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THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI'S FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE:
A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Educational Doctorate
in the Department of Higher Education at
The University of Mississippi

by

RACHAEL DURHAM

August 2023

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ABSTRACT

First-year seminar courses have become increasingly popular for colleges and universities as they are expected to help aid in the transition to college and help students persist to graduation (Culver & Bowman, 2020).

Utilizing pre-existing data from the Office of Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning (IREP), the scholar-practitioner evaluated EDHE 105, the freshman academic orientation course, at the University of Mississippi. The anonymized data file included demographic information of residency, gender, and ethnicity, high school grade point average, ACT composite scores, enrollment in EDHE 105, athlete and honors designations, first-semester grade point average, fourth-semester grade point average, fourth-semester hours attempted, fourth-semester hours earned, and fourth-semester enrollment status for the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 freshmen cohorts. Student-athletes and Honors College students were removed from the working data as they are not typically advised to enroll in the course during their first fall semester for various reasons.

EDHE 105 is a course offered to students during their first semester at the University of Mississippi. The researcher analyzed the demographics for students who enrolled in EDHE 105 for the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 freshmen cohorts as well as reviewed those student cohorts at the end of their sophomore year to see how many credits they completed overall and their grade point averages, comparing those who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. Additionally, the researcher investigated if there was a relationship between those who took EDHE 105 and were

not enrolled during their fourth semester and those who did not take EDHE 105 and were not enrolled during their fourth semester.

The findings for this study included results from the descriptive data and three research questions and hypotheses. The findings revealed that students who did not take EDHE 105 had a higher grade-point-average (3.14 compared to 3.02) and more credits completed (67 compared to 64) at the end of their sophomore year. The findings also revealed that there is no relationship between those who took EDHE 105 and left the institution prior to the end of sophomore year and those who did not take EDHE 105 and left prior to the end of sophomore year.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this study to two of the best mentors in my life who may no longer be living on Earth but are in spirit and have been with me every single day of this journey.

First, I dedicate this work to my dad, Dr. Larry W. Shook, as I follow in his footsteps to obtain a terminal degree. He passed away during the first semester of my undergraduate career as I changed my major from Biology (pre-vet) to Journalism. He would be proud and excited that although I never became a medical doctor, I was able to continue and pursue our shared passion of education to finish a terminal degree just like he did.

“All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them.”

-Walt Disney

The second person I dedicate this research to is Mr. R. Dewey Knight. Dewey was my supervisor, mentor, and friend beginning in 2014 as I joined the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience. In 2019, he retired and I took over his role and control of the EDHE 105 course at UM. His passion and dedication toward this course are what ultimately led me to dig a little deeper to analyze it. I know that he would be proud that I was finally able to finish this degree as he cheered me along in the beginning before passing away in 2020.

"The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."

-Theodore Roosevelt

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To my husband, Matt, thank you for encouraging me and not allowing me the option to even think about quitting when I wanted to most.

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To my sons, Grady and Logan, I hope I will forever be a role model for you to pursue your passions and goals no matter how hard times may get. Thank you both for being the best boys a mom could ask for. I love you.

To all of my family and extended family, thank you for the encouragement and the constant asks of, “When can we call you Dr. Durham?” I truly loved hearing that and always took that as motivation to inch a little closer to completing this degree and research.

I have to also acknowledge my coworkers in the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience (past and present), colleagues at UM, Cohort 2, and close friends who have been there every step of the way listening to me vent and encouraging me to finish. It is the little things that end up meaning so much.

I would not be where I am today without my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Amy Wells Dolan. She has been the biggest cheerleader since I began my career and education in Higher Education/Student Personnel. I cannot thank her enough for her encouragement and support throughout all of these years.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dean David Rock, Dr. Whitney Webb, and Dr. Katie Busby, for all of their support, insight, and guidance along the way. I am

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MANUSCRIPT I

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Persistence to graduation has continued to be a pressing issue in the world of American higher education. There has been more focus on students attending a college or university in the past four decades, which has more than doubled enrollment in the 1980s from nine million students to nearly 20 million students in 2011. However, the number of degrees completed has not increased as enrollment has risen (Tinto, 2012). Umbach et al. (2011) emphasized “Access without attainment is being viewed as pointless” (p. 459). Failure to complete college can have many impacts on the student, college, and community as a whole. Students who fail to complete a college degree may end up with a significant amount of debt without any personal gain for their career path. Students who may have utilized financial aid resources such as scholarships and state and federal aid end up costing colleges and universities who invested the time and resources for these students. Society also ends up with fewer college-educated citizens to help better enhance communities as students fail to complete their degrees (Mayhew et al., 2016; Tinto, 2012). The six-year completion rate for first-time, degree-seeking students entering postsecondary institutions in Fall 2012 was 58.3% according to the National Student Clearinghouse Student Report. Although this was a 1.5% increase from the Fall 2011 cohort, it still shows that 41.7% of students did not graduate in the same time frame, which poses a challenge within higher education (Shapiro et al., 2018). Students at a four-year college had a completion rate of 67.8%, however, the most notable number was for students who began within a four-year public institution, where the completion rate reached 83.6%. “The longitudinal trend

for four-year publics was especially notable, where there was a 5-percentage point increase in overall completion rate, from 60.6 percent for the 2006 cohort to 65.7 percent for the 2012 cohort” (Shapiro et al., 2018, para 1). Although increases in these numbers are positive, there are still students who are not completing degrees.

To help with retention efforts and completion rates, many colleges and universities have developed and implemented a First-Year Seminar (FYS) course. Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) agreed that “FYS participation has statistically significant and substantial positive effects on a student’s successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college” (p. 403). Depending on the institution, the FYS course may be a requirement or an elective. It may or may not have grades or credit-bearing weight. These aspects of the course also determine what can be taught (and learned) within the duration of the course. Pittendrigh et al. (2016) believed that “documenting what students learn in first-year seminars and measuring how seminars affect student persistence are important issues for universities that invest in seminar courses specifically designed to help beginning students succeed and persist in college” (p.48). If persistence and graduation can be linked to engagement with faculty, staff, and peers, including academic and social involvement (Tinto, 2012), and first-year seminar courses are designed with student engagement, involvement, and community integration in mind, then it can be understood that “first-year college experience seminars that are part of an effort to increase retention and graduation rates” which is why they “are becoming ubiquitous in higher education” (Black et al., 2016, p.85). It is uncommon to find an institution that does not have some type of FYS course. Of the institutions that responded to the 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, 86.5% offered at least one form of a first-year seminar (Padgett & Keup, 2011, p. 4).

Even in the late 1800s, prior to an actual first-year seminar course for academic credit, Johns Hopkins University and Harvard University had boards of advisers specific to freshmen, understanding that freshmen had unique needs (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). This understanding led to some programming efforts including some early noncredit orientation courses over the next several decades.

Many institutions began to look into offering similar courses, and in the late 1960s after violent student protests over racial inequality at campuses across the United States, the University of South Carolina implemented its first-year seminar course, University 101, designed to bring students together with a more student-centered approach to education and learning. The development of this course essentially began “the first-year experience movement” within higher education (Koch & Gardner, 2014). The University 101 course at The University of South Carolina was not the first of its kind as several other institutions had developed and implemented first-year orientation-like seminars as early as 1911. However, after some institutional changes in the late 1970s, John Gardner was offered a position to serve as the University 101 course director to assist with structure, enrollment, and research to show students would benefit from the course. With the success of the course, Gardner hosted a conference on the first-year orientation course where over 175 people from other institutions of higher learning came to learn about Gardner’s research and discuss similar courses across the country. After the conference’s success, Gardner was able to successfully open the National Resource Center for The Freshman Year in 1986, followed by the Freshman Year Experience Newsletter and Journal of The Freshman Year Experience (Koch & Gardner, 2014; Watts, 1999). Since then, Gardner’s Center has become the “trusted expert” as an internationally recognized leader in many aspects of best practices for the first-year experience.

This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the University of Mississippi's First-Year Experience course, EDHE 105, and its impact on student persistence and academic achievement, looking at grade-point-average (GPA) and hours completed at the end of the student's sophomore year. This study also intends to analyze demographic trends in course enrollment, including ethnicity, gender, resident status, high school academic information, and degree program selection of student participants. This study will look at four cohorts of students at the end of their sophomore year, to determine if students who took EDHE 105 during their first semester at the University of Mississippi completed more hours toward any degree program compared to students who did not take EDHE 105. This study will also compare grade point averages of those same students at the end of their sophomore year. This study has chosen to view the end of the sophomore year as a "halfway" benchmark toward four-year degree completion. While there are many studies done on FYS courses throughout the country, it is important to understand that FYS programs vary significantly with each institution. For that reason, it is important to understand the local context of the FYS course at the University of Mississippi, EDHE 105.

LOCAL CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

The University of Mississippi, founded in 1848, is Mississippi's flagship institution, designated as an R-1 research institution. The University's main campus is located in Oxford, Mississippi, with four regional campuses located in Booneville, Grenada, Southaven, and Tupelo, and the University Medical Center (UMMC) located in Jackson, Mississippi ("About UM", 2018). Total student enrollment for the 2018-2019 academic year, including Oxford and regional campuses (not including UMMC) was recorded at 20,274 ("About UM", 2018). Student enrollment for the Oxford-only campus was recorded at 19,786 for the 2018-2019 academic year ("Facts & Statistics", 2018). This study focuses specifically on students located on the main campus in Oxford. Regional campuses at the University of Mississippi only serve transfer students and do not offer 100-level courses. Therefore, regional campuses will not be included in this study.

The University of Mississippi's Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience, established in 2013, has been dedicated to the retention of first-year students, implementing one-on-one advising sessions for the majority of first-time, full-time freshmen, offering academic coaching sessions to all students, and enhancing the effectiveness of its first-year seminar course, EDHE 105: The Freshman Experience, primarily designed after the expertise of John Gardner and the Gardner Institute. According to Dewey Knight, former Associate Director of the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience at the University of Mississippi,

EDHE 105, the current academic component of the Freshman Year Experience Program at Ole Miss, was originally introduced in 1963 as *Effective Study*, which was a 2-hour course. Due to its growing popularity and success, since the fall of 2009, EDHE 105 has been offered as a letter-graded, three-hour credit course offered to all entering freshmen on the main Ole Miss campus in [the student's first] semester only. EDHE 105 is an elective course for the majority of its freshman enrollees; however, there are some University programs that require students to enroll in specialized cohorts/sections of this course. Although still primarily an elective course, enrollment in EDHE 105 has grown dramatically over the last few years. In the fall of 2009, there were 543 freshmen enrolled in 29 sections of EDHE 105, which represented 20% of the freshman class for that semester. In the fall of 2010, course enrollment swelled to 951 students in 44 sections, representing 34 % of the freshman class” (R. D. Knight, personal communication, August 17, 2018)

For the duration of this manuscript, I will refer to the Freshman Year Experience course as EDHE 105.

Part of the institutional mission of the University of Mississippi includes “providing opportunities for the people of Mississippi and beyond through excellence in learning, discovery, healthcare, and engagement” (“Vision, Mission, & Core Values”, 2018). While the EDHE 105 course serves residents and non-residents, the course itself strives to provide new students with opportunities to excel in learning and engagement, specifically within the University community. Learning outcomes of the course include having students reflect upon learning experiences to refine personal academic goals and to develop healthy relationships with peers, professors, and university staff.

