, and effort (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). For a higher education institution, being aware of the potential influence it has on its first-year students is central in creating educational environments that enhance student persistence and success (Astin, 1977; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Kinzie, Cogswell, & Wheatle, 2015).

### **Student Engagement**

Research on student engagement in higher education, particularly first-year student engagement, is a worldwide phenomenon, and student success and retention are of vital interest to colleges and universities across the globe (Baars & Arnold, 2014;

Clark & Cundiff, 2011; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Murray, Ireland, & Hackathorn, 2016; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). From Australia to The Netherlands to the United States, colleges and universities are studying how to better engage and retain first-year students (Baars & Arnold, 2014; Grayson, 1998; Könings, et al., 2008; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Higher education institutions are encouraged to offer more high-impact practices designed to “make a claim on student time and energy in ways that channel student effort toward productive activities and deeper learning” (Kuh, 2007, p. 7). These practices may include such things as first-year experience seminars, learning communities, and faculty mentor programs. These types of programming aim to engage students on multiple levels—behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Student engagement is an elusive goal because of the complex nature of this multidimensional construct, and in studying student engagement, it is helpful to understand its various parts (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013). While there are numerous aspects of engagement, the three domains addressed in this chapter are behavioral, emotional, and cognitive.

**Behavioral engagement.** Behavioral engagement refers to student conduct that promotes learning such as attendance, attention, participation, persistence, and studying (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students demonstrate behavioral engagement when they participate in “educationally purposeful activities” (Kuh, 2005, p. 87). As Chickering and Gamson (1987) pointed out nearly three decades ago, institutions of higher education can encourage behavioral engagement through programming that leads students to partake in academically focused activities beyond coursework. Examples of these programs are first-year seminars, tutoring, and supplemental instruction.

**Emotional engagement.** According to Fredricks et al. (2004), “*Emotional engagement* encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work” (p. 60). Including student emotions in the context of engagement emphasizes the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to learn (Kahu, 2013). In fact, there is considerable conceptual overlap between emotional engagement studies and motivational research, particularly in the areas of interest and value (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013). The expectancy-value theory incorporates variables such as enjoyment and importance. Students who are emotionally engaged in their learning are less likely to experience negative feelings such as anxiety, boredom, or apathy (Park, Holloway, Arendtsz, Bempechat, & Li, 2012).

**Cognitive engagement.** Cognitive engagement research looks at how students participate in learning including how invested they are in learning, the strategies they use, and their persistence in the face of challenging material (Fredricks et al., 2004). As with emotional engagement, the cognitive engagement construct borrows from other fields of research, like motivation theory and self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning (SRL) concerns itself primarily with the internal processes necessary to control one’s learning. Pintrich (2000) defined SRL as a construct that explains the degree to which students can regulate aspects of their thinking, motivation, and behavior during learning.

One of the fundamental elements of SRL is strategy use. Numerous studies have demonstrated that through direct instruction of SRL strategies, learners can improve their overall use of SRL (Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007; Pintrich, 2000;

Pintrich & Zusho, 2002). Many first-year seminar curricula incorporate lessons on learning strategies and how to apply them in college (Barefoot, 1992). Instructors teaching these courses are able to assist first-year students in developing such key learning strategies that they will need to be successful in college.

Ultimately, student engagement practices should address all three domains—behavioral, emotional, and cognitive—if not more. In doing so, colleges and universities can provide ample opportunities for students to become involved in and committed to their institutions and academic programs. However, developing programs and high-impact practices without guidance and insight into student wants and needs may not bring about the desired results. Aware of this, researchers who design instruments to measure student engagement like the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (Kuh & Pace, 1998), the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE, 2018a), and even the 1966 Student Information Form (Astin, Panos, & Creager, 1967) often include items that address student expectations.

### **Student Expectations**

The term *expectation* refers to a person's anticipated belief that something is likely to happen, and that belief is based on all of that person's past experiences; therefore, expectations heavily influence one's behavior (Howard, 2005). In school, a student acts in a manner consistent with her expectations for a desired outcome, such as studying for an exam to receive a good grade. However, when the outcome does not align with the expectation, (i.e., the student studies but does not earn an acceptable grade), the student experiences cognitive dissonance. On one hand, the student may reflect on the moment and determine different study habits would have been more

successful; thus, this unexpected outcome could alter her future behavior. On the other hand, if the student perceived the exam to be too difficult and the course too challenging, she may withdraw from the course or become otherwise disengaged. “Expectations serve as a filter through which students compare what is unfolding with what they think should happen. . . . Thus, what students expect shapes their behavior” (Kuh, 2005, p. 88). Expectations change with each new experience and are often situational or task-specific.

Miller (2005) observed that there has been “too little attention given to the subject [student expectations] and that the failure of higher educational institutions to understand student expectations has led to dissonance and, to some extent, failure” (p. xiii). Institutions that take the time to identify the gaps between their student expectations of college and their actual experiences, particularly during their first year, are better equipped to design programming that addresses, if not accommodates, the expectations and minimizes those gaps (Miller, Bender, Schuh, & Associates, 2005).

First-year students, typically freshly graduated from high school, arrive at college with academic expectations of the institution and of themselves. They have developed these personal academic expectations based on years of formal educational experiences. How students view their academic level of competence informs their expectations of how they will fare in college, but these expectations are not always accurate (Cole, Guidry, & Qi, 2010; Collins & Sims, 2006). High school students who excelled in advanced placement and dual-enrollment classes, garnered impressive weighted GPAs, and earned highly competitive college entrance exam scores, are often dismayed when faced with the challenging level of expectations that their new post-

secondary institutions have for them (Howard, 2005; Kuh, et al., 2005; Schilling & Schilling, 2005). Smith and Wertlieb (2005) concluded from their study of pre-business majors in their first year of college that “student expectations were not aligned with their academic and social experiences in the first year” (p. 160). Collins and Sims (2006) noted, “as a result [of the differences in expectations], students may overestimate their abilities relative to other students and underestimate the level of performance that is expected by their course professors” (p. 208). This dissonance can breed stress and feelings of dissatisfaction that can trigger unsuccessful learning behaviors and ultimately lead to stopping or dropping out (Howard, 2005; Schilling & Schilling, 2005).

The disconnect between student expectations for and experiences during their first year of college goes beyond the realm of just academic abilities. Students encounter similar discrepancies between their environmental and social expectations for college and what they actually experience (Moneta & Kuh, 2005; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Moneta and Kuh (2005) explain, “the physical or built environment can shape—for better or worse—students’ behavioral patterns and social choices” (p. 66). Whether a college campus is spread out over acres or compressed into several city blocks will determine the amount and types of social interactions students will have (Cole et al., 2009). The demographic population of a campus also promotes or prohibits socialization and social development. Even though the current cohort of college students is more diverse than ever (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), colleges that offer certain disciplines and majors tend to attract students with similar “dominant personality orientations” (Moneto & Kuh, 2005, p. 66). A first-year student leaning towards a marketing degree may not experience a satisfying level of social integration at a school



where engineering and science are the most popular majors. According to Moneto and Kuh (2005), an institution's environmental influences have a role in "shaping and responding to" student expectations (p. 65).

From a myriad of experiences, pre-matriculated first-year students formulate expectations for themselves and their institution. Some of those expectations relate to behaviors the students are accountable for, while other expectations fall on the institution to uphold. The closer the student expectations match the reality of the college experience, the more satisfied the student will be, thus increasing the likelihood of persisting through to graduation—a win for both student and institution. The first-year seminar is a conduit for potentially aligning incoming freshmen expectations and experiences.

### **First-Year Seminars**

While researching student attrition, Tinto (1982) reported that "rates of dropout from higher education have remained strikingly constant over the past 100 years . . . [and] have remained at about 45 percent" (p. 694). This fairly continuous rate of attrition between the years 1880 to 1980 occurred even though the number of students enrolled in higher education went from "less than eighty thousand first-time students" to nearly two million (Tinto, 1982, p. 694). Since the 1980s, the attrition rate in higher education has not improved much. What this suggests is that some degree of attrition is inevitable. Tinto (1982) proposed, "we need ask not whether we should eliminate dropout (since that is not possible) but for which types of students in which types of settings we should act to reduce it" (p. 699).

According to American College Testing (2003), in 2000 the average dropout rate of just first-year students at two and four-year public and private institutions was over 30%. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (Shapiro et al., 2015) reported that the 2009 cohort's average dropout rate at four-year institutions was 33%. In response to Tinto's (1982) question as to which type of students should garner the most attention, the literature strongly suggests that first-year students are at the greatest risk for dropping out (Astin, 1971; Delen, 2011; Thammarsiri, Delen, Meesad, & Kasap, 2014; Upcraft et al., 2005).

**A brief history.** In 1882, over a century ago, Lee College in Kentucky offered the first freshman seminar to help students prepare for the next step of their formal education (Friedman, Clarke, & Strickland, 2016). For several decades following, colleges were likely to offer some type of extended orientation course for freshmen. Friedman et al. (2016) reported that in 1911, Reed College offered the first "for-credit" seminar; but by the mid-1960s, the freshman course had nearly disappeared. In 1972, "in response to student riots against the Vietnam War, other perceived social injustices, and local campus issues" the University of South Carolina created an experimental course "to build trust, understanding, and open lines of communication between students, faculty, staff, and administration" (Friedman et al., 2016, p. 3). This course was the impetus for what was to become University of South Carolina's first-year seminar, University 101. Over the past three decades, the popularity and success of the first-year seminar has grown, and the course has transformed to meet the unique needs of individual institutions. According to Permzadian and Credé (2016), recent

surveys show nearly 90% of two and four-year colleges and universities deliver some type of first-year seminar.

**Purpose of first-year seminars.** One of the founders of the modern first-year experience movement in the United States, Barefoot (1992) defined the first-year seminar as:

a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students by introducing them (a) to a variety of specific topics, which 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)

She saw the course as a means for helping first-year students make the transition from high school to college. Hunter and Linder (2005) described the first-year seminar as a “time-honored structure through which orientation efforts can be continued beyond the first week . . . [and which] provides a logical structure for encouraging and intrusively demanding active student involvement in learning and in the life of the institution” (p. 276). As previously mentioned the curriculum of the first-year seminar is flexible to meet the needs and intentions of the institution and generally provides an opportunity for new students to engage with their peers, staff, and faculty in a supportive environment while aiding in the development of a sense of belonging to the larger campus community (Friedman et al., 2016).

Many institutions, especially those where performance-based funding has been implemented, regard the first-year seminar as an initiative that will improve retention and academic success of first-year students (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Kuh, 2008; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Porter & Swing, 2006). For some institutions, the first-year seminar is also a way to induct new students to their institutional values and

expectations (Barefoot et al., 2005). For example, Eckerd College, a small private four-year liberal arts institution on the west coast of Florida, sees its first-year seminar as “a time to acculturate students to the demands of an Eckerd education . . .” (Barefoot et al., 2005, p. 94).

**First-year seminar models.** As the purpose of the first-year seminar differs somewhat from school to school, so does the format of the program. The duration, content, and delivery of the courses also vary. In the *2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars*, Tobolowsky et al. (2008) found that most first-year seminars were one semester long, and nearly half of the 968 institutions surveyed reported that their first-year course was mandatory for all first-year students.

Based on Barefoot’s (1992) work, the *2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars* (Tobolowsky et al., 2008), identified six types of first-year seminars:

1. *Extended orientation.* This type of course expands the one or two-day orientation programs during the summer prior to beginning the fall semester. Orientation topics include institutional history, campus resources, and goal setting, as well as an introduction to institutional expectations (Barefoot, 1992; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). Hunter and Linder (2005) describe this type of seminar’s content as a focus on *student survival*.
2. *Academic content, either uniform or variable.* Courses of this type focus on developing key academic skills that are necessary for success in college. Some examples are “critical thinking, expository writing, and oral communication skills” (Permzadian & Credé, 2016, p. 286). *Uniform*

*content* refers to seminars where the course content is the same across all sections, while *variable content* reflects differences in content between sections.

