**Students' Perceptions of the Impact and Value of
First-Year Seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution**

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

The rate of student departure in the first year continues to puzzle higher education researchers and policy makers. Colleges and universities have instituted first-year seminars to promote first-year students' academic and social integration into higher education. The research on first-year seminars has documented positive effects on a variety of outcomes (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). However, few studies investigate the meanings students make of their experiences in first-year seminars, and even fewer studies examine racial and ethnic minority students' experiences in first-year seminars.

This study investigated the impact and value of first-year seminars from diverse first-year students' points of view at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. It employed a case study research design. The primary sources of data collection comprised surveys and interviews. Document analysis of course evaluations complemented the survey and interview data.

The results of this study reveal that first-year students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution perceived that their First-Year Experience course promoted their academic and social integration, an enhancement that, according to Tinto's (1993) model of student departure, may influence the process by which they stay or leave institutions of higher education. These findings support the implementation and ongoing investment in first-year seminars, and can be used to inform institutional strategic planning, curriculum, and policy and program decisions.

I. INTRODUCTION

A.   <u>Problem Statement</u>

Postsecondary student retention has long been a topic of interest in colleges and universities. Several theories and models have attempted to explain the process by which students stay or leave institutions of higher education (Bean, 1980; Braxton, 2000; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Tinto, 1993); however the rate of student departure in the first year continues to puzzle higher education researchers and policy makers. The largest proportion of institutional leaving occurs during the first year and prior to the second year (Barefoot et al., 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Approximately 20-35% of first-year students do not return to their 4-year institution in the following Fall semester, and 35-45% of first-year students do not return to their 2-year institution in the following Fall semester (ACT, 2014; Kena et al., 2014).

The dramatic rate of student departure in the first year has elevated concerns regarding graduation rates. Far too many students who enroll in colleges and universities fail to earn degrees. The 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in Fall 2007 was 59%. At 2-year degree-granting institutions, 29% of full-time, first-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree in Fall 2010 attained it within three years (Kena et al., 2015). Equally troubling, there is a wide gap in graduation rates between students of different racial and ethnic groups. Of first-time undergraduate students attending a 4-year degree-granting institution full-time in Fall

2006, the 6-year graduation rate was 71% for Asian students, compared with 67% for students of two or more races, 63% for White students, 52% for Hispanic students, 49% for Pacific Islander students, 40% for Black students, and 40% for American Indian/Alaskan Native students (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

A number of health and economic costs are also associated with failing to earn a postsecondary degree. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), in summarizing the research related to quality of life after college, concluded that individuals with less years of education had a shorter life expectancy with more health problems, as well as smoked more, drank more alcohol, and had unhealthier diets. Baum, Ma, and Payea (2013) discussed how the annual individual income of high school graduates is only 62% of their postsecondary graduate counterparts, and the unemployment rate for high school graduates is consistently double that of individuals with at least a bachelor's degree. Similarly, Schneider and Yin (2011) estimated that students who entered postsecondary education in 2002 but failed to graduate within six years lost a total of $3.8 billion a year in income and cost federal and state governments $566 million and $164 million, respectively, per year in lost income taxes. The cumulative loss in income for these students over the course of their work lives was estimated at $158 billion (Schneider & Yin, 2011).

In an era of fiscal constraints and increased accountability, there is growing pressure on institutions of higher education to improve retention and graduation rates (Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 2007; Renn & Reason, 2013; State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2005). Colleges and universities attempt to combat the dramatic rate of student departure in the first year by designing and implementing academic and co-

curricular efforts that constitute first-year experience programs. When institutions were asked to review the usage and effectiveness of 37 strategies and tactics for student retention and college completion, first-year student programs emerged as one of the most effective (Noel-Levitz, 2013).

Many first-year experience programs include first-year seminars, courses intended to enhance first-year students' academic and social integration into higher education (Barefoot, 1992). University courses that promote students' integration into the academic and social structures of their institution have the potential to enhance students' academic success and increase the likelihood that they will persist until degree completion (Tinto, 2000, 2012). When 4-year public colleges and universities were asked to review a pool of 94 practices and identify the three that made the greatest contribution to retention on their campus, the highest percentage (24%) selected credit-bearing freshman seminar/ University 101 (Habley et al., 2010).

A robust literature base contends that first-year seminars contribute to persistence to the second year, academic performance, satisfaction both with faculty and institution, use of campus services, connections with peers, and participation in campus activities (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). However, a gap exists with respect to explaining how and why first-year seminars affect student outcomes, particularly from students' perspectives. Research is often limited to either surveys of student satisfaction or correlation analyses of participation and retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swing, 2001). Few studies investigate the meanings students make of their experiences in first-year seminars, and even fewer studies examine racial and ethnic

minority students' experiences in first-year seminars. An understanding of the interpretations students make of their experiences with various interactions with the academic and social communities of their institution is a promising avenue for further understanding the phenomenon of student departure (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995).

B.   Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the meanings diverse first-year students made of their experiences in first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. It relied primarily on a qualitative research design, although quantitative data was also gathered. A qualitative research design offered the most suitable method for examining diverse first-year students' perceptions of first-year seminars because it placed an emphasis on process and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it (Hatch, 2002). It stresses the value-laden nature of inquiry, and strives to understand how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2005; Merriam, 2002, 2009; Patton, 2002).

This multiperspectival (Kellner, 1997, as cited in Frow & Morris, 2000) study combined insight from the literature on student departure and first-year experience programs with qualitative methodology that emphasized individuals' experiences and meaning-making. According to Tinto (1987), "no study of the roots of student departure is complete without reference to student perceptions" (p. 27). This study's examination of first-year students' voices, those most intimately connected to first-year seminars, highlighted individual perspectives and constructions of reality. It promoted an in-depth, context-specific study of meaning-making from students' own vantage points to better

understand the process by which racial and ethnic minority first-year students stay or leave institutions of higher education.

C. **Operational Definition**

First-year students were defined for the purpose of this study as students who were in their first year of postsecondary education and who had accumulated less than 30 credit hours. The phrase "first-year student" replaced the term "freshmen" which has largely fallen out of use by higher education researchers and policy makers due to its sexist connotation, historical association with traditional-aged students, and its unfamiliarity with international educators (Upcraft et al., 2005).

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A.   <u>Introduction</u>

The question of what accounts for student departure in higher education, otherwise known as the student departure puzzle, is an enduring object of empirical study (Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 2012). The terms *persistence* and *retention* are frequently employed synonymously notwithstanding their individualized approaches to comprehending postsecondary student departure. While persistence is defined as an individual phenomenon, retention is defined as an organizational phenomenon (Hagedorn, 2005; Reason, 2009). More specifically, students' actions and decisions demonstrate persistence (Bean, 2005), whereas institutional conditions are explained as efforts to retain students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

First-year student persistence is often cited as a key determinant of degree completion because the largest proportion of institutional leaving occurs during the first year and prior to the second year (Barefoot et al., 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Tinto, 1993). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 21% of full-time, first-time undergraduate students who enrolled in a postsecondary degree-granting institution in 2011 did not return to their 4-year institution in the following Fall semester, and approximately 41% did not return to their 2-year institution in the following Fall semester (Kena et al., 2014). Similar data from the American College Testing service shows that 35.8% of students at 4-year public institutions, 30.2% of students at 4-year private institutions, 45.1% of students at 2-year public institutions, and 35.7% of students at 2-year private institutions did not return for their second year at the institution they entered as first-year students (ACT, 2014). This

dramatic pattern of student departure in the first year is a concern and focus of inquiry for researchers and policy makers in higher education.

B.   **Theoretical Premises for Understanding Student Departure**

Several theories and models have attempted to explain the process by which students stay or leave institutions of higher education in an effort to delineate different causal variables that might plausibly lead to the retention of students, further adding to the complexity of the student departure puzzle (Bean, 1980; Braxton, 2000; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Although higher education researchers and policy makers have proposed organizational, psychological, and cultural theoretical perspectives, Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model is one of the most frequently cited in the literature on postsecondary student departure (Braxton, 2000; Carter, 2006).

1. Tinto's Model of Student Departure

Tinto's model of student departure draws from Van Gennep's (1960) proposition of the rites of passage and Spady's (1970) work connecting Durkheim's (1951) sociological theory of suicide to the study of postsecondary student departure. In *The Rites of Passage* (1960), Van Gennep argued that the process of transmission of relationships between succeeding groups is marked by three distinct stages, each with its own specialized ceremonies and rituals. The first stage, separation, involves the separation of the individual from past associations, such as family members and high school peers. Transition is the second stage, in which the individual begins to interact in new ways with members of the group into which membership is sought. The third stage, incorporation, results in the individual establishing membership in the new group as a participant member (Van Gennep, 1960). According to Tinto (1993), Van Gennep's

(1960) rites of passage apply to postsecondary education, with first-year students separating from communities of the past, transitioning between high school and higher education, and incorporating into the society of their institution. Students who leave their institution of higher education are those who are unable to effectively distance themselves from their family or community of origin and adopt the values and behavioral patterns that typify the environment of their college or university (Tinto, 1993).

In *Suicide* (1951), Durkheim distinguished between four subtypes of suicide based on the degrees of imbalance of social integration and moral regulation: (1) egoistic suicide; (2) altruistic suicide; (3) anomic suicide; and (4) fatalistic suicide. Durkheim (1951) postulated that egoistic suicide occurs when individuals are unable to integrate and establish membership within their community, subsequently feeling estranged or detached from society. Applying Durkheim's (1951) theory, Spady (1970) suggested a parallel between committing suicide and leaving an institution of higher education. In both cases, according to Spady (1970), if an individual feels isolated or experiences insufficient integration, he or she departs from that social system (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Spady, 1970). Tinto (1975) borrowed Spady's (1970) application of Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide to assert that student departure occurs because individuals are insufficiently integrated into different aspects of their postsecondary experience.

Adapting and extending the work of his predecessors, Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) theorized that students enter institutions of higher education with a variety of family and community background characteristics, personal attributes, skills, financial resources, dispositions, and precollege educational experiences and achievements. These pre-entry

attributes influence students' initial commitments to their educational goals and their institution. Initial goals and institutional commitments affect students' degree of integration into the academic and social systems of their institution. Academic integration derives from students' academic performance and faculty/staff interactions, while social integration arises from students' participation in extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. These types of integration are mutually exclusive to an extent, in that a student may be socially integrated into an institution but not academically integrated, or academically integrated but not socially integrated (Tinto, 1993).

Academic and social integration both influence students' subsequent commitments to their goals and their institution, as well as their ultimate departure decision. Institutional experiences that further students' integration into the academic and social structures of the institution are seen to enhance the likelihood that they will persist within the institution until degree completion, while experiences that do not lead to sufficient integration into the academic and social structures of the institution may lead to students' departure (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Figure 1 illustrates Tinto's (1993) model of student departure.

Pre-Entry Attributes | Goals and Commitments | Institutional Experiences | Personal/Normative Integration | Goals and Commitments | Outcome
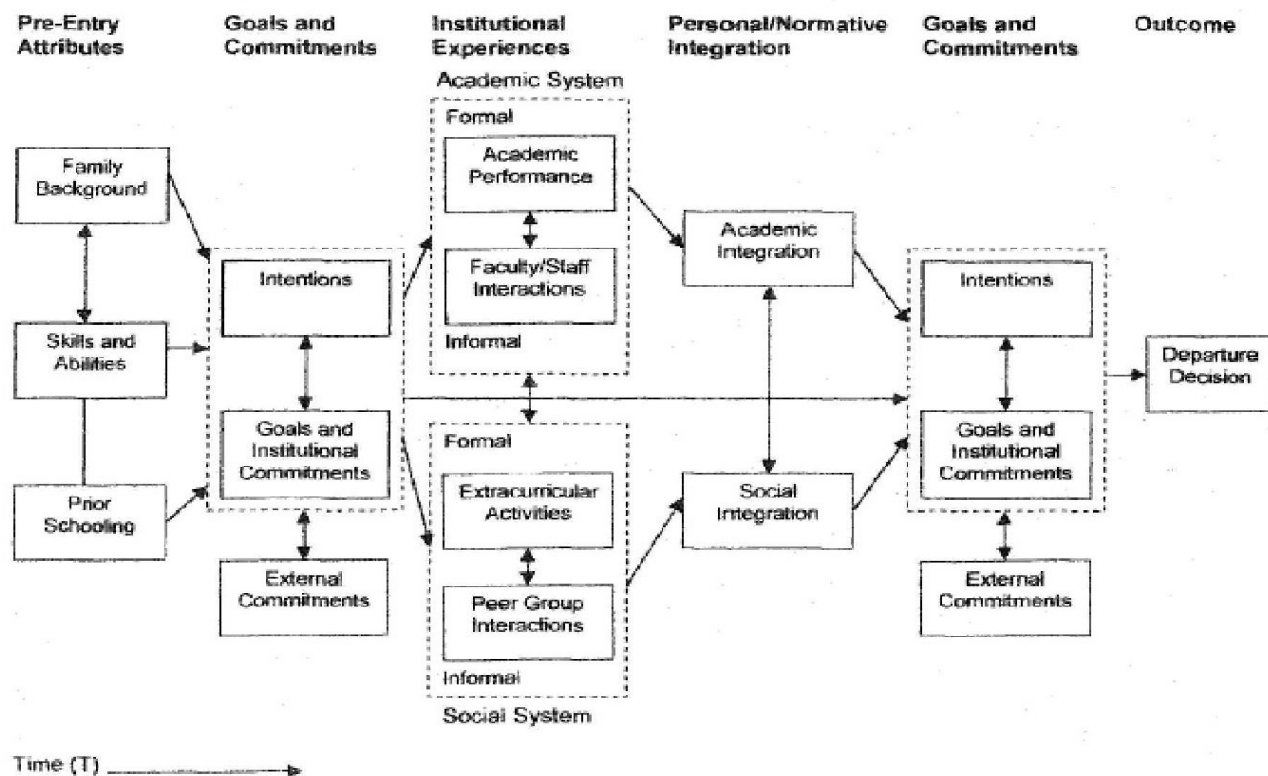
Figure 1. Tinto's model of student departure (Tinto, 1993, p. 114).

Although it is conceivable that students will stay at their institution of higher education when only one form of integration is present, evidence suggests that students are more likely to stay at their college or university when both academic and social integration occur (Tinto, 1993). Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995) contended that an understanding of the types of interpretations students make of their experiences with various interactions with the academic and social communities of their institution is a promising avenue for further understanding the phenomenon of student departure. Their results revealed that when expectations for academic and intellectual development were fulfilled, students experienced a greater degree of academic and social integration (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995).

2. <u>**Modifications and Elaborations to Tinto's Model**</u>

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student departure, often described as interactionist in the literature, explains voluntary postsecondary departure as an issue not just with the student but also with the institution (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Its initial framework and subsequent revisions serve as the foundation upon which much research related to understanding what affects postsecondary student departure is based. Higher education researchers and policy makers have built on Tinto's model, providing diverse theoretical perspectives as a means to study the student departure puzzle. The addition of constructs from a variety of theoretical perspectives enhances the explanatory power of Tinto's model and provides information about sources of academic and social integration for postsecondary students (Berger & Milem, 1999).

Bean (1980, 1983) challenged Tinto's (1975) notion of tying postsecondary student departure to suicide. He proposed an organizational model of student attrition contending that student attrition is analogous to employee turnover in the workplace. Bean (1980, 1983) emphasized the importance of behavioral intentions as direct predictors of persistence, suggesting that through interactions with others in the campus community, students either confirm their initial expectations or form new impressions, attitudes that subsequently influence their intentions to stay or leave institutions of higher education.

More recently, Bean and Eaton (2000) presented a psychological model of college student retention that incorporates attribute-behavior theory, coping behavioral theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution theory. According to Bean and Eaton (2000), students enter higher education with a complex array of personal characteristics. As they

interact within the institutional environment, several psychological processes take place that, for the successful student, result in positive self-efficacy, reduced stress, increased efficacy, and internal locus of control. These processes in turn lead to academic and social integration, institutional fit and loyalty, intent to persist, and persistence itself (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

While Bean and Eaton (2000) focused on psychological processes at the level of the individual student, Baird (2000) suggested reconceptualizing postsecondary student departure in psychological terms at the level of the environment of colleges and universities. He asserted that students' perceptions of the environment, or climate, play a central role in their coping and adaptation efforts. Students' perceptions of the opportunities and constraints within their academic and social systems shape their behaviors, which in turn affect their degree of academic and social integration and subsequently influence their decision to stay or leave institutions of higher education (Baird, 2000).

In addition to psychological approaches through which to study the student departure puzzle, higher education researchers and policy makers have expanded on Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model from a variety of other frameworks. Braxton (2000) proposed an inductive approach that builds on economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological theoretical perspectives to explain the process by which students stay or leave institutions of higher education. He suggested conducting research using constructs from those theoretical perspectives with diverse student populations across different types of colleges and universities (Braxton, 2000). Similarly, Braxton and Hirschy (2005) reviewed economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological theoretical

developments in the study of postsecondary student departure. They concluded that fundamental differences in student demographics and campus environments necessitate distinct theories of postsecondary student departure for residential and commuter institutions (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005).

