STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS: A

TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jeffrey Scott Downs

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the persistence and retention after the First Year Experience (FYE) program for second-year college students at Northern Nevada College. The theory guiding this study is Astin's student involvement theory which links student success in college to the level of involvement students have at their academic institution. This study explores how first-time full-time students being part of the FYE program have been encouraged to be involved at their institution on several levels. In this transcendental phenomenological study, data were collected using interviews, a focus group, and journaling prompts. After the data were collected, the information was transcribed and coded for analysis. The coding results have been used to identify common terms or phrases that describe the shared experience of the participants. These repeated coded terms lead to themes and subthemes describing the shared experience of these participants. Emerging themes included that the cohort structure helped students to develop friendships, the FYE program helped students to develop new study skills and habits, the FYE program helped students with their second year, and the FYE program increased their involvement on campus. Interpretations of these findings included that the FYE program can help students to make connections on campus, it can help students be more successful their second year, and using the cohort structure helps students in and out of class. Future studies should use the results of this study to expand student connections to the online realm, providing distance learning students with similar experiences of being involved. It is also recommended that the FYE program include a mental health component to help students deal with the stresses of life, especially when compounded with the college experience.

*Keywords*: student success, persistence, retention, student involvement theory

**Copyright Page**

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!

To my parents, whose love and support have guided my life.

To my wife, who has believed in me through my academic and professional journey.

To my children: Stephen, James, and Nora; who are a blessing to my life.

To Piper McCarthy for giving me a passion for student success.

To Vince Solis, who saw potential in me, encouraged me to go beyond my role and pursue my dreams, and conquered the White Rim Trail with me.

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## List of Abbreviations

Advanced Placement (AP)

American College Test (ACT)

Associated Students of Northern Nevada (ASNN)

Career Path Development (CPD)

First-Year Experience (FYE)

Georgia State University Perimeter College (GSU-PC)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)

Latino Leadership Academy (LLA)

Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP)

Mississippi State University (MSU)

Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE)

Northern Nevada College (NNC)

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

Tennessee Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (TLSAMP)

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

**Overview**

College enrollment is an ongoing concern for many institutions (Mullin & Honeyman, 2007). Reversing enrollment trends when in a decline or growing student populations are strategies institutions of higher learning always work towards (Cook, 2021). This chapter will examine the historical, social, and theoretical background surrounding enrollment concerns at colleges and universities. This chapter will also investigate efforts schools have used to improve their enrollment. The significance of this study is addressed from the theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives. The central research question, followed by three sub-questions that this study is intended to address, will be presented next. Finally, important and relevant definitions are included.

**Background**

Higher education is an established part of modern society. Most institutions face declining enrollment, leading to declining financial support (Pavlov & Katsamakas, 2020). The decline in enrollment has many factors, including the cancellation of courses and remote learning caused by the pandemic (Schanzenbach & Turner, 2022). The challenge for schools to remain fiscally sound is to reverse this trend and improve enrollment (Mullin & Honeyman, 2007). Two approaches for this would be to recruit more students or retain more of the students they already have (Cook, 2021). There are several approaches to increasing student retention and success rates (Millea et al., 2018). And within the initiative to improve student success lies the First Year Experience (FYE) program (Everett, 2019; Hermann et al., 2020). The FYE program is a retention program designed to work with students during their first semester or first year of college to help them develop improved study skills and better adapt to the higher education

environment (Everett, 2019).

## Historical Context

Public and private institutions of higher learning require money to operate. How these institutions receive their funding may differ, but funding is largely based on enrollment (Mullin & Honeyman, 2007). Most public institutions in the United States utilize a funding formula to derive the amount the state allocates towards the respective institutions (Mullin & Honeyman, 2007). Some higher education systems, such as the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) have intricate procedures that balance the difficulty of recruiting instructors with the value to the community (NSHE Staff, 2019). Also, some formulas are based on a combination of state allocations and student tuition or fees (Flynn, 2012). There are also efforts to tie the funding of colleges to their performance in graduating students with degrees and certificates within 150% of the normal period: three years for community colleges and six years for four-year institutions (Tandberg et al., 2014). When education systems are forced to reduce their budgets, fewer students can be served, which, in turn, influences future enrollment and funding by the formula (Flynn, 2012). Students are an intricate part of the funding of higher education institutions, both public and private, two-year and four-year.

Without the direct and indirect funds received from student enrollment, colleges and universities may face challenges in their functioning. A drop in student enrollment can financially harm two- and four-year institutions. With a declining headcount of students, colleges and universities anticipate receiving less in tuition and fees from students, coupled with a decline in funding from state and local sources for public institutions (Pavlov & Katsamakas, 2020). This decline in financing can lead to reduced services through the cutting of employees and an increase in tuition fees, contributing to the classical Death Spiral (Sparks & Stecher, 1974), a

term originally applied to the astrophysical transition of stars, but has been applied to the fiscal conditions of companies and institutions (Costello & Hemphill, 2014). A Death Spiral can feed upon itself, raising costs and reducing consumption, in a loop until an organization is no longer financially viable (Costello & Hemphill, 2014).

Colleges and universities have been experiencing a decline in the enrollment of students. Nationally, the decline has been around 14.1% for colleges and universities since 2019 (Cook, 2021). Two-year institutions have experienced a 10.1% decline since 2020 (Phillips, 2021). The fall has been exasperated by the global pandemic, where many students have opted not to enroll in post-secondary education after a year or more of remote learning (Schanzenbach & Turner, 2022). Following the pandemic, many potential students needed to be more satisfied with their experiences from remote learning, having their traditional high school activities canceled, and losing their enthusiasm to go to college (Ignaczak, 2022). Additionally, there has been a demographic decline in the high school population across the country (Pavlov & Katsamakas, 2020). The enrollment drop is anticipated in the coming years as educators track a drop in enrollment in the K-12 grades annually, working its way towards high school graduation when two- and four-year institutions will experience the consequence of this population shift. The demographic shift in the general population is not something that the institutions can change. The options left to schools were to increase the percentage of students coming through either a different recruitment strategy or to keep more students coming to the institution (Cook, 2021).

**Social Context**

It is important to examine the factors that influence the decisions students make regarding attending post-secondary education as it influences enrollment at colleges and universities. Many prospective students need clarification on the benefit of a college education (Ignaczak, 2022).

Potential students are frequently heard stories about how they can find lucrative careers without a degree, choosing a more entrepreneurial path (Xu, 2020). Students preferred to financially invest into a degree if it benefits them proportionally compared to their non-college-educated peers (Ignaczak, 2022). In other cases, institutions no longer offered courses of interest during the pandemic and have not resumed those courses (Schanzenbach & Turner, 2022). Still, in other cases, students have opted out of college due to social changes and the danger that poses to their psychological well-being (Xin et al., 2021). With many factors contributing to the decline in new students, institutions, both two- and four-year schools, sought ways to improve the enrollment picture.

There are two primary approaches to increasing enrollment at colleges and universities: recruitment (Cook, 2021) and retaining more students through student success (Sanborne, 2016; Sprehe, 2021; Trainer, 2018). There have been many attempts to improve enrollment that is common to colleges across the country, including expanding enrollment to dual enrollment students, for example high school students taking classes for credit at both the college and high school levels (Henneberger et al., 2022). High school students taking dual enrollment classes have a greater high school graduation rate, higher college attendance rate, and persisting to future terms when transitioning full-time to a higher education institution (Lee et al., 2022). Another approach is to seek new enrollment from another captive audience, the prison population (Kallman, 2020). Higher education institutions have seen great success in the inmate population, which benefits the students and community by lowering recidivism rates (Magee, 2021). While recruiting new people is one avenue of exploration, another strategy to improve enrollment is to improve student success (Sanborne, 2016). Improving student success is directly tied to increasing enrollment (Millea et al., 2018). Several efforts have been established to enhance

student success to improve persistence, retention, and graduation, including early alert programs, academic coaching, academic skills workshops, and summer bridge programs (Hall et al., 2021). Another approach is to conduct a semester-long FYE program (Everett, 2019; Hermann et al., 2020), which has most often been applied to specialized populations (O'Connell, 2023), students who experience economic challenges (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021), or students taking remote classes (Folk, 2019).

**Theoretical Context**

There are many theories of what may lead to student learning, which leads to success in colleges and universities. Three primary areas of thought are behaviorism (Skinner, 1965), constructivism (O'Donnell, 2012), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Behaviorism, as developed by Skinner (1965), associates behavior with consequences (Schunk, 2019) so that studying and doing well on assignments and exams will lead to the positive result of a good grade. There has been a resurgence of the behaviorist philosophy in introducing digital technology into the classroom of elementary-level students (Gunnars, 2021). At the college level, students choose to enroll in courses to learn content as evidenced by the reward of a good grade. This could also be a motivator for them to enroll in a program, such as the FYE, that would help them achieve this reward. Constructivism (O'Donnell, 2012) posits that learning occurs less from factors of the environment in a passive manner and more from constructing knowledge through reflection on their experiences (Kurt, 2021). This study engages constructivist principles in the opportunity students have to review and reflect upon their experiences in the FYE program.

Social cognitive theory, as eschewed by Bandura (1986), holds that people learn best in environments with others in which concepts are modeled, and people can learn through observing each other (Schunk, 2019). One of the core tenets of social cognitive theory is that the

individual believes in themselves being able to master the concept or task (Schunk, 2019).

Students developed competencies in technical areas more when learning the topics with their

peers (Zhu et al., 2019). The research in this study is based on the social cognitive theory and the

importance of self-efficacy. Students learning in a social environment are more motivated to

attempt a process and develop an understanding of concepts (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Whether in the classroom or online, students benefit from instruction designed to prevent

isolation in their learning environment and instead create activities that encourage student

interactions (Wang & Lin, 2021).

## Problem Statement

The problem is that higher education lacks consistent first-year student retention.

Nationally, colleges and universities have a retention rate of 61% (Engelmyer, 2022), while

community colleges alone have a retention rate of only 51% (Staff, 2021). With the impending

consequence of fewer high school students feeding enrollment at institutions of higher learning

(Drozdowski, 2023), colleges and universities must find another way to stabilize and boost

enrollment. One way to improve enrollment is to improve the retention rates of enrolled students,

increasing student success rates (Sprehe, 2021; Trainer, 2018). Northern Nevada College (NNC)

created the FYE program to improve student success in both retention and persistence. The

purpose of the FYE program is to help students develop the skills they will need to be more

successful at college, better connect with the institution and the faculty, perform better in their

coursework, and create friendships that will increase the likelihood that students will remain in

their program (O'Connell, 2023). Like many FYE programs, until now no analysis or study has

been conducted to explore the experiences of the students who participated in the first offering of

the FYE program.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences with the FYE program for second-year college students at Northern Nevada College. At this stage in the research, the retention after the FYE program will generally be defined as those students who have continued to their second year of college (Staff, 2022) following their participation in the FYE program. The theory guiding this study is Astin's (1999) Student Involvement theory which links student success to their level of involvement at an institution outside of their class time.

**Significance of the Study**

Among the many purposes of research is the ability to educate others and improve the situation that exists (Thornton, 2013). A study's results may influence the theoretical body of knowledge in the area being explored. There may also be a contribution to the field of work in the area being studied, adding to what has already been discovered and complementing unanswered or unresearched topics and concepts. There are also real-life applications that can result. This research is similar and contributes to the theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives of student success from FYE programs.

This study addresses the shared experiences of participants in an FYE program. An effective FYE program can help with student persistence and retention (Everett, 2019), bolstering enrollment at a college or university. This study examines the inaugural FYE program at Northern Nevada College (NNC) and explore how students feel connected to their institution. Forming strong connections to an institution, both academic and social, are important components of student success (Astin & Osegura, 2005). Improved student success leads to improved retention and enrollment (O'Connell, 2023), which positively affects the fiscal viability of an institution (Mullin & Honeyman, 2007).

The FYE program might be new to Northern Nevada College, but it is not new to institutions of higher learning (Wismath & Newberry, 2019). These programs have been developed in various forms and have unique characteristics at different institutions (Everett, 2019; Hermann et al., 2020). Studies have addressed the effectiveness of distinct FYE programs, but these have been limited to the experiences and levels of success that different schools offer. There have been studies to explore the influence on Latino males (O'Connell, 2023), economically disadvantaged students (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021), and distance-learning students (Folk, 2019). This research contributes to and adds to the existing body of knowledge as this FYE comprises students who voluntarily enrolled and were not segregated by race, economic status, or modality.

As with any qualitative study, the results from this study may be transferred to many applications provided that the researcher supplies depth and detail (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This study presents sufficient descriptions, content, and contexts to allow the results to be applied in various ways. First, Northern Nevada College is interested in the findings from the students' shared experiences in this first offering of the FYE program. They plan to adjust their FYE program to serve future students better. The findings may also affect enrollment for Northern Nevada College, better-developing ways to connect students to their institution. Finally, other institutions, both within the same system and outside of Nevada, may choose to build their own FYE program. This study can inform such development so that the application of these findings may have a broad reach. Results from this study can be used to create a more student-focused and friendly learning environment, provide students with the skills necessary to be successful and create a more cohesive and productive learning environment. In addition, results from this study can be used to inform the FYE program leaders in adjusting the program

for future offerings in helping students to become better engaged in the institution and more successful in their academic pursuits.

## Research Questions

In exploring the shared experience for students in the first offering of the FYE program at NNC, it is important to explore how the participants interacted with the various components and modules of the program to learn about the influence of the program on their academic and social life. At NNC, the FYE program enrolled students in a college skills course, but they were also part of a linked course model that created cohorts in which they attended three to four classes together. A cohort intends to help students develop connections that enable them to turn to each other for academic support and social and emotional encouragement. Finally, based on the student involvement theory (Astin, 1999; Astin & Oseguera; 2005) that posits students involved in campus activities are more likely to be successful, it is important to see how students viewed being involved in campus activities, such as those offered through Student Life. To determine the influence the FYE program had on students, it is also important to learn how the students view they have changed from being in the program, from their time before college, during the first year, to where they are now as second-year college students.

**Central Research Question**

How do second-year college students describe their participation in the FYE at Northern Nevada College during and after the program?

**Sub-Question One**

How do second-year college students describe their prior experiences that influence college retention?

**Sub-Question Two**

How do second-year college students describe their first-year college environment?

## Sub-Question Three

How do second-year college students describe the influence of the FYE program?

## Definitions

1. *First-Year Experience* - A program that helps students to develop the skills they need to be successful in school (Wismath & Newberry, 2019).

2. *Persistence* - The rate at which students continue from the fall to the spring term (Getzel, 2008).

3. *Retention* - The rate at which students continue from one year to the following year before graduation (Getzel, 2008).

4. *Student success* - Students learn the material for the class as evidenced by the metric of a passing score (Cui et al., 2019).

## Summary

Colleges and universities face many challenges, not least of which is enrollment. Enrollment at higher education institutions affects those schools' funding (Mullin & Honeyman, 2007). Schools face many obstacles in recruiting and retaining students, from the cost of education (Ignaczak, 2022) to opportunities to earn lucrative careers more immediately than completing a four-year degree (Xu, 2020). While there are several approaches schools have taken to improve enrollment, retaining current students through improved student success is an action that can be done by institutions (Sanborne, 2016; Sprehe, 2021; Trainer, 2018). This phenomenological study intends to understand the shared experience of the students who chose to participate in an FYE program. The results of this study will add to the existing but limited body of knowledge about FYE programs, provide evidence supporting future FYE programs, and

help institutions make potential adjustments to their programs to serve students better. This study also seeks to answer questions about how students' experiences in linked courses FYE program have helped them succeed in college, if at all. It also explores the students' feelings about being put into linked courses, creating cohorts of students. In addition, it seeks to learn if students can develop connections with other students. Finally, it explores if being in the FYE program has helped students be involved in school activities outside the classroom. These are indicators that students can have improved success in their studies.

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Overview**

This chapter offers a systematic review of the literature to explore the lived experiences of students completing a first-year experience program at a community college in rural western Nevada. The student involvement theory is discussed in the first section, followed by a review of recent literature regarding predictors for student success, first-year experiences of students, and college success programs. Lastly, the literature surrounding initiatives institutions and students can take to improve student success is addressed. In summary, a gap in the literature is identified in the first-year experience programs and their affect on student involvement at the community college level.

**Theoretical Framework**

Alexander Astin (1999) began publishing works in the early 1970s, studying the factors that lead to students being successful in college. His research led to the student involvement theory to help institutions and students increase student success in colleges and universities (Astin, 1975; Astin, 1999). When considering the process of student success, it is important to consider three steps: what students bring with them to college (Astin & Oseguera, 2005), their experiences at the institution that leads to student success (Astin, 1999), and how they apply their new knowledge or skills to be successful (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). There are predictors of student success that students bring to college, metrics that institutions of higher learning commonly use to gauge whether students are likely to succeed. These predictive metrics are most commonly student GPA (Astin & Oseguera, 2005) and college entrance exams, such as the SAT and ACT (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). These predictive scores have many supporting factors, but they represent students' ability to succeed in their high school environment and demonstrate the

knowledge they have amassed. The higher scores students have in either or both areas help institutions determine whether these students are likely to succeed at their college or university (Astin & Oseguera, 2005).

Once a student has enrolled at a college or university, it is incumbent upon the institution to create an environment where students are more likely to succeed (Astin, 1999). This represents the experiences students have at their college or university, whether good or bad, that affect the learning process. Astin (1999) began by looking at more traditional approaches to education to determine what helped students succeed. After dismissing three commonly held beliefs: students learn from subject matter experts, students learn from institutions with dedicated resources (both facilities and staff), and students learn best with instruction designed to address their particular learning style and needs (Astin, 1999), Astin (1999) looked at these components of success and gauged those components against other factors, such as how the student interacts within them. For these long-held components of student success to yield the intended result, students must choose to utilize the opportunities available. In essence, students need to become involved in whatever opportunities are available to succeed (Astin, 1999). This is the crux of the student involvement theory. As students become involved at an institution, they will increase their level of success. Astin (1999) considered the many ways students may become involved at an institution. Finding that the most influential factor was the student residence location, he determined that students living on campus tend to become more involved in campus activities and therefore tend to be more successful. The other factors affecting student involvement are being part of honors classes or an honors program, becoming involved in academic activities to avoid distractions, interacting with faculty both in and outside the classroom, membership in a sports team, and joining student government (Astin, 1999).

Being more involved in campus activities yields a changed behavior in students. Becoming more involved on campus has physical and psychological influences on students, affecting them socially, emotionally, and academically (Astin, 1999). The more they are involved, the more they will succeed (Astin, 1999). Therefore, when developing programs for student success, administrators need to consider how those policies will enable and encourage students to become more involved in academic and social activities at the institution (Astin, 1999). Being more involved changes the focus of the learning environment from the courses and instructors to the students, creating a more motivated student body (Astin, 1999). When examining how faculty and staff approach their positions, they should consider how their involvement with the students will help to improve students' involvement, leading to greater success (Astin, 1999).

**Figure 1**

*Progression in Student Success*



Prior Student Preparation → College Experience → Student Success
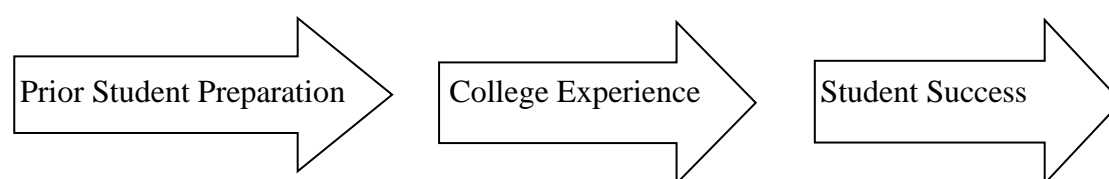
*Note*. This figure illustrates how colleges and universities take students from how they came prepared, giving them an experience to become engaged and produce successful students who will continue to succeed in school (Astin & Oseguera, 2005).

## Related Literature

As budgets and enrollment tighten at colleges and universities nationwide (Delcoure & Carmona, 2019), higher education institutions focus on improving student enrollment through

student success (Sprehe, 2021; Trainer, 2018). Student success has many definitions; however, for this review and to remain in line with the literature reviewed, success is considered graduating with a four-year degree within six years (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). In addressing student success, it is essential to consider the factors that affect student performance. Elements to consider are student preparation and performance before attending higher education classes, programs institutions develop to mitigate student shortcomings, and opportunities students may take to improve their performance. These are opportunities to improve student involvement linked to student success (Astin, 1999).

**First-Year Students Successful Traits**

It is essential to acknowledge that students bring backgrounds and skills prior to their college career that will contribute to their degree of success in college. Students' experiences at the high school level can significantly affect their college or university performance and their physical and emotional wellness and self-confidence as they venture into a new level of education.  (Yu & Mocan, 2019). There are many demographic categories to consider that can predict the degree of success students will experience. Chief among predictors for college success is evidence of success at the high school level seen through several facets: high school grade point average (GPA) (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Al-Nimer & Mustafa, 2022; Barclay et al., 2018), college entrance exam (SAT and ACT) scores (Salehi et al., 2019), the student's high school transcript (Torres, 2019), level of motivation (Barclay et al., 2018; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2018), and their confidence to succeed in their college coursework (Rummey et al., 2019; Torres, 2019). These predictors of success at the college level are common to the consideration process by many institutions of higher learning. By contrast, open enrollment institutions, such

as community colleges, do not place weight on these traits other than for placement in college courses based on SAT or ACT scores.