Currently, EDHE 105 is run out of the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience's First-Year Experience unit, with the Department of Higher Education within the School of Education providing academic oversight. As the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience falls under the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Mississippi, it is important to understand the vision statement of the division that states, "We are dedicated educators and passionate student advocates who provide extraordinary support services and learning opportunities" ("Student Affairs", 2018). The EDHE 105 program hires dedicated educators who are committed to educating new students on the support services and learning opportunities available at the University of Mississippi. A specific student learning outcome of EDHE 105 includes students being able to demonstrate knowledge of student support services available at the University of Mississippi upon completion of the course.

EDHE 105: The Freshman Experience

The mission of the course as outlined in the University's course catalog states:

This course is designed to help first-year students adjust to the University, develop a better understanding of the learning process, acquire essential survival skills, enhance academic skills, and begin the major/career exploration process. The course also introduces students to the mission, values, and constituencies of a comprehensive public university, and to ethical and social concerns that they may face as a member of this community. ("Course Catalog", 2018).

Since 2016, enrollment in EDHE 105 has been fairly consistent year to year, as observed in Table 1, where 70-75% of the first-time, full-time freshman cohort enrolled during their first fall semester. This table includes athletes and honors college students.

Table 1. *EDHE 105 Enrollment 2016-2019*

Year	Total FTFT Freshmen	Enrolled in EDHE 105	Not Enrolled in EDHE 105	Percentage Enrolled in EDHE
2016	3,895	2,620	1,275	67.27%
2017	3,646	2,725	921	74.74%
2018	3,400	2,512	888	73.88%
2019	3,224	2,325	899	72.12%

During Fall 2019, there were 2,325 first-time, full-time freshmen enrolled in 109 sections of EDHE 105 (Durham, 2019). The course itself is a three-hour, letter-graded course that counts as an elective for most majors on campus. The course can only be taken during a freshman student's first semester at UM. It is important to note that there is an additional course, EDHE 305, modeled after EDHE 105, specific to transfer students. This research will be focused on first-time, full-time freshmen on the main Oxford campus who took EDHE 105 in their first fall semester at UM. This study will not include student-athletes as most first-time, full-time freshmen student-athletes are required to be on campus prior to the start of their fall semester. Student-athletes also have fall practice schedules that often conflict with the course. Instead, student-athletes are offered a specific condensed version of EDHE 105 as a summer course before beginning the fall semester. This study also will not include students enrolled within the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College because they are required to take a specific course, HON 101, that has many similarities to EDHE 105. In addition, having two elective credit courses in a single semester for new freshmen is not recommended by most advisors and academic departments. The EDHE 105 course is not a requirement for all incoming freshmen, but several specific cohorts, Living Learning Communities, and scholarship programs may require it as part of their programming as they have learned and seen the importance of the course for their constituencies.

During Fall 2019, there were 109 EDHE 105 sections and 80 instructors. Of those 80 instructors, 86.3% (69) also worked as full-time staff members on the campus of UM. Of those full-time staff members, 44.9% (31) worked specifically in the Division of Student Affairs. All instructors are required to have a Master's degree, preferably in Higher Education, and instructors are required to attend training sessions held during the summer before the fall session begins. Anyone teaching the course is compensated with the option to choose personal compensation of \$2,000 per course over the course of the fall semester or an office honorarium of \$500 if they work on campus or use this course to fulfill part of their job requirement of teaching. Of the 69 full-time staff members, 17 (24.63%) were required to teach this course in fulfillment of their assigned duties (Durham, 2019).

As the course has grown rapidly over the years, there has not been proper time and dedication allotted to truly evaluate the success of the course. The Office of the Provost at UM provides 100% of the funding for the instruction of the course. Any information to actively show evaluation, successes, challenges, and suggestions involving the course will be beneficial to receive continued support and buy-in from the academic community. In more recent years, there has been a First-Year Experience Advisory Committee that had gathered quarterly to review FYE initiatives and discuss the course. With recent changes in administration, that specific committee is no longer active. The purpose of this study is to determine if enrollment in EDHE 105 is positively associated with EDHE 105 students' grade point averages (GPAs) and credit hours completed at the end of a student's sophomore year.

Due to the fact that EDHE 105 is not a mandatory course, one could perceive that students who sign up on their own to take the course are "joiners" or those who may not necessarily "need" to take the course for building or enhancing academic skills. However, there

are a few programs that require students to take EDHE 105, such as Developmental Studies. Students who are required to enroll in two or more Developmental Studies (DS) courses in their first semester are required to take a specific support lab section of EDHE 105 (“Developmental Studies”, 2019).

One could argue, however, that the course is much more than learning study skills or helping a student academically. As stated in its mission, it serves to help students better understand the University and adjust to college life. It introduces ethical and social concerns “they may face as a member of this community” (“CSSFYE”, 2018). This course also serves as a community in itself since the classroom sizes do not exceed 25 students. Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) suggested that first-year seminar courses should be taught in smaller sections with 18-25 students, unlike larger survey courses.

Since it is unknown if EDHE 105 makes a lasting difference in students and their abilities to navigate college and its curriculum and move toward graduation and completing any type of degree, instead of looking at freshman from fall to spring or fall to fall as we typically do at UM, I am wanting to determine whether or not there is a difference in students who take EDHE 105 as opposed to those who do not, after the completion of their sophomore year. I plan to look at two factors to determine the success of the course: grade point average and total number of credit hours completed at the end of sophomore year. To complete the analysis of quantitative data, I will request data from the University of Mississippi’s Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP) on students from four cohorts: 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. In addition, I plan to look at the descriptive profile, including gender, residency, ethnicity, average high school core GPA, and average ACT composite score, for students who enrolled in EDHE 105 during those same cohorts.

It is apparent that the continued assessment and evaluation of the EDHE 105 course must take a deeper dive in order to determine if there is any type of impact with retention and persistence to graduation. If this study indicates a positive relationship with persistence to degree completion and grade point average, EDHE 105 may be in a position to expand or grow, but more importantly, may have better buy-in from academic stakeholders.

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONALITY AND ASSUMPTIONS

For this study's purpose, I am assuming the role of scholar-practitioner. In my current role, I serve as the Assistant Director for First-Year Experience within the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience at the University of Mississippi. First-Year Experience serves as an individual unit within the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience, and the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience serves as a department within the Division of Student Affairs. In my role, I oversee all EDHE 105, 106, and 305 courses (first-year seminar courses) including the hiring, training, and credentialing of instructors, and any First-Year Experience initiatives, including Fall Convocation, Freshman Picnic, and the Common Reading Program. I currently assist with the organizing and coordination of *The Ole Miss Experience*, the textbook created by UM faculty and staff, edited by the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and used as the primary textbook for the course itself. I am also considered the liaison with the School of Education's Department of Higher Education as the course officially resides within the School of Education but is implemented by the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience. Because of my working knowledge with the instructors of the course, I have actively participated in credentialing with SACOCS for accreditation purposes.

My professional positionality with the University of Mississippi and the First-Year Experience course has a lot to do with my desire to learn more about the data related to students taking this course. I began working at the University of Mississippi in 2008 with the Office of Admissions. As a Regional Admissions Counselor for three years and Coordinator of Campus

Visits for three years, I “sold” the idea of new freshmen selecting the EDHE 105 course as it would help them to better adjust to the university and get to know more students within their freshman class. In 2011, I was in the middle of my Master’s program and was given the opportunity to observe and co-teach a section of EDHE 105; I have taught every fall semester since. In 2014, I moved into a position within the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience as the Coordinator for First-Year Experience. Since 2014, I have taught two sections of EDHE 105 every fall semester and have also taught during some spring semesters for new students who enroll mid-year but are not included in the census of the freshmen cohort. In this position, I also aided in the selection of instructors and the logistics of planning and implementing faculty training sessions. I quickly became the liaison for EDHE 105 instructors, especially as it related to their compensation. I have also regularly attended the Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience, hosted by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina to better enhance my understanding and professional development with first-year students and first-year experience programs.

In January 2019, I assumed my current position as the Assistant Director for First-Year Experience after the Associate Director retired. In my work within the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience directly related to continuing and enhancing this course, my assumptions are that this course truly makes a positive impact for all new freshmen at the University of Mississippi, regardless of their residency status and no matter what credentials they come with into the University. I feel that this study should show a strong, positive relationship between academic success with GPA and credits earned toward graduation of those who have taken EDHE 105 in their first semester compared to those who have not. I feel that this course is

extremely beneficial in various ways to all students who take it, but I would like to see if there is data to help enhance that claim. I also believe, however, that students who take this course gain much more than we may be able to calculate in a quantitative study. Students who complete this course have a better sense of belonging within their community at UM, learn soft skills and additional “college knowledge” such as time management, conflict management, and problem-solving, and overall enjoy their time at UM much more after having taken this course. Hooker and Brand (2010) stated that “academic success behaviors, which include study skills, self-monitoring, and other effective learning habits, as well as social and emotional maturity, are critical components of college knowledge” (p.78), and EDHE 105 challenges students to develop and understand these critical components themselves.

Because the majority of EDHE 105 instructors are full-time staff members at UM and work within the Division of Student Affairs, I believe that the one-on-one attention students receive from their instructor allows students to feel a better connection with the University. Knowing that they have a point of contact somewhere on campus can provide an additional level of comfort and support for students. According to Dr. Vincent Tinto, a leader in retention research, “Institutions that provide academic, social, and personal support encourage persistence. Support that is readily available and connected to other parts of student collegiate experience leads to retention” (1999, p.5). EDHE 105 at UM is one way for new freshmen to feel better connected to the university, especially when taught by a staff member or someone who also feels a connection to UM. Part of the curriculum for EDHE 105 calls for one-on-one instructor meetings where the instructors sit down with each student to check in throughout the semester. Most instructors carve in time for two individual one-on-one meetings with each student throughout the semester, which can help the student establish a relationship with the instructor.

Additionally, with a small class size of no more than 25 students, instructors have a unique opportunity to have students better engage with one another as well through community builders, group projects, and regular classroom interactions. Tinto (1999) suggested that the more students engage with faculty, staff, and their peers, the more likely they are to persist.

My goal for this study is to gather and establish actionable information about EDHE 105 as it relates to institutional retention, academic achievement, and degree completion. I also intend for the study to provide a descriptive analysis of first-time, full-time students who took EDHE 105 (not including Honors or Athletes), including ethnicity, gender, resident status, and high school academic information while exploring emerging trends from that analysis. I hope for more academic “buy-in” of the course across campus, along with possible opportunities for its growth. The American Council on Education stated, “the degree to which institutions can harness their resources to achieve their objectives will depend upon the clarity of these objectives and the institutions willingness to set priorities and solve its problems” (“Institutional Effectiveness”, 2018, para 1).