Kuh and Love (2000) offered a cultural perspective to study postsecondary student departure that focused on the role of students' precollege and campus cultures in shaping postsecondary experiences and outcomes. They outlined a set of propositions relating students' individual cultures of origin with the cultural milieu of existing peer groups. The eight propositions included: (1) Students' college experiences and decisions are mediated by a student's cultural meaning-making system; (2) Students' precollege cultures determine the importance they associate with attending or graduating from college; (3) Knowledge of both students' precollege cultures and campus cultures is necessary to understand their abilities to navigate the campus cultural milieu; (4) The likelihood of persistence is inversely related to the incongruence between students' precollege and campus cultures; (5) Students who travel a long cultural distance must either acclimate to the dominant campus culture or join one or more cultural enclaves (i.e., subcultures) to succeed; (6) The amount of time students spend in their cultures of origin during their college career is positively associated with cultural stress and eventual student departure; (7) The extent and intensity of students' connections with their academic program and affinity groups are positively related to persistence; and (8) Students are more likely to persist if they belong to one or more cultural enclaves, especially if those enclaves value achievement and persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000).

Museus and Quaye (2009) later refined Kuh and Love's (2000) cultural propositions to create an intercultural perspective of racial and ethnic minority postsecondary student persistence. Although intercultural propositions 1, 3, and 4 are similar to Kuh and Love's (2000) corresponding first, third, and fourth cultural propositions, the other five intercultural propositions are modifications of Kuh and Love's (2000) corresponding cultural propositions. In particular, the revised propositions highlight the salience of individual and collective cultural agents and the subcultures they engender. The eight intercultural propositions included: (1) Minority students' college experiences are shaped by their cultural meaning-making systems; (2) Minority students' cultures of origin moderate the meanings that they attach to college attendance, engagement, and completion; (3) Knowledge of minority students' cultures of origin and immersion are required to understand those students' abilities to negotiate their respective campus cultural milieus; (4) Cultural dissonance is inversely related to minority students' persistence; (5) Minority students who experience a substantial amount of cultural dissonance must acclimate to the dominant campus culture or establish sufficient connections with cultural agents at their institution to persist; (6) The degree to which campus cultural agents validate minority students' cultures of origin is positively associated with reduced cultural dissonance and greater likelihood of persistence; (7) The quality and quantity of minority students' connections with various cultural agents on their respective campuses is positively associated with their likelihood of persistence; and (8) Minority students are more likely to persist if the cultural agents to whom they are connected emphasize educational achievement, value educational attainment, and validate their traditional cultural heritages (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

3. **Critiques of Tinto's Model**

Although Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student departure is one of the most frequently cited in the literature, higher education researchers and policy makers have raised theoretical and practical concerns. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997), in their examination of Tinto's (1975) theory, assessed the extent and degree of empirical support for 13 primary propositions derived from the theory. They concluded that Tinto's (1975) theory was partially supported and lacked empirical internal consistency in multi-institutional and single-institutional assessments, in residential and commuter universities, and across male and female postsecondary students (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997).

Braxton and Lien (2000) explored the viability of academic integration as a core construct in Tinto's (1993) model. They found that the magnitude of support for influence of academic integration on both subsequent institutional commitment and persistence varied between multi-institutional and single-institutional tests of the relationships. Multi-institutional appraisals provided robust empirical backing for the effect of academic integration on both subsequent institutional commitment and persistence, while single-institutional appraisals rendered modest empirical support for the effects of academic integration on both subsequent institutional commitment and persistence (Braxton & Lien, 2000). In light of their findings, Braxton and Lien (2000) proposed two possible courses of action for scholars studying postsecondary student departure, either abandoning the construct of academic integration from further research on student departure or rethinking the specification and measurement of academic integration.

Higher education researchers and policy makers have also criticized the underlying assumptions of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model for their cultural bias and inadequacy in explaining the postsecondary departure of racial and ethnic minority students (Guiffrida, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Tierney (1992) discussed how Tinto (1975, 1987) inappropriately borrowed the anthropological construct of ritual from Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage. He argued that positing the postsecondary experience as a ritual accords higher status to one culture over others because rituals are embedded in cultural contexts (Tierney, 1992). Tierney (1992, 1999) also rejected Tinto's (1975, 1987) notion, based on Durkheim's (1951) sociological theory of suicide, that students must undergo a form of cultural suicide whereby they sever ties from the communities and cultures in which they were raised and integrate and assimilate into the dominant culture of their postsecondary environment. Recognizing an institutional responsibility to affirm students' cultural identities, Tierney (1999) advocated an alternative perspective, cultural integrity, emphasizing programs and teaching strategies that engage students' racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Empirical and theoretical evidence supports the importance of cultural integrity by suggesting that racial and ethnic minority students in higher education benefit from maintaining ties to their cultural heritages (Dehlye, 1995; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Guiffrida, 2005; Murguía, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Museus, 2008; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Tierney, 1992). Murguía, Padilla, and Pavel (1991), for example, concluded that participation in ethnic organizations enabled Hispanic and Native American students to scale down the larger campus environment by forming smaller enclaves. Museus (2008)

found that ethnic student organizations facilitated the adjustment and membership of African American and Asian American students by functioning as spaces that provided cultural familiarity, vehicles for cultural expression and advocacy, and sources of cultural validation. Additionally, Nagasaw and Wong (1999) proposed a theory to explain the process by which minority students remain at their institution of higher education. They suggested that if minority students are actively engaged in social networks rooted in their ethnic subculture, then they are more likely to be integrated into the academic and social systems of their institution and succeed (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999).

Tierney's (1992, 1999) critiques have been echoed by other higher education researchers and policy makers. Hurtado and Carter (1997) reasoned that Tinto's (1993) integration concept did not adequately capture the meaning of integration for diverse groups of postsecondary students. They concluded that sense of belonging, an indicator of the extent to which students feel part of the overall campus community, is more appropriate to describe minority students' reactions to their institutions than integration. While social integration implies an alignment with one predominant set of organizational norms, sense of belonging entails multiple possibilities for forming affiliations with a larger community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) contended that postsecondary students with varying ethnic and gender backgrounds may experience the academic and social context differently, yet higher education researchers and policy makers often assume that Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) assumptions can be applied to all students in the same way. They cited issues with the use of an acculturation/assimilation framework, as well as problems with interactionist theory as used in Tinto's (1993) model of student departure (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

More recently, Guiffrida (2006) suggested enhancing the cultural sensitivity of Tinto's (1993) model by integrating social and cross-cultural psychological principles. He argued that Tinto's model can more accurately describe diverse students in higher education by recognizing relationships between cultural norms, motivational orientation, and academic achievement and persistence (Guiffrida, 2006).

4. **Integration Redefined**

As a response to the theoretical and practical concerns surrounding Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student departure, higher education researchers and policy makers have redefined Tinto's integration concept, emphasizing the role of involvement (Astin, 1984, 1999) and engagement (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Kuh et al., 2006) in the process by which students stay or leave institutions of higher education. Astin (1984, 1999) defined involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. His involvement theory had five basic postulates: (1) Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects, objects which may be highly generalized or highly specific; (2) Involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times; (3) Involvement includes both quantitative and qualitative components; (4) The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program; and (5) The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (Astin, 1984, 1999).

Astin's (1984, 1999) theory of involvement stressed active participation of the postsecondary student in the learning process. It encouraged faculty members to focus less on content and teaching techniques and more on what students actually do, specifically how motivated they are and how much time and energy they devote to the learning process (Astin, 1984, 1999). The institution, thus, was important to Astin's (1984, 1999) theory in that the effectiveness of any program or policy is determined by its ability to increase involvement; however, the unit of analysis and focus is on the individual student (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). A highly involved student devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations and extracurricular activities, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, an uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from participating in student organizations and extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members and other students (Astin, 1984, 1999). In general, the greater the student's involvement in the academic and social activities of their institution of higher education, the greater will be the amount of learning and personal development (Astin, 1999).

Influenced by the theory of involvement (Astin, 1984, 1999), the concept of engagement incorporated the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to student success, and the manner in which institutions allocate resources and organize learning opportunities and services to encourage student participation in the activities that lead to student success (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). It focused on the interaction between students and

institutions, where students are responsible for their own level of involvement and institutions are responsible for fostering environments that stimulate and encourage student involvement.

Engagement has been found to be associated with certain institutional practices and conditions (Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Chickering and Gamson (1987) outlined the best-known set of engagement indicators (Kuh et al., 2005). Their seven principles of effective educational practices included: (1) encouraging contact between students and faculty; (2) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students; (3) using active learning techniques; (4) giving prompt feedback; (5) emphasizing time on task; (6) communicating high expectations; and (7) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). More recently, the National Survey of Student Engagement identified five benchmarks of effective educational practices: (1) level of academic challenge; (2) active and collaborative learning; (3) student-faculty interaction; (4) enriching educational experiences; and (5) supportive campus environment (Kuh, 2003). Generally speaking, the more students engage in these kinds of activities, the more they learn and the more likely they are to persist and graduate. At institutions where faculty members use these and other effective educational practices more frequently in their classes, students are more engaged overall and gain more from their postsecondary experience (Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

The research on involvement and engagement has documented positive effects on a variety of outcomes (Baker, 2008; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005; Webber, Krylow, & Zhang, 2013). Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005), for example, concluded that students report higher levels of

engagement and learning at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students in experiences, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interact with students, challenge students academically, and value enriching educational experiences. Kuh et al. (2008) found that engagement in educationally purposefully activities was positively related to first-year student grades and persistence from first to second year of postsecondary education. More recently, Webber, Krylow, and Zhang (2013) discovered that students who reported more frequent engagement in academic and social activities earned higher grades and reported higher levels of satisfaction with their postsecondary experience.

C.   <u>**Racial and Ethnic Minority Students**</u>

The inability of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model to incorporate racial and ethnic minority students' cultural values and identities remains a major criticism within the literature on postsecondary student departure (Guiffrida, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). This limitation is particularly important when considering that the current generation of postsecondary students has been called the "most racially and ethnically diverse in the nation's history" (Debard, 2004, p. 33). Data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics support this claim. Undergraduate racial and ethnic minority student enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions has increased. From 1976 to 2012, the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 4% to 15%, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2% to 6%, the percentage of Black students rose from 10% to 15%, and the percentage of American Indian/Alaskan Native students rose from 0.7% to 0.9% at such institutions (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). This growth has been driven by changes in the

demographics of the United States as well as changes in the college-going rates of several racial and ethnic groups (Renn & Reason, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012).

Despite their burgeoning size, a number of racial and ethnic minority groups remain significantly underrepresented in terms of postsecondary degree attainment. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that about 59% of full-time, first-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in Fall 2006 completed that degree within six years (Kena et al., 2014). Within this population, the 6-year graduation rate was 71% for Asian students, compared with 67% for students of two or more races, 63% for White students, 52% for Hispanic students, 49% for Pacific Islander students, 40% for Black students, and 40% for American Indian/Alaskan Native students (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

Although higher education researchers and policy makers recognize the increased diversity of postsecondary students, there continues to be an assumption that "issues related to the retention of minority students [are] as similar, if not identical, to those of majority students" (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000, p. 130). Race and ethnicity, however, plays a role in the process by which students stay or leave institutions of higher education. A number of factors related to minority student departure have been identified, including academic preparedness, campus climate, commitment to educational goals and the institution, academic and social integration, and the availability of financial aid (Carter, 2006; O'Brien & Zudak, 1998; Ortiz & Pichardo-Diaz, 2011; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Racial and ethnic minority students struggle not only to meet the academic demands of higher education, but also to fit into the culture of their institution. They are

more likely than other students to lack requisite academic skills, face cultural and racial hostility, and feel isolated and disconnected from the campus environment (Fischer, 2007; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

Studies have concluded that interactions with faculty affect the process by which racial and ethnic minority students stay or leave institutions of higher education (Arana et al., 2011; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Kraemer, 1997; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007; Rendón, 1994; Torres, 2006). Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996), for example, found that Latino postsecondary students who perceived a student-centered faculty and had opportunities for faculty interaction were more likely to experience a successful academic adjustment to higher education. Kraemer (1997) determined that formal faculty-student interaction, informal faculty-student interaction, and study behavior contributed to the academic integration of older Hispanic students at a 2-year institution. Torres (2006), studying Latino students at urban commuter campuses, established a direct effect between meeting with faculty outside of class and students' commitment to the institution. Additionally, Arana et al. (2011) discovered that Latino students who persisted cited the presence of enthusiastic and available faculty as a major source of encouragement and assistance, while non-persisters referred to a lack of supportive faculty as a major contributor to their departure.

Racial and ethnic minority students' perceptions of the campus environment have also been found to influence the process by which they stay or leave institutions of higher education. Studies have concluded that negative perceptions of the campus climate contribute to outcomes associated with student departure, including feelings of alienation and isolation as well as diminished sense of belonging and commitment to the institution

(Cabrera et al., 1999; Fischer, 2007; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996), for example, found that Latino students who perceived a hostile climate for diversity expressed more difficulty adjusting academically, socially, and personally/emotionally, as well as more difficulty building a sense of attachment to the institution. Nora and Cabrera (1996) concluded that minority student perceptions of discrimination and prejudice on campus and in the classroom negatively affected their adjustment to postsecondary education and exerted an indirect effect on their decisions to persist. Cabrera et al. (1999) determined that exposure to a campus climate of prejudice and intolerance lessened institutional commitment and indirectly weakened decisions to persist. More recently, Fischer (2007) discovered that minority students who had a negative perception of the campus racial climate were less satisfied with their postsecondary experience and more likely to leave their institution of higher education.

It is evident that multiple factors have the potential to explain the process by which racial and ethnic minority students stay or leave institutions of higher education. Unfortunately, colleges and universities with significant enrollment of students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds have not received sufficient attention from higher education researchers and policy makers (Braxton, 2000; Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000), and the first-year experience of racial and ethnic minority students at minority-serving institutions is understudied (Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013).

D.   First-Year Experience

The "first-year experience" in higher education is an intentional combination of academic and co-curricular efforts designed and implemented to strengthen the quality of student learning during, and satisfaction with, their first year of postsecondary education (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013). These efforts often follow the same six objectives: (1) increase student-to-student interaction; (2) increase faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class; (3) increase student involvement and time on campus; (4) link the curriculum and the co-curriculum; (5) increase academic expectations and levels of academic engagement; and (6) assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for postsecondary education (Barefoot, 2000). They target the most critical time for students, the first year of postsecondary education, particularly the first few weeks of students' experiences on campus, a period that higher education researchers and policy makers have suggested may be most critical to students' adjustment and successful postsecondary transition (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998). Programs and activities that constitute the first-year experience include new student orientation, learning communities, peer mentoring, tutoring, developmental education, academic advising, service-learning, and summer bridge programs (Barefoot et al., 2005; Keup, 2005; Kuh et al., 2006).

Colleges and universities also institute special courses or seminars intended to enhance first-year students' academic and social integration into higher education (Barefoot, 1992). Tinto (2000, 2012) argued that engagement in the community of the classroom can become a gateway for subsequent student involvement in the academic and social communities of the institution generally. University courses that promote

students' integration into the academic and social structures of their institution have the potential to enhance students' academic success and increase the likelihood that they will persist until degree completion (Tinto, 2000, 2012).

1. **First-Year Seminars: Historical Background**

First-year seminars, also referred to as freshman seminars, freshman orientation courses, or University 101 courses, trace their origins back to the late nineteenth century. One of the first such courses was established at Boston University in 1888, and the first credit-bearing freshman orientation course was established at Reed College in 1911 (Gardner, 1986; Gordon, 1989; Schnell & Doetkott, 2002-2003). By 1928, over 100 institutions established semester-long freshman orientation courses on campus, including Princeton, Indiana, Stanford, Northwestern, Ohio State, Johns Hopkins, Dartmouth, Columbia, Brown, Antioch College, and the University of Minnesota (Gordon, 1989).

After a period of rapid growth in the early twentieth century, freshman orientation courses were reduced in the 1930s as a result of faculty objections to awarding academic credit for the content covered in those courses. It was not until the 1970s that freshman orientation courses began to proliferate again as a means of addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse student population and in response to the development of a freshman seminar entitled "University 101: The Student and the University" at the University of South Carolina in 1972 (Gardner, 1986; Gordon, 1989). That course, designed to assist students in making a successful transition into higher education and to promote retention, became a model for freshman year programming referred to as "The Freshman Year Experience" (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002-2003).

By the 1990s, freshman seminars were a trend on college and university campuses. In 1995, the American Council on Education reported that 82% of institutions had taken steps to improve the freshman year, and the most common structure implemented was the freshman seminar (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). Recent data from the John N. Gardner Institute and the National Survey of First-Year Seminars highlights the extent to which American colleges and universities offer first-year seminars. Of 430 4-year colleges and universities that replied to a 2010 survey administered by the John N. Gardner Institute entitled "Enhancing Student Success and Retention throughout Undergraduate Education: A National Study," 87.2% reported that they offered one or more seminars for undergraduate students that addressed transition topics or academic themes. The most common type of seminar was the first-year seminar, with 96.2% of institutions reporting that they offered first-year seminars (Barefoot, Griffin, & Koch, 2012). Similarly, of 896 colleges and universities, encompassing 2-year and 4-year and public and private institutions, that responded to the 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, 804 (89.7%) reported that they offered at least one first-year seminar (Young & Hopp, 2014).