3. *Basic study skills*. In this type of first-year seminar, there is a focus on remedial skills such as grammar, as well as general study skills like notetaking, reading strategies, and time-management. Goals of this type of seminar are to “help students identify learning styles, evaluate personal and academic strengths and weaknesses, determine career goals, and develop study skills needed to achieve academic success” (Hunter & Linder, 2005, p. 280).
4. *Pre-professional or discipline-linked*. These seminars introduce students to particular professions such as medicine or disciplines such as biology (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Permzadian & Credé, 2016).
5. *Hybrid*. This term describes courses that combine goals of one or more of the previous types of first-year seminars, such as academic and extended orientation content (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Saunders & Romm, 2008). Hybrid also refers to first-year seminars that offer part of the course online (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008).
6. *Other*. These types of seminars are designed to meet the needs of special populations of student. In the *2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars*, Griffin et al. (2008) reported that “more than 20% of participating institutions . . . offered special sections for honors students, and nearly 20% reported that they offered special sections for

academically underprepared students and learning community participants” (p. 35).

The *2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars* (Young & Hopp, 2014) reported that the most commonly offered seminar type was the extended orientation followed by the academic variable content seminar.

**Effectiveness of first-year seminars on student success.** Although the purpose and type of seminar may change from institution to institution, Barefoot and Fidler (1996) identified seven characteristics of a successful first-year seminar:

1. Offered for course credit. Young and Hopp (2014) found that more than 90% of institutions offer the first-year seminar for academic credit typically ranging from 1 to 3 credit hours.
2. Centered in the first-year curriculum. As mostly freshmen take the course, its curricular purpose serves “as part of general education, core, or major requirements” (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996, p. 61) for first-year students.
3. Involved both faculty and student affairs professionals (e.g., residence hall directors, orientation leaders, and career center administrators) in program design and instruction. Young and Hopp (2014) reported that a little more than half of first-year seminar instructors were student affairs professionals.
4. Included instructor training. Friedman et al. (2016) reported that additional emphasis on faculty development in University of South Carolina’s University 101 class helped improve student satisfaction in the course as well as course quality.

5. Compensated instructors. Instructors are either paid, provided a course or work release from their regular class or workload, or “otherwise rewarded for teaching the seminar” (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996, p. 61).
6. Involved upper-level students in seminar delivery. These students serve as peer leaders or facilitate certain activities or lessons.
7. Included regular assessment of the course effectiveness and shared results with the campus community. According to the *2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars Executive Summary*, approximately 60% of the 896 survey respondents reported that they formally assess their first-year seminar (Young & Hopp, 2014). The most common form of assessment was student course evaluations.

Previous research on the effectiveness of first-year courses to improve student retention and academic success has produced mixed results. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reported that:

the weight of evidence indicates that FYS [first-year seminar] participation has statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student’s successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college. (p. 403)

Other researchers have described similar findings. Jenkins-Guarnieri, Horne, Wallis, Rings, and Vaughan (2015) assessed a first-year seminar program at a four-year public institution that used a uniform academic content model across all sections of the course. They found that “successful completion of the FYS program was significantly associated with an increase in the odds of persisting after controlling for demographic variables and prior academic performance” (p. 600).

In another study, Ben-Avie, Kennedy, Unson, Li, Riccardi, and Mugno (2012), examined the effectiveness of the addition of a first-year seminar to an already robust first-year experience program, which included “a revamped orientation, mandatory learning communities, increased academic support, and increased campus involvement” (p.143). Students who participated in the first-year seminar had higher one-year retention rates, significantly higher semester and cumulative GPAs, and earned more credits than students who did not complete the seminar (Ben-Avie et al., 2012). What is most impressive about the results of this study is that the positive effects of the first-year seminar on the participants persisted into their third year of college (Ben-Avie et al., 2012).

Not all studies have reported similar conclusions regarding the effectiveness of first-year seminars. Barton and Donahue (2009) conducted a quasi-experimental assessment of a pilot four-credit hour first-year seminar. The objectives of the pilot first-year seminar closely aligned with those of an academic content model, focusing on topics such as critical reading, thinking, and writing. In their assessment of the program, the researchers used a multiple-measures approach that “allowed [them] to examine explanations for the apparent impacts of the first-year seminar alternative to the course itself” (Barton & Donahue, 2009, p. 274). The results indicated that students who participated in the first-year seminar did not have a higher retention rate than their non-participative peers, but they did have slightly higher average end-of-year GPAs. Upon further analysis, the inclusion of student SAT scores as covariates eliminated the statistical effect on end-of-year GPA. Barton and Donahue (2009) concluded that “the apparent positive impacts of the first-year seminar resulted not from the content of the



courses themselves but from a biased population (i.e., better students) taking those courses” (p. 274).

Selection bias is a concern often associated with the assessment of first-year seminars, particularly when the course is not mandatory for all first-year students. To mediate this bias, Clark and Cundiff (2011) used propensity score adjustments in their assessment of a three-credit hour first-year seminar’s effect on retention to second year and first-year GPA. The researchers derived the propensity scores from a group of 19 covariates derived from a series of tests that measure “demographic characteristics, Big Five personality traits, academic motivation, loneliness, depression, and institutional commitment” (Clark & Cundiff, 2011, p. 623). Even with the use of propensity score adjustments, the researchers found no evidence that the first-year seminar improved students’ first-year GPA. In regard to retention, two different adjustment methods were used, and retention rates were slightly better for those students who completed the first-year seminar.

Tampke and Durodoye (2013) investigated the impact of different two interventions on first-time-in-college (FTIC) students who were undecided on their majors. The first intervention was a first-year seminar and the other intervention was the first-year seminar within a learning community. The first-year seminar was a three-credit hour course. FTIC students who did not participate in either intervention served as a control group. Tampke and Durodoye (2013) measured three outcomes, “retention to the next semester (fall to spring) and the next academic year (fall to fall), cumulative GPA, and the percent in good academic standing” (p. 7). Results showed no significant difference in retention rates between the students who participated in the interventions

and the control group over the periods of *fall to spring* and *fall to fall*. However, from *fall to spring*, students who participated in the first-year seminar and first-year seminar within a learning community “showed significant positive differences in GPA and percent in good standing in comparison to the control group” (Tampke & Durodoye, 2013, p. 8). These significant differences in cumulative GPA and percent in good standing did not persist to the *fall to fall* results.

In their meta-analysis of 284 first-year seminars, Permzadian and Credé (2016) reported mixed results regarding the effectiveness of first-year seminars on academic success metrics. The researchers concluded that “the average first-year seminar has almost no effect on the first-year GPA and only a small positive effect on the 1-year retention rate of participating students” (Permzadian & Credé, 2016, pp. 294-295). With inconclusive results like these, it is imperative that institutions assess their first-year seminar programs to ensure that the time, effort, and resources allocated are being wisely spent.

**First-year seminar at USFSP.** Since the summer of 2014, USFSP has offered its first-year seminar course to incoming FTIC students. The Director of Advising at USFSP confirmed that academic advisors encourage all students to enroll in the seminar regardless of their high school GPA or other pre-matriculation information (e.g. SAT or ACT scores) and that enrolment is completely voluntary (C. Collins, personal communication, March 7, 2018). Students self-select to enroll in this 3-credit hour course that counts towards their degrees as elective credit only. The first-year seminar is offered through the College of Education at USFSP and is taught by a range of

university staff from faculty members in the College of Education to academic advisors to Student Affairs personnel.

The course is modelled after the extended orientation (Barefoot, 1992), and all sections share a common syllabus. According to the course syllabus (see Appendix B), the first-year seminar is specifically intended for FTIC students at USFSP:

Its goal is to help new students adjust to college life and establish academic and social skills that will assist them in becoming integrated, adapted, and successful members of the academic community. The competencies students will acquire include effective use of campus resources, community engagement, critical thinking, and academic and career planning. (USFSP University Success Syllabus, 2015, "Course Description & Content")

Many of the assignments involve students in activities that expose them to the campus and the variety of resources USFSP offers. For example, during the course students are required to spend 120 minutes in the Career Center (see Appendix B) where they are introduced to services like resume writing, career exploration questionnaires, and interview preparation. The Professor Interview Paper (see Appendix B) asks students to interview one of their professors and write a reflective response.

One of the signature assignments of USFSP's University Success first-year seminar is the Rocky's Resources Presentation (see Appendix B). This project requires students to work collaboratively in small groups while investigating a campus resource such as Financial Aid, Multicultural Affairs, or Student Government. According to the syllabus, "Students may or may not be familiar with these campus resources, but they [the resources] are essential to the well-being and development of all students" (2015, p.5). The course and assignments are designed to involve students in campus life and build relationships with faculty and staff. Data from end-of-term surveys of instruction

collected since 2014, students have responded that this course was beneficial and helped them develop stronger faculty-student relationships as well as feel more at ease in their new campus environment (O. Hodges, personal communication, April 2017).

### **Measuring First-year Expectations**

Historically, research has addressed external factors believed to be associated with student success such as high school GPAs, college entrance exam scores, and socioeconomic status (Kern, Fagley, & Miller, 1998; Lau, 2003). Other research has investigated internal factors that are associated with students' retention and graduation rates such as motivation, personality traits, and engagement constructs (Kern et al., 1998; Kuh, 2009; Magnusson & Perry, 1992). Central to understanding student engagement is to understand the expectations students have of themselves and their chosen institutions (Cole, et al., 2009). An array of instruments have been developed that attempt to measure first-year student expectations; three are briefly discussed here.

One of the first widely used American instruments to measure incoming freshmen attitudes, behaviors, and expectations is the Student Information Form (SIF), later known as the Freshman Survey (Astin et al., 1967; Cooperative Institutional Research Program [CIRP], 2002). Astin created the SIF in 1966 as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, and the survey has been administered annually each fall to incoming freshmen. From its inception, the purpose of the Freshman Survey has been to “provide a source of current, readily available information about the population of college students” (Astin et al., 1967, p. 1).

In 1997, Kuh and Pace created another instrument, the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) as a companion to the College Student Experience

Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Kuh & Pace, 1998). Like the CIRP Freshman Survey, the CSXQ was designed to assess incoming freshmen motivations, expectations, and goals (College Student Experiences Questionnaire Assessment Program [CSEQAP], 2007).

The CSXQ asked questions regarding the following topics:

- Background information
- College activities (e.g., information technology, expectations with faculty, campus facilities, student clubs, etc.)
- Reading/writing
- Satisfaction
- College environment (CSEQAP, “CSXQ: At a Glance”, 2007).

According to the CSEQAP website, the CSEQ and CSXQ survey operations were closed following the spring 2014 administrations.

Continuing research on engagement and precollege expectations led to the development of the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) as a companion to its National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Cole et al., 2009).

The BCSSE focuses on:

Assessing (1) the time and effort entering, first-year students devoted to educationally purposeful activities in high school and expect to devote to during their first year of college, and (2) what these entering first-year students expect their institutions to provide them regarding opportunities and emphasis. (BCSSE, “About BCSSE: Quick Facts”, 2018a, para. 2)

According to BCSSE website, the “BCSSE has been completed by more than 741,000 students at 464 institutions in the United States and Canada” (BCSSE, “About BCSSE: Quick Facts”, 2018a, para. 4). Universities have used their BCSSE results to better understand their incoming first-year students and develop and improve programming for them by considering their expectations.

## Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the literature that informs and guides this study. The underpinnings of Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory are that student learning and development are strongly related to the amount and quality of student involvement, and institutions have some authority in providing opportunities for that involvement. The expectancy-value theory offers insight into the choices first-year students make regarding their college selection, the value they place on that decision, and the cost—personal and financial—they are willing to pay for it. These two theories frame this study's investigation of the effectiveness of first-year seminars on academic success and retention of first-year students. First-year students are the most likely population to drop out of college; therefore, postsecondary schools must continue to invest in programming designed to slow first-year attrition and promote student success through high-impact practices that offer opportunities for engagement. As evidenced in the literature, first-year seminars appear to hold some promise for improving student engagement, retention, and success when implemented with thoughtful and intentional design.

Chapter Three describes the methods used to assess the first-year seminar at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. Of particular interest were the differences between FTIC students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not complete the seminar in regards to their retention and academic success. Additionally, Chapter Three describes the BCSSE instrument used to collect first-year student expectations.