### Student GPA

Many researchers see student GPA as a significant predictor of student success in college (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Al-Nimer & Mustafa, 2022; Barclay et al., 2018). High school GPA is seen as the most significant predictor of student success when comparing students with an A average to a C average (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Barclay et al., 2018). First-time, full-time college students who have learned the skills and techniques to succeed in high school carry those skills and techniques to college and continue their success (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). The study by Barclay et al. (2018) has its shortcomings, given that it examined the extreme ends of first-time, full-time freshman students at the college level. There was no analysis of accepted students who fell between these extremes. In keeping with the theoretical framework of student involvement (Astin, 1999; Astin & Oseguera, 2005), there has been a link between student high school GPA and student engagement in college (Al-Nimer & Mustafa, 2022). High School GPA, as a leading indicator for college success, can be linked to students achieving acceptance in a private institution which yielded higher graduation rates, 80% in six years compared to 58% for public schools (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). However, once students are in college, a statistical significance has yet to be shown between their GPA and their persistence in college (Hall et al., 2021).

### College Entrance Exams

Another measurement for high school success is the college entrance exam scores found on the SAT or ACT achievement tests. Some see high scores on entrance exams as a requirement to enter private schools, which leads to a greater graduation rate (Astin & Oseguera, 2005).

However, entrance exam scores have been linked directly to student success, more so than high school GPA (Salehi et al., 2019). While controlling traditional demographic factors like race and gender, the predictive tool for success was the SAT or ACT score (Salehi et al., 2019). When correcting the correlation based on SAT and ACT scores, there was no significant difference in success based on race and gender. Although the study correlated entrance exams and success, further investigation needs to be done to explore the correlation and possible causation between entrance exam scores and gender or race.

### High School Rigor

Another trait that indicates success is the type of classes students complete in high school (Torres, 2019). Students who enroll in more challenging coursework in high school tend to be more successful in college coursework. A study exploring success factors for deaf Latino students found that students who enrolled in college-level English courses their first year found success in their other courses compared to students who entered college taking remedial English coursework (Torres, 2019). High school rigor's influence on college success extends beyond race or gender (Morgan et al., 2018). In a regression analysis of high school course difficulty and college student success, challenging high school classes predict college success (Morgan et al., 2018). Not all schools in all areas offer the same opportunity for rigor, thus limiting students' success indicators. The Morgan et al. (2018) study did not include other student performance data like AP, placement, or entrance exam scores. This conclusion is based solely on academic preparation in high school. It can be an indication of student preparation as well as the degree of student motivation or confidence.

Some studies challenge the importance of rigor in high school as a predictive measure of student success (Culver et al., 2021). While a challenging and heavy workload helps to develop

study skills, Culver et al. (2021) found that only rigor in reading influenced students' success in college. Allen et al. (2019) confirmed this conclusion noting that rigor in high school English classes; however, in 11th grade, English, in this case, had the greatest affect on students' GPAs during their first year of college. The studies by Culver et al. (2021) and Allen et al. (2019) reinforce previous research by Culver et al. (2019) that found that there are benefits of a rigorous curriculum in terms of developing the critical thinking skills of students whose parents did not attend college. Beyond that, a rigorous high school curriculum in literacy skills is most beneficial for college students in their freshman and senior years.

### Student Motivation

Continuing the exploration of traits that lead to success in college is motivation (Barclay et al., 2018; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2018). When comparing intrinsically motivated students to extrinsically motivated students, those who possess intrinsic motivation also experience increased success in college (Barclay et al., 2018). While some consider motivation as a factor linked to GPA, which leads to success (Barclay et al., 2018), others have explored and identified motivation as the sole driving factor for student success (Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2018). By dividing high school students' motivation into four categories from highly motivated down to not very motivated, it was the lowest level of motivation on the spectrum, considered the least motivated, that saw the lowest level of success in college (Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2018). This motivation, though, is tied to student confidence.

### Student Self-Confidence

A final factor of high school students that predicts college success is self-confidence (Rummey et al., 2019; Torres, 2019). Some see self-confidence as the leading indicator of success (Rummey et al., 2019). An inverse relationship exists between self-confidence and

anxiety levels in students. Those with greater self-confidence have lower anxiety, while those with less have increased anxiety. Even more interesting is that students who had low or little self-confidence before they entered college tended to have a high level of self-confidence and low levels of anxiety when they found success during their first semester. Science students developed higher confidence levels in beginning a second-semester course than during the first-semester portion of the class, meaning that their success in the first semester increased their confidence in the second semester (Rummey et al., 2019). Students exhibiting confidence in completing the work were more successful in their courses. Confidence did not necessarily mean that students understood the material but believed they could learn it if they sought practical assistance from their professors, tutoring, academic skills centers, or classmates (Torres, 2019).

*Family Influence on First-Year College Students' Experiences*

College students experience many challenges during their first year, not least of which is what to expect when they begin their academic journey (Roksa et al., 2020). The success first-year students experience is based on many factors. One is that of parents who attended college compared to those with parents who did not, also called first-generation college students (Ro et al., 2020, 2021; Roksa et al., 2020). These parents are often of a higher socio-economic status and recognize traits and skills that will help their students be more successful (Tompsett & Knoester, 2023), such as budgeting and financial planning, helping their students to better handle financial stressors while at college (Sabir et al., 2020). There is also a distinction between first-generation students with older siblings who went to college and those without (Roksa et al., 2020). Like non-first-generation students, first-generation students with older siblings who attended college have a resource in their parents as they seek guidance and assistance in planning their degree choices, course selection, and how to mitigate poor performance in coursework

(Roksa et al., 2020). Students with older siblings in college also have a resource in the siblings (Ro et al., 2020, 2021). These students have navigated the challenges of adjusting to college coursework expectations and can relate to their siblings experiencing this for the first time (Roksa et al., 2020). College-attended or attending siblings can also relate to the current obstacles their younger siblings face more than their parents.

First-generation students without siblings who attended college experience another disadvantage: while the students may seek extracurricular activities, the parents do not value such activities (Roska et al., 2020). They prefer the students to focus on academic endeavors rather than experience activities outside the classroom, viewing it as a distraction from the purpose of their children attending college (Roksa et al., 2020). Activities outside the classroom include athletic activities, events at school, events in the community, jobs, and other activities without tangible benefits but enriching the student's mental and physical well-being (Guilmette et al., 2019). What non-college experienced parents often fail to realize is that extracurricular activities help students to develop social bonds, which enable them to seek solutions to academic challenges they experience during their first year as they transition to college (Roska et al., 2020). Students participating in extracurricular activities also develop better ways to balance their lives concerning studying, working, and socializing, leading to improved regulation of their responsibilities (Guilmette et al., 2019). By denying or discouraging outside activities, these parents also limit professional opportunities for their students due to a lack of exposure and the ability of students to network with prospective employers (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021).

Many college and university activities are designed to help students succeed. These range from summer bridge programs that occur before the first semester begins to courses that parallel the semester, aiding students in those skills they, and their parents, may lack in navigating the

college environment. In addition, some faculty offer additional academic opportunities. Developing academic bonds with faculty helps students to extend their learning from the classroom to more applied areas, including internships and research projects (Ro et al., 2020, 2021). All students encounter challenges, especially in their first year, regardless of the social status of their parents. Institutions recognize this and work to overcome these challenges. Succeeding through the first year is the first step in students succeeding in college (Everett, 2019; Millea et al., 2018).

Recognizing parents of underprivileged and underrepresented populations' role in their student's success is important. It is often the goals and priorities of the parents that drive these students (May & Witherspoon, 2019). The parents' focus can amplify the students' success, but it can also cause the student to feel out of place and underserved of being at the institution (Bryant, 2021). Wang et al. (2020) found that despite social status, parents engaging their students in socialization activities and exposing them to greater involvement activities have improved the success rates for members of this population.

**Institution-Initiated Efforts for Academic Success**

Academic institutions have a moral and financial interest in students succeeding and remaining at their schools (Everett, 2019). To improve student success, schools have developed several programs: Summer Bridge, FYE, Academic Research and Projects, Honors Programs, Creating Student Cohorts or Linked Courses, Implementing the Five Sense of Success, and Developing Internship Programs. Student success programs have a wide range of philosophies on how to improve student success for at-risk students. Some suggest that schools should help at-risk students become better prepared for higher education (Hermann et al., 2020; Kitchen et al., 2018). Others suggest that schools need to aid students in the transition to college-level

expectations (Everett, 2019; Picton, 2018). Still, others believe that learning needs to include programs outside the classroom (Berchiolii, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020; Ro et al., 2020, 2021). At the same time, others believe in encouraging greater creativity in students who are already academically successful (Abizada & Mirzaliyeva, 2021; Barclay et al., 2018). Other schools have created cohort groups of students to help their success (Barnett et al., 2000), while including internships has been another effort to help students succeed.

### *Summer Bridge*

Summer Bridge programs have become a popular tool for colleges and universities to help their underprepared and at-risk students to become more successful in their college experience (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). In-person student success programs are most common, but offering asynchronous alternatives to accommodate students' scheduling challenges is an option (Eblen-Zayas & Russell, 2019). These programs have a two-fold benefit: preparing students academically for their first year of college and helping them become familiar with the resources and functioning of the institution (Hermann et al., 2020; Kitchen et al., 2018). Summer bridge programs teach study, critical thinking, and communication skills, where students can access resources such as the library and tutoring services (Hermann et al., 2020). Programs can also focus on specific areas to better prepare students for degrees in specific areas, such as STEM (Howard & Sharpe, 2019; Kitchen et al., 2018). Summer bridge programs can be open to all students or to students from backgrounds that have historically experienced less success in college.

Some institutions develop Summer Bridge programs to help students from specific populations. One developed a program to improve reading and writing skills for students with hearing disabilities (Williams et al., 2022). Students with hearing challenges rely more on their

reading and writing skills than their normal-hearing counterparts. (Williams et al., 2022). The success these students experienced encouraged the researchers to the degree that they recommended the program be opened to students with other disabilities (Williams et al., 2022). The focus of some Summer Bridge programs is on underrepresented students, as well. Trinity University in Texas found that summer bridge programs helped minority students improve their success and retention rates to nearly that of their traditional counterparts (Hermann et al., 2020). Simon et al. (2022) have argued that the scope of the content for serving underrepresented populations should expand to include cultural skills and a sense of belonging at the institutions. Commensurate with this scope, expansion should also be reflected in the analysis of the effectiveness of including cultural skills and a sense of belonging (Simon et al., 2022).

Another program, the Tennessee Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (TLSAMP), was geared specifically toward minority students in STEM programs (Howard & Sharpe, 2019). This program increased retention of minority students in the fields of Science, Mathematics, and Engineering by six percentage points over the general population, 72% for the Summer Bridge participants compared to 66% for the general population of students (Howard & Sharpe, 2019). The success of the TLSAMP summer bridge program has led educators to suggest the program apply to the general population to increase the persistence and retention of students in other areas and of different demographic groups (Howard & Sharpe, 2019). In addition to the academic preparation, researchers correlated the connection students made with other students as a key factor contributing to their success (Howard & Sharpe, 2019). While other students who did not participate in the program began developing connections when the semester started, Summer Bridge participants at TLSAMP institutions had up to three additional months to build relationships before the commencement of the semester.

Like the Tennessee LSAMP program (Howard & Sharpe, 2019), another study examined the LSAMP programs offered throughout Alabama. The most glaring result of these programs was how vastly they varied in both content covered and student responses to the program (Barth et al., 2021). Some programs were more academic, preparing students to succeed in STEM courses, while others focused on developing successful college skills (Barth et al., 2021). While some institutions had programs that lasted for a week, the duration at other institutions ran as long as the entire summer (Barth et al., 2021). Measuring the success of this program was challenging since the institutions had other programs that occurred during the first year. However, from the survey data collected, students' greatest strength in the programs was the development of social connections and a sense of belonging at the institution (Barth et al., 2021).

Similar to the Tennessee LSAMP program (Howard & Sharpe, 2019) and the Alabama STEM focused LSAMP program (Barth et al., 2021), Georgia offered the LSAMPT program (Birkes et al., 2021) as well. Georgia State University Perimeter College (GSU-PC) developed a Summer Bridge program to assist minority students in the transfer to the four-year institution (Birkes et al., 2021). The program components included mentoring, the development of research skills, technical skills, and the opportunity to attend conferences and build their networking skills. The results of this study indicated that students participating in the GSU-PC LSAMP Transfer program were more likely to enroll in STEM classes, graduate in the STEM program, and pursue graduate-level coursework in STEM (Birkes et al., 2021). The researchers encouraged duplication of the program to other institutions.

While the goal of summer bridge programs is often stated to improve GPA, not all programs are oriented in that manner (Dorimé-Williams, 2023). The goals of summber bridge programs can be different for different schools and for different evaluators. Greer et al. (2023)

compared the graduation rates for students attending a Summer Bridge program with those not participating. Again, rather than the general population in the program, Greer et al. (2023) focused on students in Summer Bridge from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The study compared scholarship recipients in the program with Pell Grant recipients, a needs-based program, who were not in the program. They found graduation rates at both the four- and six-year timeframe for students in the Summer Bridge program to be higher than for those not. The study also concluded that participation in the program did not necessarily predict a higher GPA (Greer et al., 2023). Other programs and evaluators focus on the ability of students to make a successful transition and develop their study skills, but they also look to the ability of the students to create ties with other students (Dorimé-Williams, 2023). The focus of the Ohio state bridge program measured how students transitioned to college expectations, their level of confidence, how well they connect with other students, their level of self-awareness, and finally their college preparation (Brady & Gallant, 2021). The affect of the program was measured using qualitative analysis, focusing on the participants' experiences and impresisons of the program (Brady & Gallant, 2021).

Some programs focus on more tangible metrics, such as student GPA and credit completion (Dorimé-Williams, 2023). Kodama et al. (2018) found that the investment by the institution yielded a positive payoff in terms of student success metrics and the student's transition to college life. Through summer remediation, student began the semester taking college-level coursework, with a downstream result of pushing students to complete more coursework than their non-bridge peers (Kodama et al., 2018). And although the focus was GPA and credit completion, students were still able to develop social connections that enabled them to persist (Kodama et al., 2018), a benefit that was apparent during the students second year at the

institution. Trinity University also uses course completion and GPA as success metrics (Hermann et al., 2020). Their minority student focus yielded greater success and higher performance at the university (Hermann et al., 2020).

Programs can also be used for transfer students coming from two year colleges in the form of developing research skills (Zuckerman et al., 2022) and preparing students for improving students' STEM knowledge (Gamage, 2022). Rather than focus on student success skills many first-year students often lack, these programs instead focus on laboratory experiences that may have been lacking at the two-year college (Gamage et al., 2022) with more hands-on experiences (Zuckerman, 2022). The result of such programs included an improved retention rate for transfer students, especially minority students in the STEM field (Zuckerman, 2022). Participants were immersed in research methods in the biological sciences, the discipline of which most students were declared (Gamage, 2022; Zuckerman et al., 2022). As a result of this science-intensive program, 30 of 32 participants secured roles in faculty research labs (Zuckerman et al., 2022). Also, participants developed a high level of self-efficacy and knowledge of the processes by which research would be conducted (Gamage, 2022; Zuckerman et al., 2022). Participants completed their studies, with most students continuing to graduate school or securing positions in public or private laboratories (Zuckerman et al., 2022).

While Institutional Research departments can track students who have been part of programs to determine their academic progress, interviewing and focus grouping students after some time, one to three years, after completing a program can help assess the influence the program had on the students' perspectives (Kodama et al., 2018). When analyzing the effects of these programs, it is important to consider both qualitative and quantitative analysis and use a data and inquiry-driven approach when possible (Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). It is also important

to consider that the students who have opted to participate in a Summer Bridge program may possess greater motivation to succeed while being underprepared than their non-bridge peers (Kodama et al., 2018). Despite these considerations and concerns, schools see increased confidence in students as they prepare for their upcoming fall semester (Kitchen et al., 2018). Schools utilizing Summer Bridge programs see increased student success, sufficient to justify program support, financial and human resources, and expansion in offerings and student inclusion (Dorman et al., 2020). Summer bridge programs, though, do not need to be stand-alone. Some schools link these programs to their first-year experience program (Hermann et al., 2020).

### *First-Year Experience*

Another popular program for first-time students is the first-year experience program. While some student success efforts can be seen as a quick fix/patch job, the FYE program is based on an academic redesign to help students see ongoing success (Nyar, 2018). Some FYE programs are for specialized populations, either race or income-based (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019); others can be for the general student body population (Dale et al., 2019). These programs teach students the skills they require to be successful in college as they transition from their development as high school students (Einboden et al., 2022). The typical FYE program occurs over an entire semester rather than during the summer (Kitchen et al., 2018). First-year experience programs are typically semester-long courses that complement the academic coursework students take to fulfill their general education requirements during their first semester of college. Some programs are optional, while others are mandatory (Dale et al., 2019; Everett, 2019). Many higher education institutions have some version of an FYE program (Reynolds et al., 2019). There are also multiple approaches to FYE programs ranging from

Living Learning communities in which students of similar disciplines might live in student housing that also has nearby classrooms with dedicated coursework for the students in the community to First Semester Core programs in which students are enrolled in their core classes together while developing the necessary study skills for success (Reynolds et al., 2019). However, Mukhopadhyay and Tambyah (2019) found that students in a Living Learning Community at the National University of Singapore benefitted from a more discipline-diverse environment, demonstrating greater intellectual growth and development.

The Living Learning Community model incorporates one of Astin's (1999) core indicators for success- on-campus housing (Mukhopadhyay & Tambyah, 2019). These programs academically and socially grow students (Reynolds et al., 2019). They are known to improve students' self-efficacy as they proceed to future terms of the course (Mukhopadhyay & Tambyah, 2019). The Living Learning Community model studied by Reynolds et al. (2019), which ran in conjunction with the First Semester Core program, showed that the Living Learning community allowed students to develop stronger social ties, as might be expected.

The difficulty level varies per program, with some being highly intensive, such as the Trinity University in Texas program, where students complete several challenging assignments, including reading 1500 pages during the semester and the coursework from their other classes (Hermann et al., 2020). However, Mississippi State University (MSU) developed and offered a game based FYE program (Dale et al., 2019). The MSU model was popular among students and increased student test scores by nearly 20% (Dale et al., 2019). There have been differing viewpoints about the components of first-year experience programs. Students prefer programs that help them develop connections and friendships at their new institution, while others are looking for a course to improve their self-confidence, allowing them to approach future

coursework less anxiously (Everett, 2019). Given the wide range of focus of first-year experience programs, it would be good to find the best components for students and focus on that direction. Considering the lens of Astin (1999), a program that allows students to become better engaged at the institution would benefit them the most. Regardless, creating a program that serves the needs of the whole student can be a solution that bridges the priorities of a wide array of experts (Everett, 2019).

Developing such a program has many components to consider for a successful implementation. Proper professional development of the faculty engaged in the FYE program is critical (Eiselein et al., 2019; Swank & Whitton, 2019). Faculty participating in national FYE program training are exposed to an expanded view of best practices (Eiselein et al., 2019). Building a community of faculty is key to building a similar community for the students (Swank & Whitton, 2019). It is also important to establish the proper goals before the program is developed (Reynolds et al., 2019). A successful FYE program chooses effective faculty for their ability to fit into the program and participate in the development of the program (Swank & Whitton, 2019). It is also important to develop a schedule that makes participation in the program convenient and manageable for both the students and the faculty (Swank & Whitton, 2019).

Einboden et al. (2022) found that students can become engaged by contributing to the development of an FYE program. This approach utilized cooperative inquiry, allowing program developers to learn from the students about their experiences and what would be meaningful to them (Einboden et al., 2022). Students could share concerns in several areas, allowing designers to adapt the program (Einboden et al., 2022). To alleviate concerns about self-confidence, designers included success skills in the design (Einboden et al., 2022). To address time

commitments and students' concerns with scheduling additional studies for the FYE, designers

offered an online option for the course (Einboden et al., 2022). It is critical to learn from students

and course designers which elements of an FYE program could have been more effective in

adjusting for better student engagement and success in the future (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019).

*Academic Research and Projects*

Another way students can improve their success in school is to participate in academic

research and project opportunities with their professors (Berchiolii, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020;

Ro et al., 2020, 2021). Students' interactions with their professors outside the classroom predict

their longer-term success in college (Ro et al., 2020, 2021). Such interactions often lead to

extended research opportunities, paid and voluntary internships, and exposure to connections in

the professional fields associated with the research (Ro et al., 2020, 2021). While some students

express anxiety regarding participation in research following an academic research project,

participating students are happy they decided to be involved, citing academic, social, and

professional benefits (Brewer & Robinson, 2018). Students participating in projects as part of the

learning process have shown an increased interest in the topic, improved collaboration skills, and

retention in the program (Nguyen et al., 2020). Students participating in research applied to

everyday life develop an even greater level of engagement in their academic pursuits (Marley et

al., 2022). In addition, first-year students participating in projects developed better social

awareness and connections (Nguyen et al., 2020). Students at community colleges who

participated in academic projects also showed more significant levels of success. They

experienced higher transfer levels to four-year schools than those who did not (Berchiolii, 2018).

Furthermore, corporate recruiters view students involved in programs that apply their learning to

the career field as the most valuable extracurricular activity when seeking new employees from upcoming or recent college graduates (Stout et al., 2019).