2. First-Year Seminars: Characteristics

First-year seminars are courses intended to promote the academic and social integration of first-year students by introducing them to: (1) a variety of specific topics, which vary by seminar type; (2) essential skills for postsecondary success; and (3) selected processes, the most common of which is the creation of a peer support group (Barefoot, 1992). They are utilized by colleges and universities to ease the transition into higher education, encourage active student involvement in learning, promote persistence,

and increase degree attainment (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). First-year seminars often combine curricular and co-curricular components to develop academic skills, explore academic and career goals, strengthen connections to the institution, and promote awareness of campus resources and services (Barefoot et al., 2005; Padgett & Keup, 2011). Most first-year seminars also focus on fostering interpersonal skills and personal development, increasing student interactions with faculty and staff, and developing support networks and friendships among first-year seminar classmates (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013; Hunter & Linder, 2005).

There are many variations among first-year seminars in terms of structure and content. Each college and university uniquely defines and administers its first-year seminar based on the purpose it serves within the context of the institution's goals and mission (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Young & Hopp, 2014). Across institutions, the majority of first-year seminars carry academic credit, are comparatively smaller in size than other first-year courses, meet for three or fewer hours per week, and last for one term (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Young & Hopp, 2014).

Barefoot (1992) created a typology of five distinct seminar types: (1) extended orientation seminars; (2) academic seminars with generally uniform content; (3) academic seminars with variable content; (4) professional or discipline-linked seminars; and (5) basic study skills seminars (Barefoot, 1992; Hunter & Linder, 2005). The 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars relied on Barefoot's (1992) typology and used similar terminology to describe first-year seminars. Nearly 90% of institutions that responded to the 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars reported that they offered at least one first-year seminar. When asked to identify all types of first-year

seminars offered, the most frequently reported discrete seminar type was extended orientation seminar (60.4%), followed by academic seminar with generally uniform content (29.4%), academic seminar on various topics (28.7%), hybrid seminar (23.4%), basic study skills seminar (22.6%), pre-professional or discipline-linked seminar (16.4%), and other (1.5%). Additionally, similar to the distribution of frequently reported discrete seminar types, the most frequently reported primary seminar type was extended orientation seminar (39.1%), followed by academic seminar on various topics (19.2%), academic seminar with generally uniform content (19.0%), hybrid seminar (14.1%), basic study skills seminar (3.9%), pre-professional or discipline-linked seminar (3.8%), and other (0.9%) (Young & Hopp, 2014).

Colleges and universities were also asked on the 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars to document the percentage of students required to take the primary first-year seminar on their campus. Approximately 56% of responding institutions reported that they required more than 90% of their first-year students to enroll in the primary first-year seminar on their campus. The three most frequently reported categories of students who were required to take the primary first-year seminar were academically underprepared students (12.5%), students within specific majors (7.9%), and students enrolled in developmental or remedial courses (7.1%) (Young & Hopp, 2014).

In addition to questions focusing on the types of first-year seminars offered and enrollment patterns in institutions' primary first-year seminar, the 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars asked colleges and universities to identify important course objectives and topics covered in first-year seminars. The three most frequently

reported course objectives for first-year seminars were to develop a connection with the institution (44.9%), provide orientation to campus resources and services (37.8%), and develop academic skills (36.3%). Further disaggregation of this data revealed differences in the three most frequently reported course objectives based on primary seminar type. Extended orientation seminars most frequently reported course objectives aimed at orienting the students to campus resources (58.3%), connecting students to the institution (56.3%), and developing academic skills (34.6%), while academic seminars on various topics most frequently reported course objectives aimed at developing critical-thinking skills (50.3%), developing writing skills (38.8%), and developing academic skills (32.0%) (Young & Hopp, 2014).

The frequently reported course objectives for first-year seminars aligned closely with the frequently reported topics covered in first-year seminars. The three most frequently reported topics covered in first-year seminars were campus resources (35.7%), academic planning or advising (34.7%), and critical thinking (32.6%). Campus engagement (27.7%), a topic directly related to the objective of connecting students to the institution, was the fifth most frequently identified topic. Similar to the documented differences in the three most frequently reported course objectives based on primary seminar type, the three most frequently reported topics covered in first-year seminars also varied by primary seminar type. Extended orientation seminars most frequently reported covering the topics of campus resources (56.3%), academic planning or advising (47.1%), and study skills (39.3%), while academic seminars on various topics most frequently reported covering the topics of critical thinking (63.3%), writing skills (49.0%), and specific disciplinary topic (33.3%) (Young & Hopp, 2014).

First-year seminars serve as a curricular anchor for a number of effective educational practices (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013). Chickering and Gamson (1987) outlined seven principles of effective educational practices that directly influence student learning and the quality of their educational experiences. While not exclusive to first-year seminars, they included: (1) encouraging contact between students and faculty; (2) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students; (3) using active learning techniques; (4) giving prompt feedback; (5) emphasizing time on task; (6) communicating high expectations; and (7) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Swing (2002), relying on data from the First-Year Initiative benchmarking survey, empirically validated Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles by identifying five teaching strategies that were highly correlated with students' satisfaction and achievement of learning outcomes in first-year seminars: (1) use of a variety of teaching methods; (2) meaningful discussion and homework; (3) challenging assignments; (4) productive use of class time; and (5) encouragement for students to speak in class and work together (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013; Swing, 2002).

More recently, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007, 2011) identified a set of 10 high-impact educational practices: (1) first-year seminars and experiences; (2) common intellectual experiences; (3) learning communities; (4) writing-intensive courses; (5) collaborative assignments and projects; (6) undergraduate research; (7) diversity/global learning; (8) service learning, community-based learning; (9) internships; and (10) capstone courses and projects. Although only one of the high-impact practices is, by definition, tied to the first year, 7 of the remaining 9 high-impact

practices are tightly connected to the instructional experience and classroom setting of
first-year seminars (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007, 2011;
Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008). The 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year
Seminars asked colleges and universities to identify the prevalence of high-impact
practices in their first-year seminar, as well as to identify which, if any, of the high-
impact practices, excluding internships and capstone courses and projects, are
intentionally connected to their first-year seminar. Over 93% of responding institutions
reported offering at least one high-impact practice in connection with their first-year
seminar, and 54.2% reported offering three or more high-impact practices in connection
with their first-year seminar. The three most frequently reported high-impact practices
intentionally connected to first-year seminars were collaborative assignments and
projects (67.2%), diversity/global learning (58.8%), and the inclusion of writing-intensive
projects (42.5%) (Young & Hopp, 2014).

3. First-Year Seminars: Outcomes

First-year seminars are often the most frequently assessed and measured of all
undergraduate curricular interventions (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini,
2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). According to the 2009 National Survey of
First-Year Seminars, persistence to the second year of college and satisfaction, both with
the faculty and institution, were at the top of the list of assessment outcomes, followed by
academic performance, use of campus services, connections with peers, and participation
in campus activities (Padgett & Keup, 2011). Summarizing the research on first-year
seminars, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that first-year seminar participation
"has statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student's successful

transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on the academic performance while in college and on a considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor's degree completion" (p. 403).

Most studies have shown that first-year seminar participation results in a number of benefits for students and institutions, including improved retention and graduation rates, higher number of credit hours completed at the end of the first postsecondary year, higher grade point averages, improved student adjustment and involvement, and greater student satisfaction (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). Ben-Avie et al. (2012), for example, determined that students who participated in an Inquiry seminar as part of a First-Year Experience program had significantly higher semester and cumulative grade point averages, earned more credits, and were retained at a higher rate than students who did not participate in a seminar. Similarly, Hyers and Joselin (1998) discovered that grades earned in a required first-year seminar course significantly predicted both academic achievement and persistence. Students' first-year seminar grade correlated significantly with their first semester grade point average, cumulative grade point average, and earned credit at the end of their first and subsequent years of postsecondary education. Additionally, persistence to the second year, as well as subsequent years, was significantly higher for the first-year students who earned a grade of A or B in their first-year seminar than for the first-year students who earned a grade of C+ or lower in their first-year seminar (Hyers & Joselin, 1998).

In a longitudinal analysis of matched treatment and comparison groups, Schnell and Doetkott (2002-2003) found significantly greater retention over a period of four years for students enrolled in a first-year seminar. In particular, results indicated a one year retention rate of 96% for students enrolled in a first-year seminar compared to 91% of the matched comparison group, two year retention rate of 75% compared to 63%, three year retention rate of 59% compared to 51%, and four year retention rate of 51% compared to 44% (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002-2003). More recently, a study by Sidle and McReynolds (2009) investigated the relationship between participation in a voluntary academic content freshman year experience course and student retention and success by matching participants who chose to enroll in the course with a control group of non-participants. Statistically significant results showed that 63% of students who chose to participate in the institution's voluntary academic content freshman year experience course continued their enrollment to the Fall term of their second year compared to 56% of non-participants. Furthermore, students who participated in the freshman year experience course completed more of their first academic year, earned higher cumulative grade point averages, and completed more semester hours at the end of their first academic year than students who did not participate (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009).

Keup and Barefoot (2005), utilizing data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's 2000 Freshman Survey and the 2001 Your First College Year Survey, determined that first-year seminar participation was related to a number of positive academic and social experiences. Students who took a first-year seminar were more likely to report interacting informally with faculty, participating in class discussions, collaborating academically with other students, and attending class. They

were also more engaged in the campus community, more likely to develop a network of friends on campus, and more likely to report feeling integrated into the campus community and successful at various aspects of campus life (Keup & Barefoot, 2005). Similarly, findings from the 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement showed six benefits for students who participated in a first-year seminar. In particular, students in a first-year seminar: (1) were more challenged academically; (2) reported more active and collaborative learning activities; (3) interacted more frequently with faculty; (4) perceived the campus environment as being more supportive; (5) gained more from their first year of postsecondary education; and (6) made greater use of campus services (Kuh et al., 2007).

Although numerous studies document the benefits of first-year seminar participation, there are a few examples in the literature of first-year seminars found to have little or no positive effect. Crissman (2001-2002) analyzed the impact of clustering a first-year seminar with an English composition course on retention. Her data showed no statistically significant difference in retention rates between students taking a clustered first-year seminar and students taking a non-clustered first-year seminar. She hypothesized that her results were inconsistent with previous research findings because of the size of the institution, the clustering of the first-year seminar course, and the time at which retention data were collected (Crissman, 2001-2002). Hendel (2006-2007) examined the efficacy of a first-year seminar on student satisfaction and retention. Although he found that participation in a first-year seminar affected certain dimensions of students' satisfaction, notably academic advising and specific campus experience, participation did not affect either overall student satisfaction or retention into the second

year (Hendel, 2006-2007). Additionally, Jamelske (2009) measured the impact of a first-year experience program on student grade point average and retention. His initial results revealed no positive effects on one-year retention for students who participated in a first-year experience course. However, reducing his sample to include only selected first-year experience courses in which the program goals were likely pursued yielded a positive effect on retention (Jamelske, 2009).

Higher education researchers and policy makers have suggested that simply developing and offering first-year seminars does not guarantee that they will have their intended effects on students. Strayhorn (2009) inferred that mere participation in a first-year seminar does not necessarily guarantee successful transitions or growth across measurable outcomes. Rather, the benefits that are likely to accrue to first-year participants may be a function of the type and content of the seminar (Strayhorn, 2009). Similarly, Porter and Swing (2006) deduced that the choice of content in first-year seminars needs to be carefully orchestrated to create the kinds of outcomes that best match the institutional goals for the course. They derived five measures of learning outcomes in transition-themed first-year seminars, and found 2 of the 5 measures, study skills and health education, to have substantial impact on early intention to persist (Porter & Swing, 2006).

Although first-year seminars are frequently assessed, Swing (2001) argued that assessment is often limited to either surveys of student satisfaction or correlation analyses of participation and retention. Reflecting on the decade that followed Swing's criticism, Friedman (2012), while proclaiming that assessment is the engine that drives a successful first-year seminar, asserted that not much progress was made in improving the

sophistication of first-year seminar assessment plans. Colleges and universities frequently rely on student course evaluations, analyses of institutional data, locally developed questionnaires, and national survey instruments as assessment measures for first-year seminars (Padgett & Keup, 2011). The vast majority of research is quantitative in nature and does little to explain how and why first-year seminars affect student outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, limited research focuses exclusively on racial and ethnic minority students' experiences in first-year seminars. In one of the few studies examining this phenomenon, Musoba, Collazo, and Placide (2013) found that Hispanic and Black students reported that a first-year experience course helped them with their sense of social connection with the university through transition friends and learning about university opportunities.

It is essential to use assessment measures that capture student outcomes other than just retention, academic performance, and satisfaction. An understanding of the interpretations students make of their experiences with various interactions with the academic and social communities of their institution is a promising avenue for further understanding the phenomenon of student departure (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995). Additionally, in light of critiques regarding the inability of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model to incorporate racial and ethnic minority students' cultural values and identities (Guiffrida, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999), it is necessary to determine whether first-year seminars effectively meet the needs and expectations of diverse first-year students. This study adds to the current literature on first-year seminars by moving beyond statistics and correlations to

investigate the impact and value of first-year seminars from the perspectives of the students they serve at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

E. **Summary**

The rate of student departure in the first year continues to puzzle higher education researchers and policy makers. Approximately 20-35% of first-year students do not return to their 4-year institution in the following Fall semester, and 35-45% of first-year students do not return to their 2-year institution in the following Fall semester (ACT, 2014; Kena et al., 2014).

Several theories and models have attempted to explain the process by which students stay or leave institutions of higher education. The different theoretical perspectives provide a holistic review of key factors that influence the meanings students make of their institutional experiences and their subsequent departure decisions. Although Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student departure is one of the most frequently cited in the literature, higher education researchers and policy makers have suggested modifications and elaborations, particularly as the constructs relate to the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students (Guiffrida, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999).

Many interventions designed to combat the dramatic rate of student departure in the first year build implicitly or explicitly on those theories and models. First-year seminars frequently serve as the cornerstone of an integrated, comprehensive, and intentional first-year experience (Barefoot et al., 2005; Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013; Padgett & Keup, 2011). The research on first-year seminars has documented positive effects on a variety of outcomes (Hunter & Linder, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005;

Padgett & Keup, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005). However, few studies investigate the meanings students make of their experiences in first-year seminars, and even fewer studies examine racial and ethnic minority students' experiences in first-year seminars. "Only when they [high-impact practices] are implemented well and continually evaluated to be sure they are accessible to and reaching all students will we realize their considerable potential" (Kuh, 2010). This study adds to the current literature on first-year seminars by exploring diverse first-year students' perceptions of their experiences in first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the impact and value of first-year seminars from diverse first-year students' points of view at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The overarching research question was: How do first-year students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution perceive their experiences in first-year seminars?

A.   <u>Research Design</u>

A case study research design was employed to investigate how diverse first-year students perceive their experiences in first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Along with much qualitative research, case study research shares an intense interest in personal views and circumstances (Stake, 2005). Case studies seek to understand a larger phenomenon through intensive examination of one particular instance (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). They are preferred when "how" or "why" questions are asked about a contemporary set of events over which an investigator has little or no control (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Case studies are well suited for assessing programs with multiple goals, objectives, and outcomes linked to students' experiences (Green, 2007). They are particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programs, and informing policy (Merriam, 2009).

The intent of case study research is to emphasize particularization, rather than generalization. Instead of studying a case primarily to understand other cases, case study research examines a focused and bounded phenomenon in its specific context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 1995, 2005). The institution-specific orientation of this case study follows the recommendation of Tinto (1987) for persistence studies, namely, that one must study each institution and the experiences of individuals

within each institutional setting to know why students depart. A reliance on thick, descriptive data in the particular context of one Hispanic-Serving Institution elucidated a deeper understanding of first-year seminars from diverse first-year students' points of view.

B.   Site and Program Selection

There are many variations among first-year seminars in terms of structure and content. Each college and university uniquely defines and administers its first-year seminar based on the purpose it serves within the context of the institution's goals and mission (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Young & Hopp, 2014). Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are a subset of minority-serving institutions, which consist of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and HSIs. They are defined in federal law as accredited and degree-granting nonprofit colleges or universities with at least 25% Hispanic full-time undergraduate enrollment (Benítez, 1998; Gasman, 2008; Stearns, Watanabe, & Snyder, 2002). Unlike HBCUs and TCUs, whose missions address the needs of their racial and ethnic constituencies, most HSIs were not established specifically to help Latinos/as (Gasman, 2008). Rather, Hispanic-Serving is a manufactured identity that is highly variable and contingent on an institution maintaining a minimum Hispanic student enrollment (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Laden, 2004). Hispanic-Serving Institutions comprise about 10% of colleges and universities in the United States, and account for more than 66% of the total Latino student enrollment in higher education (Murphy, 2013).

