A Study Of Retention Rates Among Non-Resident Students Enrolled In Freshman Retention Programs

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A STUDY OF RETENTION RATES AMONG NON-RESIDENT STUDENTS ENROLLED IN
FRESHMAN RETENTION PROGRAMS

A Dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Higher Education
The University of Mississippi

By
CHELSEA WELCH BENNETT
May 2015
ABSTRACT

This mixed methods, relational design involved a QUAL → quan Sequential Exploratory Design to determine the relationship between two freshman retention programs, cohort-based and non-cohort based Freshman Year Experience (FYE) courses, and the retention of academically less-prepared, non-resident students at a Southern University (SU). Structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted for the qualitative purposes of this study. Qualitative data was obtained from 31 non-resident, first-year students at SU enrolled in either the non-cohort FYE course (n=22) or the cohort-based FYE course (n=9). Of the 31 participants, 14 were male, and 17 were female and, at the time of interview, all participants were 18 to 19 years of age. Inductive analysis of interview transcripts led to seven themes related to students’ responses to questions on enrollment, departure, retention, and the FYE course.

Quantitative methods were used to process the results from the qualitative data and to provide the context in which the qualitative data is couched. The researcher conducted a Kruskal-Wallis test, Mann-Whitney test, and two-way Chi-square tests to determine the relationship between enrollment and retention of non-resident, undergraduate students enrolled in the FYE courses, which was juxtaposed with data on non-resident students in the freshman population at SU who are not enrolled in an FYE course.

Results of this study indicated there is no significant relationship between retention, academic standing, or high school grade point average by type of course (cohort-based, non-cohort based, or no FYE). The results did show evidence of a significant relationship between level of academic preparedness for college and first semester grade point average.
DEDICATION

For my Vaiden, who holds the key to my heart
and who will grow up to do whatever she sets her mind to.

Have your heard of tiny Melinda Mae,
   Who ate a monstrous whale?
      She thought she could,
      She said she would,
   So she started right in at the tail.

And everyone said, "You're much too small,"
   But that didn't bother Melinda at all.
She took little bites and she chewed very slow,
      Just like a good girl should…

…And in eighty-nine years she ate that whale
   Because she said she would!

-Shel Silverstein
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many individuals who have provided me with assistance and guidance with this project. I would first like to thank my Dissertation Chair and Advisor, Dr. Lori Wolff. I selected Dr. Wolff as my Chair because I knew she would provide honest feedback and would firmly keep me on task, and she did so with such grace and kindness. I will forever be grateful for her guiding hand, her shared wisdom, and her unrelenting patience as she led me on this long journey.

I am also very thankful for the guidance of my dissertation committee: Dr. Doug Davis, Dr. John Holleman, and Dr. Whitney Webb. They provided me with helpful feedback and encouragement along the way. I hold each of them and their work in such high regard and appreciate their time and effort in helping me bring this dream to fruition.

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Dr. Susan Mossing was a dear friend and mentor who also served as a peer reviewer early in this process and provided wonderful advice to me on the qualitative portion of this study. Sue helped me obtain my first job in Student Services and gave me my first opportunity to teach a pilot First Year Experience course in 2003. I am indebted to Sue for the doors she opened for me. I only wish she was here to see our work on this project completed, but I know a part of her will always be with me.
It is a joy to wake up each morning and come to work with people I cherish at a place I love. I want to thank my colleagues in the School of Pharmacy for their support in this process and for their dedication to student success. A special thank you goes to Dean David Allen for his unwavering support of me, both personally and professionally. I would also like to thank our fabulous pharmacy students who make it an absolute treat to come to work every day.

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And finally, I am thankful for my daughter, Vaiden, who brings such joy and brightens up every day.

Now let’s go play!
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As institutions turn to tuition revenue as a replacement for state funding, the competition for students is vital to their livelihood (Groen & White, 2003). This issue is clear in today’s economic climate as state appropriations for higher education continue to decline and colleges and universities struggle to balance institutional mission and funding. As college and university officials depend more and more on non-resident tuition dollars to bolster institutional revenue, it is increasingly important to understand the enrollment and retention patterns of non-resident students. If these students enroll but are not retained, institutions will see a loss of revenue.

It is important for college and university administrators to understand why this demographic is enrolling, if they are retained, and why they choose to depart if they are not retained. Understanding these dimensions can help in the planning of recruitment strategies and in the implementation of programs to help increase retention efforts and to measure the efficacy of those programs already in place.

Statement of the Problem

America’s top universities recruit high-ability non-resident students to enhance the quality of the institution and reinforce perceived prestige, while enabling public institutions to practice price discrimination, charging higher tuition to non-resident students. Not all non-resident students who enroll in an institution outside of their home state, however, are high achieving students. Many are kept out of their home state institutions due to higher
admissions standards and are sometimes forced to look across state lines to institutions with lower admissions standards where they can gain admission (Mixon & Hsing, 1994).

As academically less-prepared students look to out-of-state institutions for enrollment, colleges and universities must work to ensure these students are retained through graduation to keep tuition dollars flowing and enrollment numbers elevated. College and university administrators and state policymakers work to understand attendance patterns of current students, as these patterns hold major recruitment and financial implications for institutions of higher education (Mathies, 2009). To maximize their return on investment, colleges and universities must work to ensure they are spending their recruitment resources on students who are likely to persist and are providing programming that can assist them in doing so.

To boost retention numbers for all students, institutions are turning to special programming to ease the transition to college and to provide additional support for incoming students. These programs often take the form of new student orientations, freshman year experience courses, special tutoring options, and cohort programs. These can be costly endeavors in terms of both dollars and manpower but, if they are effective, can pay back dividends for the institution in terms of retention. Studies have examined the efficacy of these types of programs; however, very little research is available on the implication of such programs for non-resident students who are academically less prepared than their peers (Bean, 1990).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed methods, relational study was to determine the relationship between two freshman retention programs and the retention of academically less-prepared, non-resident students at a Southern University, hereafter referred to as SU. Both programs employed the same elective course, a voluntary Freshman Year Experience (FYE) introductory course to
university life, but some students took the course as part of a cohort, while students enrolled in the remaining FYE sections took it as a stand-alone course. For the purposes of this study, the FYE course that did not incorporate a cohort program was distinguished as “non-cohort FYE” and was compared with “cohort-based FYE.” A more thorough definition of these courses can be found below.

The focus for the study was on understanding the relationship between these two FYE programs and retention among non-resident, less academically prepared students and whether one program yielded a higher retention rate than the other in retaining this population. Student data involving the cohort and non-cohort tracks was juxtaposed with student data from the non-resident student population at SU not enrolled in these programs to highlight any areas of difference or significance.

Significance of the Study

Research shows a marked increase in competition for students across state boundaries (Henderson, 1996). As state appropriations continue to decrease, institutions turn to tuition revenue as a replacement for state funding. The economic downturn in the United States, among other factors, has helped push in-state students toward community colleges, making the recruitment of out-of-state students even more vital. Public institutions seeing declining state appropriations can capitalize on higher non-resident tuition to bolster institutional revenue.

The recruitment of any student, especially out-of-state students, can be costly. As colleges and universities increasingly spend their resources on the recruitment of out-of-state students, it is important to understand the retention patterns of this student group. Because less-prepared non-resident students may not meet admissions requirements at four-year public
institutions in their home states, many migrate to institutions in neighboring states with lower admission standards. If these students are not retained, institutions will see a loss of revenue. As a result, college and university officials should provide every possible resource to help these students in their transition to college. By offering effective programming and support, like FYE courses and cohort programs, institutions of higher education can continue to improve retention rates and keep non-resident tuition dollars flowing, thus supplementing institutional loss of government subsidies.

The results of this study can be used to assist administrators at colleges and universities in understanding enrollment and retention patterns of academically less-prepared non-resident students. Through this understanding, college and university administrators can begin to develop admissions guidelines and recruitment strategies for non-resident students and retention plans for the at-risk non-resident population that will maximize institutional resources.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question of this study was whether one type of FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort, had greater retention rates with academically less-prepared, non-resident students. The secondary questions explored were:

1. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enroll at SU and, in particular, in the FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort?
2. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enrolled in an FYE course stay?
3. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enrolled in an FYE course intend to depart or why have they departed?
4. Are retention rates among non-resident, less academically prepared students enrolled in FYE different from retention rates of their more academically prepared non-resident counterparts enrolled in FYE?

**Hypotheses**

The quantitative portion of this study examined the following hypotheses related to the non-resident population at SU to provide the context for the qualitative portion of the study.

1. There is no significant difference in first semester grade point average by type of course and level of preparedness.
2. There is no significant difference in Fall 2013 academic standing by type of course.
3. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 academic standing by type of course.
4. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 academic standing by type of course.
5. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 retention by type of course.
6. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 retention by type of course.

Hypothesis 1 examined the level of preparedness of all non-resident students by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Level of preparedness consisted of two categories, less academically prepared or more academically prepared. These definitions were developed using quartiles of entrance exam scores and high school grade point averages required for admission to SU. The quartiles used in this study are described in Table 1 in Chapter III. Less academically prepared students fell into the first quartile for ACT/SAT scores and in the first and second quartile for high school grade point averages. Their more academically prepared counterparts fell into the second, third, or fourth quartiles for ACT/SAT scores and into the third and fourth quartiles for high school grade point average.
Hypotheses 2 through 6 examined differences among all nonresident students by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Academic standing was determined by SU’s definitions of Academic Good Standing, Academic Probation, and Academic Dismissal. Full definitions of these standings are found in the “Definitions” section below. Spring and fall retention was recorded as “yes” or “no,” depending on whether the students reenrolled.

Limitations

This research has limited generalizability, as data was collected in only one institution of higher education with unique culture, academic standards, and academic support resources. The following limitations could further impede the study:

1. The results of this research may only be transferable to a small sample of institutions with similar FYE programs and corresponding cohort within the FYE program.

2. Unobservable student characteristics such as student motivation, level of parental education, and socioeconomic status, may confound the study.

3. The study participants were asked to voluntarily take part in the study, which could influence the results of the study.

4. Qualitative responses are dependent upon the self-reporting of students in an interview setting.

5. Enrollment in the FYE programs in this study is voluntary. A student’s enrollment in the elective courses could indicate a higher level of student motivation, thus calling into question the validity of the study.

6. Other factors, such as tutoring and additional programming, related to some special FYE sections could confound study results.
Definition of Terms

1. **Academic Dismissal** - occurs when the student is on probation as a result of having returned from an academic suspension or dismissal, and fails to meet the retention standard of a 2.0 grade point average for any semester (The University of Mississippi, 2011).

2. **Academic Good Standing** - the student has maintained a 2.0 cumulative college grade point average or better (The University of Mississippi, 2011).

3. **Academically Less-Prepared Students** - for the purpose of this study, academically less-prepared students are defined as those students who fall into the first quartile for ACT/SAT scores accepted for admission by SU in conjunction with high school grade point averages in the first or second quartile, based on a 4.0 scale. Further definition of the study sample is found in Chapter III of the dissertation.

4. **Academic Probation** - the student will be placed on academic probation, and will continue to be on probation, when his or her cumulative grade point average falls below a minimum of 2.0 (The University of Mississippi, 2011).

5. **Academic Suspension** - the student will be placed on academic suspension if his or her cumulative GPA does not reach the required level, according to the number of hours attempted. A student who is on suspension will be denied readmission to the university for at least one regular semester, not including the summer term (The University of Mississippi, 2011).

6. **Attrition** - the rate of students leaving an institution without graduating (Pocock, 2012).

7. **Drop out** - the act of leaving a specific university without completing qualifications in their chosen initial degree subject (Pocock, 2012).
8. **Freshman Cohort Programs**- a non-traditional approach to education in which students are grouped together and take a majority of their classes together based on a pre-determined schedule (Lei et al., 2011).

9. **Freshman Year Experience Courses**- introductory courses to university life in which college freshman can develop a community of peers, develop academic and social integration skills, and learn about campus resources (Hotchkiss et al., 2006).

10. **Horizontal Transfer**- students moving to same type institutions, two-year to two-year or four-year to four-year (Kippenhan, n.d.).

11. **Persistence** – a student’s postsecondary education continuation behavior that leads to graduation (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

12. **Retention**- the rate at which students re-enroll at an institution they previously attended (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

13. **Reverse Transfer**- students moving from a four-year to a two-year institution (Kippenhan, n.d.).

14. **Stop out**- the act of leaving an institution of higher education but returning after a period of time (Pocock, 2012).

15. **Vertical Transfer**- students moving from two-year to four-year institutions (Kippenhan, n.d.).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter I serves as a roadmap for the following chapters of the dissertation. Chapter II presents a review the literature relevant to economic implications of admissions policies for non-resident students, college student migration and development theories, state policies related to non-resident enrollment, institutional retention-based programming, and student attendance
patterns. Chapter III details the research methods of the study, including design of the study, the rationale for a mixed methods design, an overview of participants, data collection methods, hypotheses and research questions, and data analysis methods. Chapter IV presents the study’s qualitative research findings, including major and minor themes discovered in the study, distinctions made between those students considered by this study to be academically less-prepared, and characteristics and profiles of participants from the qualitative portion of the study. Chapter V details the study’s quantitative research findings, including an examination of the study’s hypotheses. Chapter VI integrates the results and findings of both the qualitative and quantitative portion of the study in the discussion section.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the previous research regarding admission and retention of non-resident college students has focused on economic factors and other variables associated with students’ decisions to enroll in colleges and universities outside of their home state. One variable largely overlooked is the enrollment of non-resident students, specifically those who are less academically prepared, and student retention in this population. Often times, special retention-based programs are put into place to assist students in the transition to college. These programs have been effective in helping academically less prepared students make the transition (Potts & Schultz, 2008).

This chapter presents a summary of the literature on the relationship between enrollment and retention of non-resident freshmen and the efforts of institutions of higher education to help retain this population. Much of the focus revolves around those students defined by this study as academically less prepared than their peers. The review begins with the reasons why institutions of higher education seek out this population, why these students are turning to out-of-state institutions, and what state governments and institutions of higher education are doing to ensure their enrollment. The review then turns to the literature on how these students are making the transition to college upon matriculation and the lengths colleges and universities go to ensure these students are successful and are retained after enrollment.

Included in the review of the literature is an overview of economic implications of admissions policies, including governmental interest, state appropriations, and tuition
differentials between in-state and non-resident students. Second, state policies related to admissions standards are explored, including a look at admissions selectivity, the role of state legislation in setting standards, and access and enrollment issues related to state-sponsored scholarship programs. The third portion of the review includes an examination of student development theories and theories related to college student migration and college choice. Next, an overview of student attendance patterns is offered, including a look at the transfer process and some predictions of college student retention based on pre-college student characteristics. Finally, the literature review explores the many ways in which institutions of higher education are working to smooth the transition for freshmen to ensure the institutions’ fiscal fitness and healthy college rankings through higher retention rates.

**Economic Implications**

**Governmental Interest.**

Since the 1800s, institutions of higher education in the United States have endured lasting debate surrounding college admissions. The Morrill Act of 1862 was designed to increase access through the creation of the land grant institution. The 1930s saw limited matriculation as more ill-prepared Depression-era students sought admission. As a result of World War II and the GI Bill, colleges and universities were flooded with ill-prepared students. In the 1950s, the Sputnik-era drove up four-year college admission standards as the United States strove to become more globally competitive. The Civil Rights Movement and the Higher Education Act of 1965 expanded access, again altering admissions criteria (City of New York, 2010; Harrison & Rayburn, 1979). The influential 1983 report, A Nation at Risk, recommended specific steps for four-year institutions to raise their admissions standards. For a short period after this report, SAT scores recovered even as selectivity increased. However, this trend did not remain and institutions again answered the call for lower admissions standards (Costrell, 1993). Institutions
of higher education are faced with the perennial problem of setting appropriate admissions standards today, but find their backs against the wall as state funding continues to decline (Mathies, 2009).

Groen and White (2003) examined the interests of state governments as well as universities, both public and private, in attracting in-state versus out-of-state students. They included information on the growth of public higher education and its effect on economic development and discussed migration of students as universities face increased competition for students. The authors suggested this migration leads states to provide less support for public universities, as they expect to attract out-of-state students or expect in-state students to leave their home state to pursue their goals of higher education. They found universities have an incentive to set equal admissions cutoffs for both in-state and out-of-state students, but states see greater gains when admissions cutoffs are lower for in-state students.

As for state financial interests, the study by Groen and White (2003) shows a greater gain in expected future state tax revenue when out-of-state students are admitted. The authors found the recruitment of higher ability students also benefits the state, as these students are more likely to remain in the area where they attend college and are more likely to pay higher taxes. States benefit from having a public university that attracts both in-state and out-of-state high-ability students. In explaining their findings, the authors called for Federal intervention to help balance admissions standards for public universities located in states with historically high student migration rates.

Studies show the economic and social benefits of government subsidy, making a strong argument for state financial support. In response to claims that an open admissions policy killed City College of New York, Harrison and Rayburn (1979) examined the admissions policy debate
and its effect on college enrollment. They argued that attending college is the way in which our society determines who occupies the top and upper-middle levels of our social hierarchy. Their study was designed to compare academic achievement and motivation levels of disadvantaged students enrolled in an open-admissions program at the study institution to achievement and motivation of their regularly admitted counterparts. Those enrolled in the open-admissions program participated in a program that included parent education and orientation, financial aid assistance, a six-week summer session, special study seminars, remedial assistance and a tutorial program. The study found no significant difference in achievement levels between students who entered the university with significantly lower levels of academic achievement and those in the control group after enrollment.

This finding suggests the offering of academic assistance, counseling and advising, and financial aid opportunities can counteract ill effects of open-admissions policies. Additional retention-based programming, like cohort programs and freshman year experience courses, has been effective in helping students make the transition to college (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Jamelske, 2008; Porter & Swing, 2006; Potts & Schultz, 2008; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003).

Such offerings are viewed most often as an investment, but they can be costly, further emphasizing the need for government funding. Koshal and Koshal (2000) set out to determine whether there is a correlation between tuition and state appropriation and if there is a socioeconomic basis for states to provide appropriations for institutions and to set statewide tuition charges. The authors found interdependence exists between state appropriations and tuition at public universities.
**Tuition Differentials.**

As they are faced with decreasing state appropriated monies, colleges and universities are being forced to pursue alternate sources of funding. One major source of funding is tuition dollars, namely higher out-of-state tuition flow. Previous research has employed the use of price theory and benefit-cost framework in helping to determine the relationship between the decision to enroll and non-resident tuition (Adkisson & Peach, 2008; Dotterweich & Baryla, 2005). Much of the research indicates students will migrate out of state when the benefits outweigh the costs of attendance.

Dotterweich and Baryla (2005) hypothesized that high non-resident tuition might increase an institution’s perceived quality, thus leading non-resident students to find these institutions more attractive. The authors looked at institutions in light of tuition deciles. It was found that those institutions in the top tuition tier were able to attract high non-resident percentages despite higher tuition rates. The article suggested that this could be attributable to students’ perception of institutional quality. These findings suggest that public institutions that charge the highest tuition could still increase tuition rates while maintaining a high percentage of out-of-state students. Public institutions seeing declining state appropriations can capitalize on non-resident tuition to bolster institutional revenue.

Similarly, Adkisson and Peach (2008) conducted a two-stage study in which the researchers uncovered predicted values of non-resident tuition in the first stage and then used these predicted values to determine non-resident enrollment. Results of the study indicated that higher tuition costs do not seem to be a dominate factor in students’ migration decisions. They found this to be especially true in regard to those institutions perceived as higher quality and whose current students exhibited higher academic potential.
**State Policy and Admissions Standards**

In addition to perceived prestige, other factors in a student’s home state often play a determining factor in the migration decision. State employment rates, per capita income, number and perceived quality of undergraduate institutions, degree offerings at state institutions of higher education, state-funded scholarships, and state population are all contributors to the decision to enroll outside of one’s home state. As institutions turn to tuition revenue as a replacement for state funding, the competition for students is vital to their livelihood. State policymakers and those within the higher education community are working to better understand the variables that affect enrollment and provide attractive incentives for prospective students (Dotterweich & Baryla, 2005; Groen & White, 2003).

**Admissions Selectivity and Shifting Enrollment.**

In his 1996 article, Henderson summarized the results of a study conducted by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) on admissions policies for first-year students. The purpose of the study was to better understand demographic and economic forces and policy decisions that affect the recruitment of first-year students. The article focused on admissions policies and recruitment strategies, the application process, enrollment caps, and characteristics of and competition for first-time, first-year students.

Henderson (1996) found the five most important factors used in admissions decisions to be high school grade point average, admissions test scores, pattern of high school coursework, college-level coursework completed, and rank in class. Special talents, state of residency, and race/ethnicity followed closely as minor factors.

Henderson (1996) noted the number of applications has risen and first-year students are shopping for institutions of higher education. Those students with higher credentials are applying
Henderson (1996) also found competition for students across state boundaries is increasing. The research shows 66 percent of the institutions surveyed reported a marked increase in competition with out-of-state public four-year institutions. The author maintained this competition is likely to continue as administrators strive for increased campus diversity by broadening their geographic reach for prospective students.

**State Exchange Agreements.**

One way in which interstate competition is manifested is through state exchange agreements. Morphew (2006) discussed the importance of state exchange agreements, such as the Academic Common Market, that enable the sharing of educational resources across state borders. Such programs allow non-resident students to enroll in an institution at a reduced rate, often to provide students the opportunity to participate in academic programs not offered in their home state.

Such agreements, however, have come under debate for university officials and state legislators, leading some states, including Virginia and Maryland, to cap non-resident student enrollment. Many see the trend toward out-of-state recruitment as a threat to the mission of the public institution of higher education. As more seats are taken by non-resident students, in-state students are being left out of consideration for in-state enrollment, leaving taxpayers to wonder if such programs give away state subsidies to non-resident students (Glater, 2008; Savoye, 2000).

Others, however, argue a larger non-resident population brings much more than finances to a campus. They maintain non-resident enrollment enriches the life of the student body through cultural and geographic diversity. It also lends itself to higher academic achievement among entering freshmen, creating a better national perception of institutional quality (de Vise, 2009).
These entrepreneurial exchanges allow universities to increase tuition revenue, manage enrollment numbers and capacity issues, and better control their own revenue streams.

**State Funded Scholarships.**

State-funded scholarships are another way in which states provide powerful financial incentives for students to enroll in colleges or universities in their home state. But some argue these scholarships also create higher admissions standards and competition for seats in these local institutions (Groen & White, 2003).

Duffourc (2006) addressed the ways in which state-funded scholarships affect state legislation of higher education, as well as political and economic implications for the fourteen states with such scholarships. Another focus of the article is the way in which these programs reduce “brain drain” or the tendency of high achieving students to attend out-of-state colleges, often permanently relocating to another state.

States with education scholarships have the same goal of more accessible higher education, though program variation exists among the states. This article breaks these variations into political and economic variables. Political variables include selection criteria, retention standards, and scholarship timelines. Economic variables focus on award amounts, number of recipients, state costs, and funding source. The article discussed these topics for each of the fourteen state-sponsored scholarship programs.

A large portion of the article focuses on strengths and weaknesses of state-funded scholarships. One main strength is such scholarships help keep the brightest students in state, slowing the state’s rate of out-migration of college students. These programs offer incentives for underprivileged students to do well in school. Both of these points show how state-sponsored scholarships can boost a state’s economy by increasing its skilled workforce (Duffourc, 2006).
Many of the weaknesses mentioned in the article focused on the need versus merit debate. The author maintained these programs primarily provide for already-privileged students because academic achievement is affiliated with socioeconomic status. In fact, the author suggested these programs cause many to view the scholarships, and access to higher education in general, as an entitlement. Other cases against such programs focus on problems with retention rates among scholarship recipients (Duffourc, 2006).

**Theoretical Frameworks on Enrollment and Retention**

Numerous theoretical models have been employed in research and discussion of college student enrollment and retention. These theories serve as a standard by which we measure and evaluate institutional programs and policies surrounding the two topics (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Research supporting the use of these models is summarized in the following studies.

**Human Capital Theory.**

Thiessen (2008) maintained, through the lens of Human Capital Theory, “students make college decisions by weighing their perceptions of the costs and private benefits associated with college attendance” (p. 8).

Mixon and Hsing (1994) built their study on the premise that student migration is a form of human capital. Their findings support the benefits of education from an investment and consumption perspective. The authors hypothesize that the best universities will have higher admissions standards, thus preventing many residents from attending college in their home state. In fact, these top universities often recruit high-ability out-of-state students to enhance the quality of the institution and reinforce perceived prestige. This perception enables public institutions to practice price discrimination, charging higher tuition to non-resident students.

The researchers employed a simultaneous modeling procedure to investigate college selectivity, tuition variables, labor market rewards, academic reputation of colleges, and
consumption benefits. The study found college selectivity, small class sizes, and academic prestige are important in the recruitment of non-resident students. The authors purport the recruitment of non-resident students is helpful in increasing college revenue through the use of price discrimination (Mixon & Hsing, 1994).

This consumption aspect also is highlighted by Adkisson and Peach (2008). They found that graduating from an out-of-state institution might lead students to higher future income, thus making the choice to enroll out-of-state more attractive.

**Student College Choice Model.**

DesJardins, Ahlberg, and McCall (2006) examined student college choice theory and the interdependence of application and admission behavior, financial aid, and enrollment decisions. The focus of their study was the estimation of policy change effect on enrollment in institutions of higher education. Student college choice theory consists of three stages: (a) college aspiration (one’s predisposition toward higher education; (b) search (including identification of and application to select colleges; and (c) choice (including admission, enrollment, and attendance). Choice models are used to predict student behavior in light of institutional characteristics, parental and teacher support, and student characteristics such as gender, race, socioeconomic status and academic ability. Studies employing the student college choice model incorporate tuition costs and financial aid opportunities as predictor variables (DesJardins et al., 2006).

The study examined individual, institutional, and state variables to estimate enrollment. They found in-state students tended to have a lower probability of receiving financial aid than their out-of-state counterparts. The authors noted increased tuition at the study institution did not negatively affect enrollment. The results show the odds of application diminished nine percent per every 100 miles away from campus. The probability increased, however, as unemployment rates and tuition prices in surrounding states increased (DesJardins et al., 2006).
Retention-Related Student Development Theories

Many student development theories may address issues related to college student retention. This study will focus on three theories to illuminate these issues. Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure, Astin’s Student Involvement Theory, and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and ideas on marginality and mattering are discussed below.

Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure.

Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure posits that students with higher levels of academic and social integration are more likely to be retained (Tinto, 1997). Academic integration is achieved when students meet institutional expectations and subscribe to the values and beliefs of the institution’s academic program. Social integration is achieved when the student perceives his or her own values and beliefs reflect the same mores of the social communities of the institution in which they are enrolled (Tinto, 1975). Tinto suggests academic involvement leads to greater levels of social integration (Tinto, 1997). Levels of both academic and social integration, along with individual characteristics, such as precollege scholastic achievement, family background, and personal attributes, determine a student’s commitment to his or her institution and subsequent level of persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Astin’s Student Involvement Theory.

In his theory of involvement, Astin (1984, 1999) postulates active learning and personal growth is enhanced by a student’s academic and social involvement. This participation, in turn, leads to greater satisfaction with the collegiate experience and to higher retention rates.

Astin (1996) defined involvement as the “…quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience” (p. 528). Through active participation in the classroom, interaction with faculty, and involvement with student groups,
students create for themselves a sense of identification with their institution and their place within the institution (Morgan, 2001; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003).

It is imperative, then, that institutions of higher education provide ample opportunity for a student to become involved and to do so early in his or her college career. The development of policies and programs to promote student involvement not only helps the student meet his or her personal goals, but leads to increased retention rates for the institution (Astin, 1984, 1996).

As a result, colleges and universities are investing resources in co-curricular activities, living-learning communities, enhanced advising experiences, opportunities for greater student-faculty interaction, and freshman year experience courses (Astin, 1996). The freshman year experience course meets Astin’s call for the frontloading of programming and policies to increase opportunities for student involvement at an early stage, and academic and social involvement are a key component of the freshman year experience curriculum (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003).

**Schlossberg’s Theories.**

Student affairs professionals can help foster retention by assisting students in their transition to college. Nancy Schlossberg’s Transition Theory underscores the importance of understanding the type of transition the student is going through, the context of the transition, the impact it is having on the student, and the student’s perception of the transition (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

Schlossberg defines transition as any anticipated or unanticipated event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. The student’s own perception of and relationship to the event or non-event is most important to acknowledging the transition.
Transition Theory posits understanding the student’s perception can help student affairs practitioners assess the impact on the individual’s life (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

Schlossberg suggests those in student affairs can assist students in their ability to cope with these transitions using the theory’s four stage framework to assess personal resources, including situation, self, support, and strategies. Higher education professionals can help students in seeking options and understanding implications of events or non-events to help give students a sense of control over unanticipated circumstances or to prepare for anticipated events (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

Taking the time to help students process major transitions in their life may also lead to what Schlossberg refers to as a sense of mattering. She defined mattering as the feeling one belongs and matters to others. When a higher education professional shows interest in a student’s well-being and works with them to cope with their transition to college, the student may feel a stronger connection to that higher education professional and to the institution itself. That sense of connection in turn lends itself to higher retention rates (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

**Student Attendance Patterns**

**Retention.**

Retention and recruitment are linked together as the competition among institutions of higher education increases. Colleges and universities are competing for the best students and students and parents are shopping for the best institutions. Many individuals rely on rankings, such as U.S. News and World Report on College Rankings, when making college decisions (Jamelske, 2008). Retention is often used as a measure of institutional success and commitment to its students (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). As retention makes up nearly one-fourth of an
institution’s overall ranking, colleges and universities are working to improve retention rates to attract the best students (Jamelske, 2008).