## Chapter 3

### Methods

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the study explored the relationship of retention rate and institutional first-year GPA between FTIC students who completed a first-year seminar and those who do not. Secondly, this study investigated whether factors such as FTIC student high school learning engagement and expectations for college (as measured by the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement), high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar could predict retention and institutional first-year GPA.

This chapter includes a review of the research design, detailed description of the population and sample, instrumentation, collection of data, and analysis of data. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Research Design

This study analyzed pre-existing institutional data to gain a better understanding of the correlation between completion of a first-year seminar, student high school learning engagement and expectations for college, and FTIC student retention and academic success. A quantitative correlational design provided answers to the following research questions:

1. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year retention rates between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?

2. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year institutional GPAs between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?
3. For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict student retention?
4. For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict institutional first-year GPA?

### **Population and Sample**

Secondary data collected from the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and further institutional data obtained from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg (USFSP) were used to assess the relationship of a first-year seminar course on FTIC retention and academic success. See Appendix A for institutional permissions. USFSP is a part of the larger University of South Florida system, which includes USF Tampa and USF Sarasota-Manatee. All three campuses are separately accredited. USFSP is a small, metropolitan campus located in downtown St. Petersburg. It serves approximately 4,700 students with 24 Bachelor's programs and 17 Master's programs. The FTIC student has an average weighted high school GPA of 3.79, an average SAT score of 1142, and an average ACT score of 26 (USF Office of Decision Support, 2016). According to the *Florida Counseling for Future Education Handbook* (Florida Department of Education, 2016), State University System institutions, including USFSP, calculate a weighted high school GPA "using a 4.0 scale



from grades earned in high school academic core courses in designated subject areas, as well as specified AP [Advanced Placement] and IB [International Baccalaureate] Fine Arts courses” (p.44). Courses that receive a “C” or better are awarded additional quality points (QP) in the following manner: AP, IB, Dual Enrollment courses earn 1QP and Honors courses earn .5QP (Florida Department of Education, 2016). For example, a “B” in a standard English course would earn a 3.0 versus a “B” in an IB English course which would earn a 4.0.

The participants for this study included FTIC students enrolled full-time at USFSP during the summer and fall semesters of 2014, 2015, and 2016 ( $N = 1696$ ). Students are considered FTIC if they have “never attended a postsecondary college or university or have attended an institution and earned less than twelve (12) semester credit hours of academic credit after high school graduation” (State University System of Florida, “First-Time-in-College Students”, 2014, para. 1). All FTIC students were eligible to register for a first-year seminar, and registration for this course was voluntary. To be included in the first-year seminar group, FTIC students had to complete the first-year seminar during the summer or fall (not spring) of their first year at USFSP. Of the FTIC population considered for this study, 1,596 students completed the BCSSE at orientation prior to starting classes.

### **Variables**

Several variables were examined in this study. They are as follows:

**Independent variables.** The independent variables of this study are:

1. Completion of a first-year seminar. This is a dichotomous categorical variable where students either completed the course (a value of 1) or did not complete the course (a value of 0).
2. Nine BCSSE scales assessing high school learning experiences and expectations for college, with values ranging from 0 - 60.
3. High school GPA, a continuous variable with values ranging from 2.50 – 4.90.

**Dependent variables.** The dependent variables for this study included:

1. Retention from first to second year as measured by FTIC students who were enrolled after Day 6 of the following academic year (i.e., began in Fall 2014 and were enrolled in classes for Fall 2015). This is a dichotomous categorical variable, where students who were not enrolled the following fall were coded with a value of 0, and students enrolled were coded with a value of 1.
2. Academic success was measured by students' institutional USFSP GPA at the end of the spring semester of their first year at college. This is a continuous variable with values ranging from 0.00 to 4.00.

### **Instrument**

The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) is a questionnaire created by the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University School of Education to “collect data about entering college students' high school academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as their expectations for participating in educationally purposeful activities during the first college year” (BCSSE, “About BCSSE”, 2018a, para. 1). See Appendix C for the 2014 paper version of the survey. Also see Appendix D for copyright permission.

The BCSSE consists of nine scales, two that address student-learning experiences during high school and seven that address student expectations for the first year of college (Cole & Dong, n.d.). Of the seven expectation items, six reflect expectations the students have of themselves, and one, *Importance of Campus Environment*, reflects the expectations the students have for the institution. According to the BCSSE 2017 Mean Scale Scores and Selected Student Comparisons (2017), each scale is comprised of three or more items (see Table 1), and the scale value “is calculated by converting the responses for each item to a 0-60 range” (BCSSE Scales, para. 1) and averaging the item responses. For example, on the scale High School Quantitative Reasoning (HS\_QR) a student has four response options (Very often, Often, Sometimes, and Never) that are recoded with the corresponding values 60, 40, 20, or 0. A scale score of zero for HS\_QR would indicate that the student chose the lowest response option for all three items in the scale; conversely, a scale score of 60 would mean the student selected the highest response option for all three items. This value conversion allows for comparison of data across institutions and over time (NSSE, 2018).

**Reliability and validity of data source.** In 2013, the BCSSE was revised to better align with the new version of its sister survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Cole and Dong (n.d.) examined the psychometric properties of the 2013 BCSSE using over 70,000 student records, representing 120 institutions from the United States, (Cole & Dong, n.d., p. 2). This data set was used to test the reliability and validity of the nine BCSSE scales.

Table 1

*The Nine BCSSE Scales and Corresponding Survey Items*

Scale and Scale Abbreviation	Survey Items and Response Options
High School Quantitative Reasoning (HS_CR)	<p>During your last year of high school, about how often did you do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information?</li> <li>• Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue?</li> <li>• Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never</i></p>
High School Learning Strategies (HS_LS)	<p>During your last year of high school, about how often did you do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified key information from reading assignments?</li> <li>• Reviewed your notes after class?</li> <li>• Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never</i></p>
Expected Collaborative Learning (EXP_CL)	<p>During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask another student to help you understand course material?</li> <li>• Explain course material to one or more students?</li> <li>• Prepare for exams by working through course material with other students?</li> <li>• Work with other students on course projects or assignments?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never</i></p>
Expected Student-Faculty Interaction (EXP_SFI)	<p>During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about career plans with a faculty member?</li> <li>• Work with faculty on activities other than coursework?</li> <li>• Discuss your academic performance with faculty?</li> <li>• Discuss course topics, ideas, or concepts with faculty outside of class?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never</i></p>

Table continued on next page

Table 1 (Continued)

*The Nine BCSSE Scales and Corresponding Survey Items*

Scale and Scale Abbreviation	Survey Items and Response Options
Expected Interactions with Diverse Others (EXP_DD)	<p>During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to have discussions with people from the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People of a race or ethnicity other than your own?</li> <li>• People from an economic background other than your own?</li> <li>• People with religious beliefs other than your own?</li> <li>• People with political views other than your own?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never</i></p>
Expected Academic Perseverance (EXP_PER)	<p>During the coming school year, how certain are you that you will do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study when there are other interesting things to do?</li> <li>• Find additional information for course assignments when you don't understand the material?</li> <li>• Participate regularly in course discussions, even when you don't feel like it?</li> <li>• Ask instructors for help when you struggle with course assignments?</li> <li>• Finish something you have started when you encounter challenges?</li> <li>• Stay positive, even when you do poorly on a test or assignment?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very certain (6) to Not at all certain (1)</i></p>
Expected Academic Difficulty (EXP_DIF)	<p>During the coming school year, how difficult do you expect the following to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning course material?</li> <li>• Managing your time?</li> <li>• Getting help with school work?</li> <li>• Interacting with faculty?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very difficult (6) to Not at all difficult (1)</i></p>

Table continued on next page

Table 1 (Continued)

*The Nine BCSSE Scales and Corresponding Survey Items*

Scale and Scale Abbreviation	Survey Items and Response Options
Perceived Academic Preparation (EXP_PREP)	<p>How prepared are you to do the following in your academic work at this institution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write clearly and effectively</li> <li>• Speak clearly and effectively</li> <li>• Think clearly and effectively</li> <li>• Analyze numerical and statistical information</li> <li>• Work effectively with others</li> <li>• Use computing and information technology</li> <li>• Learn effectively on your own</li> </ul> <p><i>Very prepared (6) to Not at all prepared (1)</i></p>
Importance of Campus Environment (EXP_CAMP)	<p>How important is it to you that your institution provide each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A challenging academic experience?</li> <li>• Support to help students succeed academically?</li> <li>• Opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds?</li> <li>• Help managing your non-academic responsibilities?</li> <li>• Opportunities to be involved socially?</li> <li>• Opportunities to attend campus activities and events?</li> <li>• Learning support services?</li> </ul> <p><i>Very important (6) to Not important (1)</i></p>

Adapted from “Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the BCSSE Scales,” by J. Cole and Y. Dong, n.d., pp. 11-12. Copyright by Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Permission to use this table is provided in Appendix D.

Cole and Dong (n.d.) analyzed the reliability of each BCSSE scale by calculating Cronbach’s alphas based on the Pearson’s correlations, and ordinal alphas based on polychoric correlations, which are more appropriate for ordinal data (Gadermann, Guhn, & Zumbo, 2012). According to Gadermann et al. (2012), “alpha for a scale should not be smaller than .70 when used for research purposes” (p. 5). The ordinal alphas for

eight of the nine BCSSE scales meet this suggested level, indicating a reasonable measure of reliability.

Cole and Dong (n.d.) used confirmatory factor analyses to measure the construct validity of each scale both separately and combined. Due to skewness associated with Likert-scaled responses, Cole and Dong (n.d.) calculated the polychoric correlations and found that eight of the BCSSE scales had ordinal alphas greater than .70, the exception being expected academic difficulty (EXP\_DIF),  $\alpha = .66$ . For the overall model, there were positive correlations between all scales except EXP\_DIF where there were negative correlations. This was expected as the EXP\_DIF scale measures the anticipated difficulty a student expects to encounter in the first year of college. Cole and Dong (n.d.) point out that:

Negative correlations between EXP\_DIF and the other scales provide additional validity evidence for these scales. For instance, the correlation between expected perseverance (EXP\_PER) and expected academic difficulty (EXP\_DIF) was -.24, indicating that the higher the score on perseverance, the lower the score on difficulty. (p. 4)

According to the researchers, the overall model fit was adequate for use in “assessing incoming first-year students’ past and expected engagement behaviors” (Cole & Dong, n.d., p. 7).

### **Data Collection**

Between 2014 and 2016, USFSP administered the paper version of the BCSSE. During FTIC student orientation prior to the start of the fall semester, USFSP staff, following guidelines set forth by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) staff, administered the BCSSE to all FTIC students in attendance. USFSP staff provided letters to all orientation students regarding the BCSSE’s purpose and use of

the collected data. See Appendix E for a copy of the 2015 letter. Completed surveys were returned by mail to the Center for Postsecondary Research at the Indiana University School of Education for processing. Approximately four weeks later the Center for Postsecondary Research posted an institutional report of the aggregated data and a copy of the raw data to a secure interface for access by USFSP personnel (BCSSE, Administering BCSSE, 2018b).

The researcher collected data for this study from pre-existing records, including institutional BCSSE scores, high school GPAs, enrollment data, and student grades. BCSSE data and institutional data were merged using students' university ID numbers. The researcher then de-identified all data by removing university ID numbers to protect student identities.

### **Data Analysis**

The statistical analysis for this study was computed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v25). Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were evaluated for all variables, and the alpha was set at .05 for all inferential statistics.

The general intent of correlational analysis is to answer certain questions about two or more variables or sets of data: is there a relationship? If so, what is the direction and magnitude of the relationship? (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 193). This study used correlational methods to identify relationships between academic success and retention rate for students who completed of a first-year seminar and those who did not. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare high school GPAs of the three summer admit cohorts and also for the three fall admit cohorts.



The following are the statistical analyses used to answer the study's research questions:

Question One: A chi-square test was used to address whether a statistically significant difference existed in first-year retention rates between students who completed a first-year seminar and those who did not. A chi-square test of homogeneity is commonly used to check if a difference in binomial proportions exists between two independent groups.