Colleges and universities with significant enrollment of students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds have not received sufficient attention from higher education

researchers and policy makers (Braxton, 2000; Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000), and the first-year experience of racial and ethnic minority students at minority-serving institutions is understudied (Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013). To remedy this deficit in the literature, the research site for this study was a Midwestern, urban, 4-year public University offering more than 80 undergraduate and graduate programs to its population of over 10,000 students. The University is a federally-designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, recognized by U.S. News & World Report as one of the most ethnically diverse universities in the nation. Its unique location in a metropolitan area, as well as its distinction as a commuter institution, enables it to service a diverse population with regard to such factors as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and generational status.

According to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at the Hispanic-Serving Institution, 771 students enrolled as new first-time freshmen in Fall 2014. Within this population, the largest ethnic composition was Hispanic (44.1%), followed by White (20.6%), African American (14.4%), Asian (11.3%), and other categories (9.6%). Almost 57% of the students were female, the average age was 19.3 years of age, and about 94% of the students enrolled as full-time. The University's first-to-second-year retention rate for full-time, first-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in Fall 2013 was 60.3%, and the 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in Fall 2008 was 21.8% (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2014).

The primary unit of analysis for this study was the first-year experience program at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The first-year experience program is a university-wide

initiative that supports first-year students in their transition to higher education through a series of classes and out-of-class events. The five facets of the overall program are FIRST: (1) Future planning and time management; (2) Inquiry and critical thinking; (3) Readiness and skills for academic success; (4) Self-discovery and learning styles; and (5) Transitions. These five facets are addressed through both the curriculum and co-curriculum under the general theme, "Diversity in Chicago."

While this study focused on the first-year experience program at a Hispanic-Serving Institution as the primary unit of analysis, individual first-year seminars served as embedded cases within the larger case study research design. First-year students in their first or second semester of study at the University are required to enroll in a first-year seminar. The seminar is known as the First-Year Experience Colloquium. Each First-Year Experience (FYE) course bears the course number 109, carries three hours of credit toward one General Education program requirement in a specified discipline area, contains a field component, and maintains a maximum capacity of 24 first-year students. According to Barefoot (1992)'s typology of distinct seminar types, First-Year Experience courses at this Hispanic-Serving Institution are academic seminars with variable content. Although each First-Year Experience course incorporates a number of topics, such as campus resources and time management skills, the academic themes covered in each course vary from section to section. Academic seminars, either with generally uniform or variable content, have been credited with offering a number of advantages, including specialized academic information, familiarity with faculty within the subject area, career exploration, and early interaction with the student's initial major choice (Gordon, 1989). They are currently the second most common type of first-year seminars offered on

campuses, after extended orientation seminars (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Young & Hopp, 2014).

C.   <u>**Data Collection**</u>

Case study data can be gathered from a wide variety of sources (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2006, 2009). Yin (2009) contends that any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode. The primary sources of data collection for this case study comprised surveys and interviews. Document analysis of course evaluations complemented the survey and interview data. The use of multiple methods, encompassing surveys, interviews, and document analysis, provided a framework to explore the impact and value of first-year seminars from diverse first-year students' perspectives at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

First-year students enrolled in one of the three First-Year Experience courses purposefully chosen for inclusion in this study answered a series of closed- and open-ended questions on two self-administered surveys. The first survey was administered during Week 6 of the Fall 2014 semester in late September 2014 and early October 2014. This early administration coincided with the first few weeks of first-year students' experiences on campus, a period that higher education researchers and policy makers have suggested may be most critical to students' adjustment and successful postsecondary transition (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998). The second survey was administered during Weeks 14 and 15 of the Fall 2014 semester in late November 2014 and early December 2014 to account for the approximate end of the Fall 2014 semester. Although a potential threat to validity was

that students may become familiar with the questions and remember responses for later testing (Creswell, 2012), it was essential, nonetheless, for first-year students to complete a similar survey a second time to permit an examination of possible changing opinions and thoughts regarding First-Year Experience courses at the Hispanic-Serving Institution throughout a semester.

The surveys were developed with reference to the University's existing "First-Year Experience Program Student Course Evaluation" and the literature regarding first-year seminars. The content was practically identical on both surveys; however, the first survey was written in the future tense, while the second survey was written in the past tense. Closed-ended questions were framed around a 5-point Likert scale. One open-ended question was asked on the first survey, while three open-ended questions were asked on the second survey. Both surveys included two demographic questions asking first-year students to select their gender and race/ethnicity.

First-year students completed the surveys in their First-Year Experience course. This administration format permitted a high response rate, since the rate of response is often near 100% when students in classrooms are asked to complete questionnaires (Fowler, 2009). The three First-Year Experience courses purposefully chosen for inclusion in this study had a maximum capacity of 24 first-year students per class. On the day the first survey was administered, a combined total of 62 first-year students were enrolled; however, only 51 were in attendance. Forty-seven out of 51 first-year students (92.2%) agreed to complete the first survey. On the day the second survey was administered, a combined total of 54 first-year students were enrolled; however, only 37 were in attendance. Thirty-six out of 37 first-year students (97.3%) agreed to complete

the second survey. The same first-year student who declined to participate in the first survey declined to participate in the second survey.

The self-administered surveys took no more than 15 minutes to complete. The second survey seemed to take first-year students slightly longer to complete than the first survey, perhaps because more open-ended questions were asked on the second survey. The surveys were anonymous, and no effort was made to match individual first-year student responses on the first survey with that of the second survey. First-year students' participation was strictly voluntary. They were free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, with no consequences.

In addition to survey data, the researcher individually interviewed 10 first-year students enrolled in one of the three First-Year Experience courses purposefully chosen for inclusion in this study. The interviews were conducted during Weeks 9 through 12 of the Fall 2014 semester in late October 2014 and mid-November 2014. Each first-year student was interviewed once for approximately 60-90 minutes. Although given the opportunity to select a neutral location on campus for the interview, all 10 first-year students agreed to be interviewed in an office at the University's Advising Center.

Interviews provide narratives that describe an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs and are an effective method for gathering descriptive data in an individual's own words (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The purpose of the interviews was to uncover the meaning structures that diverse first-year students use to organize their experiences and make sense of their first-year seminars (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002). A semi-structured, open-ended interview approach was used to yield in-depth responses about first-year students' experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge

(Patton, 2002). Although the researcher constructed an interview guide to focus

questioning on a few broad topics, such as academic performance, connections to the

University, and relationships with First-Year Experience classmates and faculty

members, first-year student interviewees were permitted to depart from it. This flexible

method enabled the researcher to tailor the interview to the unique experiences and

meanings of each interviewee while at the same time preserving a consistent list of topics

to explore with every interviewee (Chism & Banta, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hatch,

2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

       Each interview was audio recorded with a digital recording device. The audio

recordings captured first-year students' actual words as they described their experiences

in their First-Year Experience course at the Hispanic-Serving Institution. They also

allowed the researcher to focus on the first-year student interviewees during the

interview, rather than concentrating exclusively on writing notes (Patton, 2002). The

audio recordings were transcribed verbatim shortly after each interview. To ensure

anonymity, a pseudonym, reflecting the gender of the first-year student, was assigned to

the transcription in place of the student's actual name. Similar to the surveys, first-year

students' participation in the interviews was strictly voluntary. They were free not to

participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, with no consequences.

Additionally, if at any time first-year students did not feel comfortable being recorded,

the audio recording would be stopped.

       Finally, a document analysis complemented the survey and interview data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that documents are a rich source of information

because they are readily available and grounded in the context they represent. Faculty

members teaching a First-Year Experience course at the Hispanic-Serving Institution in Fall 2014 administered the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation" in their First-Year Experience course in early December 2014. A total of 401 first-year students completed the evaluation of their First-Year Experience course. This data source afforded the opportunity for comparison between the three First-Year Experience courses serving as embedded cases within the larger case study research design and all 28 First-Year Experience courses offered in Fall 2014. Collection of this source of data was not unique to this study since this data was already being gathered by University administrators for purposes of program evaluation.

D. **Sampling Procedure**

The Hispanic-Serving Institution offered 28 First-Year Experience courses in Fall 2014. All individuals teaching a First-Year Experience course in Fall 2014 had the opportunity for their first-year students to participate in this study. The researcher sent participation requests in mid-September 2014 to the University email account of 25 faculty members teaching a First-Year Experience course in Fall 2014. Three First-Year Experience faculty members taught two sections of a First-Year Experience course in Fall 2014; thus, they each received only one email. Fifteen First-Year Experience faculty members (60%) responded positively. The remaining 10 faculty members did not reply.

Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to choose individuals based on specific selection criteria relevant to a study (Merriam, 2009). Three First-Year Experience courses were selected purposefully for inclusion in this study on a basis of First-Year Experience course faculty who indicated a willingness to permit the researcher to administer a survey in their First-Year Experience course twice during the semester, as

well as provide the researcher with a copy of the course syllabus. One criterion for the selection of First-Year Experience courses for inclusion in this study was the specified discipline area in which the First-Year Experience course carries credit toward a General Education program requirement. The three First-Year Experience courses selected for inclusion satisfy different General Education requirements, permitting the study of first-year students' perceptions across academic seminars with noticeably variable content.

The researcher contacted the faculty member associated with each of the three First-Year Experience courses purposefully chosen for inclusion in this study by email to arrange a survey administration schedule. During the first visit to each of the three First-Year Experience courses, the researcher explained the research objectives and offered all eligible first-year students the opportunity to answer a series of questions on two surveys at two separate time points. Interested first-year students read and signed consent forms, and then were instructed to complete the first survey. The researcher returned to each of the three First-Year Experience courses about eight weeks later to administer the second survey.

The researcher sent interview participation requests in mid-October 2014 to the University email account of all students enrolled in one of the three First-Year Experience courses purposefully chosen for inclusion in this study. On the day the emails were sent, a combined total of 58 first-year students were enrolled. Ten first-year students (17.2%) replied, all of whom indicated an interest to participate in an interview. They comprised first-year students of different gender and racial/ethnic compositions, as well as represented the three First-Year Experience courses purposefully chosen to

complete the two surveys. The researcher emailed each of the 10 first-year students to arrange a date, time, and location for the interview.

Finally, the researcher contacted the Director of the University's first-year experience program in January 2015 and requested access to first-year students' responses to the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation." The researcher obtained this information in February 2015. University Technology Services at the Hispanic-Serving Institution generated and provided the Director of the University's first-year experience program with three reports detailing first-year students' responses to the close-ended evaluation questions: (1) Basic Item Analysis Report; (2) Condensed Item Analysis Report; and (3) Item Statistics Report. The Director of the University's first-year experience program presented the researcher with pdf copies of these reports, as well as photocopies of first-year students' hand-written responses to the open-ended evaluation questions.

E.   **Data Analysis**

The types of data that are gathered affect data analysis possibilities (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). A collection of transcribed interviews and responses to surveys and the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation" formed the basis of this study's data analysis.

Data analysis is a process of sorting, categorizing, grouping, and regrouping data into piles or chunks that are meaningful (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Yin, 2009). Descriptive statistics were computed, notably means and standard deviations, for the Likert-scale close-ended survey responses using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 22.0. University Technology Services at the Hispanic-Serving

Institution generated three separate reports listing statistics, including means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations, regarding first-year students' responses to the closed-ended evaluation questions.

The open-ended survey responses and transcribed interview data were condensed and indexed into analyzable units by generating codes, tags or labels that assign meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes frequently cited in the literature provided the framework for an initial examination of the data. This provisional list of codes included campus resources and services, academic planning, study skills, and campus engagement (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Young & Hopp, 2014).

Data analysis was an ongoing process that occurred simultaneously with data collection in Fall 2014 to enable early data to serve as a foundation for further data collection and analysis. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), "Analysis leads to questions that lead to further data collection that lead to further analysis" (p. 216). The researcher employed open coding processes to identify patterns, themes, and categories, as well as ascertain relationships between and among the patterns, themes, and categories. Each grouping and regrouping of the data allowed the researcher to isolate patterns, commonalities, and distinctions among the data, draw upon them to shape subsequent data collection, and begin to formulate conclusions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

F.   Ensuring Trustworthiness

The basic question addressed by the notion of trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the

research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). One way to ensure trustworthiness is by triangulation. The logic of triangulation is based on the premise that different kinds of data reveal different aspects of empirical reality (Patton, 2002). A case study research design, with its reliance on multiple data sources, provides the opportunity to triangulate data. The researcher ensured trustworthiness and achieved triangulation by comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2005; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2006, 2009). This included data collected through two surveys, 10 interviews, and 401 course evaluations throughout the Fall 2014 semester.

Triangulation can also increase the credibility of a study's findings (Merriam, 2009). To ensure credibility, the interview portion of this study included member checks. The researcher paraphrased and reflected on first-year student interviewees' remarks to verify that interviewees' thoughts and feelings were accurately conveyed. First-year student interviewees also had the option to meet with the researcher to review their transcribed interview for precision and points requiring clarification (Green, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 1995).

IV. RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of this study investigating the impact and value of first-year seminars from diverse first-year students' points of view at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The presentation of descriptive data from the close-ended responses to each of the two surveys is followed by a description of themes that emerged from the interview data. Those results are complemented by descriptive data from the close-ended responses to the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation."

A.   Survey #1

The first survey was administered during Week 6 of the Fall 2014 semester in late September 2014 and early October 2014. A total of 47 first-year students completed the first survey. Table I provides the First-Year Experience course distribution of the first-year students who completed the first survey.

Table I
FYE COURSE DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED THE FIRST SURVEY

FYE Course	Frequency	Percent
A	20	42.6
B	18	38.3
C	9	19.1

Demographic information was collected on the 47 first-year students. Table II provides the gender composition of first-year students who completed the first survey. Slightly more male first-year students (53.2%) completed the first survey than female first-year students.

Table II
GENDER COMPOSITION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED THE FIRST SURVEY

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	25	53.2
Female	22	46.8

The racial/ethnic composition of first-year students who completed the first survey is summarized in Table III. The results indicate that the most common race/ethnicity was Hispanic or Latino/Latina (38.3%), followed by White (25.5%), Asian (14.9%), Black or African American (10.6%), More than One Race (8.5%), and American Indian or Alaskan Native (2.1%). Of the four first-year students who answered "More than One Race," one selected Hispanic or Latino/Latina, White, and Black or African American; one selected White, Black or African American, and American Indian or Alaskan Native; one selected White and Asian; and one selected Hispanic or Latino/Latina and White.

Table III
RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED THE FIRST SURVEY

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Hispanic or Latino/Latina	18	38.3
White	12	25.5
Black or African American	5	10.6
Asian	7	14.9
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	2.1
More than One Race	4	8.5

Descriptive statistics for the 14 statements on the first survey relating to first-year students' expectations of First-Year Experience courses are presented next. The results in Table IV indicate that first-year students most often expected their First-Year Experience course to inform them about campus resources ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.61$), as well as help them get involved with on-campus activities ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.91$) and manage their time effectively ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.96$). First-year students least often expected their First-Year Experience course to help them develop writing skills ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.18$) and understand diversity ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.16$).

Table IV
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE 14 STATEMENTS ON THE FIRST SURVEY

Statement	*M*	*SD*
Adjust to University	4.02	0.94
Understand diversity	3.51	1.16
Develop writing skills	3.47	1.18
Inform about campus resources	4.62	0.61
Explore majors	3.89	0.87
Create relationships with other teachers	3.99	0.97
Develop critical thinking skills	3.94	1.09
Feel connected to University	4.13	0.90
Inform about University policies and procedures	4.13	0.88
Get involved with on-campus activities	4.30	0.91
Develop study skills	3.98	1.13
Create friendships with other students	4.02	1.03
Manage time effectively	4.15	0.96
Feel part of campus community	4.02	1.01

Table V displays descriptive statistics for the statements on the first survey relating to first-year students' confidence level regarding their continued enrollment at the University. The results indicate that first-year students were confident that they would enroll at the University next semester ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.78$) as well as next year ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.05$).

Table V
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE CONFIDENCE LEVEL STATEMENTS ON THE FIRST SURVEY

Statement	*M*	*SD*
Enroll at University next semester	4.53	0.78
Enroll at University next year	4.17	1.05

Table VI shows the frequency and percentage of first-year students who indicated on the first survey that they were absolutely sure that they would not return to the University or that they were not confident that they would return to the University for next semester or next year. Of the three first-year students (6.4%) who indicated that they were absolutely sure that they would not return or that they were not confident that they would return to the University for next semester or next year, one selected because intended major not offered; one selected because intended major not offered and home/family issues; and one selected other, citing "Transferring."

Table VI
FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO ANSWERED ABSOLUTELY SURE OR NOT CONFIDENT ON THE FIRST SURVEY

Answered Absolutely Sure or Not Confident	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	6.4
No	44	93.6

The final question of the first survey asked first-year students to provide an open-ended response regarding what they hope to gain from their First-Year Experience course. First-year students most often mentioned that they hope to gain academic skills, knowledge about the University, and friendships from their First-Year Experience course. Nineteen first-year students (40.4%) mentioned that they hope to gain academic skills, 18 first-year students (38.3%) mentioned that they hope to gain knowledge about the University, and 11 first-year students (23.4%) mentioned that they hope to gain friendships.