Student retention is an important topic given today’s economic climate. Colleges and universities must work to ensure their students are retained through graduation to keep tuition dollars flowing. College and university administrators and state policymakers work to understand attendance patterns of current students, as these patterns hold major recruitment and financial implications for institutions of higher education (Mathies, 2009).

According to Horn (1998), approximately 16 percent of students enrolled in a four-year institution leave during the first year or do not return for the second year of study. This attrition is costly for both the institution and the student. As retention rates decline, colleges and universities must work to replace students who leave, creating the need for greater resources and increased recruitment efforts (Jamelske, 2008). Some students choose to return to college later, but often do not complete the requirements for graduation or take a longer time to degree. Stopping out, dropping out or transferring out takes a toll on institutional resources and student achievement (Porter & Swing, 2006).

**Reasons for Departure.**

All departure should not necessarily be considered a loss, and for many students, departure may be a part of a predetermined plan. Other students are simply seeking lower tuition costs, variation in academic rigor, or a better institutional fit. There are many happy transfers who are counted as a loss by one institution but who successfully shift or transfer between higher education institutions. In fact, nearly one-third of all students do so at least once before earning a degree. Forty-one percent of students are vertical transfers who move from two-year to four-year public institutions and nearly as many are reverse transfers, leaving four-year public institutions
for two-year public institutions. Others may be horizontal transfer students, moving between the same type of institutions. Still, of all transfers nationwide, over 25 percent occur across state lines (Gonzalez, 2012).

Bean (1990) investigated underlying assumptions about attrition and retention of college students through a variety of theories. Among the theories highlighted are Spady’s 1970 theory of shared values and normative support and Tinto’s 1975 theory of student attrition.

Bean (1990) discussed variables affecting retention decisions, including student background variables such as high school achievement and socioeconomic status; organizational variables such as student services programs, financial aid and social clubs; academic integration; social integration; and student attitudes. Retention rates change as these variables, demographics, and student experiences evolve.

Additionally, Bean (1990) maintained retention rates reflect not only characteristics of the individual but also the interaction between the student attending the institution and the characteristics of the institution itself. Bean concluded that the student’s goal must be understood before retention can be measured. Students may enter a college and leave having met their own person goals, though they may not persist to graduation.

In their 1999 study, researchers Murtaugh, Burns, and Shuster of Oregon State University (OSU) explored student retention at the university over a five-year span. Their focus was to highlight the efficacy of survival analysis in the representation of retention data and to investigate factors associated with student retention at OSU. The article focused on several variables the authors believed to be critical influences on and predictors of student retention and attrition: pre-college characteristics, involvement in campus programs, demographic characteristics, age, and geographic origin.
The OSU study indicated significant associations between retention and age, residency, and academic performance. Based on the data regarding residency, the authors suggested marketing and recruiting efforts, scholarship opportunities and summer orientation programs could be expanded to help retain out-of-state students. Similar inferences were made in response to lower retention rates of non-traditional and minority students. The authors stated the results of this study should assist in refocusing recruitment efforts, identifying students at risk for withdrawal, and developing programs to increase retention at Oregon State University (Murtaugh et al., 1999).

**The Importance of Retention-Based Programming**

Like Oregon State University, some institutions of higher education are working to understand factors that lead to student retention. Doing so benefits the university, but also the students themselves and the community at large.

Some causes can be attributed to student departure during the first year of college, though feelings of isolation and difficulties in the transition to college life are often cited as the reasons for student attrition (Raymondo, 2003). College and university administrators work to understand underlying causes for difficulty in transitioning and to develop programs, like FYE courses and cohort programs, to help ease the transition.

**Understanding the Transitioning to College.**

According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood occurs for nearly one third of young adults as they make the transition to college. This is often a time of marked instability, as these young people are experiencing changes in employment status, residence, educational environment, and relationships (Johnson et al., 2010). As most college students drop out of college within their first two years of study, determining the variables that predict successful transition to college is invaluable to higher education administrators (Tinto, 1993).
In an annual survey administered by the University of Maryland, administrators try to gain a sense of students’ attitudes toward the institution within the first eight weeks of their college experience through the questionnaire. The researchers have found students’ enrollment patterns are predicted strongly by the findings in the questionnaire, suggesting “goodness of fit” is determined very early in the first year (Glenn, 2010). Those involved in the research of college student retention find students’ academic and social integration are key factors in determining a student’s decision to drop out (Johnson et al., 2010).

As students make the stressful transition to college, institutions are padding their student services offerings with opportunities for social, academic, and cultural integration through a variety of channels including first year experience courses and cohort programs. It is then up to the students themselves to make the best use of these available resources. As Nutter, Kroeger, and Kinnick (1991) maintain, “one step in the investigation of the match or ‘goodness of fit’ between institutions and adult learners is to examine to what extent students use their major resources for personal growth available in the college environment” (p. 349).

First Year Experience.

The first year seminar, often called the first year experience (FYE) course, is a common resource used by institutions to foster retention among first year students. The first of this type of course was begun in 1888 at Boston University (Raymondo, 2003). Today, approximately 95 percent of four-year institutions in the United States employ an FYE course, though they may vary in form and function, and a growing body of literature indicates these courses support student retention (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Jamelske, 2008; Porter & Swing, 2006; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003).

The FYE course serves as an introduction to the university, designed to increase academic performance and retention by providing a means of social and academic integration for
first year students (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Jamelske, 2008). The course promotes bonding
with a peer group; provides instruction on certain skills and knowledge, such as time
management and study skills, associated with college success; promotes contact with faculty;
and builds a sense of commitment, on both the part of the student and the institution (Jamelske,

Institutions are becoming more committed to programs like FYE courses and are
allocating significant resources to improve student success and retention (Jamelske, 2008;
Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Porter and Swing (2006) cite a number of different reasons for this
increased institutional attention to such programs, including financial exigency, reputation
enhancement, improved perception of institutional quality, and mission fulfillment. As
institutions of higher education continue to be inhibited by fiscal constraints, institutional leaders
look to FYE courses to aid in the retention of tuition-paying students and to meet the demands of
performance indicators to maintain state funding. Additionally, as retention has become a
barometer of institutional success, institutions are looking to FYE courses to help improve
institutional perception in national rankings to ensure effective recruitment and fundraising
activities. Finally, FYE courses help to fulfill institutional missions by promoting higher
graduation rates, a marker of institutional success (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003).

FYE courses are built on the premise that “success during the first year provides the
foundation on which the rest of the college experience is based” (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003, p.
379). Studies show the first year, and particularly the first six weeks, is crucial for student
retention (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Coordinators of FYE programs use student development
theories to guide curricular content and the implementation of such first year courses, often
focusing on cognitive psychology and affective approaches that lend themselves to student self-awareness and the development of social and academic skills (Barton & Donahue, 2009).

Through better understanding of how these FYE courses affect student retention, college and university administrators can better determine how best to allocate funds for such programs. According to Porter and Swing (2006), FYE courses play a key role in both academic and social integration, which are major components of persistence proposed by Tinto. Students enrolled in FYE courses are more likely to graduate within four years than nonparticipants; earn, on average, higher grades in other first year courses; are less likely to be placed on academic probation; are more likely to return for the second year than nonparticipants (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Jamelske, 2008; Porter & Swing, 2006; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Additionally, students enrolled in FYE courses report higher levels of satisfaction and involvement in campus life (Jamelske, 2008).

Though FYE programs generally do appear to have a positive impact on retention, results are mixed as the form and function of FYE programs vary among institutions and the majority of studies regarding FYE programs is specific to a single institution (Jamelske, 2008; Porter & Swing, 2006). Very little research on the topic incorporates longitudinal studies, which would add to the veracity of claims that FYE programs have a positive effect on retention (Barton & Donahue, 2009). Additionally, FYE programs are often based on voluntary enrollment at some institutions. This lack of randomization could create issues regarding self-selection and call into question the validity of research involving retention and the impact of the FYE course (Barton & Donahue, 2009; Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Researchers must be careful to control for the effects of motivation and the degree of affinity for group affiliation when studying the FYE impact on retention (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003).
Along with motivation to enroll in FYE courses, researchers must control for students’ precollege characteristics that could affect retention, such as grades, commitment to education, and parental levels of education (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Porter & Swing, 2006). For example, retention seems to vary based on SAT/ACT scores and strength of academic background (Astin, 1993; Porter & Swing, 2006). Additionally, institutional characteristics, such as selectivity, also impact the effect of FYE enrollment on retention (Porter & Swing, 2006). It is important to control for these factors to help eliminate bias, but it is important to remember that FYE courses vary across institutions in significant ways and results from one study do not necessarily generalize to all institutions (Jamelske, 2008).

**Cohort Programs.**

One significant way in which FYE programs differ is in the inclusion of a cohort component. Some institutions arrange students enrolled in the FYE program into learning communities of 10 to 25 students who take a pre-determined series of common courses in their first semester or first year and often participate in extracurricular activities as a group (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Jamelske, 2008; Lei et al., 2011). These programs are designed to simultaneously facilitate both social and academic integration.

The cohort education model provides the opportunity for the development of social capital relationships. Social capital refers to “norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (Lei et al., 2011, p. 9). This aspect of the cohort program promotes collaboration, team-working skills, and the formation of social networks through which students can become socially integrated into campus life (Lei et al., 2011).

This social cognition incorporates Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development, which incorporates not only solving problems independently, but also working
with a more knowledgeable peer to work through problems. This facet of the cohort model addresses students’ academic needs in a team setting (Lei et al., 2011).

Cohorts are built on psychological and social cognition theories that suggest involvement in a community and shared experiences improves student performance, promotes positive attitudes and perceptions, provides a system of support, builds student confidence, and promotes retention efforts (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Lei et al., 2011).

The cohort is instrumental in helping students to successfully navigate the college system and in providing access to peer mentors (Lei et al., 2011). This aspect of the cohort program may be especially helpful for non-resident students who are less familiar with the institution in which they enroll. The cohort system and the idea of the zone of proximal development may also be effective with less academically prepared students, as well.

Conclusion

Research shows a marked increase in competition for students across state boundaries. This competition is likely to continue as administrators strive for increased campus diversity by broadening their geographic reach for prospective students (Henderson, 1996).

As state appropriations continue to decrease, institutions turn to tuition revenue as a replacement for state funding. The economic downturn in the United States, among other factors, has helped push some in-state students toward community colleges, making the recruitment of out-of-state students even more vital. Public institutions seeing declining state appropriations can capitalize on higher non-resident tuition to bolster institutional revenue.

The recruitment of any student, especially out-of-state students, can be costly. As colleges and universities increasingly spend their resources on the recruitment of out-of-state students, it is important to understand the retention patterns of this student group. Because lower-
achieving out-of-state students may not meet admissions requirements at four-year public universities in their home states, many migrate to institutions in neighboring states with lower admission standards. If these students are not retained, institutions will see a loss of revenue.

To increase retention rates, institutions are working to insulate themselves from this loss of revenue by providing retention-based methods, like first year experience courses and cohort programs, to help foster the social and academic integration of all students with the end goal of increasing retention and graduation rates. These retention-based programs could be especially beneficial for those students who are already seemingly at-risk for departure, including non-resident students and those students who are less academically prepared for college than their peers.

As funding is increasingly restricted and universities must be ever more strategic in their recruitment, understanding the enrollment and retention patterns of these at-risk populations could help college and university administrators develop recruitment and retention plans that will maximize institutional resources.

This study, described in the following chapter, was designed to help determine the relationship between two freshman retention programs and the retention of academically less-prepared, non-resident students at SU. The focus for the data collection was on understanding the relationship between these two FYE programs and retention of non-resident, less academically prepared students and whether one program is more effective than the other in retaining this population. Student data involving the cohort and non-cohort tracks of the FYE courses was juxtaposed with student data from the non-resident student population at SU not enrolled in these programs to highlight any areas of difference or significance.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter III addresses specific steps taken to examine the relationship between enrollment and retention of non-resident, undergraduate students at a large public, research-based institution in the Southeastern United States. The study examined the relationship between two retention-based courses, one with a cohort component and one without, and retention among this population. This data was juxtaposed with data from a group of students not enrolled in the FYE courses. The study also considered the retention rates of academically less-prepared students enrolled in these FYE courses as opposed to their more academically prepared peers in the same FYE courses.

This chapter includes the design of the study, an overview of participants, instrumentation, and research procedure. The chapter concludes with information regarding the statistical tests and data analysis.

Design of the Study

The research design for this study was a mixed methods, relational design. The study involved a QUAL→quan Sequential Exploratory Design using the following procedures as described by Creswell (2008):

1. Priority was placed on qualitative data (QUAL) collection and analysis. QUAL data was introduced first in the study and represents a major aspect of data collection. A quantitative (quan) component followed.
2. Qualitative data was collected first followed by a secondary quantitative data collection.

3. Quantitative data and qualitative data are presented separately.

4. The quantitative data was used to process the results from the qualitative data. In this study, quantitative data provided the context in which the qualitative data is couched.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in a mixed-methods approach to provide greater insight than would be available by a single qualitative or quantitative design to increase understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2009).

The purpose of the qualitative portion of this study was to examine the reasons behind enrollment and departure for all non-resident freshmen enrolled in the FYE course at SU during the 2013-2014 academic year. The researcher noted any distinctions made between those students considered by this study to be academically less prepared.

Patton (2002) purported qualitative interviewing aids in the exploration of feelings, thoughts, and intentions are otherwise unobserved directly. This study incorporated a phenomenological approach in the qualitative study to examine the perspectives and experiences of the students enrolled in the non-cohort FYE course and cohort-based FYE course. Phenomenology seeks to describe things as they are and to understand the essence, or shared meaning, of the phenomenon through participant self-reflection (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). This method was appropriate for this study, as the aim was to provide a richer description about the experiences of the students enrolled in the FYE courses at SU through self-reflection in the interviews.

The purpose of the quantitative portion of this study was to determine the relationship between enrollment and retention of non-resident, undergraduate students enrolled in retention-
based courses at SU, the non-cohort FYE course and the cohort-based FYE course. This data was juxtaposed with data on non-resident students in the freshman population at SU who are not enrolled in an FYE course. The quantitative study examined differences in retention and both level of academic preparedness and academic standing by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE.

Cumulative student data was requested from the study institution’s institutional research office. Many data comparisons could be made; however, this study used available data to provide the context for the qualitative portion of the study.

**Design of the Courses in the Study**

The Freshman Year Experience (FYE) course was a voluntary elective course at SU “designed to help first-year students make a positive transition from high school to college, develop a better understanding of the learning process, enhance their academic skills, acquire essential life skills to ensure their success, and to begin their exploration of the career and major that are best for [them]” (Knight, 2012, para. 1). EDHE 105 was a stand-alone course, but also a part of the cohort curriculum for the cohort-based FYE program. For the purposes of this study, the FYE that do not incorporate a cohort program was distinguished as “non-cohort FYE” and was compared with “cohort-based FYE.”

The cohort-based FYE course was part of an elective cohort program at SU which provided first-year students the opportunity to connect with peers in small learning communities while receiving individual attention and academic support from instructors, mentors, and academic advisors. During the fall semester, each cohort class enrolled in three of the same courses, in addition to elective courses. One of the common courses in the fall of the freshman year was cohort-based FYE course. The cohort classes took three additional courses together in
the spring of their freshman year. For the purposes of this study, data was derived from only the cohort-based FYE course in the cohort program.

**Population, Sample, and Participants**

The study population included non-resident freshmen enrolled during the 2013-2014 academic year at institutions similar to SU with similar FYE programs. The sample will include all non-resident freshmen enrolled at SU during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Participants for the qualitative portion of this study were selected from the total number of students enrolled in one of the two FYE courses. The subjects were non-resident students who enrolled in either the non-cohort FYE course or cohort-based FYE course. The study incorporated both academically less-prepared students and their more academically prepared counterparts enrolled in FYE to help illuminate any differences between the two groups of students. The more-prepared participants were chosen by purposeful sampling from the total selection of non-resident students enrolled in the FYE courses who were not considered by this study to be academically less-prepared. Participants were identified by their FYE instructors. The quantitative component of the study examined the hypotheses as they relate to all non-resident freshmen enrolled at SU.

This study defined students as academically less prepared if they fell into the first quartile for ACT/SAT scores accepted for admission by SU in conjunction with high school grade point averages in the first or second quartile, based on a 4.0 scale. In the event a participant fell between two quartiles, for instance if they met standards for less academically prepared in ACT scores but more academically prepared in high school grade point average or vice versa, the study categorized these students as academically less or more prepared based on their high school GPA. The decision to categorize first on GPA was based on evidence from a three-year national study by the National Association for College Admission Counseling that indicates high
school grades are a better predictor of college success than the use of standardized test measurements (NACAC, 2008).

For regular admission to SU, resident students must have at least a 2.5 high school composite grade point average in conjunction with a 16 ACT/390 SAT or better or a 2.0 GPA in combination with 18 ACT/430 SAT or better. For non-resident admission, SU requires at least a 20 ACT/940 SAT with no less than a 2.5 cumulative high school grade point average. SAT scores are based only on critical reading and mathematics components of the exam.

For the purposes of this study, students defined as academically less prepared had ACT scores between 20 and 24 or SAT scores between 940 and 1120 with high school grade point average between 2.0 and 2.59 on a 4.0 scale. In the event a participant fell between two quartiles, the study categorized these students as academically more or less prepared based on their high school GPA.

The following chart delineates the ranges of grade point averages and scores in each quartile for both resident and non-resident admission at SU. The ACT/SAT data from this chart is based on qualifying college entrance exam scores for non-resident admission to SU. The researcher used a matrix to divide the entrance exam scores into quartiles based on ACT/SAT concordance charts (ACT, 2012). High School GPA was also divided into quartiles, based on the admissions requirements for non-resident students. The study participants fell within the first quartile ACT/SAT score and within the first and second quartiles for high school grade point average.
Table 1
Entrance Exam Score and High School GPA Quartiles for Admission to SU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartiles</th>
<th>ACT Scores</th>
<th>SAT Scores</th>
<th>High School GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>940-1120</td>
<td>2.00-2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25-28</td>
<td>1130-1280</td>
<td>2.60-3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29-32</td>
<td>1290-1430</td>
<td>3.01-3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>33-36</td>
<td>1440-1600</td>
<td>3.60-4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Site Selection

The study institution, SU, is a large, research-based, four-year public institution in a small-town located in the Southeastern United States. The institution enrolled 15,992 undergraduate degree-seeking students in the Fall of 2013, with non-resident students representing 6,100 of these students. Of the 15,992 students enrolled, 3,564 were first-time, full-time freshman with 1,965 representing the full-time, non-resident freshman population. During the Fall semester of 2013, 1,127 non-resident freshman at SU were enrolled EDHE 105, with 839 in the non-cohort FYE course, and 288 enrolled in the cohort-based FYE program referenced in this study.

Instrumentation

Qualitative data was derived from a set of interview questions created by this researcher in conjunction with a panel of experts in the field of student retention at SU. Interview responses were analyzed for content validity by this same panel of experts who were also instrumental in the formation of the non-cohort FYE course and cohort-based FYE course at SU.

Quantitative data was requested from SU’s institutional research office. Data included information on age, gender, major, state of residency, entrance exam scores, high school and college grade point averages, and academic standing.
Full descriptions of variables and the tests of significance used in the study are listed in Table 2 within the section titled “Statistical Tests and Data Analysis” below.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question of this study was whether one type of FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort, had greater retention rates with academically less-prepared, non-resident students. The secondary questions to be explored were:

1. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enroll at SU and, in particular, in the FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort?

2. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enrolled in an FYE course stay?

3. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enrolled in an FYE course intend to depart or why have they departed?

4. Is there a significant difference between retention rates among less academically prepared students enrolled in FYE and their more academically prepared counterparts enrolled in FYE?

**Hypotheses**

The quantitative portion of this study examined the following hypotheses to provide the context for the qualitative portion of the study:

1. There is no significant difference in first semester grade point average by type of course and level of preparedness.

2. There is no significant difference in Fall 2013 academic standing by type of course.

3. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 academic standing by type of course.

4. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 academic standing by type of course.

5. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 retention by type of course.
6. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 retention by type of course.

Hypothesis 1 examined the level of preparedness of all non-resident students by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Level of preparedness consisted of two categories, less academically prepared or more academically prepared. These definitions were developed with quartiles of entrance exam scores and high school grade point averages required for admission to SU. Less academically prepared students fell into the first quartile for ACT/SAT scores and in the first and second quartiles for high school grade point averages. Their more academically prepared counterparts fell into the second, third, or fourth quartiles for ACT/SAT scores and in the third and fourth quartiles for high school grade point average.

Hypotheses 2 through 6 examined differences among all nonresident students by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Academic standing was determined by SU’s definitions of Academic Good Standing, Academic Probation, Academic Suspension, and Academic Dismissal. Full definitions of these standings are found in the “Definitions” section in Chapter I. Spring and fall retention was recorded as “yes” or “no,” depending on whether the students reenrolled.

**Research Procedures**

Approval for this study was obtained from the researcher’s dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at SU. Once approved, requests were made to gather data.

For the qualitative portion of the study, the researcher requested a list of non-resident students enrolled in the FYE courses from SU’s institutional research office, as well as the high school grade point averages and ACT/SAT scores for each of the non-resident students. Additionally, the researcher requested a list of all FYE students who had not created a class schedule for subsequent semesters. The researcher used this data to identify students who were
academically less prepared, academically more-prepared, and who may not have intended to reenroll for subsequent semesters based on failure to create a course schedule.

The students were contacted by the researcher via email with a request to participate in the study. The invitation letter to participants is included in Appendix A. The students were provided with the researcher’s contact information so as to volunteer for the study. The students were asked whether they wanted to voluntarily participate in an interview for non-resident students enrolled in the non-cohort FYE or cohort-based FYE courses.

The researcher contacted the FYE course coordinator and instructors of the FYE courses in which these students were enrolled to ask for assistance in encouraging student participation in the study. The researcher followed up with the students and course instructors as needed to ensure an adequate sample.

Efforts were made to contact those students who withdrew from the FYE mid-semester. A list of these students and their contact information was requested from SU’s institutional research office. The researcher attempted to make contact via mail, email, and telephone, as appropriate, to request an interview.

As incentive for their participation, students were notified they would be placed in a drawing to receive one of four $25 Visa gift cards. Participating students were asked to sign an informed consent release, found in Appendix C, to participate in the study and were reminded that no penalty would be associated with their withdrawal from the study at any time.

To preserve confidentiality, each participant was asked to choose one assumed name from a list of pseudonyms provided by the researcher. All recorded information, both written and oral, included only the participant’s assumed name to protect their identities.
Data collection began with individual interviews using the questions included in Appendix B. Interview data was recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed for further analysis. The Release of Rights to Written or Recorded Information form is found in Appendix D. Participants were given the opportunity to choose to complete the interview in the researcher’s office located on the SU campus or to participate in the interview with the researcher via telephone. All interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes, but no longer than an hour, based upon how much the participant chose to share with the interviewer. To examine the study’s research questions, questions were open-ended, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words.

The researcher followed up with participants in subsequent semesters to determine actual level of departure and academic standing upon departure. Follow-up data on academic standing and enrollment was gathered from SU’s institutional research office.

For the quantitative portion of the study, a secondary data analysis was conducted using student data provided by SU’s institutional research office. Data was collected from the 2013-2014 non-resident freshman cohort. This provided a large, aggregate sample of student retention data. Quantitative data was used to compare data on non-resident students enrolled in the non-cohort FYE and the cohort-based FYE courses, as well as compare those non-resident students enrolled in either FYE course with the general non-resident freshman population not enrolled in either FYE course.

**Statistical Tests and Data Analysis**

The data analyses for each quantitative hypothesis along with a list of the variables in each hypothesis are listed in Table 2 below. A more detailed description of the data analysis of each hypothesis follows.
Hypothesis 1 examined the level of preparedness of all non-resident students by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Level of preparedness consisted of two categories, less academically prepared or more academically prepared. These definitions were developed with quartiles of entrance exam scores and high school grade point averages required for admission to SU. The quartiles are described in Table 1 earlier in this chapter. Less academically prepared students fell into the first quartile for ACT/SAT scores and in the first and second quartiles for high school grade point averages. Their more academically prepared counterparts fell into the second, third, or fourth quartiles for ACT/SAT scores and in the third and fourth quartiles for high school grade point average. In the event a participant fell between two quartiles, for instance if they meet standards for less academically prepared in ACT scores but more academically prepared in high school grade point average or vice versa, the study categorized these students as academically less or more prepared based on their high school GPA.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 examined differences among all nonresident students by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Academic standing was determined by SU’s definitions of Academic Good Standing, Academic Probation, Academic Suspension, and Academic Dismissal. Full definitions of these standings are found in the “Definitions” section in Chapter I. Spring and fall retention was recorded as “yes” or “no,” depending on whether the students reenrolled.

The following table includes descriptions of variables for each hypothesis and includes decisions for significance tests for each hypothesis. The chart indicates revised significance tests in Hypothesis 1 from that submitted in the prospectus of this dissertation.
Analysis for Hypothesis 1 was initially planned for the use of a two-way ANOVA. The two-way ANOVA is a statistical procedure used to determine the influence of two independent variables on the dependent variable (Gall et al., 1996; Wiersma, 1991). This test was initially appropriate for this study as it lends information on the relationships between the criterion variable (first semester GPA) and predictor variables (level of preparedness and type of course) found in Hypothesis 1. However, upon further examination, the two-way ANOVA was ruled out and replaced with Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests. Further explanation for this change is discussed in Chapter V on quantitative research findings.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were analyzed using a two-way chi-square. A two-way chi square involves differentiation on one independent variable (type of course) and is measured on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Significance Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Level of Preparedness, Type of Course (categorical)</td>
<td>First Semester GPA (continuous, interval)</td>
<td>Kruskal-Wallis Mann-Whitney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Type of Course (categorical)</td>
<td>Fall 13 Academic Standing (categorical)</td>
<td>2-way Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Type of Course (categorical)</td>
<td>Spring 14 Academic Standing (categorical)</td>
<td>2-way Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Type of Course (categorical)</td>
<td>Fall 14 Academic Standing (categorical)</td>
<td>2-way Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Type of Course (categorical)</td>
<td>Spring 14 Retention (nominal, categorical)</td>
<td>2-way Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Type of Course (categorical)</td>
<td>Fall 14 Retention (nominal, categorical)</td>
<td>2-way Chi-square</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
one dependent variable (academic standing for hypothesis 2 and 3, and retention for hypotheses 4 and 5). The chi-square test is used to determine whether research data in the form of frequency data are distributed differently for different samples (Gall et al., 2006). According to Hinkle et al. (2003), this test can illuminate the association between variables located in the rows and columns of a two-way table.

In analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher noted key meanings and topics that developed in the interviews by following a six-step approach outlined by Creswell (2009). The steps include: (a) organizing and preparing the data; (b) reading the data for meaning; (c) coding the data; (d) developing descriptions, categories, and themes; (e) determining the method of reporting and report the findings; and (f) interpreting the data.

Interview responses were codified by the researcher to ensure a certain degree of data standardization (Parker & Rea, 1992). This researcher summarized the data from the interviews by providing information on common themes and discrepant information. The researcher used descriptive terms to label descriptions, categories, and themes and grouped concepts into categories. The researcher’s own involvement in the study was significant to the validity of the study, and measures were employed in limiting the effects of researcher bias.

The Researcher as an Instrument

Professional Position.

My professional interest in this study began with my work in recruitment as Regional Admissions Counselor and as Assistant Director of Enrollment Services; my role as Assistant Dean of Student Services within an academic school; and as instructor of an FYE course and instructor of an FYE course with a cohort component. My recruitment and teaching of many
non-resident students spurred an interest in better understanding reasons for non-resident enrollment and departure.

I have watched non-resident students enroll because they did not meet admissions standards in their home state, only to later return to their home state’s institution after obtaining an acceptable transfer grade point average. I also have watched academically less-prepared students enroll in the institution and fail to academically integrate to college life, as well as watched non-resident students enroll and fail to reach a comfortable level of social integration before transferring to a different institution.

In my involvement in recruitment and retention activities, I understand that it is important to spend institutional resources wisely, to create a strategic recruitment plan that will make good use of those resources, and to invest in the students who do enroll to build retention through various institutional initiatives, like FYE courses and cohort programs.

My intent for this study was to assist university administrators in making the best use of institutional resources by understanding enrollment patterns of academically less-prepared non-resident students and by understanding the effects of the voluntary FYE courses and cohort programs.

I taught one section of the cohort-based FYE course at SU during the Fall semester of the 2013-2014 academic year during which this study was conducted. To eliminate bias, the students in my course were excluded from the study.

**Researcher Bias.**

Due to the interpretive nature of research, this researcher took specific steps to safeguard against researcher bias. To control for any possible biases, all measures were taken to standardize practices and to limit the researcher’s personal opinions on the topic during the facilitation of
interviews. The researcher used several methods, including consultation with dissertation chair, member checking, and the use of peer debriefing to control for biases and promote the validation of the study.

**Member Checking.**

To control for biases in interviewing, the researcher employed member checking in which the researcher-solicited participants’ views of the reliability of the researcher’s interpretations. The member checks helped decrease the likelihood of incorrect data and incorrect interpretation of data, with the overall goal of providing findings that were authentic and original (Moustakas, 1994). During the interviews, the researcher restated or summarized information to determine accuracy. This afforded participants the opportunity to verify or contradict interpretation of the data. Participants were again asked to verify the accuracy of their responses on the transcription from the interview.