As the Assistant Director for First-Year Experience with a unit of two staff members to oversee the course for the foreseeable future, I feel a deep sense of responsibility for the course’s evolution, progress, and potential for (continued) success. As the university has grown, especially in regard to the freshman class, there has been a demand for more EDHE 105 sections. As the course typically enrolls a maximum of 25 students per class, with a growing number of students and sections, there has been a need for additional instructors. For years, we have begged for qualified people to agree to teach a course. Although instructors are compensated, it does come with an additional workload. As the program and institution have demanded more sections of the course, I personally feel that training has fallen down the list of importance as we have had

a short time span to find, hire, and train instructors amongst the many other initiatives the two-person administrative team had to complete in a short amount of time. In addition, two Fall semesters of the COVID-19 pandemic have limited long-term planning and goal setting as we have had to create and implement short-term changes for the course. I hope that we will be able to “catch up” or increase our staff in the near future to be able to adequately train and assess the EDHE 105 faculty. One of my professional goals in my role as the Assistant Director for First-Year Experience is to evaluate some of the teaching methods used in EDHE 105 and try to tailor them toward this new generation of students, known as Generation Z (Gen Z). Johnson and Sveen (2020) mentioned in order to appeal to students with different backgrounds, universities should personalize the university for each student by segmenting messaging based on students’ interests. In thinking about Gen Z students utilizing platforms like TikTok and YouTube, Johnson and Sveen (2020) stated that “we must be innovative and utilize appropriate platforms to meet [them] where they are” (p.38). Higher education should work to understand how Gen Z uses and expects this type of technology throughout their collegiate experience. I hope to learn more to help represent those experiences within the EDHE curriculum.

These professional and personal goals have helped me to navigate my dissertation topic to determine if there are ways to better enhance the EDHE experience for students. I have had many assumptions about the EDHE 105 course during my time working with it at UM. I believe that the EDHE 105 course at UM can be extremely beneficial to a student, especially as it relates to making connections and creating a sense of belonging on campus. I also believe that EDHE 105 should be taught by those with a University connection, either on-campus faculty or staff or credentialed and trained alumni so that students have a campus connection during their tenure.

For example, over 60% of institutions intentionally place students into the section of their first-year seminar course with their assigned academic advisors (Young & Hopp, 2014).

Another driving assumption that I hold pertinent to this study, is the opinion that this course does not get the respect it deserves. It is my assumption from previous personal interactions that some faculty members may feel that the course is not rigorous enough for a graded, 3-hour letter-graded credit and that the instructors for the course are just that- instructors, non-tenured faculty but merely staff members or adjunct faculty. Personally, I have to be sure to keep this assumption and my bias toward this course controlled for so that in my analysis, numbers and percentages are not enhanced in my favor.

On the other hand, other faculty, staff, and administrators believe that general “college knowledge,” UM language, and soft skills, along with many other aspects should be learned in this course, which turns the course into a sort of “dumping ground” for anything needed to be “known” in a student’s first semester and for administering student surveys. Many also assume that all students take this course, which is not true as it is not a requirement. By examining the effectiveness of EDHE 105, there may also be an opportunity to help faculty, staff, and administrators fully understand the value of the course and make decisions around course activities.

If this study shows higher grade point averages and hours completed well into a student’s second year for those who take the course, there may be opportunities for growth and additional support. Findings from this study will be shared with the Center for Student Success, Division of Student Affairs, Office of the Provost, and School of Education. These groups can help to determine where areas of growth for the course may lie, in addition to the possible expansion of the program and funding sources, much like the University of South Carolina. I am looking at

this study from the role of a scholar-practitioner and believe in learning and accepting realities in order to enhance and better practices.

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Within Theoretical Framework and Scholarly Literature

In order to enhance students' persistence to graduation, we must also understand the value of higher education ourselves. Labaree (1997) provided a threefold framework that can help to better understand this importance as we continue research or implement programs to improve student outcomes.

Democratic equality, as Labaree explained, emphasizes education as a public good in that our entire society will benefit by educating our nation's people. As Labaree (1997) stated, "A democratic society cannot persist unless it prepares all of its young with equal care to take on the full responsibilities of citizenship in a competent manner" (p. 42) while the EDHE 105 course helps new freshmen understand the very importance of becoming a responsible citizen during their collegiate experience and beyond. This course helps to educate the University's new freshmen on the very basics of life as a new college student which then helps them better understand the meaning of a liberal arts education in general and the college experience overall. This basic knowledge helps to lay the foundation for students as responsible citizens within the university community and beyond the campus's boundaries.

Social efficiency best captured Labaree's second purpose for education in the larger society. While it's a similar approach in believing education should be a public good, Labaree suggested that the economic well-being of society depends on how well colleges prepare young people to properly carry out their careers and vocations. The vision statement for the Division of

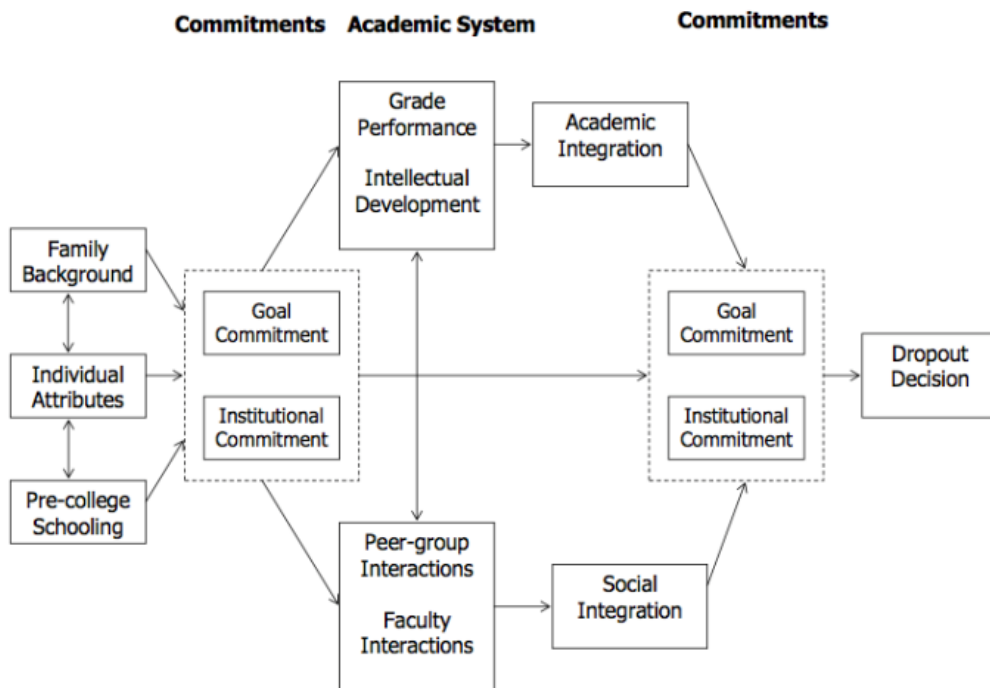
Student Affairs at the University of Mississippi (where EDHE 105 resides), also strongly believes in social efficiency as it states, “Our fulfillment comes in helping students reach their full potential for the betterment of society and the world” (“Student Affairs”, 2018). Knowing that we can all benefit from workers’ productivity and a strong economy, society should see that an investment in education is key to a prosperous society (Labaree, 1997, p, 42).

Social mobility is Labaree’s third purpose for education. Social mobility refers to the idea that education is and can be used for personal gain. He argued that education is a commodity that enhances competition, creating an advantage for the educated so that they can attain desirable positions in our society. This purpose can make one assume that education can be seen as a private good, preparing persons for more desirable roles, and creating more competition (Labaree, 1997, p. 42). Obtaining a college degree in addition to the college experience itself can help graduates attain a higher status in society. Co-curricular experiences, such as study abroad, organizational experiences, and internships, can instill students with additional “soft” skills and qualities such as networking, team building, and adaptability that they may not engage in elsewhere. This then can make them more desirable for employers or members of certain social associations.

Now that we know and understand the value of an education, it’s important to ensure those who begin college complete coursework and earn a degree. Tinto’s (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure helps to guide this study. Tinto’s model suggested that students who are integrated into the institution’s social and academic environments will persist and succeed during college.

Tinto (1993) identified three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure

to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" showed that to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. Tinto (1993) mentioned that his model also argues that students dropping out of college “can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institution” (p.113). Tinto (1993) believed that the more integrated social and academic circles are for a student, there would be a higher level of commitment to institution from the student (p.115).



As Tinto’s model is commonly used and cited, there are several aspects of his theory that have been critiqued. A first critique focused on Tinto’s language, specifically within student

social integration (Tierney, 1992). In some ways, social integration can be believed as a type of “rite of passage.” Tierney (1992) argued that Tinto’s language calls for a “misinterpretation of the cultural definition of ritual.” In traditional cultures, rituals or “rites of passage” do not allow those who partake the option to remove themselves from the action; “one simply partakes of it” (Tierney, 1992, p. 609). Whereas, Tinto assumed that students in college have the option to choose to leave, depending on their situations. Tierney continued to claim that Tinto’s language related to “dropout,” “failure,” and “departure” and other language related to student participation are all “cultural constructs.” To Tierney, Tinto’s perspective was primarily based on where he was as a faculty member and researcher. Tierney believed overall that “theory does not inform practice” and that most institutions are “asking the wrong questions” when it comes to integration of minority students.

Another critique revolved around the assumption that students must separate themselves from their past or “pre-college cultures” and assimilate into their new campus cultures to succeed (Museus et al., 2016). However, many researchers believed that assumption is culturally biased as a student of color’s culture would be completely different from that of their institution, particularly for someone attending a predominately white institution (Museus et al., 2016). In this way, students of color should not be asked to sever ties with their previous communities to conform and adapt to those of a predominately white institution as this may result in a cultural genocide or de-valuing of students’ families and communities and a false-evaluation of the campus culture over others.

A third critique of Tinto’s module is that it focused on student behavior and assumed the student has everything they need to be successful, while in reality, the institution should be held more accountable to facilitate and foster student success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, as cited in

Museus et al., 2016). More specifically, students of color may have more difficulty transitioning to a predominately white institution than their white peers. Institutions should focus more on setting up spaces to help students of color adapt over expecting that all new students have the same needs and wants. “Integration is often operationalized in ways that are relevant to the activities in which White students engage while excluding common modes of participation among students of color” (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, as cited in Museus et al., 2016, p. 770). Tinto (2016) has attempted to address these critiques in his later works, adding institutional action plans and agreeing that interventions and having “institutions to employ early-warning systems” can help to shape success of students.

It is important to understand these critiques and take them into account as Tinto’s framework continues to provide a guide for many institutes of higher learning. These criticisms are also important to keep in mind through this study as social and academic integration is one of the main focuses of the First-Year Seminar course, EDHE 105.

In response to Tinto’s model, colleges and universities have created High Impact Practices (HIPs). George Kuh (2008) published recommendations around teaching and learning practices that have shown a great benefit to students, including those from underrepresented populations. Kuh’s list of HIPs includes intellectual experiences, learning communities, collaboration with projects and assignments, community-based learning, service learning, first-year seminars, and more. HIPs require an investment of time and energy, demand reflection and integrated learning, expose students to diverse perspectives, include interaction with faculty and peers, and include real-world applications.

This research looked at what Kuh (2008) described as “First-Year Seminars and Experiences” (p. 21). Kuh mentioned that some of the most important pieces of an effective first-

year seminar include small groups of students engaging with faculty or staff frequently along with the classroom promoting a combination of academic and practical skills. Looking at the first-year seminar as a HIP, each seminar should include a variety of teaching methods, challenging assignments, and encourage students to speak in class and work together. Brownell and Swaner (2010) mentioned the outcomes of participating in a first-year seminar should include short-term impact on grades, commitment to social justice and multicultural awareness, academic and campus engagement, positive graduation rates, faculty and peer interaction, and persistence. Porter and Swing (2006) believed that the effectiveness of courses taken by first-year students, along with first-year seminars focusing on study skills can influence their persistence to return to college for a second (sophomore) year.