Question Two: An independent samples *t* test was used to determine if statistically significant differences exist in first-year institutional GPAs between those who completed a first-year seminar and those who did not.

Question Three: Logistic regression was used to explore whether high school learning experiences and expectations for college as measured by the BCSSE, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar were helpful in predicting the retention rates of FTIC students. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) suggest using this type of analysis "for determining the correlation between a dichotomous [dependent] variable and a set of predictor variables" (p. 354). In this analysis, retention is the dependent variable; it is dichotomous and coded as "1" for those who were retained and "0" for those who were not retained.

Question Four: Multiple linear regression was used to investigate whether high school learning experiences and expectations for college as measured by the BCSSE, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar could significantly predict their institutional GPA. According to Gall et al. (2007), multiple linear regression is useful in

determining correlation between a dependent variable and a set of independent variables “when the correlations are hypothesized to be linear” (p. 354).

### **Summary**

This study utilized secondary data of first-time-in-college students who completed a first-year seminar at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg during the summer or fall of 2014, 2015, and 2016. Data were acquired from the Director of Institutional Research at USFSP (see Appendix A for letter of permission). Chapter Four presents the findings of the statistical analysis for each of the study’s research questions.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the study explored the relationship of retention rate and institutional first-year GPA between FTIC students who completed a first-year seminar and those who do not. Secondly, this study investigated whether factors such as FTIC student high school learning experiences and expectations for college (as measured by the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement), high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar could predict retention and institutional first-year GPA. This chapter presents characteristics of the sample, results of the statistical analyses used to answer the four research questions, and a summary of the findings.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year retention rates between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?
2. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year institutional GPAs between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?
3. For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict student retention?

4. For FTIC students, do high school experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict institutional first-year GPA?

### **Characteristics of Samples**

Data for this study represent pre-enrollment, enrollment, success, and retention information for FTIC students who started college at USFSP for the academic years 2014, 2015, and 2016. For the 2014-2016 academic years, 1,696 FTIC students enrolled at USFSP as either summer admits ( $n = 652$ ) or fall admits ( $n = 1,044$ ). Because high school GPA has shown to be a stronger predictor of college success than standardized test scores (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2018; Sawyer, 2013; Sedlacek, 2004), this study did not include SAT/ACT score analysis.

Results of an independent samples  $t$  test, with equal variances not assumed, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in high school GPA for summer admits ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = .37$ ) and fall admits ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .41$ ),  $t(1480) = 26.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.33$ . The large effect size ( $d = 1.33$ ) combined with the fact that summer admits for this study would have had one additional, albeit abbreviated, semester of college courses led the researcher to conduct all further analyses on summer admits separately from fall admits.

The three summer admit cohorts were analyzed as one group based on an analysis of the individual cohorts' mean high school GPA. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if high school GPA was significantly different between each of the three summer admit cohorts (2014, 2015, and 2016). The difference between these three groups was not statistically significant,  $F(2, 649) = 0.276$ ,  $p = .759$ .

Within the 652 summer admits, the mean high school GPA of the 340 (52.1%) who completed the first-year seminar was 3.24. The mean high school GPA of the 312 (47.8%) who did not complete the first-year seminar was 3.39. Numerically, the mean high school GPA was slightly lower for summer admits who completed the first-year seminar. While the difference in the mean high school GPA between the two groups was statistically significant,  $t(627.839) = 5.06$ ,  $p < .001$ , the effect size ( $d = .398$ ) was small, with no practical significant difference between the two mean high school GPAs.

The three fall admit cohorts were also analyzed as one group based on an analysis of the individual cohorts' high school GPAs. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare high school GPAs of the three cohorts. There was a significant difference in high school GPA between the three cohorts,  $F(2, 1041) = 3.154$ ,  $p = .043$ . Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the high school GPA for the fall 2015 ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ) was significantly different than the fall 2016 ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ); however, a difference of .08 on a GPA scale is not practically different. Additionally, the high school GPA for fall 2014 ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) was not significantly different from fall 2015 and fall 2016.

For the 1,044 fall admits, the mean high school GPA of the 264 (25.3%) who completed the first-year seminar was 3.79. The mean high school GPA for the 780 (74.7%) who did not complete the first-year seminar was 3.85. Similar to the summer admits, fall admits who completed the first-year seminar had a numerically lower mean high school GPA than their peers who did not complete the seminar. The difference in mean high school GPAs of those who completed the seminar and those who did not

complete not the seminar was statistically significant,  $t(1042) = 2.169$ ,  $p = .030$ , but with a small effect size of  $d = .16$ , no practical significant difference existed.

The analysis of the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) data included survey responses from 1,596 students. In total, 100 (40 summer admits and 60 fall admits) students did not complete the BCSSE and were not included in the analyses regarding BCSSE scores.

### **Research Question 1**

For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year retention rates between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?

A chi-square test of homogeneity was conducted to address the retention rate of summer FTIC students. Of the 652 summer admits, 340 students (52%) completed the first-year seminar and 312 (48%) did not. Of the summer admits who completed the first-year seminar, the retention rate was 69.1% ( $n = 235$ ). Of those summer admits who did not complete the first-year seminar, the retention rate was 67.3% ( $n = 210$ ). Summer admits who completed the first-year seminar had a slightly higher retention rate than their peers who did not complete the seminar. However, the difference in proportions was .018, and not statistically significant,  $X^2 = .246$ ,  $p = .620$ .

The same statistical analysis was conducted on the fall FTIC students. Of the 1044 fall admits, 264 students (25%) completed the first-year seminar and 780 (75%) did not. The retention rate of those who completed the first-year seminar was 73.9% ( $n = 195$ ). Of the fall admits who did not complete the first-year seminar, the retention rate was 75.3% ( $n = 587$ ). In this case, the results indicate that fall admits who did not

complete the first-year seminar had a slightly higher retention rate. The difference in proportions was .014, also not statistically significant,  $X^2 = .204$ ,  $p = .652$ .

## **Research Question 2**

For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year institutional GPAs between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?

The first-year institutional GPA was calculated for all FTIC students who completed the spring term of their freshman year, which included GPAs for three terms for summer admits and GPAs for two terms for fall admits. Some students from both the summer and fall admit groups were not enrolled in the spring of their freshman year due to several possible factors such as being academically dismissed, transferring to another institution, or stopping out voluntarily. Of the 652 summer admits, 579 students had first-year institutional GPAs. Of the 1044 fall admits, 954 students had first-year institutional GPAs. First-year institutional GPAs were not calculated for FTIC students who were not enrolled in the spring semester of their first year. An independent samples  $t$  test was conducted to determine statistical differences between FTIC students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not. It should be noted that when considering GPA in and for educational research, the data are not normally distributed. Post-secondary institutions' selective admission criteria skew the high school GPAs of incoming students, and matriculation within post-secondary institutions also relies on the maintenance of an average GPA, usually 2.0 on a scale of 1.0 to 4.0. Having a large sample size minimizes violations of normality assumptions, and utilizing statistical tests that are robust to these violations, such as an independent  $t$  test, allows for analyses of data that would otherwise be hindered by the skewness of GPA data (Coladarci & Cobb, 2014; Field, 2018). An independent samples  $t$  test was

conducted to determine if there was a difference in institutional GPAs between students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not. Equal variance was not assumed.

For the summer admits who completed the first-year seminar ( $n = 309$ ), the mean institutional GPA, based on three terms, was 2.66 ( $SD = .63$ ). For the summer admits who did not complete the seminar ( $n = 270$ ), the mean institutional GPA, based on three terms, was 2.73 ( $SD = .72$ ). While numerically the institutional mean GPA was higher for summer admits who did not complete the first-year seminar, the difference was not statistically significant,  $t(536.595) = 1.27$ ,  $p = .205$ . The effect size was small,  $d = 0.103$ .

For the fall admits who completed the first-year seminar ( $n = 247$ ), the mean institutional GPA based on two terms was 3.02 ( $SD = .79$ ). For the fall admits who did not complete the seminar ( $n = 707$ ), the mean institutional GPA was 3.06 ( $SD = .72$ ). The results of the independent samples  $t$  test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two group's institutional GPAs,  $t(952) = .573$ ,  $p = .566$ . The effect size was very small,  $d = 0.053$ .

There was no statistically significant difference in the mean institutional GPAs between FTIC students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not.

### **Research Question 3**

For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict student retention?

A logistic regression was conducted to determine whether there was a relationship between the dependent variable, retention, and the predictor variables. The



independent variables included: high school GPA; completion of the first-year seminar; high school quantitative reasoning (HS\_QR); high school learning (HS\_LS); expected collaborative learning (EXP\_CL); expected student-faculty interaction (EXP\_SFI); expected interactions with diverse others (EXP\_DD); expected academic perseverance (EXP\_PER); expected academic difficulty (EXP\_DIF); perceived academic preparation (EXP\_PREP); and importance of campus environment (EXP\_CAMP). A chi-square statistic assessed the overall fit of the model; Nagelkerke's pseudo  $R^2$  was used to provide an approximate effect size. Unlike in ordinary least squares regression, where  $R^2$  represents the amount of variance accounted for in the dependent variable, the total variance accounted for in a logistic regression model cannot be measured. However, Nagelkerke's pseudo  $R^2$  is an adjustment to the Cox and Snell pseudo  $R^2$  that represents the improvement in fit from a model with no predictors to the current model taking into account sample size and adjusted such that the maximum possible value (perfect fit) equals 1.0 (Nagelkerke, 1991).

For the summer admits, the logistic regression model was statistically significant,  $X^2(11) = 24.326$ ,  $p = .011$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .055$ . The model accurately classified 69.6% of students. Of the 11 predictor variables, only high school GPA was statistically significant,  $p < .0005$ . An increase in high school GPA was associated with an increased likelihood of retention. See Table 2 for predictors of retention rate for summer admits.

Table 2

*Predictors of Retention for Summer Admits Based on High School GPA, First-Year Seminar Completion, and BCSSE Scale Scores*

Variable <sup>a</sup>	B	SE	Wald	df	p	OR	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
HS_GPA	1.019	.260	15.417	1	.000**	2.770	1.666	4.607
HS_QR	-0.007	.007	1.052	1	.305	0.993	0.981	1.006
HS_LS	0.003	.007	0.177	1	.674	1.003	0.989	1.018
EXP_CL	-0.011	.009	1.507	1	.220	0.989	0.971	1.007
EXP_SFI	-0.004	.009	0.186	1	.666	0.996	0.979	1.013
EXP_DD	-0.002	.007	0.066	1	.798	0.998	0.985	1.011
EXP_PER	0.005	.010	0.280	1	.597	1.005	0.986	1.025
EXP_DIF	-0.010	.008	1.359	1	.244	0.990	0.974	1.007
EXP_PREP	0.004	.009	0.179	1	.672	1.004	0.986	1.021
EXP_CAMP	0.007	.007	0.913	1	.339	1.007	0.993	1.022
FY Seminar <sup>b</sup>	-0.195	.182	1.146	1	.284	0.823	0.575	1.176
Constant	-2.160	.931	5.377	1	.020	0.115		

Note. <sup>a</sup> HS\_GPA = high school GPA; HS\_QR = high school quantitative reasoning; HS\_LS = high school learning strategies; EXP\_CL = expected collaborative learning; EXP\_SFI = expected student-faculty interaction; EXP\_DD = expected interactions with diverse others; EXP\_PER = expected academic perseverance; EXP\_DIF = expected academic difficulty; EXP\_PREP = perceived academic preparation; EXP\_CAMP = importance of campus environment; and FY Seminar = completion of the first-year seminar where 1 = YES and 0 = NO

<sup>b</sup> FY Seminar is to compare students who completed the course to those who did not.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

The same predictor variables were included in the logistic regression for fall admits, and the model was statistically significant,  $X^2(11) = 48.967$ ,  $p < .0005$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .072$ . The model for fall admits accurately classified 75.6% of students. In the fall admit model, three predictor variables significantly predicted retention: high school GPA,  $p < .0005$ ; expectation for academic perseverance,  $p = .004$ ; and perceived academic preparation,  $p = .047$ . A higher high school GPA and a higher

scale score for expectation to persevere were associated with a greater likelihood of retention. Conversely, a decrease in a scale score for perceived academic preparation was associated with a greater likelihood of retention. See Table 3 for the predictors of retention for fall admits.