B. **Survey #2**

The second survey was administered during Weeks 14 and 15 of the Fall 2014 semester in late November 2014 and early December 2014. The content was practically identical to that of the first survey administered during Week 6 of the Fall 2014 semester; however, the first survey was written in the future tense, while the second survey was written in the past tense. Additionally, one open-ended question was asked on the first survey, while three open-ended questions were asked on the second survey. It was essential for first-year students to complete a similar survey a second time to permit an examination of possible changing opinions and thoughts regarding First-Year Experience courses at the Hispanic-Serving Institution throughout a semester.

A total of 36 first-year students completed the second survey. All 36 first-year students who completed the second survey were part of the original 47 first-year students who completed the first survey. Table VII provides the First-Year Experience course distribution of the first-year students who completed the second survey.

Table VII
FYE COURSE DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED THE SECOND SURVEY

FYE Course	Frequency	Percent
A	13	36.1
B	14	38.9
C	9	25.0

Demographic information was collected on the 36 first-year students. Table VIII provides the gender composition of first-year students who completed the second survey. More male first-year students (63.9%) completed the second survey than female first-year students.

Table VIII
GENDER COMPOSITION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED THE SECOND SURVEY

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	23	63.9
Female	13	36.1

The racial/ethnic composition of first-year students who completed the second survey is summarized in Table IX. The results indicate that the most common race/ethnicity was Hispanic or Latino/Latina (38.9%), followed by White (27.8%), Asian (16.7%), More than One Race (13.9%), and Black or African American (2.8%). Of the five first-year students who answered "More than One Race," one selected Hispanic or Latino/Latina, White, and Black or African American; one selected White, Black or African American, and American Indian or Alaskan Native; one selected White and Asian; one selected Hispanic or Latino/Latina and White; and one selected Hispanic or Latino/Latina and Asian.

Table IX
RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED THE SECOND SURVEY

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Hispanic or Latino/Latina	14	38.9
White	10	27.8
Black or African American	1	2.8
Asian	6	16.7
More than One Race	5	13.9

Descriptive statistics for the 14 statements on the second survey relating to whether first-year students' expectations of First-Year Experience courses were realized are presented next. The results in Table X indicate that first-year students most often perceived that their First-Year Experience course informed them about campus resources ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.64$), as well as helped them create friendships with other students ($M =$

4.44, *SD* = 0.81), helped them feel connected to the University (*M* = 4.19, *SD* = 0.98), and informed them about University policies and procedures (*M* = 4.19, *SD* = 0.86). First-year students least often perceived that their First-Year Experience course helped them develop writing skills (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 1.20) and understand diversity (*M* = 3.67, *SD* = 1.26).

Table X
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE 14 STATEMENTS ON THE SECOND SURVEY

Statement	*M*	*SD*
Adjust to University	4.11	0.95
Understand diversity	3.67	1.26
Develop writing skills	3.64	1.20
Inform about campus resources	4.61	0.64
Explore majors	3.89	1.17
Create relationships with other teachers	3.89	1.37
Develop critical thinking skills	4.08	1.05
Feel connected to University	4.19	0.98
Inform about University policies and procedures	4.19	0.86
Get involved with on-campus activities	4.14	1.07
Develop study skills	4.06	1.17
Create friendships with other students	4.44	0.81
Manage time effectively	4.08	1.05
Feel part of campus community	4.11	1.04

Table XI displays descriptive statistics for the statements on the second survey relating to first-year students' confidence level regarding their continued enrollment at the University. The results indicate that first-year students were confident that they

would enroll at the University next semester ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 0.72$) as well as next year ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.09$).

Table XI
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE CONFIDENCE LEVEL STATEMENTS ON THE SECOND SURVEY

Statement	*M*	*SD*
Enroll at University next semester	4.78	0.72
Enroll at University next year	4.28	1.09

Table XII shows the frequency and percentage of first-year students who indicated on the second survey that they were absolutely sure that they would not return to the University or that they were not confident that they would return to the University for next semester or next year. Of the four first-year students (11.1%) who indicated that they were absolutely sure that they would not return or that they were not confident that they would return to the University for next semester or next year, one selected because financial issues; one selected intended major not offered; and two selected other, citing "want to go to Korea" and "Do not like the environment."

Table XII
FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO ANSWERED ABSOLUTELY SURE OR NOT CONFIDENT ON THE SECOND SURVEY

Answered Absolutely Sure or Not Confident	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	11.1
No	32	88.9

The final three questions on the second survey asked first-year students to provide open-ended responses regarding what they gained from their First-Year Experience course, what they found most useful about their First-Year Experience course, and what, if anything, they would change about their First-Year Experience course. First-year students most often mentioned that they gained academic skills, knowledge about the University, and friendships from their First-Year Experience course. Twelve first-year students (33.3%) mentioned that they gained academic skills, 11 first-year students (30.6%) mentioned that they gained knowledge about the University, and nine first-year students (25%) mentioned that they gained friendships. First-year students frequently described that the most useful aspects of their First-Year Experience course were acquiring academic skills, learning about campus resources, and interacting with their peers and/or faculty members. Eleven first-year students (30.6%) described that they found it most useful that they acquired academic skills, 10 first-year students (27.8%) described that they found it most useful that they learned about campus resources, and six first-year students (16.7%) described that they found it most useful that they interacted with their peers and/or faculty members. Lastly, although 11 first-year students (30.6%) stated that they would change nothing about their First-Year Experience course, 10 first-year students (27.8%) reflected on how they would revise the types of required assignments and eight first-year students (22.2%) reflected on how they would include more content-specific material. Of noteworthy mention, 3 of the 10 first-year students (30%) who reflected on how they would revise the types of required assignments stated that they would require participation in fewer co-curricular activities.

C.   **Interviews**

A total of 10 first-year students participated in interviews. They comprised first-year students of different gender and racial/ethnic compositions, as well as represented the three First-Year Experience courses purposefully chosen to complete the two surveys. Table XIII lists first-year student interviewee demographic information. To ensure anonymity, a pseudonym, reflecting the gender of the first-year student, was assigned in place of the first-year student's actual name.

Table XIII
FIRST-YEAR STUDENT INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	FYE Course
Melinda	female	Hispanic or Latina	C
Jennifer	female	Asian	C
David	male	White	C
Laura	female	Hispanic or Latina	B
Adam	male	White	A
Sophia	female	White	B
Kenneth	male	Asian	A
Alicia	female	Hispanic or Latina	B
Paul	male	Hispanic or Latino	A
Jane	female	Asian	A

Table XIV displays the gender composition, racial/ethnic composition, and the First-Year Experience course distribution of the first-year student interviewees. Six female (60%) and four male (40%) first-year students were interviewed. The most common race/ethnicity was Hispanic or Latino/Latina (40%), followed by White (30%)

and Asian (30%). Four first-year students (40%) were enrolled in First-Year Experience

Course A, three first-year students (30%) were enrolled in First-Year Experience Course

B, and three first-year students (30%) were enrolled in First-Year Experience Course C.

These first-year student interviewee demographics mirror the diversity of the first-year

student population at the Hispanic-Serving Institution. According to the institution's

Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, the largest ethnic composition of first-

year students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in Fall 2014 was Hispanic (44.1%),

followed by White (20.6%), African American (14.4%), Asian (11.3%), and other

categories (9.6%) (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2014). Of this Fall

2014 cohort, 56.5% was female and 43.5% was male. A brief profile of each first-year

student interviewee is presented below in the order that the interviews were conducted.

Table XIV
*GENDER COMPOSITION, RACIAL/ETHNIC COMPOSITION, AND FYE COURSE
DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENT INTERVIEWEES*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	4	40.0
Female	6	60.0
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino/Latina	4	40.0
White	3	30.0
Asian	3	30.0
FYE Course		
A	4	40.0
B	3	30.0
C	3	30.0

Melinda was an 18-year-old Hispanic/Latina female first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course C. She participated in a summer bridge program at the Hispanic-Serving Institution in Summer 2014. Melinda was an undecided major who selected her First-Year Experience course because "it looks like we're going to do some hands-on stuff. I like doing that so I chose to do that." She worked full-time while attending school full-time.

Jennifer was an 18-year-old Asian female first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course C. She was an undecided major with an interest in the Humanities, particularly Linguistics. Jennifer participated in the last First-Year Student Orientation so she selected her First-Year Experience course because it was one of the few courses with seats still available; however, she added, "It turned out to be great." She attended what she described as "fairly diverse elementary and high schools."

David was an 18-year-old White male first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course C. He was an Accounting pre-major who selected his First-Year Experience course because "it sounded interesting. They said you get to go on field trips. And plus I always had the mentality that when I go to college don't just go into what you know you want to do. Try new things. Have fun." David described himself as a social person, comparing himself to Chandler from the television series *Friends*.

Laura was a 19-year-old Hispanic/Latina female first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course B. She was an undecided major considering the fields of Justice Studies and Social Work. Laura selected her First-Year Experience course because the academic subject matter interested her. She explained her difficulty commuting to campus and financing her education. Laura described herself as having

"no friends. I'm very like antisocial. I just don't talk to people unless they talk to me . . . I'm a loner."

Adam was an 18-year-old White male first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course A. He intended to major in Computer Science, and selected his First-Year Experience course because the academic subject matter interested him. Adam acknowledged that he was debating "whether I should transfer or not transfer" to a different institution to complete his degree. He described his difficulty commuting to campus and participating in co-curricular activities.

Sophia was an 18-year-old White female first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course B. She participated in a summer bridge program at the Hispanic-Serving Institution in Summer 2014, as well as a student success program in Fall 2014. Sophia was an undecided major with an interest in Dentistry and Pharmacy. She characterized herself as a "big procrastinator . . . I guess I'm just lazy when it comes to schoolwork." She also described her difficulty financing her education.

Kenneth was a 19-year-old Asian male first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course A. He was a declared Music major who selected his First-Year Experience course because it "fulfilled a gen ed requirement and I don't have much choice when picking gen eds." Kenneth described himself as an introvert, yet he mentioned how he "really liked being a member of a team" and how he thought that "being a team member was really helpful."

Alicia was an 18-year-old Hispanic/Latina female first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course B. She was a declared English major who selected her First-Year Experience course because the academic subject matter interested her and she

"kind of researched the teacher to see how she is." Alicia worked part-time while attending school full-time.

Paul was an 18-year-old Hispanic/Latino male first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course A. He intended to major in Biology, and selected his First-Year Experience course because "it interested me. And the fact that it was there last minute was really good compared to the other classes they were offering. I wanted to actually take that one." Paul worked part-time while attending school full-time.

Jane was an 18-year-old Asian female first-year student enrolled in First-Year Experience Course A. She was a declared Computer Science major who selected her First-Year Experience course because the academic subject matter interested her. Jane attended what she described as a "really diverse high school. Coming here I felt like it wasn't too new for me." She described herself as "a lot more reserved" in her other courses than in her First-Year Experience course.

The interview questions asked first-year students to reflect on their experiences in their First-Year Experience course. A total of four themes emerged from first-year students' insights. The themes aligned closely with the framework of Tinto's (1993) model of student departure. In particular, two themes, students' academic performance and relationships with faculty, related to academic integration, and two themes, relationships with peers and campus resources and activities, related to social integration. First-year students also addressed the topic of retention in relation to their continued enrollment at the Hispanic-Serving Institution.

1. **Academic Integration: Academic Performance**

First-year student interviewees were asked how they perceived the influence of their First-Year Experience course on their academic performance in their first semester of postsecondary education. Four first-year students (40%) described how their First-Year Experience course helped them develop effective study skills. David stated that his First-Year Experience course has

> "definitely given me a better idea of how to study. It's not good like the night before a test to cram things in your head. You can get a good grade by doing that but you increase your stress levels by a lot. But if you learn how to critically think, take notes and pay attention and the night before maybe your exam you look over your notes and you're like, 'Oh yeah right right' instead of just going to the book and reading definition after definition. I've definitely learned how to study better. Study smarter, not harder."

Sophia explained how her First-Year Experience course "helped me a lot with my academics . . . it helped me identify ways to study and to incorporate strategies." She elaborated that she learned "ways not to procrastinate. Ways the brain works and how to make the information we learn stay in our brain." Additionally, Alicia commented on gaining "information about our brain and more beneficial ways to study," and Laura recalled how she learned "about exams and how to prepare for them . . . and ways to improve your critical thinking . . . and there was one section about short-term and long-term memory."

One particular study skill that was mentioned by five first-year students (50%) was that of note taking. Sophia, for example, talked about learning "how to write notes or take better notes" in her First-Year Experience course, as well as learning "how many times you have to review your notes for it to stay in your long-term memory." Similarly, Jane explained, "The note taking piece was kind of helpful . . . Before this class I wasn't really exposed to those kinds of things. Like I wasn't really sure how I was going to take notes in college."

In addition to learning note taking skills, six first-year students (60%) described how their First-Year Experience course taught them time management skills. David, for example, stated that he's "definitely learned how to use my time more wisely." Adam remembered that his First-Year Experience course talked about "the potential of technology and how it can help you with the FYE curriculum like managing your time. Finding whatever you need, the Internet." Additionally, Paul described how he developed his time management skills through a semester-long project in his First-Year Experience course: "We have to keep in touch with fellow partners so that we can meet up at a certain location so we can survey the area. And that requires a lot of planning, specific details, figuring out what your task is and who's responsible for what."

Related to the development of effective study skills, three first-year students (30%) recalled how their First-Year Experience course helped them identify their preferred learning style. Laura stated that she learned that she's "more of a writing person . . . if I remember myself saying it and writing it then usually that's how I remember things." Adam discovered that he's "kind of all-arounder" who prefers "visual and audio." He described how he writes notes "to remember them but then I usually

never look at them because I pay attention to the lecture in-depth and I usually don't forget them for a good while." Finally, Sophia explained that she is "considered a kinesthetic learner. So for me that means I have to be able to be engaged in stuff and it's helped me with my test and my quizzes."

Four first-year students (40%) discussed how their First-Year Experience course helped them explore majors. Jane described how she investigated majors and careers: "With the Career Services assignment . . . we did kind of look at based on skills, interests, values what careers fit into that." Sophia mentioned, "We had another speaker who came in . . . and he showed us how to find our majors." Laura explained, "We were doing a myplan" in her First-Year Experience course. She concluded, "After that class and meeting with her [First-Year Experience instructor] I think my major is set." Paul also recalled how an academic planning assignment in his First-Year Experience course "helped us figure out what classes we need in the future for our majors and how to decide what we want to actually study."

A final area related to academic performance that three first-year students (30%) mentioned was covered in their First-Year Experience course was the transition from high school to higher education. Sophia described, "College is different. It's not like the teachers are going to be like 'Hey you missed something.' They have tons of other students to worry about and that's on you if you want to go and see what you missed." David stated that his First-Year Experience course provided him with

> "a better understanding of college and university life . . . Deadlines to do
> something. Responsibility. Teamwork. Stuff that I believe we're going
> to be more exposed to as we progress in our university lives."

Similarly, Paul remarked on how his First-Year Experience course

> "helps make our own selves responsible because high school was a lot
> more different from college that's for sure. It helps us be more
> responsible. Teachers [in high school] would help you out with anything
> whatsoever. They would basically baby feed you all the information and
> nothing was really like put on you. But now in college you have to look
> everything up. I'd have classes where I'd come in and I didn't know there
> was any homework because I forgot to actually check the websites and the
> emails. It's all put up and it's all on us."

While the majority of first-year student interviewees reflected positively on the impact of their First-Year Experience course on their academic performance, two first-year student interviewees voiced different perspectives. According to Adam, "My academic performance I believe it does not have an effect." He mentioned, "The way I absorb the FYE it's just kind of like 'Why am I learning?' Most of this is just kind of common knowledge at this point." Jane expressed a similar opinion. She stated,

> "Academic-wise I feel like this class has definitely had pretty easyish
> assignments . . . I feel like these lessons are basically just kind of
> reinforcement. There wasn't really anything new. It was just something
> that I already knew. I didn't feel like I needed to really revisit that."

2. **Academic Integration: Relationships with Faculty**

First-year student interviewees were asked to describe their relationship with their First-Year Experience faculty member. All 10 first-year students (100%) described their First-Year Experience faculty member in positive terms. David, for example, explained

how his First-Year Experience faculty members were "excellent. They're very understanding. They're very helpful." Laura stated that her First-Year Experience faculty member was "nice . . . pretty cool" as well as "always very encouraging." Jane mentioned that her First-Year Experience faculty member was "helpful." She elaborated, "She is a good professor who really knows how to teach and make things fun." Additionally, Melinda summarized her experience with her First-Year Experience faculty member by articulating how she "did a good job making sure that you're on track not only with your FYE class but with the rest of our classes. And making sure that you make your first year just the milestone to the rest of your college experience."

Three first-year students (30%) remarked on how the small size of their First-Year Experience course allowed more time for them to interact and establish connections and personal relationships with their First-Year Experience faculty members. Jennifer stated, "Because the class is so small . . . they get time to speak to us one-on-one." She further explained, "The professors know each of us by name . . . if somebody changed their hair color he would notice and make a remark and that's how you know there's a more personal connection." David mentioned,

> "You feel like you know your professor more than just a person like in the classroom. For example, they drove many of us to the sites in their cars. When you sit in their cars you feel like you get to know them as like someone else other than a professor . . . You're getting to see them outside of the white walls of the classroom."