The key components of UM's EDHE 105 First-Year Experience course emphasize both academic and social integration within a student's first semester and year, the two years that correspond to the main categories of institutional experiences portrayed in Tinto's model. Having a smaller classroom setting of 25 or fewer while meeting for 150 hours during the week, EDHE instructors regularly have the opportunity for students to be able to interact with one another through activities and classroom discussion. "The length and frequency of the class, the student-centered nature of the course, and a sense of shared exploration and empowerment among the participants" are all channels to aid in the development of meaningful social and academic relationships (Enke, 2011, p.91).

EDHE 105 encourages students to meet with not only their EDHE instructors outside of class, but also other faculty members, especially after receiving midterm grades to get a better understanding of their academic performance in each course in which they are enrolled. EDHE 105 also has an entire module dedicated to teaching academic skills within college, from note-

taking to study tips to reading college texts. If students can learn these skills or how to enhance them early on, it will lead to better academic performance, thus making them feel more connected to their degree path and institution as Tinto's model suggests.

According to Tinto (1993), individual participation in community events outside of college, like family and work, may also help to shape persistence in college. One of the key components of the class is to have students write reflection papers on events they have attended outside of class. Some instructors offer very specific guidelines while others allow students to choose on their own or within a category, but ultimately, these assignments require students to participate in activities outside of their classroom community, thus helping them to explore and connect with the campus in general.

Tinto's model "suggests that smaller campus communities, formal and informal, may play an important role in enabling newcomers to find an early physical, social, and academic anchorage during the transition to college life" (Tinto, 1993, p. 125). EDHE 105 instructors are trained to establish a community within itself in each EDHE 105 classroom. Students are able to meet other new freshmen and get to know them in a formal, but informal way. Many EDHE classrooms utilize group chat systems like GroupMe messaging so that students can feel free and comfortable to ask questions of each other. Some sections even have students meet up to share a meal with one another to enhance their classroom connection. Astin (1993) believed that "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398).

Tinto (1993) agreed that "interactive experiences which further one's social and intellectual integration are seen to enhance the likelihood that the individual will persist within the institution until degree completion" (p. 116). EDHE 105 helps to create and connect students

with various types of interactive experiences in hopes of aiding in persistence to degree completion at the University of Mississippi.

CPED Principles

This manuscript is written in fulfillment of the degree requirements for Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) with an emphasis in Higher Education at the University of Mississippi. As the School of Education at UM is a member of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), this dissertation is framed with CPED's principles in mind, in particular, CPED's first principle around equity, ethics, and social justice.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) discussed persistence and retention by exploring the different demographic characteristics of students who benefit from a first-year seminar such as underrepresented populations, students by major, and those admitted through regular or conditional acceptances.

The first-year seminar yields larger gains with commitment to social justice and multicultural awareness than other traditional first-year courses (Engberg & Mayhew, 2007). Pounds (1989) implored predominately white institutions (PWIs) to address the needs of African American students by assisting African American students in making connections with administrators and faculty, encouraging and providing ways for them to participate in campus life, and providing a safe environment, free from threatening incidents or scenarios.

EDHE 105 and its curriculum are dedicated to all of the needs identified by Pounds (1989), in addition to the continuation of the discussion of topics of diversity, inclusion, equity, ethics, and social justice. There are components built into the textbook and course itself, however, these topics can also be brought into the classroom as events in the world happen. For

example, at UM this course has partnered with UM's Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement (CICCE) in its dedication to continue to promote principles of equity, ethics, and social justice.

As an institutional leader, specifically in planning and implementing this first-year seminar course, ensuring that instructors are teaching the importance and basics of diversity, equity, and inclusion to our new students is very important to me. Having our students know and understand even the very basic vocabulary and concepts around diversity, equity, and inclusion will equip them to be able to build a more inclusive culture in organizations and in their personal lives as they grow. As Labaree (1997) believed in a goal of higher education having democratic equality, EDHE 105 supports this goal as we work to set students up foundationally with diversity, equity, and inclusion concepts and understanding so that they have the tools needed to be more informed citizens. I believe that the more we discuss principles of equity, ethics, and social justice in the classroom early on, the more informed students become and are willing to put these discussions into practice in their daily lives.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the University of Mississippi's Freshman-Year Experience seminar course, EDHE 105, and its effectiveness on students' persistence to degree completion. UM and the Center for Student Success and First Year Experience, where this course is housed, has regularly kept track of Fall-to-Spring and Fall-to-Fall retention for each first-time, full-time freshmen cohort, however, the specific effectiveness of the course itself had not been evaluated. Table 2 shows the total enrollment for the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 first-time, full-time freshmen cohorts, the Fall to Fall institutional retention rates for those cohorts, and the percentage of those students who took EDHE 105 in their first semester.

Table 2. *FTFT Freshmen Enrollment, Retention, and EDHE Enrollment 2016-2019*

Year	Total FTFT Enrollment	Fall-to-Fall Retention	EDHE 105 Enrollment
2016	3,895	85.2%	67.27%
2017	3,646	84.9%	74.74%
2018	3,400	86.8%	73.88%
2019	3,224	85.7%	72.12%

While it cannot be assumed that correlation equals causation, the university boasts high retention numbers in these freshmen cohorts and EDHE courses, this study looked at persistence to degree completion for students who took this course during their freshmen year, particularly analyzing where students were in hours completed and grade point averages after their second

year of college (also referred to as fourth semester). Evaluation of this course at this level was necessary to see what pieces could be missing for students who leave after their first year.

The institution is a public, mid-size, state university located in the Southeast region of the United States. This study was conducted using data collected through the University of Mississippi's Department of Institutional Research. This study looked at the course of four years, with students who began at the University of Mississippi in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Athletes and honors college students were removed from this data as both constituencies are not advised to partake in the course during their first fall semester for various reasons.

Research questions for this study included:

1. What is the descriptive profile for students who enrolled in EDHE 105 compared to students who did not enroll in EDHE 105 from the 2016-2019 freshman cohorts:
 - a. Gender
 - b. Residency
 - c. Ethnicity
 - d. Average High School Core GPA
 - e. Average ACT Composite Score
2. Is there a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for those who took EDHE 105 and those who did not?
3. Is there a significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of the sophomore year for students those who took EDHE 105 and those who did not?
4. Is there a relationship between students taking EDHE 105 in their freshman year and students enrolled at the end of their fourth semester?

HYPOTHESES AND CONCLUSION

For this study, I anticipated the results would show a significant difference in the average GPA and hours completed at the end of sophomore year for students who took the EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. I also anticipated that there is a relationship between students taking EDHE 105 in their freshman year and students enrolled at the end of their fourth semester.

I expected that the data would show a positive effect between GPA and credit hours completed for those who took EDHE 105. I anticipated that if students took EDHE 105 during their first semester at the University of Mississippi, they would have completed 60 or more credits by the end of their sophomore year, showing they hit a halfway point to completing a degree within four years. I anticipated a stronger grade point average from students who took the course compared to those who did not. In addition, I expected a strong, positive relationship between those who took EDHE 105 and were no longer enrolled at UM compared to those who did not and were no longer enrolled at UM. The final results of this study will be used to continue to improve the content of the course, along with the training of instructors who teach the course.

This is the first manuscript of a three-part manuscript dissertation in practice. For this manuscript, I presented the problem of practice, literature review, conceptual framework, and proposed methodology. The second manuscript will present data retrieved officially through the University of Mississippi's Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning. The

third manuscript will present an understanding of the data and recommendations for the problem of practice presented.

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MANUSCRIPT II: DATA INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Although enrollment in colleges and universities has been on the rise, getting students to the finish line has been a challenge. Tinto (2012) and his longitudinal model of institutional departure showed that students who integrate successfully into an institution's academic and social environment are the ones who persist and succeed in college. Colleges and universities want students to enroll, but they also want those students to persist and graduate to become productive members of society so that education can be seen as a public good, especially in the eyes of employers and taxpayers (Labaree, 1997).

Colleges and universities have worked to address retention and completion by adding resources such as student support services, and as Tinto (2017) suggested, "students have to become engaged and come to see themselves as a member of a community of other students, academics, and professional staff who value their membership" (p.3). Many institutions have taken these suggestions and have implemented high-impact practices (HIPs) to help students persist to graduation. One of these HIPs includes the creation and execution of first-year seminar courses (Kuh, 2008). First-year seminars have been developed at institutions to help students succeed in their first year (Porter & Swing, 2006). In addition, according to Johnson and Stage (2018), "first-year experiences have received greater attention in the literature compared with other high-impact practices" (p.761).

Despite the popularity of first-year seminar programs, little is discussed as to how well they help with persistence to graduation beyond the first year. Many researchers believed the

first year is “uniquely important” for retention within the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). However, Johnson and Stage (2018) held “the relationship between retention and participation in the first-year seminar course is unclear” (p.756). Many institutions measure their first-year seminar course’s success solely on retention from the first year to the second year, while very few studies highlight or focus on retention beyond the second year (Friedman, 2012).

This study looked at students at the University of Mississippi (UM) who took the first-year seminar course, EDHE 105, during their first semester and those who did not, excluding athletes and honors college students. This study sought to see the differences between the two groups, specifically at the end of their second year, or fourth semester, comparing grade point averages and hours completed. This study also sought to see the difference between students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not and had left UM by the end of their second year, or fourth semester.

The researcher in this study has taken on the role as scholar-practitioner. This study used pre-existing data collected from the Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP), in conjunction with the Office of the Registrar. Independent sample t-tests and correlation analyses were conducted to examine the results. The research questions and hypotheses used in the study are as follows:

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1. What is the descriptive profile for students who enrolled in EDHE 105 compared to students who did not enroll in EDHE 105 from the 2016-2019 freshman cohorts including Gender, Residency, Ethnicity, Average High School Core GPA, Average ACT Composite Score.

Research Question 2. Is there a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year (fourth semester) for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not?

Hypothesis 2. There is a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year (fourth semester) for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. The alternative hypothesis is there is no significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year (fourth semester) for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not.

Research Question 3. Is there a significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of the sophomore year (fourth semester) for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not?

Hypothesis 3. There is a significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of sophomore year (fourth semester) for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. The alternative hypothesis is there is no significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of sophomore year (fourth semester) for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not.

Research Question 4. Is there a relationship between students taking EDHE 105 in their freshman year and students enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year (fourth semester)?

Hypothesis 4. There is a relationship between taking EDHE 105 and being enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year (fourth semester). The alternative hypothesis is there is no relationship between taking EDHE 105 and being enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year (fourth semester).

Within this manuscript, the researcher has provided information related to the research institution, the student population, the course description and grading scale, the research design, analysis, limitations within the study, and a summary of the manuscript.

Research Institution and Student Population

The University of Mississippi (UM) is Mississippi’s flagship institution, founded in 1848, and located in Oxford, Mississippi. While Oxford is the main campus, UM also has four regional campuses located in Booneville, Grenada, Southaven, and Tupelo. In addition, the University Medical Center (UMMC) is located in Jackson, Mississippi (“About UM”, 2018). UM is designated as an R-1 research institution. This study focused on students located on the main campus in Oxford as regional campuses at UM only serve transfer students and do not offer 100-level courses. Therefore, regional campuses were not included in this study.

The population for this study included all students in the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 freshmen cohorts. This study focused on students who took the University’s first-year seminar course, EDHE 105, compared to those who did not within these 4 cohorts. Athletes and honors college students were removed from the data as both constituencies are not advised to take the course for various reasons. While enrollment in EDHE 105 is not a University requirement, over 65% of the first-time, full-time freshman cohort consistently enroll during their first fall semester. The following table shows the course enrollment for the study period.

