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A Mixed-Method Investigation Comparing Perceptions of First-Generation and Non- First- Generation College Sophomores

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First- Generation College Sophomores

by

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Abstract

The researcher focused on two groups of students, the First-Generation College Student (FGCS) and the sophomore student. First-Generation College Students completed degrees within six years at a rate of 34%, compared to 66% of non-FGCS (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 2). Researchers concluded that reducing support services after the first year led to a feeling of disconnection from institution and dropouts (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). Researchers concluded the sophomore FGCS as the most susceptible group for attrition during a student's second year (Ishitani, 2006).

The purpose of the mixed methods study was to compare perceptions of the sophomore students from both FGCS and non-FGCS subgroups. Fox (2014) concluded, "sophomore struggles range widely" (p. 15) and recommended "that more research is needed to further hone in on their experiences and the role of the institution in these experiences" (p. 15). Vuong, Brown-Welty, and Tracz (2010) found "it is critical that postsecondary institutions have an understanding of strong predictors of academic persistence and completion, particularly for first-generation college sophomore students" (p. 62).

Little research existed to offer practitioners insights into the specific differences of student perceptions between the FGCS and non-FGCS. The researcher compared sophomore FGCS perceptions to offer student services practitioners additional insights for use in practice. The researcher's study filled a gap in the literature by conducting a mixed method study comparing perceptions of the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS student.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

University administrators and the United States Government committed to First Generation College Students (FGCS) by improving graduation rates. Within the literature, the definition of a FGCS varied. However, for the purpose of this study, the term FGCS was defined as a post-secondary student who does not have at least one parent or guardian that obtained a four year-college degree (Davis, 2012; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gofen, 2009; What Works Clearinghouse, 2014). Congress allocated significant funding annually to improve graduation rates and access for low-income and FGCS. Cahalan and Perna (2015) reported over $800 million in federal funding for low-income and FGCS (p. 8).

One in six Americans attending college identified as FGCS (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014, p. 154; The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2014, p. 5). The appropriation of federal funding remained consistent yet graduation rates among FGCS were 34% within six years, compared to 66% of their counterparts (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 2). Data suggested a growing disparity in degree attainment between those of the lowest and those of the wealthiest income groups. A recent Pell Institute research report cited bachelor's degree attainment since 1970 increased from 6% to 9% in the lowest family income quartile, while the highest family income quartile grew from 40% to 70% (Cahalan & Perna, 2015, p. 30). Banks-Santilli's (2014) research indicated of those one in six freshmen identified as FGCS, over 25% did not persist beyond the first year (p. 2). FGCS viewed higher education as an opportunity to improve quality of life and increase income-earning potential throughout their lifespan.

Compared to non-FGCS, FGCS were burdened with challenges making degree completion more difficult. When FGCS attended college, the students struggled completing the degree when compared to non-FGCS (Davis, 2012). Banks-Santilli's (2014) research concluded FGCS lack the assistance of family in choosing, enrolling, and adapting to college. "The parents of FGCS are less likely to help their children prepare for college entrance exams, accompany them on college tours, seek information regarding financial aid or attend information sessions" (Banks-Santilli, 2014, p. 3). Vuong, Brown-Welty and Tracz (2010) found a greater risk for dropping out among FGCS compared to non-FGCS when students carried a lower GPA.

Additional evidence indicated FGCS were not as involved on campus, had less support socially and financially, and tended to not cope directly with difficult issues (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011). Chen and Carrol (2005) determined 75% of FGCS expected to graduate while only 24% of students completed a bachelor's degree (p. 8). As a result, researchers were encouraged to explore how FGCS interacted with the collegiate system to enhance persistence to degree completion.

The literature identified the sophomore FGCS as at-risk for attrition (Fox, 2014; Ishitani 2006; Vuong et al., (2010). The literature described the sophomore year college student as uniquely challenged when compared to other year students (Fox, 2014; Freedman, 1956; Graunke & Woolsey, 2005; Gump, 2007; Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008; Schaller, 2005; Schaller, 2010a; Schaller, 2010b; Schreiner, 2010; Tobolowsky, 2008; Woodworth, 1938; Young, Schreiner, & McIntosh, 2015).

Academic scholars identified several common slump characteristics which should be examined independently of other student cohorts. Sanchez-Leguelinel (2008)

expressed concern for the sophomore describing the "consequences of the phenomenon, coupled with reduction in support services, often lead to feeling 'disconnected' and possibly, to their attrition from college" (p. 638). Kennedy & Upcraft described the "so-called sophomore slump" (p. 39) as not a regression from the previous academic year, but a complex, "multidimensional phenomenon" (p. 39) including one or more of several common characteristics: academic deficiencies, academic disengagement, dissatisfaction of the collegiate experience, and major career developmental confusion (Kennedy & Upcraft, p. 39). Many American universities required incoming freshman to enroll in a course designed to ease the student's transition from high school to college. In contrast, the second year of college was often the time when the least resources were dedicated to students (Graunke & Woolsey, 2005).

FGCS and sophomore students experienced a variety of challenges during the college years. Researchers conducted several studies focused on how to best help the students persist towards degree completion. The researcher found a gap in the literature to aid in the study's construction. The researcher compared sophomore FGCS and sophomore non-FGCS experiences at a private Midwestern University (PMU).

Statement of the Problem

A lack of research existed which compared the FCGS and the non-FGCS within the sophomore cohort. Additionally, a lack of support existed at an institutional level for the sophomore cohort in comparison to the freshman group. Researchers and practitioners recommended with increased frequency to provide student support services and activities tailored for the sophomore year student. However, little research existed to

offer practitioners insights into the specific differences of student perceptions between the FGCS and non-FGCS.

Rationale of the Study

First Year Experience (FYE) programs have been thoroughly studied and shown to provide student's tools in adjusting to the various campus procedures which improve student success. Specific subjects included financial matters, academic expectations, faculty relations, social and academic integration, involvement, institutional commitment and other topics (Schaller, 2010b). Gump (2007) suggested ending the rigorous programming at the first year may only delay the problems which lead to attrition and disengagement. Research indicated success during the first year of study was no reason to abandon ongoing support services (Schaller, 2010b).

Sophomore year students had unique challenges which should be understood when researching and or designing a Second Year Experience (SYE) program. The fewest resources were allocated to second year students in comparison to other year students (Graunke & Woolsey, 2005). Institutions with a robust, well designed SYE program were prepared to deal with the common sophomore sentiment of abandonment (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). Evidence suggested the "so-called sophomore slump" was not a regression from the previous academic year but a complex, "multidimensional phenomenon" which included several characteristics (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010, p. 39). As the literature suggested, the sophomore student population remained highly vulnerable to attrition.

The First-Generation College Student (FGCS) experienced unique challenges throughout college enrollment. For example, FGCS were often unable to utilize parents

as a source of guidance when navigating the terrain of college life. FGCS experienced

diminished parental guidance and were less likely to persist towards a degree

(Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). When FGCS issues became coupled with

common sophomore related issues, the problems compounded (Vuong et al., 2010).

FGCS have been called the most susceptible group for attrition during the second year

(Ishitani, 2006). Research indicated FGCS were at greater risk for dropping out when

compared to non-FGCS college students (Vuong et al., 2010). Additional evidence

indicated FGCS were not as involved on campus, received less social and financial

support, and tended to lack coping skills needed to address difficult issues (Mehta et al.,

2011). Even with these considerations, many universities neglected the FGCS during the

sophomore year.

The literature recommended researchers add to the depth of knowledge

contributing to the program design components of the SYE. Vuong et al. (2010)

suggested "it is critical that postsecondary institutions have an understanding of strong

predictors of academic persistence and completion, particularly for first-generation

college sophomore students" (p. 62). Fox (2014) concluded, "sophomore struggles range

widely" and recommended "that more research is needed to further hone in on their

experiences and the role of the institution in these experiences" (p. 15). The researcher

intended to fill a gap in the literature by executing a mixed method investigation

comparing sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceptions to determine if intervention

initiatives should be allocated with sensitivity to an individual's background

characteristics or experiences while enrolled in college.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the mixed methods study of the sophomore student was to compare FGCS and non-FGCS perceptions in the three broad categories of academic motivation, social motivation, and general coping. Quantitatively, the researcher compared the survey data using the prominent global retention tool designed by Ruffalo Noel Levitz. The data captured by the Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA) included Likert scale survey questions in seven specific categories: Academic Confidence, Commitment to College, Engaged Learning, Family Support, Financial Security, Leadership, and Transition (N. M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). Qualitatively, the researcher interviewed students to examine perceptions using one on one semi-structured interview questions. The interview questions aligned with each of the seven stated categories. The research was designed to expose new insights into how sophomore students from alternate backgrounds (FGCS and non-FGCS) identified and compared in their perceptions. The researcher attempted to add an understanding of the sophomore FGCS offering student services practitioners additional insights for use in practice.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is a difference in the academic confidence between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA).

Hypothesis 2: There is a difference in the commitment to college between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Hypothesis 4: There is a difference in the self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader (leadership) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Hypothesis 5: There is a difference in the degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Hypothesis 6: There is a difference in the satisfaction one feels with the communication within the family structure (family support) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Hypothesis 7: There is a difference in the level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive academic confidence?

Research Question 2: How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive commitment to college?

Research Question 3: How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive engaged learning?

Research Question 4: How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their acceptance by others as a leader (leadership)?

Research Question 5: How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition)?

Research Question 6: How do the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their satisfaction with the communication within the family structure (family support)?

Research Question 7: How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security)?

Definition of Terms

Academic Confidence: "Self-belief of doing well in academic studies" (see Appendix D: Definition of Terms) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Academic motivation: Broad category within the Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA) which examines the three distinct student characteristics: academic confidence, commitment to college, and engaged learning (see Appendix D: Ruffalo Noel Levitz SYSA Overview) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

College experience: "Participation in campus organizations and events, the frequency of and their satisfaction with interaction with faculty; their satisfaction with peers; and their involvement in leadership, peer mentoring, service-learning courses, and learning communities" (Schreiner, 2010, p. 49).

Commitment to College: "Value placed on college education and long-term benefits" (see Appendix D: Definition of Terms) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Engaged Learning: "Self-belief of doing well in reading, writing, and public speaking" (see Appendix D: Definition of Terms) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Family Support: "Satisfaction one feels with the communication within the family structure" (see Appendix D: Definition of Terms) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Financial Security: "Level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college" (see Appendix D: Definition of Terms) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

First-Generation College Students (FGCS): A post-secondary student who does not have at least one parent or guardian that have obtained a four year-college degree (Davis, 2012; Gofen, 2009; What Works Clearinghouse, 2014).

General coping: Broad category within the Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA) which examines the three distinct student characteristics: transition, family support, and financial security (see Appendix E: Ruffalo Noel Levitz SYSA Overview) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Leadership: "Self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader" (see Appendix D: Definition of Terms) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Persistence: For the purpose of this study, the term was defined as when a student successfully completes an academic semester and enrolls into the next.

Social motivation: Broad category within the Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA) which examines the student characteristics of leadership (see Appendix E:

Ruffalo Noel Levitz SYSA Overview) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA): A non-cognitive motivation assessment (see Appendix E: Ruffalo Noel Levitz SYSA Overview) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Sophomore slump: "a unique confluence of challenges for second-year students that result in dissatisfaction and frustration for sophomores" (Fox, 2014, p. 14).

Sophomore student: An enrolled student whose credit hours range from 28 through 55 or a student regardless of the hours accumulated, are enrolled in a second full year of university (Gordon, 2010; Michigan State University, 2017).

Sophomore Year Experience (SYE) Program: Initiatives designed for the sophomore student to enhance college satisfaction, increase social and academic engagement, which combat sophomore slump related issues (Schaller, 2010b).

Student satisfaction: Indication that the student is making academic progress, as determined by accruing credits and passing classes, and is "developing a sense of belonging and mastery over the environment" (Schaller, 2010b, p. 23).

Transition: "The degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student" (see Appendix D: Definition of Terms) (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Summary

The researcher developed the study based on prior research conducted by Fox (2014), Mehta et al. (2011), Schaller (2010b), Vuong et al. (2010) and Ishitani (2006). Fox (2014) concluded, "sophomore struggles range widely" and recommended "that

more research is needed to further hone in on their experiences and the role of the

institution in these experiences" (p. 15). Mehta et al. (2011) concluded FGCS were not

as involved on campus, received less social and financial support, and tended to lack

coping skills needed to address difficult issues. Schaller (2010b) recommended focusing

on student difficulties in the subjects including financial matters, academic expectations,

faculty relations, social and academic integration, involvement, institutional commitment

and other topics. Additionally, Schaller (2010b) concluded "There is no reason to believe

that students who survive the first year are suddenly successful in their second year" (p.

15). Vuong et al. (2010) suggested when FGCS difficulties became coupled with

common sophomore related issues, the problems compounded. While, Ishitani (2006)

indicated the FGCS were most susceptible to attrition during the second year of college

and were more likely than non-FGCS to hold characteristics, which disadvantage them

during the pursuit of a college degree (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014). The

researcher added to the gap in the literature by addressing the preceding study

recommendations.

  In the following chapter, the researcher reviewed the literature discussing First-

Generation College Students (FGCS), the sophomore year student, and relevant student

development theory, which guided the researcher's study. At the time of the study, no

research existed in the literature quantitatively or qualitatively examining SYSA surveys.

The researcher believed the study would fill a gap in the literature by examining

sophomore student perceptions and experiences leading to persistence to degree

completion.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher reviewed the literature relevant to the mix-methods study. Specifically, the researcher examined the literature that discussed First-Generation College Students (FGCS), the sophomore year student, and student development theory. Each topic examined throughout Chapter Two contributed to this study's design. Prior to the researcher's study, few pieces of literature existed that explored these topics collectively.

The researcher explored how these topics existed independently and interrelatedly. This chapter led the researcher to fill a gap in the literature by comparing sophomore FGCS and sophomore non-First-Generation College Student (non-FGCS) experiences at a Private Midwestern University (PMU).   This study presented new data in relation to practices designed to increase persistence in the sophomore First Generation College Student (FGCS).

The First-Generation College Student

University administrators and the United States Government were committed to improving graduation rates among First-Generation College Students (FGCS). FGCS were defined by the researcher and throughout the literature, as a post-secondary student who did not have at least one parent or guardian with a four year-college degree (Davis, 2012; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gofen, 2009; What Works Clearinghouse, 2014). In 2015, the Congressional Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce training met with academics Cahalan and Perna (2015) and discussed strategies to improve graduation rates for low-income and FGCS. In 2014, Congress allocated $828.6 million in tax dollars to

improve graduation rates and access to college for low-income and FGCS (Cahalan & Perna, 2015, p. 8). The appropriation of federal funding remained consistent from 2005 to the present (Cahalan & Perna, 2015).

One in six Americans attending college were considered to be FGCS (Irlbeck et al., 2014, p. 154; The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2014, p. 5). Graduation rates among FGCS were reported as degree attainment of 34% within six years, compared to 66% of the counterparts (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 2). Data suggested a growing disparity in degree attainment between those of the lowest and those of the wealthiest income groups. Cahalan and Perna (2015) contributed to a Pell Institute research report citing bachelor's degree attainment since 1970 increased from 6% to 9% in the lowest family income quartile, while the highest family income quartile grew 40% to 70% (p. 30). Banks-Santilli's (2014) research indicated of those one in six freshmen who were FGCS, over 25% did not persist beyond the first year (p. 2). FGCS viewed higher education as an opportunity to improve a student's quality of life and increase income earning potential throughout a student's lifespan.

A college education offered the opportunity for upward social mobility for FGCS. Once a FGCS attained a bachelor's degree, disadvantages in the labor market were reduced (Choy, 2001; Davis, 2012; Reid & Moore III, 2008). Engle and Tinto's (2008) research reported "Today's four-year college graduates will earn nearly $1 million more over their working lives than will those who only receive a high school diploma and nearly $500,000 more than those who attend some college and/or earn a two-year degree" (p. 5). Despite government funding for low-income and FCGS, and despite the

knowledge that a college degree will improve lifelong income earnings, a graduation gap persisted.

Low income FGCS who attended university had lower rates of graduation when compared to non-FGCS counterparts even those FGCS who were not considered low income. According to Bui (2017) "Thirty percent of current college students were first-generation. Eighty-five percent of those first-generation college students were considered low income. Only eleven percent of those low-income students will be the first in their family to graduate from college" (p. 1). Difficulties faced by low income FGCS suggested that attaining a degree may be more difficult for this population.

Evidence indicated student enrollment among FGCS increased, but at a far lesser rate than non-FGCS counterparts. Banks-Santilli's (2014) research described enrollment as "becoming increasingly difficult to gain admission to state universities who are experiencing an influx of applications from more highly-qualified students who have decided to forfeit private education for a public one, saving thousands of dollars for advanced degrees" (p. 7). Thus, Banks-Santilli's (2014) found a correlation of lower graduation rates with increasingly competitive admissions pool of candidates. Not only had FGCS experienced more competition during the admissions process, but also experienced differences in the process leading up to submitting an application (Banks-Santilli's, 2014).

FGCS research indicated differences in the process of selecting a higher education institution for study. "While first-generation college students rely on the advice from guidance counselors and relatives to select colleges, non-first-generation students consider a college's reputation, availability of graduate programs, school rankings, and

cost" (Banks-Santilli, 2014, p. 3). FGCS lacked the assistance of family in choosing, enrolling, and adapting to college. "The parents of FGCS are less likely to help their children prepare for college entrance exams, accompany them on college tours, seek information regarding financial aid or attend information sessions" (Banks-Santilli, 2014, p. 3). As a result, researchers encouraged to explore how FGCS interacted with the collegiate system to enhance persistence to degree completion. When FGCS attended college, students struggled completing a degree when compared to non-FGCS.

FGCS were burdened with hurdles making persistence more difficult compared to non-FGCS. Researchers of FGCS reported a greater risk for dropping out when compared to non-FGCS possessing "lower GPA and larger drop-out rates" (Vuong et al., 2010, p. 51). Additional evidence indicated FGCS were not as involved on campus, had less support socially and financially, and tended to not cope directly with difficult issues (Mehta et al., 2011). Chen and Carrol (2005) determined 75% of FGCS expected to graduate while only 24% of students conferred a bachelor's degree (p. 8).

FGCS characteristics contributed to lower degree attainment. Stebleton et al. (2014) postulated, "First -generation students are more likely than their non-first-generation counterparts to have additional characteristics that may disadvantage of them as they pursue their college education" (p. 7). The literature recommended improving support systems for FGCS leading to increased persistence to graduation (Davis, 2012; Murphy & Hicks, 2006). The FGCS population had been identified as an at-risk population and as such, appropriate to examine the literature and identify common characteristics among the population.