### *Honors Programs and Projects*

Another way students can become more engaged in their institution and improve their likelihood of success is to engage in honors programs at their institution of higher learning (Barclay et al., 2018). Some students view enrolling in honors classes as a way to attend classes with a better student-to-teacher ratio (Schepp et al., 2021). These students also see honors classes as a path to receive improved professional skills for their discipline (Schepp et al., 2021). In addition to students improving their academic performance, honors programs have improved students' social connections (Abizada & Mirzaliyeva, 2021). Students in honors programs also developed stronger connections to the faculty, which, in turn, positively influenced their academic development (Velez et al., 2021). Developing stronger connections is particularly important for first-generation students since they are entering an environment that is not as familiar to them (Williams & Ash, 2021). As expected, students participating in honors programs perform better than those not participating in the honors programs when considering the GPA for these groups (Abizada & Mirzaliyeva, 2021).

This improved GPA is despite coursework in honors programs being more rigorous with more demanding expectations, with the difference in GPA increasing from their first year onward (Abizada & Mirzaliyeva, 2021). One explanation is that honors students approach their academic journey with a different set of perspectives and priorities as compared to non-honors students, being more: ambitious, committed to success, aware, focused, and intrinsically motivated (Barclay et al., 2018). Ironically, though, students enrolling in Honors Colleges or Honors Programs tend to have lower self-confidence than their high-performing peers not in the

program (Clark et al., 2018). For schools to improve the performance of non-honors students, it is necessary to find alternative motivators and develop programs with these in mind (Barclay et al., 2018).

### *Student Cohorts*

Putting students into cohorts is a concept that can have many forms. In some cases, students are put into cohorts or groups of around 25 or fewer students who begin a program simultaneously with the intent of remaining in the program throughout its completion (Lei et al., 2011). Cohorts have been around for decades but have increased in popularity more recently as many schools see greater student success from the participation of the students in the cohort groups (Rice et al., 2022). Wilton and Pananwala (2022) found that medical students enrolled in cohort groups before and during medical school performed better and had a higher probability of completing their medical degree. To improve the success of underrepresented populations, some schools create race-based cohorts, emphasizing additional success skills to help them overcome academic challenges, allowing them to succeed at the same or higher rate than their majority counterparts (Larsen et al., 2020). Bornschlegl and Caltabiano (2022) found that utilizing the cohort for students of diverse populations was an effective tool to introduce student success initiatives and encourage students to seek academic coaching without stigma.

### *Five Senses of Success*

One approach schools have taken to improve student success is to enact Lizzio's Five Senses of Success (Lizzio, 2006). They developed this program to help students transition to college and university life and to overcome the diverse backgrounds and quality of preparation for students. One Australian university utilized the elements of Lizzio's Five Sense program with high school students from economically challenging regions of Australia, resulting in greater

student engagement (Moore & Campbell, 2020). In studying the implementation of the program for students nursing students in Australia, they found that the program helped them access the critical skills they needed to succeed in school (Zimmerman et al., 2019). Non-nursing, non-traditional, and diverse student populations also benefit from the Five Sense program to improve their success rates at institutions in Australia (Larson et al., 2020).

Following the academic disruptions from the COVID-19 shutdowns and remote learning, the Five Sense of Student Success (Pownall et al., 2022) was updated to account for even greater academic deficiencies students encountered. This program, directed at incoming first-year students in colleges and universities, focused on helping students readapt to the learning environment. It also helped students learn some unwritten processes and expectations they may encounter at institutions, such as where to find academic and mental support, how to integrate the learning, social, and possibly work life, and developing effective study skills. The program mitigated mental health challenges created by COVID-19 policies pushed upon students. The program also addressed the inequitable learning environments students have encountered due to COVID-19 restrictions and policies and sought to elevate students to a level starting point as they begin their college journey.

### *Internship Programs*

Many institutions offer students the opportunity to extend their learning while gaining practical skills through a work-learning program called internships (Ranabahu, 2020). Internship programs expose students to their intended future work environment and allow them to apply their preparation in a real-life setting, helping them develop their problem-solving skills (Ranabahu, 2020). Many universities faculty and students also see internships as a way to help students get an early opportunity for employment with the company for which they are interning

following graduation (Fachelli & Fernández-Toboso, 2021). Companies find internship programs valuable as they provide the company with a supply of future employees they can hire (Ho & Squires, 2022). Students participating in summer internship programs during the summer following their first year had a higher retention rate the following academic year (Ro et al., 2021). This retention rate was the same for students with parents with four-year degrees and first-generation college students (Ro et al., 2021). Connecting academic studies to careers also helps students to develop the skills they will need to be successful in their future careers, leading to greater engagement in their academic studies (Trolian, 2019).

Students participating in internships learn their post-college job more quickly and report higher professional satisfaction (Ho & Squires, 2022). In addition to the employment benefits of internships, students who participate in internship programs perform better in their coursework and complete school with a higher GPA than their peers who do not participate in the program (Ho & Squires, 2022). Successful internships are noted as having a defined program related to the student's curriculum and guiding students to industry standards and requirements (Bahari et al., 2022). Internship programs are not without their criticisms, though. Programs that require the students to establish a position with the company and the academic institutions do not develop and coordinate the position responsibilities, such as in Vietnam, often result in students doing menial work unrelated to their study area (Ha & Dakich, 2022). Students experiencing feelings of being exploited, not encouraged by their supervisors, and no rewards for their efforts contributed to dissatisfaction with the program (Bahari et al., 2022).

Students reported greater satisfaction in their internship experience when schools and industry are methodical in placing them in meaningful settings with companies that respect their academic and professional goals (Smith et al., 2019). Students prefer a placement that utilizes

their skills more than one that offers a greater service length or more hours per week (Smith et al., 2019). For a more effective internship program, academic leadership should coordinate with industry contacts to develop semi-professional tasks for students related to their field of study (Ha & Dakich, 2022). Industry leaders found greater challenges when coordinating with university administrators rather than academic and subject matter experts (Ha et al., 2021). In addition, extending internships from one semester to at least a full year is preferential (Ha & Dakich, 2022).

One other area of differentiation of internships is that of paid versus unpaid service from students. There is a discrepancy between the types of students receiving paid internships and those receiving no compensation (Zilvinskis et al., 2020). Analysis by Zilvinskis et al. (2020) showed that female students received paying internships 34% less than their male counterparts. Also, students of Asian heritage often received half the pay compared to their non-Asian counterparts. The pay discrepancy is significant because there is a correlation between students receiving paid internships and future offers of employment students receive prior to graduating from the program (NACE Staff, 2013).

**Academic Success: Student-Initiated Efforts**

Although students may lack a good GPA, higher entrance exam scores, high school coursework rigor, intrinsic motivation, and self-confidence, there are actions students can take to improve their likelihood of success in college. One method to mitigate student deficiencies is for students to live in on-campus housing (Melendez, 2019). There are differing opinions about on-campus housing, and there may be ways to replicate success for commuting students (Bronkema & Bowman, 2019; Simpson & Burnett, 2019). Another mitigation approach for students is to become involved in various student life opportunities (Buckley & Lee, 2021).

*Student Success in On-Campus Housing*

Students can also overcome the obstacles to their preparation by choosing on-campus housing (Astin, 1999; Astin & Oseguera. 2005). Students living on campus enjoy increased academic success and connections to their learning environment (Graham et al., 2018; Melendez, 2019). While studies support the statement that on-campus housing students are more successful both academically and socially (Tinto, 1975) and become more involved in campus life (Astin, 1999), recent studies share this result, but to a lesser degree than in earlier times (Graham et al., 2018). Admittedly, the results found by the Graham et al. (2018) study were limited due to wide variations in on-campus activities and resources for students across various institutions and the types of institutions included and excluded from their study. However, when compared to commuting students, residence hall students experienced improved success (Melendez, 2019). One rationale is that the institution developed programs around students who lived on campus. Therefore, residence hall students would integrate better and become more engaged (Melendez, 2019).

Community colleges have explored creating on-campus student housing as well. In doing so, community college students can benefit from the same academic and social perks as students at four-year schools in areas such as academic support and the development of social bonds (Taylor et al., 2019). Given the changing nature of community colleges, there is a bonus to on-campus housing at community colleges: online learning, satellite campuses, and the commuter culture (Taylor et al., 2019). Campus housing can provide community colleges with the development of the feeling of community and culture more akin to four-year institutions at the two-year college level (Taylor et al., 2019). Developing such a culture is shown to help students

succeed both in academics and social settings (Taylor et al., 2019). On-campus housing also

helps institutions with enrollment, providing students with a housing option, ultimately recruiting

a wider array of students and giving a greater blend to the student body (Taylor et al., 2019). The

on-campus housing benefit holds particularly true for schools in rural areas that require a

commute of 60 miles or more (Taylor et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the creation of on-campus

housing for remote or satellite campuses of an institution does not show a significant increase in

student engagement at the satellite campus (Kwun, 2022). Both on-campus-housed and off-

campus-housed students reported similar levels of engagement with campus activities.

On-campus housing can help with other challenges that have begun to appear. With the

increasing challenge of food insecurity and an inability to meet basic needs, creating on-campus

housing coupled with food services, students can overcome this challenge and focus on their

academic and social endeavors (Broton et al., 2020). First-generation college students often find

it challenging to integrate both in the classroom and social settings (Garvey et al., 2020). On-

campus housing helps to reduce the feeling of isolation for these first-generation students,

eliminating a barrier to social development and improving the likelihood of success (Garvey et

al., 2020).

### *Student Success in Off-Campus Housing*

While students did have various degrees of increased success in residential living, their

successes do not need to be limited to on-campus students (Melendez, 2019). Institutions can

develop programs to better connect commuting students to their academic environment. There

are avenues for student success and engagement outside campus living (Bronkema & Bowman,

2019; Simpson & Burnett, 2019). One factor that can affect student success regardless of the

residential location for students is whether they have friends who also attend classes on campus

(Bronkema & Bowman, 2019). To help develop friendships on campus and encourage students to spend time there, the institutions need to create areas on campus that will encourage students to interact with each other, such as a student union area (Bronkema & Bowman, 2019). Students who live on campus still experience a slight increase in their ability to make friends due to their proximity to campus. Another strategy for increased success is for students to dedicate themselves to coursework with increased rigor, despite their location of residence (Simpson & Burnett, 2019). This study reinforced earlier findings by Astin (1999) that indicated student involvement was a leading indicator of student success but removed the indicator of residence hall living leading to success.

### *Student Life Opportunities*

Not all institutions have the size or funding to offer on-campus housing. While this factor of student success (Astin, 1999) is not available to students at these institutions, institutions can implement other components of student success. One such facet is developing a vibrant and active student life program (Astin, 1999; Astin & Oseguera, 2005). Most institutions have developed student life opportunities in many forms, often seen as originating from the student union. Involvement in social clubs, college sports, intramural sports, honor societies, and Greek life memberships, like fraternities and sororities, increases student involvement at institutions, increasing student success (Schudde, 2019). A positive correlation exists between the number of on-campus student life-hosted events attended by students at a college or university and the student's cumulative GPA (Kulp et al., 2021). Furthermore, students on the Autism spectrum find improved social well-being when student life programs offer more opportunities to connect with their fellow students (Bailey et al., 2019).

**Student Life Initiated Activities on Campus.** Student Life is the department at colleges and universities that encourages student-centered activities outside the classroom and outside academics. These would be activities aside from the institution-initiated efforts for student success and are not branded as success initiatives, and do not require students to enroll or gain membership (Kulp et al., 2021). However, as Astin (1999) and Astin and Oseguerea (2005) have shown, student involvement in student life activities is a strong indicator of student's success in their academic pursuits. Those using recreation facilities at a college or university enjoy a higher retention rate of over 7% (Zegre et al., 2020). While what follows are activities that fall under the student life umbrella, e.g., clubs, honors societies, fraternities, and sororities, Student Life as an organization offers a wide array of opportunities for students to become involved in a less dedicated and more passive inclusion manner (Kulp et al., 2021). Involvement in campus activities, such as non-fraternity and sorority clubs, is seen positively by corporate recruiters (Stout et al., 2019).

Some examples of Student Life initiated activities improving persistence, retention, and thus, student success is on-campus movies screenings, speakers coming to campus (not for a particular class but for the population as a whole), dances, food sharing events, music festivals (again, not class related), game night, and other areas of entertainment for students (Kulp et al., 2021). These less structured activities are informal, allowing students to participate as their interest level and schedule permit (Kulp et al., 2021). Kulp et al. (2021) report that students attending as few as five Student Life events per year can show an increase in their GPA of around .25. Such activities have the benefit of drawing students to campus, nurturing a feeling of connectedness to the campus and community (Kulp et al., 2021). Kulp et al. (2021) found a great benefit to the persistence and retention of first-year students engaging in Student Life activities.

Furthermore, students participating in extracurricular activities at a college or university report more positive relationships with the institution's faculty, creating a better environment for mentoring students, especially among underserved populations (Raposa et al., 2020). Focusing on second-year undergraduate students, De Sisto et al. (2022) found that second-year students engaging in extracurricular activities were much more engaged in the institution and had a more positive view of their academic endeavors.

**Membership in Social Clubs.** Students who participate in on-campus clubs have a higher college success rate. Participating in clubs that include faculty and clubs for purely social purposes contributes significantly to student success in the classroom (Schudde, 2019). In addition, students on the autism disorder spectrum were better engaged in their classrooms if they also participated in social clubs outside of class (Chen et al., 2021). As an additional side benefit, students participating in social club activities also enjoyed a more multicultural college experience, especially at community colleges (Simpson & Bista, 2023). This conclusion is supported by the findings that minorities, especially African American students, are more likely to participate in college social club activities (Schudde, 2019).

**Membership in Club and Intramural Sports.** Students can also find increased academic success when they engage in college and university sports activities (Rundio & Buning, 2022). When examining student participation in club and intramural sports, student grade point averages were increased compared to those not participating in sports (Vasold et al., 2019). Students participating in club sports at colleges and universities had even higher academic success. In a study involving female athletes, there was a positive influence on academic success and the development of relationships for students participating in club sports (Chang et al., 2020). Club sports contribute to building friendships and romantic relationships (Chang et al.,

2020). They also help students build a professional network that can benefit them after graduation (Chang et al., 2020). Female students participating in athletic activities often develop greater self-confidence, contributing to their improved classroom success (Chang et al., 2020). And resolving challenges that arise from club-based sports creates opportunities for student leaders to learn and grow (Rundio & Buning, 2022). The academic benefits students experience justify the continuation and expansion of the program (Rundio & Buning, 2022).

**Honors Society.** Many colleges and universities have been developing honors societies to recognize student achievement and encourage academic excellence (Sommers, 2018). There are many types of honor societies at colleges and universities. There are academic-based organizations, such as Phi Theta Kappa for two-year schools and Phi Beta Kappa for four-year institutions. Other honor societies are limited to the disciplines under which students study. Membership in an honor society is of such significant importance for students that some choose to take coursework within an honors program as a pathway to an honor society within their discipline (Schepp et al., 2021). Colleges can also use the creation of honor societies to help community college students improve their successful transfer to four-year institutions (Shaw et al., 2019).

**Fraternities and Sororities.** While the stereotypical depictions of Greek life organizations such as fraternities and sororities are that of anything but academic pursuits, the reality is that students involved in these organizations tend to do better in school. Studies find that female students in sororities enjoy their college experiences more, have higher GPAs than their non-sorority counterparts, stay in school, and have a higher four-year graduation rate (Bowman & Holmes, 2017). Similar results exist for fraternity members; their satisfaction with

being college students increases, and their retention rates improve. However, freshman fraternity students tend to have lower GPAs (Bowman & Holmes, 2017).

These results support Astin's Student involvement theory that involvement in activities at a college or university improves the students' connection to the school and, therefore, their retention at the institution (Astin, 1999; Astin & Oseguera, 2005). However, segregating fraternities and sororities does not help students in non-inclusive organizations improve their performance. Students in African American fraternities and sororities tend to face academic challenges not experienced in integrated organizations (Chambers& Walpole, 2017). Studies have also shown that Latina students in sororities experience an achievement gap (Orta, 2019). However, this result may be due to other factors, including cultural expectations by the family of this demographic (Orta, 2019). Garcia (2020) found that Latino and Latina membership in fraternities and sororities, respectively, helped students find a place they belonged when attending primarily white institutions. Although students may have still found places on campus where they felt out of place, the Greek organization helped them to feel included.

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

The student involvement theory (Astin, 1999) states that students being more engaged in their institution will be more successful in their academic goals. With roots in the student dropout factors (Astin, 1975), the student involvement theory explains student success in traditional classes, utilizing college resources, and even taking individualized instruction. It theorizes that students engaged in their institutions will succeed in learning environments and be more secure in accessing institutional resources. In light of the student involvement theory and its applications, the reviewed literature discussed the many facets of student success, from student learner traits (Al-Nimer & Mustafa, 2022; Barclay et al., 2018) to the benefits of on-

campus housing (Graham et al., 2018; Melendez, 2019), to involvement in campus activities like clubs (Schudde, 2019), sports (Chang et al., 2020; Vasold et al., 2019), and various societies, both academic and social (Schepp et al., 2021; Bowman & Holmes, 2017). A gap exists in the literature on how students involved in first-year experience programs at community colleges feel connected to their institution. Previous studies on FYE programs did not look at the level of involvement students (Everett, 2019) nor did they explore student success based on traditional standards (Picton, 2018). Studying how first-year experience programs can help students transition to college expectations and college life will benefit both students and institutions of higher learning.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

## Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the retention after the FYE program for second-year college students at Northern Nevada College. These students have opted to participate in a program that includes linked classes, student success strategies, and special advising. The students enrolled in this program in the fall semester of 2022, the first year it was offered. This transcendental study explores the experiences of these students and present them in an organized and thorough analysis. This chapter presents the research design with the study's origins and how it will be applied. It will also include information about the research questions, setting, participants, and my positionality. I present my interpretive framework and the assumptions based on philosophy, ontology, epistemology, and axiology. I also share what my role is concerning this study. Details are presented explaining the procedures for the study, including permissions, recruitment of participants, and data collection in terms of individual interviews, a focus group, and journaling prompts. Finally, details are provided about how data was synthesized and the trustworthiness of the data analysis process. In terms of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is addressed, as well as ethical considerations.

## Research Design

The research for this study followed a transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). The studied population was students who experienced the initial run of a student success program called the FYE. With an initial student population of 110 students with the second year participants eligible for the study being 79, there were an insufficient number of students to conduct a quantitative study. Also, unlike a qualitative study, a quantitative study

does not explore the participants' experiences (Cope, 2014). Therefore, a qualitative study has been conducted to learn about the shared experience of those students who volunteer to participate in the FYE program. The qualitative study is phenomenological (Creswell & Poth, 2018) since the participants have a shared experience of the FYE program.

Edmund Husserl developed the phenomenological study in his book Logical Investigations (Husserl & Moran, 2013). While in its root, a phenomenological study can explore how people experience some event or phenomenon, Vagle (2018) clarified that the phenomenon could be considered how individuals "find ourselves being in relation with others… and other things" (p. 20). This study explores how students have experienced the FYE program together. Their experiences are from a program developed by professionals in the student success field. A transcendental design (Moustakas, 1994) is used since I am not a member of the design or implementation team for the FYE program.

The origins of transcendentalism are rooted in Husserl, with influences by Kant (Moustakas, 1994); the researcher is tasked with finding the essence of the phenomenon, while in a hermeneutical study, researchers consider their own experiences of being part of what is happening (Moustakas, 1994). In a transcendental study, the researcher must conduct research and analysis free from bias in the study's subject matter to determine the phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994). I bracket and remove any bias from data gathering, analysis, and interpretation (Moustakas, 1994) making this a transcendental study.

### Research Questions

In exploring the shared experience for students in the first offering of the FYE program at NNC, it is important to explore how the participants interacted with the various components and components of the program. At NNC, the FYE program enrolled students in a college skills

course and a linked course model that created cohorts in which they attended three to four classes together. The purpose of a cohort is to help students develop connections that will enable them to turn to each other for academic support and social and emotional encouragement. Finally, based on the student involvement theory by Astin (1999) and Astin and Oseguera (2005), it is this study shows how students view involvement in campus activities, such as those offered through Student Life.

**Central Research Question**

How do second-year college students describe their participation in the FYE at Northern Nevada College?

**Sub-Question One**

How do second-year college students describe their prior experiences that influence college retention?

**Sub-Question Two**

How do second-year college students describe their first-year college environment?

**Sub-Question Three**

How do second-year college students describe the influence of the FYE program?

## Setting and Participants

The geographic setting at this institution, which is being called Northern Nevada College (NNC), is as broad as the compilation of the student body. With a large service area, NNC works to give the people in its region the academic preparation they need to succeed in their future academic or professional endeavors. The student body at NNC includes traditional college-age students and a large dual enrollment population comprising 32.7% of the enrollment at NNC (College Navigator, 2022). A Latino population has grown in recent years, allowing the

institution to claim emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status at 26% of the student

body (College Navigator, 2022). The school offers several avenues of student support, from the

JumpStart (dual enrollment) program for high school students to the Latino Leadership Academy

(LLA) (Yingling, 2021) for students of Latino backgrounds. Developing specialized programs

for the Latino population has become a trend nationwide (Peña & Rhoads, 2019). It was not until

the Fall 2022 semester that the school developed and implemented a FYE program to serve all

full-time, traditional-age students, regardless of other background considerations.