Table 1. *EDHE 105 Enrollment 2016-2019*

Year	Total FTFT Freshmen	Enrolled in EDHE 105	Not Enrolled in EDHE 105	Percentage Enrolled in EDHE
2016	3,895	2,620	1,275	67.27%
2017	3,646	2,725	921	74.74%
2018	3,400	2,512	888	73.88%
2019	3,224	2,325	899	72.12%

The first-year seminar course at the University of Mississippi (UM) is listed as EDHE 105. For accreditation purposes, it resides within the Department of Higher Education within the School of Education. The course manager for EDHE 105, who also served as the researcher and

scholar-practitioner for this study, resides within the Division of Student Affairs at UM. EDHE 105 is a three-credited hour, letter-graded class that counts as an elective toward most majors at UM. As Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) believed that many first-year seminars have become “esteemed and valued” while finding their “place in the first-year curriculum” (p. 281), EDHE 105 has been growing in popularity at the University of Mississippi.

DATA COLLECTION

The University of Mississippi's Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning provided the data for this study. The data set was anonymized and included descriptive information for each student including cohort year, gender, ethnicity, residency, highest ACT score, high school GPA, UM first semester GPA, EDHE 105 enrollment, retention after the fourth semester, GPA at the end of the fourth semester, hours completed at the end of the fourth semester, honors college status, and athlete status. There were 14,165 students included in the data set. However, after removing honors college students and student-athletes, the working data included 11,955 students. The data was sent through the University's password-protected secure document exchange. The data was stored on a password-protected drive and was only shared with the methodologist and chair for the study.

Description of Course and Grading Scale

EDHE 105 is considered the University of Mississippi's extended orientation course. According to Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005), "[these seminars] focused on student survival and success techniques" combined with "an academic theme common to all sections, but may also address critical academic skills such as writing, reasoning, and critical thinking" (p.279). While the course is not a University-wide requirement, special programs or scholarships such as Luckyday and FASTrack, require their students to enroll in specific sections of EDHE 105 ("Luckyday", 2023 and "FASTrack", 2023). Students who were required to take two or

more remedial courses due to their incoming ACT/SAT scores were also required to enroll in EDHE 105 as an academic support course, required by the Department of Developmental Studies (“Developmental Studies”, 2019). EDHE 105 is a 3-credit hour, letter-graded class that counts as an elective toward most majors. Students are recruited and encouraged to take this course while they are registering for classes during their summer orientation. EDHE 105 is only offered and available to a student in their first semester at the University of Mississippi.

The University of Mississippi utilizes a 4.0 grading scale in determining plus and minus letter grades. Grade-point averages (GPAs) are calculated by dividing the number of letter-graded hours attempted into the total number of grade points earned at the University of Mississippi. Grade points per credit are assigned as: A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, B = 3.0, B- = 2.7, C+ = 2.3, C = 2.0, C- = 1.7, D = 1.0, and F = 0 (“Registrar”, 2023).

Research Design and Statistical Analysis

This quantitative study utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 to analyze data of first-year, full-time students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The research examined the students’ academic metrics to determine if taking EDHE 105 had any correlation with grade point averages and hours completed during a students’ second year, or fourth semester. The researcher also examined students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not to determine if there was any correlation with those who were still enrolled at the University of Mississippi during their second year, or fourth semester, and those who were not.

Independent sample t-tests were used for research questions two and three in order to determine if there was a significant difference between the means of two independent and

unrelated groups. In an independent sample t-test, there are two variables: the independent variable for grouping and the dependent variable for testing. The independent variable divides data into groups or categories while the dependent variable pulls the data on a quantitative level. The t-test then evaluates if the mean value of the dependent variable for one group differs significantly from the mean value of the dependent variable for the second group (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003). For research questions two and three, the independent variable was EDHE 105. Once independent sample t-tests were run through SPSS, the researcher had to determine if equal variances were assumed reviewing Levene's Test for Equality of variances. Significance level was set at .05.

Research question four utilized a chi-square test to look at the relation between two nominal variables. The two nominal variables used for this question in this data set were those who took or did not take EDHE and those still enrolled or not enroll at UM at the end of sophomore year. Significance level was set at .05.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions of Study

Several limitations occurred for this particular study. Initially, it is important to make note that the quantitative analyses do not determine causation between variables examined within this research.

A second limitation is that this course is not a requirement for all students. While certain programs require it for scholarships or cohorting purposes, general population students are not required to enroll in the course. Culver and Bowman (2020) believed most studies for first-year seminars "do not sufficiently account for students' self-selection" in taking the course as the students who typically have higher academic credentials are the ones who choose to take a first-

year seminar course. Self-selection into learning communities (such as first-year seminar courses) plays a vital role in understanding the impact of these high-impact practices (HIPs) (Stassen, 2003). This study does not include or explore information as to why students decided to take the course and why students decided not to take the course.

In addition, during the 2016 and 2017 freshmen cohorts, the University of Mississippi implemented a Non-Resident Admissions Application. In order to control growth, UM required different admissions standards for Non-Resident students. If a student failed to meet the requirements, they were to submit a Non-Resident Admissions Application that was reviewed by a selection committee. Students who were admitted by that committee were then given a status that required them to take EDHE 105 during their first semester. The Non-Resident Admissions Application was removed going into the 2018 cohort. That information was not considered during this study.

This data did not remove School of Engineering students who were not able to take the course as their curriculum does not allow space for additional electives. Due to the rigorous curriculum, one may assume that students in the School of Engineering had higher GPAs and may have had more hours completed at the end of their sophomore year. This could have skewed (and potentially raised) the GPA data for those who did not take EDHE 105. Additionally, the data did not remove Developmental Studies students who were required to take EDHE 105 due to having two or more remedial courses. This could have skewed (and potentially lowered) the GPA data for those students who took EDHE 105. While I do not believe these two groups would have cancelled one another out, I believe that removing both of them may have made for a more standardized student group of data to observe.

A delimitation of this study is that the researcher currently does not know the added benefits or values of this course beyond the purpose of this study.

Finally, it should be noted that cohorts 2018 and 2019 were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and shut down. This would be considered an outside factor that affected students in numerous ways, especially with academic performance and how they continued their second semester and sophomore year academics (Son, Hegde, & Smith, et al., 2020).

Data for this study was assumed accurate and complete as it was retrieved and collected from the University of Mississippi's Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP).

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between students who took EDHE 105 during their first semester compared to those who did not, particularly at the end of their sophomore year. This study examined the two groups' grade point averages and hours completed at the end of sophomore year, or fourth semester. The data set included students within the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 freshman cohorts at the University of Mississippi. Descriptive statistics and three research questions were collected. An analysis of the findings can be found in the following sections of the manuscript.

Descriptive Statistics (Research Question 1)

To gain a better understanding of the students within the data set, research question one asked for a review of the descriptive profile of students who took EDHE 105 during their first semester at the University of Mississippi compared to those who did not. This descriptive data included gender, ethnicity, residency, high school grade point average, and ACT composite score. There was a total of 14,165 students in the data retrieved. A total of 2,210 students were removed as they were Honors College students or student-athletes which meant a total of 11,955 students were used in the study. The following table shows the data broken down by cohort year with those who took EDHE 105 and those who did not.

Table 3. *EDHE Program Size by Year, 2016-2019 Freshman Cohorts.*

	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
EDHE (n)	2,454	2,543	2,332	2,161	9,490
Non-EDHE (n)	850	552	532	531	2,465

Honors College and Student-Athletes Removed.

Descriptive statistics of background variables of EDHE and non-EDHE students for the data set can be found in Table 4. The gender breakdown included 40.57% male students who took EDHE 105 with 52.86% who did not, and 59.43% female students who took EDHE 105 with 47.14% who did not. The ethnicity of those who took EDHE 105 included 78.64% White, 12.5% Black, and 8.86% Other while those who did not take EDHE 105 included 80.28% White, 5.6% Black, and 14.12% Other. Of those who took EDHE 105, 43.12% were Mississippi Residents and 56.88% were Non-Residents while those who did not take EDHE 105 included 39.72% Mississippi Residents and 60.28% Non-Residents.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of Background Variables of EDHE Students and Non-EDHE Students for entire data set*

Variable	EDHE Students n=9,490	Non-EDHE Students n=2,465
Gender		
Male (%)	3,850 (40.57%)	1,303 (52.86%)
Female (%)	5,640 (59.43%)	1,162 (47.14%)
Ethnicity		
White (%)	7,463 (78.64%)	1,979 (80.28%)
Black (%)	1,186 (12.5%)	138 (5.6%)
Other (%)	841 (8.86%)	348 (14.12%)
Residency		
MS (%)	4,092 (43.12%)	979 (39.72%)
Non (%)	5,398 (56.88%)	1,486 (60.28%)

Descriptive statistics of the high school achievement of students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not take EDHE 105 can be found in Table 5. Of students who took

EDHE 105, 36.61% had a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher, 33.22% had a 3.0-3.49, 22.76% had a 2.5-2.99, 7.23% had a 2.0 to a 2.49, and 0.18% had below a 2.0 or a missing GPA. Of students who did not take EDHE 105, 47.02% had a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher, 33.35% had a 3.0-3.49, 15.21% had a 2.5-2.99, 4.22% had a 2.0-2.49, and 0.2% had below a 2.0 or a missing GPA.

Of students who took EDHE 105, 5.16% had an ACT composite score of 32 or higher, 25.11% had between a 27-31, 43.3% had between a 22-26, 24.92% had between a 17-21, and 1.51% had a 16 or below or were missing an ACT score. Of students who did not take EDHE 105, 12.94% had an ACT composite score of 32 or higher, 38.9% had between a 27-31, 36.35% had between a 22-26, 11.36% had between a 17-21, and 0.45% had a 16 or below or were missing an ACT score.

Table 5. *Descriptive Statistics of High School Achievement of EDHE Students and Non-EDHE Students for entire data set*

	EDHE Students n=9,490	Non-EDHE Students n=2,465
High School GPA		
3.5+ (%)	3,474 (36.61%)	1,159 (47.02%)
3.0-3.49 (%)	3,153 (33.22%)	822 (33.35%)
2.5-2.99 (%)	2,160 (22.76%)	375 (15.21%)
2.0-2.49 (%)	686 (7.23%)	104 (4.22%)
Below 2.0 and Missing GPA (%)	17 (0.18%)	5 (0.2%)
ACT Composite Score		
32+ (%)	490 (5.16%)	319 (12.94%)
27-31 (%)	2,383 (25.11%)	959 (38.9%)
22-26 (%)	4,109 (43.3%)	896 (36.35%)
21-17 (%)	2,365 (24.92%)	280 (11.36%)
16 & below and Missing ACT (%)	143 (1.51%)	11 (0.45%)

Research Question 2

The second research question asked if there was a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not? The hypothesis stated that there is a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The alternate hypothesis stated that there no significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not.

The hypothesis was tested by utilizing an independent sample t-test on grade point averages at the end of the sophomore year. GPA was the dependent variable, and the independent variable was students who were enrolled in EDHE 105. Equal variances were assumed using Lavene's Test for Equality. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Fourth Semester GPA

EDHE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Took EDHE	7461	3.0219	.64034	.00741
Did not take EDHE	1978	3.1434	.62307	.01401

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			95% CID			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	MD	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Fourth Sem GPA	Equal Variances Assumed	2.540	.111	-7.546	9437	<.001	-.12152	.01610	-.15308	-.08995
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			-7.667	3173.226	<.001	-.12152	.01585	-.15259	-.09044

Independent Samples Effect Sizes

		Standardizer ^a	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
FourthSemGPA	Cohen's d	.63676	-.191	-.240	-.141
	Hedges' correction	.63681	-.191	-.240	-.141
	Glass's delta	.62307	-.195	-.245	-.145

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control group.