Paul echoed Jennifer and David's comments by contrasting his connection with his First-Year Experience faculty member with his connection with his other faculty members. He

described how his First-Year Experience faculty member is "the only one that I actually have a connection with" and explained how it was harder to make a connection with faculty in his other courses "especially with the amount of students there are." Paul also stated that his First-Year Experience faculty member "took a special note with me trying to help me actually pass the class and ease me into the whole process of college basically."

The sense of connection between first-year students and their First-Year Experience faculty members often extended outside of regular class time. Kenneth described how meeting with his First-Year Experience faculty member during office hours enabled him to "feel comfortable" with her. He elaborated,

> "The thing that really helped was finding her office and having an interview for her to find out about us. We were able to share our thoughts and why we were in the class and our major and to tell a professor that kind of breaks down the wall of, 'Oh, she's a teacher' or 'She's different from us.' I think that really breaks that down and I really feel comfortable with the professor because she's friendly and willing to listen and talk. It might be something not related to the class or even if it is we can just freely and openly talk about it."

Adam stated that he feels "fairly close" to his First-Year Experience faculty member "because of the fact that for one of the co-curriculars we had to go into her office hours." Similarly, Paul remarked on his how First-Year Experience faculty member stressed "making one-on-one meetings with her in her office trying to figure out if you failed a

test why you did and what she can do to help you out with it." He concluded that this experience "makes it really easy to connect with her."

3. <u>Social Integration: Relationships with Peers</u>

In addition to describing their relationship with their First-Year Experience faculty member, first-year student interviewees were asked to describe their relationship with their First-Year Experience classmates. Eight first-year students (80%) explained how they developed relationships with their peers in their First-Year Experience course. Jane stated that she "definitely gained some friends in that [First-Year Experience] class." Melinda reflected on how she has "a couple of friends in that [First-Year Experience] class . . . and I'm close to them and I have them on my social network." Similarly, Alicia mentioned, "You get new friends right away" and "You get to know more people" by taking a First-Year Experience course in your first semester.

Laura and Sophia were the two first-year students (20%) who did not explain how they developed relationships with their peers in their First-Year Experience course. According to Laura, "My relationships with my classmates I don't really have one." She did acknowledge, however, that she was "comfortable" with a First-Year Experience classmate whom she attended high school with: "We got closer because in high school we talked but not as much. But now we talk a lot. We text each other and stuff." Sophia, similar to Laura, stated, "I don't really have much friends in there [FYE course]. But I mean I talk to everyone . . . it's not like I have a certain relationship with one person who I'm more close to."

Four first-year students (40%) reflected on how the shared experience of being a first-year student in a First-Year Experience course fostered the development of peer

relationships. Melinda, for example, explained how she appreciated being in a classroom with just first-year students:

> "I know like coming from high school it was kind of intimidating. Like you hear people say, 'Oh you're going to be in a classroom full of older students. It's going to be like 30-, 40-year-old people.' It's nice to have people my age and somebody to interact with that understands me and has just come out of high school and has the same struggles and same ideas as I do."

Kenneth echoed a similar perspective. He stated,

> "We all know we're freshmen. Some of my classes there are non-freshmen. So sometimes it's a little bit intimidating or hard to approach other people because we're all students in the same class but there's that age gap or things like that. But because we all know we're freshmen, we're new, it's easier to approach each other and I guess we're all the same."

The level of closeness of first-year student peer relationships appears to be greatest among classmates in First-Year Experience courses. Four first-year students (40%) described how they established more personal relationships with their First-Year Experience classmates than with other classmates they had during their first semester of postsecondary education. According to Jennifer, "I have gotten to know a higher ratio of the students in my FYE class than in the other classes . . . because we're intentionally working together." Adam echoed a similar opinion. He stated, "I'm closer with them [classmates in his First-Year Experience course] than I am with most of my other

classmates. I think that's just because it's more of a social class because when you get into groups you talk a lot more . . . You develop relationships." David mentioned, "We're very close in that class because like I said the point of the class is bringing us together." Additionally, Kenneth explained how in his "other classes we're kind of just getting to know stage. But with the classmates in the FYE class I can just openly talk to them. Really act like a friend that I've known for quite a long time." He concluded, "I feel a little bit closer to the people [in his First-Year Experience course] compared to my other classes."

Three first-year students (30%) attributed their developing peer relationships to the small size of their First-Year Experience course. Kenneth remarked on how his First-Year Experience course is "a small class . . . and what I like about that is that we can see each other's faces when we work and we can really get close to one another and work with each other." Melinda mentioned, "There were only like twelve of us so it's like you know that person better and you know them more and because you see them more often and stuff." Similarly, Jennifer explained that her First-Year Experience course was "small. The group is small. So it feels like a close knit experience. You know everybody and get to work with everybody." She further elaborated, "My FYE course is the one that feels most intimate as opposed to other courses which there are fewer activities planned for the purpose of joining everybody together."

In addition to small class size, seven first-year students (70%) attributed their developing peer relationships to the activities designed by the First-Year Experience faculty members to encourage peer interaction. Jennifer stated,

"You know everybody and get to work with everybody. We have to rotate

and get different partners every time or they usually assign us a different

group every time so we do get to know each other. And sometimes, for

example, I got too used to two of my partners and didn't want to let them

go. But later on I was placed into another team and it turned out that me

and the new partner actually had things in common and we talked."

Paul described, "In FYE since we all know we're in the same deal, we just accept it and

talk to each other. But outside FYE, it's really up to you to make the connections with

other people." Adam mentioned, "We did a good amount of group work," and Sophia

remarked, "Group projects have helped us become a little bit closer than not having any."

Additionally, Kenneth reflected on how his First-Year Experience course was "very

beneficial because it really focuses on team work." He emphasized that he and his

classmates learned "how to mold into each other and work as a group."

4. <u>**Social Integration: Campus Resources and Activities**</u>

First-year student interviewees were asked how they perceived the influence of

their First-Year Experience course on their feelings of connection to the University. All

10 first-year students (100%) discussed how their First-Year Experience course informed

them about campus resources and activities. Melinda and Kenneth's comments reflect

those of their first-year student interviewee peers. Melinda stated,

"That's what I was wondering about. Like what clubs can fit my schedule

because I work but I also want to get involved with this school. And I

may not have the time to go around and see what's going on so maybe if

our FYE class has someone come in and talk about it."

Similarly, Kenneth remarked,

> "I think the idea of different clubs and organization leaders or speakers
> coming in helps because recently I just completely didn't realize that we
> even had clubs. I knew before but with all the classes getting busy and
> trying to fit in and making myself comfortable that just went past my head
> until someone mentioned, 'Oh, you should come to this club.' And I said,
> 'Oh, we have clubs?' So it would be nice to have someone come in and
> just introduce different clubs."

First-year student interviewees explained how class time was devoted to visiting University offices, such as the library and Learning Center, as well as having University personnel speak to their class about programs and services. Laura, for example, recounted how her First-Year Experience course "went to the library to talk with the librarians about ways to look up articles." Jennifer recalled, "We had visits to the library. We had speakers. And we also had academic planning lessons . . . The Learning Center . . . And we've actually met with the PE coordinator twice." Additionally, Sophia mentioned, "We've been to the library . . . we had another speaker from the Women's Center . . . we had another speaker who came in and showed us how to find our majors."

In addition to visiting University offices and listening to University personnel speak in their First-Year Experience course, two first-year students (20%) described attending the University's Student Organization Fair. According to Kenneth, "It was mandatory for us to go out, figure out, and get basically who, why, or what things like that." He mentioned how he "would have never took interest in it or any other organizations if I wasn't forced to go out there." Similarly, Paul described,

"One of the assignments was to go out to the fair they had where they offered all the clubs and whatnot. You had to ask information about times, meeting, what exactly they do, what do they help out in the University. And she [his First-Year Experience faculty member] pushed trying to join one."

Five first-year students (50%) explained how they were exposed to campus resources and activities through required participation for their First-Year Experience course in co-curricular activities. Jane, for example, recounted how she was told to explore other areas on campus "through co-curricular activities where we'd go and participate in like an event or go join a club and then write up about our experience on that." Similarly, Sophia detailed how her First-Year Experience course required attendance at "two co-curricular activities and, well, that's like the only way it gets us to go because we have to be there for thirty minutes and then we have to talk about it and write about it . . . So that's a way it gets us involved with the school."

Three of the five first-year students (60%) who mentioned that their First-Year Experience course required participation in co-curricular activities acknowledged that their participation in co-curricular activities exposed them to events and opportunities that they might not have otherwise experienced. Kenneth described, "Knowing about the events through the announcements and sometimes going there I guess that helped me to connect with other people and see what other people are here on this campus." Alicia stated that "completing event reports, two in school and two out of school, it helped me learn more about this college." Jane echoed a similar opinion. She recalled how her First-Year Experience course "helped me definitely where I did go and see different

things that I don't usually really see. Like for one of the co-curriculars I went to see a concert. And that was something that I usually don't do."

Five first-year students (50%) conceded that they probably would not have participated in co-curricular activities if it were not for their First-Year Experience course. Laura, for example, stated, "If I wasn't in that [FYE] class I probably wouldn't have even went [to an event]," and Paul remarked, "Without the FYE class I wouldn't have paid that much attention to the clubs or anything like that around here." Additionally, Jane mentioned,

> "I feel like I might not have necessarily gone into that [workshop] if it hadn't been for the co-curricular . . . For the first semester I was thinking I'm really just going to lie low a little bit and then second semester I'll go in and like get a job and go join a club. This was I think a good experience because it kind of started the ball rolling."

Although Laura and Sophia were the two first-year students who did not explain how they developed relationships with their peers in their First-Year Experience course, they both acknowledged the importance of being involved in campus activities. Laura explained that her First-Year Experience instructor

> "makes it a point that it's important, it's a good thing to be part of groups and socialize. And she says that studies have shown that people who are involved with like clubs and stuff with the school do great. She does encourage it. It's just that. I just don't go."

Similarly, Sophia remarked,

"It kind of scares me when they say like, 'Oh, you have a chance of like
not being able to succeed if you're not around campus and you just like go
straight home.' Because I feel like maybe I'm going to be one of those
people that won't be able to succeed because I'm not involved with the
school and stuff. That scares me."

While the majority of first-year student interviewees reflected positively on their
experience with co-curricular activities, Adam repeatedly voiced his dislike about co-
curriculars. He referred to them as a "pain in my butt," emphasizing,

"For me personally I just kind of like assignments that are in-class . . . I
like being efficient with my time. Because if I do it out of class, it takes
me about an hour to get here and two hours to leave depending on time
because the buses take forever."

Adam further explained, "I see it kind of like sports. It's fun if you want to do it. It's not
fun if your parents are forcing you to do it without your will and you just don't like it."

5. **Departure Decision**

Near the conclusion of the interview, first-year students were asked how confident
they were that they would enroll at the University in the following semester as well as
academic year. All 10 first-year students (100%) stated that they were confident that they
would return to the University for both the Spring 2015 semester and the Fall 2015-
Spring 2016 academic year. Paul, for example, explained how "the FYE class made it
easier for me to stay in school. At first I was thinking of dropping out because it just
seemed overwhelming at first but then with all the mandatory assignments of trying to
connect with other people it just literally made me want to just stay here." Similarly,

Jennifer described how her First-Year Experience course "encouraged me to further my education here. I mean before this semester I was on the fence about it. But now I'm more convinced that I should stay."

Two first-year students (20%) provided examples of what, if anything, would prevent them from returning to the University in the following semester and academic year. Laura mentioned how it would be because her "financial aid fell through," and Sophia explained how her family "doesn't want me to pay that much for health insurance so I may go to a community college."

D.   **Document Analysis**

A total of 401 first-year students completed the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation" in December 2014. Table XV displays descriptive statistics for the 15 statements on the course evaluation relating to first-year students' opinions of their First-Year Experience course. The results indicate that first-year students most often perceived that their First-Year Experience course informed them about campus resources ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 0.75$), as well as helped them adjust to the University ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.01$), develop friendships ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.00$), and participate in on-campus events and organizations ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.07$). First-year students least often perceived that their First-Year Experience course helped them improve writing ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.23$) and helped them in their other classes this semester ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.19$).

Table XV
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE 15 STATEMENTS ON THE COURSE EVALUATION

Statement	M [a]	SD
Adjust to University	1.79	1.01
Feel connected to University	1.93	0.99
Understand diversity	1.97	1.07
Understand how I learn best	1.97	1.05
Understand what plagiarism is	1.94	1.10
Inform about campus resources	1.50	0.75
Improve writing	2.28	1.23
Improve skills in oral communication	2.09	1.12
Improve presentation skills	2.16	1.13
Develop friendships	1.86	1.00
Help in other classes this semester	2.22	1.19
Participate in on-campus events and organizations	1.91	1.07
Connect with faculty or staff members	1.94	1.03
Consider a major or plan for chosen major	2.00	1.10
Help with time management skills	1.97	1.05

Table XVI displays first-year students' responses to the question on the course evaluation relating to their future plans at the University. The results indicate that 48.38% of first-year students plan to graduate from this institution and 22.94% of first-year students plan to attend another year and transfer.

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[a] A score of '1' corresponded to "Strongly agree," a score of '2' corresponded to "Agree," a score of '3' corresponded to "Neither agree nor disagree," a score of '4' corresponded to "Disagree," and a score of '5' corresponded to "Strongly disagree."

Table XVI

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE FUTURE PLANS QUESTION ON
THE COURSE EVALUATION

Future Plans	Frequency	Percent
Graduate from this institution	194	48.38
Transfer at the end of this year	39	9.73
Attend another year and transfer	92	22.94
Attend this institution and/or another university, but maybe not graduate	11	2.74
Not sure	61	15.21
Missing	4	1.00

Table XVII shows first-year students' positive responses to the questions on the course evaluation asking if they attended or used a variety of campus resources or on-campus activities during the Fall 2014 semester. The results indicate that first-year students most often visited the Library (79.55%), met with an Academic Advisor (77.81%), and attended the Student Organizations Fair (43.39%). First-year students least often attended Class Act (8.48%), joined an intramural team (9.48%), and attended a Student Town Hall meeting (13.22%).

Table XVII
FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' POSITIVE RESPONSES TO THE CAMPUS RESOURCE/
ON-CAMPUS ACTIVITY QUESTIONS ON THE COURSE EVALUATION

Campus Resource or On-Campus Activity	Frequency	Percent
Student club event	152	37.91
Conference on campus	128	31.92
Music event	92	22.94
Dance event	56	13.97
Theatre event	96	23.94
Academic advisor	312	77.81
Student Organizations Fair	174	43.39
Fall into Fun Week	66	16.46
Class Act	34	8.48
Talent show	42	10.47
Intramural team	38	9.48
Career Services	108	26.93
Student Town Hall meeting	53	13.22
Library	319	79.55
Learning Support Center	169	42.14
Academic tutors	153	38.15
Health Center	95	23.69
Counseling Center	83	20.70
Recreation Center	145	36.16
Joined a student club or organization	83	20.70

V. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the meanings diverse first-year students made of their experiences in first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The results reveal that first-year students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution perceived that their First-Year Experience course promoted their academic and social integration. This chapter summarizes the results presented in Chapter Four, as well as presents implications for policy, practice, and future research.

A.   Discussion of Results

First-year students' responses to the two surveys revealed similarities between first-year students' expectations of first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution and whether those expectations were realized. No effort was made to match individual first-year student responses on the first survey with that of the second survey. Survey data for a first-year student from the first survey was not linked with survey data for the same first-year student from the second survey. Descriptive statistics, notably means and standard deviations, were compared between the first survey and second survey. The results from the first survey indicated that first-year students most often expected their First-Year Experience course to inform them about campus resources, help them get involved with on-campus activities, and help them manage their time effectively, while the results from the second survey indicated that first-year students most often perceived that their First-Year Experience course informed them about campus resources, helped them create friendships with other students, helped them feel connected to the University, and informed them about University policies and procedures. Similarly, first-year students least often expected their First-Year Experience course to help them develop

writing skills and understand diversity, and least often perceived that their First-Year Experience course helped them develop writing skills and understand diversity.

It is important to acknowledge that first-year students' expectations of first-year seminars, as well as their subsequent experiences in first-year seminars, were generally positive. Of the 14 statements on the first survey relating to first-year students' expectations of First-Year Experience courses, the mean score on six statements ranked between "Neither Agree nor Disagree" and "Agree," while the mean score on the remaining eight statements ranked between "Agree" and "Strongly Agree." Of the 14 statements on the second survey relating to whether first-year students' expectations of First-Year Experience courses were realized, the mean score on four statements ranked between "Neither Agree nor Disagree" and "Agree," while the mean score on the remaining ten statements ranked between "Agree" and "Strongly Agree."