**Site**

NNC has an enrollment of approximately 3,800 full-time and part-time students (College

Navigator, 2022). The college has a service area that covers five counties, an area of over 8,000

square miles (College Navigator, 2022). There are currently three campuses in three different

counties, with the largest campus in the capital city. Several learning centers are also throughout

the service area, including at two local prisons. NNC offers a wide range of academic

opportunities, from preparing students to complete a four-year degree at a university to skills

certificates and certificates of completion in career and technical education. Of the student

population, 48% are seeking to transfer for a four-year degree, 29% are planning to earn a

nursing degree or enter a technical career, and the remainder of students are undecided or taking

classes for other purposes (College Navigator, 2022).

The college has undergone several leadership changes in the past four years, with upper

management consisting of a president, interim vice president, a Chief Financial Officer, and

several interim and non-interim director-level positions. NNC is part of a system governed by 13

elected officials, called regents, who hire a chancellor, currently interim, to manage the work of

the presidents of the colleges. NNC has struggled with enrollment decline over the past decade

and has reversed the decline in the past three years, seeing growth from two sectors: expansion in dual enrollment and improving student retention through student success. Students in dual enrollment and the LLA have been provided academic support for their studies, contributing to higher persistence and retention levels (College Navigator, 2022).

**Participants**

The participants of this study are students, 18 or older, who were enrolled in the FYE program at NNC during the previous fall semester. There are 13 students from those participating in and completing this pilot program (Vagle, 2018). These participants are still enrolled at NNC in the Fall 2023 semester. Purposeful sampling was used such that the participants were chosen first using criterion sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2017), and from that group, stratified sampling to be sure a proper cross-section of students is represented in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Participants included are spread across several cohorts. The gender breakdown of the group will target the population breakdown of the school at 54% female and 46% male (College Navigator, 2022). Their experiences are explored, both shared and individual, and how those experiences shaped their impressions of their first year of college.

**Recruitment Plan**

A purposeful sample of 13 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017) was collected from students who participated in the inaugural offering of the FYE program at NNC. The researcher worked with the institutional research department to generate a list of students, approximately 79, who participated in the FYE program, are still enrolled at NNC for their second year, and are not in any courses taught by me. Emails and texts were sent to all students in an attempt to recruit participants. From those responding interested in participating, a sample size of 13 participants was formed, creating a buffer of one if any students fail to complete all portions of

the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). All participants were volunteers and encouraged to participate by being informed of the purpose of the study and by receiving a $10 Amazon card per data collection activity in which they participate: individual interviews, a focus group, and journaling prompts. Participants were informed of the time commitment before consenting to be part of the study. Participants were also be informed that they will have access to all materials related to their involvement in the study, including the study results (see Appendix I). Data collection began within one week of participants agreeing to be part of the study.

## Researcher Positionality

Conducting research can be done in multiple ways; some may include the researcher's experiences, and others may work to eliminate the preconceived perspectives and biases of the researcher. This transcendental phenomenological study eliminates or sets aside the preconceived perspectives and biases that I might have. It is, however, important to understand the general background factors surrounding my mindset. Therefore, I am providing an interpretive framework. I will also examine my philosophical assumptions. These assumptions include the ontological, epistemological, and axiological characteristics of me.

### Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework used in this study is that of social constructivism. As this study looked at the shared experiences of students in the FYE program, the intent was to learn the reality constructed through social interactions. Given the phenomenological nature of the study, social constructivism is the most closely aligned interpretive framework (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). The data collected for this study drives the conclusions drawn and is about the feelings participants had and developed and their interpretations of the program, both good and bad, thus sharing the reality the participants experienced as constructed through their lenses

(Creswell & Poth, 2017). The data shared through the various collection techniques is rich in detail and shares multiple and varied perspectives of the program.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

The researcher must outline philosophical assumptions guiding research design, implementation, and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This research considers ontological, epistemological, and axiological philosophical assumptions. Research is about determining the truth of a situation. My role is to uncover that truth and acknowledge characteristics and traits that could affect the research conducted.

*Ontological Assumption*

Ontological assumptions are the basis of what can be known or what is real (Longhofer et al., 2013). While there are various beliefs about the nature of reality, there is one truth and one reality. Flawed individuals interpret this reality and rarely align between two individuals. However, there can be degrees of agreement between people or groups. As Moustakas (1994) described the difference between noema, the true meaning and reality of what is happening, and noesis, the act of trying to understand what is happening, the challenge of any research is determining the reality. I have developed and will conduct this study with a Biblical worldview and the belief that it is the individual's responsibility to learn and understand the reality or the noema of the situation. In this study, I am attempting to establish the reality of participants' experiences through methodology and analysis.

*Epistemological Assumption*

Epistemological assumptions are associated with how claims about knowledge are made (Longhofer et al., 2013). In research, these assumptions guide how truths are justified. Unlike constructionist epistemology, where reality is constructed, or subjectivist epistemology, where

the individual develops an often-unique understanding of reality based on past experiences

(Moon & Blackman, 2017), this study pursued knowledge in its pure form. I believe that

knowledge in pure form exists, but it is up to the individual to seek it through varied sources and

interpretations of events. Using data collection techniques that involve extensive time gathering

direct participant accounts, subjective epistemological accounts may be provided. However,

through analysis, it is the researcher's responsibility to consider the subjective nature of the

participants' accounts and instead deduce the nature of the shared experience.

### *Axiological Assumption*

While this is a transcendental phenomenological study in which bracketing and removing

the researcher's bias must occur, my analysis includes the axiological assumptions inherent in

any qualitative study. It is a concluding goal to present an analysis, and this analysis will include

my value structure (Creswell & Poth, 2017), which includes a Biblical worldview. I have worked

in the student success area as a Chief Enrollment and Student Success Officer (CESSO) and a

Vice President of Student Success and Support Services (VPSSSS). Student success has become

part of my foundational interest in seeing students succeed in higher education. While I no longer

work in this area and have returned to my professor position, I bracket out any connection I feel

to the FYE program to remove bias. It is also important to consider that I am a middle-aged

white male with 29 years in the education field, 25 of which are in higher education, most of

which is as a professor.

### Researcher's Role

I am the human instrument of this study and interpret the information shared by the

students in conveying the shared experience of the FYE program. I am a full-time tenured

mathematics faculty member at Northern Nevada College. None of the participants of this study

are students in any of my classes for two reasons: these students will have already completed their first-semester college-level courses, and my instructional load is largely based on dual enrollment students at the high school level. Before 2022, I served temporarily as the vice president for student success. In that role, I worked on strategies for and attended various seminars to promote student success, especially during their first year at college. Also, in that role, I supervised the director who developed and hired the staff who would eventually create and implement the FYE program. Since I am no longer in an administrative role, I have no vested interest in the FYE program nor any authority over the implementation of the program. The previous work experience generated an interest in the topic of student success but did not contribute to the professional responsibility of the researcher.

While my long-term role and experience are in mathematics instruction, a qualitative design was chosen since the student population in the FYE needed to be increased to develop a sample size capable of conducting a quantitative analysis. Therefore, through qualitative research I was able to conduct interviews, a focus group, and collect journal writings to best express the shared experiences of the participants who have been part of the inaugural class of the FYE program. As college professor, the college provided Zoom to collect data and other resources to complete this research. I had support from the current president and vice president to gather data related to the FYE program. Finally, I had the support of the director of the Counseling department and the coordinator of the FYE program to gather data related to the program to offer potential suggestions for improvement. The director of Institutional Research assisted in developing the list of participants for the research.

**Procedures**

The procedures followed in collecting data for this study were significant. Following the process outlined by Moustakas (1994), the first step was to bracket out any bias that could impact the study. Given that this study is transcendental phenomenological research, the presumption was that there will be no bias. Despite this, it is important to consider potential biases when developing the study (Moustakas, 1994). Developing ths study included creating the structure of the study, in this case developing the types of data collection: interviews, focus group, and journaling; and developing the questions associated with those (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Following the construction of the questions, permission was obtained from the Liberty IRB, the local IRB, and the institution. From this point, students were recruited to be participants in the study and data was collected. After collecting data, intuition used in conjunction with the data to develop epoche (Moustakas, 1994), or a picture of the result of the students in the FYE program. With an unbiased picture of the situation being studied, an analysis (Moustakas, 1994) was conducted with the help of NVivo. Participant data was reviewed with an analysis beginning through horizonilation, reduction and elimination, clustering, and the identification of themes (Moustakas, 1994). These identified themes were validated through the review of the data from several sources. Ultimately, utilizing NVivo, the repetitive themes were clearly evident indicating there was commonality with the various participants. Finally, a description of these validated themes (Moustakas, 1994) was developed to share both common themes and subthemes, as well as developing implications of the study.

**Data Collection Plan**

In conducting transcendental phenomenological research, gathering data is the foundation of the study. The goal is to complete a picture of the shared phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), in

this case, through the experiences of those enrolled in the inaugural FYE program at NNC. Gathered data utilized triangulation in three methods (Creswell & Poth, 2017): one-on-one interviews with participants in the program, a focus group with six of the participants interviewed, and a review of journaling prompts from each participant. The participants have completed the program within a year of the data collection, during the Fall 2022 semester. No data collection occured before receiving IRB approval (Creswell & Poth, 2017) from both Liberty University and NNC. First, upon approval of my committee, I applied for IRB approval from Liberty University. Once the Liberty IRB approved the proposal, I sought IRB approval through an application process with NNC. In addition, the Academic Advising Department will grant approval, which includes the Student Success office.

The list of students generated included students who are currently enrolled at NNC, excluding students who transferred or stopped attending college as well as students who were in classes taught by the researcher. Recruitment for this study was challenging. After receiving IRB approval from both Liberty University and the University of Nevada (the local IRB institute), student email address information was provided. Following three email attempts which included the information and permission letters (see Appendix F), the IRB department at NNC along with the directors of the Counseling and Admissions and Records suggested that the students be contacted via their registered cell phone using texting. IRB approval was given for this and successful contact with students was made. Once students agreed following the email with the permission (see Appendix F) and texting, arrangements were made to conduct interviews of each participant. Six of the participants joined a focus group to get their perspectives while being in a group. Finally, each participant was sent journaling questions. This was the most challenging to get returned, but it eventually happened. Audio recordings of the interviews and the focus group

were made and used in creating transcripts for the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Recordings were duplicated and maintained on a hard drive stored in a locked office.

**Individual Interviews**

In one-on-one interviews, 13 participant volunteers were selected to share their experiences and feelings about the FYE program. In interacting with the participants, they were addressed and treated as co-researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994) who were helping, through their responses, shape and adjust the program for a future version. Interviewing participants was a critical first step in data gathering. Students were asked questions based on Moustakas's (1994) research found in Creswell and Poth (2017, p. 79) in the following guidance: "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" The goal was to ask participants open-ended questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017) to elicit a broad range of perspectives to develop a clear picture of their shared experiences. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was conducted online using the Zoom tool using a set of questions as a guide (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Although interviews were conducted via Zoom, with the participants' permission (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994), only an audio recording was made and transcripts created from the recordings (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Vagle, 2018). In addition, interviews were 45 to 60 minutes to not overburden the participants. Participants can access recordings and transcripts upon request (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

**Table 1**

*Individual Interview Questions*

1. Please describe your high school educational background that prepared you for college through your current year. CRQ

2. How does your family feel about education? SQ1

3. What type of extracurricular activities did you participate in as a student in high school? SQ1

4. How did you view yourself as a student in high school? SQ1

5. What was your perception of college while you were still in high school? SQ1

6. How does your family feel about you being in higher education? SQ1/SQ2

7. Why did you choose to participate in the FYE program to begin your college career? SQ2

8. What was your perception of the cohort structure of the program? Most/Least liked? SQ2

9. How did the FYE program provide meaningful college opportunities? SQ2

10. Describe your peer interactions within the linked course structure of the classroom environment. SQ2

11. How did the FYE program live up to your expectations? SQ2/SQ3

12. How did the FYE program influence your educational values as you moved into your second college year? SQ3

13. What academic habits did you develop from your experience in the cohort? SQ3

14. While you were participating in the FYE program, what were your expectations for your second year of college? SQ3

15. How have you grown into your second college year expectations? SQ3

16. What else would you like to add to our discussion about the FYE program that we have not yet discussed? CRQ

Astin (1999) identified various elements of the college experience that are indicative of student success. The first indicator was students living on campus. The second indicator was students becoming involved in student life activities at the institution. Another indicator was students making on-campus friends, which encourages their presence on campus and involvement in student life activities (Roska et al., 2020). While on-campus living is not an option at NNC, involvement in on-campus activities and making friends are components the student success initiative can prioritize.

The focus of the questions follows the structure of the Central Research question and the three sub-questions. The sub-questions from one to three follow the three phases: student background, the FYE program, and the result of being in the program (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). These sub-questions create the theme of the interview questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017); exploring their backgrounds begins with a broad look at how the participants see how they progressed from high school to now. Following these questions were probing questions from numbers two through five about how high school prepared them for college, including family opinions towards higher education (Astin & Oseguera, 2005) to transition the focus to their experiences within the program. Next, questions seven through 10 questioned about their involvement in the program to elicited their observation about how the program showed them ways to be involved in campus activities (Astin, 1999) and with the hope of them mentioning the forming of connections with classmates (Bronkema & Bowman, 2019). Question 11 is a transitioning question to inquire about being in the program and how it affected them. The next questions, 12 through 15, ask about the program's affect on them, seeking the course's long-term

influence. The design of the questions is to show how their impression of college and their approach toward college may have changed and how involved they may be at this point (Astin, 1999). The interviews concluded with a general question about anything they would like to share regarding their perspective on the program (Bhattacharya, 2017).

**Focus Group**

Given that this experience is several months old, it was also helpful to gather data from "intersubjective communication" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57). Therefore, one focus group of six participants formed from those interviewed was conducted, during which participants were asked open-ended questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994) and were able to correct or adjust their responses based on recollections aided through the interactions with other participants. Focus groups enable the researcher to better understand the phenomenon studied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This focus group was conducted via Zoom, with only an audio recording being made. A transcript was created from the audio recording. This format is valuable considering an amalgamation of responses can help to present an image of the fundamentals of the shared experience (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). The themes generated from the interviews were compared with those expressed in the focus group. This comparison also acted as a second of the three triangulations of data collection.

**Table 2**

*Focus Group Questions*

1. What was the most significant deciding factor to participate in the FYE program? CRQ

2. How have your family values led you to go to college? SQ1

3. What prepared you the most for entering college? SQ1

4. What has been the best college experience you have had so far? SQ2

5. What has been the most challenging aspect of college? SQ2

6. How has the FYE Program guided your academic interactions? SQ2/SQ3

7. What was the best outcome of the FYE program? SQ3

8. What was the most influential moment you recall from the FYE program? SQ3

9. What else would you like to add to our conversation about the FYE Program? CRQ

As stated earlier, the theme of the questions followed the sub-questions in that they looked at how the participants were prepared for college through their high school time phase of life, followed by their interactions within the FYE program, concluding with ways the program affected their social and academic life (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). Questions two and three asked participants about their background from high school, seeking insight into what they brought to college (Astin & Osegura, 2005). The following questions, four and five, were designed to learn the participant's perspective on the FYE program as they were in the program, having completed it (Astin, 1999). Question six was a transition question, bridging from the FYE phase to their current class level, second-year students (Kift et al., 2010). It examines how they believed the FYE program guided their academic journey (Astin, 1999). Questions seven and eight were reflection questions, pushing students to identify how their academic journey may have changed due to the program (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). The final question was a general catch-all question for other observations they had regarding the influence of the program on their academic progress (Astin & Oseguera, 2005).

**Journal Prompts**

Finally, participants were asked to journal from prompts relating to the program (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). Journaling enabled them to reflect on their experiences without the fear of speaking in front of a group, being talked over in the focus group, or the pressure of

forgetting a response on the spot (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Participants had more time to consider how the program influenced their time in college and how they applied what they learned (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Furthermore, following the focus group, the intersubjective nature of the group meeting allowed participants to determine if the topics discussed applied to their inner perception of the program (Moustakas, 1994). Reflection time, apart from the researcher and other participants, allowed the individual time to determine how the experience appeared to them (Moustakas, 1994). Journaling acts as the third leg of data triangulation to minimize errors in the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The themes expressed in journaling were compared with those gathered in the interviews and the focus group. Participants were emailed questions with a requested due date of one week for them to email their responses.

**Table 3**

*Journaling Prompts*

The FYE program was designed to help students be more successful in college. Please write about each of the following with a thorough and detailed response for each question:

1. Describe how your family upbringing has influenced your education. SQ1

2. How were your expectations of the FYE program fulfilled when you entered college? SQ1/SQ2

3. What were the most memorable friendship interactions that developed from the FYE program? SQ2

4. Describe three college activities that you participated in that guided your perception of college. SQ2/SQ3

5. As a second-year college student, in what ways have your values changed from your first year? Why? SQ3

As with the interview and focus group questions, these questions followed students' path to reach this point (Astin & Oseguera, 2005): pre-college experiences, the First-Year Experience program, and applications for the FYE program. The first question allowed them to reflect upon their high school experience and how it prepared them for college (Asting & Oseguera, 2005). The second question asked them how the FYE program compared to their expectations of the program (Astin, 1999). Question three considered the program's influence on their ability to develop friendships (Astin, 1999; Bronkema & Bowman, 2019). The fourth question applied Astin's (1999) student involvement theory to their time in the FYE program, as it directly addressed how the students may be involved in campus activities due to being in the program. The final question asked students to reflect upon their academic journey in how they have changed from their experiences at the college (Astin, 1999; Astin & Oseguera, 2005).

## Data Analysis

Following the collection of the three data types, there was an analysis conducted to determine how the FYE program impacted students' learning experiences. Following a thorough and comprehensive transcription of the interviews and focus group, the data was loaded into NVivo, the qualitative analysis software, for a review of the statements made by students. This tool was valuable in analyzing the data collected and produced clearly identifiable themes.

**Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan**

Interviews with participants were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. Transcriptions of the interviews were completed immediately following the interview session, comparing the resulting transcription and the audio recording for accuracy. Adjustments were then made to the transcription to have an exact written version of the participants' responses. Vagle (2018) suggested an entire reading of the transcript materials first, followed by an in-depth

reading, line by line. These re-readings illuminate questions within the researcher that can be clarified by the participant. Recurring re-readings are important in performing due diligence (Bhattacharya, 2017). Then, these updated transcripts were uploaded into the analysis software NVivo where the data analysis process began. Examining each response from each participant, coding both inductive and deductive was used to analyze their expressed experiences. While coding began by reviewing the data and identifying phrases and references to common experiences, inductive coding, the derivation of themes, also considered the research question and sub-questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The themes led to creating a list of all relevant experiences, or "horizonalization" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). From these coded terms (Creswell & Poth, 2017), categories were identified and used in later comparisons in the data synthesis phase. Exploration of patterns from recurring code terms formed categories (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These patterns were compared against and organized by the research question and sub-questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

In this analysis, I asked questions about the participants' responses to develop the coding and the categories. In the context of this study, I explored how people have experienced the FYE program. Therefore, I looked for frequent terms and phrases among the participants. I explored if a phrase expressed what participants say about this topic. I asked: what are the crucial and necessary terms or phrases to describe the responses from the participants? What do these groups or ideas show about the FYE program? Are there recurring ideas? The answers to these questions helped to build the coding for the analysis.

**Focus Group Data Analysis Plan**

The focus group sessions were audio recorded using an audio recording device (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A transcriptions was conducted following the focus group session. Upon

completing a transcription, a review of the written work was compared to the audio recording to correct errors and ensure accuracy. Again, a thorough reading was conducted first, followed by a line-by-line review of the participant's responses (Vagle, 2018). This transcripts was loaded into the NVivo analysis software where the coding of statements was completed (Creswell & Poth, 2017). All data was coded (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Holley & Harris, 2019) initially using inductive coding. The identified common concepts were then grouped into categories of the participants' shared experiences. Data synthesis used these categorized, coded terms (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The apparent themes were compared against the research question and sub-questions, forming a hybrid coding process between the inductive and deductive (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The significance of statements was considered in how and why participants made them (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The goal was to determine the recurring common themes and terms that created a comprehensive image of the shared experience (Moustakas, 1994).

**Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan**

Unlike the other two data collection methods, this approach includes a written response directly from the participants. Since the information is sent directly from the participants, there was no need to verify the accuracy of the information. As earlier, these responses were read in their entirety, then again in more detail to seek any missed words, phrases, or contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Vagle, 2018). These written responses were reviewed and coded, with data loaded into analysis software NVivo where how the participants experienced the FYE program was analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Significant statements were coded using an inductive approach to cluster ideas into categories (Moustakas, 1994). These categories were compared against the research question and sub-questions and used in later data synthesis for all three data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Again, in developing codes, it was helpful to ask various questions to develop terminology, subcategories, and even categories (Moustakas, 1994). What was different in this setting is that students will have a journal prompt and a longer amount of time to formulate and express their thoughts on the topics (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Journaling also followed both the interview and the focus group activity, which will helped them to recall their experiences better. Journaling provided a deeper, richer account of their experiences in the program (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Coding was built on the same framework as before, though, with similar questions and considerations.

**Data Synthesis**

Following the three data collection methods, an analysis was conducted to interpret the data. The intent was to conduct an inductive analysis of the data to apply these results to the greater community of FYE students (Bhattacharya, 2017). Initially, these transcripts and the written responses were read and re-read to become more familiar with the participants' experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). NVivo was used to analyze the data collected. This program was used both in the initial analysis of data and in the synthesis of data analysis.