Levene's test suggested that the assumption of homogeneity of variance had been met, therefore equal variances can be assumed. In other words, if this assumption were violated, the results of the test would be unreliable. The independent samples t-test revealed there was a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for those who took

EDHE 105 ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .64034$) and those who did not take EDHE 105 ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .62307$). The difference, $-.12152$, 95% CI [$-.15308$, $-.08995$], was significant $t(9437) = -7.546$, $p = <.001$.

There was a significant difference in mean GPA between students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. The null hypothesis was rejected. The mean GPA for students who took EDHE 105 ($M=3.02$) was significantly lower than the average grade for the students who did not take EDHE 105 ($M=3.14$).

Research Question 3

The third research question asked if there is a significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of the sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not? The hypothesis stated there is a significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The alternate hypothesis stated there is no significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not.

The hypothesis was tested by utilizing an independent sample t-test on hours completed at the end of the sophomore year. Completed hours was the dependent variable, and the independent variable was students who were enrolled in EDHE 105. Equal variances were assumed using Lavene's Test for Equality. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Completed Hours				
EDHE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Took EDHE	7,461	64.19	13.672	.158
Did not take EDHE	1,978	67.17	14.557	.327

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		Sig (2-tailed)	MD	Std. Error Difference	95% CID	
		F	Sig.	t	df				Lower	Upper
Hours Completed	Equal Variances Assumed	3.847	0.05	-8.509	9437	<.001	-2.983	0.351	-3.67	-2.296
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			-8.205	2966.752	<.001	-2.983	0.364	-3.696	-2.27

Independent Samples Effect Sizes

CompHours		Standardizer ^a	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
	Cohen's d	13.862	-.215	-.265	-.166
	Hedges' correction	13.863	-.215	-.265	-.166
	Glass's delta	14.557	-.205	-.255	-.155

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control group.

Levene's test suggested that the assumption of homogeneity of variance had been met, therefore equal variances can be assumed. In other words, if this assumption would have been violated, the results of the test would have been unreliable. The independent samples t-test revealed there was a significant difference in the average hours completed at the end of sophomore year for those who took EDHE 105 (M = 64.19, SD = 13.672) and those who did not

take EDHE 105 ($M = 67.17$, $SD = 14.557$). The difference, 0.351 , 95% CI $[-3.67, -2.296]$, was significant $t(9437) = -8.509$, $p = <.001$.

There was a significant difference in mean GPA between students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. The null hypothesis was rejected. The mean hours completed for students who took EDHE 105 ($M=64.19$) was significantly lower than the average hours completed for the students who did not take EDHE 105 ($M=67.17$).

Research Question 4

Research question four asked if there is a relationship between students taking EDHE 105 in their freshman year and students enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year (fourth semester)? The hypothesis stated there is a relationship between taking EDHE 105 and being enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year. The alternate hypothesis stated there is no relationship between taking EDHE 105 and being enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between student enrollment at UM at the end of sophomore year and enrollment in EDHE 105 during freshman year. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8**Enrollment at Fourth Semester**

EDHE	Enrolled	Not Enrolled	Total
Took EDHE	7,461 (78.62%)	2,029 (21.38%)	9,490
Did not take EDHE	1,978 (80.24%)	487 (19.76%)	2,465
Total	9,439 (78.95%)	2,516 (21.05%)	11,955

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.105 ^a	1	.078		
Continuity Correction ^b	3.008	1	.083		
Likelihood Ratio	3.141	1	.076		
Fisher's Exact Test				.081	.041
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.105	1	.078		
N of Valid Cases	11955				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 518.77.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

The test showed that there was no significant association between enrollment at UM at the end of sophomore year and enrollment in EDHE during freshman year, $\chi^2(1, N = 9439) = 3.105, p = .078$. I have failed to reject the null hypothesis and assumed the two variables are independent of each other and that there is no significant difference.

SUMMARY OF THE MANUSCRIPT

As the scholar-practitioner, I researched students at the end of their sophomore year to see if they had any benefit from taking EDHE 105, the University of Mississippi's first-year seminar course, during their first semester in college. This was done by determining 1) if those who took EDHE 105 had a higher grade-point average at the end of the sophomore year, 2) if those who took EDHE 105 had completed more hours at the University of Mississippi at the end of sophomore year, and 3) if there was a relationship between those who left the University of Mississippi before the end of sophomore year and taking EDHE 105.

To achieve this goal, data from the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 freshman cohorts was officially obtained with IRB approval from the University's Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning Office. First, descriptive data was compiled of student's gender, ethnicity, residency, high school grade-point averages, and ACT Composite score. The descriptive data indicated that more females enrolled in EDHE 105 than males. It also showed that more white students enrolled in EDHE 105, along with the majority of students enrolled in EDHE 105 were non-residents. It also showed that for students who did not enroll in EDHE 105, the majority were also non-residents, which is to be expected as UM has had a high percentage of non-residents in each freshman cohort.

The descriptive data also showed that the majority of students who took EDHE 105 had a 3.5 or higher GPA from high school, with the majority having acquired between a 22-26 ACT composite score. The majority of students who did not take EDHE 105 had a 3.5 or higher GPA

from high school and held between a 27-31 ACT composite score. Majority of students who did not take EDHE 105 had a higher ACT composite than majority of those who did take EDHE 105.

Second, an independent sample t-test was performed to compare grade point averages at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. The t-test showed that there was a significant difference in grade point averages of students who did not take EDHE 105 compared to students who took EDHE 105. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Additionally, an independent sample t-test was performed to compare hours completed at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. The t-test showed that there was a significant difference in hours completed of students who did not take EDHE 105 compared to students who took EDHE 105. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Finally, a chi-square test of independence was completed to investigate the relationship between enrollment in EDHE 105 and enrollment at UM at the end of sophomore year. The test showed that there was no significant association between enrollment in EDHE 105 and enrollment at UM at the end of sophomore year and that the two variables were independent of one another. Therefore, I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

The third manuscript reviewed the problem of practice, provided a description of the study's findings, offered an overview of potential improvements, and summarized the manuscript.

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MANUSCRIPT III: IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

While more and more students are completing college at a trending rate (Shapiro et al., 2018), there are still many unable to persist to graduation. As Tinto (1993) observed, there have been three major reasons for students to depart from the collegiate experience including academic difficulties, inability to connect their educational goal with their occupational goals, and inability to be connected in the intellectual and social life of the institution. In order to persist, students need to become integrated into formal and informal academic systems and social networks. In response to this information, George Kuh (2008) published recommendations on teaching and learning practices, including utilizing High Impact Practices (HIPs) such as first-year seminar courses to help students engage with faculty or staff frequently while learning and understanding a combination of academic and practical skills in the classroom. If persistence and graduation could be linked to academic and social engagement with student peers, faculty, and staff (Tinto, 2012), then first-year seminar courses could be used as a gateway to increase retention and graduation rates (Black, et al., 2016), especially if participation in first-year seminar courses has a positive effect on academic performance and student transition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Conducting a quantitative study, my problem of practice sought to determine if first-time, full-time students benefited from enrolling in the First-Year Seminar course, EDHE 105, at the University of Mississippi (UM) compared to those who did not take the course within the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 freshmen cohorts. This study focused on comparing grade-point averages

and hours completed of those students after the completion of their second year at UM. This study also compared the number of students who took EDHE 105 and did not take EDHE 105 and are no longer enrolled at UM after their second year. Using an independent samples t-test, the researcher compared grade-point-averages and hours completed for two groups of students, those who took EDHE 105 and those who did not. In addition, a chi-square independent test was performed to determine the relationship between enrollment in EDHE 105 and enrollment at UM at the end of sophomore year.

SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study was provided by the University of Mississippi's Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP) in conjunction with the Office of the Registrar. The data set was anonymized and included the cohort year, demographic information, high school academic performance, enrollment in EDHE 105, athlete and honors designations, first-semester grade point average, fourth-semester grade point average, fourth-semester hours attempted, fourth-semester hours earned, and fourth-semester enrollment status. It is important to note that student-athletes were removed from the data as they are not typically advised to enroll in the course during their first fall semester due to their strenuous workout and practice schedules. Honors College students were also removed from this data set as are not advised to enroll in this course because they are required to enroll in an Honors 101 course that has some similar competencies and learning outcomes.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Findings from this particular study involved descriptive data results, along with three research questions and hypotheses. Two independent samples t-tests and a chi-square independent test were used to conduct this research. This manuscript summarized the descriptive data, provided details of the findings, discussed the results, made recommendations, and provided a conclusion.

Descriptive Findings

The descriptive data collected gender, ethnicity, residency, high school grade-point average, and ACT composite score from the first-time, full-time freshman cohorts in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. The data set utilized included a total of 11,955 students, 9,490 who took EDHE 105 and 2,465 who did not take EDHE 105.

The gender breakdown included 40.57% male students who took EDHE 105 with 52.86% who did not, and 59.43% female students who took EDHE 105 with 47.14% who did not. The ethnicity of those who took EDHE 105 included 78.64% White, 12.5% Black, and 8.86% Other while those who did not take EDHE 105 included 80.28% White, 5.6% Black, and 14.12% Other. Of those who took EDHE 105, 43.12% were Mississippi Residents and 56.88% were Non-Residents while those who did not take EDHE 105 included 39.72% Mississippi residents and 60.28% non-residents. The overall data set showed that more females enrolled in EDHE 105 than males. It also showed that more white students enrolled in EDHE 105, which is to be

expected as UM is a predominately white institution. It also showed that for residency, the majority of students enrolled in EDHE 105 were non-residents, but it is also interesting to note that for the number of students who did not enroll in EDHE 105, the majority of those students were also non-residents.

Of students who took EDHE 105 (n= 9,490), 36.61% had a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher, 33.22% had a 3.0-3.49, 22.76% had a 2.5-2.99, 7.23% had a 2.0 to a 2.49, and 0.18% had below a 2.0 or a missing GPA. Of students who did not take EDHE 105 (n= 2,465), 47.02% had a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher, 33.35% had a 3.0-3.49, 15.21% had a 2.5-2.99, 4.22% had a 2.0-2.49, and 0.2% had below a 2.0 or a missing GPA.

Of students who took EDHE 105 (n= 9,490), 5.16% had an ACT composite score of 32 or higher, 25.11% had between a 27-31, 43.3% had between a 22-26, 24.92% had between a 17-21, and 1.51% had a 16 or below or were missing an ACT score. Of students who did not take EDHE 105 (n= 2,465), 12.94% had an ACT composite score of 32 or higher, 38.9% had between a 27-31, 36.35% had between a 22-26, 11.36% had between a 17-21, and 0.45% had a 16 or below or were missing an ACT score.

The data set showed that the highest number of students who took EDHE 105 had a 3.5 or higher GPA from high school, and the highest number held between a 22-26 ACT composite score. The data set also showed that the highest number of students who did not take EDHE 105 had a 3.5 or higher GPA from high school, and the highest number held between a 27-31 ACT composite score. It is interesting to note that of those who did not take EDHE 105, the largest ACT composite score was higher than that of those who did take EDHE 105. One may possibly infer that students with higher ACT composite scores elect to not take EDHE 105 for various

reasons including feeling sufficiently prepared for college or wanting to use an elective credit as a course specific to their field of study.