The participants were given the opportunity to examine the emerging themes found by the researcher and were given access to the final report to review for authenticity (Creswell, 2009). As some information that comes to light in the interview may be viewed as sensitive, an invitation was extended to each participant for an individual follow-up session with the researcher.

**Peer Debriefing.**

The researcher sought assistance from two peer debriefers in validity checking of feedback from the interview responses. This method was implemented to help raise the researcher’s self-awareness related to the study data and bring to the forefront any bias related to the analysis of the data.
Peer Debriefer 1 served as Associate Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and Assistant Professor of Leadership and Counselor Education at SU. She was committed to helping students become autonomous learners. The researcher had previous work experience alongside Peer Debriefer 1 in the Academic Support Center at SU, where the researcher served as graduate assistant and Peer Debriefer 1 served as Assistant Director. During her time in the Academic Support Center, Peer Debriefer 1 was instrumental in devising curriculum for a number of academic support classes for students. Peer Debriefer 1 was especially helpful to the researcher in reading over interview transcriptions and notations, but was deceased before the publication of this dissertation.

Peer Debriefer 2 lended a great deal of expertise in the FYE course as the Coordinator of the FYE course at SU. He is committed to helping students achieve success in the classroom and serves as a member of SU’s retention taskforce. He was the recipient of SU’s 2012 staff award for exhibiting excellence in student service. The researcher works in conjunction with Peer Debriefer 2 in her role as an instructor of a section of the FYE course and in her role in student services at SU.

Summary of the Methods

The previously stated methodologies provided a guide for the researcher to successfully carry out the proposed study and to maintain reliability throughout the process. The research procedures included obtaining IRB approval and participant consent and providing an overview of the study. Information on population, sample, and participants is included, as is a description of the intended instrumentation. The mixed-methods design of the study resulted in findings that provide a greater understanding than findings from a single quantitative or qualitative study alone. This chapter concluded with a description of the appropriate statistical tests for the
quantitative portion of the study and discussed theme identification of interview data as the appropriate analysis for the qualitative portion of the study.

The following chapter gives further details on the research findings of this study. Chapter IV presents the study’s qualitative research findings, including major and minor themes discovered in the study, distinctions made between those students considered by this study to be academically less prepared, and characteristics and profiles of participants from the qualitative portion of the study. Chapter V details the study’s quantitative research findings, including an examination of the study’s hypotheses. Lastly, Chapter VI integrates the results and findings of both the qualitative and quantitative portion of the study in the discussion section.
CHAPTER IV

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of the qualitative portion of this study was to determine the reasons behind enrollment and departure for non-resident freshmen enrolled in the FYE course at SU during the 2013-2014 academic year. The study incorporated a phenomenological approach in the qualitative study to examine the perspectives and experiences of the students enrolled in the non-cohort FYE course and cohort-based FYE course.

The primary research question of this study was whether one type of FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort, had greater retention rates with academically less-prepared, non-resident students. The secondary questions explored were:

1. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enroll at SU and, in particular, in the FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort?
2. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enrolled in an FYE course stay?
3. Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enrolled in an FYE course intend to depart or why have they departed?
4. Are retention rates among non-resident, less academically prepared students enrolled in FYE different from retention rates of their more academically prepared non-resident counterparts enrolled in FYE?

This chapter offers a summary of qualitative research findings including major and minor themes discovered in the study and distinctions made between those students considered by this
study to be academically less-prepared. Additionally, characteristics and profiles of participants from the qualitative portion of the study are provided.

**Participants**

Data for the qualitative portion of this study was obtained from 31 non-resident, first-year students at Southern University (SU) enrolled in either the non-cohort FYE course (n=22) or the cohort-based FYE course (n=9). By definition of this study, 11 participants were considered academically less prepared than their peers and 20 were considered academically more prepared. Of the 11 academically less-prepared participants, four were enrolled in the cohort-based FYE course, and seven were enrolled in the non-cohort FYE course. Of the 20 participants considered academically more prepared, five were enrolled in the cohort-based FYE course, and 15 were enrolled in the non-cohort FYE course. Of the 31 participants, 14 were male, and 17 were female. At the time of interviews, all participants were 18 to 19 years of age.

**Participant characteristics.**

Demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity, ACT/SAT score, high school GPA, degree program, academic standing, and home state was obtained prior to the interview. To preserve confidentiality, each participant was asked to choose one assumed name from a list of pseudonyms provided by the researcher. All recorded information, both written and oral, included only the participants’ assumed names to protect their identities. Every attempt was made to exclude other identifying information. As a result, geographic region instead of home state is included in the study to safeguard the participants’ confidentiality. Information on the designation of geographic regions for this study is found in Appendix E.

Participant demographic information is reported below by enrollment in either the cohort section of FYE (Table 3) or non-cohort section of FYE (Table 4).
Table 3 shows the demographic information for respondents enrolled in the cohort-based section of EDHE 105. Of the 9 respondents, 5 identified as female (55.6%) and 4 as male (44.4%). Two respondents claimed residency in the South (22.2%), the same region in which SU is located, while four resided in the Midwest (44.4%), two in the West (22.2%), and one in the Northeast (1.1%). All respondents from the cohort-based section of FYE identified as Caucasian.

Table 3
Personal characteristics of participants enrolled in the cohort-based section of FYE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Geographic Region of Residency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>West (Mountain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Midwest (East North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Midwest (West North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South (South Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>West (Mountain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (East South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Northeast (Middle Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rupert</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Midwest (East North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Midwest (West North Central)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 4 below, of the 22 respondents enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE, 12 identified as female (54.5%) and 10 identified as male (45.5%). Of the respondents in the non-cohort section of FYE, 13 resided in the South (59%), the same region in which SU is located, and 7 resided in the Midwest (31.8%), while one claimed residency in the Northeast (4.6%) and one in the West (4.6%). All respondents identified as Caucasian.
Table 4
Personal characteristics of participants enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Geographic Region of Residency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (West South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Northeast (Middle Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (West South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Midwest (West North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (East South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (South Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (South Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Midwest (West North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South (East South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>West (Pacific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Midwest (East North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South (South Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (East South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South (West South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Midwest (East North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South (South Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South (South Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Midwest (West North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South (South Atlantic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Midwest (East North Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South (West South Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Midwest (East North Central)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When considering all qualitative participants by gender and geographic region of residency, a slight majority of respondents was female (54.8%). Nearly half of all respondents resided in the Southern region of the United States (48.4%), while the remainder resided in the...
Midwest (35.5%), the West (9.6%), or the Northeast (6.5%), representing all four geographic regions of the United States described in this study.

The following tables represent the academic major and level of academic preparedness of all respondents by enrollment in either the non-cohort section of FYE or cohort-based section of FYE. Table 5 considers the academic preparedness of the 22 respondents in the non-cohort section of FYE. Fifteen of the respondents were considered by this study to be academically more prepared than their peers. Of those 15 more-prepared respondents, seven identified as female and eight identified as male, with eight from the Southern region of the United States, five from the Midwest, and one each from the Northeast and West. Seven of the respondents from the non-cohort group were identified by this study as academically less prepared than their peers. Five of the seven respondents were female and two were male, with five claiming residency in the Southern region of the United States and two in the Midwest.

Table 6 outlines the academic preparedness and academic major of participants in the cohort-based section of FYE. Of the nine respondents in the cohort-based section of FYE, five were considered academically more prepared than their peers. Of these five respondents, four were female and one was male, with two from the South, two from the Midwest and one from the Northeast. The remaining four respondents, one female and three males, claimed residency in the Midwest and were considered by this study to be academically less prepared.
Table 5  
Participants enrolled in non-cohort section of FYE by major and level of academic preparedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
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<td>*Vanessa</td>
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*Denotes enrollment in Honors Program  
**Denotes enrollment in secondary Scholars Program
Table 6
Participants enrolled in cohort-based section of FYE by major and level of academic preparedness

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Beatrice</strong></td>
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<td>Charlie</td>
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<td>Eric</td>
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<td>Hugo</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lucy</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Nancy</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Rupert</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
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<td>Less Prepared</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Denotes enrollment in secondary Scholars Program

When considering all qualitative respondents by level of academic preparedness, 20 were considered by the study to be academically more prepared than their peers (64.5%). Of the 17 female respondents, 11 were considered academically more prepared (64.7%), while 9 of the 14 male respondents were considered academically more prepared (64.2%). Of the 15 respondents from the South, 10 were considered academically more prepared (66.7%). Five of the eleven respondents from the Midwest were considered academically less prepared (45.5%), while all respondents from the West (n=3) and the Northeast (n=2) were considered academically more prepared than their counterparts.

Three students in the non-cohort section of FYE are members of the competitive-entry honors program at SU, as denoted by one asterisk in Tables 5 and 6. Six students in the non-
cohort section of FYE and two students in the cohort-based section of FYE are members of a less competitive scholars program at SU, as denoted by two asterisks in Tables 5 and 6. The Honors Program at SU requires a minimum high school GPA of 3.5 and minimum ACT score of 28, while the Scholars Program requires a minimum high school GPA of 3.25 and minimum ACT score of 26 for admission to the program.

Participants in the qualitative portion of the study were pursuing a variety of different majors, the most popular being Liberal Arts Undecided (16%), Biology (16%), and Business Undecided (9.7%). Table 7 further breaks down respondents’ majors by academic discipline.

Table 7
Respondents by academic discipline

<table>
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<th>Academic Discipline</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Hugo</td>
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<td>Sophie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eric</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nancy</td>
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<td>Vanessa</td>
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<td>Professional/Applied Sciences</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charlie</td>
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<td>Ned</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Harry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Margaret</td>
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**Grade Point Averages and Academic Standing for Qualitative Participants.**

Data was collected on all qualitative participants following the Fall 2013 semester to determine Fall 2013 grade point average at SU, as well as academic standing. Tables 9 and 10 denote academic standing and grade point average by FYE section, either non-cohort or cohort-based.
The mean Fall 2013 grade point average for the non-cohort FYE participants was 3.07 on a 4.0 scale, with a range of 1.54 to 4.0, and a median score of 3.37. Two participants from the non-cohort FYE course were put on academic probation after Fall 2013, while the remaining 20 were left in academic good standing. For Spring 2014, the GPA for this subset was 2.81 on a 4.0 scale, with a range of 0.15 to 4.0, and a median score of 2.93. Three participants were put on academic probation, one did not return, and one was deceased. For Fall 2014, the GPA was 2.97, with a range of 1.92 to 4.0. One participant was placed on academic probation, and one did not return.

The mean Fall 2013 grade point average for the cohort-based FYE participants was 2.95 on a 4.0 scale, with a range of 1.31 to 3.85 and a median score of 2.95. Two participants from the cohort-based FYE course were put on academic probation after Fall 2013, while the remaining 7 were left in academic good standing. For Spring 2014, the mean GPA was 2.78, with a range of 1.25 to 3.94 and a median score of 2.88. One participant was placed on academic probation and one on academic suspension. For Fall 2014, the mean GPA was 2.85, with a range of 1.0 to 4.0 and a median of 2.86. One participant was placed on academic probation.

The following tables outline first semester grade point average and first semester academic standing at SU for participants. Table 8 shows data for those participants in the non-cohort sections of FYE and Table 9 depicts information on those participants in the cohort-based FYE course.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1.61</td>
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<td>Vanessa</td>
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When reviewing grade point averages and academic standing for all participants in both cohort and non-cohort groups of FYE, the mean grade point average for Fall 2013 was a 3.04 on a 4.0 scale, with a range of 1.31 to 4.0, and median score of 3.34. The mean grade point average for the 17 female respondents was a 3.09, with one being placed on academic probation. The mean grade point average for the 14 male respondents was a 2.96, with three being placed on academic probation. The mean grade point average for respondents from both the Southern (n=15) and Midwest (n=11) regions of the United States was a 2.99. The mean grade point average for respondents from the Northeast (n=2) was a 3.19 and the grade point average for the respondents from the West (n=3) was a 3.32.
Participant Narratives.

The participants in the qualitative portion of the study shared a variety of opinions related to their decision to enroll in SU and their enrollment in the FYE course, as well as how those decisions to enroll may have affected their academic or social integration as a college freshman at SU. The following are excerpts from each participant’s response to the interview and any comments that may have led to the development of analytic themes following later in this chapter.

Alice.

Alice, an academically less prepared student from the Southern region of the U.S., knew she wanted to stay in the South, but was looking to go out of state, no matter the cost. “I knew I wanted to stay in the South. I wanted the big SEC school feel, the football team, the athletics, all the fun stuff, but in a smaller package. My small classes are good for me, but still with the big University. It was exactly what I wanted.

Alice said the transition to college has been tough. “It’s definitely different with teachers not constantly reminding you that you have stuff due. Academically, you have to make sure you stay on top of your work.” Alice said, while she feels her non-cohort based FYE course hasn’t helped her with this academic transition, she feels it has been helpful in getting involved on campus. “My teacher starts every class with telling us what we can get involved in this week on campus. Always encouraging to go to stuff like that. And I’ve also made friends in my [FYE] class, too.”

Alice said she plans to remain at SU. “The people. The professors. The atmosphere. The campus. I love it. I can’t find bad things to say about it.”
Amelia.

Amelia, an academically more-prepared student enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE, said she felt drawn to the South. “I come from the Northeast, and I toured a lot of schools in the region and wasn’t finding what I was looking for. So I just started looking down South.” She said her transition to a smaller town took her by surprise. “It was a little shocking at first. I didn’t come down until orientation. I didn’t get a feel for it until I was on campus moving in. I was startled by the whole Southern hospitality thing. I remember walking down the street during move-in, and the girls were like ‘hi!’ and I was like ‘I don’t know you.’ It was a little bit odd. I wasn’t used to people being nice, but I really enjoy it.”

Amelia said she is getting use to small town life. “It’s a safe place to grow and explore and learn. It’s one of the reasons I wanted to get away from the city. It’s not necessarily the best place to be doing the silly college things. I’m really happy here, so I wouldn’t want to leave.”

Amelia said she would tell others to consider taking the course. “I would definitely encourage out-of-state, and especially out-of-region, people to take it or kids who aren’t really connected to SU. My experience with FYE has made me a lot closer to the University community. I feel like I’m a part of it, not like I’m just one of those new people on the edge. I feel like it just throws you more into community rather than just showing up.”

Anne.

Anne, originally from the Southern region of the United States and considered by this study to be academically more-prepared, said she was looking for a college a reasonable distance from home at an affordable price. “I wanted to go away from home, and it’s far enough without being too far away if I needed to go home for a weekend or something. I can get there without too much hassle. And it’s actually less expensive for me to come here than for me to go to the
other major in-state school that I was looking at because of automatic scholarships that I received [at SU].”

Anne was ultimately enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE, because she decided early on to drop out of the cohort-based section. She said she made the decision to drop the cohort-based section “because the dual enrollment credits I brought in, as well as some of the AP credits that I brought in, would have been duplicating the classes that I was supposed to take with my group, so it wasn’t worth it to retake classes.”

Anne said she thinks the non-cohort based section of FYE has helped her transition to SU.

For my FYE class, one of the things we had to do was meet with our professors and then we had to write about it. When I’m with my friends, I feel like I’m a pretty outgoing person, but I feel like when it comes to college professors, I’m kind of like, ‘oh….’ So the fact that I had to go there, like it was a grade for FYE for me to go and talk to them, I think helped a lot and it’s also helping in classes now because I don’t feel as nervous asking questions. I feel like I’m not just another kid in class.

Arthur.

Arthur, an academically less-prepared student from the Midwest, was determined to go out-of-state for college, despite any non-resident tuition differentials.

From where I’m from, it’s huge to go to [an in-state University], so I didn’t want to do high school all over again. I wanted to have a nice little change or whatever. As far as the price went, it didn’t really play that much of a factor. Literally, if I had gone [in state], it would have been high school, except we would’ve been living together. The exact same
thing for another four years with the same people. And you know I wanted a new experience, I guess. And to expand my social circle.

Arthur said his decision to enroll in the non-cohort section of FYE was due to word of mouth. “If you want my honest answer, I heard it was easy. But I also heard it was a fun class because I have multiple friends who are older than me here. So that’s the real reasons, but I’m glad I did it. I’m actually finding it to be most informative. Like some of the things I’ve learned in that class, I know I would have never learned.”

He said while FYE didn’t help his social integration to SU, it has helped him academically. “We’ve definitely covered a couple of things in that class that has definitely helped me. Time management was the biggest thing for me. He just taught us that we need to make a schedule, use a planner, and really buckle down, so it has been really helpful.”

Arthur said one of the main drawbacks of FYE is that people don’t take it seriously. “It’s just not one of the main classes. Yeah, unfortunately, it’s just looked at more of an easier class. I still do the work, don’t get me wrong. It’s just not at the top of my to-do list. You know, it’s something I’ll do after studying for big tests or whatever.”

Arthur said he intends to remain at SU for the spring semester and beyond. “I’m not a quitter. I hate that. So even if I did hate this place, I would never do it, because I wouldn’t want people to think…you know….but I mean I love all the people here, I love the campus, I love everything about this place.”

**Beatrice.**

Beatrice, considered academically more-prepared than her peers and enrolled in the cohort-based section of FYE, said she was looking for a change when she began her college search. Since she was born and raised in the same area in the Western region of the U.S., she
wanted to go South. “It was actually pretty similar costs to stay in-state as it was to come here, so that really wasn’t a big factor. I really like the culture down here. It’s completely different from what I grew up around and it’s been a nice change. It’s been great getting away from home and experiencing something else.”

She said she initially signed up for the cohort-based FYE because of housing benefits. “I mostly signed up for [cohort-based FYE] to live in the [residence hall for this cohort], but I was like, ‘it’ll be nice to have people that I see every single day in my classes’.”

Although she said she likes her FYE teachers, she is lukewarm about her enrollment in the actual course. “I don’t know….it’s not my favorite course. It’s not really my thing. I think for other people it might be really good, but for me personally I feel like I’m wasting my time because I already felt prepared for college. I’d rather be taking a normal course and just getting things done.”

From a social perspective, Beatrice said the cohort-based FYE hasn’t made a big impact on her integration to SU. “I guess just the first couple of weeks I didn’t really know anybody so it was nice having that same group of people every day in class. I felt more comfortable around them. But I feel like I haven’t gotten to meet as many people as if I was in just normal classes because I see the same people every day.”

Charlie.

Charlie, an academically less-prepared student from the Midwest, noted he had difficulty with the academic transition from high school to college. “It was a little difficult at first because I didn’t put forth the amount of effort…as much as I needed to. And I didn’t realize how much different it is from high school. I need to try a lot harder.”
Charlie said his mother encouraged him to enroll in the cohort-based section of FYE because it seemed like an easier class and one that would aid in his transition to college. He said FYE helped him acclimate to college life not only academically, but socially, as well.

Well, with [the cohort-based section of FYE] you’re with a bunch of the same students in your other classes, so you kind of get to know those kids. I guess if you didn’t know anybody else here, you kind of get to know…make a new group of friends. With [the FYE course] they teach you a lot of different things and how to get involved, too, and meet with other kids that get involved on campus.

Charlie said the main drawback of being in a cohort is a missed opportunity to meet more students. “Maybe you don’t get to meet as many kids as normal classes because you’re with the same kids…but I think it helps you more than it wouldn’t help you because you get it teaches you different things you can do and what you can do around campus.

*Charlotte.*

While Charlotte ultimately settled on SU as her first choice despite higher non-resident tuition costs, she debated staying in her home state to attend college. “I was thinking about going [in state], but once I looked at the majors…I wanted to be in nursing. Because they have an awesome nursing school here and I just loved the environment, my parents were willing to let me come here and pay more. But luckily I am blessed enough to be here. My parents just really wanted me to be happy.”

A female student from the South who was considered academically less prepared than her peers, Charlotte said she enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE based on recommendations from friends. “I had heard from a couple of my sophomore friends here that when you go to
Charlotte said she has found a support system in her FYE course. “You make so many friends in that class because everyone is going through the exact same thing you are. We’re all freshmen. Still, all of us are going through the same things and having to adjust, not living at home and being in the dorm, and just talking to each other and relate. It’s been really nice.”

She said the course requirement to attend various campus events has helped her build relationships and make connections.

We had a volunteer event, we have to do cultural events. It really makes us step out of our comfort zone and talk to other people. Like the volunteer thing, I love that because now you have a reason to do it. You get a grade for it; you have to do it. And with everything we’ve had to write a paper on, it’s helped us expand. We’ve gotten to meet more people and expand our relationships. Everything we do in that class has some sort of benefit to us in a way, and I just love that nothing is ‘just because’. There’s always a reason for it.

Dorothy.

Dorothy’s decision to attend SU had deep family roots, as both of her parents attended SU. As a result, Dorothy an academically less prepared student from the South, received a scholarship for children of alumni, which helped cement her decision.

Dorothy also stands behind her decision to enroll in the non-cohort section of FYE. “Everyone was like, ‘Take it! It’s fun.’ A lot of people said it was an easy A, but there is work involved.” Dorothy explained while the coursework is time consuming, the difficulty level is minimal. “Writing the papers aren’t [sic] hard. I kind of like it the reflective papers because you
can see your progress and stuff like that, so I think overall it’s a good thing that everyone should take. And that’s all I’ve ever heard. Everyone’s like, ‘you need to take this class,’ so there’s got to be something good about it.”

Dorothy contributes some of her social transition to her FYE course. She explained, “My two best friends here are in [FYE], so they kind of like, it’s responsible for my friendships, and it gets you involved in the community, and that’s kind of important.”

While the transition to SU was not always been easy, Dorothy claimed she hopes to persist to graduation.

In the beginning it was hard. You feel like you need to run away, like maybe it’s not the right school. But now that I have my friends and my classes are under control, I’m just feel like it wouldn’t be the same and having to start all over again would be really hard and uncomfortable. I like the people….my intended major is business….and everyone I’ve talked to I’ve liked and there’s just a lot of good opportunities here and I like the programs.

Emma.

Emma, an academically less-prepared student from the South, said when exploring her college choices, she narrowed her selections down to SU and another out-of-state institution. She said the cost of tuition at SU was less expensive than her other choice, helping to make her decision an easier one.

She enrolled in FYE based on the advice of her academic advisor at SU. She said she enjoyed the course, but found it was much the same as a course she took in high school. “I went to a small private college preparatory high school, so as a freshman, I had to take a class called ‘Study Skills’, which basically taught you how to study for your exams, how to study, how to
manage your time, which [FYE] has basically done the same thing, but more in-depth than it was in high school. At first I was like ‘okay, I don’t like this. I learned all this before’.”

Still, Emma said she enjoyed the course, “I actually have really enjoyed learning about the history of [SU]…all the different buildings. It’s really interesting. And [the town] itself and how we got here. I guess I also like how [our instructor] gets us involved with each other….our whole class. So right now we’re working on a project. It’s a video of our freshman year. It’s getting our class to bond and get closer together.”

Eric.

Eric, an academically less prepared student from the Midwest, said when shopping for a college, he never looked at in-state options, only at out-of-state institutions. His parents also played a major role in his decision making, only allowing him to choose a school within six hours driving time from home.

Eric’s mother was also responsible for enrolling him in the cohort-based FYE course. He said he is “indifferent” about the course. “[It’s] a fun class and all that, but it’s mostly common sense. I don’t want to sound bad, but that’s mostly what it is.”

He said one way in which FYE is helpful is that it’s one in which he is able to relax. He stated, “I mean, it is helpful in a way that you don’t have to take another hard class and you still get credit for it. It’s not really an easy A, but it’s an enjoyable, easy class. I don’t enjoy my other classes, but this is one I can enjoy.”

Franklin.

Franklin, an academically more-prepared student from the Midwest, noted a number of things that led to his decision in selecting SU over one other in-state institution. “Reasonable
costs for out of state. Good scholarships. Beautiful campus and town. Good alumni association
and town. So I guess I just liked it here more. I just wanted something different.”

Franklin said he decided to enroll in the non-cohort section of FYE after reading the
course description. “I heard good things about it, and I did hear it was easy, so that adds to it.
The course description sounded like something I’d like.” He said he enjoys the laid-back
atmosphere of the FYE classroom, the smaller class size, and the structure of the course, which
includes few lectures. When asked what was most helpful about the FYE courses, he said, “I’d
say just learning how to manage time in college because it’s a lot different than high school and
there’s not really a class that teaches you how to study like it does.” Franklin said he considered
the course load for FYE to be relatively significant and, although it’s easy to get behind in the
course, it can also help boost one’s grade point average.

As Franklin completed his first semester of his freshman year at SU, he said he feels like
he adjusted to college life at SU and intended to persist to the spring semester. “I guess now that
I feel comfortable being down here, it’s not a culture shock.”

George.

For George, an academically more-prepared student from the South, the decision to enroll
at SU was largely based on degree program availability, cost, and distance from home, although
he said, more than anything “it was the personal touch that [SU] has. [SU] made me feel like
they wanted me more than anyone else did, so that was the biggest deciding factor.” George said
SU was closer to home than his in-state option and he was able to obtain enough scholarships at
SU to cover his cost of attendance.

While George was enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE, he was enrolled in a
different section of FYE that grouped students into freshman interest housing groups. “When you
live in one of the Freshman Interest Groups, you’re required to take [FYE]. So that was the reason why I enrolled. Had I not been living in an interest group, I probably wouldn’t have enrolled.” He said enrollment in the course has helped him make connections in his residence hall, though. “It’s been great as far as when you have a class with those people on [your] floor. You get to know them a little bit better and know who’s living around you, whereas otherwise you might not have a class in all four years with them or get to know them. So I’ve gotten to know pretty much everybody on those first two floors.”

George said he was academically prepared enough for college and the FYE course may not have been as beneficial for him as others in his class.

I don’t want to say that it didn’t help me, but I think I was in a position that I needed less help academically than a lot of other students. I can see how it could help. More than anything, just giving students a class where they know what’s required of them, and it’s really laid out for you…kind of a peace of mind class. And someone you can talk to. Usually the instructors are faculty and staff are really willing to be there for the students.

George said one drawback of his enrollment in the FYE course is the fact the course is not a prerequisite for a degree program. “It doesn’t really go toward your major or a specific general education requirement. That’s the only thing for me. For most people, that’s not a problem as an elective, but I’m trying to do a triple major, so it’s kind of a time factor there.”

Overall, George said he would recommend that others take the course.

Probably depends on who I was talking to and what they were looking to do as far as planning the academic classes that they need for certain majors, a combination of majors and minors. But for the majority of people, I would say yes, I think it’s a good…almost a great tool more than anything to use to help you integrate yourself into [SU] and kind of
take a little of the stress factor off of some of your major lecture hall classes. Being with 20 people is a whole lot less stressful and a whole lot more personal.

Harry.

Harry, an academically more-prepared student enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE, decided to attend SU after touring campus for the first time. Originally from the Western portion of the United States, Harry was looking for a warm climate, academic offerings that suited his interests, and affordable tuition rates. “There were a couple of schools that I really liked. [An in-state school] was one of them, which is much closer to where I’m from, but I didn’t even get accepted there, so obviously that helped.” Harry said had he chosen to stay in-state, he would have paid more for in-state tuition than tuition at SU. “The financial stuff helped, too, because I got good scholarship money [at SU], and I wanted somewhere that was warm, preferably. And somewhere that had poli sci or public policy.”

Harry enrolled in the FYE course as part of the Freshman Interest Group program through SU’s housing department. “We all do live on the same hall, so that’s made it easier. I’ve gotten to know them more through the hall than through the class.”

Harry said he feels non-resident students must be proactive in meeting others. “Especially as a non-resident, you need to go out as a non-resident because I showed up and didn’t know a soul here. The first day, I was the only person. So that kind of forced me with or without the [FYE] to go out and meet people.” He said FYE can be beneficial both academically and socially. “I think it pertains to everybody. I could see where it would help certain people with academics, some people with social. I feel like it’s kind of universal. It would make a difference for everybody.”
Homer.

Homer, an academically more-prepared student from the Midwest, enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE to help him adjust to his new surroundings. “It was one of those things where I’m not from around here and it would help me get acquainted with the University, but also I heard it was an easy A. Unlike a lot of people, or probably most people, who took it because it was an easier A, I actually really wanted to learn just where I am.” He said although it’s been helpful in this regard, he found much of the content of the class to be basic knowledge. “I think it’s helped me get acquainted with the University and the culture here, but as far as academic-wise….I went to a really good high school, first of all, so it might help others but it’s not really….it’s basically stuff I already knew.”

Homer said he was glad to enroll at SU. “The benefits of being away from home where I’ve been all my life definitely outweigh. I didn’t really like my home. I wasn’t happy there. I just needed to get out of there. But I wanted to go somewhere I could drive back within a day if there was a huge emergency. But my parents can’t just stop by one weekend without me knowing or something.” He said high ACT scores and a strong GPA helped him obtain scholarships that lowered the costs at SU to in-state tuition at his home institutions, making SU an even more attractive choice.

While Homer said he was glad to be away from home, he is thinking of transferring to another institution in search of more opportunities for involvement and a better fit. “I probably will transfer, but that’s just because I made my decision and I’m not going to go Greek. I want to be social, but if I’m not Greek….I love the academics and I love this place, it’s just not enough to keep me here. It’s not like it’d be one of those hard feelings transfers. It would just be one of those, ‘I made my decisions I made and they didn’t work out, so I’ve got to start over’.”
Greek life and lack of involvement in a fraternity was a major source of frustration for Homer. “I don’t have time for Greek life and it’s kind of frustrating right now, because all my friends are pledges and always doing this random stuff. It’s really kind of a tough time since I’m having a hard time finding stuff to do socially. So right now it kind of stinks, and it’s harder to meet people because all of the mixers and stuff, because I can’t be in those.”