Upon completing the initial data analysis from each of the three data collection techniques, further examination was conducted of the terms that had been coded and categorized. Then, themes were created from the coded terms that emerged from frequent appearances across multiple data collection methods. Recurring subthemes from coding allowed for the emergence of themes (Bhattacharya, 2017). It is also interesting to explore co-occurrences of coded terms that have been recorded and consider how those fit within the study context.

Reading and re-reading the coded information connects themes and concepts. Several questions were able to be answered relating to the study: What happened in the FYE program?

What is a common experience for most students in the program? How do these experiences address the central question or any of the sub-questions of this study? Is further exploration needed to examine outlier experiences? How do these experiences compare to the theoretical framework of this study (Bhattacharya, 2017)? These questions help to develop how this study addressed the central questions. Once a thorough review of the coding and themes had been exhausted, it was possible to continue to the next study phase.

Having collected and organized the data, it was then possible to construct an account of the program and its influences on students. This account, however, was from the perspective of the participants who experienced the program. With the set of codes, categories, and themes, the document conveyed the full experiences of those involved (Vagle, 2018). As Moustakas (1994) phrased it, the development of a "textural-structural description" (p. 123) expressed the shared experiences of the entire group, not just the individuals. This textural illustration conveyed the "what" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122) of the FYE, while the structural illustration conveyed the "how" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). In sharing the account of the participants, it was critical to answer what and how they experienced the FYE program (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

## Trustworthiness

In any study, the results derived from the data collected and analyzed are only as good as the level of trust readers have in the work completed. Shenton (2004) summarized that the trustworthiness of a study has four main components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Added to this are the ethical considerations of a study. Trustworthiness gives the reader confidence in the study's methodology, analysis, and purpose (Bhattacharya, 2017). Aside from establishing effective sampling techniques (Holley & Harris, 2019), adequately addressing potential concerns about a study's validity is essential to completing the study.

**Credibility**

Credibility is a concept that references how true the data is or how accurate are the views of the participants in the study (Cope, 2014). As with any study, it is important to establish credibility in the research conducted. In ensuring credibility, this study will reflect reality regarding the participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The intent is to express the reality these participants have experienced in conveying their truth about experiencing the FYE program: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking to establish credibility (Phoenix et al., 2020).

*Triangulation*

To ensure accurate and consistent data collection, triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2017) was implemented in gathering participant data about the FYE program. First, participants were interviewed (Moustakas, 1994) for approximately one hour each. Next, six participants engaged in a focus group (Bhattacharya, 2017). Finally, participants replied to journaling prompts (Bhattacharya, 2017) emailed to them. Interviews captured their first impressions of the questions and their initial recollections. The focus group allowed participants to recall shared experiences through "intersubjective communication" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57), possibly helping them to recall forgotten details. Journaling through prompts allowed participants to share their experiences after a reflection period and outside of the pressures of the group setting. Triangulation was used to gain deeper insight into participants' experiences and improve the quality of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Flick, 2007; 2008; 2011). Triangulation also brings credibility to a study, having cross verified with three data collection sources (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

*Peer Debriefing*

While this research is relatively new, as evidenced by the gap in the literature surrounding the topic, peer experts can review the data from the FYE program. Peer debriefing is a reflective process allowing individuals to reflect on the performance or progress based on feedback from their peers (Doherty-Restrepo et al., 2018). At NNC, this peer group consists of the program's developers, instructors, and staff who work with the students in the program. As data is collected and analyzed, coded, and themed, data was shared with these professionals to illuminate any questions arising (Bhattacharya, 2017). These individuals have first-hand knowledge of the program and its delivery. They were able to verify the information collected aligned with their program design and implementation and explain the outlier results that were identified.

*Member Checking*

Through all parts of data collection: interviews, focus group, and journaling prompts, member checking (Bhattacharya, 2017) occurred to clarify terminology used by participants as well as extreme or unexpected experiences. During interviews, participants were asked to clarify unfamiliar statements or confusing concepts. These interviews were followed by sharing the transcripts with the participants (Shenton, 2004) to verify the accuracy of the data collected. Any concepts needing clarification was addressed directly to the participant who shared the data. The focus group was treated similarly, probing for clarification for unfamiliar statements or concepts. The journaling prompts did not require transcription; however, any topics, phrases, or concepts found within these documents were clarified, as needed, with input from participants.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the results of a study to a broader population (Cope, 2014). Qualitative studies do not allow the drawing of inductive conclusions to a larger population. Instead, they provide information for the readers to draw a conclusion and apply as they see appropriate (Cope, 2014). Within this qualitative study, sufficient detail is shared to allow the reader to understand the boundaries of the data collected (Shenton, 2004). There is also a detailed description of the data collected, and the analysis of this data so that readers can draw conclusions and apply them to populations they feel is appropriate. They may expand the findings to all FYE students, or they may determine that this group was unique in its experiences and the reason that the findings are limited to the participants included in the study. Depending on the data collected, such consistency may be present that conclusions will have greater applicability.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the ability to produce similar results if the study is replicated (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This proposal presents the study characteristics in detail (Shenton, 2004), which is sufficient for another study iteration. Using the same techniques for interviews, the focus group, and journaling, future research could replicate these results for 12 to 15 participants selected from those who underwent the inaugural class, or possibly a subsequent semester, of the FYE program at Northern Nevada College. With 110 participants in the first run of this program, it is possible to find other groups to share their experiences. What might be different, though, is that as more time passes, recollections of their shared experiences may be less strong. This study was conducted within a year of completing the FYE program. Delaying replication of the study could result in slightly different findings. However, another study

iteration conducted more immediately should have similar results. To further ensure

dependability, the dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director could conduct an

inquiry audit to examine how the research was conducted and what was produced from this

study.

**Confirmability**

Delivering a study that represents the experiences and feelings of the participants, absent

those of the researcher, is the basis of confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Several steps have been

taken to ensure this study exhibits confirmability. First, triangulation was used to test and verify

participant data is consistent and accurate. This study proposal justified data collection types.

Data collected from participants created an audit trail of when, where, and how data collection

occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This audit trail will also included information about how data

was analyzed, and conclusions drawn in the final report. Establishing and sharing the data

analysis process helped verify confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Finally, reflexivity establishes my

background and relationship to the project to remove bias from the study while also noting how

bracketing was used (Creswell & Poth, 2017). As stated earlier, this program does not affect my

professional responsibilities, allowing me to remain neutral to its findings. With the goal of

student success, the conclusions drawn do not directly affect me or my workload.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to commencing data collection, several steps were followed. First, IRB approval

from Liberty University and Northern Nevada College was granted. Receiving such approval

required the completion of several training courses that provided instruction on how to protect

the participants while gathering data. Evidence of permission from the administration of NNC

was also required prior to permission from the NNC IRB. Protecting the privacy and personal

information of the participants was of utmost concern in this study. Participants needed to feel

confident that they could share their experiences without consequences.

*Permissions*

Before collecting any data related to the FYE program and student success at Northern

Nevada College (NNC), permission was obtained from several groups. First, permission from the

Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was requested and received (see Appendix

A).  Permission from the NNC IRB was also obtained (see  Appendix B). This permission was

two-fold. One, permission was sought from the NNC IRB to do unsupervised research since I am

not a student at a school within the system to which NNC belongs. Second, permission was

granted to conduct the actual research. Permission from the NNC president was received and

available in Appendix C. Finally, permission from each participant was received and stored. A

copy of the participant permission letter is available in Appendix E.

*Other Participant Proctections*

All potential participants were informed that participation is voluntary and does not affect

their grades or academic standing at NNC. They were also informed that they may withdraw

from the study at any time. Potential participants were informed that their participation and

contributions are confidential. Before interviewing participants, permission will also be received

from each participant. All participants were expected to be of majority age; therefore, no

permission was necessary from the parents or guardians of participants. No participants in the

study was under the supervision or instruction of the researcher. Data collected from interviews,

the focus group, and journaling was saved on a portable hard drive that is stored in a locked desk

in the locked office of the researcher. The names of participants was changed to protect their

anonymity. All data will be destroyed three years following the completion of this study

(*Institutional Review Board | Liberty University*, 2022). There are no expected risks to participants associated with this study. If students experience distress at recalling their experiences in the program, counseling services were available to help students cope with their trauma.

## Summary

Through a transcendental phenomenological study of students' shared experiences in the FYE program, the experiences of 13 students was collected, analyzed, and shared. A quantitative analysis is not feasible with only 110 students in the initial program; however, a qualitative study was well suited. Data was collected from participant volunteers using three data collection techniques: interviews, a focus group, and journal writing. Data was analyzed using the qualitative research software, NVivo. Initially, coding began with the inductive process; however, deductive coding linked phrases to themes. Finally, the trustworthiness of the analysis was established through credibility strategies and an audit trail. The analysis of the shared experiences is presented to the reader, and the transferability of the findings are for the reader to determine. The dependable nature of the participant selection suggests that the study can be repeated with similar, if not identical, results.

# CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

## Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences with the FYE program for second-year college students at Northern Nevada College. The following will provide participant data information, including the course level that took in high school, family education attitude, involvement in on-campus activities, and what they feel is best about the FYE program. There are also themes and subthemes presented as produced by a thorough review of the data using NVivo. Outliers of data that represent limited responses are also included. Finally, answers to the Central Research Question and the Sub Questions are also provided.

## Participants

A list was generated by the institutional research department from the population of students who completed the FYE program and were not students in any of my classes. The list provided included 79 students. Of the list of 79 students, 13 participated in the study, with six students joining the focus group. Following the interviews and focus group, students were given journaling prompts to return. The journaling prompts proved to be a helpful activity for some participants since they had time to reflect on their answers following the interview and focus group. The participant population followed closely with the demographic breakdown of the institution, both racially and by gender. A brief biographical description is provided in Table 4.

**Table 4**
*Participants*

| FYE Participant | High School Course Level & Attitude | Family Education Attitude | Active on campus | Best Part of FYE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jennifer** | Honors & AP Courses, focused on doing well | Family supports education, cautious of some colleges | Did some Student Life activities | Making new friends |

| FYE Participant | High School Course Level & Attitude | Family Education Attitude | Active on campus | Best Part of FYE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Javier** | Mostly Honors and AP<br><br>Did not maintain rigor | Family supports education, encouraged college | Yes, able to get on-campus job through FYE | Helped to make connections |
| **Robert** | Honors and AP classes, school focused on higher level classes | In favor of college, parents want better opportunities for him | Most classes are online, but uses library to study, some student life activities | Liked learning about where resources are on campus |
| **Scott** | Honors and AP student, did not pass AP tests | Family encouraged education and expected him to go to college | Enjoyed using the Library and Student Life activities | Has the confidence to take future classes |
| **Frederick** | Attended a college prep private school | Family is pro-education, want him to go as far as possible | Uses library and academic coaching | Meeting new people, both students and professors |
| **Ronald** | Average classes, generally earned As & Bs | Family feels college is important-would not attend without their support | Not involved in campus activities, would like to do more | Helped to see the value of in-person classes, liked meeting people |
| **Maria** | English class prepared her for college | Family expects her to earn at least a bachelor's | Very involved in campus activities, joined ASNN | Made friends and learned to reach out to counselors |
| **Samantha** | Honors courses freshman and sophomore years | Family very supportive of education | Uses campus resources, library | Scheduling and prioritizing |
| **Camila** | Honors & AP classes, dedicated student | Mother supported education if she wanted to go, did not push her | Very involved in campus activities, joined ASNN | The friends and connections she make in the program |

| FYE Participant | High School Course Level & Attitude | Family Education Attitude | Active on campus | Best Part of FYE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Suzanna** | One AP class, other classes regular classes | Family values education to give kids more opportunities | Not involved in campus activities | Learned time management and not to procrastinate |
| **Santiago** | Some honors classes, no AP classes, did not put in effort until senior year | Family sees education as a priority | Not involved in campus activies | Learned to better communicate with classmates |
| **Luis** | Did not take challenging classes in high school | Parents want him to finish school because they did not | Highly involve in campus life, senator for ASNN | Making friends and developing a strong support group |
| **Esmelda** | Enrolled in English 100 as a high school student, had other AP courses as well | Mother supported education, wanted a better life for her | Very involved in campus activities, senator for ASNN | Making friends, time management, not procrastinating |

**Jennifer**

Jennifer described herself as a hard working and studious person in high school. She took honors and AP classes and graduated with an advanced diploma. She comes from a family that supports higher education but can be skeptical of some colleges and the curriculum they teach. Her parents want Jennifer to earn at least one degree. In high school she was not involved in many extra-curricular activities, but she did participate in the drama club. She viewed herself as a shy and introverted student before coming to NNC.

Jennifer thought college was going to be challenging, with large lecture halls and very little interaction with her professors. Jennifer joined the FYE program at the recommendation of her counselor. She liked the structure because it allowed her to work with the same group of students for three classes. The FYE program enabled her to make friendships that endured into her second year of college. Jennifer enjoyed the CPD class and the projects assigned which she

attributed to her developing connections with classmates. She feels her second year is much better than her first year, something she credits the FYE program for providing her.

**Javier**

Javier found high school difficult. He was enrolled in mostly honors classes, with some Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Given his rigorous academic preparation in high school, Javier believed he was better prepared for the college level work when he began at NNC. Javier's biggest struggle was time management. His parents, both immigrants, were very supportive of education, and he recalled being told about college as early as eight years old to help him get a better career. In high school Javier was involved in choir, orchestra, and boxing. Despite being enrolled in rigorous classes, Javier viewed himself as a poor, unmotivated student. He saw his time at NNC as an opportunity to reverse that trend.

He liked the freedom built into the college program with due dates but free from micromanagement. Javier liked being able to complete assignments in a manner that worked for him, as long as it was by the due date. His academic goal is to become an architect. Javier joined the FYE program due to an overwhelming fear of college demands. He really liked the cohort program and how it introduced him to other people. His only critique was that he would have preferred larger cohorts. Javier credited the FYE program with helping him to get scholarships and even his on-campus job. He also credited the program with helping him to develop personal habits such as time management and used these skills to determine an appropriate work-life balance of time.

**Robert**

Robert attended high school at a private religious school. While there he enrolled in mostly honors classes with one AP class. His parents had mixed feelings about education. With a

father who did not finish high school and a mother who completed some college classes, Robert's parents were supportive of school but were concerned about the cost. Robert did not view himself as a hard working student, but was busy with work and other activities like sports during his high school years. He looked forward to going to college to branch out and meet more people, a priority of his coming from a smaller private high school. The opportunity to meet new people along with the preparation the FYE program offered were key motivators for Robert enrolling in the program. He enjoyed the cohort structure because it allowed him work work with the same group of people and better develop connections with others. He also credited the FYE program and the CPD class within the program for helping him to develop skills for success and utilize the resources available at the college.

Robert was able to find on-campus employment through the work-study program, something he also attributed to his involvement with the program and his CPD class. He also appreciated the study skills, like time management and not procrastinating, that he developed through the FYE program. He also enjoyed the study space provided by the library for both individual and groups studying opportunities. Robert lamented the fact that he only had one in-person class for the fall semester of year two. However, he still opted to come to campus to utilize the resources and study space.

**Scott**

Scott was enrolled in honors and AP classes throughout his high school career. While he was not very successful on the AP exams, he did appreciate the boost in GPA that these classes gave him. Scott was involved in extracurricular activities in high school, both club based and sports. He critiqued himself for his high school grades, admitting that he could have earned higher marks. His family highly encouraged him through education and in particular for college,

a trait he attributed to his culture and ethnic background. Scott joined the FYE program to avail himself of more opportunities at the college, in particular with the CPD course within the program.

Scott liked the cohort structure of the program because it made making friends easier. He described the cohort as a community that made him feel comfortable. He found himself drawn to the library and what it offered him as a student. He also liked the accountability and guidance of the program to keep him moving and motivated. Scott also found that the FYE program helped him to earn scholarships, removing a concern of the affordability of college.

**Frederick**

Frederick also attended a private religious school for high school. He described his high school as being college preparatory and that the coursework was designed to prepare the students to be successful in college. Therefore, Frederick believed he was more prepared for college than his public school peers. He believed that he was prepared to perform at a high level in college. His parents were very supportive of his academic journey, especially as he transitioned to the college level. Frederick was very active in high school, being involved in sports as well as being part of the national honor society. He even had a part-time job when he was in high school. He described that period of his life as being constantly busy.

While not being at the top of his class, Frederick saw himself as a very studious and self-motivated student. He had concerns about college based on other people's experiences, but those fears were alleviated when he began at NNC. He joined the FYE program at the recommendation of his counselor to help him be better prepared for his academic goal, psychology. Frederick enjoyed the program and in particular the cohort structure. He appreciated being able to work with a group of students with whom you could become comfortable and not be concerned about

expressing yourself. Frederick credited the FYE program with helping him to branch out and meet new people, both students and faculty. The FYE program helped broaden his education. He also connected his experience in the FYE program with helping him begin his second year with less anxiety and more confidence that he can be successful. The FYE program showed him where to find resources, such as the library, a place he chooses to study to minimize distractions. Frederick is glad he enrolled in the program and carried the confidence he grew into his subsequent terms.

**Ronald**

Ronald described himself as an average student in high school, taking college preparatory classes except for one AP course and earning average grades. He was involved in some extracurricular activities in high school such as theater. Ronald's parents were supportive of education and are proud that he is enrolled in college. His expectation of college was different from what he experienced. Ronald thought college would be more hands on with applications in his subject area of interest, computer science. He was disappointed that the first year of his studies limited him to general education courses, comparing the type of classes he had completed to high school topics.

Ronald joined the FYE program to meet new people and was happy to encounter fellow students with similar interests. He was disappointed and discouraged during his second year since he had to take online courses due to difficulty in transportation to college. Ronald does credit the FYE program with helping him to improve his time-management skills. Despite his discouragement now, Ronald was happy he was part of the FYE program.

**Maria**

Maria attended high school at two schools in different states. She believed she was best prepared for college by her English class, and later by her mathematics courses. Maria did not view herself as a particularly studious person, admitting she had challenges with procrastination and completing assignments on time. She was not involved in many extracurrular activities, recalling the she was only in one club. Maria's parents valued education and expected her and her siblings to earn college degrees. Since most of her family has bachelor's degrees, she believed she was expected to earn one as well, something that caused her anxiety and fear. Maria initially began as a business major to follow her parents expectations, but she was considering changing that to an area of more interest to her. When she planned to attend college, she was very concerned about whether she would be successful. Maria enrolled in the FYE program to help her do better in school.

Once in the program, she enjoyed the cohort structure and the interactions with her peers. She specifically cited the use of the Kahoot tool in class to play games and conduct quizzes as something she enjoyed doing. She also connected with the activities the FYE program ran during the first days of the program. She met other students in the program who have become very close friends. She also credited the FYE program with helping her to get to know the college better, from the buildings and where classes were located to the resources available. From being in the CPD cours in the FYE program, Maria began to have doubts as to whether she should be a business major. Her time in the program led her to join student government and become involved in campus life and activities. While Maria did not know what she wanted to do as a major, she felt drawn to student advocacy in the student government.

**Samantha**

      Samantha felt prepared for college from her time in high school, citing her preparation with the MLA format for writing essays. She began high school taking honors classes, but switched to college preparatory courses after her sophomore year. Samantha played basketball in high school until the program was ended due to the covid pandemic. She also enjoyed choreographing dance routines for herself and her friends and being in the writing club. She viewed herself as a hard working student in high school, but following the remote learning due to covid, she lost some motivation. Her family was very supportive of education, both in high school and in college, but they had concern for her choice of major, criminal justice. They were also concerned about the amount of classes she was taking, fearing it would overwhelm her. However, Samantha was motivated to complete her education in a quick and timely manner.

      Samantha appreciated the cohort structure and the smaller class size, which allowed her to get to know her classmates. These classmates became the individuals with whom she spent time outside of class since she did not have time to develop friendships with other people due to scheduling constraings. Samantha also liked the CPD course which taught her about building resumes, time management, setting priorities, and scheduling her time. She shared how she used her iPad to keep herself on track with assignments. Samantha found that her second year was less stressful because she implemented the time management skills she learned about in her CPD course. She also learned to be communicative with her professors and share when she needed a break due to stress. She planned to take a gap year prior to transferring to the university to complete her four year degree.

**Camila**

Camila was a very studious and involved student in high school. In addition to completing seven AP courses, she was also the cheerleading captain, volleyball captain, part of the national honor society, and a member of a club that helped middle school students transition to high school. She saw herself as a hard working and dedicated student, enjoying school and the learning process. Despite her love of learning, Camila did not know what she wanted to do for school and decided to take a gap year before continuing to college. With her father not involved in her life, her mother was her biggest influence, and her mother expected Camila to earn straight As. Camila's mother did not disparage her for taking the gap year but supported her during that time and as she returned to school the following year. She imagined that college could be a great experience, or a bad one, having fun or failing miserably. Camila's desire for success led her to the FYE program where she hoped to get opportunities.

Camila saw herself as a social person both in high school and in college, being very involved in school and finding it easy to make friends. She recalled that during the first event with the FYE program, she sat with people she did not know and invited others to join so that everyone would have the opportunity to make friends. Camila appreciated the cohort structure and enjoyed the students grouped with her. She especially enjoyed the games that opened the FYE program prior to the commencement of the semester. Camila credited the FYE program with connecting her to the campus through touring it to be familiar with buildings and resources as well as showing her what was available. She joined the student government to be more involved and to be a voice for students. Camila was sad to conclude her first year, but began her second year with great enthusiasm and excitement, looking forward to being involved in planning and conducting campus activities and connecting students, especially the new group of

FYE students. She developed a strong friend group in student life and credited the FYE program

for helping her meet her fellow students and leading them to student life.