Research Questions Findings

This study focused on three additional research questions with their hypotheses. Research questions two and three were answered using an independent samples t-test. Research question two question asked: Is there a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not? The hypothesis stated that there is a significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The alternate hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the average GPA at the end of sophomore year for students who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The findings revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean grade-point averages between those who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The second-year GPA for those who did not take EDHE 105 was significantly higher compared to those who took EDHE 105. The null hypothesis was rejected.

The third research question asked: Is there a significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of the sophomore year for those who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not? The hypothesis for the third research question stated that there was a significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of sophomore year for those who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The alternate hypothesis for the third research question stated that there was no significant difference in the credit hours completed at the end of sophomore year for those who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The findings

revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean credit hours completed between those who took EDHE 105 compared to those who did not. The average number of credits completed for those who did not take EDHE 105 was significantly higher compared to those who took EDHE 105. The null hypothesis was rejected.

The fourth research question asked: Is there a relationship between students taking EDHE 105 in their freshman year and students enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year? The hypothesis for the fourth research question stated that there was a relationship between taking EDHE 105 and being enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year. The alternative hypothesis was there is no relationship between taking EDHE 105 and being enrolled at UM at the end of their sophomore year. The findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between enrollment in EDHE 105 and enrollment at UM at the end of sophomore year and that the two variables were independent of one another. Therefore, I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Within this manuscript, the researcher has provided information related to the research institution, the student population, the course description and grading scale, the research design, analysis, limitations within the study, and a summary of the manuscript.

Dissemination of the Findings

In the completion of the study, the researcher had the following conclusion: while correlation does not equal causation, enrolling in EDHE 105 did not show to be more beneficial statistically for retention and academic achievement for students at the end of their sophomore year compared to those who did not take the course. Research showed that students who did not take EDHE 105 had a higher grade point average and more credits completed at the end of their

sophomore year. Although the data showed this result, I believe there could be additional tests run adjusting the data received. For example, similar to the Honors College, the School of Engineering does not advise students to take EDHE 105 as the course does not fit within the curriculum. Students within the School of Engineering typically have a higher high school grade point average and ACT composite score. Not having removed students within the School of Engineering from the data set may have skewed the data for those who do not take EDHE 105. Additionally, students who are required to take two or more remedial courses are also required to take EDHE 105. These are typically students who enter the university with lower high school grade point averages and ACT composite scores. Not having removed students with two or more DS statuses from the data set may have skewed the data for those who take EDHE 105. Additional analysis should be explored.

Furthermore, I believe there are positive impacts of the course, such as soft skills and social connections to the institution that could be explored qualitatively in future research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the view of the researcher, the EDHE 105 course at the University of Mississippi could be enhanced by taking the following recommended actions: (a) improving and expanding EDHE 105 instructor resources, (b) developing and utilizing a peer mentor program, and (c) continuing regular research and assessment of the course.

Prior to discussing these proposed strategies, a critical first step is for key stakeholders such as the program coordinator, who also currently serves as the practitioner-scholar, the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience Director, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Provost, and representatives from the Department of Higher Education in the School of Education to identify clear program goals and desired outcomes for the EDHE 105 course. With the administrative turnover and increased, rapid enrollment, there should be a more recent discussion for current goals for the course. Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) agreed that while institution specific first-year seminar courses can vary campus to campus, course content is a “dynamic that changes and evolves to meet the changing needs of the students and the institution” (p. 283). Stakeholders should first determine the needs of the students and institution as it relates to EDHE 105 and thereby establish the goals for the course, including the number of sections to be offered and the number of students to be enrolled.

Currently, the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience's promotes the EDHE 105 course during summer orientation by utilizing the mission of the course as outlined in the University's course catalog:

This course is designed to help first-year students adjust to the University, develop a better understanding of the learning process, acquire essential survival skills, enhance academic skills, and begin the major/career exploration process. The course also introduces students to the mission, values, and constituencies of a comprehensive public university, and to ethical and social concerns that they may face as a member of this community. ("Course Catalog", 2018)

Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) stated that although many first-year seminars have the ultimate goal of assisting in the adjustment and engagement of college-level learning, their missions are accomplished in a variety of ways, depending significantly on the purpose of the seminar at each institution. Of course, there is always the assumption and possibility that the first-year seminar is tasked to solve any student issue an institution may face with no specific, operational definition of the first-year seminar (Reid, Reynolds, & Perkins-Auman, 2014).

Without a direct and specific understanding of the goals and desired outcomes of the EDHE 105 course from an administrative standpoint, it is difficult for the program coordinators to make informed decisions related to course participation, instructor training, and curriculum to improve outcomes. Depending on what those priorities may be, the following recommendations should be considered.

Improve and Expand Instructor Resources

Classroom instructors at all levels define the life of the college as they sit on the front lines in delivering academic information and concepts (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

Specifically, first-year seminar instruction focuses solely on students and their learning, which according to Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005), requires that instructors “understand and champion the distinctive goals, content, and processes of effective first-year seminars” (p. 284).

The instructors of EDHE 105 are made up of a majority of staff members on the UM main campus. It is rare for any faculty to teach the course. As many researchers have noted, it is imperative to have faculty collaboration with the first-year seminar. In addition, teaching a first-year seminar can be extremely beneficial for faculty to learn more about becoming “student-centered” in order to bring new methods of teaching back to their respective areas of expertise (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Gardner 1980). There are various reasons as to why faculty are not as engaged in teaching the first-year seminar, such as not recognizing the value of the seminar (Upcraft, Gardener, & Barefoot, 2005), but although many assumptions can be made as to why faculty are reluctant to teach the EDHE 105 course at the University of Mississippi, most notably, one could argue it may be due to the course compensation, or lack thereof. Monetary compensation for teaching the three-credit, in-person course first began in 2014. Teaching EDHE 105 prior to 2014 was strictly voluntary. Since 2014, EDHE 105 instructors are paid \$2,000 per course over the course of the semester taught. Because staff members make up for the strong majority of instructors, they also have other duties within their specific roles that they must tend to, making it difficult to spend additional time dedicated to developing, evaluating, and changing their own teaching skills and philosophies.

Additionally, proper training and continued development of first-year seminar instructors is vital to the success of the course. As enrollment at the University of Mississippi has grown, the need for EDHE 105 instructors has significantly increased. The focus has shifted from developing strong instructors to “covering all bases” as the University of Mississippi has

experienced a quick growth in students and sections of the course offered to students with limited additional resources for support. As Scanlon and Dvorak (2019) noted, “the quality of instruction should never be compromised” (p. 7), and in order for a first-year seminar course to be successful, the institution must heavily invest in ongoing education, training, and support for instructors. A one-day workshop or one-time training is not sufficient enough when it comes to effective training for a first-year seminar instructor (Hunter & Skipper, 1999). Groccia and Hunter (2012) believed that “an extended training program exposes instructors to a broader and richer range of topics and perspectives enabling them to provide the best quality teaching to first-year learners” (p. 13).

Hunter and Skipper (1999) agreed that creating training opportunities that are significant to all levels of instructors for the course (brand new to tenured faculty) can be challenging. At the University of South Carolina, the first-year seminar (University 101) holds an intense, three-day training workshop for new instructors. It continues the instructor support throughout the year with robust development initiatives such as round-table luncheons, online resources, and an annual one-day conference (Friedman, Greene, Gardner, et al., 2022). Instructor training programs should include philosophies to enable instructors to expand their knowledge beyond the course and implement into their daily work at the university (Gardner, 1980).

In addition, more resources are needed to fully and adequately evaluate and assess instructor performance. Seminar administrators and instructors should be engaged in regular improvement through assessment feedback as seminars should consistently be evolving to meet the needs of the institution and its students (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). The researcher believes that additional financial and staff support is needed for the course coordinators to be able to create and implement these resources for EDHE 105.

Develop and Utilize a Peer Mentor Program

Many researchers have discussed the positive impacts peers have on one another's learning and development in college (Astin, 1993; Newton & Ender, 2010). Upton, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) believed incorporating peer instructors at the undergraduate level can have positive effects with student satisfaction in the classroom. In addition, peer mentors can have a strong but less intimidating influence on many factors inside and outside of the classroom, compared to their instructor counterpart, in helping new students understand both academic and interpersonal skills. Shook and Keup (2012) believed that universities should "harness this resource in student education, support, and service delivery by using undergraduate peers in leadership roles" (p. 6).

Peer leadership is currently utilized in other areas of higher education such as orientation, student activities, and student housing. Many departments at the University of Mississippi currently already have their own versions of "student ambassadors" specific to their programs. While peer mentors are generally used less for instruction purposes, that does not mean they cannot be effective within the classroom. In fact, Friedman, Skipper, Greene, et al. (2022) agreed that there is an added benefit to instructors who have peer leaders in their classrooms, and that peer leaders in the first-year seminar classroom should be "treated as teaching partners and share in all aspects of course planning and implementation" (p. 157). The University of South Carolina's peer mentor program within the first-year seminar course has shown significant positive effects not only on new students but also on the instructors whose classroom contains a peer leader (Friedman, Skipper, Greene, et al., 2022).

Creating a peer mentor program for EDHE 105 at the University of Mississippi would not only support new freshmen enrolled in the course, but there may be additional positive

implications created for the students serving as peer mentors. (Particularly, sophomores who may need a boost of connection or a possible refresher on concepts, such as time management, introduced in the first-year seminar.)

More than half of the institutions that responded to the National Survey on the First-Year Experience indicated that they utilized peer leaders in their first-year seminar (Young, 2019). Within this survey, those who served as peer leaders had a positive experience, and 98 percent of them responded that they would recommend their experience as a peer leader to a fellow student. The survey also revealed that peer leaders had positive impacts within their own academic experiences like better time management skills and more confidence in speaking with faculty.

By utilizing a peer mentor program, students would be able to feel more of a sense of community and belonging to the university, leading to institutional fit and retention (Tinto, 1993). The peer mentor program at the University of South Carolina for the first-year seminar course, University 101, also developed specific outcomes and goals for peer mentors to deliver and gain. The program illustrates peer leaders serving in three distinct roles: role model and mentor, resource, and facilitator for learning (Friedman, Skipper, Greene, et al., 2022). It is the recommendation of the researcher that UM begins to take small steps, possibly in a focus group setup, in creating and implementing a similar peer mentor program for the EDHE 105 course to benefit both new freshmen and upperclassmen, specifically sophomores.

Continue Research and Assessment

While this study was an important start in quantitatively analyzing EDHE 105, the first-year seminar at the University of Mississippi, further and deeper evaluation and assessment should continue for a clearer picture of the impacts of the course. Demands for new students to

enroll in this course will continue as enrollment increases. It is important for a program of this kind to demonstrate effectiveness through assessment results as budgets and resources continue to be limited. Additionally, the need for continued research and evaluation of the EDHE 105 course would be beneficial for all stakeholders to ensure program and institutional goals are being met. Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) agreed that first-year seminars should continually be assessed in order to prove “that program goals and objectives are being met and provide important information about which aspects of a program may need to be improved” (p.289). At the University of South Carolina, it has taken decades of course assessment to show efficacy in their first-year seminar course’s improvement of student grades, retention, and graduation rates (Friedman, Skipper, Greene, et al., 2022). The University of Mississippi should continue regular assessment of the course.