Homer said, although, the class is not a prerequisite for a major, he would encourage other students to take FYE. “It kind of eases the transition from high school to college. I think I would have been well off without it, but I still think it was good. I mean all my classes are fairly small, but just being able to talk and stuff. It’s just one of those where you’re just…it’s kind of a fusion of a class and a support group type thing.”

_Hugo._

Hugo, an academically more-prepared student from the South, said he did not plan to take FYE, but he’s glad that he did.

When I was picking my classes, I didn’t know what [FYE] was, so I might not have since I didn’t know what it was. But I’m glad I did take it because you get to meet a bunch of kids and it’s really cool and you really just talk about what it’s like to live at college and it’s a good way to relieve stress. We were talking about stress last week and everyone was talking about school and work or roommates and stuff like that, so it was kind of nice to talk to people and see that everyone’s kind of got similar problems going on. So I think it’s a good class to take.

Hugo said he’s also glad that he decided to enroll at SU, even though he thought he would end up at an institution in his own home state. He said, “I don’t know. I thought it would
just be a good experience to get away from home and grow up. Honestly, I was kind of excited to leave [my home state] and completely restart. Meet all new people, a totally different culture.”

He said cost differentials did not really come into play when making his decision. “I don’t know. Obviously it would have been a lot cheaper if I had gone to an in-state school, but I liked the campus a lot. I had a feeling that it really kind of fit who I was. And I really liked this smaller atmosphere. I don’t know if there was really an issue, but I did think that this was the right fit for me, so the cost didn’t really matter.”

Hugo is enrolled in the cohort-based section of FYE. He said this group helped ease his academic transition to college.

Obviously [FYE] helps with transitioning to college living. We’ve gone over so many different things that have to do with just transitioning. And I think that helps because if someone’s comfortable while transitioning, they don’t get homesick. I haven’t been homesick at all. And the cohort, definitely the study groups that they have, definitely help academically with transitioning because college is definitely way harder than high school. You have to try harder, so it helps to have people to study with.

He said the small class size and the cohort structure also helped him acclimate to the college classroom setting. “I think you’re in a class which is really just talking about college with 20 to 30 people you’re going to be with the whole semester, so it helps you open up and get to meet those 30 kids. It just helps you talk about all the issues you’re going to face and how you deal with them. I think that’s the most important part. Learning how to deal with a problem when it comes up. I think that definitely helps.”
Jack.

Jack, an academically more-prepared student from the South, said he was looking for a change of scenery when he searched for a college campus. “I knew I didn’t want to go to (my home institution), which is where everyone from high school ended up going. Something like 40 percent of my graduating class. But I definitely got enough money here that it was a better deal than if I had ended up [staying in state]. So my parents were all for it.”

He said his decision to enroll at SU came down to a sense of belonging. “I was getting full ride offers from [other institutions], and I got in everywhere I applied. When it came down to it this was the place that felt like home to me. So that’s definitely why I ended up here. The community feeling.”

Jack said he enrolled in FYE on advice from an older friend. “I feel like the classic thing is like it’s an easy A. But like I’m so in love with the school, and I’d heard it was a lot of history about SU so I was just really interested in that aspect of it as well.”

He said he would recommend others take the course, as well.

I think perhaps they need to look more past it being an easy A because there are other classes that might be an easy A that might be more helpful to them. If anything, if there are people coming here who were planning on just hanging out in their room not really doing anything, FYE definitely forces you to go out and do stuff if you want to pass the class. If for nothing else but that fact that you want to get a good grade in the class you have to go do stuff. I guess for some people it wouldn’t be a necessity but if you’re kind of shy and have trouble meeting people and stuff it’s a good way to get out there.

While he would recommend it to others, Jack is lukewarm about his enrollment in the course. “For me, I’m kind of on the fence about having taken it because I’ve heard a lot of
people say that… Not to say that I’m smarter than other people… But some people have trouble in this class just because it is low level. We just have to write reflective papers and journals and stuff like that and it’s kind of like… It’s not really application like my other classes that I’m used to, having AP and dual enrollment and stuff.”

Jane.

Jane, an academically more-prepared student from the West, was also looking for a change of scenery. “I grew up in the same area, and I decided it was time to get out and explore the rest of the nation and I knew that I always loved the South, so I started looking at schools and SU was the one that felt like home.”

She enrolled in FYE because she was looking for a smaller community at SU. “I knew I would probably need some help with study groups and meeting new people coming as far as I was and knowing no one down here. So [the cohort-based FYE course] gave me a way to be in class with the same few people, so I had some familiar faces around campus. FYE sounded kind of interesting because it helps freshmen prepare themselves for what’s to come in college.”

Jane said FYE has also helped her transition socially, as well.

FYE opened my eyes to the different communities around here. I’m part of the Student Activities Association and I’m looking to getting involved with the athletic training here on campus. So it just kind of opened my eyes up to those different little places that I could find myself being placed. And I have people that I know and I say hi to and I go to classes with a lot of them, because I have similar classes with some of them…even not the FYE courses. It has really helped ease everything together. It’s an easier course, so kind of as a GPA booster in the end, which helps.

Although she learned to love SU, Jane’s transition was not easy at first.
I thought of transferring at the beginning of the year for second semester, but after looking at it, SU has a lot to offer. It just took a little while adjusting coming from [out of state]. I had trouble fitting in at first. A lot of the students here come with people they know or know people down here and that’s why they came. So it was hard finding people in the same boat as me. After a while, I really did find quite a few people who were in the same boat as me, but it took some searching.

Lily.

Lily, an academically more-prepared student, enrolled in FYE to help with her transition from her home in the Southern part of the U.S. “I thought it would be beneficial for me to adjust during my freshman year because I knew it would be a big thing with my family being so far away. Yeah, I knew it would be a big thing to try to adjust, so I thought that might help me get out a little more, experience things better.”

She said the course has helped her socially, but not academically. “I don’t know if I would have gone to meet as many of my professors as I have and now I’m really glad that I have. I think it makes you get out there and do things that I don’t think most freshmen normally do like talk to your professors and go to events you wouldn’t normally go to and meet people you wouldn’t normally meet, and I think that’s helpful because you don’t know who you might run into.”

Lily said earning scholarships to SU helped make her college decision easier. “It’s definitely cheaper here. If I would have gone anywhere it would have been in-state, and they have a really high tuition and they don’t offer scholarships easily. And I got good scholarships down here. I didn’t really want to go in-state, and we went to look at Southern schools and liked the values that were maintained here, so we chose here.”
Lily said she recommends FYE to non-resident students. “I thought it would be beneficial for me to adjust during my freshman year because I knew it would be a big thing with my family being so far away. I knew it would be a big thing to try to adjust, so I thought that might help me get out a little more, experience things better. I just think it’s a bigger investment when you go out of state, so you just need all the extra help you can get.”

Lucy.

For Lucy, an academically more-prepared student from the South, the decision to enroll at SU was a family affair. “I came to SU…most of my family has come to SU, so it is definitely a family school for sure, and it’s what I’ve grown up being around. SU is definitely where I’ve supposed to been all my life, I know, and I didn’t apply anywhere else, but I knew I was supposed to be here.”

Because of her family connection to SU, Lucy received alumni scholarships to help with the cost of non-resident tuition. “Price was a factor in my applying to school for sure, but my family knew I was going to SU, and that I wasn’t asking to go somewhere outrageous. But I probably received a little more money here than I would have [in my home state].”

Lucy enrolled in the cohort-based section of FYE without many expectations. “I didn’t realize….I mean I realized what it was, but I think it’s cool how I’m able to take two classes, my FYE class and my writing 101, with the same students, and I’ve really enjoyed that. Because I’ve actually been able to develop bonds with the students. Some classes there are so many students that you don’t have time to say ‘hey, I’m so-and-so…tell me about your weekend,’ so it’s really nice to be in these classes with these people and I can talk with them and grab lunch with a couple of the girls in the classes and stuff, so it’s, I knew, I got the idea of what the cohort-based FYE was, but now that I’m in it, I’m happy I did it. It was, it’s really cool how I can do that.”
While Lucy enjoyed her FYE course, she said others may feel it is superfluous. “I guess some people would feel...not my class necessarily...but could see some of the people around me in my dorm and stuff talking like, ‘Oh, this is just such a busywork class. This is just nothing, it’s just a credit. FYE is so dumb. We shouldn’t have to take this.’ Like, I enjoy mine. I’m so happy with the section I received and my professors and everything. But I’ve heard some random comments like that. I wouldn’t say that’s my experience with it. I would love to be in FYE for every semester with my professor now.”

Lucy said the course and the cohort have helped her enjoy her first year experience. “Having those two small classes with the same people has been really nice. And I mean, I really look forward to those classes. It has helped with the transition and everything.”

_Madeline._

Madeline, an academically more-prepared student from the South, applied to several similar schools during her college search. “The only difference was what state they were in. I was looking for big football, big school spirit, lots of traditions, all of that good stuff. But when it came down to what am I actually looking for, everything lined up with a big southern school. It really came down to visiting. SU is the last school I saw in person and up until then I was of the mindset that I will make myself happy wherever I go, it won’t be a problem. And then I came on campus, and SU was the only school that I thought, it will make me happy. It will make me excited to be there and be in college.”

Madeline had a unique experience. As a child of military parents, she moved around a lot and never lived in one place for a four-year period.

Because I’ve never done four years before choosing a school was a very serious topic. It wasn’t taken lightly because transferring…obviously if I wanted to do it my parents
would support me in it, but it was not something I ever thought about doing. I came in knowing that after two years, which is my normal length of time of staying somewhere, that I might kind of have an itch to go somewhere new, so I was trying to choose a completely new environment. I’ve never done small town USA before, so this is crazy. I also have a travel bug, so I chose a school that has a plethora of study abroad opportunities. I wanted to be able to get out if I needed to and then come back to where I felt was becoming my newest home addition. I don’t have a hometown type of thing that I feel like I need to get back to, so that makes a difference. So I’m really used to being on my own. I’m very independent. It’s not really something that I need to go back to my family because I feel out-of-state, because I’m always out-of-state.

Madeline has enjoyed the opportunities FYE has given her to get to know her new surroundings and has helped her feel connected to SU. “Choosing a college was crazy, and getting to know about it is something that I haven’t had the opportunity to do anywhere else I’ve lived. So I love that. It makes me feel like it’s my own. And when people visit I can tell them all these things about the campus. And maybe they don’t care about, but it makes it more special for me.”

Madeline said she was at first unsure of her decision to enroll in the non-cohort section of FYE. “I was honestly very skeptical. I wanted to dive right in and start my course load and get gen eds out of the way before I could start doing what I really wanted to. And somebody told me at orientation that it is a great GPA booster, you’ll learn a lot, you will be thankful when you’re in your freshman year that you have a class like that where you can just kind of go to and hang out in and get to know kids.”
She came to appreciate the FYE course and found it was helpful, both academically and socially. “I think academically it helped as far as we were required to meet with our teachers for an assignment. That was helpful because I wouldn’t have gone otherwise. If I don’t have a dire question, I’m not going to ask, because I feel like I can just figure it out on my own. So going when there weren’t any questions and allowing me to just meet my professors and form that relationship was very beneficial. It’s still helping me out.”

Madeline said FYE has helped her to form relationships and connections on campus. “Some of the people I’ve met in my class…..it’s much easier to bond in FYE. It’s a little more reflective of a high school course. Some of the girls I’ve met in there, we’re still friends and we’ll hang out on the weekends and stuff like that.”

_Margaret._

Margaret, an academically less-prepared student from the Midwest, looked at colleges in the South. “I just kind of wanted to go far from home. I visited here a long time ago with my dad and I liked it. My boyfriend’s here, too. I just kind of wanted to go somewhere new with a lot of new people and farther from home.”

Margaret said her mother encouraged her to enroll in FYE. “In high school I had a lot of problems finding study skills and getting adjusted, so my mom wanted me to do it when I started college. I’m doing a lot better in college than I did in high school, which is good. I like having more time. I find myself studying way more. I actually make notecards for all my classes and I meet with my teachers every day after class, so I’m doing better here because I have more time.”

While she said she is adjusting well academically, the social transition has been difficult. “It’s just harder to make friends, I guess, when you’re coming from far away. A lot of people came here with people they knew, so they’re like all together, so yeah it’s difficult. The guys are
more open to hanging out with new people, so I pretty much spend more time hanging out with my boyfriend and his friends rather than girls, mostly. A lot of the girls back home act differently than the girls here do.”

While she plans to remain at SU, Margaret said she has contemplated transferring. “I was thinking about it, just to go somewhere in a bigger city. Probably just a bigger city. I’m not used to being somewhere so small. I’m not used to being in the middle of nowhere. It’s so weird. There’s nothing to do.”

While the change in location has been difficult, Margaret also sees the upside to living in a small town. “It’s very comfortable and safe. And it’s very friendly. A lot of my friends, like my friend goes to [college in a bigger city], and she can’t go anywhere alone, she can’t walk to her classes alone, and she’s always kind of freaked out to be walking around alone, and I’m kind of like….I don’t know, at night, like, I feel safe walking back to my dorm at night. I really like that.”

Max.

Max, an academically more-prepared student from the South, came to SU on an athletic scholarship. He said SU was the best option for him, based on his ability to participate in athletics and the low costs of non-resident tuition. “I knew I wanted to go to a big school. So I looked at several schools in the South, and SU….everything lined up cost-wise, so it fell into place.”

Max said he was also looking for a change of scenery. “Coming to school where I didn’t know anybody appealed to me. But we had a really cold winter [back home], so the South was really appealing to me. Instead of going to [an in-state institution] where I would know 50 of my friends from high school….yeah, I wanted a new place, I wanted something different, and here I am.”
He said he enrolled in the FYE section by chance. “To be honest, it was kind of pre-
signed up for me, and I thought it was there for some important reason, so I thought, ‘I won’t
drop it. I’ll just keep it’.” Max enrolled in the non-cohort section of FYE, but his section was
specifically for students in his intended major. Max said he does not have strong opinions
regarding his experience in FYE. “It's just what I see as my other class on my Tuesdays. It’s
more or less neutral in my opinion. I think there are kids that do need the stuff in the class, but
someone like me that’s got a lot of support already and has always been a relatively good
student, the class is really just there for a grade buffer. But it’s probably necessary for some
people. It probably actually really helps some people.”

**Ned.**

Ned, an academically more-prepared student from the South, said he was accepted by a
number of state institutions across the South, but is glad he decided on SU. “I just wanted to go
somewhere else. I wanted to get good grades. Not that SU is easy or anything, but I just felt like I
could balance out more activities here. It was everything I was looking for.”

Ned attended a summer program at SU and got a head start on his college courses. It was
during this summer program when he learned about FYE. “I’m taking kind of a tough schedule
with accounting and micro and a bunch of classes like that. I heard it was a fun class. You got to
meet a lot of people, too. I heard it wasn’t too challenging.”

Ned said he has found college to be much easier for him than high school. “I went to a
very difficult high school. Very difficult. I was number 10 out of 350, and I only had a 3.2 GPA,
so it was hours every night and I studied not much compared to my peers. Here you literally
don’t do anything except just a little bit of homework. I guess that’ll change when I get older.”
He said his experience in the non-cohort based FYE course has helped ease his transition to SU. “It’s the only class where you really meet people…that I’ve taken. Because it’s smaller and you get to talk in class to the teacher and to each other. If someone is coming in and they don’t know what they want to do…freshman year Greek scene is pretty big. If they don’t want to do that, it’s definitely a good guide to the freshman year. If you struggle, you never really had to study, it could probably teach you because we do go over time management. If you don’t know many people, you’ll definitely meet people there.”

Though Ned feels FYE has helped with the social transition, he feels it hasn’t been much benefit academically. “You don’t really learn much. It’s three credit hours and that’s probably it. There aren’t many drawbacks to it. It’s kind of neutral. I have a neutral feeling toward the course.” Although his personal experience has been lukewarm, he would still recommend that others take the course. “If they have a spare three hours that they’re looking for in an elective. I don’t like to say it, but it probably is a GPA booster.”

_Nancy._

For Nancy, an academically more-prepared student from the Northeast, her enrollment in the cohort-based section of FYE was a last minute decision. “My mom got an email saying there were spots in [the cohort section of FYE], and she was like, ‘Smaller classes sounds great.’ And so she just kind of took care of it for me, and I just came here.”

She said FYE has helped her academic transition and has helped her learn to manage her time in college. “It’s definitely different. In high school I studied, but I didn’t have to really go and study and put forth that time, and that’s actually where I think FYE helped a lot. Just their lessons on time management were really good. Just to be like, okay, this is different. Don’t wait
until halfway through the semester to realize you need to study. It’s definitely been beneficial for sure.”

Nancy said she is glad that she enrolled in FYE. “When you hear a ton of people recommend it as a class you should take as a freshman, you’re like, ‘maybe that’s a good thing to take.’ Three credits, GPA boost. All that kind of stuff, so there were a lot of appeals in that.”

Olivia.

Olivia, an academically more-prepared student from the Midwest, chose to attend SU to try something new. “The main reason I wanted to come to SU was just about everyone in my family has gone to [the in-state college at home], and I decided I didn’t want to do that and I wanted to do my own thing and I wanted to branch out. They gave me a lot of good scholarship money so I was able to come here and the campus just really sold me honestly.”

Olivia, one of five children, was given a budget by her parents and free reign to choose any institution, as long as she stayed within the budget. “SU was what I was looking for in terms of size and environment and opportunities and they also gave me a lot of money for my ACT score, so that definitely was a really big factor. I wouldn’t have been able to come here without the scholarships.”

Olivia, who attended an all-girls high school, said FYE has become a source of comfort and familiarity to her. “That class is my first small class that has boys in it, and I’m really used to it, but that class is helping me a lot because it’s just a discussion class and now it’s like I’m sort of getting used to it. Because at first I was like really overwhelmed. I didn’t think that I would be, but I was really overwhelmed by boys in my class.”

She said the main benefit of her FYE experience is her interaction with her FYE instructors and the fact that she has a kind of “counselor” three times a week. “It has a lot mainly
because the class size and everyone’s sort of lost together in the class so that makes it a lot easier. There’s no stupid question, there’s no… Everyone’s just sort of lost together and we all are figuring it out together and both of my teachers have been really helpful.”

She said the class has also helped socially, as she has met two of her best friends through FYE. “It’s sort of…everyone knows each other in that class. If you walk by someone in the class you can wave and say hey. There’s no other class like that for me. That’s the only class that I know every single person. So that’s been nice. I’m not a guest here anymore. And so that’s what made it like home to me and that’s what is keeping me here, pretty much.”

**Peter.**

Peter, an academically less-prepared student from the South, was looking to go his own way when he decided on attending SU. “To go out of state, a little bit of distance. Just so I could start doing things on my own, doing things on my own schedule. You know it’s close enough that mom and dad can come visit, especially since my mom travels a lot. She’s everywhere. But it’s still far enough away that I can feel that separation a little bit.”

Peter said he started his academic career at SU, through a summer program for incoming freshman. SU staff associated with the summer program encouraged Peter to enroll in FYE. “He was just telling me that it’s a good class because you learn about the history of the school and all that stuff. They get you out and attending events that you normally probably wouldn’t. And you get to go around and do some service work, which is always a good thing.”

Peter said although FYE it time consuming, the lessons on time management have been especially helpful to him. “Sometimes no matter how prepared you are, sometimes you can get here and get a little lost. But the time management stuff helps and some of those lessons are good.”
He said FYE has also been helpful from a social perspective. “I’d say it would because you have to attend certain events and you’re not going to know everybody in your class, especially being from out of state, so it kind of forces you to go out and talk to some people, make new friends. FYE helps you get involved. I feel like that’s the main goal of the class.”

**Rachel.**

Rachel, an academically more-prepared student from the Midwest, was very cognizant of costs when she was making her college decision. “I made sure that I got a lot of scholarship money, because I wanted to make sure to go somewhere I wasn’t going to have to pay too much. My parents said money wasn’t an issue, but I didn’t want them to have to pay a lot, so when I ended up getting a lot of scholarships, I made the firm decision.”

Rachel said she decided to enroll in FYE to help with her transition to college. “I have a tough time transitioning. It was really tough transitioning from grade school to high school, so I figured I would do everything I could to make the transition easier. And they offered that. Everyone kept telling me ‘oh, you don’t need it; you learn this stuff anyways,’ but I wanted to make sure that I made a smooth transition this time.”

Rachel said FYE has helped her both academically and socially. “It makes you do things, but once you’re doing them, it doesn’t feel like you’re being made to. It’s enjoyable and it helps because it gets you out of your dorm room. It’s not just during class time. You have to budget your time and make sure that you get there and get the grade for it. I really like all the stuff that we have to do.”

She also said she has made friends in her FYE class. “One of the girls lives in my building and we have some other classes together. We have a big biology lecture together, so I’m
Rachel said, overall, her transition to college has been easy. “I was so scared to come to college. I didn't know what to expect, and it just helps you take things step by step. Not completely on your own, but more on your own than you would in high school. And making you do things and putting yourself out there and doing things you’re maybe not so comfortable with.”

Rachel intends to stay at SU. “I’ve made friends. I really like it. I try to stick to my decisions. I feel comfortable here. I feel safe. I like the campus. I like all my teachers. I like the [education] program.”

Rupert.

SU was the only out-of-state school to which Rupert, an academically less-prepared student from the Midwest, applied. He said there was only a nominal difference in costs between SU and the schools in his home state. “I thought the campus was beautiful, obviously. They had a lot of good programs. And just wanted to try something new. Explore the world.”

Rupert decided to enroll in cohort-based FYE course because his mother was attracted to the associated mentor program. “She wanted me to have a good base of people to be involved. So she thought it was a good idea, of course I had to do it.”

Rupert had a slightly different FYE experience, as he signed up for the cohort-based FYE course late and only had one course with the cohort. Still, he feels FYE has been largely beneficial. “It’s kind of nice having a slow-paced course where you can ask questions of your instructor and it’s not necessarily the hardest course. There are papers and stuff, but FYE is a nice class to have to get a general understanding. It’s a little bit busy work. Some of it seems extraneous, but that’s just my opinion.”
The hardest part of Rupert’s transition to SU was social, and he is considering transferring back to his home state. “I’m not in Greek life or anything, which apparently is the worst thing to ever happen on this campus. Culturally-wise, people down here care a lot about image and what people think of them. They think just because they drive a new Mercedes that they’re the best thing that ever happened in this world. I’m not like that. Stuff like that. Some of the stuff people say.”

_Sophie._

Sophie, an academically less-prepared student from the Midwest, found SU to be reasonably priced and a good fit for her. “I really liked the campus, the overall feeling of it. I went to school with the same people from pre-school to high school and I kind of just wanted a change. And everyone here is really nice. And the tuition here wasn’t as expensive as a lot of out of state schools, so it wasn’t as big as a factor as other places.”

Sophie’s mother encouraged her to enroll in the cohort-based section of FYE. “In high school, my classes were really big. So, when my mom was telling me about it, it was kind of nice to hear about how you’re in the same group of kids, it’s like a smaller group. And since I didn’t know anybody…I came here not knowing anybody. Being in the same group of kids for two classes just seemed like a good opportunity to meet people.”

Sophie said that the biggest benefit of FYE is the social interaction in the class. It’s nice because a lot of my friends….two of my best friends now….are in my FYE classes, so it’s nice because you get to know kids in your class. In my math class, I don’t know many people in it, and I don’t have numbers of people, so I can’t ask questions. But in those two classes, I know those two kids, so we always help each other. Just meeting
everybody and having all those friends. My class has gotten really close with each other since we started.

_Todd._

Todd, an academically more-prepared student from the South said he decided to attend SU because he didn’t get into his home state institutions due to strict admissions standards. “I decided to come because I like the South, I like the atmosphere. All the people are really nice, and I met all the advisors. I didn’t want to come for just all the social stuff, but I wanted to make sure it’s a good school, like it looked good academically. And the cheap price.”

Todd said he enrolled in FYE because he thought it would be a good way to meet people. “I didn’t just enroll for the GPA booster. It is a good GPA booster, but I felt like I didn’t want to overload myself right away, I wanted to meet people who were my age in this class, and that it was just a good class to kind of let you know about campus and stuff outside of the classroom, which is also where you can learn…outside the classroom.”

Todd said he struggled to fit in socially at SU.

I talked to a lot of people who are from out of state, and it’s kind of hard if you don’t go into a fraternity or sorority right away because, what I saw it was, I’m not sure if I want to join a fraternity. If I could go back, I would have gotten involved in stuff earlier. I came here and was like, ‘Oh, it’s just 33 percent [Greek],’ but I was talking to people, and perception is reality. So everyone seems like is in a fraternity here, so it’s really hard to feel like you’re really involved if you’re not in a fraternity or sorority.

His social experience at SU, along with the fact that he is not involved in a fraternity, has caused Todd to consider transferring.
I was looking for a place with a little less emphasis on Greek life and a little less emphasis on… I was just looking for more diversity. But I felt like it was too early to just pack up. I heard from a lot of out-of-state people. They say your first semester, maybe your first year, is going to suck. Just because…it may not be because of the university. It may just be because you’re out of state. A lot of people sometimes go out of state… but this was not really all that popular among my high school, so I came here kind of alone. So you start from scratch, which is cool because you learn a lot about yourself and you get to meet a bunch of new people. I didn’t want to just give up.

Despite considering transferring to another institution, Todd said his time in FYE has been beneficial. “People may disagree with me, but I really feel like college…the biggest classroom is really outside of the classroom. You learn a lot about yourself and about life and about people and how to interact with people when you go to college. And I think that’s what FYE really prepares you for, and I really like that aspect of it.”

Vanessa.

Vanessa, an academically more-prepared student from the Midwest, chose to attend SU after a visit with a friend. “I wasn’t really looking out of state too much, and I have a friend who’s a junior now who’s here. Once I started to decide maybe I should look out of state, she was the only person I know that went far, so she’s a family friend. I came down with her family one time just to visit, and I loved the campus and I started looking into it.” She said the costs of attending SU, which were less than staying in state, helped her finalize her decision.

She said she decided to enroll in the non-cohort section of FYE to help acclimate to her new environment. “Honestly, I had a big course load, and a lot of people told me it wasn’t a high stress class. And also just coming from out of state, I didn’t really know much about the school,
so it has taught me a lot about the history and about everything…the culture here. It’s been really helpful.”

Vanessa also said FYE has helped her make an easier social transition to SU. “Actually it’s funny because two of my best friends I’ve met here are in my FYE class. That’s how we met. So that class actually really did help. Where there’s actually a sense of community in the class. Really I’ve just met a lot of people through it, so it’s really helped socially.”

Although she said she has had a good experience at SU, Vanessa said she is still considering transferring to another institution. “Really the only thing would to be closer to people…..like my family and friends who are back home. Other than that, I really like the school. The distance is just….I’m 15 hours away, so it’s hard.”

**Analytic Themes**

Inductive analysis of interview transcripts revealed seven main themes that held meaning across participants and were relevant to the research questions. These themes included: (a) building relationships; (b) desiring change; (c) is the grass really greener?; (d) deciding to persist or depart; (e) seeking security; (f) immersion into campus life; and (g) a great course…for someone else.

The first theme, *Building relationships*, discusses the establishment of critical relationships through the FYE program that create shared experiences and bonding which may factor in to decisions to stay or depart. The second theme, *Desiring change*, discusses the participants’ motivations for enrolling at SU and in the FYE program and their motivation to persist. In addition, the theme also explores the allure of the South for many participants and the role of non-resident tuition on enrollment decisions.
The third theme, *Is the grass really greener?*, focuses on issues faced by participants, including cultural differences and inclusion or exclusion from Greek life at SU as a deciding factor in many participants’ feelings of social integration. The fourth theme, *Deciding to persist or depart*, examines the reasons participants decided to enroll and persist or leave, based on cultural differences, geographic challenges, academic issues, or other goodness-of-fit concerns.

*Seeking security*, the fifth theme, focuses on a variety of ways in which the FYE program provides a sense of security to those enrolled. Here, several aspects are explored, including: FYE as a support group, facilitation of familiarity, and FYE as a GPA booster. Finally, the theme explores parental influence on the decision to enroll in FYE. The sixth theme, *Immersion into campus life*, explores the ways in which FYE affected participants’ social and academic integration at SU. The final theme, *A great course...for someone else*, discusses participants’ perceived level of preparedness for college, as well as perceived drawbacks of the FYE course.

**Building Relationships.**

This theme examines relationships built between the participants and their instructors, as well as shared experiences among participants. Many participants mentioned several factors related to relationship building and its effect on their integration to SU. The following discusses this theme and related subthemes across participants.

**Relationships with instructors.**

During the interview process 45 percent of participants mentioned instructor relationships facilitated through FYE as influential to their academic and social integration. Thirteen percent also mentioned these relationships were one of the biggest benefits of the FYE course. Participants provided information on different types of instructor interaction and instructor behavior that influenced them in their first year.
Overall, participants said the instructor relationship has helped them both academically and socially. Emma said, “In the beginning of the year, my professor talked to us about managing your time and being prepared for class, so I feel like he had an influence on me, and I went and took the things that he told me and put them into my academic performance, and it’s made it a lot better.” For Alice, the biggest impact was on his/her social integration. “My teacher starts every class with telling us what we can get involved in this week on campus. Always encouraging to go to stuff like that.” Further examples are provided below, beginning with the most commonly reported themes across participants.

Instructor visits.