FGCS faced unique challenges that affected the college experience. Numerous studies detailed the disadvantages of FGCS (Choy, 2001; Davis, 2012; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Ishitani, 2006; Lindemann-Litzsinger, 2017; Murphy & Hicks, 2006; Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014; Petricek, 2014; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Price, 2013; Reid & Moore III, 2008; Warburton et al., 2001). Challenges unique to the student included academic experiences, coping with experiences while enrolled in college, and social experiences on and off campus. Stebleton and Soria (2013) concluded with statistical significance of higher instances of issues hindering academic success when comparing FGCS and non-FGCS in the following categories: competing job responsibilities, family responsibilities, English and writing, and math skills, inadequate study skills, and feeling depressed, stressed or upset. The experiences inevitably varied, however, consistencies existed within the literature and researchers recommended future studies examine issues which included: academic performance and engagement, transitions or coping with change during college, social relationships, family relationships and support, and institutional processes. Researchers expressed concern for FGCS describing the cohort as "underprepared, both academically, and psychologically, for higher education" and concluded their potential for growth may be delayed (Pelco et al., 2014, p. 50). Individuals, found in the literature, also identified the sophomore student as at-risk for attrition population, and when the student was also FGCS, additional barriers to persistence emerged. Ishitani's (2006) research identified the sophomore FGCS as the most susceptible group for attrition during the second year.

The Sophomore

The literature described the sophomore college student as uniquely challenged when compared to other year students (Fox, 2014; Freedman, 1956; Graunke & Woolsey, 2005; Gump, 2007; Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008; Schaller, 2005; Schaller, 2010a; Schaller, 2010b; Schreiner, 2010; Tobolowsky, 2008; Woodworth, 1938; Young et al., 2015). Researchers agreed common negative characteristics existed due to processes unique to second year student experiences. The next several pages of this literature review discussed the history of the sophomore student research, common sophomore slump characteristics; and sophomore focused research which influenced the researcher's study.

History of Sophomore Research. Woodworth published the earliest work examining the sophomore student experience in 1938. Woodworth's (1938) research provided two crucial findings, which influence today's perspectives on the sophomore student. First, the innovative writing noted the sophomore student as far more independent than the freshman. Woodworth (1938) described freshman as receiving significant attention from deans, resident advisers, and upper-class counselors. Second, for the first time the sophomore year was described as a transitional period stating, "a year in which the student seeks to acquaint himself with new fields of interest" (Woodworth, 1938, p. 89). However, the early work did not prompt campus practitioners to divert resources to improve retention rates for sophomores.

Negative sophomore experiences were frequently grouped together and referred to as the sophomore slump, throughout the literature. Freedman's (1956) research first coined the term "sophomore slump" (p. 22). The "Sophomore Slump is characterized as

a unique confluence of challenges for second-year students that result in dissatisfaction and frustration for sophomores" (Fox, 2014, p. 14). Administration and faculty expressed concern these common negative student experiences could lead to attrition thus preventing persistence to graduation. Freedman (1956) claimed the sophomore slump might begin to surface as early as the second semester of the freshman year. Conversely, Freedman remarked, "On a whole the sophomores are industrious and enthusiastic about their academic work" and added, "Academically things are likely to go rather smooth in the sophomore year" (1956, p. 22). Freedman's research began to lay the groundwork for modern sophomore perspectives describing the student experience as socially and academically engaged, and sometimes too demanding academically for some students leading to attrition. Notably, Freedman offered few recommendations for institutional policy contributing to student success.

The origin of programmatic initiatives designed to improve student graduation rates originated near the end of the 20th century. Efforts to improve retention among first-year students began in the 1980s in response to troubling trends (Tetley, Tobolowsky, & Chan, 2010). Astin (1977) concluded the majority of drop- outs occurred during the first two years of college. Astin's research prompted administrators to allocate resources over the next two decades towards first-year students and "until recently, sophomores, in comparison, have been largely ignored at many institutions" (Tetley et al., 2010, p. 217). Unfortunately, sophomore research was almost non-existent until the beginning of the 21st century.

Little research focused on diverting second year student attrition until the groundbreaking monograph, published in 2000, by the National Resource Center for The

First Year Experience and the Students in Transition titled: Visible Solutions for Invisible

Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed (Schreiner, & Pattengale, 2000). The

monograph's authors, not only exposed "the issues of sophomores, but also institutional

approaches designed to help them" (Tobolowsky, 2008, p. 60). Many institutions were

only beginning to develop program initiatives for the sophomore. Take for instance the

Private Midwestern University (PMU) for which the researcher's work was based. The

first semester for services, targeted to engage the sophomore student, was launched in the

Fall of 2017. The PMU named the pilot program the Second Year Experience (SYE).

The first year for the SYE coincided with the researcher's study.

 The foremost work credited in guiding administrators in the design of SYE

programs was published in 2010, entitled *Helping Sophomores Succeed: Understanding

and Improving the Second Year Experience* (Hunter, Gardner, Tobolowsky, Evenbeck, &

Pattengale). This textbook collected leading academic researchers' work detailing

programmatic initiatives designed to increase institutional success for the sophomore.

The researcher learned from the PMU's department director of sophomore student

services that the text, *Helping Sophomores Succeed: Understanding and Improving the

Second Year Experience,* was instrumental in providing key components contributing to

the framework for the newly launched sophomore experience program. The textbook

provided the researcher with guidance for evaluating the needs of the sophomore student.

Additionally, the textbook detailed leading research on the sophomore student.

 Sophomore Slump Characteristics. Most universities in America required

incoming freshman to enroll in a seminar course where institutional processes were

introduced to ease the student's college transition. In contrast, the second year of college

was often the time when the least resources were dedicated to student (Graunke &

Woolsey, 2005). Consequently, sophomore students felt disconnected from the

institution (Fox, 2014; Graunke & Woolsey, 2005; Gump, 2007; Kennedy & Upcraft,

2010; Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008; Schaller, 2005; Schaller, 2010a; Schaller, 2010b;

Schreiner, 2010; Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012; Tobolowsky, 2008; Young et al.,

2015). The literature noted one reason for sophomore attrition was the drop off in

institutional initiatives, which, during the first year of college intended to heavily engage

and acclimate the student. Schaller (2010a) described the disconnection for the

sophomore as a sense of abandonment, as "there is less attention paid to retention beyond

the first year" (p. 16). Institutions with a robust, well-designed Sophomore Year

Experience (SYE) program were better prepared to avoid the sentiment of abandonment

(Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). Students continued to experience change throughout college

and the transitions did not end after the first year's orientation (Schaller, 2010a).

The first year of college focused on the process of transition into college life

leaving the student intensely connected to initiatives which integrated the student, taught

the student, and engaged the student in a way which connected to the "institutional

mission" (Tetley et al., 2010 p. 219). The second year became critical in keeping the

student connected to the university. Tetley et al. (2010) encouraged increasing

sophomore student involvement in meaningful ways by connecting students with specific

experiences that provoked the exploration of values and beliefs by "searching for

meaning, purpose, and identity," (p. 218) and selecting a major and choosing a career by

"dealing with pressures related to future plans including internships, study abroad, and

life after college" (p. 218). Tetley et al. (2010) added institutions should tailor program

components to the particular student population based on a comprehensive needs assessment. Student Affairs practitioners focused on common sophomore slump characteristics to improve student experiences.

Academic scholars identified several common slump characteristics which should be examined independent of other student cohorts. Sanchez-Leguelinel's (2008) research expressed concern for the sophomore describing the "consequences of the phenomenon, coupled with reduction in support services, often lead to feeling 'disconnected' and possibly, to their attrition from college" (p. 638). Kennedy & Upcraft described the "so-called sophomore slump" (p. 39) as not a regression from the previous academic year, but a complex, "multidimensional phenomenon" (p. 39) including one or more of several common characteristics:

- *Academic deficiencies* such is failing to make satisfactory academic progress towards a degree and carrying a low-grade point average into the second year

- *Academic disengagement* such as lacking academic motivation, failing to have meaningful interaction with faculty, not participating in class, feeling disconnected from the college major, and experiencing incompatibility between learning and teaching styles

- *Dissatisfaction of the collegiate experience* such as being unhappy with administrative process, feeling that advisors and faculty do not care, not receiving timely faculty feedback, and feeling isolated from peers in the campus community

- *Major and career indecision* such as failing to meet the academic requirements for their desired major, experiencing anxiety about making career

and major decisions, and taking extra time to graduate because of changing
majors

- *Developmental confusion* such as struggling with one's identity,
spirituality, beliefs and values, and life's purpose (p. 39)

The majority of published peer reviewed research included at least one of the
sophomore slump characteristics described above. Subsequently, leading scholars who
designed programs and had researched sophomore groups recommended "At any
institution, regardless of type, sophomore programs will ideally go beyond retention and
progression issues and connect directly to student learning, engagement, and the
institutional mission" (Tetley et al., p. 219). Schreiner (2010) recommended improving
the sophomore experience to address several issues: students lacking academic
motivation, failing to have meaningful interaction with faculty, not participating in class,
feeling disconnected from the college major, and incompatibility between learning and
teaching styles.

Academic Deficiencies. Research indicated poor academic performance among
sophomore students was a significant contributor to the dissatisfaction leading to attrition.
Kennedy and Upcraft's (2010) work concluded, "College grades may be the single best
explanation for sophomore academic persistence and degree completion" (p.34).
Kennedy and Upcraft (2010) called Adelman's 2006 research "by far the most credible
study of sophomore student performance" (p. 34). Adelman (2006) determined that "by
the end of students' second year, a significant spread in credit generation, academic
performance, and curricular participation has opened up between those who eventually
completed bachelor's degrees and those who did not" (p.61). Students who completed

the coursework with strong GPA scores were more likely to persist when compared to lower achieving students.

Academic Disengagement. Academic performance was positively influenced by academic engagement while one or more of the following student experiences was found to motivate academic disengagement: academic motivation, quality of interaction with faculty, a lack of class participation, feeling connected to one's college major, and the incompatibility of learning and teaching styles (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010). Previous researchers focused on sophomore specific research and reported attrition may increase if any of the disengagement characteristics emerged. Gardner's (2000) research concluded sophomore student dissatisfaction increased when learning styles conflicted with instructor delivery methods. The researcher added students felt disconnected from instructor's interaction, even when the instructor claimed to have encouraged engagement and participation (Gardner, 2000). The researcher also indicated instructional encouragement might not equate to academic satisfaction. Instructors needed to be sensitive to varying student learning styles and work to incorporate multiple approaches. Gardner, Pattengale, Tobolowsky, and Hunter (2010) explained student's engagement can be complex and difficult to achieve but should be approached throughout the college experience including in class, on-campus related activities, selecting a major, having dialogue with instructors to communicate learning needs.

Dissatisfaction of College Experience. Researchers who focused on the sophomore cohort detailed specific examples of how negative student experiences contributed to feelings of sophomore slump. Juillerat's (2000) research indicated sophomores that dropped out held higher expectations of university administrative

processes in comparison to peers that persisted. Building off of Juillerat's study, Schreiner's (2010) research indicated similar attrition results "characterized by significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction with institutional services than seen in first year student attrition predictors" (p. 44). The study's conclusion implied that student experience with administrative processes became more crucial during the sophomore year and correlated to satisfaction and persistence (Schreiner, 2010). Schreiner's (2010) Sophomore Experience Survey results indicated students who were more involved in campus activities reported higher levels of satisfaction with peers. Keeping students involved on campus indicated a higher likelihood of satisfaction with peers. Astin's (1977) seminal work concluded the most important influence to student development is the peer group. Positive student experiences interrelated with persistence.

Major and Career Indecision. The sophomore student was best supported by institutional systems designed to help the student choose a major suited for individual needs and abilities. Graunke and Woolsey's (2005) research of the college sophomore indicated both interactions with faculty and the student's commitment to a major as significant predictors of academic success. The authors concluded "sophomores who expressed higher levels of certainty about their major also achieved higher grades" (Graunke & Woolsey, 2005, p. 374). As a recommendation for practitioners, institutions, and administration, Graunke and Woolsey (2005) suggested providing sophomore focused activities intended to explore majors and to have individual departments "aid in the transition from general curriculum to one that focuses on their major" (p. 374). The researchers also recommended providing support most pertinent to sophomores. The researcher found the recommendation particularly crucial, suggesting each sophomore

cohort should be engaged in dialogue to flesh out his or her specific needs and "to increase their chances of success at their current institution" (p. 375). Sanchez-Leguelinel's (2008) research recommended institutions add program activities, "It becomes imperative that colleges begin to develop programs to address the specific needs of the students during this critical second year" (p. 639). Program designers should engage sophomore students more frequently with the intention of developing various academic and future needs.

Faculty and advisors should be empowered to provide support systems to help students discover what content majors best suit the student's interests. Nealy (2005) wrote of an interview with leading sophomore program design scholar Schreiner and stated, "The most essential element of retention is strong advising" (p. 12). Schreiner's work continued to suggest good advising is a crucial programmatic need in support of the sophomore student. "The advisor can play a helpful role in assisting the student in the decision-making process and exploring possibilities of majors that are congruent with the student's values, and interests, and strengths" (Schreiner, 2010, p. 60). Based on research, campus advisors needed to consider purposeful planning as more complex than previously thought. Schreiner (2010) recommended advising sophomore students in a way which provides hope and encourages identity development. Advising then became a process of teaching specifically related to "set[ting] goals, finding pathways to those goals, and learning how to motivate oneself" (Schreiner, 2010, p. 60). Perhaps, based on research analysis, advisors and faculty may play a more significant role in the student's development of self than originally credited.

Developmental Confusion. Administrators designing sophomore student programs should be mindful of the student's personal development while enrolled in college. Kennedy and Upcraft defined (2010) developmental confusion as **"**struggling with one's identity, spirituality, beliefs and values, and life's purpose" (p. 39). As students began to accumulate new experiences during college, the questioning of one's ideals occurred, formed prior to college. The changes were confusing and could lead the student into a transitional period of new beliefs, values, and or ideas.

Students often experienced transitional challenges as part of processing the developmental confusion. Schaller's (2000, 2005) work organized a theoretical perspective to assist in explaining the processes by which a student transitioned through college. For example, Schaller (2010b) called the sophomore year of college "a time of transition" (p. 67) describing transition as a beginning to an end of old ideals. Schaller (2010b) explained many students began to recognize "that precollege identity does not work well with the new information and experience associated with college" (p. 68). Internal conflicts were difficult for students as diverse ideas began to contradict previously held beliefs. Schaller (2010b) called the process random exploration (Schaller, 2005), and described the transition as a time when students "find ways to integrate these new experiences with their old ways of seeing the world" (p. 69). Schaller (2010b) described the transitional time as a feeling of emptiness, whereas "the old definition no longer exists, but students must construct the new via an exploration of alternatives to their notion of self, values, relationships, and career futures, and other issues" (p. 70). Schaller offered a comprehensive transition theory to explain sophomore

student's pathway in development. The author discussed transition theory, in the next section Theoretical Considerations.

Theoretical Considerations

Examination of literature on student development theory led the researcher to the text entitled *Student Development in College: Theory, Research and Practice* (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Patton, Renn, Guido-DiBrito, & Quaye, 2016). The author's claimed to be the first of all scholars to comprise a "comprehensive overview of student development theory to serve as a single guide for understanding what happens to students in college and for creating intentional interventions designed to enhance student learning and development" (p. xi). The text provided many insights, based on leading research, ascribing student affairs practitioners and researchers for effectively utilizing student development theories in combination. The textbook provided the framework for integrating theory into research for the researcher.

The literature discussing student development and the second-year student led the researcher to conflate multiple leading researcher's theoretical findings. Evans et al. (1998) wrote, "Rarely is an issue in student affairs so straightforward that one theory will adequately explain it or provide sufficient guidance to address it" (p. 265). The researcher's examination of the literature found several theories which fit various aspects of the study population.

Rodgers (1990) defined student development as "the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her develop mental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education" (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, p. 4, p. 27). The authors within the literature recognized Rodgers definition, as positive growth as a result

of enrollment in college. Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) explained a

theory's broad purpose by stating: "Theory in any scientific field is to provide a

framework within which to explain connections among the phenomena under study and

to provide insights leading to the discovery of new connections" (p. 198). Rodgers

(1980) defined theory in a student affairs context as "a set of propositions regarding the

interrelationship of two or more conceptual variables relevant to some realm of

phenomena. A theory provides the framework for explaining the relationship among

variables for empirical investigations" (p. 81). Conflating the above definitions, the

researcher concluded student development theory was a framework explaining how

higher education experiences led to growth. Scholars agreed the utility of a student

development theory relied on the ability to relate to students in practical situations (Evans

et al., 1998).

A student development theory used in practice and research detailed "the basis for

the practice of student development. Knowledge of student development theory enables

student affairs professionals to proactively identify and address student needs, design

programs, develop policies, and create healthy college environments that encourage

positive growth in students" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 5). Previous researchers

recommended student development theory possessed specific characteristics.

Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) posited student developmental theory must

respond to four questions: (1) What interpersonal and intrapersonal changes occur while

the student is in college? (2) What factors lead to this development? (3) What aspects of

college environment encourage or retard growth? (4) What developmental outcomes

should we strive to achieve in college (Patton et al., 2016, p. 8)? The researcher utilized

the questions when evaluating which theories were useful in researching student

experiences within the context of the study. Additionally, the researcher discovered a

second set of questions used to determine the usefulness of a theory. Knefelkamp et al.

(1978) recommended evaluating the utility of a theory by asking several additional

questions: (1) Upon what population is it theory-based? (2) How was the theory

developed? (3) Is the theory descriptive? (4) Is the theory explanatory? (5) Is the theory

prescriptive? (6) Is the theory heuristic? (7) Is there useful in practice? (Patton et al.,

2016, p.53-54)? Patton et al., (2016) asserted "most theories fall short on answering one

or more of these criteria" (p. 26). However, each theory employed by the researcher

answered questions within the original research with a significant impact to the student

affairs practice. Additionally, the researcher used both sets of questions as a point of

guidance for answering the research questions. The literature credited student

development theory as a framework to explain student experiences in a specific context.

However, Evans et al. (1998) asserted issues among student affairs practitioners were too

complex and rarely seen as one single theory as an explanation to answer all phenomena.

Using this reasoning, the researcher identified multiple theories for use in combination

when designing and analyzing the study.

      The literature recommended student affairs practitioners and researchers utilize

theories in combination. The two theories which contributed to the researcher's study

were Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Schaller's (2005) transition theory.

"Student involvement refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological

energy a student invests into the college experience" (Astin, 1999, p. 528). Schaller's

(2005) transition theory derived from an effort to "make sense of the sophomore year"

(p.18) and resulted in the discovery "that these students existed or moved through four stages: random exploration, focused exploration, tentative choices, and commitment" (p. 18). Individually, each theory attempted to answer questions on how student experiences led to the student's development and how the experiences contributed to persistence. The researcher examined each theory, discussed the gap in the literature, and discussed how each contributed to the researcher's study.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory. Astin's Student Involvement theory encouraged a shift of focus from the educator's examining course content as a predictor of outcome to focus on "how motivated the student is and how much time and energy the student devotes to the learning process" (Astin, 1999, p. 18). Astin also suggested turning the focus from educator practices such as course content, books, and laboratory techniques to student experiences. Furthermore, Astin posited, "involvement seems to be a more useful construct for educational practitioners. 'How do you motivate students?' is probably a more difficult question to answer than, 'How do you get students involved?'" (Astin, 1999, p. 522).