The findings of the two surveys aligned closely with first-year students' responses to the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation." According to the course evaluation, first-year students most often perceived that their First-Year Experience course informed them about campus resources, helped them to adjust to the University, helped them to develop friendships, and helped them to participate in on-campus events and organizations. First-year students least often perceived that their First-Year Experience course helped them to improve their writing and helped them in their other classes this semester.

Taken together, first-year students' responses to the two surveys and the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation" revealed that first-year students' expectations of first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution were met.

First-year students generally got what they expected to get out of their First-Year Experience course. This alignment between first-year students' expectations of first-year seminars and whether those expectations were realized is important. Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995) concluded that when expectations for academic and intellectual development were fulfilled, students experienced a greater degree of academic and social integration. In contrast, students with unmet expectations are unlikely to become integrated into the academic and social structures of their institution, and unlikely to forge subsequent commitments to the institution and persist until degree completion (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Since first-year students' responses in this study indicated that their expectations of their First-Year Experience course were realized to a great extent, it can be argued that first-year seminars promote first-year students' academic and social integration into higher education.

This inference is further supported by interview data revealing the meanings first-year students made of their experiences in first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Four themes related to academic and social integration emerged from first-year students' insights. According to Tinto's (1993) model of student departure, academic integration derives from students' academic performance and faculty/staff interactions, while social integration arises from students' peer group interactions and participation in extracurricular activities. First-year students described how their First-Year Experience course impacted their academic performance by helping them develop academic skills, explore majors, and transition from high school to higher education. They credited their First-Year Experience course with promoting the acquisition and development of academic skill sets, notably study, note taking, and time management

skills, as well as supporting the identification of their preferred learning style. First-year students also reflected on how their First-Year Experience course fostered the development of relationships with faculty. They remarked on how the small size of their First-Year Experience course allowed for more personal interaction with their First-Year Experience faculty member, subsequently enabling them to feel more comfortable approaching their faculty member outside of regular class time, such as during office hours.

With regard to social integration, first-year students reflected on how their First-Year Experience course promoted the development of relationships with peers. Almost half of first-year student interviewees stated that they formed more personal relationships with their First-Year Experience classmates than with other classmates during their first semester of postsecondary education. First-year students often attributed their more personal relationships with their First-Year Experience classmates to the shared experience of being a first-year student, the small size of the First-Year Experience course, and the activities designed by their First-Year Experience faculty members to encourage peer interaction. First-year students also described how their First-Year Experience course informed them about campus resources and activities. They explained how their participation in co-curricular activities exposed them to events and opportunities that they might not have otherwise experienced.

The findings of this study reveal that first-year students' expectations of first-year seminars matched their experiences in first-year seminars. First-year students wanted opportunities to develop academic skills, form relationships with faculty and peers, and participate in on-campus activities through their First-Year Experience course. The

expectation that their first-year seminar would promote their academic and social integration into higher education was realized. The results of this study corroborate Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) conclusion that first-year seminar participation "has statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on the academic performance while in college and on a considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor's degree completion" (p. 403).

The enhancement of first-year students' academic and social integration may influence the process by which they stay or leave institutions of higher education. First-year students' responses to the two surveys and interview questions indicated that they were confident that they would enroll at the University next semester as well as next year. Similar findings were obtained from first-year students' responses to the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation," with almost half of first-year students indicating that they planned to graduate from the University. Whether these students' enrollment and graduation intentions were actually realized remains unknown in this study; however, future research can benefit from longitudinal studies examining students' persistence and graduation rates after first-year seminar participation at this Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Both self-administered surveys included a demographic question asking first-year students to select their race/ethnicity. It is interesting to notice that one first-year student selected a different race/ethnicity on the first survey and second survey. Four first-year students selected "More than One Race" on the first survey, while five first-year students

selected "More than One Race" on the second survey. Since the same first-year students completed both surveys, and given the anonymity of respondents, it is not possible to know which first-year student changed racial/ethnic identity. One is left to ponder why this first-year student changed racial/ethnic identity and what factors may have influenced this change.

The particular context of Hispanic-Serving Institution did not emerge as salient in this study of first-year seminars from diverse first-year students' points of view. Consistent with the literature, results revealed that first-year students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution perceived that their First-Year Experience course promoted their academic and social integration. The racial and ethnic minority status of Hispanic was transformed into the majority at this minority-serving institution. First-year students may have recognized how they were part of a community in which being Hispanic was accepted and appreciated instead of focusing on racial and ethnic differences. It is also possible that other characteristics, such as social class and first-generation status, may have promoted feelings of belongingness and a sense of likeness across different racial and ethnic first-year students at this Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Additionally, the survey and interview questions did not explicitly identify the Hispanic-Serving status of the institution as something for first-year students to consider. The decision to allow the salience of this institutional identifier to arise spontaneously from the first-year students, instead of explicitly leading them into that issue, has a benefit as well as a cost. The benefit is discovering that this was not a part of how the first-year students readily thought about their institutional context; the cost is that explicit questioning on the matter might have revealed more of their thinking about this issue.

B.   **Limitations**

There are a few limitations that should be acknowledged when considering the results of this study. First, this study is limited in that it examined first-year students' perceptions of first-year seminars at a single Hispanic-Serving Institution. The results are context-bound to a particular institution and therefore cannot be generalizable to first-year seminars at other colleges and universities.

Similarly, this study contained a small number of participants. Forty-seven first-year students completed the first survey, 36 first-year students completed the second survey, and 10 first-year students were interviewed. Since the purpose of this study was to understand first-year students' meaning-making in-depth at a Hispanic-Serving Institution, results cannot be generalized beyond the specific student participants.

Selection bias is another limitation of this study. First-year students self-selected to participate in an interview. These students may have had a particular interest in First-Year Experience courses, and thus their perceptions may not reflect the perceptions of all first-year students in a First-Year Experience course at the Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Finally, my own positionality may have impacted this study. Researchers themselves maintain perspectives, based on cultural experiences, worldviews, and theoretical foundations, that influence their selection of research questions and variables, collection of data, and interpretation of results. My interest in this topic derived from working with first-year students as an academic advisor at a Midwestern, urban, 4-year public University for over eight years. I enrolled first-year students in First-Year Experience courses, as well as presented an academic planning assignment during a First-Year Experience class period. During data collection, I worked as an employee of the

Hispanic-Serving Institution. Although I do not believe my position posed a threat to students, as I did not work directly with them in my duties, first-year students may still have seen me as a member of the University community and thus could have tailored their responses to increase a sense of likeability.

C.   Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

The results of this study reveal that first-year students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution perceived that their First-Year Experience course promoted their academic and social integration. These findings align with 290 first-year students' responses at the Hispanic-Serving Institution to the 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement. In particular, 80% of first-year students rated their entire educational experience at this institution as "excellent" or "good," 55% of first-year students gave the quality of their interactions with their peers a "high" rating, and 48% of first-year students indicated that they "frequently" worked with their peers on course projects and assignments (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). Additional data from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at the Hispanic-Serving Institution indicates a significant difference in first-to-second-year retention for full-time, first-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in Fall 2012 and were enrolled in a first-year seminar (67.4%) in comparison to students not enrolled in a first-year seminar (42.9%) (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2014).

The process of assessing and monitoring the effectiveness of first-year seminars is necessary since there is growing pressure on institutions of higher education to improve retention and graduation rates (Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 2007; Renn & Reason, 2013; State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2005) and the largest proportion of

institutional leaving occurs during the first year and prior to the second year (Barefoot et al., 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Higher education policy makers, practitioners, and researchers can use the findings of this study to inform institutional strategic planning, curriculum, and policy and program decisions.

1. __Implications for Policy__

First-Year Experience courses at the Hispanic-Serving Institution are academic seminars with variable content. Although encouraged to incorporate a number of topics, First-Year Experience course faculty are able to do so within the context of their particular academic discipline. A disconnect appears to exist between institutions' and first-year students' expectations of academic seminars with variable content. According to the 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, the second most frequently reported course objective for academic seminars on various topics was developing writing skills (Young & Hopp, 2014). First-year students' responses to the two surveys and the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation," however, revealed that they least often expected their First-Year Experience course to help them develop writing skills, and least often perceived that their First-Year Experience course helped them develop writing skills. It is possible that first-year students do not expect their First-Year Experience course to help them develop writing skills because they expect written assignments to be evaluated on a content basis such as an essay exam or research paper. First-year students may think that unless feedback is provided on the proper use of language, sentence structure, and grammar that they are not developing their writing skills. They may not be aware that topics such as note taking and outlining

can also fall under the purview of writing. Additionally, first-year students who enroll concurrently in an English composition and First-Year Experience course may downplay the extent to which their First-Year Experience course will help them develop their writing skills. They may expect their English composition course, with writing explicitly stated in the course title, to help them develop their writing skills; therefore, they may expect their First-Year Experience course to cover other topics. Higher education policy makers should ensure that first-year seminar course objectives and learning outcomes are explicitly stated, and that assessment outcomes align with the stated course objectives and learning outcomes.

Most first-year student interviewees reflected on how they were able to select a First-Year Experience course that interested them. This reflects well on the Hispanic-Serving Institution's diverse course offerings. Institutions that offer academic seminars with variable content should ensure that distinctive disciplines are well-represented and that multiple sections within the various disciplines are available.

Colleges and universities should consider mandating that all first-year students enroll in first-year seminars. The findings of this study are consistent with the literature and illustrate the positive outcomes that result from first-year seminar participation. In addition to mandating that all first-year students enroll in first-year seminars, institutions should consider requiring participation in first-year seminars during a student's first semester of postsecondary education rather than their first-year. This has the potential to promote first-year students' academic and social integration by targeting the first few weeks of students' experiences on campus, a period that higher education researchers and policy makers have suggested may be the most critical to students' adjustment and

successful postsecondary transition (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998).

2. <u>Implications for Practice</u>

According to responses to the two surveys and the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation," first-year students most often perceived that their First-Year Experience course informed them about campus resources and activities. This finding aligns with data from the 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminar that the most frequent course topic covered in first-year seminars was campus resources, and the second most frequent course objective identified for first-year seminars was to provide orientation to campus resources and services (Young & Hopp, 2014). An introduction to campus resources and activities in first-year seminars may help first-year students with limited time, such as commuter populations, more effectively allocate their time on campus and integrate into the academic and social structures of their institution. Additionally, by increasing first-year students' awareness of campus resources and activities in first-year seminars, it is hoped that students will ultimately utilize the resources and activities to a greater extent throughout their postsecondary education.

First-year seminars offer a prime opportunity for combining curricular and co-curricular experiences for first-year students. Half of first-year student interviewees described how their First-Year Experience course required attendance at co-curricular activities or events. The required participation in co-curricular experiences has the potential to promote first-year students' use of campus resources and increase their engagement in the campus community (Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Kuh et al., 2007). Faculty teaching first-year seminars can facilitate the integration of the curricular with the

co-curricular by requiring participation in activities outside of class time for course credit. These activities may include attending on-campus topical lectures and cultural events, engaging in service learning, or participating in student organizations.

First-year students responded to the second survey and the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation," as well as described in their interviews, that their First-Year Experience course helped them create and develop friendships with their peers. The establishment of connections with peers during the first few weeks of first-year students' experiences on campus is crucial, as those relations set the foundation upon which future social membership and involvement is built (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). First-year seminars can benefit from incorporating high-impact educational practices, such as the inclusion of collaborative assignments and projects (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007, 2011) into the curriculum to encourage cooperative and collaborative peer interactions.

In addition to promoting the development of relationships with peers, first-year student interviewees reflected on how their First-Year Experience course fostered the development of relationships with faculty. Three first-year student interviewees (30%) acknowledged how their relationship with their First-Year Experience faculty members often extended outside of regular class time. Research has shown that contact with faculty members outside the classroom can have a positive impact on students' feelings of support by their institution (Astin, 1993). Faculty teaching first-year seminars can require first-year students to attend their office hours for course credit, as well as use technology, such as e-mail, video chat services, and social media outlets, to create opportunities for interaction outside the classroom.

It has been noted that faculty members are experts in their discipline area; however, few faculty have been formally educated on student development theory or effective learning pedagogies (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Individuals responsible for faculty development activities at colleges and universities should develop programming that assists faculty members in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the goals and unique opportunities of academic seminars with variable content. Faculty development should also emphasize strategies and techniques for integrating the curricular with the co-curricular and incorporating high-impact educational practices in academic seminars with variable content.

3. **Implications for Future Research**

Additional research is needed to determine the impact and value of first-year seminars in various college and university settings, as well as with increasingly diverse student populations. First-year seminars vary from campus to campus. Each college and university uniquely defines and administers its first-year seminar based on the purpose it serves within the context of the institution's goals and mission (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Young & Hopp, 2014). The institution-specific nature of first-year seminars accentuates particularity, necessitating its study in different contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 1995, 2005). It is unreasonable and inappropriate to promote a universal, one-size-fits-all approach to first-year seminars because what might be effective or appropriate at one college or university might be ineffective or inappropriate at another. Similarly, as voiced by Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) critiques, caution should be exercised in applying concepts and measures designed for majority students to racial and ethnic minority students. Higher education researchers should

make concerted efforts to understand racial and ethnic minority students' cultural values and identities, and consider the role race and ethnicity plays in the process by which students stay or leave institutions of higher education.

Future longitudinal research can compare the campus resource and activity utilization rates of students who participate in a first-year seminar with those who do not participate in a first-year seminar. This can provide additional policy and practitioner direction in the design and development of first-year seminars. It can also be beneficial to examine the relationship between first-year students' involvement in campus resources and activities as a result of first-year seminar participation and their subsequent departure decision.

Subsequent research can benefit from modifications to the interview protocol. Additional areas for investigation can center on first-year students' perceptions of their level of preparedness for the postsecondary experience. By identifying first-year students' self-defined inadequacies, institutions might be better able to address and potentially alleviate these student concerns.

Future research on academic seminars with variable content can examine pedagogical and subject matter variations. Research beyond academic seminars with variable content would also be beneficial. Potential studies can compare first-year students' expectations of first-year seminars and determine whether those expectations were realized across the distinct seminar types outlined by Barefoot (1992). A study of first-year students' expectations in distinct types of first-year seminars can describe the structure and content of first-year seminars as well as suggest different ways by which

first-year seminars promote first-year students' academic and social integration into higher education.

Another line of future inquiry can involve first-year students who were placed on academic probation the semester after completing a first-year seminar. It would be interesting to follow first-year students who participated in a survey of student expectations in their first-year seminar and then were placed on academic probation the following semester. If first-year students felt that their first-year seminar met their expectations, and yet they ultimately ended up on academic probation, what might be possible explanations for this discrepancy? Recruiting first-year student participants who agree to forgo anonymity might be a challenge; however, the results could prove highly valuable in developing and revising first-year seminars. These students would be in a position to potentially identify areas in which the first-year seminar might have provided more assistance.

The inclusion of financial aid and financial literacy in first-year seminars is another topic for further exploration. Lack of financial resources can be a significant factor in determining whether students are able to continue in higher education. It can be beneficial to explore the degree to which first-year seminars acquaint first-year students with available financial resources. It can also be worthwhile to examine whether a significant portion of first-year students who are on academic probation have financial issues that might be impeding their academic progress. If this proves to be the case, then first-year seminars might be inclined to incorporate financial resources as a prominent component.

D. **Conclusion**

This study investigated the impact and value of first-year seminars from diverse first-year students' points of view at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. First-year students' responses to the surveys, interview prompts, and the University's "First-Year Experience Student Course Evaluation" are consistent with the large body of research documenting the positive outcomes of first-year seminars. The literature contends that participation in first-year seminars strengthens connections to the institution, promotes awareness of campus resources and services, fosters support networks and friendships, and develops academic skills (Barefoot et al., 2005; Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013; Hunter & Linder, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005; Young & Hopp, 2014). The results of this study reveal that first-year students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution perceived that their First-Year Experience course promoted their academic and social integration. According to Tinto's (1993) model of student departure, institutional experiences that further students' integration into the academic and social structures of the institution are seen to enhance the likelihood that they will persist within the institution until degree completion, while experiences that do not lead to sufficient integration into the academic and social structures of the institution may lead to students' departure (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The findings from this study can be used by higher education researchers and policy makers as evidence to support the implementation and ongoing investment in first-year seminars as an effective and first-year experience program.

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APPENDIX A[b]

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAM
STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION

INSTRUCTIONS:
Do not put your name on either this questionnaire or the answer sheet.

Questions 1-17
Using the answer sheet, respond to each of the following statements by darkening the letter (A, B, C, D, E) that best conveys your opinion of the course in that area.
KEY: (A) Strongly agree   (B) Agree   (C) Neither agree nor disagree
                      (D) Disagree   (E) Strongly disagree

1. My FYE course helped me to adjust to the university.
2. My FYE course made me feel connected to UNIV.
3. My FYE course helped me to understand diversity.
4. My FYE course helped me to understand how I learn best.
5. My FYE course helped me to understand what plagiarism is.
6. My FYE course informed me about campus resources.
7. My FYE course helped me to improve my writing.
8. My FYE course helped me to improve my skills in oral communication.
9. My FYE course helped me to improve my presentation skills.
10. My FYE course helped me to develop friendships at UNIV.
11. My FYE course helped me in my other classes this semester.
12. My FYE course helped me to participate in on-campus events and organizations.
13. My FYE course helped me to connect with one or more faculty or staff members in a useful and/or positive way.
14. My FYE course helped me to consider a major or to plan for my chosen major.
15. My FYE class helped me with time management skills.
16. In my FYE class, students were encouraged to ask questions.
17. In my FYE class, students were encouraged to discuss the topics.