The importance of required instructor visits resonated throughout the interviews as part of the Relationships with instructors subtheme in Building Relationships. Thirteen percent of participants cited mandatory visits with instructors were one of the most beneficial components of their grade in FYE. Students were required to meet twice a semester with their FYE instructor and also once a semester with two additional instructors of other classes in which they were enrolled. Participation points for these four visits were added to the students’ overall grade for the FYE course. Madeline found these required visits helped her step outside of her comfort zone. “I think academically [FYE] helped as far as we were required to meet with our teachers for an assignment. That was helpful because I wouldn’t have gone otherwise. If I don’t have a dire question, I’m not going to ask, because I feel like I can just figure it out on my own. So going when there weren’t any questions and allowing me to just meet my professors and form that relationship was very beneficial. It’s still helping me out.”

While a certain number of instructor visits are required, these often developed into continued relationships between instructor and student. Nancy said, “I love my teacher. He’s
Instructors are people, too.

For Anne, the required meetings helped see her instructors as approachable individuals and helped calm her nerves about speaking to her instructors and participating in class. “In high school, I talked a lot in class, I participated a lot, versus now…in some of my classes I’m one of a handful of freshmen and so I just kind of sit there and don’t really say much. So the fact that I had to go there, like it was a grade for [FYE] for me to go and talk to them, I think helped a lot and it’s also helping in classes now because I don’t feel as nervous asking questions. I feel like I’m not just another kid in class.” Rachel also said the meetings with his instructor were beneficial in making a connection at SU. “I just learned a lot about him and his department, and he helped me figure things out that maybe I wouldn’t feel comfortable telling a counselor or an advisor because I had already talked to him and I knew him from class. Just having a normal human conversation with a teacher and making that connection. That was nice. I feel like I can go to him whenever I need to.”

Instructors as a resource.

Other students found their FYE instructors were also a great resource for new students, offering insights into courses, providing tips for social integration, offering advice for course scheduling, and assisting some students in finding on-campus employment.

For Olivia, the instructor relationship helped her navigate the SU campus early on. “You can ask her where a building is on campus, you can ask them anything and it’s sort of like having an advisor three times a week that you don’t have to make an appointment with. They know you on a first name basis and I think that the best part about it.” Vanessa said her relationship with
her instructor also helped her get a better feel for her surroundings. “It’s helped socially. When we get there, he asks us, ‘What do you want to talk about?’ Anything that’s going on, just current events on campus and stuff….if there’s something big going on, we just talk about why it happened and things like that. So it’s really cool. So we just understand what’s going on around us.”

Several participants also mentioned how their instructors helped set expectations for college, even recommending courses or providing insight on what to expect from certain courses at SU. Nancy said, “My teacher is just really good about telling you how it is and how SU is, and it’s not like you’re on a college tour where they’re telling you all these great nice things about…he’s telling you like, ‘This is SU. This is what you need to know.’ And that’s been really helpful just in making that transition.” Charlotte agreed, stating “[Our instructor] told us exactly what to expect and what you have to do.”

Madeline’s instructor encouraged her to decrease her course load during the first week of class from 18 hours to 15 hours. “I said you definitely have a lot more experience in this than I do, and I will just take a leap of faith and trust you,” she explained. “I haven’t looked back, and now I signed up for next semester and I have a meeting with him tomorrow morning and I’m bringing my schedule.”

Emma and Dorothy discussed how their instructors offered advice for other courses in which they were enrolled. “It definitely prepared me for my other classes,” Emma said. “If you ask [my instructor] a question about another class, he knows the answers and knows what to tell you, as far as studying for that class or how to be prepared, things like that. He’s just really helpful.” Dorothy said her instructor has also provided insight. “I got a lot of background information and they give you tips on studying and what to do. And our teacher’s like, ‘I can
look up professors and tell you from when I was here.’ So he knew all about it. He gave us a lot of background information. It’s been helpful.”

For Charlotte, the main benefit of FYE is the instructor himself. “He would literally bend over backwards for any of us and give us any resource he has. One of my best friends is trying to get a job, and [my instructor] is passing out her resume and helping her so much. Any question we have…he gives out his personal phone number. If we were ever in any trouble, he would help us.”

Madeline also said the relationship with her FYE instructor has helped her in applying for programs and positions on campus.

We’re trying to get into things that ask for letters of recommendation from professors who know us. And it’s hard to do that for out-of-state students, especially, because you’re coming in with no prior ties to the University. It’s nice to be in a class where the teacher knows you and you have to talk to them even if you don’t think that it’s something you need because they know that you will need it, and they know how to help you better than you know how to help yourself.

**Instructors as counselor figure.**

Many participants stated this familiarity with their FYE instructors has been a source of comfort, many seeing their instructor as a counselor figure or surrogate family member. George said having “someone you can talk to” has been the biggest benefit of enrolling in FYE. “Usually the instructors are faculty and staff are really willing to be there for the students,” he explained. Olivia agreed, stating “the main benefits are having kind of a counselor three times a week. It helps you transition, and you basically get an advisor and extra advisor for your whole first semester.” Sophie said her instructor helped with her transition, as well. “I feel like you can
really connect with them and they’ll help you with everything. I think it just helped me ease into college,” she said.

Lucy said her instructor has played a key role in helping to create calm in the chaos of the first year experience.

He’s been helping us realize it’s okay to slow down, it’s okay to relax, it’s okay to breathe, it’s okay to think. These past two weeks I’ve had a lot of stress on me with some stuff, and it helped me realize that in college it’s okay to stop and just think and look back and relax and take a breath because that breath may get you through the rest of the day. And that’s really helped my transition to college.

Twenty-six percent of participants mentioned they have leaned on their FYE instructors for advice and support for everything from homesickness to roommate issues. Alice said, “My teacher was very open and she just told us if we ever need anything to contact her. And I have a few times, so that was really helpful in the beginning of the year when I really didn’t have anyone else to go to.” Lily said the first week’s discussion on talking about adjusting to being away from home was helpful. “There was a week or 3 days when I was having a really bad time being away from home, and I could go talk to her. That was really helpful.” He said he discussed his roommate issues with his FYE instructor, who encouraged him to stay for the spring semester before making a decision to transfer. Now Hugo says, “I see myself staying here.”

For several participants, the FYE instructor relationship was a make or break deal for the overall FYE course experience. Anne said, “I think it depends on who the teacher is, too. My roommate doesn’t really like her [FYE] teacher at all. And so I feel like if you have a teacher….like my teacher tried to make it fun. I feel like if we had ones that didn’t I probably wouldn’t recommend it, but I mean I think it’s a nice benefit.”
Charlotte and Lucy agreed their instructor relationships had a positive impact on their FYE course experience, Lucy mentioning she would love to be in FYE every semester with her professor, and Charlotte expressed her admiration for her instructor, as well. “[My instructor] is an awesome man and professor and I’ve loved every second of that class,” Charlotte said. “He makes you feel like he’s your dad or something. He’s just very personal, and he’s just helped us a lot adjust to the changes coming here out of state and stuff. I think it’s just your family away from home, and I love that.”

**Relationships with FYE peers.**

In addition to the *Relationships with instructors* subtheme for *Building Relationships*, participants also mentioned the important role of FYE in building peer relationships. During the interview process, 42 percent of participants discussed relationships with classmates in FYE as a main benefit of the course and program and as a major factor in the participants’ academic and social integration at SU. This section discusses the most frequently occurring topics related to FYE peer interaction inside and outside of the classroom and its effect on participant integration.

**Shared experiences.**

Participants discussed how shared experiences with peers in FYE creating opportunities for bonding among class members. Charlotte said,

Just going to class, I’ve met a lot of my best friends now, especially in [FYE], because we’re all freshmen and can relate to each other. You make so many friends in that class because everyone is going through the exact same thing you are. We’re all freshmen. All of us are going through the same things and having to adjust, not living at home and being in the dorm, and just talking to each other and relate. It’s been really nice.
Hugo explained these peer relationships are one reason he’s glad he enrolled in the course. “I’m glad I did take it because you get to meet a bunch of kids and it’s really cool and you really just talk about what it’s like to live at college and it’s a good way to relieve stress,” he said. “It was kind of nice to talk to people and see that everyone’s kind of got similar problems going on. So I think it’s a good class to take.”

Twenty-nine percent of participants mentioned this bonding was important, especially for those students from out-of-state. Todd enrolled in the course as a way to meet people. “I wanted to meet people who were my age in this class, and that it was just a good class to kind of let you know about campus and stuff outside of the classroom, which is also where you can learn…outside the classroom.”

Dorothy said she met her best friends, all non-resident students, in the FYE course. She explained, “You get to share the differences and what it’s like to come to the South. It’s been good. I think everyone should definitely be in [FYE].” Dorothy said she had some difficulty transitioning at first. “It’s hard at first because you don’t know anyone and you’re in a new place. It was hard in the beginning because you don’t really know how to put yourself out there. And I think it’s about pushing yourself to go and say hi and talk to people,” she said.

Rachel also mentioned she has bonded with another non-resident student in her class. I’ve made a few friends in [FYE] and we go do all the stuff together. One of the girls lives in my building and we have some other classes together. We have a big biology lecture together, so I’m sure we wouldn’t have met if it hadn’t been for [FYE]. But we help each other out because she’s from [out of state]. So we figure things out together and we go to things and we find things together. And it’s fun.
While many of the participants discussed finding companionship with other non-resident students, 42 percent of the participants in the cohort-based section of FYE and 52 percent of participants in the non-cohort section of FYE noted in the interview that FYE helped facilitate academic or social integration through small groups. The smaller make-up of the class aided students in making connections with their peers and seeing familiar faces around campus.

Sophie said, “It’s nice to have the smaller classes and the same group. Since you have it every day, I have that group of kids every single day, so it’s nice to know I’m going to class with the same faces every day. Jane agreed, saying “I knew I would probably need some help with study groups and meeting new people coming as far as I was and knowing no one down here. So [the cohort-based FYE course] gave me a way to be in class with the same few people, so I had some familiar faces around campus.

Although Beatrice’s main objective in enrolling in the cohort-based FYE course was to live in a particular residence hall, she said she knew it would “be nice to have people that I see every single day in my classes.” She said she would encourage students who might have trouble meeting people to enroll in the cohort-based section of FYE. “If someone’s really outgoing and they’re great at making friends, I might say don’t do it. But if someone’s more shy, I might say, ‘Yeah, do it so you know people. You see them every day’.”

Lucy said she didn’t know what to expect from enrolling in the cohort-based section of FYE, but has found it to be helpful in making friends.

I think it’s cool how I’m able to take two classes, [my FYE] and my Writing 101, with the same students, and I’ve really enjoyed that. Because I’ve actually been able to develop bonds with the students. Some classes there are so many students that you don’t
have time to say ‘Hey, I’m so-and-so. Tell me about your weekend.’ It’s really nice to be in these classes with these people and I can talk with them and grab lunch with a couple of the girls in the classes and stuff, so now that I’m in it, I’m happy I did it.

For Jane, the cohort-based FYE course “has really helped ease everything together.” She said, “I have people that I know and I say hi to and I go to classes with a lot of them, because I have similar classes with some of them…even not the [FYE] courses.”

Dorothy said FYE has helped her remember faces outside of the classroom, as well. “I just remember on the first day we introduced ourselves and said where we live and that kind of helps when you meet people in your building. A girl in my class is actually my neighbor in my building. I didn’t even realize until we had class. So it’s been cool.” Dorothy said FYE has the potential to form lasting relationships. “I know how to network with people. The friends that you’ve made, you’ll probably see them all over the place. And we’re doing group projects right now, so it’s helping me get to know my classmates better. It’s very small.”

Open dialogue.

Many of the participants claimed the small class size of FYE also facilitated a more open dialogue among students. Hugo said, “I think you’re in a class which is really just talking about college with 20 to 30 people you’re going to be with the whole semester, so it helps you open up and get to meet those 30 kids. I think it is a pretty good way to just meet people.” For Hugo, FYE “is just a great class for helping you transition. It just helps you talk about all the issues you’re going to face and how you deal with them. I think that’s the most important part. Learning how to deal with a problem when it comes up. I think that definitely helps.”

This smaller classroom setting was especially helpful to Olivia, as college was her first experience with mixed-gender classes. Olivia said, “That class is my first small class that has
boys in it, and I’m not really used to it, but that class is helping me a lot because it’s just a
discussion class and now it’s like I’m sort of getting used to it. Because at first I was really
overwhelmed. I didn’t think that I would be, but I was really overwhelmed by boys in my class.
It’s a really big change.”

Homer claimed the environment was conducive to open dialogue. “It kind of eases the
transition from high school to college. I think I would have been well off without it, but I still
think it was good. I mean all my classes are fairly small, but just being able to talk and stuff. It’s
just one of those where you’re just…it’s kind of a fusion of a class and a support group type thing.”

Sophie mentioned being a part of the cohort-based section of FYE has helped her to open
up and has brought her class closer together, as well. “Everybody gets to talk and have more fun
together.”

**Sense of community/belonging.**

Apart from establishing friendships in the class, many participants noted FYE helped
them gain a sense of community and a sense of belonging at SU. This sense of belonging helped
many transition socially and academically and fostered the desire to persist at SU.

Required participation in certain events helped nurture the sense of belonging among
several participants. Franklin said these required events gave him a feel for the culture at SU,
saying, “Those were required events and those kind of gave good insight into what SU would be
like.”

Amelia recalls her experience with freshman convocation, a required event for FYE
students. “I remember convocation was pretty cool because it was that first big anything we had
to do for that class. I mean I had mixed feelings on the actual ceremony itself, but I liked going
as a class and having that first…‘You’re in college; this is the thing that you do. It’s legit.’ She also referenced a required event that helped in easing her transition. “[It] was crazy because we had to do that for [FYE]. It was a mob scene. It was insane. It was a weird bonding thing. So I feel like it just throws you more into community rather than just showing up.”

Amelia said these experiences brought her closer to her classmates and helped her feel a part of the SU community. “My experience with [FYE] has made me a lot closer to the University community. I feel like I’m a part of it, not like I’m just one of those new people on the edge.”

Other participants mentioned required attendance at these events also fostered the human connections made through the class. Charlotte said, “I think because we’re required to do so much, you get to meet more people and make connections and those relationships will last you all four years. I think requiring us to do stuff….at first you don’t really want to do it, but in the end it obviously is going to pay off. We’ve gotten to meet more people and expand our relationships.”

For Jack, FYE was the first social experience he had outside of Greek life. “Socially I have a more varied friend group because of the class,” he said. “I had trouble fitting in at first. A lot of the students here come with people they know or know people down here and that’s why they came. So it was hard finding people in the same boat as me. After a while, I really did find quite a few people who were in the same boat as me, but it took some searching.”

Others also mentioned how FYE contributed to their social integration. Vanessa said, “Actually it’s funny because two of my best friends I’ve met here are in my [FYE] class. That’s how we met. Really I’ve just met a lot of people through it, so it’s really helped socially.”

Several participants in the cohort-based section of FYE mentioned the cohort component helped
them in establishing relationships in the class. This population also mentioned they are able to
form study groups easily because they have multiple classes with their cohort. Sophie said, “[It]
is nice because a lot of my friends….two of my best friends now….are in my [cohort-based
FYE] classes, so it’s nice because you get notes from kids in your class. In my math class, I don’t
know many people in it, and I don’t have numbers of people, so I can’t ask questions. But in
those two classes, I know those two kids, so we always help each other.” Nancy said, “I’m really
good friends with one of the girls in that class. We really hit it off and we’ll study together and
read each other’s papers.”

Although many peer relationships have formed as a result of FYE, some participants have
not found as strong a social connection. “As far as the entire class, we’ll talk but it’s not like
we’re really hanging out outside of class, but it’s good that I did find that one girl where we
really could hit it off and work together,” Nancy explained. Beatrice had a similar experience. “I
don’t really talk to the people in my class outside of class. I recognize them on campus and I say
hey and stuff, but we don’t really hang out.”

Desiring Change.

The second main theme of the study is Desiring Change. When asked about their
decision to enroll at SU, participants cited a number of reasons, from breaking the mold and
being different to failure to gain acceptance at their home institutions of higher education. The
underlying theme for 58 percent of participants was a desire for change and the freedom that a
new environment promised. The following section explores the most common subthemes related
to participants’ decisions to enroll at SU.
College at any cost.

The first subtheme related to participants’ desire for change was related to non-resident tuition costs and affordability. Forty-two percent of participants indicated they were only looking at out-of-state institutions during their college search and had no intention of staying at a college or university in their home state. The majority of participants said costs were not an issue in their decision to enroll at SU. The reasons are discussed below.

For some students like Hugo, goodness of fit was more important than costs when selecting an institution of higher education. “Obviously it would have been a lot cheaper if I had gone to an in-state school,” he said, “but I liked the campus a lot, I had a feeling that it really kind of fit who I was. And I really liked this smaller atmosphere. I don’t know if there was really an issue, but I did think that this was the right fit for me, so the cost didn’t really matter.”

Other participants indicated they had older siblings who also attended out-of-state institutions, so they found leaving their home state was feasible. Jane said, “I knew the cost was higher, but my sister went out of state, and it was just something that I knew probably would happen.” The same was true for Dorothy, who said, “My parents were kind of like, ‘you can go wherever you want; it’s not a big deal.’ They were prepared…my brother goes to an out-of-state college, too. He’s in Oregon, so they can go wherever. I didn’t really consider it because my parents were like, ‘it’s fine’.”

Dorothy also said she received an alumni scholarship to attend SU, which helped defray the costs of non-resident tuition. In fact, 61 percent of participants received some type of scholarship to attend SU, helping seal their decision to attend SU.

Amelia said with her scholarships, she is only paying the cost of in-state tuition. “I was deciding between here and another out of state school down here. One of my biggest things was
that I have scholarship here based on my ACT, so that brought the cost down significantly.” The same was true for Homer, Madeline, and Lily, all considered more-prepared students in the non-cohort section of FYE.

Olivia, a more-prepared participant and one of five children, said affordability was important to her in selecting a university. “So my parents gave me a budget and said will send you anywhere in the country as long as it’s under this amount,” she said. “SU was what I was looking for in terms of size and environment and opportunities and they also gave me a lot of money for my ACT score, so that definitely was a really big factor. I wouldn’t have been able to come here without the scholarships.”

Rachel, another more-prepared participant, was also cognizant of costs and the impact on her parents’ wallet. “I made sure that I got a lot of scholarship money, because I wanted to make sure to go somewhere I wasn’t going to have to pay too much. And I ended up doing pretty well on my ACT. My parents said money wasn’t an issue, but I didn’t want them to have to pay a lot, so when I ended up getting a lot of scholarships, I made the firm decision. I really liked it here, but I wanted to make sure I wasn’t taking a big bite out of my parents.”

Jack said his parents were supportive of his decision to attend SU because the costs were less than they would have been had he decided to stay in state. Vanessa also said coming to SU was half the cost of staying in state. This was a common theme among participants, with 68 percent of participants reporting SU’s costs were similar to or less than what they would have paid for tuition at an in-state institution.

Harry said costs played a big role in his decision to attend SU. “If I had stayed in [my home state], even the in-state tuition at pretty much any of the schools I would have gone to, it would have been higher than I pay here, so that was pretty key.”
Nancy found this to be true for her, as well. “It was the same for me to stay in state as it was for me to come here out of state. And I knew I wanted a change of scenery. Coming to school where I didn’t know anybody appealed to me. Instead of going [in state] where I would know 50 of my friends from high school….yeah, I wanted a new place, I wanted something different, and here I am.

Thirty-nine percent of participants indicated this change of scenery was more important to them than the costs of attendance. Franklin said his decision came down to SU and one in-state institution and there was only a nominal difference in costs. “I guess I just liked it here more. I just wanted something different.”

**Breaking the mold.**

Like Franklin, 42 percent of participants indicated one of the main reasons for choosing SU was to seek an institution outside of their home state. This desire to attend an out-of-state institution was often driven by a desire to do something different from other students with whom they graduated high school. Alice said she knew she did not want to attend her in-state institution because, “that was very typical for everyone from [my hometown], and what I hear about [that institution] from people from [my hometown] that go [there], it’s high school all over again just on a bigger scale.” Arthur felt much the same about his decision to enroll in SU. He said, “I didn’t want to do high school all over again. I wanted to have a nice little change or whatever. Literally, if I had gone [there], it would have been high school, except we would’ve been living together. The exact same thing for another four years with the same people. And you know, I wanted a new experience, I guess. And to expand my social circle.”

Jack expressed he felt more mature than his high school classmates.
I really don’t talk to anyone from my old high school just because they all went to [the same college], and it was kind of like 13th grade and they didn’t really move past high school, and a lot of them are really not happy where they are because they’re like stuck in high school. Here, it’s like me and one of my best friends from home but he went to a different school. I could not be happier. I couldn’t imagine being anywhere else.

Olivia’s reasons for choosing SU were similar, only she was seeking to be different from her family who had a history of attending the same in-state institution. “The main reason I wanted to come to SU was just about everyone in my family has gone there, and I decided I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to do my own thing and I wanted to branch out.”

The theme of breaking the mold continued with Nancy who said, “I knew I wanted a change of scenery. Coming to school where I didn’t know anybody appealed to me. Instead of going [in state] where I would know 50 of my friends from high school….yeah, I wanted a new place, I wanted something different, and here I am.”

**Seeking independence and adventure.**

Another common subtheme of *Desiring Change* among participants was the desire for independence. Thirty-five percent of participants indicated they wanted to put some distance between themselves and their hometown to gain a sense of freedom.

Hugo said he thought he would end up attending an in-state school before deciding to enroll at SU. His desire for independence helped form his decision. He said, “I thought it would just be a good experience to get away from home and grow up.”

When asked why he chose to attend SU, Peter said, “To go out of state, a little bit of distance. Just so I could start doing things on my own, doing things on my own schedule. You
know it’s close enough that mom and dad can come visit, especially since my mom travels a lot. She’s everywhere. But it’s still far enough away that I can feel that separation a little bit.”

Homer’s home life led him to his decision to enroll out of state at SU. He said, “The benefits of being away from home where I’ve been all my life definitely outweigh. I didn’t really like my home. I wasn’t happy there. I just needed to get out of there.”

Although many were seeking freedom through distance from their hometown, they still found it comforting that they were a reasonable distance from home. Anne said, “I wanted to go away from home and it’s far enough without being too far away if I needed to go home for a weekend or something I can get there without too much hassle.” Eric said he never considered attending an in-state school, only looking for out-of-state schools within a six hour radius because he and his parents wanted him to be driving distance from home.

Rachel also said her parents played a large role in her decision to attend SU. She said, This seemed like a good fit. And it was far enough away from home, but it wasn’t too far. [The drive is] actually really nice. It’s really pretty and it’s not too long. We can do it only stopping twice if we have to, so it’s fine. I visited junior and senior year just to make sure. My mom came with me the first time, then my dad came with me and they both really liked it, and that was important. They were willing to make the drive to come visit me.

Many students considered distance from their hometown to be an exciting change of pace, causing them to only seriously consider out-of-state institutions. These students indicated their move out of state has been an adventure.

Beatrice said “I just wanted something different. I grew up in the same town, born and raised, so I just needed to get out and do something else.” Rupert said he too wanted a change. “I
just wanted something new. Explore the world.” Jane said she felt the same call to exploration. “I
grew up in the same area, and I decided it was time to get out and explore the rest of the nation
and I knew that I always loved the South, so I started looking at schools and SU was the one that
felt like home.” Beatrice said she has enjoyed her journey. “It’s been great getting away from
home and experiencing something else.” Hugo found the same to be true. “Honestly, I was kind
of excited to leave [my home state] and completely restart,” he said. “Meet all new people, a
totally different culture.”

Allure of the South.

As part of their desire for change and adventure, 29 percent of participants indicated part
of the draw to SU was the allure of the Southern region of the United States, its values and
traditions, culture, and climate.

Many participants said they appreciated Southern hospitality. Beatrice said, “I really like
the culture down here. It’s completely different from what I grew up around and it’s been a nice
change. I like the Southern hospitality and the manners. It’s been great getting away from home
and experiencing something else.” Lily said she too was drawn to Southern standards. “I didn’t
really want to go in-state, and we went to look at Southern schools and liked the values that were
maintained here, so we chose here. I like the atmosphere. Everyone’s really nice down here, and
I was really looking for that. Because I was going out of state, I wanted more accepting people
and I think I’ve found that here.”

Jane also said the Southern culture is very different from where she grew up and played a
part in her decision to enroll at SU. “I knew that I always loved the South, so I started looking at
schools and [SU] was the one that felt like home.”
The warmer Southern climate was also appealing to several participants. Nancy said, “We had a really cold winter [at home], so the South was really appealing to me. So I looked at several schools in the South, and [SU]….everything lined up cost-wise, and they have a great Accounting program, so it fell into place.”

Participants also discussed their perception of traditions at Southern institutions of higher education. Three participants indicated these traditions played an important role in their decision to enroll at SU. Madeline said,

I was looking for big football, big school spirit, lots of traditions, all of that good stuff. It really came down to visiting. SU is the last school I saw in person and up until then I was of the mindset that I will make myself happy wherever I go, it won’t be a problem. And then I came on campus, and SU was the only school that I thought, it will make me happy. It will make me excited to be there and be in college. When it came down to what am I actually looking for, everything lined up with big Southern school.

Amelia, originally from the Northeast, toured many schools in that region and wasn’t finding what she was looking for. “I wanted a bigger school with lots of opportunities just for whatever I wanted to explore. Just anything. And I wasn’t finding it there. I mean, we do have some larger schools, but I wanted to get out of the region, meet new people, and see new things. So I just started looking down South, and settled on SU.”

Like Amelia, several participants said they were looking for the feel and amenities of a big Southern school, but enjoy the benefits of a smaller campus. Nancy said, “I knew I wanted to go to a big school. I’m a really big sports person and you know big schools obviously have that Division I draw to them.” A big sports atmosphere also appealed to Alice. “I knew I wanted to stay in the South. I wanted the big school feel, the football team, the athletics, all the fun stuff,
but in a smaller package. My small classes are good for me, but still with the big university. It was exactly what I wanted.”

The home team disadvantage.

For this final subtheme related to *Desiring Change*, it is important to understand the root of decision for non-resident enrollment and whether outside factors affected participants’ decisions. For some participants, the underlying reason for attending an out-of-state institution may have had less to do with seeking adventure and independence and more to do with seeking an institution that met their ideals and desires, but also accepted their academic qualifications for admission. Some participants may have been forced to seek non-resident enrollment, not out of a desire for change, but out of necessity due to the institutional academic standards in their home state.

Todd said, “Where I was from, a lot of people are leaving the state because of the top ten percent rule [for admission]. I tried to go to [an in-state school] and I got denied. I was looking for a sign, and I got that sign that I didn’t get into [that school] right away. So I looked at other schools.”

In fact, several participants had trouble meeting the academic requirements for admission to their most desired institution in their home state. While the extent to which this affected participants’ decisions to enroll at SU is still unclear, it is a topic worth mentioning, as it could have impacted participants’ primary reasons for leaving their home state and could have retention implications later as participants consider transferring back to their home states.

Is the Grass Really Greener?

While many participants mentioned their desire for adventure and independence and to be different by going out of state for college, several found their expectations didn’t match their
reality when they arrived at SU to begin their freshman year. While previous sections have discussed a stated desire for change, this third main theme considers non-resident expectations, if their experiences matched those expectations during their first semester at SU, and the impact any discrepancies could have on their decision to persist. The following discusses subthemes as related to these discrepancies.

**Cultural differences.**

Twenty-nine percent of participants stated they had considered transferring or were still considering transferring to another institution at the time of interview. The cultural differences were once so appealing during their college search later caused several participants to consider transferring to a different institution.

Margaret, who said she was originally drawn to the South and wanted to be far from home, said she was considering transferring. “I’m not used to being somewhere so small. I’m not used to being in the middle of nowhere. It’s so weird. There’s nothing to do.”

Hugo said he, too, found the transition from a larger city to a more rural environment a challenge. “I’m definitely [an in-state] boy at heart. I miss the beach. I miss the weather, stuff like that,” he said. “I kind of grew up in a big area, and then coming here I felt like for the first week or so that there was nothing to do, but you find stuff to do. I don’t really see myself leaving, but those would be the reasons.”

Rupert also stated cultural differences as one reason he was considering transferring. “There is just more of an emphasis on material items and image here. I would go back to my home state, but not because of homesickness; just because of cultural difference.”
Diversity and the Greek debate.

Like Rupert, other participants not only expressed a desire for more diversity in their physical surroundings, but indicated their expectations for a more diverse student body went unmet, as well. The second subtheme for *Is the grass really greener?* discusses Greek life and how involvement affected some participants’ views of diversity on the campus of SU.

While participants noted SU has come far in bridging the diversity gap, they also indicated there is still work to be done. Todd said,

I know in my [FYE] class we were talking about how SU is getting more diverse because we’re getting more famous around the country. People are coming back and giving good reviews, but it’s still separated. They’re still separated into the individual races. I try to do….I have friends who are in different races, but you don’t see that very often. I mean every university has its problems. But there’s a lot of good people. I met just good people.

This diversity gap was made most evident in participants’ responses related to the Greek system at SU. Todd said, “To be honest, I was looking for a place with a little less emphasis on Greek life and a little less emphasis on….I was just looking for more diversity.” Todd said part of this diversity gap for him was a division between races among the Greek system.

I wish it included more people because you really just see…Blacks have their fraternities, Whites have theirs. I saw probably like two Black people the whole time coming through [Greek recruitment]. I think it’s very catered a lot of times to, and I’ve met exceptions to this, but I think it’s catered to rich White people. And I’ve heard a lot of stories about kind of stuck up mean people, but you get…there’s different types of people everywhere.
Go Greek or Go Home?