Astin's theory of student involvement attempted to identify how student success can be predictive and was the "foundation for most other success models" (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010, p. 31). "The theory of student involvement is more concerned with the behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development (the how of student development)" (Astin, 1999, p. 522). Kennedy and Upcraft (2010) described Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model as a commonsense approach to determining who students were prior to beginning college (input) and how experiences during college (environment) explained results (outcomes). "Input variables typically

include student demographics and characteristics prior to college. Environmental

variables typically are divided into institutional characteristics and student academic and

out of classroom experiences" (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010, p. 31). Astin further explained

the model as a research tool to represent student development. In summary, Astin (1991)

recommended predicting outcomes by analyzing a student's background in combination

with college experiences. Astin devised the I-E-O model to simplify assessing

experiences and determine outcomes. Astin's (1991) research summarized the model's

usefulness by suggesting student input and outcome data "is of limited value if you do

not know what forces were acting on these students during the same period of time" (p.

20).

Astin utilized an example using healthcare research to articulate how the I-E-O

model functions. Astin's (1991) analogy explained:

The basic evaluation problem in medical research is to learn which treatments

(environments) are most effective. If we were trying to enhance our understanding

of how best to treat patients in the hospital, imagine how difficult it would be if

all we did was to collect all the information on how long patient stayed, whether

they lived or died, and what their condition was as they left the hospital. We

would improve the situation considerably if we also got input (diagnostic)

information on the patient's condition at the time of admission. But we would still

be greatly handicapped without environmental data. That is, how could we expect

to learn much about how best to care for a patient if we did not know which

patients got which therapies, which operations, or which medications? This is the

equivalent of studying student development with no environmental data on what courses they took, where they lived, how much they studied, and so on. (p. 20)

Astin's method explained the general functionality of how to utilize information prior to enrollment (input), and experiences in college (environment) to explain outcomes. The researcher found the theoretical approach useful when analyzing student experiences for the qualitative research. However, because sophomore student experiences which influenced development over time, the researcher found Schaller's (2005) transition theory to be useful in evaluating research questions in relation to change (transition).

Schaller's Transition Theory. Schaller's (2005) transition theory developed using the qualitative research of 19 students in a private, religiously based institution. Schaller (2010b) explained, "with transition, going to college is letting go of the old self and coming to a new definition of self with the new experiences and insights of college taken into account" (p. 68). Schaller's (2005) research discovered "students existed or moved through four stages" of development: Random Exploration, Focused Exploration, Tentative Exploration, and Commitment. Each stage held certain specific characteristics (p.18).

Random Exploration represented the first stages of student's self-discovery. Schaller (2010b) described random exploration as "almost exuberant time when students go about the process of investigating what college has to offer, expressing their freedom and autonomy, and meeting new people" (p. 68-69). Students described in the phase were beginning college with ideals previously formed. However, new knowledge and

ideas gained during the first year transform one's perceptions of the world and led to the next stage of transition, Focused Exploration.

Focused Exploration occurred typically the time between freshman and sophomore year where students contemplated career choices, selecting a major, expressed frustration with various relationships, sometimes themselves, and sometimes with academic experiences (Schaller, 2005). Schaller (2005) recommended for students who remained in the Focused Exploration stage for extended periods of time received additional "support as they move[d] through this process" (p. 19). Schaller (2005) added "students who don't stay in this stage for long enough or in deep ways may resort to allowing powerful external forces such as parents, peers, faculty, society at large, or old notions of themselves to make decisions for them" (p. 19). As students began to make individual choices, for example finalizing a choice of major, the next stage occurs, Tentative Choices.

The Tentative Choices stage reflected the time in which a student was close to committing to a final choice (often represented by selecting a major) and often occurred once the student invested a significant amount of time into exploration. Schaller (2010b) wrote, "If students are going to make internally directed decisions about the future, tentative choices need to involve either (a) significant personal exploration and decision making or (b) for decision-making that allows for a later change (p. 75). Tentative Choices was the time when self-reflection produced a "new understanding" of the self, and "this new awareness becomes the guiding force in making internally directed choices" (Schaller, 2010b, p.75). Purposeful awareness led the student to Schaller's final Commitment Stage.

The final Commitment Stage of transition reflected the student's "planning for the future, clear about what they wanted, and unwavering in their sense of responsibility for their own future" (Schaller, 2005, p. 20). This stage represented a firm commitment based on past self-exploration and firmly understanding options. Schaller explained, "they were either resolute in their choices or they felt such relief in making choices that they ignored their other options" (p. 20) and added, "Sophomores who make choices while in denial of other options may, in fact, end up revisiting those same alternatives as they age" (p. 20). Schaller recommended students have a firm understanding of all the options available to prevent revisiting those options at a later age.

Student Motivation

In this study, data was collected using the RNL retention tool. Ruffalo Noel Levitz's (2017) SYSA instrument included "retention assessments, analytics, and career services so students achieve their educational goals and secure their first job in their desired field" (Ruffalo Noel Levitz SYSA Overview, year, para. 4). The instrument measured a student's non-cognitive motivation across several categories. This section of the literature review discussed key SYSA concepts.

Non-Cognitive Motivational Assessment. The SYSA's purpose was to administer "a non-cognitive motivational assessment to identify risk, challenges, strengths, and receptivity of second-year students to curb the sophomore slump. The SYSA had intervention properties geared towards helping administrators to target student self-reported motivation which identified deficiencies. The SYSA targeted three broad categories which contained additional specific measures within. Broadly the categories included (1) Academic Scales, (2) General Coping Scales, and (3) Receptivity to Support

Services (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). Within the

Academic Scale category, the assessment measured Academic Confidence, Commitment

to College, and Engaged Learning. Within the General Coping Scale, the assessment

measured Transition, Family Support, and Financial Security (Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

(2011). The assessment measured both Leadership and Parental Counseling within the

broader category of Receptivity to Support Services (Ruffalo Noel Levitz. (2011).

The SYSA provided administrators and advisors details of what student reported

as non-cognitive motivation strength and weakness. Blackwell and Pinder's (2014)

research was guided by defining motivation as energy and guidance for one's behavior

when seeking out a particular life goal. The definition accurately captured the SYSA

instrument's meaning for motivation. Non-cognitive skills "are related to motivation,

integrity, and interpersonal interaction" (para. 4) which were less consciously activated

than cognitive skills and were associated with functioning in an environment (ACT

WorkKeys, 2014). The SYSA effectively tested for motivational factors, which were

driven more by attitude and experience than by a student's cognitive function.

Academic Motivation.   **T**he researcher combined the categories of Academic

Confidence, Engaged learning, and Commitment to College with the overarching topic of

Academic Motivation. Academic Confidence was defined as "Self-belief of doing well

in academic studies" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Engaged Learning was defined as "Self-belief of doing well in reading, writing, and

public speaking" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Commitment to College is defined as "Value placed on college education and long-term

benefits" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). The literature

provided insights into how each category affected student experiences.

     Academic Confidence. Researchers found students who were confident in their

learning capabilities, committed to completing the degree, and engaged in the learning

process were most prepared to persist to the graduation (Bandura, 1997; Price-Williams,

2015; Rodgers, 2013; Schreiner, 2012). A student actively engaged in the learning

process was more likely to connect their interests to materials being taught while

persistence improved. Academic confidence in each study cited above contributed

uniquely to the literature. Sanders and Sanders (2006) research concluded two outcomes

related to the researcher's study intent. First, "the role of self-perception in conditioning

a student's willingness and even ability to succeed" (Sanders & Sanders, 2006, pp. 501-

2). Second, "the research suggests a range of external factors that can shape the

academic confidence of post-secondary students and subsequently affect their outcomes

and success" (Sanders & Sanders, 2006, p. 502).

     The researcher's goal in the study was to examine the relationship of student

motivation and academic confidence, and to connect these measures to the student's

reporting of what and how external factors contributed to forming academic confidence.

The research conducted by Nicholson, Putwain, Connors, and Hornby-Atkinson (2013)

on academic behavioral confidence recommended implementing strategies to improve

student grades by enhancing student self-responsibility for learning (attending classes and

studying) improving confidence. The researcher responded accordingly by looking for

student interview responses connected to the academic behavioral confidence concepts.

Bickerstaff, Barragan, and Rucks-Ahidiana (2017) concluded student confidence in the

classroom had a direct relationship to the effort students exerted; confidence was not static, "it shifts and changes in their perceptions of themselves as students as they engage with the college environment" (p. 507). The researcher found the data useful in designing interview questions which examined how and why student experiences changed over time.

Engaged Learning. Engaged learning was defined as "the student's positive energy invested in his or her own learning, as evidence by meaningful processing, attention to what is happening in the moment, and involvement in learning activities" (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2011 p. 8). Schreiner (2012) described "students who are thriving academically and psychologically engaged in the learning process; they are meaningfully processing course material, making connections between what they already know or are interested in and what needs to be learned" (p. 6). Schreiner (2012) spoke of students who were academically thriving and were psychologically engaged in learning as "meaningfully processing course material" (p. 6) by making connections between what needs to be learned and the student's prior knowledge or interests.

Commitment to College. A student's commitment to college is a key indicator of a success mindset and the intent to persist to graduation (Schreiner, 2012). Commitment to college was defined as the "degree to which a student values a college education, satisfaction of college life, and the long-term benefits of graduation" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). It identifies students who possess a keen interest in persisting, regardless of their prior level of achievement" (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2011 p. 8). Commitment to college was a student's determination to succeed without an excuse or viable reason for failure. Schreiner (2012) described a success mindset; high-

risk students such as FGCS mitigated negative information by refusing to "dwell on it and by quickly postulating positive outcomes based on their high level of confidence in their own ability and determination to work hard" (p. 94).

Self-efficacy is one's own judgment of their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). In an academic context, self-efficacy should be considered when analyzing a student's likelihood to graduate college. Bandura's (1997) stated "efficacy beliefs contributed to the quality of human functioning in diverse ways. They do so by enlisting cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes through which accomplishments are realized" (p. 115). Rodger's (2013) qualitative research of a private mid-western university concluded, "First-generation students were personally aware of their own abilities, which allowed them to be successful in persisting to graduation" (p. 140). Price-Williams (2015) quantitative analyses of sophomore students determined those students who reported higher levels of self-efficacy were more likely to graduate college (p.106).

Social Motivation. The category of leadership falls under the category of Social Motivation. Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2011) intended the scale to measure the "student's feelings of social acceptance, especially as a leader" (p. 9). Leadership is defined as "Self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017).

Leadership. The literature contributed significant findings to leadership and transition. For the purpose of the researcher's study both measurements were defined under the category of social motivation because each determined the student's comfort in a social context. For example, leadership "measures the student's feelings of social

acceptance, especially as a leader" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). This scale simply reflects the student's feelings about how others perceive his or her leadership; it does not measure leadership ability or even potential (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2011 p. 8).

General Coping. The researcher combined the categories of family support, financial security, and transition with the overarching topic of general coping. Family support was defined as "Satisfaction one feels with the communication within the family structure" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). The literature provided insights into how each category affected student experiences. Transition was defined as "The degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). Financial Security was defined as "Level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college" (N.M. McVay, personal communication, September 29, 2017). The literature provided insights into how each category affected student experiences.

Family support. Qualitative research provided faculty and staff an even greater detail into variance in student experiences, meaning student perceptions could be divergent from classic literature norms. FGCS were often unable to utilize parents as a source of guidance when navigating the terrain of college culture (Davis, 2012). The research conducted by Irlbeck et al. (2014) on a group of students in an agricultural science program described a mixture of results in comparison to historical literature. FGCS in the study supported the literature stating eight of nine students were not likely to seek out support systems on campus directed to FGCS, all students were aware of the importance of financial security during college, and "most students stated their parents

were very supportive of their academic goals, but many said a lack of knowledge existed"
(Irlbeck et al., 2014, p. 162). The research concluded with significant findings for
university faculty and staff including students who succeeded socially and academically
because participants used extracurricular activities to manage transitions, developed
faculty relations for goal setting, and parental involvement and support increased with
orientation information such as tuition and financial aid, housing details, student
involvement opportunities and other campus specific information (Irlbeck et al., 2014).
Ziemniak's (2010) qualitative research determined families matter for FGCS concluding,
"Data from this study has shown that family support and involvement can play an
important role in helping first-generation students persist in college" (p. 204).
Lindemann-Litzsinger's (2017) research warned a strong academic FGCS who lacked
self-confidence do did sometimes drop out without family pushback. In this way,
according to the literature, academic confidence played a role in student persistence.

  Financial Security. The SYSA assessment measured a student's perception of
individual financial security. Research concluded a student who lacked comfort in
available financial resources experienced increased stress. Britt, Canale, Fernatt, Stutz,
and Tibbetts (2015) defined financial stress "as the inability to meet one's economic
responsibilities and is influenced by attitudes, beliefs, and other psychological factors" (p.
173). Researchers determined that financial stress was the "second largest stressor
among college students" (Lim, Heckman, Montalto, & Letkiewicz, 2014, p. 148). Lim,
Heckman, Montalto, and Letkiewicz's (2014) study revealed millennial parents were
much more involved in student financial decisions which may have then, in turn,
diminished student's self-reporting of financial stress and recommended adding to the

gap in the literature. Thus, the literature recommended additional research to identify

experiential minutia, recommending researchers introduce new peer reviewed work to

assist administrators in developing programming to improve student success.

Summary

The literature review discussed several topics which influenced the researcher's

study. Each topic reviewed was relevant to the researcher's study. Topics included

FGCS, the sophomore student, the sophomore slump, student development theories

perceived by the author as central in guiding the study, and non-cognitive motivational

behaviors.

FGCS and sophomore students experienced a variety of challenges during the

college years. The literature revealed a gap directing the researcher's methodology. The

researcher compared sophomore FGCS and sophomore non-FGCS experiences at a

Private Midwestern University (PMU). Chapter Three detailed the researcher's

methodology used to construct the study.

Chapter Three: Research Method and Design

Introduction

Chapter Three included the methodology utilized in constructing the research project. Specifically, this chapter detailed a description of the research work's purpose, a description of the university research site, hypotheses and research questions, a description of the survey tools (both quantitative and qualitative), the participant recruitment process (both quantitative and qualitative), data collection processes (both quantitative and qualitative), and analysis procedure for data procured (both quantitative and qualitative). Chapter Three included all requisites to fully explain the study's methodological construction.

Purpose

The purpose of the mixed methods study was to compare first generation and non-first-generation sophomore student perceptions at a Private Midwestern University (PMU). The researcher focused on three broad categories: academic motivation, social motivation, and general coping. The sub-categories of academic motivation included academic confidence, commitment to college, and engaged learning. The sub-categories of social motivation included leadership. The sub-categories of general coping included family support, financial security, and transitioning.

The researcher's mixed methods approach examined a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Quantitatively, the study statistically compared First Generation College Students (FGCS) and non-First-Generation College Students (non-FGCS) responses to the Second-Year Student Assessment (SYSA) survey questions to determine if differences in perception existed. Survey data collected was curated using an online

survey instrument tool developed by Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) and distributed by the PMU. Qualitatively, the researcher conducted one on one semi-structured interviews to examine and compare perceptions among sophomores from each subgroup. The researcher explored how sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceptions differed, and as such, may require additional adjusting engagement strategies to improve on campus services intended to increase retention rates.

Research Site

All data collected for the research was gathered from one PMU. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions provided data from Fall of 2017 and described the researched university as: private not-for profit, in a suburban setting with a student population of 10,025 and offered the basic classification as Doctoral/Professional (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, para. 1, 2018). The U.S. News & World Report (2019) best college rankings considered the university to be selective with a 2017 acceptance rate of 74% (para. 7). The publication detailed student gender distribution at 54% female, 46% male, freshman satisfaction rate of 70%, 4-year graduation rate of 31%, with a NCAA II collegiate athletic association (U.S. News & World Report, para. 9, 2019).

PMU introduced new services to improve the sophomore student college experience in the fall of 2017. The university expanded first year support services into the second year to increase sophomore satisfaction and success. For example, the university launched a sophomore newsletter to notify students of services directed specifically towards the cohort. In addition to new services directed towards sophomores, the institution adopted Ruffalo Noel Levitz's survey tool titled: Second-

Year Student Assessment (SYSA). The "online, 68-item Second-Year Student Assessment carefully assesses the non-cognitive, motivational needs of second-year students, providing a wealth of data to guide student retention planning (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2011). The PMU intended to utilize the survey tool to improve sophomore student retention. The PMU survey tool did not specifically compare sophomore FGCS with non-FGCS.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Each hypothesis and research question made suppositions to explore gaps in the literature. Specifically, the researcher intended to expose new insights into the college experiences of sophomore from both FGCS and non-FGCS subgroups. Additionally, hypotheses and research questions were designed to discern differences in experience among the two subgroups. The mixed method study investigated FGCS and non-FGCS perception's by discussing experiences in the subjects of academic confidence, commitment to college, engaged learning, leadership, transition, family support, and financial security.

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in the academic confidence between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in the commitment to college between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in the engaged learning scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in the self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader (leadership) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in the degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 6: There is no difference in the satisfaction one feels with the communication within the family structure (family support) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 7: There is no difference in the level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive academic confidence?

Research Question 2: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive commitment to college?

Research Question 3: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive engaged learning?

Research Question 4: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their acceptance by others as a leader (leadership)?

Research Question 5: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition)?

Research Question 6: How do the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their satisfaction with the communication within the family structure (family support)?

Research Question 7: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security)**?**

Survey Instrument and Interview Protocol Summary

The researcher utilized two extraction tools to gather data in the mixed methods study; a quantitative retention survey tool and qualitative semi structured one on one interviews conducted by the researcher. The survey tool, Second-Year Student Assessment (SYSA), was administered by the researched university. The semi-structured interview questions were designed by the researcher and approved by the PMU's Internal Review Board (IRB).

Survey Instrument

The SYSA survey tool was produced by Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Ruffalo Noel Levitz described a vision for clients as: "to lead the charge to excellence in enrollment and fundraising management, helping organizations meet their challenges and fulfill their missions" (History of Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017, para. 8). Ruffalo Noel Levitz marketed the SYSA survey tool as:

Find out how to curb the "sophomore slump" on your campus, or assess the needs

of transfer students

Ensuring the persistence of second-year students and transfer students is a

continuing challenge for two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

To retain these students, you must meet their specific needs and keep them

engaged.

The online, 68-item Second-Year Student Assessment (see sample) carefully

assesses the non-cognitive, motivational needs of second-year students, providing

a wealth of data to guide student retention planning. The resulting data:

- Identifies the specific needs of at-risk, second-year students and

  transfer students, including their level of engagement, commitment to

  college, and receptivity to assistance from advisors, academic support

  offices, career counselors, and other campus services.

- Prioritizes sophomore and transfer student engagement strategies by

  equipping you to design or update campus services to match the

  interests and concerns of your cohorts.

- Compares students' receptivity to assistance in their second year vs.

  their use of campus services in the previous year.