Questions 18-20: Please blacken A, B, C, D, or E on the answer sheet.
18. When you first enrolled at UNIV, what was your plan?
        A.   I planned to graduate from UNIV
        B.   I planned to transfer at the end of my first year
        C.   I planned to attend two years and then transfer
        D.   I planned to attend UNIV or another university, but maybe not graduate from it
        E.   I was not sure of my plan

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[b] The University's "First-Year Experience Program Student Course Evaluation" lists the institution by name. It has been changed to UNIV.

APPENDIX A (continued)

19. At this point, what is your plan regarding UNIV?
  A. I plan to graduate from UNIV
  B. I plan to transfer at the end of this year
  C. I plan to attend another year and transfer
  D. I plan to attend UNIV and/or another university, but maybe not graduate
  E. I'm not sure

20. How many <u>hours per week</u> did you work for paid employment this semester?
  A. 0
  B. 1-7
  C. 8-13
  D. 14-20
  E. Over 20

Questions 21- 40: Answer (A) for YES and (B) for NO.
Did you attend or use the following this Fall semester?
21. A student club event
22. A conference on campus
23. A music event
24. A dance event
25. A theatre event
26. Academic Advisor
27. Student Organizations Fair
28. Fall into Fun Week
29. Class Act
30. Talent show
31. Intramural team
32. Career Services
33. Student Town Hall meeting
34. Library
35. Learning Support Center
36. Academic tutors
37. UNIV Health Center
38. UNIV Counseling Center
39. Recreation Center
40. Joined a student club or organization

APPENDIX A (continued)

ONLY IF YOUR CLASS HAD A FYE PEER MENTOR: PLEASE ANSWER 41-50
Using the answer sheet, respond to each of the following statements by darkening the letter (A, B, C, D, E) that best conveys your opinion of the course in that area.
KEY: (A) Strongly agree   (B) Agree   (C) Neither agree nor disagree
                  (D) Disagree   (E) Strongly disagree

41. The Peer Mentor cared for the students in the class.
42. The Peer Mentor worked well with the FYE instructor.
43. The Peer Mentor was available outside of class time.
44. The Peer Mentor responded to my questions and concerns in a timely manner.
45. The Peer Mentor sent emails to the class frequently.
46. The Peer Mentor was someone I could confide in.
47. The Peer Mentor helped me connect to UNIV.
48. The Peer Mentor gave me information about UNIV events and activities.
49. The Peer Mentor gave me information about UNIV resources (Ex: tutors).
50. The Peer Mentor helped me in academic areas (ex: writing, studying).

Open-Ended Questions

1. What's been good about attending UNIV so far? What aspects of it are you enjoying?

2. What's been hard about attending UNIV so far?

3. Have you thought about taking a break from UNIV or even quitting altogether? If so, why?

4. What advice would you have for someone about to start college next year?

5. Would you recommend UNIV to a relative or a friend thinking about college? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

**FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

<u>**Directions:**</u> **Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using this scale:**
1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
My FYE course will help me adjust to the University.					
My FYE course will help me understand diversity.					
My FYE course will help me develop writing skills.					
My FYE course will inform me about campus resources.					
My FYE course will help me explore majors.					
My FYE course will help me create relationships with other teachers.					
My FYE course will help me develop critical thinking skills.					
My FYE course will help me feel connected to the University.					
My FYE course will inform me about University policies and procedures.					
My FYE course will help me get involved with on-campus activities.					
My FYE course will help me develop study skills.					
My FYE course will help me create friendships with other students.					
My FYE course will help me manage my time effectively.					
My FYE course will help me feel a part of the campus community.					

<u>**Directions:**</u> **Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using this scale:**
**1- absolutely sure that I will not return, 2- not confident that I will return, 3- somewhat
confident that I will return, 4- confident that I will return, 5- absolutely sure that I will return**

	1	2	3	4	5
How confident are you that you will enroll at this University next semester?					
How confident are you that you will enroll at this University next year?					

If you answered 1 (absolutely sure that I will not return) or 2 (not confident that I will return) for either question, why do you not plan to return to this University? Please check all that apply.

❑ Academic Climate   ❑ Financial Issues   ❑ Intended Major Not Offered

❑ Home/Family Issues   ❑ Social Climate   ❑ Poor Academic Performance

❑ Other: _____

(Optional). Any additional comments why you do or do not plan to return to this University?

APPENDIX B (continued)

Demographic Information

Gender: ❏ Male   ❏ Female

Race/Ethnicity (Select one or more):

❏ Hispanic or Latino/Latina   ❏ White   ❏ Black or African American   ❏ Asian

❏ American Indian or Alaskan Native   ❏ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Directions: Respond to the following question by writing a brief response.

1.   What do you hope to gain from your First-Year Experience course?

APPENDIX C

**FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Directions: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using this scale:
1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
My FYE course helped me adjust to the University.					
My FYE course helped me understand diversity.					
My FYE course helped me develop writing skills.					
My FYE course informed me about campus resources.					
My FYE course helped me explore majors.					
My FYE course helped me create relationships with other teachers.					
My FYE course helped me develop critical thinking skills.					
My FYE course helped me feel connected to the University.					
My FYE course informed me about University policies and procedures.					
My FYE course helped me get involved with on-campus activities.					
My FYE course helped me develop study skills.					
My FYE course helped me create friendships with other students.					
My FYE course helped me manage my time effectively.					
My FYE course helped me feel a part of the campus community.					

Directions: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using this scale:
1- absolutely sure that I will not return, 2- not confident that I will return, 3- somewhat confident that I will return, 4- confident that I will return, 5- absolutely sure that I will return

	1	2	3	4	5
How confident are you that you will enroll at this University next semester?					
How confident are you that you will enroll at this University next year?					

If you answered 1 (absolutely sure that I will not return) or 2 (not confident that I will return) for either question, why do you not plan to return to this University? Please check all that apply.

❏ Academic Climate   ❏ Financial Issues   ❏ Intended Major Not Offered

❏ Home/Family Issues   ❏ Social Climate   ❏ Poor Academic Performance

❏ Other: _____

(Optional). Any additional comments why you do or do not plan to return to this University?

APPENDIX C (continued)

Demographic Information

Gender: ❏ Male   ❏ Female

Race/Ethnicity (Select one or more):

❏ Hispanic or Latino/Latina   ❏ White   ❏ Black or African American   ❏ Asian

❏ American Indian or Alaskan Native   ❏ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Directions: Respond to the following questions by writing a brief response.

1. What did you gain from your First-Year Experience course?

2. What did you find most useful about your First-Year Experience course?

3. What, if anything, would you change about your First-Year Experience course?

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

I'm trying to learn how students think and feel about their First-Year Experience courses here at this University.

1. Describe a typical day in your First-Year Experience course. What do you do?

2. What benefits, if any, have you gained from your First-Year Experience course, up to this point?
   a. Which activity or lesson do you feel has been most beneficial for you? Why? What did you learn from this activity or lesson?
   b. Have you been able to apply topics from your First-Year Experience course in your other courses? If yes, can you provide an example? If no, why not?
   c. How beneficial is your First-Year Experience course compared with your other courses this semester? Why?

3. What topics, if any, are you concerned are not being covered in your First-Year Experience course?

4. How has your First-Year Experience course influenced your academic performance at the University?
   a. Do you think most other first-year students at this University feel the same way?
   b. Do you think most other first-year [insert ethnic background] students at this University feel the same way?

5. How has your First-Year Experience course influenced your feelings of connection to the University?
   a. Do you think most other first-year students at this University feel the same way?
   b. Do you think most other first-year [insert ethnic background] students at this University feel the same way?

6. Describe your relationship with your First-Year Experience teacher. How does your relationship with your First-Year Experience teacher compare with your relationship with other teachers this semester?

APPENDIX D (continued)

7. Describe your relationship with your First-Year Experience classmates. How does your relationship with your First-Year Experience classmates compare with your relationship with other classmates this semester?

8. How confident are you that you will enroll at this University next semester? How confident are you that you will enroll at this University next year?
    a.   If you do not plan to return to this University next semester or next year, why not?

9. Is there anything more you would like to say about your First-Year Experience course that would help people at the University make them more successful?

APPENDIX E^c

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Approval Notice
Initial Review (Response To Modifications)

September 17, 2014

Jamie Riess, MA
Policy Studies
5500 N St Louis Ave
Chicago, IL 60625
Phone: (773) 442-5477

RE: **Protocol # 2014-0702**
       "Students' Perceptions of the Impact and Value of First-Year Seminars at a
       Hispanic-Serving Institution"

Dear Ms. Riess:

Your Initial Review application (Response To Modifications) was reviewed and
approved by the Expedited review process on September 15, 2014. You may now begin
your research.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval Period: September 15, 2014 - September 15, 2015
Approved Subject Enrollment #:   70
Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors: These determinations
have not been made for this study since it has not been approved for enrollment of
minors.
Performance Sites: UIC, UNIV
Sponsor: None
Research Protocol:
   a) Students' Perceptions of the Impact and Value of First-Year Seminars at a
       Hispanic-Serving Institution; Version 2; 08/15/2014

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^c The "Approval Notice" lists the institution by name. It has been changed to UNIV.

APPENDIX E (continued)

Recruitment Materials:
    a) Faculty Participation Email Solicitation; Version 1; 07/23/2014
    b) Student Participation Email Solicitation; Version 3; 09/16/2014

Informed Consents:
    a) Survey; Version 3; 09/10/2014
    b) Interview; Version 3; 09/10/2014
    c) A waiver of consent has been granted for recruitment purposes only under 45 CFR 46.116(d) (minimal risk; release of contact information; written consent will be obtained at enrollment)

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific categories:

(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis),
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes., (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
07/24/2014	Initial Review	Expedited	08/01/2014	Modifications Required
08/26/2014	Response To Modifications	Expedited	09/04/2014	Modifications Required
09/11/2014	Response To Modifications	Expedited	09/15/2014	Approved

Please remember to:

→ Use your **research protocol number** (2014-0702) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure,
    "UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"
     (http://tigger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf)

APPENDIX E (continued)

Please note that the UIC IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 996-2014. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Sandra Costello
Assistant Director, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research
Subjects

Enclosures:
1. **UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects**
2. **Informed Consent Documents:**
    a) Interview; Version 3; 09/10/2014
    b) Survey; Version 3; 09/10/2014
3. **Recruiting Materials:**
    a) Faculty Participation Email Solicitation; Version 1; 07/23/2014
    b) Student Participation Email Solicitation; Version 3; 09/16/2014

cc: David Mayrowetz , Policy Studies, M/C 147
       Steven Tozer (faculty advisor), Educational Policy Studies, M/C 147

APPENDIX F[d]

University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research
Students' Perceptions of the Impact and Value of First-Year Seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Jamie N. Riess, Ph.D. Candidate
Department and Institution: Educational Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information: 5500 N. St. Louis Ave., LWH 0027 Chicago, IL
60625.   J-Riess@neiu.edu.

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about students' perceptions of first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

You have been asked to participate in the research because you volunteered to participate in it and you meet the study's eligibility requirements of being a first-year student at least 18 years of age enrolled in a First-Year Experience course in the Fall 2014 semester.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with University of Illinois at Chicago or UNIV. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship**.

Approximately 70 subjects may be involved in this research.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to understand students' perceptions of their First-Year Experience course at this University.

What procedures are involved?

The study procedures involve answering questions on a survey in your First-Year Experience course. You will be given two surveys to complete, taking 15 minutes each, at two different timepoints.

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[d] The "Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research" lists the institution by name. It has been changed to UNIV.

APPENDIX F (continued)

<u>What are the potential risks and discomforts?</u>

There is a risk of breach of privacy (others may find out the subject is participating in the research) and/or confidentiality (others may find out identifiable information collected or disclosed during the research).

<u>Are there benefits to taking part in the research?</u>

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about the meaning students make of their experiences with First-Year Experience courses at this University. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

<u>What other options are there?</u>

You have the option to not participate in this study.

<u>What about privacy and confidentiality?</u>

The people who will know that you are a research subject are the Researcher, your First-Year Experience faculty member, and your First-Year Experience classmates. The UIC IRB and State of Illinois auditors may review identifiable documents in order to monitor the research. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

<u>Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?</u>

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

<u>Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?</u>

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

APPENDIX F (continued)

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the Researcher's Faculty Advisor, Steven Tozer, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago, at 312-413-7782 or stozer@uic.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with UNIV. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I agree to have my birthdate verified by the Researcher through my UNIV student record. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

_____

Printed Name

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date (must be same as subject's)

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix G[e]

University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research
Students' Perceptions of the Impact and Value of First-Year Seminars at a
Hispanic-Serving Institution

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Jamie N. Riess, Ph.D. Candidate
Department and Institution: Educational Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information: 5500 N. St. Louis Ave., LWH 0027 Chicago, IL 60625.　　J-Riess@neiu.edu.

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about students' perceptions of first-year seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

You have been asked to participate in the research because you volunteered to participate in it and you meet the study's eligibility requirements of being a first-year student at least 18 years of age enrolled in a First-Year Experience course in the Fall 2014 semester.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with University of Illinois at Chicago or UNIV. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship**.

Approximately 15 subjects may be involved in this research.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to understand students' perceptions of their First-Year Experience course at this University.

What procedures are involved?

The study procedures involve an individual interview with the Researcher. The interview will occur once at a neutral location on campus. It will last about 60-90 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded.

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[e] The "Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research" lists the institution by name. It has been changed to UNIV.

APPENDIX G (continued)

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

There is a risk of breach of privacy (others may find out the subject is participating in the research) and/or confidentiality (others may find out identifiable information collected or disclosed during the research).

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about the meaning students make of their experiences with First-Year Experience courses at this University. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The person who will know that you are a research subject is the Researcher. The UIC IRB and State of Illinois auditors may review identifiable documents in order to monitor the research. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

The interview will be audio recorded, and the audio recording will be electronically transcribed. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of data. A pseudonym, reflecting your gender, will be assigned to your audio recording and resulting transcript. If at any time you do not feel comfortable being recorded, the audio recording will be stopped. When the research is finished, the audio recording will be destroyed. This will be done after December 31, 2017.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

APPENDIX G (continued)

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the Researcher's Faculty Advisor, Steven Tozer, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago, at 312-413-7782 or stozer@uic.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with UNIV. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

_____

Printed Name

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date (must be same as subject's)

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX H

Subject: Participation Requested for a Study on FYE Courses

Hello,

I am writing to request your participation in my study titled, "Students' Perceptions of the Impact and Value of First-Year Seminars at a Hispanic-Serving Institution." The purpose of my research study is to understand how students think and feel about their FYE courses at this University.

I am requesting your permission to administer a survey in your FYE course twice during the Fall 2014 semester, as well as your willingness to provide me with a copy of the course syllabus. The survey will be administered in early September and early December, and should take no more than 15 minutes of your class time.

If you are interested in participating, please respond to this e-mail or call 773-442-5477. Space is very limited. Final selection of FYE courses will be selected purposefully on a basis of FYE course faculty who respond.

If you are interested in learning more about this research study, please feel free to contact me at J-Riess@neiu.edu or 773-442-5477. I am the research project Principal Investigator and a Ph.D. student at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jamie

APPENDIX I

Subject: Participate in a FYE Interview

Hello,

My name is Jamie Riess and I am a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). The purpose of my research study is to understand how students think and feel about their First-Year Experience courses at this University. Your participation is important to achieving my purpose, so I hope that you will take part in my research.

You meet the study's eligibility requirements of being a first-year student at least 18 years of age enrolled in a FYE course in the Fall 2014 semester. If you decide to participate, you may be individually interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you would like to participate, please respond to this e-mail or call 773-442-5477. In your response, please identify your gender and ethnicity to promote a diverse research sample. Space is limited. Final selection of interviewees will be selected purposefully on a basis of first-year students who indicate a willingness to participate.

If you are interested in learning more about this research study, please feel free to contact me at J-Riess@neiu.edu or 773-442-5477.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jamie Riess

<div align="center">**VITA**</div>

Name: Jamie N. Riess

Education: Ph.D., Educational Policy Studies in Urban Education
University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 2015

M.A., Counselor Education, School Counseling
Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois, 2008

B.S., Liberal Arts and Sciences, Psychology and History
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, 2006

Experience: Director, Advising Center, Northeastern Illinois University, 2015-Present

Interim Director, Advising Center, Northeastern Illinois University, 2014-2015

Interim Assistant Director, Advising Center, Northeastern Illinois University, 2013-2014

Academic Advisor, Northeastern Illinois University, 2008-2013

Honors: IASPARP Excellence Award, Northeastern Illinois University, 2012

Phi Beta Kappa, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2006

Professional
Affiliations: American School Counselor Association
Illinois Counseling Association
Illinois School Counselor Association
National Academic Advising Association