Continuing a quantitative study and employing qualitative methods would help to close evaluation gaps presented within EDHE 105. While barriers to making and implementing changes are not uncommon in academe, these barriers can be minimized if first-year seminar advocates are considerate of the institution’s mission and are committed to continuing to evolve and improve the course (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

RESEARCHER'S FINAL THOUGHTS

In addition to the results, I was excited to see that students who took EDHE 105 had on average more than 60 credits and greater than a 3.0 GPA at the end of their sophomore year. I believe that information is very positive overall for students who took the course. It is a great selling point for incoming students and their parents.

After reviewing the literature on first-year seminar courses, I believe the University of Mississippi's first-year seminar course, EDHE 105, needs a little more attention given to the development of instructors and implementation in the classroom. While it may be assumed the course helps with retention and persistence, quantitative data does not currently support that assumption. The University of Mississippi should invest in more resources specifically related to training, development, and compensation of instructors if the assumption is that this course is considered a key component of retention and persistence. Key stakeholders should further investigate this quantitative data of student persistence factors related to students who have and have not taken EDHE 105. Further data should be collected to assess additional student factors for students who have taken EDHE 105 along with a comparison to those who have not.

SUMMARY OF THE MANUSCRIPT

First-year seminar courses have become popular at colleges and universities not only to help new freshmen acclimate to their institution but to serve as high impact practices (HIPs) to aid in the institution's retention of new students (Kuh, 2008). Despite their popularity, there has been little research found on how these courses impact students later in their collegiate journey. The purpose of this study was to add to the body of existing literature on first-year seminars and evaluate the University of Mississippi's first-year seminar course, EDHE 105, and its impact on student success outcomes including student GPA, credits earned, and retention.

Key findings of this study concluded that enrolling in EDHE 105 did not show to be more beneficial statistically for retention and academic achievement for students at the end of their sophomore year compared to those who did not take the course. Students who did not take EDHE 105 had a higher GPA at the end of their sophomore year along with more credits completed. This study provided an important baseline understanding of EDHE 105's performance with quantitative metrics identified by the researcher.

The University of Mississippi's EDHE 105 course could be enhanced by improving and expanding instructor resources, developing and utilizing a peer mentor program, and continuing regular research and assessment of the course. Moving forward, university administrators should identify and discuss desired goals and outcomes specific to this course and its assumed relationship to the University's retention and completion goals. These goals and outcomes would

help to drive decisions related to curriculum and instruction, additional faculty buy-in, and future course evaluation and assessment.

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VITA

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Highlights of Qualifications

- Excellent communicator with the ability to motivate & direct efforts of others
- Outstanding time-management skills with a history of creating & following a work schedule
- Creative, organized, & energetic employee with outstanding problem-solving & follow-through skills
- Great knowledge of the University of Mississippi & its highlights in order to sell its product, including the School of Journalism & its programs
- Keen sense of personal drive & initiative: a dedicated team player

Education

The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS

Doctor of Education in Higher Education/Student Personnel –2023

The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS

Master of Arts in Higher Education/Student Personnel –August 2012

The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS

Bachelor of Arts – May 2008

Professional Experience

Center for Student Success & First-Year Experience, University of Mississippi

Assistant Director of First-Year Experience, January 2019– Present

- Oversee & manage 175 sections of EDHE 105 & 305, including event planning management
- Manage 120+ EDHE 105 & 305 instructors including hiring, training, teaching agreements, & E-form processing
- Oversee classroom performance & evaluations for EDHE 105 & 305 instructors
- Oversee & update instructor resources for EDHE 105 & 305
- Work with the Higher Education Department Chair & Provost's Office for SACSCOC evaluation & reports for EDHE 105 & 305
- Work with many campus partners to coordinate EDHE 105 & 305 classroom presentations & events
- Coordinate the planning, implementation, & budget for Fall Convocation
- Coordinate the planning, implementation, & budget for the Common Reading author & related events
- Assist in the planning, ordering, coordination, & copy editing of the Ole Miss Experience textbook

- Speak on behalf of the CSSFYE during Orientation Welcome sessions
 - Serve on behalf of the CSSFYE for Parent Discussions & Receptions during Orientation sessions
 - Fill in as an academic advisor when needed during Orientation sessions
 - Teach 2 sections of EDHE 105 or 305 every semester
 - Supervise the Coordinator for First-Year Experience
- Coordinator of First-Year Experience, May 2014– January 2019***
- Coordinated activities related to the Partnership for Student Success Program & Ole Miss Opportunity (OMO) Scholars
 - Recruited & provided support to the students enrolled in the Partnership program & OMO Scholars
 - Assessed program effectiveness & provide methods for retention
 - Served as a liaison to Northwest Mississippi Community College for the Partnership program
 - Served as an advisor & advocate for students
 - Served as an academic advisor during the first year for all Partnership students
 - Oversaw graduate & practicum students within First-Year Experience
 - Maintained & collaborated with Associate Director on program budgets for Partnership, Common Reading, & First-Year Experience
 - Created policy & protocol for Partnership students
 - Created & maintained recruitment information for Partnership students, such as brochures & website
 - Coordinated management of EDHE 105 & 305 instructors including training, teaching agreements, & E-forms
 - Worked with Associate Director & Provost's Office for SACS evaluation & reports for EDHE 105 & 305
 - Worked to create curriculum for EDHE 106: Advancing the First-Year Experience
 - Coordinated the planning & implementation of Convocation, Creed Week, Welcome Picnic, & the Ole Miss Planner

Office of Admissions, University of Mississippi

Coordinator of Campus Visit Programs, August 2011– May 2014

- Planned, coordinated, & directed daily visits for prospective students & their families
- Used & utilized a campus recruiting management (CRM) software system on a daily basis for prospective students (Hobsons: Connect)
- Created event registration & maintained prospective student data available through Hobsons: Connect, Events & Interviews campus recruiting management (CRM) system
- Recorded, reported, & analyzed assessments of events to ensure an upward trend for a positive experience for all visitors
- Planned, coordinated, & directed special events for prospective students & their families, including Get Ready for Ole Miss, Fall Visit Day, Scholars Day, MOST Conference, Junior Preview Day & Saturday Open Houses with anywhere from 200-2000 guests
- Served as a liaison for Admissions with university academic schools & work with other university staff to coordinate appointments, visits, & special events
- Created notifications in SAP for specific needs of events
- Monitored & updated the Ole Miss visit webpage daily
- Supported in the successful conduction of 11+ orientation sessions each summer for new students & parents with a team of 25+ leaders, staff & graduate assistants
- Utilized customer service & conflict resolution skills in assisting parents & students
- Upheld the values & creed of the University of Mississippi on a daily basis

- Supervised & oversaw the Ole Miss Ambassador program of 55 students & 5 Leadership Council members
- Created & implemented weekly trainings to provide guidance to ensure consistency of the University message
- Recruited & trained new members & Leadership Council members
- Provided support to current & former student ambassadors
- Created & implemented a yearly application & two-day selection process
- Coordinated & oversaw scholarship awards of summer ambassador volunteers

APEX Leadership Summit, 2009 – May 2014

- Successfully implemented four, 3-day APEX Leadership Summits each summer during the month of July with 90 students per session
- Reviewed & selected community college & high school applicants for each leadership summit
- Created programming & implemented leadership activities for students attending
- Served as a liaison for the APEX Summit & the Office of Admissions to outside community service partners

Regional Admissions Counselor, July 2008 – August 2011

- Recruited students throughout Mississippi & Tennessee to visit & explore their collegiate options at the University of Mississippi
- Developed a personal communication plan for the prospective students in my territory
- Established & built relationships between high school counselors, students & families
- Created, planned & executed activities & events for counselors & prospective students (e.g. leadership dinners, counselor luncheons, college nights)
- Helped to create, plan & execute events through the Office of Enrollment Services (e.g. Red & Blue Preview Days, MOST Conference, Summer Counseling Conference, APEX Leadership Summit)
- Followed up with students who had applied & been accepted, along with responding to prospective student inquiries through correspondence, personal visits & phone calls
- Conducted daily admissions presentations on campus & at high schools to audiences ranging from 2-200+
- Served on various scholarship committees

Teaching Experience

The University of Mississippi

EDHE 105: First-Year Experience Instructor, Fall 2011- Present

- ***Instructor for Journalism sections, Fall 2021-Present***
- ***Instructor for FASTrack sections, Fall 2012-Fall 2014***

EDHE 106: Advancing the First-Year Experience Instructor, Spring 2017-Spring 2020

Publications

Book Chapter

Durham, R., & Roberts, J. (2022). Tips for Success at OM. In N. Jeter (Ed. 12), *The Ole Miss Experience* (pp.127-138). Oxford, MS: The Nautilus Publishing Company.

Perry, P., & Durham, R. (2022). The Importance of Emotional Intelligence, Mindset, and Grit. In N. Jeter (Ed. 12), *The Ole Miss Experience* (pp.139-148). Oxford, MS: The Nautilus Publishing Company.

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Perry, P., Reysen, R., & Durham, R. (2021). The Importance of Emotional Intelligence, Mindset, and Grit. In N. Jeter (Ed. 11), *The Ole Miss Experience* (pp.143-152). Oxford, MS: The Nautilus Publishing Company.

Reviewer

Served as a reviewer for the Caring for Students Playbook (2021). Every Learner Everywhere.
<https://everylearnereverywhere.org/resources>.

Speaking Engagements

Connecting to Students, **Human Resources Lead Yourself Training Sessions** (2023-present, quarterly)
Customer Service on a College Campus, **Human Resources Lead Yourself Training Sessions** (2016-2019)
Grit & Growth Mindset, **Leadership Lafayette** (2021)
Grit & Growth Mindset for Student Leaders, **Pulse Leadership Conference** (2019, 2021)
Customer Service 101, **EDHE 301** (2016-2019)
Grit & Growth Mindset for Students, **Women's Council Red Plate Supper** (September 2019)
Being Prepared for College: Academically, Financially, & Emotionally, **Emerging High School Leaders** (December 2019)
Growth Mindset in Student Affairs, **Division of Student Affairs** (2017, 2018)
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, **APEX Leadership Summit** (2010-2014)

University of Mississippi Service

Retention Advisory Board (2017-present), **Member**
Luckyday Scholarship Committee (2017-present), **Member**
Transfer Leadership Organization (2017-present), **Co-Advisor**
Common Reading Experience Selection Committee (2019-present), **Member**
Common Reading Experience Steering Committee (2019-present), **Member**
Students for a Safe Ride (2020-present), **Advisor**
Living Learning Communities Task Force (2023), **Member**
JED Campus Strategic Plan (2019-2021), **Member**
Keep Teaching, Keep Learning (2021), **Member**
Keep Teaching (2020), **Member**
Core Values Committee (2016-2019), **Chair**
Demonstration & Assembly Response Team (2016-2019), **Member**
University Judicial Council (2017-2019), **Member**
Retention Advisory Board Financial Aid Subcommittee (2018), **Member**
MPOWER Extended Orientation Program (2015-2017), **Co-Chair**
Pi Beta Phi Fraternity (2011-2016), **Advisor**

Honors and Awards

Community Church of Oxford Community Service Award Recipient, 2023
University of Mississippi FACT Institute Grant Recipient, 2019-2020
Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society Honorary Member Inductee, 2020
Order of Omega Faculty Member of the Year, 2012-2013