- Pinpoints the college completion plans of students: You learn which

  students expect to complete their degrees at your campus, transfer to

  another institution, or are unsure of their plans for the next term.

Determines which campus services students utilize the most. (Ruffalo Noel

Levitz, 2011, para. 1-5)

The PMU electronically administered the survey and required approximately 20 minutes

to complete. The survey included 27 questions to track data across seven categories of non-cognitive motivation including: academic confidence, commitment to college, engaged learning, leadership, transition, family support, and financial security. All survey data was procured by the PMU. The researcher was granted access to data to support the study.

All SYSA data was procured with prior permission from the PMU's IRB with departmental oversight. The researcher acquired the data from the university's department director. The data was organized in a password protected excel spreadsheet and included student mean scores and the generation status. The spreadsheet organized student scores by subgroups, FGCS or non-FGCS, and listed percentile scores individually across each of the seven motivation categories. The data was scrubbed of all unique identifiers.

Interview Protocol

The semi-structured one on one interview intended to determine how students report differences in individual experiences as described by self-reported perceptions. The first four questions focused on the student's gender, ethnicity, parent's career, and family income growing up (see Appendix B: Interview Protocol). Each additional interview question intended to flesh out student perceptions and aligned to the SYSA survey questions. For example, the interview dedicated two to five questions to each topic category (academic confidence, commitment to college, engaged learning, leadership, transition, family support, and financial security).

Study Participants and Student Recruitment Process Summary

All data compiled included sophomore students who completed the Private Midwestern University's Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA) survey. All study participants were subcategorized into one of two sub-groups, either First Generation College Student (FGCS) or non-First-Generation College Student (non-FGCS).

Study Participants. All study participants were enrolled at the PMU as traditional sophomore second year students and met specific criteria. To qualify as a study participant, the students needed to be in the second year of attendance with credits ranging from 28 to 55 hours. Each study participant was organized into one of two subgroups, FGCS or non-FGCS. A FGCS was a post-secondary student who did not have at least one parent or guardian who obtained a four year-college degree (Davis, 2012; Gofen, 2009; What Works Clearinghouse, 2014). A non-FGCS was a student who had at least one parent or guardian who completed a four-year college degree. The researcher placed each student into the appropriate subgroup based on generation status criteria listed above.

Quantitative Recruitment. Participant recruitment was not needed for the study's quantitative component. The secondary data was collected from the SYSA survey administered by the PMU in the Fall semester of 2017. All quantitative data was procured with prior permission from the PMU's IRB with departmental oversight. The data collected was provided to the researcher by the university's department director. The data was organized in a password protected excel spreadsheet which included student mean scores and the student's generation status. The spreadsheet included student scores

by subgroup, FGCS or non-FGCS, and percentile scores individually across each of the

seven motivation categories. The data was scrubbed to maintain student anonymity.

Qualitative Recruitment. A semi-structured, one on one qualitative interview

recruitment process was offered to students who participated in the SYSA survey. The

university's department director delivered the initial recruitment email on the researcher's

behalf (see Appendix: A). Initially, only students who completed the SYSA would be

eligible to participate in the one on one interview. The researcher offered each

participant compensation of a $20 Visa gift card following the completion of the one on

one interview. Students showing interest in participating were directed to email the

researcher for scheduling. Subsequently, the researcher scheduled and completed five

non-FGCS and two FGCS interviews. The researcher did not meet the IRB protocol

minimum interview participants of five per sub-group. A second recruitment process was

initiated to acquire the remaining three interview participants to meet the researcher's

IRB approved quantity of five to ten participants per student subgroup, FGCS and non-

FGCS.

University doctoral candidate research protocol required the researcher to adhere

to the IRB approved recruitment process. Failure to meet the minimum interview

participants required an Amendment Application procedure to alter the criteria of the

original participant candidate pool. The researcher first met with the department director

to determine if additional candidates were available. The researcher was directed to

discuss potential candidates with another member within the same department. Following

a discussion with the Director of First Year Programs, the researcher determined that

potential candidates existed who met similar criteria as the initial FGCS group. The

criteria included a student who is in the second year of college and whose parent or

guardian had not attained a bachelor's degree. A department representative reached out

to potential participants who met the sophomore FGCS criteria, but did not complete the

SYSA. The same recruitment process was executed to collect the remaining participants.

Again, offering compensation of a $20 Visa gift card following the completion of the one

on one interview. Simultaneously, the researcher filed an IRB Amendment Application

(see Appendix: B) to allow for the new recruits for acceptance into the one on one

interview. Permission was granted to allow the alteration in potential candidate criteria.

The researcher proceeded to schedule and complete the final three interviews without

alteration to the interview protocol.

Data Collection Summary

All data compiled included sophomore students. Each student who participated

completed the PMU's SYSA survey. This section detailed how the participant's data was

collected for analyses.

Quantitative Data Collection. The university's department director provided the

secondary data. The data was organized in a password protected excel spreadsheet and

provided to the researcher via email and scrubbed of all unique identifiers. The

spreadsheet data was organized by student scores and each subgroup, FGCS or non-

FGCS including each student's generation status. Each subgroup listed the individual

percentile scores across each of the seven motivation categories. Survey scores listed the

student's satisfaction represented as a percentile within its category. For example, FGCS

1's score in Academic Confidence was listed as 71.40%, and non-FGCS 1's score in

Academic Confidence was recorded as 60.70%.

Qualitative Data Collection. The researcher acquired qualitative data by conducting 10 one on one semi-structured interviews. Prior to beginning the interview, the students were presented with the informed consent form (see Appendix: C). Each student reviewed the consent form, asked questions as needed, and signed the consent form prior to beginning the interview. Interviews consisted of five students matching the criteria of the FCGS subgroup and five students matching the criteria of the non-FGCS subgroup. The researcher completed all 10 interviews then transcribed each participant's response. Once transcription was completed the researcher separated all questions according to alignment to each research question.

Data Analysis Procedure

All data was analyzed by aligning student answers of motivational perceptions into one of the seven relevant categories: academic confidence, commitment to college, engaged learning, leadership, transition, family support, and financial security. This strategy allowed the researcher to "define as precisely as possible what aspects of the content" (p. 480) aligned to each hypothesis and research question (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015).

Data collected to support the mixed methods research work was distinguished as either (1) quantitative extracted from the SYSA survey for statistical analysis or (2) qualitative extracted from one on one semi structured interviews for analyses. In both quantitative and qualitative data sets, the participants fell into one of two comparison groups, FGCS or non-FGCS. By organizing the data into subgroups, a statistical or qualitative analysis was made to answer each hypothesis and research question. For quantitative analysis, the researcher utilized a purposeful sample gathered from

secondary data to provide representation of populations being compared, "based on prior information" (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 101); while for qualitative analysis, the researcher utilized a purposive convenience sample. The literature recommended between 1 and 20 participants for qualitative analysis (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 104). The researcher secured 10 total participants for one on one semi structured interviews. Five participants were identified as FGCS and five participants were identified as non-FGCS.

Quantitative Analyses Procedure. The quantitative analysis procedure was used to answer each of the seven hypothesis questions. The researcher analyzed hypotheses 1, - 7 using a *t*-test to determine statistical difference and an *f*-test to determine statistical variance. Next, the researcher used the *t*-test calculations to determine a difference in means of each hypothesis. The results of the statistical analysis provided a statistical determination of each hypothesis.

Qualitative Analysis Procedure. The qualitative portion of the research required one on one semi structured interviews to answer each of the study's seven research questions. The researcher analyzed each interview question examining student perceptions as reported. Each interview question or questions aligned with a research question. For instance, question 3a asked, "How would you describe your academic performance?" The question was designed by the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of Research Question One: "How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive academic confidence?" Each of the seven research questions aligned directly with the interview protocol questions with one exception. The first two questions were used to collect descriptive statistics of the students' self-perceived social class, gender, and ethnicity. Following the completion of the interview process, the researcher

transcribed all recordings into two Word documents. One document contained all the

transcriptions of FGCS responses and one contained all transcriptions of non-FGCS

responses. For further clarity, the researcher organized transcriptions according to the

interview question or questions. The researcher then coded the answers while scanning

for themes among student responses. Open coding was used to determine common

themes when answering each of the seven research questions and once all questions were

analyzed and themes emerged the researcher again looked over the interview

transcriptions for a second round of analyses.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to investigate sophomore student's perceptions.

Quantitatively, the study compared First-Generation College Students (FGCS) and non-

First-Generation College Students (non-FGCS) responses to survey questions which

measured perceptions of academic confidence, commitment to college, engaged learning,

leadership, transition, family support, and financial security. Qualitatively, the researcher

interviewed students to compare perceptions of the FGCS and non-FGCS. Cumulatively,

the research intended to expose new knowledge and determine differences in perceptions'

of traditionally enrolled sophomore FGCS with non-FGCS for student services

professionals.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The researcher detailed the results in Chapter Four of all data collected. The data compared student perceptions among two sophomore student subgroups: First Generation College Students (FGCS) and non-First-Generation College Students (non-FGCS). An examination compared the differences between student perceptions of FGCS and non-FGCS across seven categories. Each category aligned to one of the seven research questions and seven hypotheses; academic confidence, commitment to college, engaged learning, financial security, leadership, family support, and transition. Quantitative analysis included secondary data from the Private Midwestern University's survey titled Second-Year Student Assessment (SYSA). Qualitative analysis was completed by the researcher utilizing interview questions. An open coding method was utilized to connect emerging themes to the research questions.

Whenever possible, the researcher utilized Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome Model (I-E-O) to guide in analyzing student development. For example, each research question asked students to describe aspects of individual student experiences. Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model was designed as a common sense, rigorous approach to determining who students were prior to beginning college (Input) and how experiences during college (environment) explained results (outcomes). "Input variables typically include student demographics and characteristics prior to college. Environmental variables typically are divided into institutional characteristics and student academic and out of classroom experiences" (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010, p. 31). Astin

further explained the model as a research tool to reason or predict student development. Astin (1991) wrote,

> student input and student outcome data are meant to represent student development-changes in the student's abilities, competence, knowledge, values, aspiration, and self-concept that change over time" and later in his description added, "knowing what particular environmental experiences each student has had helps us to understand why some students develop differently from others. (p. 21)

Astin's model attempted to provide researchers a simplified mechanism for assessing student experiences in determining outcomes.

Hypotheses and Research Questions Summary

Each hypothesis and research question made suppositions to explore gaps in the literature. Specifically, the researcher intended to expose new insights into the college experiences of sophomores from both FGCS and non-FGCS subgroups. Additionally, hypotheses and research questions were designed to discern differences in experience among these two subgroups.

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in the academic confidence between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in the commitment to college between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in the engaged learning scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in the self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader (leadership) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

 Null Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in the degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 6: There is no difference in the satisfaction one feels with the communication within the family structure (family support) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Null Hypothesis 7: There is no difference in the level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive academic confidence?

Research Question 2: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive commitment to college?

Research Question 3: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive engaged learning?

Research Question 4: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their acceptance by others as a leader (leadership)?

Research Question 5: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition)?

Research Question 6: How do the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their satisfaction with the communication within the family structure (family support)?

Research Question 7: How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security)**?**

Quantitative Data Analysis Summary

The following section detailed the researcher's findings. Each Hypothesis was analyzed and results were listed. A summary of all data, titled Table 1: *Summary of Results of Hypotheses 1-7* have been placed at the end of the section.

Hypothesis 1

The researcher analyzed Hypothesis 1 by conducting a *t*-test of two means to determine if perceptions of Academic Confidence were different between First-Generation College Students (FGCS) and non-First-Generation Students (non-FGCS). A preliminary test of variances revealed the variances were equal. The analysis revealed the academic confidence scores for FGCS (M = 70.53, SD = 10.56) were not statistically different from those of non-FGCS (M = 76.08, SD = 13.30); $t(76) = -1.38$, $p = 0.176$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded the FGCS did not report different perceptions in academic confidence when compared to non-FGCS.

Hypothesis 2

The researcher analyzed Hypothesis 2 by conducting a *t*-test of two means to determine if perceptions of commitment to college were different between FGCS and non-FGCS. A preliminary test of variances revealed the variances were equal. The analysis revealed the commitment to college scores for FGCS ((M = 82.73, SD = 9.49) were not statistically different from those of non-FGCS (M = 87.50, SD = 10.53); $t(76) =$ -1.46, $p = 0.148$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses and concluded the FGCS did not report different perceptions in commitment to college when compared to non-FGCS.

Hypothesis 3

The researcher analyzed Hypothesis 3 by conducting a t-test of two means to determine if perceptions of engaged learning were different between FGCS and non-FGCS. A preliminary test of variances revealed the variances were equal. The analysis revealed the engaged learning scores for FGCS (M = 72.61, SD = 11.12) were not statistically different from those of non-FGCS (M = 76.63, SD = 13.70); $t(76) =$ -0.96, $p = 0.341$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded the FGCS did not report different perceptions in engaged learning when compared to non-FGCS.

Hypothesis 4

The researcher analyzed Hypothesis 4 by conducting a *t*-test of two means to determine if perceptions of acceptance by others as a leader were different between FGCS and non-FGCS. A preliminary test of variances revealed the variances were equal. The analysis revealed the leadership scores for FGCS (M = 77.98, SD = 13.27) were not statistically different from those of non-FGCS (M = 76.13, SD = 13.59); $t(76) = 0.43$, $p =$

0.666. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded the FGCS did not

report different perceptions in leadership when compared to non-FGCS

Hypothesis 5

The researcher analyzed Hypothesis 5 by conducting a *t*-test of two means to

determine if perceptions of transition were different between FGCS and non-FGCS. A

preliminary test of variances revealed the variances were not equal. The analysis

revealed that the transition scores for FGCS (M = 74.78, SD = 23.33) were not

statistically different from those of non-FGCS (M = 81.17, SD = 13.95); $t(11) = -0.92$, *p*

$= 0.337$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded the FGCS did

not report different perceptions in transition when compared to non-FGCS.

Hypothesis 6

The researcher analyzed Hypothesis 6 by conducting a *t*-test of two means to

determine if perceptions of family support were different between First-Generation

College Students (FGCS) and non-First-Generation Students (non-FGCS). A preliminary

test of variances revealed the variances were equal. The analysis revealed the family

support scores for FGCS (M = 83.33, SD = 20.11) were not statistically different from

those of non-FGCS (M = 84.64, SD = 16.23); $t(76) = -0.25$, $p = 0.806$. The researcher

failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded the FGCS did not report different

perceptions in family support when compared to non-FGCS.

Hypothesis 7

The researcher analyzed Hypothesis 7 by conducting a *t*-test of two means to

determine if perceptions of financial security were different between FGCS and non-

FGCS. A preliminary test of variances revealed the variances were equal. The analysis

revealed the leadership scores for FGCS ((M = 66.07, SD = 27.77) were not statistically

different from those of non-FGCS (M = 69.59, SD = 25.54); $t(76) = -0.43$, $p = 0.666$.

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded the FGCS did not report

different perceptions in financial security when compared to non-FGCS.

Table 1

Summary of Results for Hypotheses 1-7

	FGCS		Non-FGCS				
	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	d.f.	t-score	p-Value
Academic Confidence	12	70.53 (10.56)	66	76.08 (13.30)	76	-1.38	0.176
Commitment to College	12	82.73 (9.49)	66	87.50 (10.53)	76	-1.46	0.148
Engaged Learning	12	72.61 (11.12)	66	76.63 (13.70)	76	-0.96	0.341
Leadership	12	77.98 (13.27)	66	76.13 (13.59)	76	0.43	0.666
Transition	12	74.78 (23.33)	66	81.17 (13.95)	11	-0.92	0.337
Family Support	12	83.33 (20.11)	66	84.64 (16.23)	76	-0.25	0.806
Financial Security	12	66.07 (27.77)	66	69.59 (25.54)	76	-0.43	0.666

Note: α = 0.05

Qualitative Data Analysis

The researcher answered the research questions through analysis of answers

acquired during the one on one semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted 10

interviews: five interviews from the FCGS subgroup and five students of the non-FGCS

subgroup. The participants responses provided a set of rich data and qualitative insight.

The researcher analyzed the data and coded the respondent's answers searching for

common themes utilizing an open coding method.

The researcher utilized interview question to gather data which revealed subtle differences in the student experience. For example, Research Question One (RQ1) How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive academic confidence? In the example for RQ1, the subtle differences being examined within the two interview questions included: (1) How do students self-report academic confidence? (2) Do perceptions differ between subgroups? (3) Do changes in student perceptions vary between subgroups from freshman to sophomore year? The researcher utilized theorist Astin's Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model as a guide for analyses throughout.

The I-E-O model "can be used by student development researchers to guide their investigation of student development-and by college administrators-to help them design more effective learning environments" (Astin, 1999, p. 519). Input data were represented by student characteristics and qualities which existed prior to entering the university, or a student's "talent at the time of entry" (Astin, 2012, p. 18). For the study, input will most often be a student's generation status and variations have been identified as appropriate. Environmental data were represented by students self-reporting of educational experiences relevant to the interview question being asked. Outcome data "refers to the 'talents" we are trying to develop in our educational programs" (Astin, p. 18). For the study, outcomes will most often be the student responses. The I-E-O variables have been identified throughout the analyses.

Research Question 1

How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive academic confidence?

Previous research concluded students who were confident in learning capabilities, committed to completing a degree, and engaged in the learning process were most

prepared to persist to degree completion (Bandura, 1997; Price-Williams, 2015; Rodgers, 2013; Schreiner, 2012).   The researcher designed interview question 3a to align with RQ1 by asking the student to describe self-perceptions of academic confidence. The researcher answered RQ1 compiling all student interview data and coded each answer according to emerging themes. Analysis for RQ1 was applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS, using an open coding, comparative method. Utilizing Astin's Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) methodology, the researcher accounted for student input, for example, preexisting characteristics such as generation status. Output was represented by the student answer. For example, FGCS 2 responded, 'I'd say above average.' The researcher attempted to identify environment characteristics utilizing student descriptions within the interview remarks.

Interview question 3a asked: How would you describe your academic performance? Responses to the interview question 3a on self-perceived academic confidence revealed two significant themes among both subgroups: (1) self-perceived good student, and (2) motivation. The researcher concluded both FGCS and non-FGCS perceptions of academic confidence were similar and had little variation. Question 3a provided insufficient data to determine environment, or educational experience variables.

Interview question 3b asked: Have these feelings changed since your freshman year? The question explored how student perceive changes in academic confidence (outcome) since freshman year. The interview data did provide insights into how the environment, or education/college experience changed since freshman year.

RQ1 theme one: self-perceived good student. The researcher concluded both FGCS and non-FGCS identified as good students. Four FGCS identified as good

academic performers, and one described performance as motivated. Similarly, four non-FGCS identified as good academic performers, and one identified as motivated. The researcher concluded both inputs of FGCS and non-FGCS self-identified academic confidence similarly with little variation.