**Suzanna**

Suzanna felt prepared for college from the coursework she completed in high school. She

noted that the rigor of the curriculum at her high school intensified during her last two year,

purhing her to improve her performance. Her attitude towards school matured as she approached

her junior and senior years when she realized she needed to be ready for college. Suzanna

completed one AP class in Spanish. As a high school student, she played soccer and was

involved in two clubs. She came from a family of immigrants who valued education for their

kids and expected them all to do well. Suzanna believed her parents were proud of her for

working so hard in school and continuing to college and setting an example for her siblings. She

imagined college would be hard with mean professors, a myth that was dispelled when she began

taking college classes.

Suzanna joined the FYE program to be in a place with other students having a similar

experience. She liked the cohort structure because it gave her the opportunity to get to know her

classmates and create friendships. Some of her classmates went to high school with her, but the

cohort helped her get to know them better. Suzanna noted that the math instructor for her cohort

was not helpful, so her CPD instructor brought a tutor from the academic skills center to the CPD

class to help bolster student performance in math. She also credited the CPD class with showing

her where to find resources at the college to help her be successful. Suzanna felt the most

valuable skill she developed in the FYE program was getting her assignments submitted on time.

While she did not use a paper or online planner, she was taught to use the calendar feature of the

learning management system to keep her on task. Following the FYE program, Suzanna did not

have classes with any of the students from her cohort. She maintained a connection with a group of them on a social level. She recalled how much she enjoyed the program, especially how it started when students were in groups, met professors, and played games.

**Santiago**

While Santiago did not take any AP classes in high school, he did take honors classes which he credited with preparing him for college. He believed taking Pre-Calculus in high school helped him when he went to college. Santiago admitted, though, that he struggled with English. During his first three years he did not apply himself, but through stern encouragement from his parents, Santiago increased his efforts and was rewarded with better grades. Improving his performance made his parents happy. His parents were proud of him for going to college and supported his efforts. He wanted to set a good example for his younger siblings. While Santiago was not a student athelete, he enjoyed volunteering as the cameraman for the football team and recording their games for review later. He had an impression of college that he was going to be lost in the crowd, attending classes in a large room. He was pleasantly surprised when he found that classes were smaller at the community college.

Santiago did not know that students would be able to get help from their professors outside of the instructional time, believing that he was going to be on his own if he did not comprehend a topic. He was happy that that fear was not realized as well. With such anxiety about higher education, Santiago joined the FYE program to help him be successful in college. He liked the cohort structure and how it helped him to form study groups since the same group was in three classes together. He also interacted with students from his cohort in social settings. Santiago appreciated the student notification system about on-campus events, alerting him to activities in the student life area. He credits the FYE program with helping him to be successful

in his second year through him learning to speak to classmates about topics and assignments in the class when he is unclear. Santiago still had struggles with his English class, but he was overcoming those. Santiago was also part of the student government for one semester of his freshman year.

**Luis**

School was always a struggle for Luis. He described himself as a quiet and removed person so he did not have a peer support group in high school. He did not see himself completing high school and envisioned himself working in the factory alongside his father. Luis was not involved in many extracurricular programs, but he joined a creative writing club in high school. His parents did not finish school and wanted him to complete his education so he could have a better life. His father did not want him working in the factory. He planned to complete his associates degree and transfer to the local four year school to earn his bachelor's degree in social work. When he was in high school Luis did not think much about college because he did not believe he would be going there. When he did consider college, he thought it would be more of the same as high school.

Luis joined the FYE program to help him make friends and begin college on the right path. He liked the cohort structure and was part of the Latino Leadership Academy (LLA) cohort, a cohort focused on the success of Latino students. Even in the cohort, Luis felt isolated since the rest of the students seemed to have already established relationships. He credited the FYE program with introducing him to the ASNN, a place where he made many friends who became his support group. While Luis's cohort served to help him with group projects, the student government peers provided him meaningful connections outside of class and had a significant impact on his college experience. He also credited the FYE program with helping him

be better prepared for his second year, lowering his levels of stress and anxiety. Luis was introduced to the academic support services of the college through the FYE program. He also learned about scheduling and planning his time through the time management component of the CPD class. Luis expected his second year to be much easier thanks to the skills he developed his first year. He reported that his second year was going well.

**Esmelda**

As a high school student, Esmelda was enrolled in a dual enrollment college English class. She was also in three AP classes. The rigor of these classes helped Esmelda to be better prepared for college, although she did not identify herself as a devoted student in high school. She was not involved in many extra-curricular activities in high school, but she did coordinate the Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) event on campus to share her culture at school. Esmelda is supported by her mother and attended college because her mother wanted her to have a better life with greater opportunities than she had. While in high school, Esmelda became overwhelmed with fear when people would discuss college. She frequently told people to stop talking about it around her.

Esmelda joined the FYE program to help her overcome her fears and anxieties associated with college. She planned to go to the orientation with her friends from high school, but she was the only one to show up. She made new friends at the orientation and toured the campus with those new friends. Esmelda was in the LLA with Luis and also found that most of the students already knew each other, making it difficult to form connections with them. Esmelda formed study groups with members of her cohort, usually studying with people she did not already know. She also joined the ASNN and developed a friend group from the members of student government. Esmelda was interested in scholarships and on campus jobs and was happy to learn

that she could get paid for being involved in ASNN. She credited the FYE program with showing her the college was not scary and was something she could master. She learned study skills including time management that helped her to improve her performance in school. Esmelda expected her second year to be more challenging but found it to be easier after utilizing the skills she developed in the FYE program.

**Results**

The results from this study are straightforward and consistent. From the interviews, focus group, and writing samples six themes have been identified along with two to three subthemes each. These themes have been instructive and yield a clear image of the impact of the FYE program, noting the transformation of students from their view of themselves as high school students, through their FYE experience, to their current status as second year students at the college. There are also some outlier results that indicate concerns from students that are not consistent with the rest of the students, but worth noting as an institution.

**Table 5**

*Themes & Subthemes*

| Theme | Subthemes | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family supported educational ventures | Parents wanted better life for kids. | Students want to make their proud | |
| Cohorts helped make friends | Cohorts helped students collaborate | Students connected in and out of class | |
| Students developed new study skills and habits | Students learned time management skills. | Students learned about resources. | Students approached their professors. |
| Participants imagined no support in college | Community college a relaxed experience. | Cohorts reduced the stress of beginning college.. | |
| Student involvement increased | Were motivated to be present | Students joined governance group. | |

| Second year easier than expected | Students have success skills and knowledge. | Friend groups provide academic and emotional support.. |
|---|---|---|

**Family supported educational ventures**

There was a wide range of family experiences for the group of participants in this study. Some attended college and wanted their kids to also attend college. Others never had the opportunity to attend college and possibly even high school. The families of the students also valued education and wanted to see their students push themselves. Robert's parents had mixed levels of completion, but reported,

They think it's pretty important. It's a little conflicting. My dad didn't finish high school, but my mom did take some college. They want for me to be able to finish college since neither of them did. They both got busy with life. They push me to finish through.

Despite neither parent having a completed academic degree, they still valued their son pursuing a degree for himself.

Maria comes from a family with both educated parents and siblings. Her parents more than support her achieving an academic degree, they expect it. She commented on how she views her parents's perspective on education,

They want me to go to college. So I can find, you know, maybe what I want to do in my career. They're really into that. They like me to also get involved in like clubs, in anything that might.

Maria's parents have conveyed to her the value of education resulting in her presence at college. They have also shared with her the value of being involved in extra-curricular activities which has influenced her to become part of the student government group.

*Parents wanted better life for kids*

Parents support their students attending college to improve their future prospects. Javier reflected on his parents attitude towards his education, "They're glad that I am going for architecture. For them, they are giving me an opportunity that they never had." Javier commented on how his father did not want him to end up working in a factory like him. He noted, "…they are very big advocates of going further into education, getting myself a better career."

Luis also noted how important education was to his family, "…they never finished school so they really care about education and so when they had me, they always had this plan of me, you know, being successful in life and going through school and getting a good career." Luis also noted that due to his parents and their view of education, he is pursuing his goals, "And so throughout all my life, they've been really pushing me to get an education and to do well in college…" Luis's parents saw the value of education and wanted him to benefit from the opportunities he has in this country that his parents did not have in theirs. They sacrificed to come here to give him a better life.

Robert shared a similar experience. He noted how his parents were supportive of his educational aspirations. He recalled, "My dad didn't finish high school, but my mom did take some college. They want for me to be able to finish college since neither of them." Attending and completing college was an important goal Robert's parents have for him. He said it was nice that they are supportive of his education.

*Students want make parents proud.*

Understanding the challenges their parents faced, students want to earn their degree and be successful in school to validate what their parents endured. Scott, said,"They came to

America in hopes of a better future of their descendants, so I shall do my best to make up for their sacrifice." This sentiment was shared by many students whose parents migrated to the United States. Javier recalled, "Since they were immigrants, they never had the opportunity to get higher than, probably, middle school."

Scott commented on how the culture of his family valued education, "My family highly encouraged it and we're traditionally Asians, so we want our children to be educated and do well in their livelihood by gaining all these opportunities through education." His family placed upon him the expectation that he will go to school and do well, that he would take advantage of the academic opportunities available to him. Scott attended school with support and expectations from his parents.

In gratitude for the hard work and sacrifice his parents have done for him, Luis wants to succeed in school. He noted, "…and it's thanks to them that I'm even in college and trying to study for what I want to be a social worker." Luis does not want to squander the opportunity he has and is working to make his professional goals a reality. He has become connected to his classmates and integrated himself into the academic and social fiber of NNC.

**Cohorts helped make friends**

A central strategy in the FYE program is to link three courses together so that students for a cohort, attending these three courses together. The courses chosen are a Career Path Development course (CPD), the appropriate math course for their major pathway, usually Math 120 or Math 126, and an English class, usually English 101. Linking students together gave them a degree of familiarity with each other and encouraged them to connect. Esmelda commented, "Also just having friends in classrooms really helped me out. It really helps me not be as nervous for any new classes I'm taking." In contrasting the cohort experience to high school, Javier noted,

"It was more fluid and much easier to work with others, compared to high school. Might have been because everybody was starting off fresh, nobody knew each other that well. And, it's a completely different experience from high school." Scott really enjoyed the cohort concept, saying "Oh, well, honestly, I personally enjoyed the cohort conception because each class doesn't feel like you're a stranger, you at least recognize somebody from another class." These experiences demonstrate the designers of the program succeeded in their goals. Putting students into linked courses helped them to overcome feelings of being an outsider, since everyone was an outsider. The cohort structure also allowed them to grow their connections beyond the classroom.

### *Cohorts helped students collaborate*

The cohort structure was more than just linking classes. The program was designed to develop engagement between students to allow them to connect with each other. Jennifer shared about the cohorts,

> With that class [CPD] specifically, there were a lot of group projects and a lot of working as a team, trying to get us to know each other. So that was part of it. We were all familiar with each other coming out of that class. And, yeah, like I said before, there were kids in that class that I am still friends with.

Jennifer found that the work in her CPD class was a valuable aid in making the connections she has developed with her classmates. She commented that, "Since I knew some of the kids that I had gone through that with, it made it a lot easier to interact with students I didn't know." From her experiences in the FYE program, Jennifer felt more comfortable interacting with students she had not already met and to make those connections for the first time.

Scott saw the direct benefit of the cohort structure. Being with the same group for three classes helped him to form study groups. He confirmed, "It's just really good to have study groups, if it makes sense." The cohort structure helped students to group together to help each other better understand the topics. He described his peer interactions as "Honestly, it's like a little community if that makes sense. A little community that well at least I'm comfortable talking with others and I'm just more comfortable with my classmates or peers you say." Scott found the cohort structure valuable.

### Students connected in and out of class

While the cohorts linked students in an academic setting, such as the classroom, the cohorts also helped students to form study groups and even spend time in more social settings. Scott recollected that, "Mario and I have been hitting the gym and going to parties every once in a while." Mario was a fellow classmate of Scott and they have developed a friendship that persisted to the time of this study. He also noted his enjoyment of the cohort structure, "I personally enjoyed the cohort conception because each class doesn't feel like you're a stranger, you at least recognize somebody from another class." Being part of the cohort allowed students to feel like they were in a familiar place. One of the intended purposes of a cohort is to connect students and create that resource within the linked courses. Scott was able to take advantage of the personal connections he made in his linked courses.

Being in a new environment was motivation for Esmelda to reach out to strangers. She recalled, "I just basically went to the people that I didn't know and made friends with them." Esmelda identified herself as a shy person who kept to herself in high school. She described herself as "…I was a loner. I was alone with myself and then I was like maybe it's time for me to make more friends and then I met a lot of awesome people." Being involved in the FYE program

helped her to be more outgoing and to make new friends. She also joined the student life program at the college.

Jennifer also liked making new friends in the program. She mentioned, "Some of the people that I met for the First Year Experience I am still friends with." The friendships that Jennifer created did not end with the class, but endured into the second year of her college career. Through the cohorting design, students were able to create friendships they would have been unlikely to create otherwise.

**Students developed new study skills and habits**

As part of the goal of the FYE program, students developed study skills that they may have been lacking coming form the high school experience. Santiago commented on the communications skills he developed through the FYE program, "I got more into a habit of asking my classmates questions about the homework or a certain assignment that we had instead of just trying to figure it out on my own." Rather than make assumptions or miss content, Santiago learned how to clarify assignments and expectations by seeking further information.

Suzanna also found the new skills valuable for her academic journey. She noted that, "…it prepared me for like for the rest of the classes that I have to take." The FYE preparation allowed Suzanna to begin her second year with the tools she needed to succeed. She found that the FYE helped prepare her for that second year.

And, in the focus group, Luis stated that the FYE program introduced him to what the college had to offer. The program helped him to, "…also see the different kinds of things that they can help out during my college life." Learning about resources available helped Luis to have a fuller second year of college. He also noted that what was particularlyhelpful were "… the

resources that were provided." He was found success in his studies and became involved in student life.

### *Students learned time management skills.*

The FYE program covered many skills to help students be more successful. One of the specific skills was time management and addressing your assignments in a timely manner. Robert said, "I started to not procrastinate, I actually worked on my homework ahead of time and studied and read all the assigned material, whereas before I would wait until the last minute and not really read the material and kind of just not put nearly as much effort." This sentiment was echoed by Esmelda, "I learned how not to procrastinate. I know how to leave all this stuff at the last minute because of that I failed one class." Samantha's CPD instructor taught her a better way to manage her assignment due dates using a color coding system. She described the process to me with her iPad,

> So I started color coding everything so for example, it was in red and it was due like
> either the next day or due that night or like bluest for notes and black versus for like
> things that like I shouldn't do but it's not due for the next couple of days but I should
> probably start doing it. And so like because we learned how to prioritize and we learned
> how to like, yeah prioritize like our school or homework and stuff like that. I started
> incorporating it to do lists and I still use it.

Samantha found the technology very helpful in keeping her on track and on time with assignments.

### *Students learned about resources*

Often students can become overwhelmed and discouraged when they reach topics that are challenging. The FYE helped students learn where to find resources, like tutoring help. Robert

shared his experience, "It definitely showed me the resources that were available in college, like the library, the tutors, and how to utilize the resources and all that…That way I didn't have to figure it out all on my own." A core component of the CPD class included showing students where to find resources around campus, such as tutoring services, study areas, and other academic support tools.

Esmelda noted, "Thanks to my classes I learned about the academic coaching and how they help students with their homework and resources that they may need for their academic goals to be accomplished." The FYE program introduced students to the resources available to them at the college, in Esmelda's case in particular, the tutoring available in the library. She also learned about the study rooms in the library and used those for study groups.

Frederick discussed how the CPD component of the FYE program helped teach him how to use various tools. He said, "We get to learn about the online library, how to rent the books." Too often institutions have online resources, but students are forced to learn how to access them on their own. Frederick also commented on how the program introduced him about, "how to meet with academic coaches." The academic coaches help students with tutoring and study skills.

### *Students approached their professors*

Many students shared feelings of fear associated with their professors. The FYE program deliberately developed times for the students to meet instructors prior to the semester and encouraged students to interact with their professors during the semester. Camila appreciated meeting with professors before the semester began, commenting, "When we sat down with all of the professors and to know that it wasn't as daunting as we thought it was going to be going into a college course." Frederick found, "The first year experience showed me that the professors do

want to help you and they do want to be there for you." A member of the focus group noted that

the FYE program, "helped me get to know my teachers better." Samantha developed the

confidence to communicate with her professors, describing, "And I'll let all my teachers know

beforehand, I'm like, hey, it's going to be late because my brain is, I'm fried. I'm exhausted."

**Participants imagined no support in college**

Attending college was associated with a high level of uncertainty and fear. Cultural

depictions of higher education from friends, teachers, and media made students question what

the experience would be like. Luis noted, "I was really scared that it wouldn't fit in or I'd be a

college dropout honestly." Luis did not know what to expect of college and did not know if it

was for him. He did not know if he was properly prepared and expressed doubt about his ability

to succeed. He was unaware of the support structure students have available for them at the

college.

Javier said, "I was completely intimidated about college and college life in general."

Cultural perceptions of college caused Javier to doubt his ability to succeed in college. Like Luis

he did not know that there were several student supports to help him succeed. Esmelda shared

similar concerns, recalling,

> It was scary every time someone talked about college I was like, "no stop talking about
>
> that, that's scary." But, at the same time is because some of my teachers told me their
>
> college life and how it was but I think things have changed since they went to college
>
> until now and yeah basically I was scared coming here.

Esmelda found the stress of thinking about going to college overwhelming. She, too, did not

expect the college to have support for students in their learning objectives. What she found was

very encouraging, "the FYE showed me that it was not scary at all. Everyone here is helping

each other out." The support structure was a surprise to her.

### *Community college a relaxed experience*

After attending at the college, students saw the environment as less intimidating and more

manageable. One student noted that the more frightening environment might still be at the

university level and that now that she is at a community college, it is less overwhelming. Jennifer

said, "I think I was thinking about the university experience with college. I was thinking it was

going to be this huge campus with really hard classes, really strict professors." After being in the

FYE program, Jennifer was more optimistic about studying at the college level. She was not

alone.

Maria shared that going to college was a frightening experience. She spoke about starting

her first year prior to the FYE program,

> Especially when you're like so new to the concept of like getting a higher education. It's
>
> like a very scary thought to have and a scary experience. So when you go in with the first
>
> year experience and you familiarize yourself with everything, it like lets you, you like
>
> you have that breath of relief after that.

The FYE program allowed Maria to take a breath and lower her levels of anxiety. Subsequently,

Maria became involved in student life at the college.

*Cohorts reduced the stress of beginning college*

The FYE program helped students to demystify their college experience, giving them the confidence and self-efficacy to begin their academic journey and overcome their fears. Robert noted,

> Because I feel like it was a good introduction, to be able to, because it was a little nerve wracking to go into this new environment and completely different school, so I believe it was a good entry way to with the events to meet new people and to show you what it was going to be like to alleviate some of your concerns and answer any questions.

Esmelda also saw that the FYE program helped to reform her perception of college. She commented, "During the FYE, I thought that college wasn't as bad as it was portrayed in High School and movies."

**Student involvement increased**

A core part of Astin's student involvement theory is that students becoming involved in campus activities leads to greater student success (Astin, 1999). The FYE program has cultivated an environment that encourages students to become involved in campus activities. These activities included, but were not limited to, student life programs and involvement in the local student government. Jennifer mentioned that she has become connected to the campus more, both with friends and student life activities. She said, "…it easier to open up and be involved in student life. So, it made me more active on the campus, that's for sure."

When asked about the best outcome of the FYE during the focus group discussion, Maria answered,

> For me, it's just actually being involved at NNC because I would have never actually thought that, you know, I would really be participating in any of the events because I was

> so concerned about my career. But as like, you know, I'm not sure if I really wanted to be
>
> here or not and so it just really helped me.

The FYE program helped Maria to be involved in college, one of the components of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory. Maria joined student government and was able to be more connected to her college.

Camila also shared how she was more involved on campus. When asked about was the best college experience, she recalled,

> I got offered so many different opportunities and now I'm a part of student government.
>
> And I've met so many different people on this campus and different people and the first
>
> year experience kind of pushed me into the direction that I wanted to go.

Being in the FYE program has given Camila opportunities on campus to be more connected and involved. As a student government representative, Camila is actively involved in planning and executing activities for the student body.

### *Were motivated to be present*

Camila was very outspoken about her involvement on campus. Through the FYE program she connected with classmates and began to feel that she belonged on campus, which resulted in her being around more. She recalled, "

> And I know that I worked it this year and I just remember thinking, I hope the students
>
> got what I got out of it because what I got out of it, like it made me want to stay on the

campus and it made me want to meet more people because I was just like, wow, this is

crazy.

She was hoping that all of the student got out of the FYE program the same benefits she did. Camila became very involved in campus activities after being in the FYE program, with a goal of helping the next group of students to get the most out of their college experience.

Esmelda credited the FYE program with helping her to be more present on campus as well. She has found her second year to be easier because she was able be more involved on campus, especially in forming study groups, something she had not done before. When asked about study groups, she noted, "…it's funny because I didn't with my friends I've been going to the library to get like study sessions sometimes which didn't before, now I learned it's something I should do to get my stuff done." Esmelda learned about the resources on campus and made the library a part of her study plan.