To drill down still further into the subtheme, *Diversity and the Greek debate*, this study found the perceived emphasis on Greek life at SU was often cited as a reason for participants’ decisions to persist or depart from SU. There were mixed reports, as many participants had positive experiences with Greek life and recruitment, while for others, like Todd, Greek life at SU held negative connotations. Homer explained he works and doesn’t have time to pledge a fraternity, which has led to feelings of isolation on the SU campus.

I don’t have time for Greek life and it’s kind of frustrating right now, because all my friends are pledges and always doing this random stuff. It’s really kind of a tough time since I’m having a hard time finding stuff to do socially. So right now it kind of stinks, and it’s harder to meet people because all of the mixers and stuff, because I can’t be in those.

For Homer, this negative experience with Greek life is one reason he was considering a transfer to another institution at the time of interview. He said, “I probably will transfer, but that’s just because I made my decision and I’m not going to go Greek. I want to be social, but if I’m not Greek it’s really….I love the academics and I love this place, it’s just not enough to keep me here with out-of-state tuition and such.”

Rupert expressed similar feelings toward Greek life at SU, stating he is not associated with a fraternity, but recognizes the strong emphasis placed on being Greek. He said, “I’m not in Greek life or anything, which apparently is the worst thing to ever happen on this campus.”

Max said other obligations kept him from participating in fraternity recruitment and this has affected his social integration at SU. “With [my other obligations] and everything, it’s difficult to…it’s not like I could join a fraternity or anything like that. But I have a good amount
of friends in my class and everything, but it’s not like I have tons of friends, in a way.” Hugo
said his parents didn’t want him to participate in Greek recruitment his first year, but instead
wanted him to focus on academics. At the time of interview, he still had plans to join a fraternity.
“Hopefully next semester,” Hugo said. “I think it’s a really great way to meet people. Other than
that, I haven’t really had any issues transitioning.”

Todd stated he found it especially hard for non-resident students who were not part of a
fraternity or sorority to get involved on campus.

I talked to a lot of people who are from out of state, and it’s kind of hard if you don’t go
into a fraternity or sorority right away because what I saw was I’m not sure if I want to
join a fraternity. I might want to in the future, I don’t know. I rushed and then dropped
out. I just wasn’t sure if that was for me. So I dropped out and was like ‘well I can get
involved in stuff.’ If I could go back, I would have gotten involved in stuff earlier, but it’s
just a learning curve.

Todd said he had to look a little harder for opportunities to get involved since he was not
involved with the Greek system. “I do feel that it’s kind of hard….I came here and was like, ‘Oh,
it’s just 33 percent [Greek],’ but I was talking to people, and perception is reality. So everyone
seems like is in a fraternity here, so it’s really hard to feel like you’re really involved if you’re
not in a fraternity or sorority.”

Homer said Greek recruitment not only affected his decision to depart, but also impacted
his experiences in the FYE course, as well. He said following recruitment, he felt much less
connected to his classmates and his feelings related to the FYE course changed.

Really it was not so much the class but the people in it. Pre- and post-pledge people.

Once again, Greek life’s huge here. Before pledging, we all talked to each other and we
all talked about different things. Post-pledge, it seems like the guys still kind of talk about different things, but the girls…all they want to talk about is their sorority. All they care about is their sorority. The only reason they exist is because of their sorority. And that’s kind of annoying me. It’s just kind of shaped me realizing the differences between….I noticed a complete personality shift in people. The way groups affect people and such.

While some participants were not involved in Greek life at the time of interview or expressed discontent with the Greek system at SU, other non-members, like Arthur still thought the Greek system played a role in their social interaction on campus. Arthur said, “I was unable to rush [due to my high school GPA], but I was still able to go to all the parties or whatever. So I guess I’m pretty big in that. I mean I’ve met guys outside or doing whatever you normally do, but I guess I just didn’t join the committee or anything like that.”

Fifty-eight percent of the study’s participants were members of a social sorority or fraternity. These participants indicated they were pleased with their Greek experience and belonging to a social fraternity or sorority helped them become more involved in campus life at SU. This social integration led to a greater sense of belonging for many participants and created in them a desire to persist at SU.

Jack said, “Well, I did rush and I’m pledging [a fraternity] right now. Through them, the stuff that we have to do for pledgeship, they want us to be involved, they want us to get a good name for the fraternity, so I’ve done everything from philanthropy, to the recycling center and helped out there little bit. So a lot of [my social integration] has been through rush and Greek Life.”

Madeline said she too has enjoyed the benefits of being a member of Greek life. “So I joined a sorority. I went through rush. That was very interesting as an out-of-state student. A lot
of girls are bred for that, so being the first one in my family was very interesting. So that awards me a lot of involvement. There are social activities and then the philanthropic events that we get to do.”

For Charlie, the Greek system has meant more than just getting involved in social activities, but is a big reason he wants to remain at SU. “With my fraternity,” he said, “since I joined I want to stay with all those guys and I like that part. It’s kind of like a whole other family to be down here with.”

Deciding to Persist or Depart.

Social integration through Greek life was not the only theme related to participants’ decisions to persist at SU or to consider transferring to another institution. This section examines the fourth theme, Deciding to Persist or Depart, and the subthemes that emerged across participants related to a desire to transfer included proximity to family, not wanting to be viewed as a quitter, social issues, and cultural and geographic differences. The following sections include further examinations of these subthemes.

Deciding to depart.

Of the 31 participants in the qualitative portion of this study, 29 percent indicated they intended to depart or were considering transferring to another institution at the time of interview. Two participants did not re-enroll for the Spring 2014 semester following the interview and one participant did not re-enroll for the following Fall 2014 semester. Of the three non-returners, one participant was deceased, and the other two participants could not be reached for comment. Participants cited a number of reasons they considered departing, among them being social and cultural issues and distance from their hometowns. The following discusses three main reasons
participants named for considering departure: Social issues, Closer to family, and Cultural and geographic differences.

**Social issues.**

Several participants indicated social issues, apart from those aforementioned issues with Greek life, played a role in their consideration of departure from UM. Social integration played a key role in many participants’ decisions to persist or depart. Those who experienced early struggles with social integration indicated a desire to depart from SU at an earlier stage.

Jane said, “I had trouble fitting in at first. A lot of the students here come with people they know or know people down here, and that’s why they came. So it was hard finding people in the same boat as me. After a while, I really did find quite a few people who were in the same boat as me, but it took some searching.”

Other participants had trouble adjusting to a new lifestyle on a college campus. Hugo said he had roommate issues that made him consider departing from SU early in his first semester. Hugo’s FYE instructor played a crucial role in talking him through these issues and helping him make the decision to stay. Hugo said, “Now I don’t see myself leaving. After talking to [my instructor] I think it would definitely be good for me to stay for the Spring and then decide about transferring, but I see myself staying here.”

**Closer to family.**

Some participants stated they struggled with homesickness. For many who desired to move away from home, what initially seemed like a great adventure turned into feelings of isolation from family and hometown friends.

Todd said he found it hard to be far from family and friends back home. “I was kind of looking everywhere. I had one school in [my home state] just because it was kind of close to
home.” Todd, considered a more-prepared student by this study, was forced to look at other options because he was denied admission to many of his in-state institutions. As a result, he decided to attend SU.

Vanessa said the distance from her hometown was causing her to consider transferring back to her home state. “Really the only thing would to be closer to people….like my family and friends who are back home. Other than that, I really like the school, the distance is just….I’m 15 hours away so it’s hard.”

While participants struggled with homesickness, many just needed time to adjust to their new surroundings. Anne said, “You know I thought one of the harder things when I came here was going to be like if I were homesick. And I do miss my friends and my family, especially because I haven’t been home yet. But at the same time, all the friends that I’ve made here, I never would have met these people otherwise, you know.”

Jane also struggled with being so far from home and just needed time to adjust. “I thought of transferring at the beginning of the year for second semester,” she said, “but after looking at it, SU has a lot to offer. It just took a little while adjusting coming from [my home state].”

Madeline came to SU under very different circumstances. From a military family, Madeline doesn’t feel connected to a hometown, and as she explained, “I’m very independent. It’s not really something that I need to go back to my family because I feel out-of-state, because I’m always out-of-state.”

*Cultural and geographic differences.*

SU’s environment also affected perceptions and decisions to depart. Rupert said one major difference between life at SU and back home was an emphasis on material items and
image at SU. “That’s one reason I would go back to my home state,” he said. “Not because of homesickness; just because of cultural differences.”

While one major draw to SU for many participants was a sense of adventure and a change of scenery, many participants had difficulty with this change. Some participants said they struggled with the cultural and geographic differences at SU and in the South.

Hugo, who initially desired to be different and sought a change of scenery in his college search, found it hard to adjust to the new culture at SU, as well. One major difference was the geography. Hugo said of his home state, “I miss the beach. I miss the weather, stuff like that. I’ve got a lot of really good friends at [my home state institution]. It’s a big school and I kind of grew up in a big area, and then coming here I felt like for the first week or so that there was nothing to do, but you find stuff to do.” He said while he plans to stay at SU, these cultural and geographic differences would be reasons to depart.

Margaret also said the transition from a larger city to a more rural area was difficult for her. “I was thinking about [transferring], just to go somewhere in a bigger city. I’m not used to being somewhere so small. I’m not used to being in the middle of nowhere. It’s so weird. There’s nothing to do.”

**Deciding to persist.**

This second subtheme of Deciding to Persist or Depart examines primary reasons for persistence among non-resident participants. Of the 31 participants in this qualitative study, 71 percent indicated they intended to persist at SU at the time of interview. Twenty-nine participants re-enrolled for the Spring 2014 semester following the interview, and 28 participants re-enrolled for the following Fall 2014 semester. Of the three non-returners, one participant was deceased, and the other two participants could not be reached for comment. Participants cited a
number of reasons they considered departing which are discussed below: Change of atmosphere, Academic and social integration, and Never give up.

**Change of atmosphere.**

While some participants struggled with transitioning to a new environment with new cultural norms, many participants welcomed the change of scenery and different customs found at SU. Charlie said he likes the South better than the North, from which he hails, and Beatrice agreed. Beatrice said, “I really like the culture down here. It’s completely different from what I grew up around and it’s been a nice change. I like the Southern hospitality and the manners. It’s been great getting away from home and experiencing something else.” Amelia said, “The campus is beautiful. And the small town is good. It’s a safe place to grow and explore and learn. It’s one of the reasons I wanted to get away from the city. It’s not necessarily the best place to be doing the silly college things. I’m really happy here, so I wouldn’t want to leave.”

Some participants still seemed a bit conflicted about the change. Hugo, who also said the different environment and culture were reasons he was considering transferring home, also said he enjoyed the change of scenery. “I just love it here. People are nice. I kind of like the weather. It’s a little bit cold, but it’s different so I like it. I like the area. It’s a beautiful area. We never had any forests in [my home state]. You know, it’s totally different and I like it. It’s a totally different view of everything.”

Others, like Sophie, stated they just loved the “friendly atmosphere” at SU. Harry said, “I love the people, I love the atmosphere. It’s a lot of fun, but it’s still academically challenging. I’m enjoying the classes. It’s good for my major. It seems like it’s pretty good for networking.” Max agreed, stating, “It’s got a great atmosphere here. I like it here. It’s a perfect combination of fun and hard work. It’s a great place.”
Academic and social integration.

That combination of fun and hard work also came through in the interviews as participants discussed how their academic and social integration made them want to stay and continue pursuing their college education at SU. George explained, “The programs academically as well as the amount of social involvement opportunities that there are on campus is really attractive to me.”

Olivia talked about her first experience at an SU football game and how it impacted her decision to stay at SU. She said attending that game “changed my life. I was like, ‘okay, I finally get this whole football thing.’ That’s the first time I felt like now I’m a part of SU. I’m not a guest here anymore. And so that’s what made it like home to me and that’s what is keeping me here, pretty much.”

Other participants also spoke of feeling at home at SU. Nancy said, “I really feel like this is my new home. I have my friends here. When I first came to SU, I was like, ‘Oh man, I’m not going to meet anybody. I’m not going to get close to anybody like I was in high school.’ But being at the end of the semester, I have so many friends here. I’m already planning to meet up with one of my friends over Thanksgiving break. So this is where I want to be. There’s no reason I want to leave.” Vanessa shared the same sentiments saying, “I just feel like I already fit in pretty well, so I don’t see any reason to leave that and just have to start over somewhere else.”

For many participants, academic integration played an even more important role in their decision to stay at SU. Rupert said while he may transfer, early academic success would be one main reason for him to stay. Others, like Vanessa and Lucy, said specific academic programs were helping her stay at SU.
George said, “Every experience I’ve had at SU has been even better than I thought it would be. Coming in, I was excited about choosing SU, but everything that I’ve been involved in and every opportunity has completely surpassed my expectations. Lucy explained, “Well, I love it. I knew I was going to love it. And the programs, the hospitality program here has been very welcoming. My father majored in the same program when he was here, and I definitely see all the benefits I can gain from it.”

*Never give up.*

One theme that surfaced over the course of interviews related to decisions to persist at SU was participants’ fears of being perceived as a “quitter” should they decide to leave SU. When asked what made him want to stay at SU, Arthur said, “I’m not a quitter. I hate that. So even if I did hate this place, I would never do it, because I wouldn’t want me people to think….you know….but I mean I love all the people here, I love the campus, I love everything about this place.”

Others shared Arthur’s sentiments. Rachel said, “I try to stick to my decisions,” and Lily echoed saying, “I’m really a dedicated person. I don’t give up on things.”

Todd explained while he did entertain the idea of transferring back to his home state, he felt like it was too early to just pack up.

I heard from a lot of out-of-state people. They say your first semester, maybe your first year, is going to suck. Just because…it may not be because of the university. It may just be because you’re out of state. A lot of people sometimes go out of state….but this was not really all that popular among my high school, so I came here kind of alone. So you start from scratch, which is cool because you learn a lot about yourself and you get to meet a bunch of new people. But why I stayed. The main reason I wanted to stay
was….well, I don’t know if I’m going to stay in the future or not, but I’d like to if that’s possible. I didn’t want to just give up.

Madeline said moving around in a military family has caused her to want to put down roots at SU. She said,

Because I’ve never done four years [in one place] before, choosing a school was a very serious topic. It wasn’t taken lightly because transferring, obviously if I wanted to do it my parents would support me in it, but it was not something I ever thought about doing. I came in knowing that after two years, which is my normal length of time of staying somewhere, that I might kind of have an itch to go somewhere new, so I was trying to choose a completely new environment. I’ve never done small town USA before, so this is crazy. I also have a travel bug, so I chose a school that has a plethora of study abroad opportunities. I wanted to be able to get out if I needed to and then come back to where I felt was becoming my newest home addition. It’s the campus that makes me happy, so I can’t imagine leaving. I’m a little biased on that. I don’t have a hometown type of thing that I don’t feel like I need to get back to, so that makes a difference.

Like Madeline, many other participants found the SU campus and their experiences on the campus make them happy. Peter said, “I think I’ll graduate from here. I have no intentions of leaving, and I don’t know if I’ll ever want to.” When asked if he planned to persist at SU and if he thought he would graduate from SU, George replied, “Yes and yes. I’ll be here in the Spring, no doubt. I’ll be here all four years. I don’t see any problem graduating from SU. The only problem would be wanting to stay when you graduate!”
Seeking Security

The fifth main theme that emerged across participants during the interview phase of the study was participants seemed to be seeking a sense of security through choosing SU and through the decision to enroll in the FYE program. The following section explores how this theme developed through participant dialogue in the interview setting and highlights seven subthemes that discuss the ways participants sought physical, academic, and social security.

Safe environment.

Several participants indicated personal safety was an important part of their decision to enroll at SU. Rachel said she plans to persist at SU because “I feel comfortable here. I feel safe.” Margaret also said she felt “comfortable and safe. A lot of my friends [at other schools] can’t go anywhere alone, she can’t walk to her classes alone, and she’s always kind of freaked out to be walking around alone, and I’m kind of like….I don’t know, at night, like, I feel safe walking back to my dorm at night. I really like that.”

Amelia said FYE has helped to perpetuate this feeling of safety through programming and presentations. “We had someone come and speak about personal safety from UPD. I really like those presentations. I like having those programs come to you. Having it right there and being reminded that these are the things that are keeping you safe, that you can do to help others or whatever. I like having that accessible.”

Amelia went on to say she also appreciates the small town where SU is located. “It’s a safe place to grow and explore and learn. It’s one of the reasons I wanted to get away from the city. It’s not necessarily the best place to be doing the silly college things. I’m really happy here, so I wouldn’t want to leave.”
Easy A/GPA booster.

Participants also found a different kind of security through the FYE course, which served as an academic safety net for many participants. Fifty-five percent of participants indicated one reason for their enrollment in the course was their understanding they could earn an “easy A.”

Nancy said, “When you hear a ton of people recommend it as a class you should take as a freshman, you’re like, ‘maybe that’s a good thing to take.’ Three credits, GPA boost. All that kind of stuff, so there were a lot of appeals in that.” Dorothy also said she took FYE based on recommendations from older students. “Everyone was like, ‘take it; it’s fun.’ A lot of people said it was an easy A, but there is work involved. I’ve enjoyed it.” Vanessa said she, too, initially decided to enroll in FYE because she heard it was an easier course. “Honestly, I had a big course load, and a lot of people told me it wasn’t a high stress class. And also just coming from out of state, I didn’t really know much about the school, so it has taught me a lot about the history and about everything…the culture here. It’s been really helpful.”

Other participants also said the composition of the FYE course helped them in their academic transition, although the “easy A” wasn’t the only reason they enrolled. Jane said, “[FYE] has really helped ease everything together. It’s an easier course, so kind of as a GPA booster in the end, which helps.” Homer agreed. “It was one of those things where I’m not from around here and it would help me get acquainted with the University,” he said. “But also I heard it was an easy A. Unlike a lot of people, or probably most people, who took it because it was an easier A, I actually really wanted to learn just where I am.” Todd said that in addition to an “easy A,” he also thought the class would be a good way to meet people. “I didn’t just enroll for the GPA booster,” he said. “It is a good GPA booster, but I felt like I didn’t want to overload myself
right away. It was just a good class to kind of let you know about campus and stuff outside of the classroom, which is also where you can learn…outside the classroom.”

**Parental influence to take FYE.**

Charlie also heard that the FYE course was an easier class and his mother encouraged him to take the course. Parental influence played a part in FYE enrollment decisions for 23 percent of participants, indicating that parents also sought a sense of security for their children through the FYE course. In turn, some participants seemed to find security in depending on their parents for course selection.

“My mom wanted me to do [cohort-based FYE] because she thought it would help me better,” Charlie said. “I enrolled in [FYE] because when I heard about it, it seemed like it was going to help me, teach me a lot of different things, and it didn’t seem to be too hard of a class.”

Many participants’ parents took it upon themselves to enroll their students in the FYE course, including Nancy whose mother enrolled her in the cohort-based section of FYE.

“Actually it was a last minute kind of thing,” Nancy said. “I was working as a camp counselor this summer, and my mom got an email saying there were spots in [the course], and she was like, ‘Smaller classes sounds great.’ And so she just kind of took care of it for me, and I just came here.” Eric said, “My mom enrolled me in [the cohort-based FYE], so I had to take it then.”

Alice found herself in a similar situation. “My mom really wanted me to do it,” she said. “At orientation they made a big deal out of it, and my mom was like, ‘You have to take that’.”

Other participants said their parents encouraged them to enroll in FYE because they thought it would help with the students’ transition to college. Margaret said, “In high school I had a lot of problems finding study skills and getting adjusted, so my mom wanted me to do it when I started college.” Similarly, Rupert said his mother influenced his enrollment in the
cohort-based FYE course because she wanted him to have a readymade friend group. “My mother wanted me to have a good base of people to be involved with and the mentor thing,” he said. “So she thought it was a good idea. Of course I had to do it.

**Familiarity with campus/familial ties.**

Enrollment in the FYE course was not the only evidence of familial influence that emerged throughout the course of interviews. As participants reflected on their decision to enroll at SU, familiarity with campus and familial ties to SU were a dominant theme in this decision. That familiarity provided many participants with a sense of security in their decision and in their early days at SU.

Dorothy is a child of SU alumni. “My parents both went here. I didn’t exactly have a guided tour, since my parents just said, you know, ‘we’ll take you around.’ Like not a big deal. I just came a couple of times and I liked it. I just feel comfortable here. And everyone has been so nice and welcoming. I just feel like I need to be here. It’s perfect.”

Lucy said she grew up visiting SU and SU “is definitely a family school for sure, and it’s what I’ve grown up being around.” For Lucy, she said she felt called to follow in the footsteps of her family members and attend SU, even though she is considered a non-resident student. “SU is definitely where I’ve supposed to been all my life, I know, and I didn’t apply anywhere else. I knew I was supposed to be here and it was kind of ‘why not go to SU?’.” Lucy said familiarity with the campus was an important part of her decision to enroll. “Knowing the area was definitely a benefit. Knowing [the town], and my dad recently remarried and her family lives here so I have family here, and that’s a huge benefit. If I had gone somewhere else in my state then I would probably have no idea of how to get around, so I just love this school.
For students like Eric, attendance at SU sporting events played a big role in the decision to attend SU. “I’ve been looking to come down here for a while. Nobody [in my family] has ever gone here, but we’ve been [tailgating] and all that for 10 years. Came down here one time and just kept coming back. I just decided to be the first one [to attend], I guess.”

A sense of history.

While not all participants had a direct connection to SU prior to enrollment, many found a sense of security in their FYE course, which teaches students about the history and culture of SU, as well as provides a safe environment for exploration of the campus.

During participant interviews, 35 percent of participants indicated learning about the history of SU was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the FYE course. George said FYE helped him better understand the traditions behind SU. “There’s a lot of institutional history that you have to understand when you first get here. I think [FYE] helps you understand SU more than you would have otherwise.”

The sense of history the FYE course imbues played an especially important role for non-resident students. Vanessa said, “Just coming from out of state, I didn’t really know much about the school, so it has taught me a lot about the history and about everything…the culture here. It’s been really helpful.” Madeline agreed.

It’s been great because I’ve loved learning about the University. Knowing the history of SU makes me feel like I’m more involved here. I have never lived somewhere for four years before. So choosing a college was crazy, and getting to know about it is something that I haven’t had the opportunity to do anywhere else I’ve lived. So I love that. It makes me feel like it’s my own. And when people visit I can tell them all these things about the campus. And maybe they don’t care about it, but it makes it more special for me. I
actually do not like history. I’m awful at history. I don’t like when it’s the facts…I can’t connect with it. I like this story. I care about it. That’s the difference.

Other participants mentioned the camaraderie in the FYE course. The relationships built in the course seem to have provided many participants with an added sense of security. Emma said, “I guess I also like how [our instructor] gets us involved with each other….our whole class. So right now we’re working on a project. It’s getting our class to bond and get closer together.”

**Comfort in community.**

The bond among students and between students and faculty fostered through the FYE course was referenced often as the reason for participants’ decisions to persist at SU. The support the class offers through academic study groups, the instructor-as-advisor relationship, and familiarity with peers, especially in the cohort-based course, provides a sense of security to participants.

Charlotte said, “I had heard from a couple of my sophomore friends here that when you go to [FYE], it just helps you get more comfortable with the campus and kind of just shows you more of why to love SU and the resources they have for you.” Rachel said she got mixed messages from others about taking the course. “Everyone kept telling me ‘oh, you don’t need it; you learn this stuff anyways,’ but I wanted to make sure that I made a smooth transition this time,” she said. “I have a tough time transitioning. It was really tough transitioning from grade school to high school, so I figured I would do everything I could to make the transition easier. And [FYE] offered that.”

Some participants mentioned study groups formed in FYE as a source of comfort and aid in academic integration. Jane said, “I knew I would probably need some help with study groups and meeting new people, coming as far as I was and knowing no one down here.” Hugo also
found the academic support through FYE to be an important part of the course. “I like how it has study groups and stuff like that… The study groups have definitely helped academically with transitioning because college is definitely way harder than high school. You have to try harder, so it helps to have people to study with.”

Many participants, especially in the cohort-based sections of FYE, indicated the course with social integration, as well. This was especially true for non-resident students. Beatrice said, “I guess just the first couple of weeks, I didn’t really know anybody, so it was nice having that same group of people every day in class. Just being able to be like, ‘I know who you are.’ I felt more comfortable around them.” Jane said, “[The cohort-based course] gave me a way to be in class with the same few people, so I had some familiar faces around campus.” Lucy agreed. “I think it’s cool how I’m able to take two classes with the same students, and I’ve really enjoyed that,” she said. “I’ve actually been able to develop bonds with the students. Some classes there are so many students that you don’t have time to say ‘Hey, I’m so-and-so; tell me about your weekend,’ so it’s really nice to be in these classes with these people, and I can talk with them and grab lunch with a couple of the girls in the classes and stuff.” Others also found comfort and security in the smaller class size. Sophie said, “It was kind of nice to hear about how you’re in the same group of kids. And since I didn’t know anybody, being in the same group of kids for two classes just seemed like a good opportunity to meet people.”

Participants seemed to find comfort, as well as common ground with their classmates. Hugo said, “I’m glad I did take it because you get to meet a bunch of kids and it’s really cool and you really just talk about what it’s like to live at college and it’s a good way to relieve stress. It was kind of nice to talk to people and see that everyone’s kind of got similar problems going on.” Others established close friendships within their FYE course. Dorothy said, “My two best
friends here are in [FYE], so they kind of like, it’s responsible for my friendships, and it gets you involved in the community, and that’s kind of important.” Vanessa also found friendship in her FYE class. “So that class actually really did help. Where there’s actually a sense of community in the class.” Olivia said she appreciates the sense of community and the sense of security it provides, as well. “Everyone knows each other in that class. If you walk by someone in the class you can wave and say hey. There’s no other class like that for me. That’s the only class that I know every single person. Everyone’s sort of lost together in the class so that makes it a lot easier. There’s no stupid question. We all are figuring it out together.”

Finding one’s way.

Participants also indicated FYE helped with social integration beyond the FYE classroom at a campus-wide level. Anne said, “I was not really in the know about what’s going on, or at least I didn’t feel like I was back then. So I thought if I take this course it will help me become better acquainted with SU.” Lily thought enrollment in the course would help her adjust to college and being away from her family. “I thought that might help me get out a little more, experience things better.” Amelia said learning the culture at SU through the FYE course also helped with social integration. “I had to learn the [SU] chant and stuff like that. Yeah, the traditions. And just kind of like…what we do. That was helpful on the social side. Knowing that and not being awkward.”

George said he, too, felt the class serves as a link to the greater campus and helps students become involved and aware of campus resources.

I think just from observation that [FYE] would really help someone even more who wasn’t looking to get involved in as many organizations. I know where most buildings on campus are because of tours, but a lot of people don’t really know what’s in each
building or where you need to go for different things or even that there’s services like the writing service or career services or a multitude of different offices in student services that are available.

Lucy also found FYE helped illuminate offerings across campus that helped with social integration. “[People] don’t really realize how in-depth you can get in learning about the university and learn about the different resources it offers. And [FYE] has kind of brought this to some people’s attention in the class. They realize, ‘I didn’t know we had that,’ or ‘Oh, I didn’t realize I could do that,’ or ‘Oh, what is that?’”

**Immersion into Campus Life**

The sixth main theme discusses *Immersion into Campus Life*. The FYE course not only highlights various resources and ways to get involved on campus, but it also requires some level of involvement as a part of the grading scale for the course. This “forced” immersion into campus life has benefits for those struggling to adjust to college life and for those who simply want to learn more about how to get involved on campus. This section takes a closer look at subthemes related to this forced involvement and the ways this involvement led to participants’ sense of integration.

**Forced involvement.**

As part of the FYE course, both cohort-based and non-cohort based, students are required to attend a variety of on-campus and off-campus events as part of their grade. Sixty-eight percent of participants cited their required attendance at these events and their subsequent involvement on campus as a main benefit of the FYE course. Rachel said,

I probably wouldn’t have done some of the stuff that I’ve done if I didn’t have to do it for [FYE]. I probably wouldn’t have even heard about that stuff if it hadn’t have been for
that class. It makes you do things, but once you’re doing them, it doesn’t feel like you’re being made to. Whether you like it or not, it kind of forces you to kind of go out and do some stuff. I guess it kind of makes you get an experience of the school. Immerse yourself in it. Like I said, you did have to go to those events, so you did see kind of cool things, met some new people, listened to what they had to say.

Peter said FYE helped him get involved. “I feel like that’s the main goal of the class,” he said. “Just to get you involved after this first semester to get you out there. You’re not going to know everybody in your class, especially being from out of state, so it kind of forces you to go out and talk to some people, make new friends. So I’d say it’s helped [with my social integration].” Lily agreed. “I think it forces you…forces is a strong word…but it makes you get out there and do things that I don’t think most freshmen normally do like talk to your professors and go to events you wouldn’t normally go to and meet people you wouldn’t normally meet, and I think that’s helpful because you don’t know who you might run into.”