High school GPA was the biggest predictor of retention for both summer and fall admits. Additionally, two other variables were predictors of fall admit retention: expectation for academic perseverance and perceived academic preparation.

#### **Research Question 4**

For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict institutional first-year GPA?

Multiple linear regression was used to examine whether there were any significant relationships between the dependent variable, institutional GPA, and the following predictor variables: high school GPA; completion of the first-year seminar; high school quantitative reasoning (HS\_QR); high school learning strategies (HS\_LS); expected collaborative learning (EXP\_CL); expected student-faculty interaction (EXP\_SFI); expected interactions with diverse others (EXP\_DD); expected academic perseverance (EXP\_PER); expected academic difficulty (EXP\_DIF); perceived academic preparation (EXP\_PREP); and importance of campus environment (EXP\_CAMP).

Table 3

*Predictors of Retention for Fall Admits Based on High School GPA, First-Year Seminar Completion, and BCSSE Scale Scores*

Variable <sup>a</sup>	B	SE	Wald	df	p	OR	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
HS_GPA	1.095	.194	31.837	1	.000**	2.989	2.043	4.372
HS_QR	0.002	.005	0.180	1	.671	1.002	0.992	1.013
HS_LS	-0.004	.006	0.409	1	.522	0.996	0.985	1.008
EXP_CL	-0.010	.008	1.893	1	.169	0.990	0.975	1.004
EXP_SFI	-0.009	.007	1.482	1	.223	0.991	0.977	1.005
EXP_DD	0.004	.006	0.292	1	.589	1.004	0.991	1.016
EXP_PER	0.027	.009	8.080	1	.004**	1.027	1.008	1.046
EXP_DIF	-0.003	.008	0.174	1	.676	0.997	0.982	1.012
EXP_PREP	-0.018	.009	3.928	1	.047*	0.982	0.965	1.000
EXP_CAMP	0.002	.007	0.065	1	.799	1.002	0.988	1.015
FY Seminar <sup>b</sup>	0.049	.173	0.080	1	.778	1.050	0.749	1.473
Constant	-2.773	.852	10.598	1	.001	0.062		

Note. <sup>a</sup> HS\_GPA = high school GPA; HS\_QR = high school quantitative reasoning; HS\_LS = high school learning strategies; EXP\_CL = expected collaborative learning; EXP\_SFI = expected student-faculty interaction; EXP\_DD = expected interactions with diverse others; EXP\_PER = expected academic perseverance; EXP\_DIF = expected academic difficulty; EXP\_PREP = perceived academic preparation; EXP\_CAMP = importance of campus environment; and FY Seminar = completion of the first-year seminar where 1 = YES and 0 = NO

<sup>b</sup> FY Seminar is to compare students who completed the course to those who did not.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Field (2018) and others (Schmidt & Finan, 2017) report that with large sample sizes “where the number of observations per variable is  $>10$ ” (Schmidt & Finan, 2017, p. 1) violations of normality are not that impactful, and transformations or other manipulations of the variables can make interpretation overly complicated and prone to error. Based on this research, a standard multiple regression was conducted without manipulation of the data.

The multiple regression model for summer admits was statistically significant,  $F(11, 536) = 13.568, p < .0005$ . The  $R^2$  for the overall model explained 22% of the variance in GPA; adjusted for the number of predictors it explained 20% of the variance. Of the 11 predictor variables, three were statistically significant: high school GPA,  $p < .0005$ ; high school learning strategies,  $p = .003$ ; and importance of campus environment,  $p = .007$ . Increases in each of these three predictor variables while controlling for the other predictor variables were associated with increases in institutional GPA.

For fall admits, the model was also statistically significant,  $F(11, 888) = 37.689, p < .0005$ . The  $R^2$  for the overall model explained 32% of the variance in GPA; adjusted for the number of predictors, it explained 31% of the variance. Of the 11 predictor variables, six were statistically significant: high school GPA,  $p < .0005$ ; high school quantitative reasoning,  $p = .015$ ; high school learning strategies,  $p = .007$ ; expectations for collaborative learning,  $p = .034$ ; perceived academic preparation,  $p = .001$ ; and importance of campus environment,  $p = .028$ . Higher high school GPAs, and higher BCSSE scores for high school learning strategies and importance of campus environment were associated with higher institutional GPAs. However, higher BCSSE scores for high school quantitative reasoning, expected collaborative learning, and perceived academic preparation were associated with lower institutional GPAs. Regression coefficients and standard errors can be found in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of Institutional GPA for Summer Admits*

Variable <sup>a</sup>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	-.057	.273		-0.211	.833
HS_GPA	.747	.072	.416	10.388	.000**
HS_QR	-.001	.002	-.035	-0.790	.430
HS_LS	.006	.002	.139	3.037	.003**
EXP_CL	.000	.003	.006	0.117	.907
EXP_SFI	.000	.002	-.002	-0.044	.965
EXP_DD	-.002	.002	-.040	-0.857	.392
EXP_PER	.002	.003	.035	0.641	.522
EXP_DIF	-.001	.002	-.020	-0.488	.626
EXP_PREP	-.004	.003	-.086	-1.633	.103
EXP_CAMP	.006	.002	.126	2.707	.007**
FY Seminar <sup>b</sup>	.043	.053	.032	0.819	.413

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> HS\_GPA = high school GPA; HS\_QR = high school quantitative reasoning; HS\_LS = high school learning strategies; EXP\_CL = expected collaborative learning; EXP\_SFI = expected student-faculty interaction; EXP\_DD = expected interactions with diverse others; EXP\_PER = expected academic perseverance; EXP\_DIF = expected academic difficulty; EXP\_PREP = perceived academic preparation; EXP\_CAMP = importance of campus environment; and FY Seminar = completion of the first-year seminar where 1 = YES and 0 = NO

<sup>b</sup> FY Seminar is to compare students who completed the course to those who did not.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Summary

This chapter presented the statistical analyses used to address the four research questions posed in this study. The research looked at differences in retention and institutional GPA between students who completed a first-year seminar and those who did not complete the seminar. Additionally, this study considered whether pre-matriculation data of FTIC student expectations for college (as measured by the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement), high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar would predict retention and institutional first-year GPA.

Table 5

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of Institutional GPA for Fall Admits*

Variable <sup>a</sup>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	-.535	.226		-2.372	.018
HS_GPA	.951	.050	.535	18.919	.000**
HS_QR	-.003	.001	-.074	-2.442	.015*
HS_LS	.004	.002	.085	2.713	.007**
EXP_CL	-.004	.002	-.074	-2.118	.034*
EXP_SFI	.000	.002	.004	0.098	.922
EXP_DD	.001	.002	.027	0.835	.404
EXP_PER	.003	.003	.051	1.354	.176
EXP_DIF	-.001	.002	-.019	-0.660	.509
EXP_PREP	-.008	.002	-.117	-3.198	.001**
EXP_CAMP	.004	.002	.069	2.202	.028*
FY Seminar <sup>b</sup>	.035	.046	.021	0.770	.442

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> HS\_GPA = high school GPA; HS\_QR = high school quantitative reasoning; HS\_LS = high school learning strategies; EXP\_CL = expected collaborative learning; EXP\_SFI = expected student-faculty interaction; EXP\_DD = expected interactions with diverse others; EXP\_PER = expected academic perseverance; EXP\_DIF = expected academic difficulty; EXP\_PREP = perceived academic preparation; EXP\_CAMP = importance of campus environment; and FY Seminar = completion of the first-year seminar where 1 = YES and 0 = NO

<sup>b</sup> FY Seminar is to compare students who completed the course to those who did not.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Chi-square tests of homogeneity were conducted to analyze differences in retention between students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not. No statistically significant differences were found.

Independent samples *t* tests were conducted to analyze the differences in mean institutional GPA between students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not. There was no statistically significant difference in institutional GPAs.

The logistic regression models were significant for both summer and fall admits; high school GPA was the strongest predictor for both groups: the higher a student's high school GPA, the better the probability of retention. For fall admits only, greater

expected academic perseverance was associated with higher retention probability, but greater perceived academic preparation was associated with lower retention.

Standard multiple regression was used to determine the predictive nature of high school GPA, completion of a first-year seminar, and high school experiences and expectations for college on FTIC institutional GPA. The models for summer and fall were both significant, but effect sizes were small for each model. For both summer and fall admits, three predictor variables were significant: high school GPA, learning strategies in high school, and importance of the campus environment. Higher levels of these variables were associated with higher institutional GPA. For fall admits, three additional predictor variables were significant: quantitative reasoning in high school, expectations for collaborative learning, and perceived academic preparation. Higher levels of these three variables were associated with lower institutional GPA.



## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the study explored the relationship of retention rate and institutional first-year GPA between first-time-in-college (FTIC) students who completed a first-year seminar and those who did not. Secondly, this study investigated whether factors such as FTIC student high school learning experiences and expectations for college (as measured by the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement), high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar could predict retention and institutional first-year GPA. This chapter includes a summary of the study, conclusions related to the research questions, implications for key stakeholders, and recommendations for further research.

#### Summary

Researchers have touted first-year seminars as a high-impact practice for improving retention and academic success of FTIC students by promoting student engagement with the many facets of campus life and resources (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Ben-Avie et al., 2012; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Kuh, 2008). Not all the literature on first-year seminars concurs. In their meta-analysis, Permzadian and Credé (2016) concluded that on average, the first-year seminar had very little, if any, effect on institutional GPA or retention. Another concern from the literature was the inconsistencies and poor analytical assessment of first-year seminars with many institutions relying strictly on student satisfaction surveys. Furthermore, the current

literature has not fully probed how pre-matriculation survey data like the BCSSE can provide insight into FTIC populations, offering clues as to who may be best served by the first-year seminar and what their expectations for college may be.

The purpose of this research was to provide a thoughtful assessment of USFSP's nascent first-year seminar and explore the use of BCSSE data in understanding of the expectations of its FTIC population. This study addressed the following questions:

1. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year retention rates between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?
2. For FTIC students, does a significant difference exist in first-year institutional GPAs between students who complete a first-year seminar and those who do not?
3. For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict student retention?
4. For FTIC students, do high school learning experiences and expectations for college, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar predict institutional first-year GPA?

The data for this study were collected from pre-existing records of USFSP students, including institutional BCSSE scores, high school GPAs, enrollment data, and student grades. For the 2014-2016 academic years, 1,696 FTIC students enrolled at USFSP as either summer admits ( $n = 652$ ) or fall admits ( $n = 1,044$ ).

## Conclusions

The questions posed in this study focused primarily on two academic success metrics for FTIC students, retention to the second year and overall institutional GPA. The conclusions from this study are discussed in this section.

The first two research questions examined differences in retention rates and institutional GPAs of FTIC students who completed USFSP's first-year seminar and those who did not. In the literature regarding assessment of first-year seminar effectiveness, retention rate and first-year GPA are common measures (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Kilgo et al., 2015; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). For this study, a chi-square test of homogeneity revealed no significant difference in retention rates for FTIC students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not. Likewise, independent samples *t* tests found no significant difference in institutional GPAs of FTIC students who completed the first-year seminar and FTIC students who did not complete the course. These findings are in line with a number of studies that concluded first-year seminars had little, if any, impact on retention or first-year GPA (Barton & Donahue, 2009; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Tampke & Durodoye, 2013).

The last two research questions explored whether high school learning experiences and expectations for college as measured by the BCSSE, high school GPA, and completion of a first-year seminar could predict FTIC student retention and institutional GPA. The results for this study showed that of the predictor variables included in the retention model, high school GPA was the strongest predictor for both summer and fall admits. Many studies have reported similar findings on first-year student retention (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Friedman & Mandel, 2009). Additionally, in

this study fall admit retention was also predicted by expected academic perseverance and perceived academic preparation. Higher scores for academic perseverance were associated with higher retention. This positive correlation is in line with observations made by Kuh et al. (2005) that first-year students with high expectations tend to engage more often in academically purposeful activities leading to greater academic outcomes. However, results from this study also found that higher scores for perceived academic preparation were associated with lower retention. This finding seems similar to what Collins and Sims (2006) refer to as the disconnect between first-year student expectations and their actual experiences where “students may overestimate their abilities . . . and underestimate the level of performance that is expected by their course professors” (p. 208).