Frederick appreciated being shown the resources available. In particular, he liked the study space available at the library. He found the space amenable to focusing on his work. He recalled,

> I would set the library pretty much every single school day that I had just doing work
>
> there. It was a good place for me to be able to go and like get my reading in of my
>
> chapters, to be able to do my homework and not have to worry about my mind getting
>
> like lost path and like watching TV, your friends or something to distract me.

The library kept him on campus because it provided a place free from distraction where he could have productive time on campus.

Robert enjoyed studying on campus. The spaces and resources at the library helped him to study. In particular, having access to expensive programs and study rooms kept him on

campus. He noted, "It's great to meet up with people and do homework together. They have nice little rooms with privacy here. Laptops that have access to programs that I don't have access to, programs such as Microsoft Word or Excel." The library redesigned the layout to create a more conducive environment for studying and working. They also provided resources such as commonly used computer programs on the computers they had available for students. Robert appreciated these and took advantage of these resources.

***Students joined governance group***

More than one student in the study decided to join the local student government group, called Associated Student of Northern Nevada (ASNN). After experiencing the programming offered by ASNN and being encouraged to attend by her CPD instructor, Camila noted,

> It gave me the experience of meeting... all the people in student life. ASNN, which I think there was only like three people in ASNN at that point. But I ended up joining ASNN because I had met people at the FYE in ASNN and realized that I enjoyed being around them.

ASNN has been another way students have been encouraged to stay on campus and embrace the college experience. Camila became an officer in ASNN and some of her fellow FYE program students became senators.

Maria was another student who became involved in ASNN. She was impressed with how the student government group worked with the FYE program to engage students. She recalled,

> And I really did think that I was just going to be stuck in one corner all by myself and didn't think that I was going to be involved in like advocating for students, for example, just like what ASNN is doing.

When she began college she did not expect to be involved. She thought she would keep to herself and study alone. After the FYE program she felt a sense of empowerment as she met with the vice president of student affairs regularly to share concerns that students had.

Luis joined ASNN after he experienced the many activities that the organization conducted with the FYE program. He noted, "I had a good connection with people and I had a lot of help from friends or from ASNN." Being involved in ASNN helped Luis to feel like he had a family in the ASNN community. He shared, "I lost a parent uh this year and so that really took a hard on me but I had a really great support group with my friends and I also had ASNN." After suffering personal loss, Luis found the people in ASNN to be his support structure.

**Second year easier than expected**

As noted above, many students were uneasy about beginning their college experience as their first year approached. However, after participating in the FYE program, many students gained a level of confidence needed to begin their second year. Scott remarked, "

> As I progress into my 2nd year of College I can safely assert that I am incredibly comfortable with college life and being able to do classes and accessing the resources I need. The First Year Experience has sufficiently inserted me into the college lifestyle where I can easily exist and be successful.

Scott specifically noted how comfortable he was continuing his education into the second year. Due to his involvement in the FYE program, Scott believed he can face the challenges that college presented.

Luis share the same sentiment. He attributed the improvement in his second year to his involvement in the FYE program. He confirmed,

It actually has gotten easier because I know what to expect now. And so, all my classes,

I've been getting really good grades on my classes right now. It's already been almost a

month now that we've started this semester.

Luis has approached his second year of college with increased confidence that he can be

successful. The mystery of what college would be has disapated and Luis faced his second year

prepared to succeed.

Jennifer credited her improved success I her second year to the FYE program and how it

helped her to make new connections with people she did not know. She said,

It's been a lot better, just because I am talking to more people on campus and I am more,

it's easier to do well in your classes when you feel supported by your college. And, one

of the things I like about Northern Nevada is that they set up this whole first year

experience program to support their students socially. And that's not the main point, but

it's an important aspect of it.

Connecting students to one another was a valuable component of the FYE program. Having the

confidence and comfort reaching out to her classmates helped Jennifer to be successful in her

second year of college.

***Students have success skills and knowledge***

Due to their involvement in the FYE program, one of the components, teaching students

where they can get support, has become a valuable resourse to them. Luis attributed his success

to the FYE program, saying,

It's been a lot better, just because I am talking to more people on campus and I am more,

it's easier to do well in your classes when you feel supported by your college. And, one

of the things I like about Western Nevada is that they set up this whole first year

experience program to support their students socially. And that's not the main point, but

it's an important aspect of it.

Frederick made a similar statement, noting how he has the tools to get the help needed when it is needed,

And so it showed me that going into my second year, it's not as good that my

expectations of college being so hard isn't the case and that I can relax a little bit and that

I don't have to be so anxious all the time about my grades and that I know that I'll be able

to succeed and go through it because of what I've been taught and how I've kind of

learned of how WNC works.

### *Friend groups provide academic and emotional support*

During the focus group session, the students discussed their struggles with mental health

when asked about challenges they faced. There was a universal agreement that mental health is a

concern and that in the past students would usually suffer in silence. Camila brought up her

battle with mental health through stressful times and explained how the friends she made in the

FYE have helped her to cope more effectively. She recalled,

…but I think the way I would say I don't know how to talk about this honestly it would

just be my mental health, which later led to a fall in my actual academics [in high

school], but I always managed to pick myself back up. And honestly, the support of my

friends have really made a difference. Where in high school, I just had to figure it out on

my own, but in college it's a lot different because I have friends that are basically like

family members to me now, and that they're always there to help me whenever I need

them.

**Outlier Data and Findings**

There were three outlier findings in this study. These outliers include: preferring and increased cohort size, increasing the number of on-campus offerings for second year courses, and addressing English as a second language (ESL) challenges faced by one student. It may be that these issues cannot be addressed, however the institution should be aware of these concerns by students and consider them as a solution either part of future iterations of the FYE program or for stand alone remedies.

*Cohort sizes were too small*

One student, Javier, commented on the size of the cohort being too small. He noted, "The only thing I didn't really like was the size of the cohorts. I wish they were a tiny bit bigger." This response was unique to him. Most students preferred the smaller cohort size to allow them to get to know their fellow students better. Maria, for example, specifically addressed the small cohort size and how she preferred it, "Because of how small the group was, I felt comfortable with how my cohort was. Because it was a very small part of all the people."

*Coursework was not in the major*

Ronald, another student, enjoyed the FYE program, but was disillusioned with college as a whole. When thinking about college as a high school student, he hoped college would be more adventurous instead of "It's just been school but more [work]." In particular, he wanted classes to "…be like actual hands on knowledge" and that he "…would actually start doing things related to the career rather than just studying more math, science, and English and all of that." Ronald's frustration was that he had been taking his general education courses and had not begun courses in his major, computer science. Also, while his first semester was in person, he currently has all of his classes online and experiences isolation from the cohort connections he made last year. In

describing his FYE experience, Ronald said, "Well, it was good. It was probably good. It was good meeting new people, especially people that had like the same interests." However, his second year has left him "well, disappointed, but it's been most of the same old, same old." He did note that between his first and second year experiences, he sees "the value of in -person classes."

### *Courses difficult for non-native English speaking students*

While many of the participants of this study were of Latino descent, most of them were very fluent in English. One student, Esmelda, struggled with English, saying, "I've been studying English for like eight years. And it still has trouble for me because I don't understand some words, so I don't know how to express myself sometimes. And I think that's one of the biggest problems, well, challenges that I had." As NNC does offer bilingual support in their Adult Education courses, regular enrolled students are not offered these services.

## Research Question Responses

Through this study and the questions developed for the three data collection types that were inspired by the central research question and sub questions, the information gathered answered these four questions. What was most interesting is how some of these answers were not unique to one or two students, but consistent throughout the group. These students were satified with their participation in the program. They completed what they needed to do at the high school level and believed they were prepared for college. They described their first year of college as very positive, primarily due to the FYE program. They also found that the FYE program gave them the skills, resources, and support structure they needed to be successful in their second year of college.

**Central Research Question**

How do second-year college students describe their participation in the FYE at Northern Nevada College during and after the program? Participants in the FYE program found that being part of the program was rewarding and worth it. None of the members of this study had anything negative to share about their time in the program and felt it improved their college experience. Samantha noted,

> The FYE made my college experience not as daunting as I made it in my head and it encouraged me to seek out new friends because I realized the people were so nice and welcoming and it was easy to talk to new people because it wasn't like high school where everyone was judgmental and not welcoming and that the whole environment of college was completely different and it was place that wanted to be at.

> Students in the focus groups commented on how they benefitted from the program. One example they gave was from their introduction to the FYE program when the cohorts met and competed in games. Maria noted

> And I would say having that time to bond with them and do silly little games, it made me realize like, wow, this is a completely different ball game compared to high school. Like everybody was just as nervous, everybody was just as shy as me, and everybody was just going through the same experience all at the same time.

**Sub-Question One**

How do second-year college students describe their prior experiences that influence college retention? Many of the students noted that they had taken college preparatory courses when they were in high school. They intended to go to college, so they took coursework that would give them the greatest chance of success. Suzanna said,

I guess the workload that they would give me in high school, especially during my junior and senior year, it really prepared me for college because of the same amount of work that they used to give me in high school.

Frederick was also taking college preparatory courses, noting that,

So I took a lot of classes that got me more prepared for what I felt was more preparing for college and maybe other people weren't as lucky to have gotten. I got to take a very large spectrum of all different types of sciences, all different types of math and a high level of English.

He also commented,

So I felt like from all throughout my years in high school that the whole time that they were just preparing me so that I would be able to perform my fullest in college and I feel like it worked pretty well.

Camila felt she had achieved all she could from high school and needed the opportunity to grown by going to college, saying,

I had outgrown the people I had outgrown the space and I just felt like a plant that was just in a pot that was too small and I and I think that I was just ready I was ready to move on.

In all, students did not leave high school feeling they needed to stay. These participants knew they needed to move on to the next level.

**Sub-Question Two**

How do second-year college students describe their first-year college environment?

Students spoke highly about their experiences in the FYE program. Participating in the FYE

program was encouraging and exciting to students. Luis enjoyed meeting new people, saying,

> For me, a first -year experience was an opportunity to get to know people and start off my
>
> year off to a good start. And it was just a chance for me to finally make some new friends
>
> in college and try to see what the college life was.

Camila was very excited about the program, remarking,

> It ended up being way better than I thought it was going to be and I, honestly that's an
>
> experience I would want to live again. And then it's an experience that I wish all the first
>
> years could go through.

And, the general sentiment from the focus group could be summed up with the following

statement from Maria, "I would say probably first year experience was a big highlight of my

whole college career." Clearly for these participants, the FYE program was an important

component of their college career, enabling them to transition from high school to college

successfully.

**Sub-Question Three**

How do second-year college students describe the influence of the FYE program? The

FYE program prepared them for their second year of college, giving them skills they need to be

successful, confidence that they can succeed, and the friend support structure to provide a safe

place to be oneself and seek empathy. Camila described,

> And I know that I worked it this year and I just remember thinking, I hope the students
>
> got what I got out of it because what I got out of it, like it made me want to stay on the

campus and it made me want to meet more people because I was just like, wow, this is
crazy. Like this is so welcoming. This is so inviting to be here. And I love that everybody
is just curated on student success.

She also remarked,

It ended up being way better than I thought it was going to be and I, honestly that's an
experience I would want to live again. And then it's an experience that I wish all the first
years could go through.

### Summary

The data collected for this study were positive and demonstrated students developed a
strong connection to the institution and their classmates. Most of the students participating in the
program had concerns about attending college, questioning whether or not they could succeed.
The FYE program has created an environment in which students are able to come to college and
either build skills to make them successful, or improve upon the skills they already began
developing. Components of this program also showed them how to find the resources they need
to succeed. The fact that so many students developed lasting friendships with others in the
program has given them a peer support structure that can be their both academically and socially.
The FYE program has also helped to make students want to be present on campus, a key factor
of success in the student involvement theory (Astin, 1999). None of the students involved in this
study regretted the time or money spent on participating in the FYE program. On the contrary,
some longed for their first year while others were happy for the experience the current group of
students are able to enjoy. Also, all of the participants are finding their second year of college as
more manageable due to their involvement in the FYE program.

**CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

**Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences with the FYE program for second-year college students at Northern Nevada College. This chapter reviews the results of the study, exploring and discussing the themes that emerged from the data provided by the participants of the study. The discussion begins with an interpretation of the findings, which includes a summary of the themes from chapter four. Next implications of the FYE program study are presented, exploring how the data can be applied to both policy and practice. Application of these results to the theoretical and empirical research is also presented, interconnecting this study with research by other experts. By exploring the limitations of this study, recommendations arise for future research.

**Discussion**

This study produced extensive findings reflecting the experiences students from the FYE program at NNC. These findings presented encouraging observations from the participants supporting the benefits of the FYE program. Students completed the program and applied the skills they developed to their subsequent semesters of study. There were some universal benefits to the program and some individual results of success reported. These benefits are explored in through an interpretation of the findings. An implication for these results is also discussed below. How the data supports the theoretical framework is presented, and the limitations of the study is also shared. Finally, the recommendation for future research is explored.

**Summary of Thematic Findings**

The thematic findings from the data collection provided an insight into the mindset of the students and the benefits of the FYE program on their academic journey. Through interviews,

journaling prompts, and a focus group, the themes began emerging rather quickly. Students began college with a family that values education, both in high school and college. They also brought with them a high level of apprehension about what college life was about. From being in the FYE program, it was clear that students valued making new friends, being involved in campus activities, and developing new study skills. Despite their anxiety in beginning college, these components of the FYE allowed them to begin their second year with greater confidence than their first year.

**Interpretation of Findings**

This study successfully explored the experience that second year students had during their first year, given their involvement in the FYE program. From the data collected, six themes emerged, leading to four interpretations.

***Family support is important to students succeeding in higher education.***

In this study, all of the participants, except for one, reported that their parents found education an important component of their future. In most cases the parents of the students had not begun, let alone completed college. In many cases the parents of the participants had not completed high school, having immigrated to the United States from other countries to provide their children better opportunities. This last factor was a driving force for these students to make their parents proud and their parents sacrifices justified. Family support aligns with Astin and Oseguera's (2005) study on influences for college degree completion, who found that the emotional and financial support of parents played a role in students persisting in college. A lack of family support does not mean, though, that students cannot succeed. The participants in this study, however, expressed that education was important to their families.

***The FYE program helps students make connections on campus.***

Students viewed coming to college as an overwhelming and daunting experience. They knew they would be in an unfamiliar environment, likely without the peer group they had in high school. Enrolling in the FYE program was a way that they could make new friends through the cohort structure with linked courses. What they did not expect is that the FYE program helped them to make connections with their professors and demystify who the professors were and how they would be approaching the class. One of the components of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory that was expanded by Astin and Osecgura (2005) is that students forming connections on campus, both with new peer groups and with the faculty, improves student success. From the first day of the FYE program, students meet each other, their Career Path Development (CPD) instructor, and the other instructors of their linked course structure. The initial meeting helped students to feel more comfortable with their academic journey and led to them being able to contact their instructors outside of classtime to ask questions and seek support.

***Students now have the skills needed to be academically confident.***

Despite some students taking honors and AP classes in high school, participants had concerns about beginning college and what to expect. During their time in the FYE program through their CPD course, students learned how to be successful in their coursework through developing study skills to include note taking, time management, and knowing when to take a break. They also learned how to locate resources on campus such as tutoring services in the Academic Skills center, how to research with the research librarian, and where to get academic advisiong. Students also learned how to connect with their professors and became more comfortable reaching out to them when they have questions, challenges, or life events that

impact their studies. These elements of student success align with Astin & Oseguera's (2005) influences for degree completion. Developing a connection with faculty is a core element of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory. These skills and relationships developed helped students to begin their second year with less stress and anxiety, resulting in a successful beginning to their second year.

### *Cohorts helped students both in and out of class.*

Through the cohort structure of the program, students also developed connections with other students which helped them with a resource of a class was missed, gave them a groups with which to form study groups, and helped them with mental health challenges when anxiety, stress, and depression affected their state of mind. In some cases, students reported that their support structure on campus became a surrogate family where they felt accepted and not judged. Given that these students began college at the same time and entered the experience new, they felt that they were all starting at the same place with a fresh slate. The linked nature of the courses reinforced their connections and allowed them to more quickly establish interconnected relationships. Since NNC lacks residence halls, the next level of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory included influences that keep students on campus. Developing these connections with classmates helped to encourage students to remain on campus, especially for studying in the library, either with other students or solo. These relationships also helped students hold each other accountable, where students reported checking on their classmates if they had not heard from them in a bit.

## Implications for Policy and Practice

As with any study, results from the study may lead to suggestions for either policy implementations or an alteration on practice. This study is no different. Data collected from the

study demonstrated a need on the part of students for mental health support. There is also a need to provide a similar program for off-campus students. In terms of practice, the institution should look at expanding the program to more students and the system should explore how it can be applied to other institutions.

*Implications for Policy*

This study on the FYE program was very supportive of the program in its current configuration. The goals of student success and student connections are being met as intended. Students are also very involved in campus life, another contributing element of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory. Two issues were presented by the students that could be addressed through the FYE program.

First, students expressed concern about mental health issues. The nature of the FYE program has supported students in their challenges by helping them to develop a supportive peer group. This group can act as a surrogate family, granting acceptance and helping students to feel free from judgement. The FYE program, though, could include a component on mental health and how students can receive the emotional and psychological support they need to be successful in college and in life. Students would also benefit if the institution had the resources to provide some level of mental health care.

Second, the FYE program has been designed for students to be present, on campus, for classes and other team development. Such a campus presence has shown to be effective and has achieved the student success aspects Astin (1999) described in his student involvement theory. What is lacking is the ability of students in the online setting to either develop such connections or for those in the FYE program in their first year to remain connected to the campus if their life circumstance or schedule require them to be online students. To do so would require two

components. One, the FYE program would need to show them how and where to remain connected. And, two, the college would need to expand current programs to be inclusive of students who are taking only online courses.

*Implications for Practice*

In a practical manner, the results from this study show how the FYE program can be an effective part of a college success initiative. More NNC students would likely benefit from an expansion of the FYE program. While the nature of the program is not compatible for all students at the college, sharing the current successes with incoming students could allow a greater incentive for those students to join the program. Students at other institutions in the system may also benefit with the offering of a similar program. There are three other two-year schools, one of which does have student housing, this program could be beneficial to all of them. And, while there is already a student success program at each of the universities, which also have student housing, this program could be scaled up to include those students as well as other university students who do not reside in student housing. The FYE program differs from the university programs in that the universities offer success programs prior to the commencement of the semester while this program scaffolds the students during the first semester.

**Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

Results from this study support both the conclusions drawn from the exhaustive literature review as well as the theoretical framework which formed the basis of this study. Empirically, the findings demonstrate the practical results of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory in harnessing the investment of time and energy students invest in an institution. Theoretically, this study supports Astin's (1999) student involvement theory and can be seen as an extension of the theory to include student involvement through supportive programs.

*Empirical Implications*

The student involvement theory (Astin, 1999) had its roots in students being more involved on campus through on-campus living. The rationale by Astin was that students living on campus would be better integrated into the social scene on campus, helping them to be more successful than their off-campus counterparts. This concept is demonstrated in the study conducted by Reynolds et al. (2019) in which students were involved in an FYE program in a Learning Living Community. The FYE program at NNC was designed to connect students with their campus. This study illustrated that the manifestation of this involvement occurred in many forms. Some students became involved in student life and student governance. Others found utilizing the resources on campus to be valuable in both their academic and social life. The results of this study indicate that students are approaching their education with a more positive spirit than when they began. Much like the Reynolds et al. (2019) study, these students also developed stronger social ties with their peer-group without having the living on campus component.

Students in this study expressed increased confidence and comfort with the institution after completing their first year. They attributed these feelings to the skills and relationships they developed as being part of the FYE program. Comparing with the Reynolds et al. (2019) study with a select population, both groups have a stronger sense of the ability to be successful. This result also agrees with that of Everett (2019) in which participants approached their future studies with greater confidence in their ability to succeed. In comparing with other FYE programs, this study remains unique in that the current research studies specific, voluntary populations and not students from the general population of the institution. This study

contributes to the collection of FYE studies and presents a uniqueness as it included a linked

course structure and included all students interested, not segregating by race or major.

This population was a subset of the general population who, after consultation with an

advisor, felt they could benefit from extra preparation. As noted in chapter four, many students

wanted to participate to have the opportunity to make new friends. Unlike some programs

reviewed, this program was not mandatory and allowed students the option of participating.The

findings illuminate students confidence as they begin their second year, based off the elements of

the FYE program design at NNC.It would be interesting to see if a future iteration of the program

could offer a game based program such as the one found at MSU (Dale et al., 2019). Following

recommendations of this study and feedback from students completing the NNC FYE program, it

would be beneficial for designers to incorporate suggested changes, such as Fitzpatrick et al.

(2019) found in conducting effective FYE programs.

### *Theoretical Implications*

This study was inspired by the works of Astin (1999) and his student involvement theory.