The output data reported as stated above, for the five FGCS, four FGCS identified as good academic performers, and of the five non-FGCS, four non-FGCS identified as good academic performers. FGCS 2 stated, 'I'd say above average.' FGCS 4 stated, 'Good, I like school.' Responses were similar among non-FGCS. For example, non-FGCS 4 stated, 'I feel like it's going good.' Another student, non-FGCS 5 added, 'I have always performed really well.' Students' responses reported the outcome of good academic performers similarly across both sub-groups.

RQ1 theme two: Motivated. The researcher concluded both student groups identified as motivated students. FGCS 1 identified as motivated stating, 'Very motivated, I'm not the brightest out of the bunch.' Non-FGCS 1 identified as, 'very motivated,' adding, 'personally I want to achieve a high GPA.' Student responses reported outcome as similar across both sub-groups and contained a similar sentiment. Students' responses reported the outcome motivated similarly across both sub-groups.

Interview question 3b asked: Have these feelings changed since your freshman year? The interview question provided data of student experiences describing the environment variable. Responses varied by the input variable of generation status. In other words, FGCS and non-FGCS interview responses did vary regarding the question. FGCS responded to question 3b with one student who stated 'no changes', one student stated 'they are managing time more efficiently', and three students stated 'their

academics are becoming more difficult due to course work now focused in their major'.

FGCS 1 stated, 'mostly have remained the same, I came to college pretty determined'.

FGCS 2 remarked, 'I'm kind of in the swing of things. I am getting more involved and

have to manage my time differently.' FGCS 3 stated, 'Now in Sophomore year I'm just

starting to take my business classes and it's getting harder and harder for me, it's

definitely been a change, for sure.' Similarly, FGCS 4 explained, 'my freshman year was

a lot easier with Gen Ed courses. So, they weren't too difficult, but now that I'm getting

in my major, it's a step above the Gen Eds'. FGCS 5 remarked with similar sentiment,

'in my sophomore year I'm realizing it's a little harder than I thought it was going to be.'

Non-FGCS responded to question 3b with four students suggesting more time and

work had been directed towards their studies and one student was unsatisfied with the

learning experience in their major course work studies. Non-FGCS 5 described the

change in academic experience as unsatisfying stating,

> 'In high school I felt like I was getting something from everything I was learning
>
> and now I'm in certain major courses that are supposed to help me in the long run
>
> but I feel like I'm not getting anything out of them.'

Non-FGCS 1 stated, 'I'd say my work ethic has changed since freshman year. I spend a

lot more time in order to get good grades.' Non-FGCS 2 claimed similar experiences

stating, 'It's getting more challenging.' Non-FGCS 2 and 3 also reported similar

experiences with increasing difficulty.

Responses to question 3b revealed themes among both student subgroups; inputs.

However, most students, regardless of the generation status or environment experience

identified as good academic performers or motivated. The research concluded, regardless

of the environment input, the student academic confidence output did not change.

Student output, or identification with academic confidence was not changed based on

college experiences but most likely a characteristic of self-efficacy established prior to

enrollment in college.

Research Question 2

How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive commitment to college?

A student's commitment to college is a key indicator of a success mindset and

intent to persist to graduation (Schreiner, 2012). Interview questions 4a, and 4b

examined RQ2 by asking the student to describe their commitment to college. The

researcher designed this set of interview questions to gain data which determined how the

student valued the completion of their college degree? In addition, RQ2 asked if any

reasons existed in a student's mind which would prevent persistence to degree

completion.

Specifically, the researcher asked the participants in interview questions 4a, and

4b: How would you describe the importance of a college education for your life? Can

you describe any circumstances that might prevent you from completing your degree?

Analysis for RQ2 was applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS, using open coding,

comparative method. Responses to the interview question 4a described the importance of

a college education for the student's life and revealed one significant theme among both

FGCS and non-FGCS.

RQ2 theme: Important to Future Success. The researcher concluded each of the

ten students view college education as crucial to life. Themes did not vary based on any

student input characteristic (generation status). For example, FGCS 1, 2, 3 all stated,

'Very Important' and FGCS 5 responded stating, 'Pretty Important.' FGCS 4 responded

with similar sentiment stating, 'Well, since, like, my major is premed I think it's a good

idea to have a strong basis of college.' Non-FGCS responded similarly; non-FGCS 1 and

3 stated 'very important,' Non-FGCS 2 stated, 'a college education I get a really good job

and more opportunities' and Non-FGCS 5 claimed, 'I think in this day and age it's really

important to get a college degree.' The researcher concluded student responses reflected

perceptions for both subgroups that completing a college degree was crucial to future

success.

Utilizing Astin's I-E-O model, the researcher analyzed the data to determine if the

input variables of generation status, gender, race, or self-reported social class would

change the output (importance of degree completion). If so, what environmental factors

influenced persistence to degree. Each student, regardless of generation status (input

variable) regarded degree completion as crucial to future success. However, four

students did identify environmental issues; providing reasons which may prevent degree

completion. Three of the students were of the FGCS subgroup and one non-FGCS.

Interview question 4b asked: Can you describe any circumstance that might

prevent you from completing your degree? Two responses emerged among all students:

(1) finances, and (2) no reason. Six students (two FGCS, and 4 non-FGCS) responded

stating 'there is no reason' which would prevent the student from completing their

degree. Four students responded stating 'finances could prevent them from completing

their degree.' Three of the four students were from the FGCS, the remainder was from

the non-FGCS subgroup.

The researcher concluded students were overwhelmingly committed to completing a college degree. However, some students provided some potential reasons for what may, hypothetically, prevent them from persisting to degree. Four of ten students responded to interview questions by stating 'there is no reason they would not complete their degree.' Three of five FGCS students reported 'finances', and one of five non-FGCS reported 'finances.' Non-FGCS 5 mentioned finances stating, 'I don't foresee anything but I know that a lot of other students struggle financially.' Financial concerns arose more prominently for FGCS students, FGCS 1 stated, 'Financial Stress.' Similarly, FGCS 2, 'Finances, that's it.' FGCS 4 stated, 'money would probably be the only issue.' FGCS 3 stated something different, 'Not really, I'm very, very motivated.' FGCS 3 described her family as 'upper class, wealthy.' Interestingly, Non-FGCS 1 commented regarding mental health stating, 'Mentally, health problems could arise, but I'm very determined to complete at least the four years' and added 'I feel like that's a standard that my parents set.'

The researcher concluded finances were the reason given by any students when asked about barriers to completing a degree. Comparatively, three students from the FGCS group carried more concern over the potential for finances to prevent degree completion. Only one FGCS college student reported concerns over finances as a barrier to degree completion. The responses connected consistently with the literature which suggested FGCS had more concern of finances when compared to non-FGCS groups.

Research Question 3

How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive engaged learning?

Students who strongly connected to their own academic abilities were most likely to completed a degree (Bandura, 1997; Price-Williams, 2015; Rodgers, 2013). Interview questions 5a, 5b, and 5c examined RQ3 by asking the student to describe their perceptions of engaged learning. The researcher designed the interview questions to gather data on how the student perceive their abilities in skills which were crucial obtaining a degree in the subjects of reading, writing, and public speaking. In addition, RQ3 also examined, through question 5d, if FGCS and non-FGCS perceptions changed from freshman to sophomore year.

Specifically, interview questions 5a, 5b, 5c, and 5d asked: How do you feel about your ability in reading? How do you feel about your ability in writing? How do you feel about your ability in public speaking? How would you compare your ability as a sophomore with your abilities as a freshman? Analysis for RQ3 were applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS, using an open coding, comparative method. Students responded to question 5a, 5b, and 5c revealing one consistent theme among both subgroups: positive academic self-perception. Table 2 summarized student responses in terms of negative or positive perceptions of their academic ability. Students responded to question 5d revealing one consistent theme: college improves abilities.

Table 2

Summary of Student Responses Describing Academic Abilities

Sub Group	Reading	Writing	Public Speaking
FGCS 1	✓	✓	X
FGCS 2	✓	✓	✓
FGCS 3	X	✓	✓
FGCS 4	✓	✓	X
FGCS 5	✓	✓	✓
non-FGCS 1	✓	✓	✓
non-FGCS 2	✓	✓	✓
non-FGCS 3	✓	✓	✓
non-FGCS 4	✓	✓	✓
non-FGCS 5	✓	✓	✓

Note: ✓ indicates positive response, X indicates negative response

RQ3 theme one: Positive Academic Self-Perception. The researcher concluded all students interviewed were overwhelmingly confident in their abilities reading, writing, and public speaking. Only three students out of all ten students, all FGCS, responded by describing any academic ability as negative (as noted in Table 2). Not one of the non-FGCS described their ability negatively. Considering responses from the I-E-O perspective, positive self-perception appeared to have a relationship with positive academic experience (output) in high school, or during the time spent in college. Examples were described in the following paragraphs. In addition, the data reported less impact from the input characteristic of generation status, sex, or gender, compared to the environmental experiences obtained during high school or college.

Question 5a asked: How do you feel about your ability in reading? Nine of ten students self-described positively in the domain of reading. Only one student (FGCS) reported negatively on their perception of reading. When asked to describe abilities in reading, FGCS 3 explained, 'Reading, I don't, actually hate reading books so that's a very big downfall.' However, most other students were firm and quick to respond with

positive remarks regarding reading abilities. FGCS 1 stated, 'I can read very well.' And

added, 'But I'm pretty confident in it.' FGCS 5 claimed to be a 'good reader' and added,

'I think about seventh grade I started to read more.' Non-FCGS 2 discussed a disability

but was improving, 'Actually, I have a reading comprehension disability, but that's

gotten better over time, although I still struggle with it.' Non-FGCS 4 was an

international student and had this to say about reading abilities, **'**I think it has gotten

better since I've moved to the United States but I'm still trying to process it in my head

but through the years it's becoming easier to read.' Non-FGCS 5 stated, 'I love to read.

I've always loved to read. Probably about average.'

Interview question 5b asked: How do you feel about your ability in writing? All

ten students self-described positively in the domain of writing. FGCS 2 stated**,** **'**I'm

really good at writing' and added, 'A lot of my teachers helped me cultivate that skill of

writing and always encouraged me by highly critiquing my work all the time.' FCGS 5

'It's getting better. I think being here does help a lot. It was kinda weak in high school,

we never really had to write papers and stuff. So, coming here has really helped.' Non-

FGCS 1 stated, 'very good' and attributed the proficiency to attendance at a private

religious high school. Non-FCGS 3 stated, 'Writing, especially in English classes was

not my favorite or my strong suit, but thankfully for being in the military, especially for

that first semester in freshman classes, I had good experiences that I could translate into

essays.' English is the second language for Non-FGCS 4. The student described her

writing abilities stating, 'I think it's harder for me to write in English than in my

language. Especially because of the grammar and vocabulary' and added, 'It has gotten

better, I have gotten good grades in writing but at the same time it's not as good as people who were born here.'

Interview question 5c asked: How do you feel about your ability in public speaking? Eight of ten students self-described positively in the domain of public speaking. When asked to describe abilities in public speaking, FGCS 1 explained, 'Sometimes when it's formal I have a hard time with public speaking.' FGCS 4 stated, 'Hate public speaking. I'm probably not the greatest.' FCGS 2 explained, 'I have a scholarship with the speech and debate team here' and added, 'I probably say I'm above proficient in public speaking skills.' FGCS 5 stated, 'Good. I did quite a few public speaking classes in high school.' When asked the follow up question, 'Do you feel like you came into his college with a good understanding of public speaking?' FGCS 5 responded, 'Definitely.' Non-FCGS 1 explained, 'Oh, it's top of the line I'd say. I was on the speech team in high school and in my position in the fraternity, I'm constantly standing up, or out talking to people and just networking um, it just kinda comes naturally.' Non-FCGS 3 commented, 'When I was in high school, definitely not good. Through the experiences in the military and as I've gotten older I don't have as much trouble.' Non-FCGS 6 remarked, 'I love public speaking. I've always been very extroverted and any opportunity I get to share my views and opinions I love taking that opportunity.'

Research Question 3 also examined, through question 5d if FGCS and non-FGCS perceptions of their abilities had changed from freshman to sophomore year by asking, How would you compare your ability as a sophomore with your abilities as a freshman? Student answers to the questions concluded college experience improved their abilities.

In other words, students responded to question 5d revealing one consistent theme: college improves abilities.

RQ3 theme two: College Improves Abilities. Student responses to question 5d concluded the learning experience of college improved their abilities in the three domains, of reading, writing, and public speaking. The researcher concluded students interviewed reported with high frequency the experiences in the first three semesters of college contributed to improving academic skills. Four of five FGCS and four of five non-FGCS reported some improvement in academic abilities. Students tended to attribute the growth in skill to course work and learning experiences at college. FGCS 2 explained, 'I think I've developed a professional writing skill and academic writing which is much different and creative writing, spoken word and poetry.' FCGS 3 commented, 'I can definitely talk about public speaking. Freshman year, I was terrified to speak in front of everyone' and added, 'But now, if I were to take it, I would not care at all.' In addition, FGCS 3 stated, 'writing and stuff like that, I think it's challenged me a lot. So, it's definitely [said with conviction] become more prominent of what I know in writing now.' FCGS 4 remarked, 'I definitely use the reading and writing a lot more with lab reports and just reading the textbooks.' FGCS 5 stated, 'I'd say with all three of them it's gotten better. Definitely with writing. The reading has helped, and the public speaking I've done a lot since I've gotten here. So, I think that's even gotten better too.' Non-FCGS 1 explained, 'I'd say polished, and I'd also say, I guess, I had everything freshman year and it's just improving.' Non-FCGS 5 commented, 'I think they have improved since I've got here. Now it's easier for me to write and read and do

presentations in front of the class.' The researcher asked the follow question: Why do you think you are improving? Non- FGCS 4 responded,

> 'I think mainly because where I live a lot of people speak Spanish so I would just speak in Spanish. Here, I have more American friends which help me speak English more. Most all of my golf team is American so I have to speak English more. English classes have help me improve my writing too.'

Non-FCGS 5 commented,

> 'I think that as a freshman I was less confident in my ability. I didn't really have an established foundation yet for all the school work. So, I definitely think I've progressed in my skills through my position in student government. And I'm also in a sorority so that's helped as well. I think I could say that in reading and writing as well, but definitely in public speaking, my confidence has shot up.'

The researcher devised two conclusions. First, Non-FGCS perceived their academic abilities more positivity than the FGCS subgroup. All non-FGCS perceived the academic abilities without negative attributes. Three of five FGCS reported one negative academic attribute in one academic skill as shown in Table 2. Secondly, the researcher concluded most of all students, regardless of the generation status (input) find the college experience (environment) improved the student's academic abilities (output). The evidence reported four of five FGCS and four of five non-FGCS had some improvement in academic abilities during their time in college.

Research Question 4

How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their acceptance by others as a leader (leadership)?

The literature posited that students involved in campus activities reported higher levels satisfaction with peers and the most important influence on student development was peer groups (Astin, 1977; Schreiner, 2010). Interview questions 10a and 10b examined RQ4 by asking if the student was involved in any leadership activities. The question recorded data of student self-perceptions regarding leadership activities. Additionally, the interview questions attempted to extract two new data points relating to I-E-O. These two points of data were output and environment. The student self-perception of being perceived as a leader represented output. The student participation in on or off campus leadership activities represented environmental factors. Simultaneously, the researcher explored how data differed between inputs (FGCS and non-FGCS).

Specifically, interview questions 10a and 10b asked: Can you describe any leadership activities you're involved in on campus? Can you describe any leadership activities you're involved in off campus? Analyses for RQ4 were applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS, using open coding, comparative method. Responses to the interview question 10a and 10b on self-perceived leadership revealed two significant themes among both subgroups: (1) highly involved in on or off campus activities, and, (2) actively in leadership roles. Table 3 summarized student responses.

Table 3

Student Leadership Involvement

	Type of Involvement			
Sub Group	On Campus Leadership	Off Campus Leadership	On Campus Involvement	Off Campus Involvement
FGCS 1	X	X	X	X
FGCS 2	X	X	X	X
FGCS 3	None	None	X	None
FGCS 4	X	X	X	X
FGCS 5	X	None	X	None
non-FGCS 1	X	None	X	None
non-FGCS 2	None	None	None	X
non-FGCS 3	None	X	None	X
non-FGCS 4	None	None	None	None
non-FGCS 5	X	X	X	X

Note: X indicates student involvement

RQ4 theme one: Highly Involved in Activities. Only one of all students

interviewed did not report some involvement in any type of campus activity or campus

leadership activities. This indicated nine of ten students have self-perceived campus

involvement. All FGCS reported active involvement of at least one on-campus

organization, sport, or club, or off-campus activity. Additionally, four of five FGCS were

also involved in some on or off campus leadership activity. Collectively, non-FGCS

reported high levels of on or off campus activity involvement. Specifically, three of five

non-FGCS were involved in some leadership role on campus. Two non-FGCS were

engaged in highly visible fraternity, sorority, or student council roles. Three of the five

non-FGCS were also involved in off campus leadership activities leaving only one

student, non-FGCS 4, having not disclosed any activity involvement on or off campus.

Non-FGCS 4 described the lack of involvement as a result of academic demands as a

premed student.

All FGCS reported involvement in various of campus activities. FGCS 4

described her involvement in rugby explaining, 'Now that I'm a sophomore I kind of help

out with a lot of stuff including some fundraising, and incoming freshmen and recruit

sometimes.' FGCS 5 stated, 'I am in a sorority. So, I've done a couple different events,

like volunteer events and stuff.' FGCS 3 mentioned, 'Not as of right now but I am

starting up the fashion society club.' FGCS 1 stated, 'I am an adult Girl Scout.' FGCS 2

described her involvement in off campus activities stating, 'The ministry that I'm part of,

I'll be a leader during the summer so I'll mentor them on spiritual development skills.'

Non-FGCS also reported involvement in both on and off campus activities. Non-

FGCS 1 and 5 reported specific leadership roles in both fraternity, sorority, and student

counsel roles. Non-FGCS 2 answered, 'I'm only in a few off-campus activities. I'm not

involved in any leadership activities on campus.' Non-FGCS 5 stated, 'I coach

gymnastics on the weekends and I did that all through high school as well.' Collectively,

based on student responses the researcher concluded both student subgroups were highly

involved in on or off campus activities.

RQ4 theme two: Actively Involved in Leadership Roles. In summary, four of five

FGCS reported some level of either on or off campus leadership activity. Three of five

non-FGCS reported some level of either on or off campus leadership activity. Both non-

FGCS 1 and 5 were highly involved in leadership roles in a sorority, fraternity and

student government (quotes left out to maintain anonymity). Non-FGCS 3 reported an

active leadership role with his employer stating, 'Yes, at my job.'

The researcher concluded the majority students from both subgroups perceived

themselves as leaders. The interviews revealed all students self-reported as leaders and

the generation status (input) did not seemingly influence the characteristic. All FGCS self-described as involved in leadership activities. Two of five non-FGCS reported on-campus leadership, two of the remaining three non-FGCS reported off-campus leadership involvement. Only one of all students interviewed reported no leadership involvement.