Regarding the regression model for institutional GPA, summer and fall admits shared three significant predictor variables that were positively associated with higher institutional GPA. High school GPA was the strongest predictor, followed by high school learning strategies (e.g., taking notes or summarizing course material) and the importance of campus environment (e.g., having access to learning support services, getting help managing non-academic responsibilities). Campus environment has been found to be instrumental in either facilitating or inhibiting student behavior (Cole et al., 2009) and is a factor that institutions can have direct influence over (Moneto & Kuh, 2005). However, three additional variables were significant in predicting institutional GPA for fall admits: high school quantitative reasoning (use and evaluation of numerical information), expected collaborative learning (working with other students on course-related material), and perceived academic preparation. Higher levels of these three

variables were associated with lower institutional GPA. The inverse relation of high school quantitative reasoning to institutional GPA, like perceived academic preparation, may also be associated with the overestimation of ability recognized by Collins and Sims (2006). The inverse relation of expected collaborative learning to institutional GPA appears to be unique to this study.

## **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to assess USFSP's first-year seminar as it related to FTIC student retention and academic success as measured by institutional GPA. This research also explored how data regarding pre-college experience and expectations for college might provide additional insight into retention and academic success behaviors of the institution's FTIC student population.

Astin (1984) positioned that the greatest impact on student development is the level to which students are involved with their college experience, both in and outside of the classroom. The purpose of USFSP's first-year seminar was to assist FTIC students in their academic and social transition to college life by engaging and involving them with their campus, faculty, and staff. This study's results showed that retention rates and institutional GPAs were similar for FTIC students who completed the first-year seminar and those who did not. These findings were based on quantitative data used in this study. However, students from each cohort who completed the seminar reported that they felt the course helped them develop stronger faculty-student relationships and feel more at ease with the campus environment (O. Hodges, personal communication, April 2017). So, the value of this course cannot be established on quantitative data alone, since that precludes personal growth not measured by this type of data.

Even though retention rates and institutional GPAs were similar within the admit groups for FTIC students who completed the seminar and those who did not, tracking these metrics beyond the first year may reveal more data and insight with which to make informed decisions. It may be that students need additional time to practice and implement what they learned in the first-year seminar.

It is encouraging to consider that alternate data sources may reveal hidden or latent benefits of the first-year seminar, but Florida institutions of higher education are pressed to move the needle on hard numbers, specifically the retention rate and institutional GPA of FTIC students. As a performance-based funding state, one of the key metrics on which Florida universities are measured is the *academic progress rate*, which is the retention of FTIC students to the fall of their sophomore year with an institutional GPA of 2.0 or better (State University System of Florida, 2018). The first-year seminar has been regarded as a high-impact practice in helping engage and retain first-year students, but it can be costly to run. As previously mentioned, the research on the effectiveness of first-year seminars has produced mixed results (Ben-Avie et al., 2012; Permazadian & Credé, 2016), and the results of this study did not demonstrate a significant relationship between completion of the first-year seminar, retention rate, and institutional GPA. With funding tied directly to these metrics, institutions need to decide for themselves whether the course is valuable enough to warrant the time and costs associated with it.

While not a direct intent of this study, findings confirmed what many other researchers have already noted, high school GPA is a strong predictor of academic

success in college. Summer admits, whose high school GPAs were lower than those of the fall admits, fared worse than fall admits in terms of retention and institutional GPA. This presents admissions offices something to consider regarding summer admission policy.

Although Florida universities are held accountable for the retention rate and institutional GPAs of both summer and fall admits through performance-based funding metrics, there continues to be a push to admit FTIC students with the highest entrance qualifications in the fall because *student selectivity* is one of the factors *U.S. News and World Report* considers when computing college rankings. According to Morse et al. (2017), all ranking data reported by colleges are for the fall enrollment population only. This leaves the summer term open for admission to FTIC students who only meet the minimum college entrance requirements without negatively influencing the school's national rankings. Decision makers may want to re-examine aspects of the first-year seminar for summer admits considering whether it is the right fit for this population of students, and whether it provides them with the experiences necessary for their success and academic development.

With no significant difference in retention or institutional GPA for FTIC students who completed the first-year seminar at USFSP, the first-year seminar coordinator may consider implementing some of the best practices in successful first-year seminar course design (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Friedman et al., 2016) not currently in place. While USFSP offers the course for credit, involves faculty and student affairs professionals, and compensates instructors for teaching the course, Barefoot and Fidler (1996) recommended involving upper-level students in the course as peer leaders or

facilitators. Friedman et al. (2016) found that emphasis on instructor training helped improve student satisfaction and overall course quality.

To minimize the gaps between expectations and actual experience, Miller et al. (2005) recommended first-year programming address, if not accommodate, first-year student expectations. With the flexible nature of first-year seminar curricula, it may be beneficial for the first-year seminar coordinator to customize the course based on the experiences and expectations of FTIC gathered from BCSSE data.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The following are recommendations for further research.

1. Due to the limitations of studying a sample from one institution, replications of this study could be conducted on first-year programs from institutions with similar student populations.
2. While this study did not consider a wide array of demographics associated with its samples, future research might choose to investigate more demographic data such as ethnicity, gender, or major.
3. Further investigation of all three USF campus first-year seminars could be conducted. While the student populations at each campus: St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Sarasota-Manatee, vary somewhat from one another, the overarching goal of preeminence for the university might be well served through a systematic exploration of first-year program content, target populations, and assessment models.
4. As touched on earlier in this chapter, a follow-up assessment of retention and institutional GPAs of the participants in this study may lead to findings that



- support both the literature and student feedback on the benefits of a first-year seminar.
5. The University of South Carolina currently conducts annual survey research of first-year seminars and programs at colleges and universities nationwide. Additional research could be conducted on the institutions with successful first-year programs known to have well-established assessment procedures in place. The focus of this research would be to identify exemplary assessment methods for their potential use.
  6. Further qualitative research could investigate students' perceived benefits not measured by the data in this study. Student input could come from surveys or interviews. An interview protocol that generates useful and meaningful information could be used to develop a new type of survey to measure student perceptions not addressed on the BCSSE.
  7. Focus group research of students who completed a first-year seminar could be conducted to glean insight into aspects and programming they deemed useful as well as what they felt was not useful. This information could then be used to customize the seminar for each institution and its unique populations.
  10. A further enhancement of this research would be to conduct a mixed-method study. This research design would incorporate qualitative data gained from interviews with students about what elements of the first-year seminar they perceived to be beneficial to them. These results would be combined with a quantitative review of their retention and academic success, giving a more holistic understanding of the first-year seminar.

11. It is unknown what became of the FTIC students who did not re-enroll and therefore were not counted in the retention rate analyses. Research could be conducted to determine if these students were academically dismissed, transferred to another institution, or took a gap year and re-enrolled in a future term. For those who transferred or re-enrolled in a future term, follow-up research on their academic progress may provide additional insight into the long-term influence of the first-year seminar.
12. Another opportunity for future research could be to compare the high school learning experiences and expectations for college of FTIC students who choose to take a first-year seminar with those of FTIC students who select not to take the course. If retention and institutional GPA can be predicted by these experiences and expectations, it may be useful to know if these characteristics are different for students who elect to take a first-year seminar from those who do not.

### **Concluding Remarks**

While a good amount of literature has promoted the first-year seminar as a high-impact practice for helping first-year students transition to college thereby improving retention and progression (Ben-Avie et al., 2012; Hunter & Linder, 2005; Jenkins et al., 2015; Moneta & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), this study has not supported this claim. However, these results are similar to other studies that have assessed the impact of first-year seminars on retention and academic success (Barton & Donahue, 2009; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). This is not to say there is no value in the first-year seminar.

To reiterate the guiding words of Kuh (2009):

Institutions cannot change who students are when they start college. But with the right assessment tools, colleges can identify areas where improvements in teaching and learning will increase the chances that their students attain their educational and personal goals. (p. 14)

Institutions of higher education should make thoughtful, data-driven decisions regarding the intent and implementation of their respective programs. If the main goal is to ease the transition from high school to college thereby improving retention and academic success, first-year seminar design should address a university's unique first-year population. The needs, concerns, and expectations of first-year students are as diverse as various institutions they choose to attend. Through regular review of institutional data and ongoing assessment of programming, first-year seminars can be tailored to meet the skills, experience, and expectations first-year students arrive with, providing them with the best resources for success.

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## Appendices



## Appendix A: Permission to Use Institutional Data



11.2.17

Cynthia Edwards  
140 7<sup>th</sup> Ave S DAV107  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear CeCe,

Thank you for meeting with the Office of Institutional Research regarding your planned study of students who have received various levels of academic and other support. The data available through this Office can easily be de-identified so as to preserve the anonymity of individual students while you use the existing database to identify patterns in student outcomes and to report these in the aggregate.

As Director of Institutional Research for the University of South Florida, I can provide the data for this study to you as the principal investigator with the understanding that this data will be used to support research related to your doctoral studies and dissertation. We recognize that this data will be used to support findings which will be published as part of the requirements of your doctoral program. We understand that these results may be cited in other studies. Permission is granted for use of the data in any activities associated with your doctoral research.

It was a pleasure to discuss this project and I will be excited to see the results of your research when the study is complete.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. Friedman", is positioned above the typed name.

Lauren Haddad Friedman, Ph.D.  
Director of Institutional Research  
Academic Affairs Division  
University of South Florida St Petersburg

### Office of Academic Affairs

University of South Florida St. Petersburg • 140 Seventh Avenue South, BAY 204 • St. Petersburg, FL 33701  
(727) 873-4260 • Fax (727) 873-4889 • <http://www.usfsp.edu/academics>



## Appendix B: USFSP University Success Syllabus



**Course Information**

Course Number: EDG 2930, Section 69 (CRN XXX)  
Course Title: University Success  
Credit Hours: 3 credit hours  
Office Hours: Contact Dwayne to schedule appointments.

Main Instructor: [REDACTED]  
Office: University Student Center (USC 173)  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
E-mail: [REDACTED]

Co-Instructor: [REDACTED] a	Co-Instructor: [REDACTED]
Office: COQ 101	Office: COQ 101
Phone: [REDACTED]	Phone: [REDACTED]
E-mail: [REDACTED]	E-mail: [REDACTED]

NOTE: University Experiences is worth three hours of academic credit, which may be used as an elective towards the state-wide minimum 120 credit hour requirement for graduation.

**Course Description & Content**

University Success is a course intended specifically for First Time in College Students at USFSP. It is designed to enhance the academic and social integration of the students' first semester by providing them with the skills and resources necessary for academic success. Its goal is to help new students adjust to college life and establish academic and social skills that will assist them in becoming integrated, adapted, and successful members of the academic community. The competencies students will acquire include effective use of campus resources, community engagement, critical thinking, and academic and career planning.

**Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the value of higher education for the individual and society including USFSP's role.
2. Facilitate meaningful interactions with fellow students, faculty, and the USFSP community.
3. Demonstrate effective study habits, time management strategies, and knowledge of campus resources to improve the academic experience.
4. Convey the importance of diversity on campus and respect for others.
5. Apply critical thinking skills to personal and academic life and adequately support claims with evidence

## Appendix B Continued

through information literacy and utilization of library resources.

6. Engage in personal reflection to develop realistic educational and career goals.
7. Demonstrate financial management strategies such as budgeting, obtaining Financial Aid, and managing credit wisely.
8. Identify and practice behaviors to improve physical and emotional wellness, as well as identify negative behaviors that affect a healthy lifestyle.

### Course Policies and Procedures

#### Attendance/Participation:

In order for this class to function properly, attendance and active participation is expected from all students. Showing up to class but not contributing to discussions or activities may result in a loss of participation points. Likewise, arriving late or leaving early may cost you participation points for that day.