While the student involvement theory (Astin, 1999) posits students living on-campus have a

greater level of success, other factors, such as students being involved in campus life regardless

of residence location, also contribute to student success (Astin, 1999). In exploring the influence

the FYE program on students at NNC, students have found that they are better prepared for their

second year due to their involvement in the program. Developing study skills, creating and

expanding connections, and harnessing the vital resource of student time (Astin, 1999) by

investing students in campus activities, the FYE program has given students the confidence to

approach their second year, and at the time of data collection, participants universally identified

that their academic journey was on the correct path. The results of this study reinforce Astin's (1999) student involvement theory.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

As with any study, there are limitation and delimitations that must be addressed. These represent factors that could not be controlled in the collection of data. These also include considerations in the design of the study in relating to the methodology chosen. As discussed below in considering future research, there may be options for different study designs as the population of students who have completed the program increases.

*Limitations*

The limitations of this study introduce what could be potential weaknesses. While this study pulled students from the list of second year students who completed the FYE program, it did not include students who are no longer enrolled at the institution. Since recruiting participants from students who were no longer enrolled at the institution is problematics and contact information may no longer be valid, it was determined that this study would focus on current second year students only. In addition, the population of students in the study excluded students who are currently enrolled in courses taught by the researcher. While this is unlikely to have been more than a few students, these students were excluded, leaving a population of students eligible to participate in the study at 79.

*Delimitations*

In considering delimitations for this study, it is important to understand that it was conducted using a qualitative approach, rather than a quantitive methodology. The choice of a qualitative study was due to the student population in the FYE program was too small. After consulting a quantitative methodologist, it was determined that the population for the study

would need to be at least 130 for the lowest level study. Since this composition reflected closely the total population of students participating in the program, it was determined that if any students withdrew or did not complete the FYE program, there would be an insufficient sample size to analyse the impact of the FYE program on their academic performance.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study was thorough and explored the impact of the FYE program on the second year population, there are opportunities for future research. As the FYE program evolves with subsequent iterations, it would be helpful to conduct repeated studies to determine if the program is remaining effective and relevant to the cultural shifts and developments. It could also be educational to learn why those students chose to not continue their studies and determine if the FYE could be modified to address those issues or concerns. This study included students who were in the 19 – 23 year old range, the target and traditional population for the college. In addition, this study included primarily White and Latino students, with one Asian American student and one mixed race African American student. While these populations represent the vast majority of the college, it may be helpful to explore the experiences of non-traditional aged students and those of the Native American students, if any participated in the program. Finally, as noted above, the population of the FYE program students restricted this study type to a qualitative study. As the number of students enrolled in the FYE program increases, it could be possible to conduct a quantitative study to determine if the FYE program has had a statistically significant impact on student success.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the experiences of students from the first iteration of the FYE program as they began their second year. Based on Astin's (1999) student involvement theory,

the study explored how students transformed from high school students, to first year students, to second year students. A thorough data collection was conducted to include interviews with participants, journaling prompts, and a focus group. The themes that emerged from the study revealed that students viewed college as an intimidating and overwhelming prospect, their parents supported their educational journey, they developed meaningful and enduring friendships owed largely to the FYE program, and they developed study skills the participants did not have coming into college. Participants also became more involved in campus activities due to the FYE program, many of whom became involved in student life and some joined the student government group. And finally, students found that the development they underwent their first year to become better students has helped them to begin their second year with less stress and anxiety. As a result of this study, the institution should consider some adjustments to the program to include a mental health component and include a component to suggest how students can remain involved and connected if they are required to take online only courses. It would also be beneficial to increase the scale of the program to include a greater population at this institution, and possibly sharing the structure of the program with sister institutions would extend the benefits to more students, helping to improve the academic experience for more higher education scholars.

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**Appendix A**

**IRB Approval Letter**

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 21, 2023

Jeff Downs
Rick Bragg

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-159 Student Success through First-Year Experience Programs: A Transcendental Phenomenology Study

Dear Jeff Downs, Rick Bragg,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us a████████████

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
*Administrative Chair*
**Research Ethics Office**

# Appendix B

# Site IRB Approval
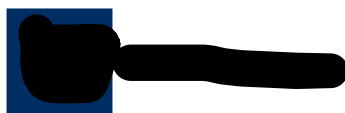
DATE:              August 22, 2023
TO:                Jeffrey Downs, M.A. Mathematics
FROM:              ██████████████ Institutional Review Board (IRB)

PROJECT TITLE:     [2079295-1] STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE
                   PROGRAMS: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
REFERENCE #:       Social-Behavioral
SUBMISSION TYPE:   New Project
ACTION:            DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
REVIEW TYPE:       Exempt
DECISION DATE:     August 22, 2023
REVIEW CATEGORY:   Exemption Category # 2(ii)

--

An IRB member has reviewed this project and has determined it is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations. Please note, the federal government has identified certain categories of research involving human subjects that qualify for exemption from federal regulations.

Only the IRB has been designated by the University to make a determination that a study is exempt from federal regulations. The above-referenced protocol was reviewed and the research deemed eligible to proceed in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations on the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46.104) and University policy.

--

**Reviewed Documents**

- Advertisement - DownsRecruitmentLetterUpdated.docx (UPDATED: 08/21/2023)
- Consent Form - DownsInformationSheetUpdated 8-22.docx (UPDATED: 08/22/2023)
- Letter ██████ Permission to conduct study.docx (UPDATED: 08/21/2023)
- Letter - Liberty IRB Approval Exemption Letter.pdf (UPDATED: 08/21/2023)
- Proposal - Downs_Jeff_ Proposal 7-8-2023.docx (UPDATED: 07/10/2023)
- Protocol - Protocol - SBER- Downs.docx (UPDATED: 08/21/2023)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Focus Group Questions.docx (UPDATED: 08/21/2023)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Focus Group Questions.docx (UPDATED: 08/21/2023)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Individual Interview Questions.docx (UPDATED: 08/21/2023)
- University of Nevada, Reno - Part I, Cover Sheet - University of Nevada, Reno - Part I, Cover Sheet (UPDATED: 07/14/2023)

If you have any questions, please contact ████████████████ r at ████████████

Sincerely,

Co-Chair, ███ IRB          Co-Chair, ███ IRB

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within ███ ███ IRB's record.

## Amendment Request Review Worksheet

*See IRB policy for information about amendment reviews by full committee or expedited procedure. Place an "X" in the spaces provided, and note comments, and requested revisions.*

| Assessment of Type of Changes Requested | |
|---|---|
| 1. Do you concur with the PIs categorization of the amendments as *minor* or *substantive*? NOTE: Substantive amendments to research posing greater than minimal risk, or amendments that increase risk to greater than minimal MUST be reviewed at a convened IRB meeting. | __ No, specify: <br> _X_ Yes |

| Amendment Identification and Justification | |
|---|---|
| 2. Check the types of amendments being requested at this time: <br> __ New PI (requires updated Part I application) <br> __ Adding/removing researchers (requires updated Part I application) <br> __ Adding/removing funding sources/sponsor (requires updated Part I application) <br> __ Amendments to Investigator Brochure or Sponsor Protocol (amended document must be added with amendment package) | Note any requested revisions: |

3. Check the other components of the research being amended at this time (most require amendments to Part II application):

| | |
|---|---|
| __ External IRB approval | __ Study drug/placebo |
| __ Enrollment (e.g., closing enrollment or increasing enrollment numbers) | __ Study device |
| | __ Study procedures |
| __ Study population* or sites | __ Data collection procedures |
| _X_ Recruitment processes | __ Research instruments or assessments |
| __ Consent/assent processes | __ Data monitoring processes |
| __ Study purpose | __ Data handling or storage |
| __ Research design | __ Other, describe: |

*NOTE: If new study populations include pregnant women/fetuses, prisoners, children, or persons with diminished mental capacity, the relevant population-specific researcher form must be added to the package. Complete the review using the related, population-specific review worksheet.*

| | |
|---|---|
| 4. Are the changes/reasons for the changes acceptable with consideration for criteria for IRB approval of the research (see Policy 53)? | __ No, note your concerns: <br> _X_ Yes |

| Amended Applications, Researcher Forms, and Study Documents | |
|---|---|
| 5. Were the Part I or Part II applications modified to reflect the amendments and submitted with the package? | __ N/A, no changes to Part I/Part II applications required <br> __ No, note requested revisions: <br> _X_ Yes |

| | |
|---|---|
| 6. Were other researcher forms modified or added to reflect the amendments (e.g., forms for federal agency support, vulnerable populations, blood draws, drugs, devices, changes related to consent waivers)? | _X_ N/A, no changes to other researcher forms required<br>__ No, list missing researcher forms:<br>__ Yes |
| 7. Were the investigator brochure or sponsor protocol modified or added to reflect the amendments? | _X_ N/A, no changes to these study documents required<br>__ No, list documents:<br>__ Yes |
| 8. If a federal grant application was modified or added for this amendment request, are the procedures in the grant and IRB application congruent? | _X_ N/A, no changes to federal grant application<br>__ No, explain:<br>__ Yes |
| 9. Are changes to the recruitment materials appropriate and sufficient? | _X_ N/A, no changes to recruitment materials required<br>__ No, note requested revisions:<br>__ Yes |
| 10. Are changes to study instruments/data logs appropriate and sufficient? | _X_ N/A, no changes to instruments/data logs required<br>__ No, note requested revisions:<br>__ Yes |
| 11. Are changes to consent/HIPAA documents appropriate and sufficient? | _X_ N/A, no changes to consent/HIPAA documents required<br>__ No, note requested revisions:<br>__ Yes |
| **Effects of Amendments on Participant Risks and Research Benefits** | |
| 12. As the result of these amendments, are risks to subjects likely to: | __ Increase (change risk level in IRBNet if appropriate)<br>__ Decrease (change risk level in IRBNet if appropriate)<br>_X_ Remain unchanged<br>Explain your reasoning: The change it in effort to get higher quality data from online participants |
| 13. As the result of these amendments, are the research benefits likely to: | __ Increase<br>__ Decrease (consider if the relationship of risks to benefits allow the research to continue as amended)<br>_X_ Remain unchanged<br>Explain your reasoning: No change to benefits related to this amendment |
| **Effect of Amendments on Enrolled Participants** | |

Amendment Request Review Worksheet (73)

| 14. Do the researchers have a reasonable plan to notify, or inform and re-consent *enrolled* participants (*required* when amendments may affect participants' willingness to continue participating in the research)? | _X_ N/A, changes not likely to affect enrolled participants<br>__ No, note requested revisions:<br>__ Yes |
|---|---|

**Reviewer Determinations**

_X_ Approve amendment request as submitted
__ Approve amendment request with conditions (i.e., minor, directed changes are required); revisions may be reviewed by expedited procedures
*Indicate who may approve revisions:*
   __ IRB staff
   __ Any voting member of the IRB
   __ Primary reviewer or IRB Chair
__ Defer review of amendment request; substantive revisions are requested; revisions require *Full Committee Review*
__ Disapprove amendment request by *Full Committee Review* only. Justify this determination:

In the *Reviewer Comments* page in IRBNet: Note additional comments if any. Select a *Recommendation* from the drop-down list. Mark your review complete. Add this worksheet as a new document. Save and Exit.

**Appendix C**

**Permission Request**

August 1, 2023

████████████
President
████████████
████████████

Dear President ████████

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Education degree. The title of my research project is Student Success through First-Year Experience Programs: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study and the purpose of my research is to describe the retention after the First Year Experience (FYE) program for second-year college students at ████████████

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at ████████████

Participants will be asked to schedule an interview, participate in a focus group, and complete a journaling prompt. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval or respond by email to ████████████. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Downs
Community College Professor
Doctoral Candidate

**Appendix D**

**Permission Response**

August 29, 2023

Jeffrey Downs

████████████████████

Doctoral Candidate

████████████████████

████████████████████

Dear Professor Downs:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Student Success Through First-Year Experience Programs, I have decided to grant you permission to access our student body and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☒ [[I/We] will provide our FYE membership list to Jeffrey Downs, and Jeffrey Downs may use the list to contact our members to invite them to participate in his research study.

☒ [[I/We] grant permission for Jeffrey Downs to contact FYE participants to invite them to participate in his research study.

☒ We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

████████████████████

President

████████████████████

**Appendix E**

**Participant Letter**

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to about the shared experience of participants from the First Year Experience program at Northern Nevada College, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, college students who are in their second year at NNC, having participated in the First Year Experience program. Participants will be asked to take part in a one-on-one, recorded, Zoom interview, complete a journal prompt, and possibly take part in a Zoom-recorded focus group. It should take approximately one hour to complete each of the procedures listed, three hours in total. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me prior to the time of the interview.

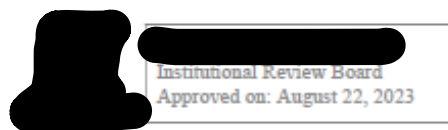Participants will receive a $10 Amazon gift card for each phase of the study they complete up to $30.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Downs
Community College Professor
Doctoral Candidate
▮▮▮▮▮▮
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

**Appendix F**

**IRB Approval from local institution IRB**

Institutional Review Board
Approved on: August 22, 2023

**Appendix F**

**Information Sheet**

**Title of the Project:** STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

PROGRAMS: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

**Principal Investigator:** Jeffrey Downs, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an 18 years or older student at Northern Nevada College who participated in the First Year Experience program during the Fall 2022 semester. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is learn the shared experiences that student have from their involvement with the First Year Experience program at Northern Nevada College. Results from this study may be used to make modifications or adjustments to the program for future students.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Take part in a recorded Zoom interview with the researcher. This will be approximately one hour and is a time for you, the participant, to reflect on your experiences in the program.
2. Complete a journal prompt of five questions with 200-word responses each. The time to complete this task can vary depending on the level of reflection participants choose. Students can expect to spend 30 minutes to an hour on this task.
3. Five to eight participants will be invited to take part in a focus group of 4 to 5 other students from the First Year Experience program. This will be approximately one hour and be a recorded Zoom session.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include improved student success with greater completion and graduation rates.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then be deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

### How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the study will receive up to a $30 Amazon gift card. Any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study after beginning but before completing all study procedures will receive a $10 Amazon gift card per procedure in which they participate.

### Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Western Nevada College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be

Institutional Review Board
Approved on: August 22, 2023

included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

## Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jeffrey Downs. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, ▮▮▮ at ▮▮▮▮.

You may discuss a problem or complaint or ask about your rights as a research participant by calling the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ y Office at ▮▮▮▮▮. You may also use the online Contact the Research Integrity Office form available from the Contact Us page of the University's Research Integrity Office website, ▮▮▮▮.

## Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, ▮▮▮▮▮ our phone number is ▮▮▮▮▮ and our email address is ▮▮▮▮.

You may discuss a problem or complaint or ask about your rights as a research participant by calling the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also use the online Contact the Research Integrity Office form available from the Contact Us page of the University's Research Integrity Office website.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Appendix G**

**Institution Permission Letter**

June 12, 2023

To: ████████████████ Institutional Review Board
Liberty University Institutional Review Board

To Whom it May Concern:

████████████ supports the dissertation research to be conducted by Jeffrey Downs and his qualitative research into the shared experience of students in the First Year Experience (FYE) program.

This program, which began in the Fall of 2022, is designed to help students be more successful in college. Students and the FYE program would benefit from the results of such a study.

With Mr. Downs' interest in student success and area of study in Instructional Design and Technology, we believe that the results of this dissertation will benefit all parties involved.

The ████ Academic Advising Department, Vice President, and President support this research and will assist Mr. Downs in gathering participants and other supportive content needed for this study.

If we can provide additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

President

**Appendix H**

**NNC Permission to be Principle Investigator**

Research & Innovation

**Request for Approval to Serve as Principal Investigator**

University employees must meet one of the following criteria to serve as the PI for human subject research projects that are *exempt* under DHHS regulations or the University's IRB Flexibility Policy, or *non-exempt* (thus requiring IRB review, approval, and oversight). 1. Faculty at the University with renewable appointments as defined in the University Administrative Manual (see UAM section 2,511). 2.Valid and current contract as Community Faculty at the ▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ dorsed in writing from Senior Associate Dean for Research or his designee to conduct human subject research. 3. Visiting faculty or scientists during the time they are on the University payroll and endorsed in writing from his/her sponsor 4. Full-time classified staff at the University, with signature approval from the appropriate dean and the Vice President for Research and Innovation (contact Sponsored Projects to request approval). 5. University of Nevada, Reno Emeritus faculty in residence who wish to continue their research programs, with signature approval from the appropriate dean and the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

"Affiliate Sites" refers to institutions that have an inclusive, signed agreement (generally a Memorandum of Understanding) that allows the University IRB to be the *IRB of Record* for human subject research conducted at or on behalf of the Affiliate Site.

Individuals from other external sites who wish to be the PI for exempt or non-exempt human subject research to be conducted under the auspices of the University RI or IRB must contact the RI Director to establish a written agreement for the University IRB to be the *IRB of Record* for the research.

To serve as a principal investigator for human subjects research submitted for exempt determination by the University Research Integrity or for review, approval, and oversight by the University IRB, individuals at Affiliate Sites must meet one of the following criteria:

She/he is faculty at the Site;
She/he is clinical staff at the Site; or
She/he is otherwise considered a qualified representative or agent of the Site, as determined/confirmed by the Affiliate Site.

**The individual must also provide a copy of her/his CV or other documentation of her/his educational, professional, and research experience.**

**Contact Information**

Name: Jeffrey Downs                                    Title: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Department: Mathematics                           Email: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

College/VP: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓                              Phone ▓▓▓▓▓▓

**Project Information**

1. Indicate with of the following categories apply to the proposed project (check all that apply):

    ___ The proposed project will be funded in whole or in part by a federal or non-federal entity via an agreement or contract with the University.

    ___ The proposed project will be funded by University funds.

X_The proposed project will involve human subjects.

2. Proposed Project: Please describe the project.

The project is to conduct a Qualitative Phenomenological study of the First Year Experience (FYE) program at ██████████████████████ The study will include interviews, focus groups, and journal writing of 12 to 15 students who were part of the FYE program Fall 2022.

3. Funding Source: Name of sponsoring agency.

Any costs associated with the study will be covered by me, the researcher. The study is part of a dissertation being conducted for Liberty University.

4. Length of Study: Specify the anticipated duration of this project.

The data collection is planned to be in the Fall 2023 semester, intending to be in the earlier part of the semester. Data analysis will be done during the Spring 2024 semester.

5. Expertise: What skills and knowledge do you have to serve as PI on this project?

I have been trained through Liberty University in conducting Qualitative research in many capacities, including phenomenological research. Training has included developing questions, collecting data, maintaining the confidentiality of the subjects, and bracketing biases. I have also been trained through the CITI program for Social & Behavioral Research, Social & Behavioral Researchers, and the basic course. I have also worked in the past in the area of Student Success at Western Nevada College. I am no longer in that role and currently teach mathematics, but I am interested in components of student success.

6. Select the trainings you have completed that are applicable to this project.


___CITI – Responsible Conduct of Research

___CITI – Protection of Human Subjects

___CITI – Financial Conflicts of Interest

___CITI – Good Clinical Practices

___Webcampus: Training for Human Research Oversight Responsibilities (THOR)

Trainings I have completed through CITI:

Belmont Report and Its Principles
Populations in Research Requiring Additional
      Considerations and/or Protections
History and Ethical Principles
Defining Research with Human Subjects
The Federal Regulations
Assessing Risk
Informed Consent
Privacy and Confidentiality
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in
      Social and Behavioral Research
Internet-Based Research

**Approvals**

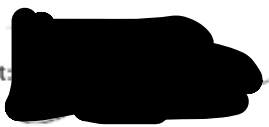Principal Investigator: *Jeffrey S Downs*      Date: 3/17/2023

Chair/Director: ██████████████      Date: 3 – 20 – 23

Dean/Vice President: ███████████      Date:    3/20/23

**Appendix I**

**Questions for Data Collection**

**Individual Interview Questions**

1. Please describe your high school educational background that prepared you for college through your current year. CRQ

2. How does your family feel about education? SQ1

3. What type of extracurricular activities did you participate in as a student in high school? SQ1

4. How did you view yourself as a student in high school? SQ1

5. What was your perception of college while you were still in high school? SQ1

6. How does your family feel about you being in higher education? SQ1/SQ2

7. Why did you choose to participate in the FYE program to begin your college career? SQ2

8. What was your perception of the cohort structure of the program? Most/Least liked? SQ2

9. How did the FYE program provide meaningful college opportunities? SQ2

10. Describe your peer interactions within the linked course structure of the classroom environment. SQ2

11. How did the FYE program live up to your expectations? SQ2/SQ3

12. How did the FYE program influence your educational values as you moved into your second college year? SQ3

13. What academic habits did you develop from your experience in the cohort? SQ3

14. While you were participating in the FYE program, what were your expectations for your second year of college? SQ3

15. How have you grown into your second college year expectations? SQ3

16. What else would you like to add to our discussion about the FYE program that we have

not yet discussed? CRQ

**Journaling Questions**

1. Describe how your family upbringing has influenced your education.

2. How were your expectations of the FYE program fulfilled when you entered college?

3. What were the most memorable friendship interactions that developed from the FYE

program?

4. Describe three college activities that you participated in that guided your perception of

college.

5. As a second-year college student, in what ways have your values changed from your first

year? Why?

**Focus Group Questions**

1.What was the most significant deciding factor to participate in the FYE program? CRQ

2.How have your family values led you to go to college? SQ1

3.What prepared you the most for entering college? SQ1

4.What has been the best college experience you have had so far? SQ2

5.What has been the most challenging aspect of college? SQ2

6.How has the FYE Program guided your academic interactions? SQ2/SQ3

7.What was the best outcome of the FYE program? SQ3

8.What was the most influential moment you recall from the FYE program? SQ3

9.What else would you like to add to our conversation about the FYE Program? CRQ