Additionally, interview question 10c asked: How would you compare your leadership as a sophomore with your leadership as a freshman? The question determined if student perceptions changed, developed, increased or decreased in importance during or as a result of the transition from sophomore to freshman year of college. Responses to question 10c revealed additional variables for consideration within the I-E-O model.

FGCS overwhelming reported the college experience contributed to leadership capabilities. Only FGCS 1 reported no change in leadership from freshman to sophomore year. FGCS 2 stated, 'I think that now as a sophomore I can put it in the context and use my leadership abilities, and kind of understand my leadership style.' FGCS 3 commented, 'Once you get into your major and you know more about what you're talking about," and added, 'I feel like a leader in that sense compared to last year.' FGCS 4 initially responded, 'I did take a little more seriously.' The researcher added a follow up question asking, 'Why do you think that is?' FGCS 4 added to the initial response, 'Just because I have more experience now than I did as a freshman.' FGCS 5 also commented, 'I'd say it's gotten better. I mean, I didn't do that much my freshman year. I think joining a sorority helped a lot with leadership.'

Non-FGCS also reported the college experience contributed to leadership capabilities. Non-FGCS answers to 10c varied. Non-FGCS 1 commented, 'I'd say more opportunities arise.' Non-FGCS 2 'commented, I haven't had the experience to be too

much as a leader.' Non-FGCS 3 stated, 'It's grown due to my job.' Non-FGCS 4

explained, 'No, now as a Sophomore I have learned to manage my time better with

practices and homework and social life. I'm only involved in my sport and classes.'

Finally, non-FGCS 5 stated, 'I feel like it's about the same except that I've stepped up.

Like I said in my sorority I went from social chair to [omitted for anonymity], and in

student government from [omitted for anonymity], to [omitted for anonymity], I'm taking

on more responsibilities.'

The researcher concluded college experience (environment) contributed to the

student development outcomes (leadership perception) more so than the generation

(input) status. Across each response to 10c, students reported their experience at

university as contributing to growth in capabilities as a leader. The researcher concluded

both FGCS and non-FGCS reported growth in leadership as a result of progression

through grade levels and college experiences. However, responses varied describing

what experiences provoked improved leadership capabilities.

Research Question 5

How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their degree of comfort

with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition)?

Schaller (2010b) called the sophomore year of college "a time of transition"

describing transition as a beginning to an end of old ideals claiming that many students

began to recognize a "precollege identity does not work well with the new information

and experience associated with college" (pp. 67-68). Schaller also remarked, internal

conflict was difficult for students as diverse ideas began to contradict previously held

beliefs. Schaller's transition theory posited students needed to experience change in

order to grow into their future self (Schaller, 2010b). Interview question 11a examined RQ5 by asking the student to describe feelings when experiencing changes at college.

Specifically, the researcher asked in question 11a: How do you feel when you experience various changes at college? The question examined how students from each subgroup perceived change. The researcher asked in interview question 11b: How would you compare the changes your experience as a sophomore with changes as a freshman? The question examined how students perceived change comparing freshman to sophomore year. Analysis for RQ5 were applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS, using open coding, comparative method. Responses to the interview question 11a on feelings when experiencing change revealed two themes among both subgroups: (1) Change is difficult, (2) Deals well with change. Interview question 11b revealed one new theme, theme three: College experience makes change manageable.

RQ5 theme one: Change is Difficult. Three of five FGCS reported change as difficult and created anxiety; four of five non-FGCS reported change as difficult. FGCS 1 stated, 'I don't like change. I've never really liked change. Change makes me a little sad.' Similarly, FGCS 2 remarked, 'I really don't like change. I plan my life around things not changing so when they do change, I have to, [laughs and regroups] I do get flustered sometimes by change. Because I have a plan all the time.' FGCS 5 answered stating, '**I get stressed easily and kind of anxious. Sometimes discouraged.' Four of five non-FGCS reported change was difficult. Non-FGCS 1 described change as 'kind of scary at first.' Non- FGCS 2 explained, 'Sometimes it's hard for me to cope with change, but I still cope with change, it just takes a little while.' FGCS 4 commented on change

stating, 'I think it's harder because you're alone here.' Finally, FGCS 5 stated, 'Like, most people don't really like change unless it's for the good.'

Overwhelmingly, students reported the experience of change as difficult during college (eight of ten students interviewed). Both student sub groups described change as difficult. Considering student responses through the I-E-O model, the researcher recorded data reflecting the precollege input characteristic of generation status, gender and income had little impact on the output (perception of change). Additionally, there were no data recorded to suggest the environment of the college experience to be cause of discomfort. Interview data suggested change was more difficult for FGCS due to anxiety when compared to the non-FGCS. Interestingly, more students of the FGCS when compared to non-FGCS reported change as more manageable.

RQ5 theme two: Deals Well with Change. Two FGCS and one non-FGCS stated they dealt well with change. FGCS 3 stated, 'I am actually really good with just rolling with whatever happens.' FGCS 4 stated, **'**I kind of learned to just go with it, you learn a lot from them.' Non-FGCS 3 stated, 'Having been in the military change happens constantly, you show up one day and things have changed. It's helped me to, as we call it, adapt and overcome.'

The researcher concluded few students perceived change as manageable. Interestingly, the interview data recorded more FGCS than non-FGCS as comfortable when dealing with change. The researcher recorded no conclusive data to suggest the input of generation status or gender as the explanatory factor contributing to the output of handling change well. No data was recorded to suggest the environment, or collection of

college experiences influenced any student perception of change. There is no data which suggested the students' generation status made change more manageable.

Perhaps additional input characteristics acquired via childhood experience influenced student perceptions on change. It is noteworthy that both students from the FGCS subgroup reported income growing up as comfortable. Specifically, FGCS 3 reported her family as 'very wealthy' and FGCS 4 self-reported as middle class. Non-FGCS 3 attributed the environment, or military experiences as a mitigating factor to influence his perception of change (output).

RQ5 theme three: College experience makes change manageable. Interview question 11b asked: How would you compare the changes you experience as a sophomore with changes as a freshman?   Students of both input subgroups reported growth from the freshman to sophomore year made change easy to manage in a positive way. FGCS 1 stated, 'I do think I've gotten better to adjusting a certain change, I just come to realize certain things will change and I just need to let it go.' FGCS 4 commented on change stating, 'Now that I'm getting close to graduating, it feels more urgent and more important and you have to either move on and deal with it.' Non-FGCS 4 stated,

> 'I think as a freshman they were harder because it was the first time I was away from my family and I needed to do everything even if it was financial solution. And the sophomore year it was easier to find the answers because I knew the University and I knew what to do. As a freshman I didn't know as well what to do.'

'Non-FGCS 5 stated, **'**I think there have been a lot more changes this year which overall

has been a very positive thing.'

The researcher recorded data for consideration within the I-E-O model. Based on

student responses, the researcher concluded the ability to manage change became easier

over time due to the growth experienced during college. More specifically, the

perceptions of change, or the output, improved positively as a result of experiences in

college (environment) rather than an input such as generation status or income.

Seemingly, the student experience during college (environment) produced more positive

perceptions on change (output) when compared to generation status or income (input).

Research Question 6

How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their satisfaction one feels

with the communication within the family structure (family support)?

FGCS were often unable to utilize parents as a source of guidance when

navigating the terrain of college culture (Davis, 2012). Interview questions 12a, 12b,

12c, 12d, and 12e examined RQ6 by asking students several questions describing

communication with family. The researcher compared FGCS and non-FGCS (input)

interview answers to determine if ongoing family communication (environment) impacts

perceptions of the college experience (output).

Research question six explored how students utilized family for support while

attending college. Specifically, interview questions 12a, 12b, 12c, 12d and 12e asked:

How would you describe your communication with your family? Can you tell me if your

parents or any other family members are helpful with your writing, studying, reading, or

public speaking? If yes, how so? How do your parents and/or other family members feel

about your college education? Do you look to family for support when you experience a

challenge as a student? Is your family helpful with financial matters while attending

college? Analysis for RQ6 was applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS, using open

coding, comparative method. Responses to the interview questions 12a, 12b, 12c, 12d,

and 12e on participant perceptions on Family Support revealed four significant themes:

(1) Family communication are active and positive, (2) Family are supportive and value

college education, (3) FGCS parents cannot always be helpful, and (4) All non-FGCS

have financial assistance.

   RQ six theme one: Family communication is active and positive. The theme was

derived primarily from interview questions 12a, 12b, and 12d. The researcher concluded

nearly all students, regardless of generation status or income inputs, regarded family

communication as positive. All FGCS and four of five non-FGCS responded describing

active and/or positive communication with family. FGCS 1 responded, 'I have pretty

decent communication. FGCS 2 commented, 'My siblings, I'm really close with all my

siblings. I talk to them probably once a week.' FGCS 3 stated, 'I probably talk to them,

at least my mom every day.' Non-FGCS 2 responded, 'We have really good family

communication.'" Non-FGCS 5 commented, 'We have a very open communication I've

always told my mom everything.'

   RQ6 theme two: Family is supportive and values a college education. The theme

was derived primarily from interview question 12c. The researcher concluded all

students, regardless of the input of generation status or income, described family as

supportive of the pursuit of a college education. All FGCS and all non-FGCS responded

describing family as supportive of the pursuit of a college education. FGCS 1 remarked

on the family's perspective of the value of higher education stating, 'They hold it in

really high regard.' Similarly, FGCS 2 commented on the family's perspective of the

value of higher education stating, 'I think they just think very highly of what I do and that

it's something they probably wish they did when they were my age. Um, so I think

they're supportive in that.' FGCS 3 commented, They're all really proud of me. I mean,

like I said, I'm the first one to go to college.' FGCS 4 responded, 'I'm an only child so

it's my parents or grandparents but, they're very supportive, happy that I got into college.

FGCS 5 commented, 'Every time we get together, they're very curious to see what's

going on, and if I still like it. I think if I want to drop- out they would be supportive.'

Non-FGCS 1 responded, 'For the motivational aspect, that's where my parents support

me.' Non-FGCS 2 commented, 'I feel that they want me to be here and that I want to be

here. They support me in my choices. Non-FGCS 3 stated, 'I think they always support

me in whatever I do.' Non-FGCS 4 remarked, 'In my family it was normal to go to

college it was expected from them and for myself too. I didn't have any other idea then

to go to college.'

 RQ6 theme three: FGCS parents cannot always be helpful. The theme was

derived primarily from interview question 12b, and 12e. When students were asked in

interview question 12b: Can you tell me if your parents or any other family members are

helpful with your writing, studying, reading, or public speaking? If yes, how so?

Responses varied between FGCS and non-FGCS. The researcher concluded that non-

FGCS have more family assistance in academics than compared to FGCS. The data from

interview question 12b, reported only two of the five FGCS responded describing any

type of contact with family to assist in academics. FGCS 3 responded, 'Not my

immediate family. My mom's best friend, I always send her my papers and she'll review them because she's really good at that.'   FGCS 5 commented, 'My first brother that went to college. He's pretty helpful and my sister-in-law, his wife, she's really helpful too. He's a gym teacher and she's a History English teacher. Things like editing papers and math.' FGCS 1 commented, 'They are not very helpful. FGCS 2 stated, 'No. [laughs] I think they hope for the best for me while I'm here. Um, but I probably know more than they do, unfortunately, on all those topics and I'm probably past their reading levels if anything, so.' Conversely, utilizing data from interview question 12b, four of five non-FGCS responded describing some active and or supportive contact with family regarding academic assistance. Non-FGCS 2 commented, 'mostly my grandmother because she is a retired English teacher and she's been very helpful with that, so I guess I had a really good home English teacher.' Non-FGCS 5 remarked, 'they always supporting me and my siblings with her schoolwork but my mom is never the mom that would do school projects for me.'

The researcher concluded that placing the family academic assistance data within the I-E-O model reported consistently for the input of generation status. Data reflected the environment of family assistance in academic support was consistent with generation status. Specifically, non-FGCS had more accessibility to academic family assistance when compared to non-FGCS. The researcher concluded that FGCS (input) had less academic assistance (environment) available to ensure academic success (output) was met.

RQ6 theme four: All non-FGCS have financial assistance. The theme was derived from the interview question 12e: Is your family helpful with financial matters

while attending college? Responses varied between FGCS and non-FGCS. All non-FGCS had some form of financial assistance from family while only three of five FGCS received financial support. Perhaps more notable, two of five FGCS received no financial assistance from family.

FGCS 1 commented, 'I think they would like to be, but they don't really have much to contribute.' FGCS 2 remarked, 'No, No, [she said sadly]. My mom doesn't even have a job. And my dad takes care of a sick wife.' Four of five non-FGCS reported describing family as financially supportive. Non-FGCS 1 commented, 'Absolutely, you know we've never been uncomfortable related to finances. My parents didn't come from a high income; they were police officers but at the same time they invested wisely, very good with their finances.' Non-FGCS 4 remarked, 'Yes. They provide both advice and financial support.'

The researcher concluded that placing the family financial assistance data within the I-E-O model reported consistently for the input of generation status. Data reflected the environment of family assistance in academic support was consistent with generation status. Specifically, non-FGCS had more accessibility to academic family assistance when compared to FGCS. The researcher concluded that FGCS (input) had less financial support (environment) from family and needed additional resources to ensure degree completion (output).

The researcher drew several conclusions from the series of questions on family assistance. First, of the students interviewed, generation status did not affect communication with family. Most all students reported strong family communication and relationships. Secondly, all ten students interviewed reported the family to be

supportive of a college education. Thirdly, differences in family assistance with

academics was existent based on generation status. Only two of five FGCS received help

from family, while 4 of 5 non-FGCS received help in academics. Finally, difference in

financial assistance varied by generation status. All five non-FGCS had some form of

financial assistance from family while only three of five FGCS received financial

support. Moreover, two of five FGCS received no financial assistance from family.

Overall, the researcher concluded both subgroups tended to have an emotionally

supportive family. Particularly in terms of supporting the children in the acquisition of a

degree. In addition, all students interviewed, regardless of the generation status tended to

have good communication with family. However, generation status was consistent with

the literature: FGCS did not have as much support when compared to non-FGCS

regarding academic assistance or financial assistance.

Research Question 7

How do the sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS perceive their level of comfort with

the financial resources available while attending college (financial security)?

Previous research determined financial stress as the "second largest stressor

among college students" (Lim et al., 2014, p. 148). Interview question 19a examined

RQ7 by asking participants to describe feelings on financial resources available.

Interview question 19a asked: How do you feel with the financial resources available

while attending college? Analysis for RQ7 were applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS,

using open coding, comparative method. Responses to question 19a revealed two

significant themes: (1) Concerned over finances, and (2) Comfortable with finances.

RQ7 theme one: Concern over finances. Concerned over finances was expressed in four of ten students. Three of five FGCS and one of five non-FGCS expressed some level of concern regarding finances. FGCS 1 commented, 'Not great. I think that Lindenwood's financial aid is very confusing.' FGCS 2 explained, 'Well, it is very expensive to go here last [laughs]. But, um, I have an abundance of scholarships that probably cover a little over half of my tuition.' FGCS 4 remarked, 'It seems like every semester I've missed some form of payment even though I'm pretty sure it should've all been covered by my financial aid so that's only negative.' Non-FGCS 5 explained troubles with the clarity of financial aid,

> 'At [PMU] specifically I've heard a lot of people complain about the business office, financials, getting a loan, saying it was a difficult process, that it's was blurry, vague, and not sure how to describe it. I think a lot of people have had issues with that. I had to pay a fee for course overload which is reimbursed a few weeks into the semester. And it really wasn't clear to me how I would be reimbursed. It took a while but this semester it went a lot smoother and maybe that's because I was more well-versed in that. I was told it could be waived then I had to pay it. They said as a freshman we could take an online class over the summer yet I was still charged. They sent a bill and then said wait it was a mistake. I called the business office and they said it's probably a mistake. It was confusing who my financial advisor was and how to set up specific payments. The way they explained it to her, she just decided not to bother with it. I think laying it out for people in the most simplified way as possible because when it comes to

money and stuff people are really concerned, I need to be clear and let them know

exactly what they're doing and are getting.'

The researcher concluded that placing the financial resources data within the I-E-

O model produced consistent results based on the experiences with the university

financial aid process (environment). Data reflected the environment of negative financial

aid experience impacted the student perceptions of financial resources (output) available.

Specifically, based on data collected, if the student experiences financial aid

(environment) difficulties, then negative perceptions of financial resources available

(output) may be the result regardless of the generation status (input).

RQ7 theme two: Comfortable with Finances. Comfortable with finances were

described by seven of ten students. Three of five FGCS commented positively of

financial resources while four of five non-FGCS remarked positively of financial

resources. FGCS 3 explained, **'**Comfortable because of my parents. I think that if my

parents didn't have the money than I probably would've stayed close to home and gone to

like a community college.' FGCS 5 had positive remarks for financial aid, 'I think

they're good. I think they try to help as much as I can to make it easier.' In addition,

when asked, how is your experience been with financial aid office? FGCS5 responded, 'I

think they're really helpful and clear, straightforward and I've never really been

confused. They make it easy.' Non-FGCS 1 commented, 'If I really needed finances, I

believe I'd have it available. Of course, you know college loans can get a little hefty. I'd

make personal sacrifices in time, and my own finances, in order to complete my college

degree.' Non-FGCS 3 explained, "The Pell Grant is nice. It's a couple thousand dollars

basically. For the most part that's what helps me pay for my books and supplies. But the

VA covers tuition.'

The researcher concluded FGCS were more likely to be concerned over financial

researches available while attending college. This appeared evident in the student

responses when comparing FGCS to non-FGCS. Also, four of five non-FGCS

interviewed reported positive feelings of financial supports available while attending

college in comparison to only two FGCS. The responses were consistent with the

literature which suggested FGCS have more financial stress compared to non-FGCS.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine how sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS

students experienced college at PMU. Experiences were examined both quantitatively

and qualitatively. The study's quantitative component statistically analyzed if differences

existed according to the survey titled Sophomore Year Student Assessment, administered

by the University. One on one, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the

researcher with ten students, five of whom are FGCS and five non-FGCS. Results did

not reveal significant statistical differences. Interviews exposed student experiences for

sophomore students among both FGCS and non-FGCS subgroups. The researcher

discussed in Chapter Five the hypotheses and research questions instrumental to the

study, study limitations, data results discussion, and future studies recommendations.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

The researcher examined statistical differences and experiences of sophomore FGCS and non-FGCS across non-cognitive motivation categories. Broadly these categories are (1) academic scales, (2) general coping scales, and (3) receptivity to support services. Within the academic scale category, the assessment measured academic confidence, commitment to college, and engaged learning. Within the general coping scale category, the assessment measured transition, family support, and financial security. Within the receptivity to support services category, the assessment measured leadership and parental counseling. Hypotheses were answered using statistical data collected from the SYSA survey. Research questions were answered utilizing qualitative analyses of student experiences gathered from data collected from one on one semi structured interviews conducted by the researcher. The researcher reviewed in Chapter Five hypotheses and research questions instrumental to the study, study limitations, data results discussion, future studies recommendations, and conclusion.