Each absence from class will result in a deduction from your participation grade. Extenuating circumstances such as a family emergency, extended illness, or observance of a religious holiday will be considered on a case-by-case basis. You are expected to e-mail your instructor in advance if you expect to miss class. If you miss class you are responsible for determining what was covered in class and for completing any assignments that are due.

Classroom Expectations: Students are expected to arrive to class on time and ready to participate in all class activities, as well as turn in any assignments that are due that day. One purpose of this class is to create a safe environment where everyone is encouraged to share their opinions, emotions, and aspirations in class discussions. Please respect fellow classmates by maintaining confidentiality and not discussing this information outside of the classroom. Any student exhibiting rude or disrespectful behavior will be asked to leave class and will lose participating points for that day. Participation points will be deducted at the instructor's discretion for any inappropriate behavior. This includes, but is not limited to: disrespectful behavior toward the instructor and/or classmates, arriving late to class or leaving early, doing work for another class, excessive talking, and other disruptions (i.e. ringing phone/ texting).

Laptops, Cell Phones, and Other Electronic Devices: Cell phones, laptops, iPads, and other electronic devices are NOT permitted in class unless specified by instructors. Please turn them off before entering the classroom.

#### Paper Requirements:

Throughout the semester, you are required to complete multiple written compositions at college level standards. Your compositions will be evaluated based on content, style, grammar, creativity, and organization.

All papers must be:

- *Typed, double-spaced, on 8 ½" by 11" paper*
- *Using 11 point type and one inch margins on all sides.*
- *Please include your name, title of the paper, and date (single-spaced) in the top right corner of the first page.*

#### Late Assignments:

You are expected to turn in all assignments on the due date noted in the Class Agenda (last page of the syllabus).

NO late or emailed papers will be accepted. If you know you will be unable to attend class, papers can be emailed prior to the start of class to both instructors.

Dropping/Withdrawing from Class: The last day to drop this class without penalty is XXXXX. The last day to withdraw (grade of "W" and fee-liable) from this course is XXXXXX. Students are strongly advised to consult with their academic advisor and the Financial Aid Office (if applicable) before dropping or withdrawing from any class.

Incomplete Grades: An incomplete "I" grade is temporarily given in rare instances when a student is passing, but due to unforeseeable circumstances he/she is unable to complete the course requirements before the end of the term. This is at the instructor's discretion and specific conditions must be met. See Catalog for details.

## Appendix B Continued

**Student/Instructor Communication:** Students' USFSP email address is considered the official means of communication among students and instructors. Personal emails such as yahoo and Hotmail should not be used. Letter grades will not be discussed over any email, per FERPA regulations. In addition, the course will use Canvas. If a student does not have Internet access at home, he/she may utilize the computer labs on campus. Students are responsible to log in frequently and check their email. Emails to an instructor will be answered in a timely manner.

**Emergency Closure:** In the event of an emergency, it may be necessary for USFSP to suspend normal operations. In the event of a campus closure on our meeting day, check email for updates on due assignments.

**Title IX USFSP's Student Sexual Harassment and Violence policy:**

Following national guidance from the Office of Civil Rights, requires that faculty follow USF policy as a "mandatory reporter" of any personal disclosure of sexual harassment, abuse, and/or violence related experiences or incidents shared with the faculty member in person, via email, and/or in classroom papers or homework exercises. These disclosures include but are not limited to reports of personal relational abuse, relational/domestic violence, and stalking.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with documented learning and/or physical disabilities in need of accommodation should be encouraged to work with Student Disability Services and inform the instructor about any special requirements they may have. Contact information for the Student Disability Office is SLC 1203, (727) 873-4990, or (727) 873-4837.

**Religious Observances:** All students have a right to expect that the University will reasonably accommodate their religious observances, practices, and beliefs. Students who anticipate the necessity of being absent from class due to the observation of a major religious observance must provide advance notice of the date(s) to the instructor, in writing, by the second week of the term.

**Academic Dishonesty:** All university policies regarding academic integrity must be adhered to in this class. It will be assumed that the submission of all coursework is original, includes appropriate documentation of any and all source materials, and has not been submitted in part or as a whole to fulfill requirements for any other course.

### Instructional Strategies Used in this Course

- Cooperative Learning
- Lecture
- Guest Speakers
- Group Discussion
- Independent student activities

### Required Textbooks and Materials

Bullard, D.B. & Kelley, S.M. (2015) *The USFSP Experience: Your Journey Begins*. (Looseleaf Edition)

## Appendix B Continued

Course Modules and Assignments				
Assignment	Point Value	My Grade	Overall Percentage	Letter Grade
Canvas Discussion Post (4)	200		90 - 100%	A
Class Attendance and Participation	200		80 - 89%	B
Student Success Center Hours	100		70 - 79%	C
Rocky's Resources Presentation	100		60 - 69%	D
Career Pathfinder Project/Presentation	100		0 - 59%	F
Service Learning Reflection Paper	100			
Student Event Paper	50			
Professor Interview Paper	50			
Budget Project	50			
Final Reflection Paper	50			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000</b>			

**Class Attendance and Participation 200 points**  
 Attending class is an important part of succeeding in any course. In this class, attendance will be determined by on-time arrival, readiness for class, and active participation in discussions and activities. Excused absences will only be granted by the instructor based on proper documentation of an extenuating circumstance. The student is expected to arrive to class prepared to participate in all class activities, as well as turn in any assignments that are due that day. One purpose of this class is to create a safe environment where everyone is encouraged to share their opinions, emotions, and aspirations in class discussions. Please respect your classmates by maintaining confidentiality and not discussing this information outside of the classroom. Any student exhibiting rude or disrespectful behavior will be asked to leave class and will lose participation points for that day. Participation points will be deducted at the instructor's discretion for any inappropriate behavior. This includes, but is not limited to: disrespectful behavior toward your instructor and/or classmates, arriving late to class or leaving early, doing work for another class, excessive talking, and other disruptions (i.e. ringing phone/texting). Topics covered during face to face class time:

- Time Management
- University Culture
- USFSP History
- Majors, Advising, Degreeworks
- Listening & Study Skills
- Critical Thinking
- Financial Literacy
- USFSP Policies & Procedures
- Active Reading & Test Taking
- Information Literacy
- Diversity
- Health & Wellness
- Career Exploration

## Appendix B Continued

### Student Success Center Hours (SLO 1, 2, 3, 5, 6) 100 points

For this class, students are required to spend time in the Student Success Center (SSC) for a minimum of ten hours over the course of the semester. Two of those ten hours MUST be logged with a tutor. The remaining eight may include working on CANVAS assignments for this class or studying for other classes individually or as a group. Students MUST sign in and out to receive credit. The purpose of this requirement is to familiarize the student with the SSC and encourage the use of FREE tutoring to help you be successful in classes. For location and hours, please visit: <http://www.usfsp.edu/success/>

### Student Event (SLO 1, 2, 4, 6) 50 points

For this assignment, student are required to attend a student event or student organization meeting and submit a one page reflection that includes date, time, and location of the event or meeting, what occurred, why you chose it, whether or not you met new people, what you learned, how it might help you get involved, and why involvement in campus events/organizations is important.

### Professor Interview Paper (SLO 1, 2, 4, 6) 50 points

Meet with an instructor of your choice during his or her office hours. Submit a one page reflection on the experience that includes name, title, and rank of the professor, his or her location, classes they teach and research interests, what made you select this professor, details of your discussion, what they believe to be keys to college success, and how meeting your professor adds to the academic experience. Suggested questions to ask include, but are not limited to:

- What was his or her most important college experience and how, if at all, it relates to their current success?
- What does he or she like most and least about their profession?
- What most stands out about their own freshmen year and what they would change, if anything?

### Rocky's Resources Presentation (SLO 1, 2, 4, 8) 100 points

For this assignment, students will be placed into small groups responsible for researching and presenting one or more campus resources. For example, Financial Aid, Student Government, Study Abroad, Records and Registration, Waterfront, Multicultural Affairs, etc...). Each group is required to give a 5-10 minute presentation on their findings. Students may or may not be familiar with these campus resources, but they are essential to the well-being and development of all students. Groups are encouraged to contact staff members in their assigned area to obtain information for their presentation. Groups will be graded on content, professionalism, creativity, quality of visual aids, and level of team cohesion. At minimum, you should include the mission or purpose of the unit, hours of operation and location, ways in which students can utilize the services they provide, and any other relevant information.

### Career Pathfinder (SLO 1, 2, 3, 6) 100 points

For this assignment, students will choose a career to research. The end result will be a Career Pathfinder that you will submit for a grade and be responsible for sharing with the class. It should include the following components:

- A brief introduction of the career chosen to learn about and why.
- List of the duties, responsibilities, tasks, work activities, and work environment.
- Description of the educational/training requirements for the chosen career.
- A list and description of at least three websites related to the chosen career.
- Information on marketability, salary range, and opportunities for advancement.
- A 1-2 page essay on the students' initial thoughts about this career, their My Plan results, and knowledge gained from this pathfinder. Include whether or not this project reinforced your interest or made you change your mind? Why?



## Appendix B Continued

### Service Learning Reflection Paper (SLO 1, 2, 4, 8) 100 points

The National Service Learning Clearinghouse defines service learning as a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. As part of this class, students will be required to volunteer two to five hours at a local organization and submit a one or more page reflection that includes the when, where, and with whom, mission of the organization, details about your experience, and why community engagement is important. Students may seek out their own organization to be approved by the instructor and/or attend the Civic Engagement Fair at the beginning of the term to connect with a local group in need. You may work in groups on this assignment or the class may opt to work as a whole.

### Financial Literacy: Budgeting Project (SLO 6, 7, 8) 50 points

A broad range of topics will be covered including budgeting, credit cards, loans, and credit history. Students will create two working budgets (current term, and after graduation). Another assignment will cover credit cards (interest rates, fees, and policies). Students will also learn about loans, including good debt vs. bad debt, and credit score and history information.

### Final Reflection Paper (SLO 1, 5, 6, 8) 50 points

(100 points): As you finish the spring semester at USFSP, reflect on your academic and personal experiences. What have you learned through this course? What stands out to you, feels new to you, excites you, or challenges you? Why does this learning matter? Why is it important - to you personally or in the bigger picture? What do you do from here? How will you take this learning with you? Does this learning change your perspective, your career goals, or your interests? Your reflection should be 3-4 pages long and should dig deeply into your learning and aspirations. It should connect to academic concepts and critically examine your own development through this learning.

### CANVAS 200 points

Students will complete a weekly assignment orientated to the topic covered in that given week. The assignment will either be short answer questions, or responding to a discussion board topic relating to the weekly topic. (Examples: Academic Plan, Budgets, and Time Management).

120 minutes with a Librarian: All sections of this course must include two sessions with a USFSP Librarian. One will be early in the semester that will focus on information literacy and critical thinking. The second will be a midterm visit to the library that will focus on library resources, space, and student support services.

120 minutes with the Career Center: All sections of this course must include at least two sessions with the Career Center. They should be back to back and include an overview of the Career Center, career explorations discussion, My Plan Assessment, and analysis of the My Plan results.

60-120 minutes with the Health and Wellness Center: All sections of this course must include one-two health education sessions offered by Health & Wellness including but not limited to stress management, communication, health jeopardy, and sex education.

## Appendix B Continued

### Grades

The grading scale is as follows:

Points	Percent	Letter Grade
900-1000	90% - 100%	A
800-899	80% - 89%	B
700-799	70% - 79%	C
600-699	60% - 69%	D
0-599	0% - 59%	F

# Appendix C: 2014 Paper Version of the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement



## Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement

We are interested in your high school experiences and how often you expect to participate in certain activities during your first year of college. The information that you provide will help your institution improve teaching, learning and the quality of the student experience. Thanks for your help. Write or mark your answers in the boxes. Examples:  or

Please print your student ID number in the box below. Do **not** print your Social Security number.

Please write in the 5-digit ZIP code of your home during your last year of high school.

--	--	--	--	--

(U.S. residents only.)

When are you completing this survey? (Select only one.)

- Prior to the start of fall term classes  
 During the first week of fall term classes  
 After the first week of fall term classes

### HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

**1** Please write in the year you graduated from high school (for example, 2014):

--	--	--	--

**2** From which type of high school did you graduate? (Select only one.)

- Public  Home school  
 Private, religiously-affiliated  Other (e.g., G.E.D.)  
 Private, not religiously-affiliated

**3** What were most of your high school grades? (Select only one.)

- A  B  C  
 A-  B-  C- or lower  
 B+  C+  Grades not used

**4** To date, in which of the following math classes have you earned a grade of "C" or better? (Select all that apply.)

- Algebra II  
 Pre-Calculus/Trigonometry  
 Calculus  
 Probability or Statistics

**5** Did you take the SAT and/or ACT?

- Yes  No

If yes, please write your scores below (as best you remember):

SAT (possible range=200-800)	ACT (possible range=1-36)
Critical Reading <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	Composite <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Mathematical Reasoning <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
Writing <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	

**6** During high school, how many of the following types of classes did you complete?

Classes: **0** **1-2** **3-4** **5-6** **7-8** **9-10** **11 or more**

- a. Advanced Placement (AP) classes         
 b. College or university courses for credit

**7** During your *last year* of high school, about how many papers, reports, or other writing tasks of the following length did you complete?

- a. Up to 5 pages
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| None                     | 1-2                      | 3-5                      | 6-10                     | 11-15                    | 16-20                    | More than 20 papers, etc. |
- b. Between 6 and 10 pages
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| None                     | 1-2                      | 3-5                      | 6-10                     | 11-15                    | 16-20                    | More than 20 papers, etc. |
- c. 11 pages or more
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| None                     | 1-2                      | 3-5                      | 6-10                     | 11-15                    | 16-20                    | More than 20 papers, etc. |

**8** During your *last year* of high school, about how many hours did you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

- a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, doing homework, etc.)
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 0                        | 1-5                      | 6-10                     | 11-15                    | 16-20                    | 21-25                    | 26-30                    | More than 30             |
| Hours per week           |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
- b. Working for pay
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 0                        | 1-5                      | 6-10                     | 11-15                    | 16-20                    | 21-25                    | 26-30                    | More than 30             |
| Hours per week           |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
- c. Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, school publications, student government, sports, etc.)
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 0                        | 1-5                      | 6-10                     | 11-15                    | 16-20                    | 21-25                    | 26-30                    | More than 30             |
| Hours per week           |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
- d. Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or videos, keeping up with friends online, etc.)
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 0                        | 1-5                      | 6-10                     | 11-15                    | 16-20                    | 21-25                    | 26-30                    | More than 30             |
| Hours per week           |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |

**9** During your *last year* of high school, of the time you spent preparing for class in a typical 7-day week, about how much was on assigned reading?

- Very little  Some  About half  Most  Almost all



## Appendix C Continued

**10** During your *last year* of high school, about how often did you do the following?

	Very often	Often	Some- times	Never
a. Came to class without completing readings or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Identified key information from reading assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Reviewed your notes after class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**11** During your high school years, how involved were you in the following activities at your school or elsewhere?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	Not at all
a. Performing or visual arts programs (band, chorus, theater, art, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Athletic teams (varsity, JV, club sport, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Student government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Publications (student newspaper, yearbook, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Academic clubs or honor societies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Vocational clubs (business, health, technology, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Religious youth groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Community service or volunteer work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**12** During your *last year* of high school, to what extent did your courses challenge you to do your best work?

Not at all						Very much
▼						▼
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

### EXPECTED FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES

**13** During the coming school year, about how many hours do you expect to spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							
b. Working for pay on- or off-campus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							
c. Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							
d. Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or videos, keeping up with friends online, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
	Hours per week							

**14** During the coming school year, of the time you expect to spend preparing for class in a typical 7-day week, about how many hours will be on assigned reading?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
Hours per week							

**15** During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following?

	Very often	Often	Some- times	Never
a. Ask another student to help you understand course material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Explain course material to one or more students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Prepare for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Work with other students on course projects or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Talk about career plans with a faculty member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Work with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix C Continued

**15** During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to do each of the following? (Continued)

	Very often	Often	Some-times	Never
	1	2	3	4
g. Discuss your academic performance with a faculty member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Discuss course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Come to class without completing readings or assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16** During the coming school year, about how often do you expect to have discussions with people from the following groups?

	Very often	Often	Some-times	Never
	1	2	3	4
a. People of a race or ethnicity other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. People from an economic background other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. People with religious beliefs other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. People with political views other than your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**17** During the coming school year, how certain are you that you will do the following?

	Not at all certain			Very certain		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. Study when there are other interesting things to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Find additional information for course assignments when you don't understand the material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Participate regularly in course discussions, even when you don't feel like it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Ask instructors for help when you struggle with course assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Finish something you have started when you encounter challenges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Stay positive, even when you do poorly on a test or assignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**18** During the coming school year, how difficult do you expect the following to be?

	Not at all difficult			Very difficult		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. Learning course material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Managing your time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**18** During the coming school year, how difficult do you expect the following to be? (Continued)

	Not at all difficult				Very difficult	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Paying college expenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Getting help with school work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Making new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Interacting with faculty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**19** During the coming school year, about how many papers, reports, or other writing tasks of the following length do you expect to complete?

a. Up to 5 pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	More than 20 papers, etc.
b. Between 6 and 10 pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	More than 20 papers, etc.
c. 11 pages or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	None	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	More than 20 papers, etc.

**20** How prepared are you to do the following in your academic work at this institution?

	Not at all prepared			Very prepared		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. Write clearly and effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Speak clearly and effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Think critically and analytically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Analyze numerical and statistical information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Work effectively with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Use computing and information technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Learn effectively on your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**21** How many courses are you taking for credit this fall term?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 or more	Uncertain

Of these courses, how many are entirely online?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 or more	Uncertain

## Appendix C Continued

**22 How important is it to you that your institution provide each of the following?**

	Not important						Very important
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
a. A challenging academic experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b. Support to help students succeed academically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c. Opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
d. Help managing your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
e. Opportunities to be involved socially	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
f. Opportunities to attend campus activities and events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
g. Learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**23 Which of the following sources are you using to pay your education expenses (tuition, fees, books, room & board, etc.)?**

	Using	Not using	Not sure
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
a. Support from parents or relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Loans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Grants or scholarships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Job or personal savings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**24 What do you expect most of your grades will be during the coming year? (Select only one.)**

A       B       C  
 A-       B-       C- or lower  
 B+       C+       Grades not used

**25 Do you expect to graduate from this institution?**

Yes       No       Uncertain

**26 Do you know what your major will be?**

No       Yes, specify:

**27 Are you (or will you be) a full-time student this fall term?**

Yes       No

**28 How many of your close friends will attend this institution during the coming year?**

None     1     2     3     4 or more

**29 This institution was your:**

1st choice     2nd choice     3rd choice  
 4th choice     5th choice or lower

**30 What is your gender identity?**

Man       Woman       I prefer not to respond  
 Another gender identity, please specify:

**31 Are you an international student or foreign national?**

Yes       No

**32 What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Select all that apply.)**

American Indian or Alaska Native  
 Asian  
 Black or African American  
 Hispanic or Latino  
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
 White  
 Other  
 I prefer not to respond

**33 What is the highest level of education completed by either of your parents (or those who raised you)?**

Did not finish high school  
 High school diploma or G.E.D.  
 Attended college but did not complete degree  
 Associate's degree (A.A., A.S., etc.)  
 Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)  
 Master's degree (M.A., M.S., etc.)  
 Doctoral or professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)

**34 In driving time, about how far is this institution from the home where you lived during your last year of high school?**

Less than 1 hour       At least 4, less than 6 hours  
 At least 1, less than 2 hours       At least 6, less than 8 hours  
 At least 2, less than 4 hours       8 hours or more

**35 Which of the following best describes where you will be (or are) living during the coming school year?**

Dormitory or other campus housing  
 Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance to campus  
 Residence (house, apartment, etc.) farther than walking distance to campus  
 None of the above

**36 Enter your first two initials and last name:**

         
 F. I.    M. I.    Last Name

**THANKS FOR SHARING YOUR RESPONSES!**

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## **Appendix D: Copyright Permission to Include Copy of Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and BCSSE Scales**

Permission to use BCSSE information

Cynthia Edwards <cedwards2@mail.usf.edu> Thu, Jan 25, 2018 at 3:23 PM

To: colejs@indiana.edu

Dear Dr. Cole,

My name is Cynthia Edwards, and I am a PhD candidate in Adult Education at the University of South Florida Tampa in the final stages of my dissertation proposal, First-Year Seminars and Student Expectations. My study includes pre-existing institutional data including three years worth of institutional BCSSE data (2014-2016). In order to fulfill the requirements set forth by the IRB, I was asked to include a copy of the BCSSE (2014 paper version) in my appendices. I would also like to replicate the information found in Appendix A Items Included in the BCSSE Scales. I understand that the instrument as well as the table are copyrighted. Please advise me on the best way to acquire permission for including these items within my dissertation.

Thank you so much for your consideration of this matter. Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call or contact me via email.

Warmest regards,

Cynthia "CeCe" EdwardsPermission

Cole, James Stuart <colejs@indiana.edu> Mon, Jan 29, 2018 at 3:21 PM

To: Cynthia Edwards <cedwards2@mail.usf.edu>

Cynthia. You are fine using the items. See note from Alex McCormick below. Good luck with your dissertation!

Thanks

Jim

No special permission is needed as long as the copyright is clearly indicated and the source for the scales properly cited.

Alex

—

Alexander C. McCormick, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and  
Policy Studies, Indiana University Bloomington  
Director, National Survey of Student Engagement

## Appendix E: USFSP Orientation Letter to Students Taking the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement



June 11, 2015

Re: Study #0406000001R005

Dear new USFSP Student:

It is important to us that you get the most out of your time at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. We know all that USF-St Pete has to offer you, but we really want to know what you think about your upcoming experiences here at the University. Completing the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement will provide USFSP administrators with information directly from you and other new students to help us improve our curriculum and general campus life.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This survey is conducted on behalf of your institution by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Your identified responses will be sent to your university for institutional assessment. No information associated with your name will ever be released publicly, but personally identifiable survey responses may be inspected by the University and government organizations when required by law. The survey asks for your USFSP student ID number and the first initial of your first and middle name, as well as your complete last name, which accompanies your survey responses. Your ID and name are requested so that your responses can be matched with USF St. Petersburg records for three reasons: (1) assessing new student programs, (2) providing individualized information to your academic advisor, and (3) to invite you to complete a possible follow-up survey this next spring. By completing the survey you give the University of South Florida System permission to link your responses to your academic records, as well as to your responses to any follow-up survey.

For more information about the survey, email the Indiana University, Center for Postsecondary Research at [bcse@indiana.edu](mailto:bcse@indiana.edu) or call 812-856-5824. For questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research project, contact the Indiana University Office of Human Subjects Committee at 812-856-4242 or [iub\\_hsc@indiana.edu](mailto:iub_hsc@indiana.edu). For information about the project on this campus or our interest in using the results, please contact the USFSP Office of Institutional Research by phone 727-873-4391 or email [IR@usfsp.edu](mailto:IR@usfsp.edu).

Welcome to University of South Florida St. Petersburg! We look forward to an exciting and productive year together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Mark Durand".

V. Mark Durand, Ph.D.  
Interim Regional Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
Professor of Psychology

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gardiner Tucker".

Gardiner Tucker, Ph.D.  
Regional Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs

IRB Study #: 0406000001R005  
Study Approval Date: December 23, 2014  
Study Expiration Date: December 22, 2016

### **About the Author**

Cynthia “CeCe” Edwards received a B.A. in Secondary English Education in 1994 and an M.A. in English in 2000 from Western Illinois University. She has over 20 years of experience in education, ranging from administrative roles to classroom teacher. Her career in education began as Director of a Sylvan Learning Center. In 2000, she moved to the classroom as a middle school Language Arts and Social Studies teacher, then on to high school as an International Baccalaureate English Teacher in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Upon returning to the United States, she taught as an adjunct instructor of Composition at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg (USFSP). Currently, Cynthia serves as the Assistant Director of the Debbie Nye Sembler Student Success Center at USFSP, where she trains and supervises the institution’s peer tutoring program.