Members of certain sections of the FYE course at SU also participated in a student housing interest group, creating even stronger connections among students in the course. Harry said, “We all do live on the same hall, so that’s made it easier. I’ve gotten to know them more through the hall than through the class.” However, many participants highlighted the importance of getting out of the residence hall during the first year of college. “[FYE] is enjoyable and it helps because it gets you out of your dorm room,” Rachel said. “It’s not just during class time. You have to budget your time and make sure that you get [to the required events] and get the grade for it. I really like all the stuff that we have to do.” George said “through [FYE] I’ve had the opportunity to be more socially involved, too. And getting integrated into the Ole Miss culture and all the programs that Ole Miss has to offer has been huge for me, as far as not having
a whole lot of free time to wonder what I’m going to do. You know, ‘what am I going to do now? I don’t want to just go sit in the dorm.’ I think that’s been a good aspect of it.” Todd said what he’s taken away from the FYE course applies not only to college but to life in general. “I really feel like college…the biggest classroom is really outside of the classroom. You learn a lot about yourself and about life and about people and how to interact with people when you go to college. And I think that’s what [FYE] really prepares you for, and I really like that aspect of it.”

Participants also mentioned other relationships developed through FYE encouraged involvement. The FYE course employs a peer mentoring program using upperclassmen who are former FYE students themselves. Sophie said the peer mentoring program is another way in which the course highlights ways to get involved. “We have peer mentors in our [FYE] class,” she said, “and we’ve done interviews with them. The peer mentor for my class is really cool and he helps us learn more activities on campus that we can do, which is cool.” Others alluded to the “forced” student-instructor relationship as beneficial, as well, as FYE students are required to meet with instructors and faculty for the FYE course and other courses in which they are enrolled. Margaret said, “It kind of made you go talk to someone when usually you wouldn’t…just do it on your own. Madeline said she thought these required meetings helped her academically. “That was helpful because I wouldn’t have gone otherwise. If I don’t have a dire question I’m not going to ask, because I feel like I can just figure it out on my own. So going when there weren’t any questions and allowing me to just meet my professors and form that relationship was very beneficial. It’s still helping me out.”

Involvement Leads to Integration.

While many participants, like Madeline, claimed FYE helped them adjust academically, others discussed social implications of the course. Many non-resident students, in particular,
discussed the challenges of social integration and the role FYE played in helping them assimilate to campus life.

“Probably for me, it was doing things I probably wouldn’t have been comfortable with,” Rachel said. “I was so scared to come to college. I didn’t know what to expect, and [FYE] just helps you take things step by step. Not completely on your own, but more on your own than you would in high school. And making you do things and putting yourself out there and doing things you’re maybe not so comfortable with.”

Margaret addressed her social experience as a non-resident student. “It’s just harder to make friends, I guess, when you’re coming from far away,” she said. Dorothy held the same sentiments but said FYE and the campus involvement encouraged in the course helped lead her to reach a level of social integration. She said, “It’s hard at first because you don’t know anyone and you’re in a new place. You don’t really know how to put yourself out there. And I think it’s about pushing yourself to go and say hi and talk to people. It was hard and then it got better after [FYE]. That’s where I made my friends.”

Participants also addressed how involvement and the FYE course helped to combat homesickness. Hugo said, “Obviously [FYE] helps with transitioning to college living. We’ve gone over so many different things in [FYE] that have to do with just transitioning, and I think that helps because if someone’s comfortable while transitioning they don’t get homesick. I haven’t been homesick at all.” Jack also said involvement, encouraged through FYE, can help those struggling with being away from home. “If anything, if there are people coming here who were planning on just hanging out in their room not really doing anything, [FYE] definitely forces you to go out and do stuff if you want to pass the class,” he said. “If you’re kind of shy and have trouble meeting people and stuff it’s a good way to get out there.” Arthur said he
witnessed this in his section of [FYE], as well. “There are some people in my class, I would say, you could just tell they were homesick or didn’t put themselves out there or whatever. [My instructor] was talking a lot about how you do have to put yourself out there and the best thing for homesickness is to go out, leave your door open, or whatever.”

**A Great Course….For Someone Else**

This final main theme examines participants’ response to the FYE as a whole. While 74 percent of participants said they would recommend the FYE course to high school seniors, 19 percent indicated it may be a worthwhile course for others, but did not fit their personal interests and needs. Some participants were forced to take the course as a condition of membership in another group. Others said the course was largely based on what they considered “busy work”, while still others thought it was not a good use of time as the course credits did not count toward their major. The following section examines these and other participant issues with and perceived drawbacks of the course in six related subthemes.

**“Forced” enrollment.**

Nine participants indicated they only enrolled in the FYE course as a condition of membership in some other group. Beatrice said she decided to sign up for the cohort program associated with FYE in order to live in the residence hall assigned to students in the cohort program. Her enrollment in the FYE course was simply a condition of enrollment in the cohort program based on her housing preference.

Others, like Harry and George also enrolled in the FYE course because of a requirement associated with their housing situation. Both belonged to a freshman housing interest group in which students are assigned to a floor in a residence hall based on some common interest. George said, “When you live in one of the freshman interest groups, you’re required to take
[FYE]. So that was the reason why I enrolled. Had I not been living in a group, I probably wouldn’t have enrolled.”

Dorothy and Max indicated they were automatically pre-enrolled in the FYE course. Max said, “To be honest, it was kind of pre-signed up for me, and I thought it was there for some important reason, so I thought, ‘I won’t drop it. I’ll just keep it’.“ Hugo said, “When I was picking my classes, I didn’t know what [FYE] was, so I might not have [taken it] since I didn’t know what it was.” Hugo said he feels that it’s “a good class to take”, though. “I’m glad I did take it because you get to meet a bunch of kids and it’s really cool and you really just talk about what it’s like to live at college and it’s a good way to relieve stress.”

Busy work.

Forty-five percent of participants mentioned they felt the course was comprised of busy work and was not a necessary course. Based on participants’ comments in the interviews, many did not see value in the reflection-based work and assignments that undergird the FYE course. Rupert said, “Some of it seems extraneous, but that’s just my opinion.” Olivia agreed, saying, “I think some of it is a lot of busywork and may be unnecessary. A couple of the projects we have to do where kind of just ‘what is the point of this?’.” Amelia said she did not benefit from the homework assigned in the course. “A lot of reflections and stuff like that….they’re not valuable. I don’t know how much about my life I want my [FYE] teacher to know about.” For Nancy, she still found value in some FYE assignments, although she does consider much of the class to be superfluous. “I’m not a big fan of what I consider busy work,” she said. “I think sometimes some of the assignments can be along that line. But we have to make a resume, which I think is a really beneficial thing, so there’s a lot of stuff…while some of it seems redundant….some of it is really beneficial.”
Thirty-two percent of participants mentioned the class was time consuming. Peter said, “When I heard about it I though a few papers here and there. I can do that. But I didn’t really realize attending the events and all the papers that we have to do and all that stuff.” Eric said he, too, found the course to be time consuming. “A lot of it’s busy work…the essays and papers after going to stuff. It takes time, but it’s not too hard. I was indifferent about [the course].” Frank and Alice both said it’s easy to get behind in the course. “People go in thinking, ‘Oh, easy A’,” Alice said. “The tests aren’t hard the stuff you have to do isn’t hard, but it’s a lot. You definitely have to stay on top of it, and you can’t fall behind.” For students like Arthur, staying on top of the course proved challenging. “I still do the work, don’t get me wrong,” he said. “It’s just not at the top of my list to do. You know it’s something I’ll do after I finish studying for big tests or whatever.” Lily also struggled with prioritization. “I know any class is going to have a lot of work,” she said, “but sometimes it’s the timing of certain papers or projects and I’m trying to focus on a biology thing, and then I have to take away a few hours to do something.”

**Credits that don’t “count”**.

The struggle to prioritize FYE assignments often came about because students were frustrated that the FYE credits don’t count toward their major. Twenty-six percent of participants indicated this was the biggest drawback of the FYE course. “It takes away from getting a credit that actually goes toward your major,” Todd said. Others suggested they were missing an opportunity to explore different courses that could count toward their degree. Hugo said there were other classes he wanted to take but had to drop in order to stay under the minimum number of allowed credit hours. Homer said, “It’s not a prerequisite for anything that I know of….so you’re taking away an opportunity to take a class that might be a prerequisite for something.” Beatrice said she would not recommend the course to others, but would instead encourage them
to focus on other courses. “I feel like I’d rather be taking a normal course and just getting things done. I probably wouldn’t recommend it. It’s just not for me.”

For students like George and Madeline, charting their course toward graduation has proved difficult, and they felt FYE was holding them back. “For most people, that’s not a problem as an elective, but I’m trying to do a triple major, so it’s kind of a time factor there,” George said. Madeline said she, too, feels like she is wasting time in the FYE course, as she must have an additional 21 hours in a subject to complete her degree requirements. “It’s a drawback for me that it’s three hours that I can’t use toward helping my degree.”

**Level of college preparedness.**

Fifty-five percent of participants cited their high school or high school experience prepared them for college, some even saying high school was harder than college.

Lucy said her choices in high school are what really prepared her for college. “I would say my teachers prepared me in ways and such and me keeping up with everything on my own, but I wouldn’t say my high school was necessarily the thing to push me to get up to a university level,” she said. “I’d say it was my choosing to do the higher, harder things in high school.”

Olivia said, “I don’t think I could be any more prepared. Some of my high school classes in high school were harder than some of the classes I’m taking now,” she said. “I don’t think that is a reflection of SU, I think it’s a reflection of my high school.” Ned agreed, although he did acknowledge this will likely change as he continues in his studies.

Nineteen percent of participants indicated this preparedness rendered the FYE course unnecessary. Eric said, “[FYE] is a fun class and all that, but it’s mostly common sense.” Others found the course content monotonous. Emma said, “I like the class. Some of the things I learn in there, it’s kind of what I learned in high school, though,” she said. “Although I do like [my
instructor] telling us the tips for studying, at first I was like, ‘okay, I don’t like this. I learned all this before’.” Homer said, “It might help others, but it’s not really…it’s basically stuff I already knew.”

**FYE is for others but not for me.**

A participant’s perceived level of preparedness for college affected their response regarding their satisfaction with enrollment in the FYE course. Beatrice acknowledged that while she had a good high school experience that prepared her for college, others might not have had the same experience. “I think it would be a course for people who don’t get that preparation in high school, but I felt like I was ready when I got here.” Jack said he was privileged to attend a high school with a strong academic background and social scene. “I know there are some that didn’t get the benefits I got,” said Jack, “so [FYE] can definitely help academically and socially.”

Some participants stated the course was simply not for them. Beatrice said because she felt prepared, “I personally feel like I’m wasting my time.” Anne said, “Sometimes in [FYE] I sit in class and wonder, ‘What is the point of this? Why am I here right now? This is a waste of time’.” She said she is often “annoyed” at having to sit through long lectures that others in the class need to hear, although she feels she already understands the material and doesn’t need to hear it. Hugo stated the course was unnecessary. “You’re going to study how you’re going to study. You’re not really going to change that,” he said.

Max said he is “more or less neutral in my opinion [about FYE]. I think there are kids that do need the stuff in the class, but for someone like me that’s got a lot of support already and has always been a relatively good student, the class is really just there for a grade buffer,” he
said. “But it’s probably necessary for some people. It probably actually really helps some people.”

George held similar sentiments. “I don’t want to say that it didn’t help me, but I think I was in a position that I needed less help academically than a lot of other students,” he said. “I can see how it could help. More than anything, just giving students a class where they know what’s required of them and it’s really laid out for you…kind of a peace of mind class.”

Jack said he too is “on the fence” about having taken the course. “Not to say that I’m smarter than other people, but some people have trouble in this class just because it’s low level. It’s not really application like my other classes that I’m used to. So the only drawback would be that I have a B in there right now, but only because some of the stuff I kind of overlooked because it’s so easy.”

While there were mixed feelings among participants about the FYE course, with seventy-four percent of participants saying they would recommend it to a high school senior, even those who didn’t feel it was of benefit to them personally could see the potential benefit for others. Anne said, “If I were any farther away from home, or if I didn’t know anyone, or if I weren’t friends with my roommate, then it would be completely different, and I’d probably be really, really thankful that I’m in the class.” Rachel said while many deem the course unnecessary she said, “Overall it’s an easy class. It’s fun. And whether or not you notice it or not, it really does help.”

Madeline said, “[FYE] is a fabulous complement if you want it to be. I think if you want it to be something where you meet your professors, you understand the school, you get a better understanding of what you’re in for for four years and why things are the way they are now, then
it’ll be something that you can enjoy. If you want it to help you, then it will, and if you don’t care, then it won’t care about you.”

**Other drawbacks.**

Throughout the course of interviews, several other perceived drawbacks of the FYE course emerged among participants. For those students in the cohort-based section of FYE, two participants indicated their enrollment in the cohort was cause for less interaction with a variety of individuals. Beatrice said, “I feel like I haven’t gotten to meet as many people as if I was in just normal classes because I see the same people every day.” Charlie also said this was a drawback of the cohort-based section. “You don’t get to meet as many kids as normal classes,” he said.

Participants in the cohort-based sections of FYE also indicated frustration that they were locked into certain classes, even though they knew this was a condition of the program upon enrollment. Jane said, “It’s hard to get moved and changed in those classes. And FYE doesn’t count toward a lot of majors, so it’s just a class that you take to take, not necessarily for the credits.” Lucy also expressed frustration with this aspect of the cohort-based program. “I was frustrated that I couldn’t get out of Writing 101 and just jump to Writing 102,” she said. “I wish they could offer more classes and just be more of a living-learning community.”

The living-learning aspect of the cohort-based section, though, raised questions for Hugo about associated expenses. Members of the cohort-based sections are required to live in a newer, suite-style residence hall on SU’s campus and the cost for that residence hall is higher than a traditional residence hall on SU’s campus. He questioned whether or not the additional fees were worth the price of enrollment in the cohort program.
Another underlying theme that emerged in the interviews was an apparent discrepancy between the participants’ expectations for the course and what the course delivered. Vanessa said, “As far as teaching me study skills, it was pretty much stuff that I already knew.” Lily said, “Academically, I don’t think it’s helped a lot. It really focuses on go meet your instructors, go participate in things on campus, just kind of on that level.” Ned said, “You don’t really learn much. It’s three credit hours and that’s probably it. It’s kind of neutral, I have a neutral feeling toward the course.”

No matter their personal experiences with the course, 74 percent of participants said they would encourage others to take it. Amelia said, “I feel like I would definitely encourage out-of-state and especially out-of-region people to take it or kids who aren’t really connected to SU,” she said. “My experience with [FYE] has made me a lot closer to the University community. I feel like I’m a part of it, not like I’m just one of those new people on the edge.”

Summary of Themes

Inductive analysis of interview transcripts revealed seven emergent themes that held meaning across participants and were relevant to the research questions. These themes included: (a) Building Relationships; (b) Desiring Change; (c) Is the Grass Really Greener?; (d) Deciding to Persist or Depart; (e) Seeking Security; (f) Immersion into Campus Life; and (g) A Great Course…For Someone Else.

The themes discussed in this qualitative section are integrated with findings from the quantitative sections that follow in Chapter V and are discussed in Chapter VI.
CHAPTER V
QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of the quantitative portion of this study was to better understand the relationship between the cohort-based and non-cohort sections of FYE and retention among non-resident, less academically prepared students. The study examined whether cohort-based or non-cohort FYE yields a higher retention rate than the other in retaining this population. Student data involving the cohort and non-cohort tracks was also juxtaposed with student data from the non-resident student population at SU not enrolled in these programs to highlight any areas of difference or significance.

This chapter offers a summary of quantitative research findings and descriptive statistics including an examination of the following hypotheses related to the non-resident population at SU.

Hypotheses

The quantitative portion of the study was guided by the examination of the following hypotheses, stated in null form.

1. There is no significant difference in first semester grade point average by type of course and level of preparedness.
2. There is no significant difference in Fall 2013 academic standing by type of course.
3. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 academic standing by type of course.
4. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 academic standing by type of course.
5. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 retention by type of course.
6. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 retention by type of course.

Participants

For Fall 2013, a total of 3,564 first-time, full-time freshmen enrolled at SU. Of the total population, 1,599 students were residents of the state in which SU is located, and 1,965 were considered non-resident students. Of the 1,965 first-time, full-time non-resident students, 49 in the class were not included in the study, as they are considered international students.

For our sample (N=1,916), a total of 288 students enrolled in the cohort-based section of FYE, 839 in the non-cohort based FYE course, and 789 students did not enroll in the FYE course at all. Descriptive statistics for participants in the quantitative portion of the study as well as description of the course categories are found in the section below.

Descriptive Statistics by Course Category

Cohort-based FYE.

For the purposes of this study, the cohort section of FYE is defined as a non-traditional approach to education in which students are grouped together and take a majority of their classes together based on a pre-determined schedule (Lei et al., 2011). For Fall 2013, a total of 288 non-resident freshmen enrolled in the cohort-based section of FYE at SU. The average high school GPA for this group was 3.35, with an average ACT/converted SAT score of 24. Seventy-three percent were considered by this study to be more academically prepared than their peer group. The average Fall 2013 SU grade point average for those students enrolled in the cohort-based FYE course was 2.9.
The gender breakdown among this group was relatively equal, with 52 percent female and 48 percent male. Eighty-eight percent identified as White/Caucasian, while 12 percent identified as another race/ethnicity (2 individuals identified as Asian, 11 Black/African-American, 13 Hispanic/Latino, 1 Native Hawaiian, and 8 Two or More Races). Geographical regions of residency included participants from the Northeast (n=11), Midwest (n=27), West (n=22), and South (n=216). Two participants did not identify their geographical region of residency upon enrollment.

**Non-cohort based FYE.**

For Fall 2013, a total of 839 non-resident students enrolled in the non-cohort based section of FYE at SU. The average high school GPA was 3.29, with an average ACT/converted SAT score of 23.6. The average Fall 2013 SU grade point average for the students in the non-cohort based FYE course was 2.87.

It should be noted that of the total number of students enrolled in the non-cohort based FYE, including both residents and non-residents (N=1,674), some were grouped into other special sections of the course. Other sections of the non-cohort based FYE course include special sections for the following programs: Scholars Program section (n=20); business majors only (n=54); health professions majors only (n=22); engineering majors only (n=19); psychology majors only (n=16); and a section of students grouped by the floor in which they reside in the residence halls (n=82). The following table gives an overview of special sections of FYE, as well as cohort and non-cohort based FYE, as defined by this study.
Table 10
Fall 2013 Grade Point Average by FYE and Special Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Section</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Fall 2013 GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort-Based FYE</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Cohort Based FYE</td>
<td>1674</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Business Majors</td>
<td>(54)</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engineering Majors</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Health Professions Majors</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Housing Section</td>
<td>(82)</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Psychology Majors</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scholars Program</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No Special Section</td>
<td>(1461)</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No FYE.

For Fall 2013, a total of 789 non-resident students did not enroll in any section of FYE at SU. The average high school GPA for this sample was 3.48, with an average ACT/converted SAT score of 25. The average Fall 2013 SU grade point average for the students not enrolled in an FYE course was 2.93.

Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1.**

Hypothesis 1 examined the level of preparedness of all non-resident students by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Level of preparedness consisted of two categories, less academically prepared or more academically prepared. These definitions were developed using quartiles of entrance exam scores and high school grade point averages required for admission to SU. The quartiles used in this study are described in Table 1 in Chapter
III. Less academically prepared students fall into the first quartile for ACT/SAT scores and in the first and second quartile for high school grade point averages. Their more academically prepared counterparts fall into the second, third, or fourth quartiles for ACT/SAT scores and into the third and fourth quartiles for high school grade point average. Participants who fell between two quartiles were categorized as academically less or more prepared based on their high school GPA.

Hypothesis 1 was analyzed using a two-way ANOVA to determine the influence of level of preparedness and type of course on first semester GPA. The two-way ANOVA is a statistical procedure used to determine the influence of two independent variables on the dependent variable (Gall et al., 1996; Wiersma, 1991). This test is appropriate for this study as it lends information on the relationships between the criterion variable (first semester GPA) and predictor variables (level of preparedness and type of course) found in Hypothesis 1. There are three main assumptions associated with a two-way ANOVA (Hinkle, Wisersma, & Jurs, 2003).

The first assumption is that there is independence of observation between groups. No participant in this study was assigned to more than one group, thus meeting this first assumption. The second assumption involves normality of distribution of the dependent variable across the population. Normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilks test, and the normality assumption was violated. The final assumption for the two-way ANOVA is homogeneity of variance. All variances were examined using Levene’s test for homogeneity of variance. Findings of the Levene’s test did not support the assumption of homogeneity of variance.

The original prospectus for this study included analysis of Hypothesis 1 with a two-way ANOVA, however failure to meet two of the three assumptions for the two-way ANOVA
indicated this was not a viable means of analysis. The decision was made to proceed with nonparametric tests in analyzing Hypothesis 1.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed for the independent variable “type of course” (non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE). The Kruskal-Wallis test was chosen as it is a nonparametric test that compares three or more unmatched groups on a continuous scale and does not depend on the assumption of normality (Beauchamp & Ruxton, 2008). A revised hypothesis (Hypothesis 1A) is stated in the null form: At the $\alpha=0.05$ level of significance, there is no sufficient evidence of a significant difference in first semester grade point average by type of course. The Kruskal-Wallis analysis revealed no sufficient evidence of a significant difference in GPA by type of course $[KW=\chi^2=3.521$, and $p=0.172]$. Since $p > .05$, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

A Mann-Whitney test was conducted for the independent variable level of “academic preparedness.” The decision to use these nonparametric tests was weighed against the loss of ability to see any interaction effects, and the Mann-Whitney test was deemed most appropriate. A revised hypothesis (Hypothesis 1B) is stated in the null form: At the $\alpha=0.05$ level of significance, there is no sufficient evidence of a significant difference in first semester grade point average by level of preparedness. The Mann-Whitney analysis revealed the sum of ranks for less academically prepared participants (256750) was less than Wilcoxon $W$ (256749) and $p < 0.05$, so the null hypothesis was rejected. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant difference in the first semester grade point average by level of preparedness.

**Hypothesis 2.**

Hypothesis 2 examined the possible relationship among all nonresident students’ Fall 2013 academic standing and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no
Hypotheses 2 is stated in the null form: There is no significant relationship between first semester academic standing and type of course. The hypothesis was analyzed using a two-way chi-square to determine whether a relationship exists between the two sets of data, with the dependent variable set as Fall 2013 academic standing and the independent variable as type of course. Level of significance was set at the .05 level.

The results of this analysis show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between Fall 2013 academic standing and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled for that given semester [Pearson Chi-Square statistic, $\chi^2=1.701$, and $p=.791$]. Since $p > .5$, the null for Hypothesis 2 was not rejected.

**Hypothesis 3.**

Hypothesis 3 examined possible relationship among all nonresident students’ Spring 2014 academic standing and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Academic standing was determined by SU’s definitions of Academic Good Standing, Academic Probation, Academic Suspension, and Academic Dismissal. Full definitions of these standings are found in the “Definitions” section.

Of the 1,916 participants in the quantitative study, 136 did not persist to Spring 2014, and were labeled “No Spring Course Schedule.” In addition, 19 had no available academic standing and were labeled “Not Available” (16 received less than full-time status due to the number of hours in which they were enrolled, and three withdrew from all spring classes). These 155 participants were considered outliers to this analysis and were removed prior to examination of
this hypothesis. Data for the remaining 1,761 non-resident participants was used to analyze Hypothesis 3.

Hypotheses 3 is stated in the null form: There is no significant relationship between second semester academic standing and type of course. The hypothesis was analyzed using a two-way chi-square to determine whether a relationship exists between the two sets of data, with the dependent variable set as Spring 2014 academic standing and the independent variable as type of course. Level of significance was set at the .05 level.

The results of this analysis show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between Spring 2014 academic standing and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled the prior semester [Pearson Chi-Square statistic, $\chi^2=3.383$, and $p=.496$]. Since $p > .05$, the null for Hypothesis 3 was not rejected.

Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 4 examined possible relationship among all nonresident students’ Fall 2014 academic standing and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Academic standing was determined by SU’s definitions of Academic Good Standing, Academic Probation, Academic Suspension, and Academic Dismissal. Full definitions of these standings are found in the “Definitions” section.

Of the 1,761 participants in the quantitative study who persisted to Spring 2014, 191 did not persist to Fall 2014, and were labeled “No Spring Course Schedule.” In addition, 40 had no available academic standing and were labeled “Not Available” (34 received less than full-time status due to the number of hours in which they were enrolled, four withdrew from all spring classes, one studied abroad, and one participated in independent study). These 231 participants were considered outliers to this analysis and were removed prior to examination of this
Hypothesis 4.

Hypotheses 4 is stated in the null form: There is no significant relationship between third semester academic standing and type of course. The hypothesis was analyzed using a two-way chi-square to determine whether a relationship exists between the two sets of data, with the dependent variable set as Fall 2014 academic standing and the independent variable as type of course. Level of significance was set at the .05 level.

The results of this analysis show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between Fall 2014 academic standing and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled the previous fall semester [Pearson Chi-Square statistic, $\chi^2=5.889$, and $p=.436$]. Since $p > .05$, the null for Hypothesis 4 was not rejected.

Hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis 5 examined possible relationships between Spring 2014 retention rates of all nonresident students and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Spring and fall retention is recorded as “yes” or “no,” depending on whether the students reenrolled at SU. Of the 1,916 participants in the study, 1,792 did persist to Spring 2014, while 124 did not reenroll at SU.

Hypotheses 5 is stated in the null form: There is no significant relationship between Spring 2014 retention and type of course. The hypothesis was analyzed using a two-way chi-square to determine whether a relationship exists between the two sets of data, with the dependent variable set as Spring 2014 retention and the independent variable as type of course. Level of significance was set at the .05 level.
The results of this analysis show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between Spring 2014 retention and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled the previous fall semester [Pearson Chi-Square statistic, $\chi^2=1.677$, and $p=.432$]. Since $p > .05$, the null for Hypothesis 5 was not rejected.

**Hypothesis 6.**

Hypothesis 6 examined possible relationships between Fall 2013 to Fall 2014 retention rates of all nonresident students and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Spring and fall retention is recorded as “yes” or “no,” depending on whether the students reenrolled at SU. Of the total 1,916 participants in the study, 1,583 did persist to Fall 2014, while 333 did not reenroll at SU. Only 11 participants were not retained from Spring 2014 to Fall 2014.

Hypotheses 6 is stated in the null form: There is no significant relationship between Fall 2014 retention and type of course. The hypothesis was analyzed using a two-way chi-square to determine whether a relationship exists between the two sets of data, with the dependent variable set as Fall 2014 retention and the independent variable as type of course. Level of significance was set at the .05 level.

The results of this analysis show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between Fall 2014 retention and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled the previous fall semester [Pearson Chi-Square statistic, $\chi^2=2.854$, and $p=.240$]. Since $p > .05$, the null for Hypothesis 5 was not rejected.

**Summary**

Because the assumptions of the two-way ANOVA were violated, non-parametric testing was deemed most appropriate for analyzing Hypothesis 1. After analysis, results indicated no
significant difference in GPA by type of course but sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant difference in first semester grade point average by level of preparedness.

Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 examined possible relationships among all nonresident students’ academic standing and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE for Fall 2013, Spring 2014, and Fall 2014, respectively. The results of the analyses show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between academic standing and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 examined possible relationships between retention rates of all nonresident students and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE for Spring 2014 and for Fall 2013 to Fall 2014, respectively. The results of the analyses show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between retention and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled.

The following chapter presents the discussion of both qualitative and quantitative research findings and results from Chapters IV and V, as well as provides implications for higher education practice, research, and policy.
CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This mixed methods relational study used a QUAL → quan Sequential Exploratory Design to determine the relationship between two freshman retention programs, cohort-based and non-cohort based Freshman Year Experience (FYE) courses, and the retention of academically less-prepared, non-resident students at a Southern University (SU). Structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted for the qualitative purposes of this study. Qualitative data was obtained from 31 non-resident, first-year students at SU enrolled in either the non-cohort FYE course (n=22) or the cohort-based FYE course (n=9). Of the 31 participants, 14 were male, and 17 were female and, at the time of interview, all participants were 18 to 19 years of age. Inductive analysis of interview transcripts led to seven themes related to students’ responses to questions on enrollment, departure, retention, and the FYE course.

Quantitative methods were used to process the results from the qualitative data and to provide the context in which the qualitative data is couched. The researcher examined the relationship between enrollment and retention of non-resident, undergraduate students enrolled in the FYE courses, which was juxtaposed with data on non-resident students in the freshman population at SU who were not enrolled in an FYE course.

This chapter includes an overview of the study and a discussion of research findings. Finally, implications for future research, policy, and higher education practice are recommended.
Overview of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods, relational study was to determine the relationship between two freshman retention programs and the retention of academically less-prepared, non-resident students at a Southern University. The purpose of the qualitative portion of this study was to determine the reasons behind enrollment and departure for all non-resident freshmen enrolled in the FYE course at SU during the 2013-2014 academic year. The primary research question of the study was whether one type of FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort, had greater retention rates with academically less-prepared, non-resident students.

Structured, open-ended interviews were conducted to address the study’s research questions. Inductive analysis of interview transcripts revealed seven main themes that held meaning across participants and were relevant to the research questions on enrollment, departure, retention, and the FYE course. These themes included: (a) building relationships; (b) desiring change; (c) is the grass really greener?; (d) deciding to persist or depart; (e) seeking security; (f) immersion into campus life; and (g) a great course…for someone else.