Data Results Discussion

Null Hypothesis 1. There is no difference in the academic confidence between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

After analyzing the data of FGCS and non-FGCS at a PMU there was no difference in students' academic confidence as measured by the SYSA survey. The researcher believed a larger population, such as the entire sophomore cohort of both FGCS and non-FGCS, would yield results showing a significant statistical difference. The researcher also believed the students who selected to participate in the survey

represented a student group more willing to participate in college activities. In turn,

student participation in a survey was representative of a student more engaged in the

collegiate experience overall, resulting in data which was skewed to show higher levels

of satisfaction in any category.

Null Hypothesis 2. There is no difference in the commitment to college between

FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

After analyzing the data of FGCS and non-FGCS at a PMU there was no

difference in students' commitment to college as measured by the SYSA survey. The

researcher believed if a larger population, such as the entire sophomore cohort of both

FGCS and non-FGCS, would yield results showing a significant statistical difference. In

turn, student participation in a survey was representative of a student more engaged in the

collegiate experience overall, resulting in data which was skewed to show higher levels

of satisfaction in any category. Specifically, the analysis revealed the commitment to

college scores for FGCS ((M = 82.73, SD = 9.49) were not statistically different from

those of non-FGCS (M = 87.50, SD = 10.53); $t(76) = -1.46$, $p = 0.085$. However, the $p =$

0.085 represented the closest of all analyses with the potential to reject the null

hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis 3. There is no difference in the engaged learning scores between

FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

After analyzing the data of FGCS and non-FGCS at a PMU there was no

difference in students' engaged learning as measured by the SYSA survey. The

researcher believed a larger population, such as the entire sophomore cohort of both

FGCS and non-FGCS, would yield results showing a significant statistical difference. In

turn, student participation in a survey was representative of a student more engaged in the collegiate experience overall, resulting in data which was skewed to show higher levels of satisfaction in any category.

Null Hypothesis 4.   There is no difference in the self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader (leadership) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

After analyzing the data of FGCS and non-FGCS at a PMU there was no difference in students' self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader (leadership as measured by the SYSA survey. The researcher believed that a larger population, such as the entire sophomore cohort of both FGCS and non-FGCS, would yield results showing a significant statistical difference. In turn, student participation in a survey was representative of a student more engaged in the collegiate experience overall, resulting in data which was skewed to show higher levels of satisfaction in any category.

Null Hypothesis 5.   There is no difference in the degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

After analyzing the data of FGCS and non-FGCS at a PMU there was no difference in students' degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student (transition) as measured by the SYSA survey. The researcher believed that a larger population, for example the entire sophomore cohort of both FGCS and non-FGCS, would yield results showing a significant statistical difference. In turn, student participation in a survey is representative of a student more engaged in the collegiate

experience overall, resulting in data which is skewed to show higher levels of satisfaction in any category.

Null Hypothesis 6. There is no difference in the satisfaction one feels with the communication within the family structure (family support) scores between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

After analyzing the data of FGCS and non-FGCS at a PMU there was no difference in students' satisfaction with the communication within the family structure (family support) as measured by the SYSA survey. The researcher believed that a larger population, for example the entire sophomore cohort of both FGCS and non-FGCS, would yield results showing a significant statistical difference. In turn, student participation in a survey is representative of a student more engaged in the collegiate experience overall, resulting in data which is skewed to show higher levels of satisfaction in any category.

Null Hypothesis 7. There is no difference in the level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security) between FGCS and non-FGCS, as measured by the SYSA.

After analyzing the data of FGCS and non-FGCS at a PMU there was no difference in students' level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security) as measured by the SYSA survey. The researcher believed that a larger population, for example the entire sophomore cohort of both FGCS and non-FGCS, would yield results showing a significant statistical difference. In turn, student participation in a survey is representative of a student more engaged in the

collegiate experience overall, resulting in data which is skewed to show higher levels of satisfaction in any category.

Research Questions

    Research Question 1. How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive academic confidence?

    Students from both subgroups largely considered themselves good students and/or motivated. Most students of both subgroups were academically confident and fully committed to completing a degree. However, the data was not representative of all sophomore students nationwide.

    Unfortunately, the researcher was concerned the student respondents were too narrowly selected. For example, the students interviewed, except for one FGCS, were recruited from those students that participated in the SYSA survey. The researcher believed the students were generally the type of student s who were high participators in the college experience. The researcher presumed student responses may have presented more diverse qualitative data if a greater variety of the sophomore FGCS population were interviewed. For example, SYSA survey participants totaled 12 FGCS and 66 non-FGCS. The total sophomore cohort was approximately 600 students. Had the total cohort been surveyed or had random students which did not participate in the SYSA been interviewed, a greater difference in experiences may have been observed. Furthermore, interview results may have recorded deeper insights into student experiences which may be useful to administrators when developing student programs geared to sophomore success.

Research Question 2. How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive commitment to college? The researcher presumed that students participating in interviews are generally the type of student that are highly active in the college experience. Consequently, the students placed a high value on a college education. Perhaps if students were selected from the entire sophomore cohort, a larger range of experiences may have been recorded. For example, if interviews included a broader range of sophomore participants, the data recorded may have revealed a greater variation of perceptions.

The researcher noted one other observation. Students of both subgroups identified financials as a significant concern to completing a college degree. In the future administrators, student affairs practitioners, and college policy makers should be mindful of the cost of college and the student potential to dropout over financial concerns or poor university administrative experience. From the researcher's perspective, greater attention should be placed on all students who were not highly active in the college experience. More specifically, the presumption was students may be lost to attrition because they were less involved with faculty and staff. Subsequently, when the students felt financial pressures or overwhelming expenses mounting, they may have elected to leave college to avoid the financial burden. This presumption can be made of both FGCS and non-FGCS based on interview data.

Research Question 3. How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive engaged learning?

Students strongly connected to their own academic abilities were most likely to persist to graduation (Bandura, 1997; Price-Williams, 2015; Rodgers, 2013). The

interview questions were designed to ask specifically, "How does the student perceive their abilities in skills which are crucially needed while persisting to a college degree?" In addition, RQ3 also examined, through question 5d, if FGCS and non-FGCS perceptions changed from freshman to sophomore year.

Analysis for RQ3 was applied to both FGCS and non-FGCS, using open coding, comparative method. Students responded to question 5a, 5b, and 5c and revealed one consistent theme among both subgroups: positive academic self-perception. Question 5d revealed one significant theme: college improves abilities.

The researcher was baffled by how students from both subgroups consistently reported positive perceptions of academic abilities. After researching the literature extensively, the researcher presumed students would have declared less confidence in academic abilities as FGCS. As stated, the data may be attributed to the student participants and a general involvement in the college experience. Again, using a larger pool of students from each subgroup may have produced a greater divergence in student experience resulting in data which is more consistent with the literature.

The researcher believed many students, from both subgroups responded to the experience as a sophomore, as a growing experience. The student perception appeared useful when considering experience through Schaller's Transition theory. Simply put, students declared college was an opportunity to grow and improve abilities.

The researcher was concerned about the lack of data from students at the PMU who are not active in campus activities. For example, A FGCS previously placed on academic probation might report perceptions negatively. The researcher wondered if these students would have reported negative perceptions of their experiences transitioning

from freshman to sophomore year. If the researcher had been able to interview a more diverse group of sophomores from both groups, results may have offered greater differences of perceptions.

The researcher also examined Astin's involvement theory and the I-E-O variables. Several responses suggested students' perceptions of abilities were solidified both in college and prior to the freshman year. In hindsight, the researcher would have preferred to go deeper into the interview, asking additional questions to gather more data specific to experiences. The researcher would have preferred to have discovered more of what specific student experiences contributed and created such confidence. This would have produced a greater depth of data for consideration of both input and environment characteristics.

Some students were responsive when interviewed which made follow up questions develop organically. For instance, FGCS 2 described her family income as 'probably at the poverty line or below it.' Question 5a asked, how do you feel about your ability in reading? FGCS 2 responded, 'I actually didn't grow up with lotta books in my house, just toys.' The researcher followed up by asking: Was it educators that sparked your curiosity? She responded, 'yes.' The researcher would have preferred an opportunity to have asked follow up open-ended question, such as: Tell me how you became interested in reading. The researcher believed this would have offered greater details into how the student overcame the lack of educational support from within the home. However, Question 5a provided a greater look into how the environment of positive education influences in the participant's life. Question 5a asked: How do you feel about your ability in public speaking? The participant responded:

'I have a scholarship with the speech and debate team here. I also used to

act in high school. I really exhausted all my resources in school because I

know I didn't have any resources at home. A coach noticed me when I

was acting and asked me if I want to do competitive drama and then I

started competitive speaking. That led to my scholarships. I probably say

I'm above proficient in public speaking skills. I lived in Columbia

Missouri growing up. I was involved in a Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

My big sister was an elderly lady. She put me in an acting class, so I've

been acting since I was very young. When I switch from acting to

speaking, I was in my sophomore year of high school. And you like to get

money for that so that led to this is where I'm going.

The researcher followed up asking, "Was your relationship with Big Brothers and Big

Sisters what led you to this path?" She responded, 'I learned how to knit because I had a

big sister, I learn how to cook different things. I was introduced to all different kinds of

concepts and things that I wouldn't have had without that relationship.' Perhaps, a

second interview of students, or a focus group including impoverished FGCS and non-

FGCS would have provided a greater wealth of data.   The researcher believed this data

could represent experiences which positively influenced academics.

  Research Question 4. How does the sophomore First Generation College

Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their acceptance by others as

a leader (leadership)?

  The literature suggested students more involved in campus activities reported

higher levels of satisfaction with peers and the most important influence on student

development were peer groups (Astin, 1977; Schreiner, 2010). The researcher was

shocked to find all but one non-FGCS were involved in some form of leadership activity

on or off campus. However, in hindsight, the result supported the presumption that the

students interviewed were active and highly involved in the college experience. Once

again, the researcher was concerned how students less involved in campus activities

viewed leadership involvement. There researcher was concerned students less involved

would report less leadership and subsequently may have had valuable data to report.

Regrettably, the data was not available, but perhaps one conclusion could be made.

Perhaps, faculty and administrators should have actively sought out students who

struggled and found leadership programs for the students. Collectively, the students

interviewed suggested a relationship to the intention to persist, the value of a college

degree, and involvement in leadership activities. Furthermore, the researcher should have

asked follow up questions to determine how and why the students were so involved as

leaders. For example, would you describe yourself a leader prior to attending college?

Has college influenced your interest in being a leader? These questions could prove

useful to college program designers who intended to improve retention and persistence.

The researcher did pose a series of questions to FGCS 4 which revealed little data, the

respondent may have felt uncomfortable speaking with the researcher. In this way, the

researcher believed focus groups may have been a good option to get students talking

more comfortably.

   Research Question 5. How does the sophomore First Generation College

Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their degree of comfort with

the various changes one experiences as a student (transition)?

Schaller (2010b) called the sophomore year of college "a time of transition" describing transition as a beginning to an end of old ideals claiming many students began to recognize "precollege identity does not work well with the new information and experience associated with college" (pp. 67-68). Internal conflict appeared difficult for students as diverse ideas began to contradict previously held beliefs.

The researcher was not surprised to hear students from both subgroups contributing to all three themes: change is difficult, deals well with change and growth makes change more manageable. Follow up questions provided the researcher with several considerations related to Schaller's Transition theory, as well as how sophomore year drew students away from campus involvement. Take for instance Interview question 11b, which asked: How would you compare the changes you experience as a sophomore with changes as a freshman? Non-FGCS 2 responded, 'Lots of things have changed since I was a freshman. One thing for sure is that my classes have gotten demanding, more busy and that can be frustrating. That can happen to anyone.' The researcher followed and asked the participant, Are you more involved with your major right now? The participant responded, 'I'm getting into a lot more of my major classes.' The example confirmed the recent literature, when it was suggested sophomore students can begin taking on more challenging classes during their second year.

Research Question 6. How do the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their satisfaction with the communication within the family structure (family support)?

The researcher found it surprising that both FGCS and non-FGCS had deeply supportive family. Perhaps the current cultural and economic climate influenced how

families support a college education. In comparison, the researcher believed a FGCS with parents from the Baby Boomer Generation did experience parental support differently. The researcher believed that in this era, a middle-class working parent of a FGCS could achieve career success more easily without a college education. Parents that made a living without a college degree experienced hardship, and due to these experiences, these same parents now view post-secondary education as a pathway for many higher paying careers and upward social mobility.

The researcher expected FGCS to have parents who could not always be helpful to their children regarding college experiences, particularly in academics. This was confirmed by FGCS 2, who explained that she grew up in poverty. She explained her reading level had likely surpassed her parents by high school. She added, as did other FGCS, that she did have other friends or family members who were accessible to provide support.

The researcher concluded a few notable assumptions regarding these family support matters. Culturally young people in America are overwhelmingly being taught from a young age that a college education is needed for a middle-class wage. These same young people are exposed to knowledge via the Internet at a pace which far exceeds generations past. These young people are becoming increasingly resourceful at learning how to become problem solvers, at identifying ways in which they will need to find others for assistance through cooperation and asking for help. Furthermore, these ideas of teamwork, and asking for help are becoming the norm in American society. Perhaps, the cultural norms students are being exposed to, such as searching out answers to solve problems, asking for help, and getting a four-year degree is crucial for a living wage.

Perhaps even these ideas have penetrated so deeply into the minds of American youth that they are more resourceful than ever at finding ways to improve the quality of their life by way of an education.

The researcher found additional data worth discussion within the theme: *All non-FGCS have Financial Assistance.* This theme connects to RQ2 and the student's commitment to college. Here all the students interviewed were enthusiastic about their commitment to completing their college degree. In fact, only when pushed to identify a reason that they may conceivably be stopped from degree completion did they suggest health or finances as a possible factor to stop their pursuit. Therein lies the point, students, and Americans in general, some argue that the expense of a college degree is so large, so imposing, that it may be more costly to complete a college degree compared to the wages attainable as a college graduate. Comparatively, FGCS do not have the same perceptions of support as consistently as non-FGCS. This is simply something that educators and parents should be thoughtful of as we prepare our young people for higher education. In terms of Astin's I-E-O, what experiences can be provided throughout the college experience to eliminate the fear of financial burden which ensures a student's peace of mind? What can be done during the college years to truly prepare students for post college workforce employment and financial preparation, which prevents them from stagnating in the workforce, earning less than a living wage, and valuing an education for the next generation?

Research Question 7. How does the sophomore First Generation College Student and non-First-Generation College Student perceive their level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college (financial security)?

The researcher found the mixed responses regarding financial security to be interesting. Participant perceptions were driven by experiences. One FGCS student who had negative experiences with financial aid remarked that every time financial aid questions are asked in office, there 'seems to be different staff in the department.' Another FGCS student commented the information provided by the financial aid office lacked 'consistency or clarity.' Conversely, a non- FGCS student remarked, 'my experience with financial aid has always been clear and concise.' Students from both sub-groups who had financial security at home tended to view financial resources as accessible and positive.

From the researcher's perspective, the above results noted the importance of staffing at colleges. Having knowledgeable staff, who cared for students and worked towards providing clear and accurate information were crucial to preventing subtle student attrition. Despite administrators' efforts to have provided positive experiences in campus offices, students still reported negative experiences with admissions, enrollment, and financial aid staff. Research determined financial stress was the "second largest stressor among college students" (Lim et al., 2014, p. 148). The researcher recommended colleges be extraordinarily considerate of the staffing and student perceptions when interacting with administrative processes.

Study Limitations

There were three limitations within the research. The limitations were broadly: (1) study design, (2) impact limitations, and (3) data limitations. The researcher intended to gather data from a broad range of students from both the subgroups FGCS and non-FGCS.

Study design limitations included a limited participant pool of sophomore students in the Second Year Student Assessment (SYSA) survey with only a fraction of the total sophomore cohort available for analysis. For example, had the researcher conducted focused groups of each subgroup, a greater depth of data may have emerged. Only two points of data were collected. Quantitatively, the data gathered were limited to SYSA survey participation. Qualitatively, the data gathered were limited to students participating in the one on one semi-structured interviews.

Secondly, an impact limitation existed due to the limited diversity and total number of participants. Due to the low participant number no generalization of the results occurred. Specifically, data gathered was only collected from students participating in the SYSA survey; approximately one third of the total sophomore cohort. In addition, the study collected data from only a single suburban Private Midwestern University (PMU); limiting the diversity of student participants. Regarding diversity of participants, the SYSA data did not specify race or socio-economic background and interviews lacked participation from a broad range of minority students. For example, each of the five FGCS interviewed were female students. Also, the study lacked participation of non-traditional students or evening degree pursuant students.

Thirdly, the total number of sophomore study participants surveyed may have created data limitations. Specifically, the data gathered was only collected from only students participating in the SYSA survey. The reduced participation to approximately one third of the total sophomore cohort. This limitation of students surveyed may have impacted statistical results. For example, if the study surveyed the entire sophomore population of the PMU, rather than only the 96 SYSA participants, the data may have

presented different statistical results. Although many surveys only reached a portion of a university's population, the researcher was concerned many FGCS had not been reached in the SYSA survey, therefore limiting or skewing the statistical analyses.

Future Study Recommendations

The researcher had several recommendations to improve the usability of data. First, the researcher recommended increasing the number of completed SYSA surveys for analysis. In the study, the SYSA survey data was administered to approximately 100 students; the researcher recommended in future studies to offer the SYSA to the entire sophomore population, further dividing and analyzing results based on race, sex, sexual orientation, international students, athletes, and other relevant student classifications thus possibly altering the results. In addition, the researcher recommended expanding interviews to include more students for greater sampling variation specifically African American and male FGCS students.

Next, the researcher recommended altering and or expanding the interview questions. Questions should be expanded to extract how experiences shaped student perceptions. Future researchers should be directed to ask about specific experiences that lead to shaping student perceptions. For instance, all students reported high levels of commitment to completing a college degree. The researchers suggested future studies include the research question: What experiences assured you that you would complete your college degree?

The researcher also recommended comparing SYSA data from a variety of higher education institutions. For example, expanding the research to different types of institutions that utilized the SYSA. More specifically, various institutions based in

various regions and type. The researcher believed expanding the study design to include

various intuitions regionally and to include community colleges, public institutions, and

Historically Black Universities may provide additional data useful to program designers.

In summary, the researcher made several recommendations to improve the study

when replicated: increase the pool of students interviewed; triangulate the data by

including focus groups, refine interview questions to flesh out data which reflected

student experiences, and consider replication of the study between different types of

institutions. Suggested types include: Historically Black Colleges (HBC) and

Universities, community colleges in urban settings, rural settings, and suburban setting,

highly selective universities, and college, not primarily white universities.

Although the study did provide insights into student experiences, there may be

added insight by comparing a larger pool of students for comparison. For example, a

future study could compare interview data from SYSA participants and non-participants,

FGCS and non-FGCS and offer greater insights into students who were not as engaged in

college related surveys. The researcher's assumption was students in the study who

participated in the SYSA were more active than a student who did not take surveys.

The researcher believed additional useful data could be acquired by modifying the

data collection process. For example, separate focus groups of FGCS only and non-

FGCS only students could have provided the researcher with additional participant

perspectives. The assumption was the data acquired conversationally between students

during a focus group may reveal important details into student experiences.

The study could be enhanced by adding interview questions designed to identify

more detail of the students' experiences. Although the study did offer insights into

student experiences, the researcher believed the greater depth of data could be acquired.

For example, by directing questions on how students develop characteristics which

influenced academic confidence, more useable data may emerge.

Finally, duplicating the study to include a greater variety of institutions and

students being interviewed. Simply stated, the study included only one PMU, which was

predominantly white and in a suburban setting. The researcher presumed that by

diversifying the students being interviewed the data would become less homogenized.

Therefore, the data would shed more light on how the type of institution may better serve

students, and to consider a greater diversity in the type of student.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Practitioners and Researchers

The researcher would like to offer recommendations for student affairs

practitioners. These suggestions can be directed for either the FGCS or the sophomore

cohort. Particularly, those student affairs departments which utilized surveys to measure

student satisfaction. The researcher did not propose to be an expert in student services,

but rather felt obligated to communicate observations made as a result of conducting the

research project. The two recommendations were to (1) be cautioned to not omit students

when using surveys to assess student satisfaction and (2) provide FGCS with resources

regardless of the type of institution.

The first observation involved utilizing a Likert style survey as a tool to calculate

student satisfaction at the university. The PMU utilized the SYSA survey with the noble

intentions to assist at risk students and determine generally, student satisfaction during

the second year. However, the distribution of the survey was limited in the reach of

students being assessed. More specifically, the SYSA was only distributed to students

who participated in the College Student Inventory (CSI) and distributed during the first year of study. The SYSA acted as a follow up to those who participated in the CSI and omitted offering the survey to any student who did not complete first survey. Consequently, the university attempted to evaluate sophomore satisfaction without consideration for those who did not participate in the first wave of survey and left many students without being offered satisfaction surveys during the second year.   The researcher was concerned using the survey as a baseline to determine satisfaction was not accurately assessing student needs because too many students were omitted from the evaluation process. In other words, students who did not submit the CSI were not offered the SYSA. Consequently, satisfaction cannot be accurately assessed.

The SYSA survey distribution presented a flaw in how student services tallied data for analysis. In this study, students who participated in the survey reflected a type of student, from either sub-group, who were actively involved in the college student experience. As the respected theorist Astin (1977) had concluded, involvement in college was a success and satisfaction indicator. The researcher is concerned the survey was limited in its reach to highly involved students and therefore cannot accurately represent sophomore wide satisfaction.

The researcher feared using this style standardized survey were not gathering data from the students less involved with college experience. Perhaps the students who would have recorded data reflective of unsatisfied experiences were consumed with responsibilities which align to the literature. For example, data may have captured FGCS or sophomore data more consistent with the literature, those who are more involved in activities off campus such as holding a job. If retention and student success is the

priority, the researcher believes higher education administrators should avoid assessments which restrict student participation.

The second recommendation was to consider thoughtful approach when designing services developed for FGCS. In the researcher's experience, student services practitioners needed to be sensitive of FGCS in all institutions. FGCS were highly adaptive people who had, in many instances, fought many odds to be successful in the higher education system. The students may not be comfortable admitting individual shortcomings and could be perceived as outsiders in the system; individuals who felt like they did not belong. The researcher worried of student reservations to consult with college personnel which may have left the student without attention from the institution.

The researcher recommended all institutions dedicate resources for FGCS. More specifically, institutions needed to identify cutting edge ways to reach FGCS and bring them forward to participate more deeply in campus activities. For example, the literature discussed the use of peer mentors as a successful outreach (Schreiner, 2010). Peer mentors was one opportunity to empower FGCS juniors and seniors who were self-identifying as leaders to reach those freshman and sophomore students that may have otherwise never connected deeply to campus services and activities.

The researcher's overarching point was to recommend universities consider new thinking when approaching the FGCS. The data reported little divergence in the FGCS and non-FGCS in the domain of academic confidence, and commitment to college. Both subgroups were extraordinarily vocal in self-confidence academically and the commitment to graduate. However, academic confidence and self-efficacy do not address inherent difficulties which existed as a FGCS; issues such as a lack of support at

home, a lack in financial resources or knowledge, or a support system for integrating into the college system (Davis, 2012). Academic Confidence should not act as a replacement university support system. Rather, student affairs personnel should be concentrated on processes which further integrated students into campus involvement in meaningful and deeply connected ways and created authentic relationships and active participation. The researcher recommended student affairs professionals should take a creative and forward-thinking approach to the classically underrepresented student. For example, developing curricular and co-curricular initiatives developed for FGCS success.

Conclusion

Collectively, the study results did not conclude significant differences in any of the student perception categories tested. However, significant differences may have been exposed if larger populations, or if other types of institutions were tested.

 The researcher concluded the limited pool of study participants' restricted data.   Some responses did follow the literature in terms of expected FGCS perceptions. However, answers varied, and interview questions could be refined and administered to an expanded variety of FGCS. Ultimately, student experiences were vastly complex and by refining the interview questions, results may have offered increasingly useful data to aid the construction of student development programming at in student affairs initiatives.

As the researcher, the greatest concern was the lack of usable data for student affairs practitioners. Unfortunately, the lack of depth of questions likely produced lack of depth results to compare perceptions of the two subgroups. However, when given the opportunity to enhance research results, the shortcoming of the research revealed the needs of an improved research construction design. However, the study did reveal, to the

researcher, the vastness of student diversity and programs and the need to evolve thinking

when developing initiatives aimed to serve FGCS.

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Appendix A: Initial Research Participation Email Request Form

SUBJECT:

Lindenwood graduate student pays $20 for 30-60 minute interview.

EMAIL CONTENT:

Greetings!

Recently you have completed the Second Year Student Assessment survey.

I am a graduate student of Lindenwood University and working on my dissertation titled:

A mixed method investigation of sophomore students comparing First Generation

College Students and non-First-Generation College Students perceptions of academic

motivation, social motivation, and general coping at a private Mid-Western university.

I am looking for students to interview to help in developing my research. If you were to

complete this interview, regardless of your answers, will entitle you to compensation of

$20. This will be presented as a Visa gift card immediately following the interview.

Our interview will last between 30-60 minutes and take place at the Lindenwood

University to conducted at the Library and Academic Resources Center (LARC). Meeting

times will be highly flexible to accommodate your schedule.

If you are interested in scheduling the interview, please respond to this email by (DATE).

Thank you,

Josh Hanke

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Q1-Q2: Background demographic descriptive information
Q1:

How would you describe your ethnicity and gender?

Q2:

How would you describe your parent's career and family income growing up?

Q3a-Q3b: Academic confidence
Q3a:

How would describe your academic performance?

Q3b:

Have these feelings changed since your freshman year?

Q4a-4b: Commitment to College
Q4a:

How would you describe the importance of a college education for your life?

Q4b:

Can you describe any circumstance that might prevent you from completing your degree?

Q5a,5b,5c,5d: Engaged Learning
Q5a:

How do you feel about your ability in reading?

Q5b:

How do you feel about your ability in writing?

Q5c:

How do you feel about your ability in public speaking?

Q5d:

How would you compare your ability as a sophomore with your abilities as a freshman?

Q10a,10b, 10c: Leadership
Q10a:

Can you describe any leadership activities you're involved in on campus?

Q10b:

Can you describe any leadership activities you're involved in off campus?

Q10c:

How would you compare your leadership as a sophomore with your leadership as a freshman?

Q11a,11b: Transition

Q11a:

How do you feel when you experience various changes at college?

Q11b:

How would you compare the changes you experience as a sophomore with changes as a freshman?

Q12a,12b,12c,12d,12e: Family Support

Q12a:

How would you describe your communication with your family?

Q12b:

Can you tell me if your parents or any other family members are helpful with your writing, studying, reading, or public speaking? If yes, how so?

Q12c:

How your parents and/or other family members feel about your college education?

Q12d:

Do you look to family for support when you experience a challenge as a student?

Q12e:

Is your family helpful with financial matters while attending college?

Q19a,19b: Financial Security

Q19a:

How do you feel with the financial resources available while attending college?

Q19b:

How does this compare with your feelings on available financial resources as a freshman?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Title of Project: A mixed method investigation of sophomore students comparing First Generation College Students and non-First-Generation College Students perceptions of academic motivation, social motivation, and general coping at a private Mid-Western university.

Before reading this consent for, please know:

- Your decision to participate is your choice
- You will have time to think about the study
- You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time
- You are free to ask questions about the study at any time

After reading this consent form, we hope that you will know:

- Why we are conducting this study
- What you will be required to do
- What are the possible risks and benefits of the study
- What alternatives are available, if the study involves treatment or therapy
- What to do if you have questions or concerns during the study

Basic information about this study:

- The researcher interested in learning more about the student's perceptions are when finding motivation regarding your college experience.
- You will be asked several questions to help the researcher gather data on the student perceptions.
- There should be no risk to the student. Your information is confidential, and you are able to withdrawal from the study at any time.

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Title of Project: A mixed method investigation of sophomore students comparing First Generation College Students and non-First-Generation College Students perceptions of academic motivation, social motivation, and general coping at a private Mid-Western university.

You are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Josh Hanke under the guidance of Dr. Roger "Mitch" Nasser of Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. Before you choose to participate, you are free to discuss this research study with family, friends, or a physician. Do not feel like you must join this study until all of your questions or concerns are answered. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

Why is this research being conducted?

We are doing this study to learn more about how sophomore students find motivation. We will be asking five to ten First Generation College Students and five to ten non-First-Generation College Students to answer these questions.

What am I being asked to do?

The only requirement of the participant is this one interview session.

How long will I be in this study?

The participant's only time active time participating is during this interview time lasting between 30-60 minutes.

Who is supporting this study?

This study is independently supported by the researcher and under the supervision of his faculty supervisor. Data were collected from a small, midwestern university.

The researcher is being provided survey data from the Director of First Year programs, the honest data broker, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ scrubs the data of all identifiable information, meaning all data from the survey is anonymous to the researcher.

All interview audio recordings are being managed by the researcher, Josh Hanke, without additional assistance.

What are the risks of this study?

- Privacy and Confidentiality
  We will be collecting data that could identify you, but each survey response will receive a code so that we will not know who answered each survey. The code connecting you and your data will be destroyed after 3 years in accordance with federal regulations.

What are the benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefits for completing this survey. We hope what we learn may benefit other people in the future.

Will I receive any compensation?

You will receive your $20 Visa gift card at the completion of the one on one interview.

What if I do not choose to participate in this research?

It is always your choice to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions or perform tasks that make you uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw, you will not receive any penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw from a study, please use the contact information found at the end of this form.

What if new information becomes available about the study?

During the course of this study, we may find information that could be important to you and your decision to participate in this research. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

How will you keep my information private?

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies. All the data pertaining to our interview will be securely destroyed after three years.

How can I withdraw from this study?

Notify the researcher immediately if you would like to withdraw from this research study.

Who can I contact with questions or concerns?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact the researcher, Josh Hanke directly at 636-734-9003 or Jsh439@lindenwood.edu. You may also contact Dr. Roger "Mitch" Nasser at 636-949-4570 or Rnasser@lindenwood.edu.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   **Date**

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____

Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee   **Date**

_____

Investigator or Designee Printed Name

Appendix D: SYSA Definition of Terms

Scale descriptions
The SYSA Scale numbers in the left column correspond with the numbers/information below.

1. *Academic Confidence*: Self-belief of doing well in academic studies.

2. *Commitment to College*: Value placed on college education and long-term benefits.

3. *Engaged Learning*: Self-belief of doing well in reading, writing, and public speaking.

4. *Leadership*: Self-perceptions of being accepted as a leader.

5. *Transition*: The degree of comfort with the various changes one experiences as a student.

6. *Family Support*: Satisfaction one feels with the communication within the family structure.

7. *Financial Security*: Level of comfort with the financial resources available while attending college.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT
The Retention Solutions Team at Ruffalo Noel Levitz can help you:
- Set up your administration.
- Add custom survey items and custom report text.
- Utilize the email invitation and reminder that are sent to students to boost completion rates.
- Assist with accessing reports and advanced data sorting and analysis.

RUFFALO NOEL LEVITZ

Integrate information for each student across all sections of the report

Page 1:	Potential connections among Scales	Page 2: Upper Left	Page 2: Bottom Half	Page 2: Upper right
SYSA Scales Review scores for each scale, then integrate information across scales		Student Background Information Integrate with Academic Motivation, Social Motivation, and Coping Scales	Needs and Interests 1. Receptivity Scales 2. Received help already 3. Want to receive help	Institutional Impressions – Levels of Satisfaction – Rating: High = 7 and Low = 1
1. Academic Confidence	Scales 1, 3, 4	GPA, study plans, major selection, degree sought	Academic Assistance	Interaction with instructors
2. Commitment to College	Scales 2, 5, 6, 7	Degree sought, credits earned, study plans, major selection, degree sought, intent to re-enroll	Academic Assistance, Advising	Variety of majors, degree sought, adequacy of financial assistance
3. Verbal and Writing Confidence	Scales 1, 3	GPA, study plans, major selection	Academic Assistance, Advising	Interaction with instructors, academic challenges
4. Leadership	Scales 4, 5	Major selection, work plans	Career Planning, Advising	Leadership opportunities and availability of services learning and internships
7. Social Engagement	Scales 2, 5, 6, 7	Major selection, intent to re-enroll	Personal Support, Career Planning	Interaction with other students, social life, sense of belonging, overall experience as students
8. Family Support	Scales 5, 6, 7	Work, major selection	Personal Support	Sense of belonging, financial assistance, communication with advisor
9. Capacity for Tolerance	Scales 5, 6, 7	Work, major selection, degree sought, concurrent enrollments	Finances	Adequacy of financial assistance.

Academic Motivation | Social Motivation | General Coping

Conversation starters per scale for advisors:
- *Academic Confidence*: Are there any classes you think will be especially challenging?
- *Commitment to College*: Do you ever consider doing something other than completing your degree here?
- *Engaged Learning*: What class do you most look forward to?
- *Leadership*: Are you involved in any leadership activities here?
- *Transition*: Is your experience as a student meeting your expectations?
- *Family Support*: Is your experience as a student meeting your family's expectations?
- *Financial Security*: Have you experienced any unanticipated expenses?

Appendix E: Ruffalo Noel Levitz SYSA Overview

RUFFALO NOEL LEVITZ
Second-Year Student Assessment™ *Overview*

FEATURES
68 items distributed across 5 sections
- Student Information (10)
- Motivation Assessment (27)
- Receptivity to Assistance (15)
- Institutional Impressions (13)
- Internal Validity and Authorization (3)

Student Information: 10 demographic variables are assessed: work, GPA, ethnicity, current enrollment, credits earned, dual enrollment/classes at other institutions, study plans, major status, degree sought, college/program completion plans.

Motivation Assessment: The 8 scales that comprise motivation assessment include:

Academic Motivation Scales	General Coping Scales	Receptivity to Support Services
Academic Confidence	Transition	Leadership
Commitment to College	Family Support	Personal Counseling
Engaged Learning	Financial Security	

Student Interests and Needs: Student receptivity has a dual focus: student participation last year and current desire to receive services in 15 areas of potential interest and need.

Receptivity: Students Interest and Needs	Received help already?		Would like to received help or information?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Academic Assistance	X			X
Advising	X		X	
Career Planning		X	X	
Personal Support		X	X	
Finances	X			X

Institutional Impressions: Student satisfaction with their college experience is assessed in 13 areas, each rated on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high).

1. Frequency of interactions with my instructors.
2. Frequency of communication with academic advisor.
3. Variety of majors available here.
4. Variety of courses available in my (desired) major.
5. Degree of academic challenge in my classes here.
6. Opportunities to get involved in activities and events associated with my (desired) major.
7. Availability of service learning, internships, etc..
8. Adequacy of financial assistance available to me.
9. Leadership opportunities in student government/other organizations.
10. Social life (both on and off campus).
11. Level of interaction with other students.
12. Sense of belonging to the college community.
13. My overall experience as a student at this institution.

SYSA REPORTS
- Student Report
- Advisor/Counselor Report
- Summary and Planning Report

All reports are available online immediate!

Advisor/Counselor Report
Student motivation results with scale and item scores.

Action Plan
Student receptivity provides insight on use of student services and direction for accessing the services.

Advisor/Counselor Report
Demographic information and satisfaction results.

Summary and Planning Report:
Interrelated motivation, receptivity, and satisfaction results on academics, advising, leadership, transition, and finances.
Referral Lists included with the Summary and Planning Report:
- I plan to complete my degree/certificate at this college or university.
- I plan to transfer to another college or university to complete my degree.
- College is not right for me at this time, and I do not plan to continue.
- I am undecided about my plans at this time.

Retention Data Center: Web dashboard for analysis and action

The Retention Data Center makes it easy to:
- Sort and cross-tab student data by any characteristics captured in the survey.
- Access reports, analyze and act on findings using pre-set data filters or create custom filters.

1-800-876-1117
RMS.Tech@RuffaloNL.com
www.ruffalonl.com/RMSPlus

What is the SYSA
SYSA is a non-cognitive motivational assessment to identify the risk, challenges, strengths, and receptivity of second-year students to curb the "sophomore slump" on your campus.

ADMINISTERING THE SYSA

Which students are targeted?
Students who are enrolled/preparing to enroll in their second year of college, and transfer students.

When is it administered?
Toward the end of the second term of the first year, or during the first term of the second year. For transfer students, within the first few weeks of the first term.

Where is it administered?
Computer labs, sophomore seminars, classes, residence halls, at in-person or online orientation (for transfers), or other places where student has access to computer. *Mobile device compatible.*

How much time is required?
Average time to complete is 20 minutes.

SHARE RESULTS WITH
- Students
- Advisors/Counselors
- Institutional Research
- Deans/Department Chairs/Faculty
- Action Plans to Service Offices

USE RESULTS TO
- Inform Retention Planning
- Assign Accountability
- Measure Program Effectiveness
- Write Grant Proposals
- Conduct Service Audits

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Integrate information for each student across all sections of the report

Page 1:	Potential connections among Scales	Page 2: Upper Left	Page 2: Bottom Half	Page 2: Upper right
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Row groupings (left margin): Academic Motivation · Social Motivation · General Coping

Scale descriptions

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Vitae

Colleges and Universities

2009-2013: Bachelor of Science in Media Studies from University of Missouri-Saint Louis, College of Fine Arts and Communication; 2013-2014: Master of Arts in Communication with a Promotions Emphasis from Lindenwood University, 2015-Present: Educational Leadership Doctorate, Emphasis in Higher Education Administration from Lindenwood University with an anticipated graduation date of December 2019

Work History in Education

2013-2014: Graduate Assistant in Academic Services at Lindenwood University

2014: Graduate Assistant in NCAA Certification at Lindenwood University

2017-2018: Internship in Student Affairs, Sophomore Year Experience Program Assistant Coordinator at Lindenwood University