The first theme, Building relationships, discusses the establishment of critical relationships through the FYE program that create shared experiences and bonding which may factor in to decisions to stay or depart. The second theme, Desiring change, discusses the participants’ motivations for enrolling at SU and in the FYE program and their motivation to persist. In addition, the theme also explores the allure of the South for many participants and the role of non-resident tuition on enrollment decisions. The third theme, Is the grass really greener?, focuses on issues faced by participants, including cultural differences and inclusion or exclusion from Greek life at SU as a deciding factor in many participants’ feelings of social integration. The fourth theme, Deciding to persist or depart, examines the reasons participants
decided to enroll and persist or leave, based on cultural differences, geographic challenges, academic issues, or other goodness-of-fit concerns. *Seeking security*, the fifth theme, focuses on a variety of ways in which the FYE program provides a sense of security to those enrolled. Here, several aspects are explored, including: FYE as a support group, facilitation of familiarity, and FYE as a GPA booster. Finally, the theme explores parental influence on the decision to enroll in FYE. The sixth theme, *Immersion into campus life*, explores the ways in which FYE affected participants’ social and academic integration at SU. The final theme, *A great course...for someone else*, discusses participants’ perceived level of preparedness for college, as well as perceived drawbacks of the FYE course.

The purpose of the quantitative portion of this study was to determine the relationship between enrollment and retention of non-resident, undergraduate students enrolled in retention-based courses at SU, the non-cohort FYE course and the cohort-based FYE course. The quantitative study examined differences in retention and both level of academic preparedness and academic standing by type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE.

The quantitative portion of the study was guided by the examination of six hypotheses, stated in null form.

1. There is no significant difference in first semester grade point average by type of course and level of preparedness.
2. There is no significant difference in Fall 2013 academic standing by type of course.
3. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 academic standing by type of course.
4. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 academic standing by type of course.
5. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 retention by type of course.
6. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 retention by type of course.
For Hypothesis 1, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed for the independent variable “type of course” (non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE). The Kruskal-Wallis analysis revealed no sufficient evidence of a significant difference in GPA by type of course. A Mann-Whitney test was conducted for the independent variable level of “academic preparedness.” The study found sufficient evidence to conclude there is a significant difference in the first semester grade point average by level of preparedness.

Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 examined the possible relationship among all nonresident students’ academic standing and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Academic standing was determined by SU’s definitions of Academic Good Standing, Academic Probation, Academic Suspension, and Academic Dismissal. The hypotheses were analyzed using a two-way chi-square to determine whether a relationship exists between the two sets of data. The results of this analysis show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between academic standing and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 examined possible relationships between retention rates of all nonresident students and type of course, either non-cohort FYE, cohort-based FYE, or no FYE. Spring and fall retention is recorded as “yes” or “no,” depending on whether the students reenrolled at SU. The hypotheses were analyzed using a two-way chi-square to determine whether a relationship exists between the two sets of data. The results of the analyses show no sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between retention and the type of course in which the participants were enrolled.

**Discussion of Research Findings**

One variable largely overlooked in the literature on college student retention is the enrollment and retention of academically less prepared, non-resident students. Often, special
retention-based programs are put in place to assist students in the transition to college. These programs, including first year experience (FYE) courses, have been effective in helping academically less prepared students make the transition (Potts & Schultz, 2008).

The primary research question of this study was whether one type of FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort, had greater retention rates with academically less-prepared, non-resident students at SU. The results of this study indicate non-resident students in one type of FYE course did not have significantly different retention rates than students in the other type of FYE course. This data shows the presence of a cohort did not significantly affect retention rates, nor did enrollment in the FYE course in general, as no significant difference was found in retention rates between those enrolled in FYE and those who were not. Related to these findings was confirmation that there was no significant relationship among first semester GPA or academic standing by type of course, which can be argued are both factors of retention.

Further discussion of the study’s research questions follows. Each secondary research question is presented below with a more in-depth examination of the emergent themes of this study as they relate to each question. Discussion is couched in supporting literature and aforementioned themes on student enrollment, retention, and student development.

**Reasons for enrollment at SU and in FYE.**

Interview questions were devised to answer the secondary research question of why academically less-prepared non-resident students enrolled at SU and in the FYE course. The reasons for enrollment emerged in two main themes from the qualitative data: *Desiring Change* and *Seeking Security*. A discussion of findings related to these two themes follows.
Desiring Change.

Among academically less-prepared participants, a common theme for enrolling at SU was a desire for new surroundings in the American South and with that, a new found independence, a sense of breaking from their own personal and familial norms, and a quest for adventure.

Participant responses supported the literature in that they would seek that change and adventure at any cost, with benefits outweighing the often higher expenses of nonresident tuition. This finding is supported by Mixon and Hsing (1994) who built their study on the premise that student migration is a form of human capital. As noted by Thiessen (2008), “students make college decisions by weighing their perception of the costs and private benefits associated with college attendance” (p. 8). The Student College Choice Model also posits that any increase in tuition does not negatively affect enrollment (DesJardins et al., 2006). Participants again and again detailed their desire to attend SU despite out-of-state tuition prices, indicating that the allure of the South, sense of security at SU, and desire for independence and adventure all outweighed the costs associated with non-resident enrollment.

Others in the study reported they enrolled at SU because they were not accepted to their home state institution. For those in this study, this came as a result of programs, such as the state of Texas’ Top Ten Percent rule, implemented in 1997, whereby students in the top ten percent of their high school’s graduating class are guaranteed admission to one of Texas’ public universities. Such rules leave academically less prepared students, who are often denied admission, seeing higher education opportunities across state lines (Gloecker, 2009).
Seeking security.

Other academically less-prepared non-resident students from this study indicated they were seeking a sense of security by enrolling at SU. For some, this sense of security was a familial tie or some previous exposure to SU. Others were drawn to the environment in which SU is located. Many respondents mentioned the small size of the institution being a deciding factor for enrollment, creating a sense of comfort with smaller class sizes. This finding is supported by a study by Mixon and Hsing (1994), which found that small class sizes are important in recruitment of non-resident students. Others addressed the safety ratings of SU as a whole and cited different aspects of campus safety in helping determine their decision to enroll.

When addressing their decisions to enroll in FYE, participants also alluded to a sense of security in the course, as well. Some participants mentioned that this sense of security was academic, as the FYE course served as a GPA cushion to help balance out more challenging courses during their first semester at SU. Others reported a sense of comfort as it relates to social and physical security.

Research shows that involvement in a community and shared experience improves student performance, promotes positive attitudes and perceptions, provides a system of support, builds student confidence and promotes retention efforts (Hotchkiss et al., 2006; Lei et al., 2011). Small FYE class sizes, especially for the cohort-based group, led to indications of a heightened sense of security among participants as they indicated they belonged to the group and were not alone in their transition to college. The cohort was deemed instrumental in helping students to successfully navigate the college system and in providing access to peer mentors (Lei et al., 2011). This aspect of the cohort program may be especially helpful for non-resident students who are less familiar with the institution in which they enroll.
Others suggested the sense of security through FYE was really sought by a parent. Regardless, participants often cited the intimate class setting, familiar faces in FYE, and easy access to the FYE instructor as a comfort to first semester students. The sense of community created through the FYE course was an oft-reported source of ease and security among participants.

**Reasons for persistence at SU.**

This sense of community and belonging was a main response to the secondary research question of why participants decided to persist at SU. Through active participation in the classroom, interaction with faculty, and involvement with student groups, students create for themselves a sense of identification with their institution and their place within the institution (Morgan, 2001; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Participants from this study cited various aspects of academic and social integration behind their reasons to persist. Many student development theories address issues related to college student retention, but this study focused on three theories to illuminate these issues: Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure, Astin’s Student Involvement Theory, and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. This section includes a discussion of five of the study’s main themes, (a) Building Relationships combined with (e) Seeking security; (d) Deciding to Persist or Depart; and (f) Immersion into Campus Life, as they relate to this secondary research question.

**Building relationships and Seeking Security**

Participants discussed how the FYE course at SU helped develop relationships among instructors and peers, often leading to greater levels of involvement on campus. The FYE course is generally designed to promote bonding with a peer group, promote contact with faculty, and build a sense of commitment, on both the part of the student and the institution (Jamelske, 2008;
Schnell & Doetkott, 2003: Tinto, 1990). Many participants talked of friendships formed through the FYE course and others discussed the mentoring relationship between instructor and student as beneficial in the transition to SU.

Taking time to help students process major transitions in their life may also lead to what Schlossberg refers to as a sense of mattering. She defined mattering as the feeling one belongs and matters to others. When a higher education professional shows interest in a student’s well-being and works with them to cope with their transition to college, the student may sense a stronger connection to that higher education professional and to the institution itself. That sense of connection in turn lends itself to higher retention rates (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

Participants indicated the relationships formed through their FYE courses and the oft-forced immersion into campus life prompted by the course led to feelings of security. Schlossberg suggests that those in student affairs can assist students in their ability to cope with transitioning using the theory’s four stage framework to assess personal resources, including situation, self, support, and strategies. Helping students seek options and understand implications of events or non-events can help provide students a sense of control over their circumstances, thus creating opportunity for a smoother transition to college (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

**Deciding to persist or depart.**

Beyond relationships and a sense of security, other reasons behind students’ decisions to persist were outlined in the theme *Deciding to Persist or Depart*. Participants again mentioned their initial desire for a change of atmosphere, new scenery, and different customs and found that these new changes were part of the equation that led them to persist.
Several participants also indicated they never give up and they would not consider
departure for fear of being seen as a quitter. All who reported this sentiment were considered by
this study to be academically more prepared for college. In fact, academically less prepared
participants were more likely to consider departure at the time of interview.

Academic and social integration was another subtheme of *Deciding to Persist or Depart*
related to students’ tendency to persist. Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure and Astin’s Student
Involvement Theory both indicate increased levels of academic and social integration lead to
increased retention rates (Astin, 1996; Tinto, 1997). Participants specifically noted attendance
requirements for various events through the FYE course as helpful in promoting integration, both
academically and socially.

*Immersion into campus life.*

The final theme related to the secondary research question of why students decide to
persist relates to immersion into campus life. This theme builds on the previous idea that the
FYE course was cited by participants as helpful in promoting both academic and social
integration at SU. Participants cited that forced involvement in campus activities and forced
meetings with instructors imposed by the FYE course helped immerse them into campus life,
both socially and academically.

Astin (1984, 1999) postulates active learning and personal growth is enhanced by a
student’s academic and social involvement. That participation, in turn, leads to greater
satisfaction with the collegiate experience and to higher retention rates. Similarly, Vincent
Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure posits that students with higher levels of academic and
social integration are more likely to be retained (Tinto, 1997).
One of the main social aspects related to persistence that emerged from the interviews was involvement in Greek life. Fifty-eight percent of the study’s participants were members of a social sorority or fraternity. These participants indicated they were pleased with their Greek experience and that belonging to a social fraternity or sorority helped them become more involved in campus life at SU. This social integration led to a greater sense of belonging for many participants and created in them a desire to persist at SU. These findings have long been supported in the literature on fraternity/sorority membership and college satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Pennington, Zvonkovic, & Wilson, 1989; Tinto, 1993).

Data suggests Greek affiliation has a positive effect on members if the organizations’ goals, missions, and values align with those of the individual (Nelson, Halperin, Wasserman, Smith, & Graham, 2006). This rang true for most participants in this study affiliated with Greek life; however, Greek life was also one of the main reasons cited for considering departure from SU.

The following section discusses the next secondary research question related to reasons why participants did not persist or why they were considering departure at the time of interview, including continued discussion on the influence of the Greek system on this decision.

**Reasons for departure or consideration of departure**

The third secondary research question address reasons for departure among study participants. Participant responses fell into two main themes of the study: (c) *Is the Grass Really Greener?* and (d) *Deciding to Persist or Depart*. Discussion of findings related to reasons for departure within these themes follows.
Deciding to persist or depart/Is the grass really greener?

Social issues.

Tinto (1975) maintained that social integration is achieved when the student perceives his or her own values and beliefs reflect the same mores of the social communities of the institution in which they are enrolled. As mentioned in the previous section, this was not the case with a subset of participants in this study, leading to feelings of isolation related to lack of involvement in the Greek system at SU. Feelings of isolation and difficulties in the transition to college life are the most often cited reasons for student attrition (Raymondo, 2003).

Emphasis on Greek life at SU, among other social issues, was a recurring theme among participants in this study and was often cited as reasons for participants’ decisions whether or not to persist at SU. There were mixed reports, as many participants had positive experiences with Greek life and recruitment, while for others, Greek life at SU held negative connotations, often leading to feelings of isolation on the SU campus. This finding should come as no surprise as research has shown that members of Greek organizations are more involved in campus life than their non-Greek peers (Pike, 2000).

This and other social issues, including difficulty finding friends as a non-resident student and various roommate issues, emerged when examining the secondary research question, Why do academically less-prepared, non-resident students enrolled in an FYE course intend to depart or why have they departed?

Cultural and geographic differences

Other participants indicated they had considered departing from SU to be closer to family or due to cultural or geographic differences. The Desire for Change and the sense of adventure
that drew many to SU seemed to fade as they settled in to their new surroundings and found these differences and the distances from home overshadowed the freedom they once sought.

**Retention and Academic Preparedness**

Quantitative data was used in determining the answer to the final secondary research question: *Are retention rates among non-resident, less academically prepared students enrolled in FYE different from retention rates of their more academically prepared non-resident counterparts enrolled in FYE?* Results for Hypothesis 1 indicate the answer to this question is affirmative.

A Mann-Whitney test was conducted for the independent variable level of “academic preparedness”. The Mann-Whitney analysis revealed the sum of ranks for less academically prepared participants (256750) was less than Wilcoxon W (256749) and \( p < 0.05 \), so the null hypothesis was rejected. There is sufficient evidence to conclude there is a significant difference in the first semester grade point average by level of preparedness. Additionally, no difference was found between those enrolled in either FYE course and those enrolled in no FYE course.

Similar findings were noted by Harrison and Rayburn (1979) who examined the admissions policy debate and its effect on college enrollment at City College of New York. The study found no significant difference in achievement levels between students who entered the university with significantly lower levels of academic achievement and those in the control group after enrollment.

**Implications for Higher Education Practice**

As institutions turn to tuition revenue as a replacement for state funding, the competition for students is vital to their livelihood (Groen & White, 2003). As college and university officials depend more and more on non-resident tuition dollars to bolster institutional revenue, it is
increasingly important to understand the enrollment and retention patterns of non-resident students. If these students enroll but are not retained, institutions will see a loss of revenue. Colleges and universities must work to ensure their students are retained through graduation to keep tuition dollars flowing.

To boost retention numbers for all students, institutions are turning to special programming to ease the transition to college and to provide additional support for incoming students. One such program is the freshman year experience course, which, if delivered effectively, can pay back dividends for the institution in terms of retention.

While the findings of this study fail to show a significant relationship between retention and the FYE course for this particular academic cohort, the benefits of FYE courses are well documented. The findings of this study do point to several important opportunities for implementation. This section offers a discussion of recommendations for higher education administrators and for future research in the field of higher education.

**Implications for Higher Education Administrators and FYE Coordinators**

**Securing engaged faculty.**

The findings of this study underscore the importance of enlisting an engaged group of FYE faculty to serve as instructor, advisor, and counselor-figure. Participants in the qualitative portion of this study belabored this point through their discussion of benefits and drawbacks of the FYE course. Approachable, interested FYE faculty proved a valuable resource for first year students, and participants indicated this as one of the main benefits of the first year experience (Jamelske, 2008; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003: Tinto, 1990). Higher education administrators would do well to consider annual assessment of FYE faculty and to provide adequate compensation to recruit the most qualified and interested faculty to teach FYE courses.
Access for all.

Several participants in this study cited issues with their enrollment in the course, as related to financial concerns and course flexibility. Should an institution provide a living-learning component with a cohort-based FYE course, care should be taken to ensure the housing option offered to the particular cohort is affordable for all to avoid pricing students out of participation. Institutions should also consider offering flexibility in course selection, as many participants in the cohort-based sections of FYE indicated frustration with forced enrollment in courses that did not count toward their given academic major. Flexibility in course scheduling may entice more students to enroll. Additionally, academic affairs should consider creating room in the course of study for a given major for the FYE course to count as an elective toward that major as incentive for students to enroll.

Recruitment implications.

Retention and recruitment are linked together as competition among institutions of higher education increases. College and universities are competing for the best students and students and parents are shopping for the best institutions. Retention is often used as a measure of institutional success and commitment to its students, and FYE courses help improve institutional perception in national rankings and fulfill institutional missions by promoting higher graduation rates, a marker of institutional success (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003).

Higher education administrators should consider the literature on human capital theory that suggests students will enroll when the benefits of enrollment outweigh costs of attendance (DesJardins et al., 2006; Mixon & Hsing, 1994; Thiessen, 2008). As it is clear non-resident students will continue to enroll across state lines as long as they are reaping some benefit, it is worth putting surplus non-resident tuition dollars toward enhancing first year experience
programs and marketing those programs in recruiting practices. The results of this study show
the importance of family influence on enrollment in the FYE course, so admissions officers
should consider special marketing of the FYE program to parents and guardians of prospective
students.

As institutions of higher education continue to be inhibited by fiscal constraints,
institutional leaders should look to FYE courses to aid in the retention of tuition-paying students
and to meet the demands of performance indicators to maintain state funding. The results of this
study should assist in refocusing recruitment efforts, identifying students at risk for withdrawal,
and developing programs to increase retention.

**Social integration is key.**

Qualitative responses in this study underscore the importance of social integration on
retention. The development of policies and programs to promote student involvement not only
helps the student meet his or her personal goals, but leads to increased retention rates for the

Higher education should consider opportunities to enhance social engagement among
students in FYE courses, whether cohort-based or non-cohort. One item of note is the FYE
courses with a special designation (see page 151) showed overall higher grade point averages,
levels of academic standing and retention rates. This could be attributed to a number of factors,
including common academic majors/goals, more opportunities for social engagement among the
various cohorts, special programming like peer mentoring and tutoring, or a living-learning
component; however, these differences could also be attributed to other factors, such as higher
levels of academic preparedness. Higher education administrators should consider examining
cohort-based FYE sections with a common academic core and conduct research related to retention and academic success.

Given the feedback from this study’s participants, administrators would also do well to provide ample opportunity for social engagement among FYE cohorts, such as living-learning communities and peer mentoring, as social integration also seemed to play a key role in the participants’ academic success and overall well-being. Administrators should, however, be cautious about isolating students who are enrolled in a cohort-based FYE program, as they may have less opportunity to interact with a variety of individuals on a day-to-day basis, as noted by study participants. It is important for administrators to seek a balance for cohort activities and requirements.

Implications for Future Higher Education Research

As stated above, an interesting finding in this study was the differences in GPA, academic standing, and retention rates among students in FYE courses with a special designation. An overview of these designations is offered on page 151. Other factors, such as tutoring and additional programming, related to some special FYE sections could confound study results. Future research may extend to examine factors contributing to greater academic achievement and higher retention rates, especially among FYE courses with a common academic core or major.

This study used one population with a small sample. The results of this research may only be transferable to institutions with similar FYE programs and corresponding cohorts within the FYE. Research should be extended to observe other programs of similar format, but also to institutions with a mandatory FYE course. Enrollment in the FYE programs in this study is voluntary. Student enrollment in the elective courses could indicate a higher level of student
motivation. More should be accomplished to control for effects of student motivation and to examine the validity of this study’s findings in a longitudinal design.

Finally, further research should be conducted on student demographics and characteristics as they related to this study. Bean (1990) maintained retention rates reflect not only characteristics of the individual but also the interaction between the student attending the institution and the characteristics of the institution itself. Retention rates change as these variables, demographics, and student experiences evolve. Unobservable student characteristics such as student motivation, level of parental education, and socioeconomic status, may confound the study, and steps should be taken to better understand the influence of such variables on retention as related to enrollment in an FYE course. One limitation of this study was a lack of diversity, as all respondents for the call to interview were Caucasian. Further research should examine ethnicity and its effects on retention among students in FYE programs.

Summary

This mixed methods relational study used a QUAL → quan Sequential Exploratory Design to determine the relationship between two freshman retention programs, cohort-based and non-cohort based Freshman Year Experience (FYE) courses, and the retention of academically less-prepared, non-resident students at a Southern University (SU). Structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to address the primary research question of the study: Does one type of FYE course, either cohort or non-cohort, have greater retention rates with academically less-prepared, non-resident students? Inductive analysis of interview transcripts revealed seven main themes that held meaning across participants and were relevant to the research questions on enrollment, departure, retention, and the FYE course. These themes included: (a) building relationships; (b) desiring change; (c) is the grass really greener?; (d)
deciding to persist or depart; (e) seeking security; (f) immersion into campus life; and (g) a great course…for someone else.

Quantitative methods were used to process the results from the qualitative data and to provide the context in which the qualitative data is couched. The researcher examined the relationship between enrollment and retention of non-resident, undergraduate students enrolled in the FYE courses, which was juxtaposed with data on non-resident students in the freshman population at SU who were not enrolled in an FYE course. The quantitative portion of the study was guided by the examination of the following hypotheses, stated in null form.

1. There is no significant difference in first semester grade point average by type of course and level of preparedness.
2. There is no significant difference in Fall 2013 academic standing by type of course.
3. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 academic standing by type of course.
4. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 academic standing by type of course.
5. There is no significant difference in Spring 2014 retention by type of course.
6. There is no significant difference in Fall 2014 retention by type of course.

Results of the analyses showed no significant difference in first semester GPA or a significant relationship between academic standing or retention rates by type of course. The finding did suggest a significant difference in first semester GPA by level of academic preparedness.

Based on the findings in this study, recommendations were made to inform higher education practice and future research. Recommendations for higher education practice included marketing the FYE program to recruit engaged FYE faculty, as well as promote the program to non-resident students and their parents. It was recommended that institutions should take care to
ensure all students have equal access to these programs, especially those with a cohort component including required housing. Finally, a recommendation was made for administrators to consider other opportunities to promote social integration through the FYE program, such as living-learning communities and peer mentoring, but also taking care not to isolate students in a cohort from the general student population.

Recommendations for future research included examining factors contributing to higher success rates among special sections of FYE, often including a common academic core or major. It was also suggested that future research should extend to similar FYE programs, but also to institutions with mandatory enrollment in FYE to check the validity of this study’s findings. Finally, suggestions were made for further research on student demographics and characteristics and their effect on enrollment and retention among non-resident FYE students.
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LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER
Sample Invitation Letter

Department of Leadership of Leadership and Counselor Education
The School of Education at The University of Mississippi
117 Guyton Hall
University, MS 38677

[Date]

Dear Student,

My name is Chelsea Bennett, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Higher Education Administration program in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education through the School of Education at the University of Mississippi. You are reading this letter because you have been identified as a person who may be interested in talking about your experiences as a non-resident freshman here at Ole Miss, particularly as these experiences relate to your experiences in EDHE 105.

My research focuses on the relationship between freshman retention programs, like EDHE 105, and the retention of certain subgroups of non-resident students. I am interested in this topic because of my role as instructor of EDHE 105 and FASTrack, a subgroup of EDHE 105. Through my past work in the Office of Enrollment Services, I am extremely interested in the recruitment and retention of non-resident students and am committed to seeking ways to help non-resident students persist at Ole Miss.

As part of my dissertation, I plan to conduct audio recorded interviews with individuals from subgroups of non-resident students enrolled in EDHE 105 this semester. Participation will require about one hour of your time, and you will be placed in a drawing to receive one of four $25 Visa gift cards as a thank-you for your participation.

Please contact me if you are interested and willing to participate in an interview about your experiences. If you have any further questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me. I am happy to help clarify any questions before you make the decision whether or not to participate in the study. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Chelsea W. Bennett, M.Ed
Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education
cdwelch@olemiss.edu
(662) 915-6957
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date: 

Time: 

Place: 

Interviewer: Chelsea W. Bennett 

Interviewee: 

Standard Procedures: 
Participants will participate in an interview for approximately 30 minutes. Each participant will be asked to sign an informed consent form and select before any questions are asked. Once consent is given, the interviewer will turn on the digital voice recorder, and start the interview. Questions may be asked in any sequence, and prompts may be added as they are needed. Upon completion of the interview, the interviewer will thank the participants for their contribution, and turn off the digital voice recorder. Debriefing will follow and an invitation to follow up with the interviewer at a later date will be extended. Before departure, the interviewer will place the interviewees names into a drawing to receive a $25 Visa gift card as a thank you for their participation in the study.

Interview Questions: 
1. What are some of the reasons behind your decision to enroll at SU? 
2. Much of the research on non-resident enrollment indicates that students will migrate out of state when the benefits outweigh the costs of attendance. How did this play a factor in your decision to enroll at SU, if at all? 
3. Why did you enroll in EDHE 105, and why was the course type selected (cohort v. noncohort)? 
4. What is your level of involvement/integration into campus life from an academic perspective? 
5. What is your level of involvement/integration into campus life from a social perspective? 
6. How do you think that EDHE 105 has affected this integration, if at all? 
7. What are the main benefits and drawbacks of the EDHE 105 course? 
8. Do you intend to remain at SU for the spring semester and beyond? 
9. What are some of the reasons you intend to stay? 
10. What are some of the reasons you intend to depart? What are your plans after departure? 
11. Please describe the specific experiences during your time in EDHE 105 were most impactful to your transition to college and development as a student. 
12. Do you believe that participation in EDHE 105 better prepared you for your freshman year at SU? If so, in what ways? If not, why?
APPENDIX C: SAMPLE CONSENT FORM
SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Information about a Relational Research Study

Title of Study: A Study of Retention Rates Among Non-Resident Students Enrolled in Freshman Retention Programs

Investigator Chelsea Welch Bennett
Department of Leadership & Counselor Education, The University of Mississippi School of Education (662) 915-6957
cdwelch@olemiss.edu

Advisor Lori A. Wolff, Ph.D., J.D.
Department of Leadership & Counselor Education, The University of Mississippi School of Education (662) 915-5791
lawolff@olemiss.edu

Description The researchers in this study are interested in exploring the relationship between freshman retention programs and retention of certain subgroups of non-resident students. In order to explore this topic fully, we ask that you participate in an interview in which you will have the opportunity to share your experiences with us. Interviews will last approximately thirty minutes, but no longer than an hour. Questions will focus on your personal experiences as a non-resident freshman at Ole Miss, particularly as these experiences relate to your experiences in EDHE 105. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will explain the research project to you and you may ask any questions that surface about the project. We will be collecting your ACT score, high school grade point average, and some demographic information from the institutional research office.

Risks and Benefits During the interview process, you will be asked to reflect upon experiences as a non-resident student. Some of the questions may be uncomfortable for you to answer, as some will address your academic performance in high school and college. The benefits you can gain from participation is the knowledge that you have helped further research in the area of retention and that your discussion may also lead you to a better understanding of your experiences as a non-resident student.

Cost and Payments The interview will take approximately one hour. There are no other costs associated with this study. Your name will be placed in a drawing for one of four $25 Visa gift cards as a small thank you for participating in this study.

Confidentiality Every effort will be made to protect your identity during the course of the research project. To prevent your identification, the study will use a pseudonym for the university that you currently attend and you will select an assumed name which you will be referred to throughout the study. I will not use your real name or any identifying information during the interview session or in any of the written documents associated with the study. All recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research project.

Right to Withdraw You are under no obligation to take part in this study. Withdrawal from the study will not result in penalty and or loss of any benefits to which you are entitled. Simply inform Chelsea W. Bennett with your decision in person, by email (cdwelch@olemiss.edu), or telephone (662-915-6957). Your standing with The University of Mississippi will in no way be affected by your choice to withdraw from the study and your choice to withdraw will remain confidential.

IRB Approval This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any
questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.
APPENDIX D: RELEASE OF RIGHTS TO WRITTEN OR RECORDED INFORMATION
RELEASE OF RIGHTS TO WRITTEN OR RECORDED INFORMATION

My signature below indicates that I release all rights, including copyright rights for the use of any recorded or written information that I provided during this study. With this release, I grant the University of Mississippi and the aforementioned researchers the permission to use, reproduce, copy, and distribute my words in whole or in part into derivative works without limitation. I indemnify and hold the University and the researchers harmless from any claims of infringement of copyright by any third party regarding my words. I agree that I will receive no further consideration and no royalty payments for the use of my words. My signature below means that I agree to all of the above terms.

________________________________________
Signature

________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX E: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU REGIONS AND DIVISIONS
### U.S. Census Bureau Regions and Divisions with State FIPS Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region 1: Northeast</th>
<th>Division 2: Middle Atlantic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division 1: New England</td>
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<td>Maine (23)</td>
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<td>Massachusetts (25)</td>
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<td>New Hampshire (33)</td>
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<td>Rhode Island (44)</td>
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<td>Vermont (50)</td>
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<th>Region 3: South</th>
<th>Division 5: South Atlantic</th>
<th>Division 6: East South Central</th>
<th>Division 7: West South Central</th>
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<td>West Virginia (54)</td>
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<th>Region 4: West</th>
<th>District 8: Mountain</th>
<th>District 9: Pacific</th>
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<td>Wyoming (56)</td>
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</table>
Chelsea W. Bennett lives in Oxford, MS with her husband, Steven W. Bennett, and 10-month-old daughter, Vaiden Elizabeth. Chelsea earned her Masters degree in Counselor Education in 2005 while serving as a graduate assistant in the Academic Support Center at the University of Mississippi. It was during this assistantship that she developed a love for higher education administration and taught her first FYE course. Since then, Chelsea has taught hundreds of first-time first year students in the FYE program at Ole Miss. Chelsea currently serves as Assistant Dean of Student Services in the School of Pharmacy at the University of Mississippi. Her primary roles are overseeing recruitment and retention efforts, admissions processes, and academic advising. Chelsea was recently asked to join a team of UM faculty and staff to enhance learning communities with a living component at UM, and will work with the team to develop living learning communities with common academic majors/cores. Chelsea is a member of Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society, National Board of Certified Counselors, and American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy.