Retaining Students Through First-Year Experience Courses: Exploring Relationships Between Course Content and Graduation of Students Enrolled in a First-Year Experience Course

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RETAINING STUDENTS THROUGH FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSES:
EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COURSE CONTENT AND GRADUATION
OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

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ABSTRACT

The large number of students who choose to leave the university before graduation has caused administrators to explore new ways to retain students. Research indicates “only half (51%) of students who enrolled at four-year institutions in 1995-96 completed bachelor’s degrees within six years at the institutions at which they started” (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008, p. 540). Institutions of higher education are responding to these concerns by allocating significant resources specifically targeting first-year students focused on improving their experiences and outcomes (Jamelske, 2009). Research indicates that over the last 35 years, thousands of institutions have created first-year programs with increased retention rates and persistence to graduation as the primary goal (Barefoot, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between course content and graduation of students enrolled in the First-Year-Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. This study compared the three approaches to course content - academic, social, and mixed (both academic and social) - offered through the First-Year Experience program to determine which approach was associated with higher student graduation. This study compared sections with similar course-related characteristics to minimize the influence of outside factors on the results. Multiple class sections of the FYE program over a six-year timeframe were examined and comparisons drawn based on the course content. Therefore, the educational significance of this study is to advance the existing body of knowledge and to improve instructional practices for First-Year Experience programs around the country.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The impact of first-year programs has been the focus of numerous research studies over the last three decades. Many of these studies have attempted to define the link between first-year programs and persistence to graduation. A majority of these studies “show a positive gain in persistence for students who enroll in the course” (Porter & Swing, 2006, p. 91). A national study on First-Year Experience programs indicates that students who enroll in these courses perform better, are retained, and persist at a higher rate than students who do not enroll (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2003). Another examination of these studies (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) indicates that first-year seminars are directly and positively linked to retention and persistence to graduation even when pre-college achievement and academic aptitude are considered.

The success of first-year programs raises an important question: what aspects of the course appear to have the greatest association with student success? The literature suggests that students who enroll in first-year seminars tend to have positive gains in their academic and social integration into the community, which is a key outcome of student persistence (Porter & Swing, 2006). Research on students who participate in first-year programs indicates that they perform better academically and earn higher grades in their other courses, are less likely to have academic issues, have a higher campus participation rate, and tend to establish more connections with faculty members and fellow students (Fidler, 1991). While it seems clear that first-year programs promote student success and integration into campus life, there is limited research on what aspects of the seminar explain this result.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between course content and the graduation of students enrolled in the First-Year-Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. This study compared three types of course content: academic, social, and mixed (a combination of both academic and social), as offered through the First-Year Experience program to determine which was associated with higher student graduation. The study compared sections with similar course-related characteristics to minimize the influence of outside factors on the results. These course-related characteristics included the year the course was taught, the number of students enrolled in the course section, and the number of instructors. The study analyzed six years of data to gain insight into the relationship between course content and student graduation. This analysis may offer greater insight and suggestions on how institutions can improve the first-year transition process, which has been shown to increase retention and to encourage persistence to graduation.

Three decades of research suggest that providing opportunities for students to establish a social connection to the institution is a key component of student persistence. Current research indicates that social integration among first-year students directly impacts the student’s connection to the institution and their desire to continue their studies at the institution (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Student peer interactions are a major focus for first-year programs as research has shown that “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (Astin, 1993, p. 398). Many institutions have specifically designed first-year programs to promote positive peer interactions as a means to establish group bonding and affiliation for students (Barefoot, 2000). Student-faculty interactions are also a focus for first-year programs as Pascarella and Terenzini
(1991) argued that increased interaction between students and faculty may actually strengthen the student’s personal connection to the institution, which often leads to increased social integration and persistence.

The opportunity to create a connection between the student and the institution through which students feel a sense of belonging and connection to the institution is another key component to student persistence. Tinto (1975, 1993) argued in his model of student persistence that a sense of belonging is a central component of student persistence. He also predicted that students are more likely to withdraw when they do not feel connected and integrated into the collegiate environment. The structure and focus of course content for first year programs are specifically designed to help students connect with the institution by providing information on campus services and activities, student organizations, and on skills related to student success including time management and fiscal responsibility.

It is the primary goal of first-year programs to offer course content that provides a support network to aid students in their transition to the collegiate environment, to encourage the development of relationships for students with peers, faculty, and staff, and to create a connection between the student and the institution. The “emphasis on student involvement and perceived integration, both of which are likely to be correlated with sense of belonging, is consistent with the idea that developing a sense of belonging is important to college persistence” (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007, p. 805).

Research Question

The primary research question in the study was to examine the three curricular approaches to course content - academic, social, and mixed (a combination of academic and social) - offered through a single First-Year Experience program to determine if one approach
was more associated with higher student graduation than the other two. In order to minimize the influence of outside factors on the results, this study compared sections with similar course-related characteristics that included the year the course was taught, the number of students enrolled in the course section, and the number of instructors.

**Primary Research Question**

Is there a relationship between graduation and whether students received academic, social, or mixed course content among students who have completed the First-Year Experience program at Florida State University?

The literature suggests that the building of relationships and the establishment of a connection between the student and the institution are key components in terms of increasing persistence to graduation among students. Tinto (1975) theorized that it is the student’s “integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college” (p. 96). Tinto (1982) also noted that a student’s inability to connect and integrate into the collegiate environment often leads to the student withdrawing from the institution during or after their first year or performing below expected academic levels.

First year programs provide an opportunity for institutions to help build these connections with and for students. The course content for first year programs is typically designed to help students connect with the institution by providing information on campus services and activities, student organizations, and on skills related to student success including time management and fiscal responsibility. At the institution used for this study, individual course instructors were able to determine their specific approach to the course content. The research question focused on which approach - academic, social, or mixed - was most associated with higher graduation among students.
Variables

The dependent variable in this study was student graduation. Graduation is defined as the number of first-year students who fulfill the requirements for degree completion within six years of their matriculation. The study focused only on first-time-in-college (FTIC) students enrolled full-time which required a minimum of 12 credit hours each term. The independent variable was course content, defined as noted earlier as academic, social, or mixed, based on the content of the syllabus for the course. The study compared course sections with similar course characteristics. These characteristics, as described previously, included: number of instructors per course section, size of course section, and year the course section was taught.

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework illustrates the potential relationship between the course content and the graduation of students who completed the course. This conceptual framework is based on Astin’s Input-Environment-Outcomes (IEO) Model as well as Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework
Definition of Terms

*First-Year Experience (FYE) Programs.* First-Year Experience Programs are generally small, discussion-based courses or seminars offered by higher education institutions as a means of acclimating students to the collegiate environment and retaining students beyond their freshman year. While the structure and content varies between institutions, First-Year Experience Programs are designed to assist incoming students with their transition into the collegiate environment and encourage their academic and personal growth. The First-Year Experience courses and seminars are typically less academic in structure and content than regular, academic courses. It is also important to note that First-Year Experience courses and seminars are often geared towards social interactions and the establishment of a network or connection to the university for the incoming student.

*Retention Rate.* The retention rate is the percentage of first-year students who return to the university for their second academic year.

*Graduation Rate.* The graduation rate is the percentage of first-year students who complete their degree requirements for graduation within six years of their matriculation.

*First-Time-In-College (FTIC) Student.* A student is considered first-time-in-college if they are enrolling for the first time as a full-time student at an institution of higher education.

*Full-Time Student.* A student is designated as full-time if they are enrolled in and complete a minimum of twelve credit hours during both the Fall and Spring academic semesters.

*Course Instructors.* The instructional team varied for each FYE course section. At a minimum, each FYE course section had: 1) one FSU faculty member or one full-time FSU staff member, and 2) an FSU student peer leader. Some FYE course sections included multiple FSU faculty/staff members or FSU graduate students.
Peer Leader. The peer leader was an undergraduate student who helped to instruct the course and served as a mentor to the students.

Course Content. The curriculum implemented in each section. While the FYE program had specific guidelines for topics that must be covered, the instructors were allowed to determine additional subjects to discuss in the course and the format for which material is presented. These additional activities were often social in nature rather than academic.

Course Size. The course size is the number of students enrolled in each course section. FYE courses varied in size based on the semester and location. Typically, each section of the course had between ten and thirty students enrolled.

Course Location. The course location is the physical classroom on campus in which the course is taught. FYE courses were taught in residence halls, classrooms, and administrative buildings.

Course Time. The course time is the time of day in which the course physically meets. FYE courses were offered as early as 8am and as late as 9:05pm.

Significance of Study

Research indicates that students who participate in first-year seminars persist at a higher rate than students who do not participate and are more likely to graduate within four years than non-participants (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). While it is evident that first-year programs promote student success, there is very limited research on what approaches to course content are associated with this result. This study examined the relationship between course content and graduation among students who completed the First-Year Experience program over a six-year period.

It was anticipated that an analysis of the course content might provide suggestions on which practices were most effective and identify opportunities for improvement. As noted in the
literature, an understanding of which aspects in a first-year seminar are most linked to increased persistence could inform program directors and course instructors about where to focus their efforts (Porter & Swing, 2006). Insights gained from this study could promote changes to the structure and content of First-Year Experience programs and provide ideas on how institutions can encourage stronger persistence and increased graduation for students.

Assumptions

This study utilized data collected by the Florida State University Registrar’s Office, the First-Year Experience Office, and the Office of Institutional Research. The study assumed that the data collected and provided by these University offices is accurate. It is also assumed that the student sample selected for this study was representative of the overall student population who enrolled in and completed the First-Year Experience course at Florida State University between the years 2001-2006. This study further assumed that there were no structural or formative changes to the First-Year Experience program that have not been disclosed to the researcher.

This study examined the syllabi for sections of the First-Year Experience course at Florida State University to determine the approach to course content. The syllabi were analyzed using a course content rubric (see Chapter 3, Table 1). These syllabi were submitted by instructors to the First-Year Experience Office in advance of the first day of class for each year in which their section was taught. This study assumed that each syllabus examined for the study was an accurate reflection of the approach the instructors used to teach their assigned section of the course. Finally, the study assumed that there were no major changes to structure, schedule, or content of the course syllabus from time of submission to the FYE Office to the completion of the course.
Limitations

The research and analysis for this study was limited to Florida State University. This fact creates a limitation in the ability to generalize the findings of this study to other higher education institutions, as the research involved was limited to one institution. The findings of this study may be useful to institutions with similar characteristics and student populations as Florida State University but no generalizability is claimed or expected.

During the years represented by the data used in this study, the First-Year Experience Program at Florida State University was not required of new students. As a result, incoming students self-selected into the FYE program during the registration process. As the course was not mandatory, the underlying message to students may have been that FYE was not important or a valuable experience. Thus, the student’s self-selection into the course is also a limitation for the study.

This study compared the approach to course content - academic, social, and mixed - to determine which was associated with higher graduation among students. This study utilized graduation as a measure of success as graduation is widely used by researchers, publications, and surveys as a measure of both student and institutional success. The researcher acknowledges that multiple factors affect whether a student persists to graduation so the use of graduation as a measure in this study in itself a limitation.

Summary

The large number of students who choose to leave a college or university before graduation has caused administrators to explore many new ways to retain students. Research indicates “only half (51%) of students who enrolled at four-year institutions in 1995-96 completed bachelor’s degrees within six years at the institutions at which they started” (Kuh,
Institutions of higher education are responding to these concerns by allocating significant resources specifically targeting first-year students focused on improving their experiences and outcomes (Jamelske, 2009). Research indicates that over the last 35 years, thousands of institutions have created first-year programs with increased retention rates and persistence to graduation as the primary goal (Barefoot, 2000).

A number of research studies have examined the impact of First-Year Experience programs on student success and persistence. This research indicates that students who participate in first-year seminars have stronger gains in their social and academic integration into the college environment – key components linked to increased persistence among students (Porter & Swing, 2006). Research on students who participate in first-year programs indicates that they perform stronger academically and earn higher grades in their other courses, are less likely to have academic issues, have a higher campus participation rate, and establish more connections with faculty members and fellow students (Fidler, 1991). While it is evident that first-year programs help to promote student success, it is not clear if there is a relationship between the course content and student graduation.

This study explored the relationship between course content and graduation of students enrolled in the First-Year Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. The study compared the three approaches to course content - academic, social, and mixed (a combination of academic and social) - offered through the First-Year Experience program to determine if any of these different approaches was associated with greater student graduation. The study compared sections with similar course-related characteristics to minimize the influence of outside factors on the results. A quantitative data analysis was used to provide insight into the relationship between course content and graduation. The analysis may yield suggestions on how institutions
can better assist students as they transition into the collegiate environment and improve their persistence to graduation.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutions of higher education have adopted first-year programs as a central component of their student services mission. John Gardner, a former professor at the University of South Carolina and the creator of the First-Year Experience course and textbook, defined first-year programs as “a national and international effort to improve the first-year, the total experience of students – and to do this intentionally and by rethinking the way the first-year was organized and executed” (Schroeder, 2003, p. 10). Colleges and universities are utilizing first-year programs as a tool to attract and retain students, enhance a student’s academic success, orient students to campus resources, encourage relationships between students, faculty, and staff, assist students in career planning, and promote persistence to graduation.

The large number of students who chose to leave the university prior to graduation has motivated the growing trend of first-year programs. Data gathered by American College Testing (2014) indicates that 72.3% of students at four-year, public institutions continue beyond their first year. This number improves only slightly for first year students at private institutions (74.4%). These attrition rates continue to grow beyond the first year as research shows that 51% of students who enrolled at a four-year institution earned a baccalaureate degree at that institution within six years of their matriculation (Kuh, et. al., 2008). This number increases slightly (7%) by adding in students who earned a degree within six years after attending multiple institutions. The research also indicates that students who do leave and return experience increased time to degree and are less likely to obtain a degree (Porter & Swing, 2006). The data suggests that dropping out or transferring to another institution typically has a negative impact on degree attainment for students (Porter & Swing, 2006).
Many stakeholders in higher education view academic success and persistence as a responsibility of the institution. They view the purpose of higher education as a way to promote both the cognitive and affective development within students and to prepare them for practical affairs. Tinto theorized that, “it is the individual’s integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college” (Tinto, 1975, p. 96). A majority of institutions have adopted first-year programs as the starting point for new students where they are welcomed, supported, and integrated into the college community (Gardner, 1986). First-year programs are designed to assist students with their transition into the campus community, promote their academic and social development, and provide tools and resources for their academic success (Hunter & Linder, 2005).

Research indicates that first-year programs are increasing student persistence and graduation rates by five to fifteen percentage points (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). These results raise a valuable question – what aspects of the course are most associated with increased persistence and graduation among students. An examination of the research and theories on first-year transition must first be investigated to understand the challenges students face as they integrate into college. These transition challenges offer a background to then explore the design, purpose, and impact of first-year programs on student success, integration, and persistence. This analysis provides a context for examining the structure and goals of the First-Year Experience program at Florida State University.

First-Year Student Transition

First-year students face a number of challenges as they transition into the collegiate environment. A study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California Los Angeles (2008) surveyed first-year students on academic concerns. A majority of
students surveyed received high grades throughout high school and indicated that they would continue to do so during their first year. Instead, the findings suggest that students feel disengaged from their academic pursuits. Over one-third of the students admitted to skipping class, two-thirds indicated that they came to class late, and nearly 15% reported turning in course assignments late or not at all. The most distressing finding of the survey indicated that only 75% of the students earned a grade-point-average of 2.75 or better during their first year.

The study also asked students about their relationships and behavior. Students indicated that they interact frequently with their peers yet do not establish relationships with faculty and staff during their first year. The study found that a minimal number of students interacted with advisors, faculty, administrators, or staff on a monthly basis while over 80% reported interacting with friends on a daily basis. In addition, students reported spending more time socializing and partying with friends than focused on their academic pursuits. The study also revealed that less than a third of students perceived themselves as “successful” in managing their time efficiently, developing effective study skills, or utilizing institutional resources.

This data illustrates some of the adjustment issues facing first-year students and institutions. During this first year, students undergo significant changes in their identity and beliefs. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stated that “students not only make statistically significant gains in factual knowledge and in a range of general cognitive and intellectual skills; they also change on a broad array of value, attitudinal, psycho-social, and moral dimensions” (p. 557). While students may demonstrate “significant gains” in academic knowledge, they report decreases in their motivation to achieve and their confidence in their academic abilities. Stakeholders argue that colleges and universities have an ethical responsibility to the students that they admit and that institutions must be responsive to the multiple needs of first-year
students (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). The transition process for new students into the collegiate environment can be divided into three distinct areas: academic, personal, and environmental.

**Academic Challenges**

For a new student transitioning into college, the academic experience provides the most structured and stable environment. The classroom is often the first place that a new student finds a sense of continuity where meetings are held regularly and consistently thus creating a sense of monotony for the student that is welcomed during this time of transition (Fleming, Howard, Perkins, & Pesta, 2005). A full-time student enrolls in 12 to 18 credit hours on average per semester, which equates to multiple classroom meetings throughout the week. The academic experience within the classroom “serves as a springboard for new relationships that will include the individual student as an integral part of the community at a college or university” (Fleming, et. al., 2005).

The academic experience also helps to establish a sense of community early on for first-year students. Astin (1968) argued that while students typically spend more time participating in campus activities, it is the experiences from the classroom that have the most significant influence in the undergraduate years. The sharing of ideas between students with similar interests and motivations and with faculty members inside the classroom promotes the building of relationships within the academic environment for new students. Scholars note that this environment plays a key role in the student’s intellectual growth through interactions with peers and faculty on an academic level and in the development of new concepts and viewpoints that are academically focused (Fleming, et. al., 2005).

The academic rigors and differing conventions of higher education can also provide challenges for many new students. Students who excelled academically in high school are often
placed in upper division courses that begin with a pre-existing knowledge base and move at an accelerated pace. This environment can be especially challenging for new students as upper division students, who do not share their current experience, typically surround them. Students who struggled academically in high school may face similar challenges with the pace and rigor or with the differing conventions offered in higher education. Research indicates that new students benefit more from classes that actively engage them in the learning process rather than dry, sterile lectures (Fleming, et. al., 2005). Students are more likely to engage and develop relationships with peers and faculty in courses that demand student participation. Course size can also impact a new student’s engagement and participation with a course. Typically, students will experience both large and small courses during their academic path. The size and focus of the institution and the student’s major often times dictate the course size. Research suggests that new students find more success academically in courses that are smaller in size and promote student interaction and participation (Fleming, et. al., 2005).

Social Integration

Personal interactions are a major stimulant within the collegiate environment - one that can build a foundation of support that promotes student success at the collegiate level. The diversity of students and the frequency of interaction among them provide a level of stimulation not found in other environments (Fleming, et. al., 2005). This rate of interaction leads to a constant state of flux in the environment and serves as a testament to the range of differences brought to this community by the students themselves (Astin, 1968). New students are no longer surrounded by peers with similar backgrounds from the same neighborhoods and schools and instead, must meet and interact with peers who may have different cultural backgrounds, value systems, or socioeconomic status. The resulting environment is one that challenges its
inhabitants to be more proactive in their seeking of knowledge, to be more critical and reflective in their thinking, and to be open to establishing new relationships with a diverse group of peers within the community (Fleming, et. al., 2005). For this reason, personal interactions can be one of the most difficult and challenging aspects for students as they transition into the collegiate environment.

New students often struggle with feelings of loneliness and isolation as they build new relationships with peers. During the first semester, many students often forget that every other new student is navigating through a similar transition as them (Fleming, et. al., 2005). While people generally form relationships with those who share similar experiences and values, they know very little about the individuals that they pass around campus. The first few months are often challenging for new students as they struggle to form close bonds with peers even though they surround them. Research indicates that a disconnect exists where students feel isolated and alone in their transition into this new environment yet are surrounded by peers experiencing the same struggles (Fleming, et. al., 2005). This transition can be one of the most difficult and emotionally demanding for new students and is exasperated by the fact that they are actually their main support in this transitional process.

Campus Environment

The campus environment plays a pivotal role in the success or failure of a student’s transition into higher education. According to Astin (1968), the college environment can be defined, in the broadest sense, as including any aspect of the environment that constitutes a possible stimulus for students. The student and their campus environment must present a good fit for one another in order to establish a successful and supportive relationship. Astin (1968) “postulated that individual achievement, behavior, self-esteem, and feelings of loneliness and
alienation are often the result of a mismatch between the student and the environment” (p. 3). Scholars have argued that a connection exists between the campus environment and the student’s successful or unsuccessful transition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This argument is reflected in Pascarella’s General Causal Model of Student Development (1985) that suggests an institution’s environment and characteristics directly relate to a student’s development.

While the campus environment can support new student success, it is also a major area of concern for many administrators in higher education. Scholars have typically defined the campus environment as the academic areas of the institution to include the classrooms, libraries, and laboratories (Astin, 1968). However, most administrators argue that the environment encompasses not just the academic aspects but student life as well and that these aspects combine to influence the student (Fleming, et. al., 2005). Administrators define the student life aspects to include the residence halls, exercise facilities, student unions, as well as the surrounding local community (Fleming, et. al., 2005). The majority of students spend a minimum of nine months a year living in this environment and dramatic changes can impact their ability to find success in this new environment.

The academic, personal, and environmental challenges that students encounter as they integrate into the campus community has an impact on their success and persistence at the institution. However, which of these challenges is the most important continues to be the subject of debate. The key issue for faculty, staff, and institutions lies in how to support new students through the process of integration and assimilation. An examination of the theories on students in transition can provide a framework to better understand the process and factors impacting students during this experience.
Theoretical Framework for First-Year Students

New students face a number of transition challenges as they enter and are integrated into the college environment. Astin’s Input-Environment-Outcomes (IEO) Model and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure attempt to explain the characteristics of incoming students, the environmental factors within the institution, and how these experiences shape the student’s direction. These theoretical models argue that “if institutions are to challenge and support first-year students in their academic success, they must focus on both the characteristics and experiences of their student prior to college, as well as their experiences both inside and outside the classroom once they are enrolled and how these variables interrelate” (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005, p. 31).

Astin’s Input-Environment-Outcome model was designed as a theoretical guide to study student persistence in college with the basic premise that a student’s success is a function of who they were before they entered college and what happened to them after they enrolled (Astin, 1991). The model hypothesizes that students entering college have a previously established set of characteristics (inputs) that directly shape their view of college. Astin (1991) identified 146 potential inputs that may directly influence their view of college including race, gender, ethnicity, family income level, socio-economic status, high school grades, admission test scores, and parental level of education. Astin (1991) stated that consideration of the input characteristics helps to provide context for the influence of a student’s background on their ability to persist.

Astin (1991) also examined the environment within college and identified 192 variables that may impact a student’s success. These environmental variables were organized into eight categories that included institutional characteristics, faculty teaching methods and values, characteristics of a student’s peer group, major, curriculum, financial need of student, place of
residence, and student involvement (Astin, 1991). The final component of the model is outcomes and is defined as the effect of college and the environmental variables on the student’s characteristics. Astin (1991) identified 82 potential outcomes for students to include academic success, retention, persistence to graduation, campus and community involvement, critical thinking, self-discovery, and personal satisfaction.

Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure is very similar to Astin’s model with pre-established characteristics (inputs), environmental variables in the collegiate environment, and outcomes for the student. Tinto’s theory departs from Astin’s model and delves further into the social and intellectual integration of the student into the collegiate environment. Tinto (1993) theorized that students entering college have a pre-established set of characteristics that shape their commitment toward college and that this commitment is directly impacted by their academic and social experiences within the collegiate environment. Tinto (1993) argued that students are more likely to become integrated into the institution when they experience positive and rewarding social and academic experiences. Multiple scholars argue that institutions have an obligation to assist students in achieving both academic and social integration (Tinto, 1993; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Tinto (1993) suggested that institutions would see higher retention rates if they focus on the social and academic integration of their students.

History of First-Year Programs

Designed to address the unique challenges facing new students, first-year programs have been a part of colleges and universities for over 130 years. The history of first-year programs dates back to 1882 when Lee College in Kentucky pioneered the first freshman seminar, a zero-credit course to assist students transitioning into the college environment (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2005). Boston College followed
suit six years later with the creation of an extended orientation seminar for students (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2005). In 1911, Reed College integrated the first-year program into their curriculum by offering a freshman seminar for college credit thus beginning a trend that continued across the country for 40 years. In the 1950s, a majority of higher education faculty began questioning the purpose and significance of first-year experience courses. This questioning led higher education administrators to drastically cut or end first-year programs on a majority of college and university campuses. Over the next 20 years, first-year programs were primarily dormant.

The rebirth of first-year programs as an institutional standard did not take place until 1972 when a series of campus riots rocked the University of South Carolina. During the early 1970s, students at the University of South Carolina held protests against the Vietnam War, perceived social injustices, and community issues (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2005). As an educational experiment in response to the campus riots, Thomas Jones, the university president, asked for the development of a course whose primary goal was to build trust and understanding between students, faculty, staff, and administrators while providing an avenue for open communication.

John Gardner, a library sciences professor, developed a course that would eventually become known as the First-Year Experience or FYE. Gardner developed the curriculum to embrace Thomas Jones’s primary goal for the course and established four secondary goals. These secondary goals were to encourage positive student behaviors and attitudes toward the institution, to increase student persistence and graduation rates, to promote the positive impact of higher education on student growth and development, and to improve teaching methods for faculty in undergraduate courses (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and
Students in Transition, 2005). In a recent interview, Gardner defined FYE as “a national and international effort to improve the first-year, the total experience of students – and to do this intentionally and by rethinking the way the first-year was organized and executed” (Schroeder, 2003, p. 10).

Over the last 40 years, first-year programs have expanded at historic rates across the nation’s colleges and universities. Research indicates that 94% of accredited, four-year institutions offer a first-year seminar to their new students as a tool for promoting persistence (Porter & Swing, 2006). Institutional attention to persistence rates and the implementation of first-year programs has emerged for multiple reasons including budgetary concerns, mission fulfillment, reputation enhancement, and a perceived advantage in recruiting and fundraising (Porter & Swing, 2006). In recent years, many colleges and universities have broadened the scope of their first-year programs to include all categories of new students who are in transition, including transfer students. Whether institutions undertake first-year programs for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons, the success of these programs can have a positive impact on the institution and the student (Porter & Swing, 2006).

First-Year Program Purpose and Structure

First-year programs have become a cornerstone in the new student experience on a majority of college campuses. The First-Year Experience course “is the primary opportunity, besides the other orientation activities, for students to learn what a university has to offer” including the academic expectations of the university (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009, p. 442). The First-Year Experience course is designed to assist in the transition to college and in the academic and social development of new students (Hunter & Linder, 2005). The FYE course is typically structured as a seminar where students and instructors share and discuss ideas as to create
community within the classroom (Hunter & Linder, 2005). The institutional motivation for offering such courses is to attract and retain students, enhance a student’s academic success, orient them to campus resources, encourage relationships between students, faculty, and staff, assist students in career planning, and promote persistence to graduation.

The structure and format of the First-Year Experience course varies among institutions. The 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars found that 41.1% of institutions reported extended orientation seminars as their first-year seminar type (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). An academic seminar with uniform content was reported by 16.1% of institutions while an academic seminar with various topics was indicated by 15.4%. Some institutions (8.6%) utilized the First-Year Experience course to develop basic skills or focus on specialized disciplines.

The course objectives and topics for First-Year Experience programs also varied among institutions. The 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars found that the three most reported goals for first-year programs were to develop academic skills for students (54.6%), to develop a connection between the student and the institution (50.2%), and to orient students to campus resources and services (47.6%) (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). While the objectives varied, first-year programs were consistent in the course topics covered among institutions including campus services, academic skills, academic advising, career planning, and critical thinking.

The 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars found that the administrative oversight, course length, and grading also varied among institutions. The survey found that institutions utilized the Office of Academic Affairs (37%) and the Orientation Office/Office for New Student Programs (12%) to provide administrative oversight of first-year programs (National Resource
Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). A majority of institutions (67.8%) indicated that their first-year seminar was one semester in length. Other institutions reported a course length of half a semester (12.6%), one quarter (5.9%), and one year (3.8%). A slight majority of institutions (53.1%) allow the first-year seminar to count as a general education requirement with 39.8% as an elective credit followed by 9.7% as credit within the student’s major (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). The survey also found that a majority of institutions (80.5%) award a letter grade for the course, whereas only 13% reported their course to be graded pass/fail and 4% indicated that their course was not graded.

The 2009 National Survey also examined First-Year Experience program instructors and their compensation and training. The type of instructor varied among institutions and included tenure-track faculty (61.4%), full-time, non-tenure track faculty (54.4%), student affairs administrators (48.2%), adjunct faculty (46%), other campus administrators (29.9%), graduate students (5.6%), and undergraduate students (5.1%) (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). The compensation reported for instructors included stipends, additional leave time, and professional development funding. Training for instructors was offered by 76.1% of institutions with 50.1% requiring all instructors to participate (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). The length of instructor training varied with a majority of institutions requiring one day or less.

While the structure varies between institutions, first-year programs are consistent in their common purpose of supporting new students during their transition into the college environment. First-year seminars are being utilized to orient students to campus resources and services,
connect students with peers, faculty, administrators, and the institution, and increase academic success and persistence for students (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). The focus of first-year seminars on student development and integration, key components of persistence, can be felt not just by the institution but by the students as well.

First-Year Programs and Student Persistence

Retaining students from their freshman year to graduation has become an increasingly pressing issue for most universities. Winston and Sandor (1984) noted that the recruitment and retention of students is a key issue that affects institutional success. University administrators are turning to first-year programs as a tool for retaining students and promoting persistence to graduation. Universities and their administrators “have come to understand the need to both challenge and support the students they admit and make a commitment to help them succeed” (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005, p. 29). The reliance on First-Year Experience programs as a tool to retain students and help them succeed has placed a greater emphasis on these programs and their impact.

The impact of first-year programs has been the focus of numerous research studies in recent years with most studies attempting to define the link between FYE and persistence. An examination of recent research found substantial evidence linking first-year programs to increased persistence from the student’s first to second year of college (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). While studies indicate that the structure and format of first-year programs vary among institutions, the commonality rests in the overarching goal for these programs. The common objective is to increase educational performance and persistence through social and academic
integration leading to increased success and degree attainment for students (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

Recent studies on persistence rates at several four-year public institutions found that students who chose to participate in first-year seminars re-enrolled for their second year at a higher rate (63%) than students who elected not to participate in the seminar (56%) (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). A study cited by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) measured the impact of the seminar by matching program participants and non-participants on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, admission test scores, and high school achievements. The results showed that program participants returned at a higher rate (7% higher) for the second year than non-participants. Another study conducted at a single institution indicated that students who participated in the program re-enrolled for the second year at a higher rate (13% higher) than non-participants.

While retaining students from their first to second year is a key focus of first-year programs, the long-term goal is to increase persistence to graduation. A synthesis of multiple research studies found that students who enrolled in first-year seminars were more likely to earn a degree within four years than non-participants (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). The research indicates an advantage of five to fifteen percentage points for those students who participate in the first-year programs as compared to non-participants. However, it is important to note that these studies did not control for a student’s precollege characteristics that may influence these results. Factors such as grades, educational commitment, and the parent’s educational attainment are likely to be connected with the outcomes of participating in the program (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). When these precollege characteristics are controlled for, the size of the advantage decreases but is still significant (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).
While a number of scholars argue that students who enroll in first-year programs have a common set of characteristics and are predisposed to succeed in college, research suggests that these programs provide a positive benefit to all students. Evidence “indicates that students who have benefited from participation in first-year seminars include both males and females; both minority and majority students; students of various ages; students from various majors; students living on or off campus; and regularly admitted students and at-risk students” (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006, p. 27). Research suggests that first-year programs serve as an all-purpose intervention and method of increasing student persistence to graduation for a majority of students regardless of predisposed factors.

Academic Impact on Students

A majority of students entering higher education share concerns over their preparation and potential for academic success. Research indicates that failing academically is the greatest fear for the majority of students and students report that the single greatest source of stress is academic concerns (Cuseo, 1991). While these academic concerns resonate throughout the college experience, it is particularly impactful for first-year students. Research indicates that the strongest influence on a student’s decision to persist or withdraw is typically their academic performance in their first semester of enrollment, particularly as reflected in their course grades (Guskey, 1988).

The increased academic demands between high school and college cause concern for many new students. Freshmen report that the academic skills required in college are substantially more demanding than those utilized in high school with emphasis on lectures, note-taking, testing, reading, writing, and library research (Cuseo, 1991). He also observed a significant difference in the critical thinking found in postsecondary education, with college
requiring information integration and the qualitative processing and analysis of that information. The emphasis for learning transitions from fact recall and memorization at the secondary level towards analytical analysis, self-reflection, and critical thinking at the postsecondary level.

The academic impact of First-Year Experience programs on students has been shown to be highly successful. Studies confirm “that students who enrolled in freshman-year experience courses tend to complete more credit hours, earn higher cumulative grade point averages, and return to the institutions at higher rates than students who did not enroll in such first-term courses” (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009, p. 435). The impact of first-term courses on student success is consistent across institutions of higher education. Sidle and McReynolds (2009) found that these results occurred even though the students who did not participate in the first-year seminar were often reported to be more academically prepared for college based on high school grades, rankings, and standardized test scores than those students who actually participated in the course. The academic success achieved by students who completed the First-Year Experience course can be attributed to the focus on the development of academic skills within the course.

The First-Year Experience course focuses on developing intellectual and academic competence among the students registered for the course. Many scholars identify intellectual and academic competence for first-year students using three measurements: the completion of first-year coursework with a successful and acceptable grade point average, persistence to the second year, and the development of intellectual skills including critical thinking, problem solving, and reflective judgment (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). The First-Year Experience course attempts to achieve these goals through in-depth discussions on academic skills and learning strategies for the college environment. This focus on intellectual competence includes strategies for lecture comprehension, note taking, reading comprehension, memory
improvement, test taking, library research, and writing term papers and reports. The First-Year Experience program’s focus on higher-order intellectual skills that supports students in achieving higher grade point averages, completing more credit hours, and persistence to graduation at a higher rate than those students who elected to not enroll in the course.

First-year experience programs have been found to produce statistically significant outcomes in academic achievement for students. An examination of the research indicates a consistent finding that the grade-point-averages for students who participated in the course are significantly higher than those achieved by non-participant, matched control groups. In addition, the research suggests that first-year programs can help raise the academic performance of at-risk students as identified by lower high school grade point averages and standardized test scores (Cuseo, 1991). Fidler and Hunter (1989) concluded that the findings indicated that first-year seminars can help academically strong students perform at an even higher level while helping at-risk students just survive academically.

Summary

Since its inception over 130 years ago, first-year programs have become a cornerstone in the new student experience on many college campuses. The first-year seminar is one of the primary opportunities for students to learn what the institution has to offer including the academic expectations (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). FYE has been defined as “a national and international effort to improve the first-year, the total experience of students – and to do this intentionally and by rethinking the way the first-year was organized and executed” (Schroeder, 2003, p.10). Colleges and universities are utilizing first-year programs as a tool to attract and retain students, enhance a student’s academic success, orient students to campus resources,
encourage relationships between students, faculty, and staff, assist students in career planning, and promote persistence to graduation.

Many stakeholders in higher education view student integration and persistence as a responsibility of the institution. They view the purpose of higher education as a way to promote both the cognitive and affective development within students and to prepare them for practical affairs. A majority of institutions have adopted FYE programs as the starting point for new students where they are welcomed, supported, and integrated into the collegiate community (Gardner, 1986). Tinto (1975) theorized that the student’s academic and social integration into the college environment directly relates to whether or not they persist to graduation.

The goal for First-Year Experience programs is to increase academic performance and persistence through social and academic integration leading to increased success and degree attainment for students. Research indicates that these programs have a significant impact on social integration and academic achievement for students. An examination of the research indicates that institutional commitment and persistence are closely associated with social integration among first-year students (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Student peer interactions are a major focus for first-year programs as research suggests that the single most influential source for growth and development during the undergraduate years is a student’s peer group (Astin, 1993).

The research also suggests that first-year programs have a significant effect on academic success and persistence. An examination of the research indicates a consistent finding that students who enroll in first-year seminars have a higher grade point average after completing the course as compared to students who did not participate. A national study on first-year programs found that students who enroll in these courses perform better, are retained, and persist at a
higher rate than students who do not enroll (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2003). A synthesis of multiple studies suggests a positive link between first-year seminars and persistence to graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

While the weight of the research suggests that first-year seminars have a positive impact on students, it is unclear as to what specific aspects of the course content are most associated with this result. An examination of the literature indicates very limited research on the impact of content on new students enrolled in a first-year seminar. This study will explore the relationships between course content and student success and attempt to identify if a connection exists.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine possible relationships between course content and graduation of students enrolled in the First-Year Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. This study compared the three approaches to course content - academic, social, and mixed (a combination of academic and social) - offered through the First-Year Experience program to determine which approach may be associated with higher student graduation. The study compared sections that were similar in terms of the year the course was taught, the number of students enrolled in the course section, and the number of instructors.

The researcher devised a systematic process for the collection, maintenance, and eventual examination of the data. This process began with the identification of the sample to be used for this study. Information was obtained from the University Registrar at Florida State University for students in FYE courses taken over a six year period, 2001-2006. Additional data were then collected from multiple administrative offices within Florida State University. The researcher then examined all the data, conducted an analysis, explored the results, and drew conclusions. These research methods used are described below and detail the systematic method used to explore the association between course content and student graduation.

First-Year-Experience Program at FSU

The First-Year Experience Program at Florida State University was described as a “fun and informative seminar” designed to help new students learn about the many resources available to them while providing skills necessary to become successful at Florida State University (First-Year Experience Program, 2005). The course was designed to help new students in learning about the university, their peers, and themselves (First-Year Experience
Established during the Fall semester of 1992 as a zero-credit course, FYE was initially designed to assist new students as they transitioned into the university by providing a series of informal discussions with campus representatives.

University administrators acknowledged the success of the program in 1997 and began devoting additional resources to FYE. The additional resources led to the redesign of the First-Year Experience course and the establishment of a clear set of objectives focused on student success at Florida State University. While the purpose of the seminar remained extended orientation, the content was formalized with academic, uniform, and variable topics. The oversight of the FYE Program remained with the Dean of Students Office for the university. The course structure was also redesigned with the course becoming a nine-week, one-credit course that was graded on a pass/fail basis. The course instructors included faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate “peer leaders” from within Florida State University. Training for the instructors varied based on teaching experience and ranged in length from half-a-day to three days. The course was offered exclusively to incoming first-year students during the summer and Fall semesters with enough sections to accommodate over 35% of all incoming freshmen.

The mission of the First-Year Experience program at Florida State University was to: facilitate transition to college, promote academic and personal success at FSU and beyond, and facilitate holistic student development. The facilitation of the holistic student was defined by the FYE Office to include development in responsible freedom, leadership, diversity, positive personal relationships, and civic and global responsibility. The goal of the course as stated by the First-Year Experience Office (2005) was to achieve the following five objectives for students:

1. To introduce students to an education based in the liberal arts.
2. To recognize and respect the dignity and worth of each person and the requirements for successful community life.

3. To acquire academic survival skills

4. To challenge the student to become involved and in avenues in the university community for the development of the whole person.

5. To develop a support group for successful transition

(The full mission and detailed goals for the FYE program can be found in Appendix A.)

The First-Year Experience program at Florida State University experienced a major setback in 2008. The State of Florida faced with a downturn in the economy and ballooning expenditures, made drastic reductions to higher education funding and the state university system. These reductions totaled more than 78 million in recurring funds for Florida State University alone. The university was forced to make reductions in order to deal with the loss of funding – some of which were passed along to individual departments or areas where faculty and entire academic programs were removed. The Dean of Students Office faced budget reductions as well and the decision was made to discontinue the First-Year Experience program. This decision was not an easy one for anyone involved and was made with the hope that once the budget crisis ended, that the opportunity would exist to resurrect the program. Recently, the Dean of Students Office held discussions around bringing the program back but in a slightly different format.

Population

The participants for this study were students who completed the First-Year Experience course at Florida State University during the Fall of their first year in college. The population for this study included all students who completed the First-Year Experience course since the
program’s implementation in 1992 through 2007. It was determined that data were incomplete on the First-Year Experience courses prior to 2001 and for the 2007 academic year. Therefore, the study only examined students who completed the course during the Fall 2001-2006 academic semesters. Prior to this study, it was estimated that this period of time would provide a sample of 3,500 students for this study.

Data Collection

This study included data maintained by the Florida State University Registrar, the First-Year-Experience Office, and the Office of Institutional Research as part of their operational responsibilities. The student data used in the study were collected through the student registration process conducted each semester by the University Registrar and accessed by both the University Registrar and Office of Institutional Research. This study did not utilize surveys, tests, or other instruments. Nor did the study involve the interview of any subjects or use any data that would allow identification of an individual student. All data were archival in nature.

The University Registrar and Office of Institutional Research provided enrollment data by section and year for all students enrolled in the FYE courses offered during the Fall terms between 2001-2006 academic years. These enrollment data included the number of students who completed the course for each course section. At the request of the researcher, the University Registrar and Office of Institutional Research also compared university records against the roster of each course section to determine the number of students from each course section who graduated from the university within six years. These two data sets were grouped by year and course section. The resulting data set provided the data necessary to determine the percentage of students who persisted to graduation within six years for each FYE section.
The study also examined the focus of and approach to the course content and several
course-related characteristics. These course-related characteristics included the number of
instructors per course section, the size of the course section, and the year in which the course was
taught. Archival data from the First-Year Experience Office on the course-related characteristics
were collected and analyzed by the researcher. The FYE Office maintained a database that
provided information on each section of the course including these characteristics.

The FYE Office archives also provided an electronic and/or hard copy of each syllabus
from the 2001-2006 Fall academic terms. The FYE staff required that each instructional team
submit their final course syllabus to the FYE Office for review prior to the start of the academic
semester in which the section was taught. Each syllabus was then kept on file at the FYE Office.
It should be noted that while syllabi were viewed and evaluated by the FYE Office prior to the
start of the semester, students were not able to view the syllabus until after registering for the
course and the instructors’ publishing the syllabus to the official section’s website on or near the
first day of class.

Procedures

To assemble the necessary data, the University Registrar and Office of Institutional
Research were asked to provide the researcher with an Excel spreadsheet with data on each FYE
course section for the 2001-2006 Fall academic terms. The researcher requested that the
spreadsheet have four columns of data that included the year the course was taught in column
one, the section number of the course in column two, the number of students who completed the
course in column three, and the number of those students who graduated from the university
within six years in column four. The researcher received the data as requested and then created a
fifth column for graduation percentage. The value for this column was determined for each
section by taking the number of students who graduated within six years and dividing it by the total number of students enrolled.

The First-Year Experience Office data were examined in detail by the researcher to identify sections that contained incomplete syllabi. A syllabus was considered incomplete if the course schedule, course assignments, or grading information was not contained in the syllabus submitted to the FYE Office. If the examination of the course syllabus determined that the syllabus was incomplete, the section was not used for the study.

The researcher also reviewed First-Year Experience Office data in order to identify sections that were not considered standard. The standard course enrollment was between 10 and 32 students. Sections with a course size either smaller than 10 or larger than 32 were excluded from the study. The standard number of teachers for this course was one to two instructors and one peer leader. Instructors were faculty, staff, or graduate students. Sections with more than two instructors or sections with more than one peer leader were not included in this study. The sections to be excluded from the study, based on the criteria listed above, were identified by year and section number and deleted from the spreadsheet.

Next, a sample of the syllabi was examined in order to create a course content rubric. The sample included eight syllabi chosen at random for each year between 2001-2006, yielding a total of 48 syllabi over a six-year period. Four categories were identified by which to score the syllabi. The four categories were course theme (the design and approach to the syllabus by the instructors), course schedule (the topics and/or activities for each class meeting), focus of assignments (the type and frequency of the assignments), and weight of grading (the percentage of each assignment used to determine the final grade).
This analysis allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the syllabi across the four categories to identify shifts between academic, mixed, and social content. The identification of where these differences in content occurred within each syllabus was then written into a rubric to create a set of criteria for each category with corresponding point values (see Table 1). The point values range from 1 (social) to 5 (academic).

A second sample with only the 33 course syllabi from 2003 was then used to create a point system based on content shifts from social to mixed to academic. The researcher scored each syllabus based on the rubric. Syllabi were then arranged by point total and analyzed to determine where the shift from social to mixed to academic occurred. This process allowed the researcher to set parameters for coding each syllabus based on the categories.

An overall score code of 1 to 2.5 indicated that the course content was more socially focused and the section was coded as “social.” Syllabi that were coded as “social” typically had a theme throughout with the schedule and assignments focused on group activities, class discussions, and social events. An overall score code of 3.5 to 5 indicated that the course content was more academically focused and the section was coded as “academic.” Syllabi that were coded as “academic” typically had no course theme with the schedule and assignments focused on quizzes, multiple papers, and individual presentations. A score of 2.75 to 3.25 indicated that the course content was both academically and socially focused and the section was coded as “mixed.”

With the rubric and the point system created, the remaining syllabi from 2001-2006 were then reviewed based on the established criteria (course theme, course schedule, focus of assignments, and weight of grading) and assigned a point value between 1 and 5 for each category. The values for the four categories were then added together and divided by four to
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<tr>
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<td>Social events/activities, group presentations, group participation</td>
<td>Textbook and readings, research papers and presentations, group participation</td>
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### Course Schedule

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### Focus of Assignments

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### Weights of Grading

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<tr>
<td>Group discussions, group participation, social journals</td>
<td>Social events/activities, group presentations, group participation</td>
<td>Textbook and readings, research papers and presentations, group participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course syllabi is formatted and presented completely around a theme except for required verbiage</td>
<td>Course syllabi is formatted and presented partially around a theme except for required verbiage</td>
<td>Course syllabi is formatted and presented non-academically, without a theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading is weighted over 75% on attendance, class participation, social journals, and group activities</td>
<td>Grading is weighted over 60% on attendance, class participation, social journals, and group activities</td>
<td>Grading is weighted over 50% on assigned papers, research papers, and presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
determine an overall score for each course section.

Six new columns were then added to the Excel spreadsheet containing the data from the University Registrar and the Office of Institutional Research. The first four of these columns were labeled with the four categories from the rubric (course theme for column six, course schedule for column seven, focus of assignments for column eight, and weight of grading for column nine) and the determined point values were entered for each syllabus. Column 10 was labeled “overall score” and the determined value for each syllabus was entered into the spreadsheet. Column 11 was labeled “overall code” and the corresponding code based on the overall score was entered for each section.

The Excel spreadsheet was then sorted by year and then by overall coded score. The data were then combined by year and overall code resulting in three data sets per year so that a data set was created for academic, mixed, and social. As a next step, a chi-square analysis was used to examine the data sets by year. The chi-square analysis was used to determine if significant differences existed within the data sets.

It was the intent of the analysis to examine the differences between sets with the eventual goal of identifying best practices that would result in ways to promote increased student graduation through appropriate course content. In other words, if academic focused syllabi resulted in higher graduation rates, it would be clear that more syllabi should emphasize an “academic” approach. In addition, the analysis may provide suggestions on how institutions can better assist students as they transitioned into the collegiate environment and assist institutions to improve retention and persistence generally.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the course content and graduation of students enrolled in the First-Year Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. This study compared the three approaches to course content, academic, social, and mixed, as offered through the First-Year Experience program between 2001-2006 to determine which approach is associated with higher student graduation. This study compared sections with similar course-related characteristics to minimize the influence of outside factors on the results.

The participants for this study were groups of students who completed the First-Year Experience course at Florida State University during the Fall semester of their first year in college. Originally, it was thought that the sample for this study would include all students who completed the First-Year Experience course from the program’s first implementation in 1992 through its final year in 2007 when the program was eliminated due to budget constraints within the university and the state of Florida. After a detailed review of the available data, however, it was determined that data were incomplete for the First-Year Experience courses prior to 2001 and for the 2007 academic year. Therefore, this study was limited to the data for those students who completed the course during the Fall 2001-2006 academic semesters.

Using quantitative data analysis to compare the course content of individual course sections of the FYE program by using the coding schema, academic, social, or mixed, to determine which approach, if any, has a greater association with student graduation was the primary focus of this study. As a result, the study attempted to evaluate the course content to determine which, if any, approach had a relationship with graduation. A secondary outcome of the study was to highlight effective practices and suggest opportunities for improvement in the administration of first-year seminars.
As noted earlier in the study by Porter and Swing (2006), obtaining a better understanding of which aspects of FYE courses relate to greater graduation might help instructors in making decisions about where to place emphasis in their courses. The insight gained from this study might suggest changes to the structure and content of First-Year Experience programs and provide ideas on how institutions could encourage stronger persistence for students.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between course content and the graduation of students who completed the First-Year Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. This study compared the three approaches to course content - academic, social, and mixed (a combination of social and academic) - offered through the FYE program to determine which approach is associated with higher student graduation. Sections with similar course-related characteristics were utilized for the study in order to minimize the influence of outside factors on the results.

Population

The participants for this study were students who had completed the First-Year Experience course at Florida State University during the Fall of their first year in college between the 2001 and 2006 academic years. From 2001 to 2006, there were 264 sections of the FYE program offered with a total enrollment of 5,743 students. This study examined FYE course sections with similar course characteristics including the year the course was taught, the number of students enrolled per section, and the number of instructors. The researcher conducted an analysis of each course section and its characteristics and eliminated sections with incomplete syllabi or non-standard characteristics as described in Chapter 3. After eliminating those sections, a final sample of 167 sections of the FYE course taught between the years 2001 and 2006 with a total enrollment of 3,377 students was examined.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study included data maintained by the Florida State University Registrar, the First-Year Experience Office, and the Office of Institutional Research as part of their operational
responsibilities. The student data used in the study were collected through the student registration process conducted each semester by the University Registrar and accessed by both the University Registrar and Office of Institutional Research. This study did not utilize surveys, tests, or other instruments nor did it involve the interview of any subjects. All data for the study were archival in nature and used in aggregate. None of the data employed for the study would identify individual students.

The Florida State University Registrar and Office of Institutional Research provided enrollment data by section for the FYE courses offered for the Fall 2001-2006 academic terms. This data included the year the course was taught, the course section number, the total number of students enrolled for each section, and the number of students from each section who persisted to graduation within six years. For each section, the number of students who persisted to graduation within six years was divided by the total number of students enrolled to determine the percentage of students who graduated for each section of the course. The University Registrar and Office of Institutional Research provided data for 264 sections of the First-Year Experience course from 2001 to 2006 with an enrollment of 5,743 students.

The Florida State University Dean of Students Office, where the FYE program had been housed, provided data on each course section from 2001 to 2006. This course data included the syllabus for each course section, the number of instructors, the year the course was taught, and the course section number. This study examined 167 of the 264 sections of the course and 3,377 of the 5,743 students who enrolled in the course. The difference in the total number of sections and the number of sections utilized for this study is based on the syllabus, course size, and number of instructors. Course syllabi were analyzed for each section. In some cases, syllabi were determined to be incomplete. For those sections, the course size was either very large (over
100) or very small (fewer than 8). In other cases, the number of instructors varied from the norm for the course. These sections were viewed as outliers and were excluded from the study to minimize the influence of extraneous factors on the results.

Each retained course syllabus was then evaluated based on the course content rubric (see Table 1) to determine if it was academically focused, socially focused, or mixed. The rubric assessed each syllabus on four criteria: course theme, course schedule, focus of assignments, and grading. A point value was assigned based on the rubric for each of the four criteria. The values for the categories in the rubric were added together and divided by four to determine an overall score for each course section. A syllabus with a score of 1 to 2.5 was determined to be based on social content, a score of 3.5 to 5 was determined to be based on academic content, and a score of 2.75 to 3.25 was determined to be both academic and social content or mixed. An example of a syllabus coded as “social” may be found in Appendix B, an “academic” syllabus in Appendix C, and a “mixed” syllabus in Appendix D.

The data collected by the Florida State University Registrar and the Office of Institutional Research were then combined with the course content evaluation data. Six new columns were added to the Excel spreadsheet containing the data from the University Registrar and the Office of Institutional Research. The first four of these columns were labeled with the four categories from the syllabus evaluation rubric: course theme for column six, course schedule for column seven, focus of assignments for column eight, and weight of grading for column nine. Point values were entered for each syllabus. The first of the remaining two columns, column 10, was labeled “overall score” and the determined value for each syllabus was entered into the spreadsheet. Column 11 was labeled “overall code” and the corresponding code based on the overall score was entered for each section.
The Excel spreadsheet was first sorted by year and then by overall coded score. The data was then combined by year and overall code resulting in three data sets per year so a data set was created for academic, mixed, and social. Next, a chi-square analysis was used to examine the data sets for each year. Chi-square analysis was used to determine if significant differences existed within the data sets. An examination of the syllabi with a statistically significant difference was conducted to identify best practices that would result in ways to promote increased student graduation through appropriate course content. In addition, the analysis was presumed to provide information on how to better assist students as they transitioned into the collegiate environment and to determine if the results might help to improve retention and persistence generally.

Results

The study examined 167 sections of the First-Year Experience course with an enrollment of 3,377 students for the Fall terms during the 2001-2006 academic years. The number of sections and students utilized per year for the study is shown in Table 2. The sections were first sorted by year and then by overall coded score. The data were then combined by year and overall code resulting in three data sets per year so a data set was created for academic, mixed, and social.

A chi-square analysis was used to examine the data sets by year to determine if any results were statistically significant. The analysis was conducted for each year comparing graduation rates for the three course content groups. The results for the chi-square analysis indicated that statistically significant results were only found in two of the years studied. A statistically significant difference was found in 2001 between the socially focused course content
and the mixed (both academic and social) course content (see Table 3). The result was significant at p<0.05 with a p value of 0.028 and a chi-square statistic of 4.819.

Table 2 – FYE Data Utilized for Study by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>#/Sections</th>
<th>#/Students</th>
<th>#/Students Graduated</th>
<th>Graduation %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 – Chi-Square Analysis Comparing Graduation and Course Content Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Social vs. Academic</th>
<th>Social vs. Mixed</th>
<th>Academic vs. Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>4.819*</td>
<td>1.9571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1.1427</td>
<td>7.6254*</td>
<td>4.2171*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1.1054</td>
<td>0.0381</td>
<td>0.9103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1.1371</td>
<td>0.0273</td>
<td>0.6482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1.3181</td>
<td>0.0147</td>
<td>1.8886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.5819</td>
<td>0.3675</td>
<td>0.0165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant results at p<0.05

Statistically significant differences were also found in 2002 between the socially focused course content and the mixed content and between the academically focused content and the mixed content. For the social vs. mixed content, the result was found significant at p<0.05 with a p value of 0.006 and a chi-square statistic of 7.6254 (see Table 3). For the academic vs. mixed
content, the result was found significant at p<0.05 with a p value of 0.040 and a chi-square statistic of 4.2171 (see Table 3). The full chi-square analysis and results can be found in Appendices E-J. Comparisons of graduation percentages were then made between students who participated in FYE, non-participants, and the overall student population for each year (see Table 4).

Table 4 – Graduation Percentage for FYE Coded Sections, Non-Participants, and All Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FYE - Social Graduation %</th>
<th>FYE - Mixed Graduation %</th>
<th>FYE - Academic Graduation %</th>
<th>Non-FYE Graduation %</th>
<th>All Student Graduation %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for this study found that the sections coded as “social” had a higher student graduation percentage than sections that were coded “academic” in each year. In addition, sections that were coded social also had a higher graduation percentage than sections coded as mixed except in 2005. A comparison of the mixed and academic sections found that from 2003-2006, mixed sections had a higher graduation percentage as compared to academic sections.

The study also compared the graduation percentages for the coded sections to the overall student population and the non-FYE participants. The FYE sections, on average, had a higher graduation percentage among students as compared to non-participants and the overall student population. Further analysis found that the socially focused sections had a higher graduation percentage for students as compared to non-participants and the overall student population.
These results generally support the literature and prior research in finding that first-year seminars encourage persistence to graduation among students who participate in the course as compared to non-participants.

The chi-square analysis determined that statistically significant differences existed in the 2001 and 2002 data sets, specifically between the social and mixed sections in 2001, the social and mixed sections in 2002, and the academic and mixed sections in 2002. As noted previously, the researcher was unaware of any structural or formative changes to the FYE program during the years examined for this study. These differences raised questions as to what specific aspects of the course led to this result. An examination and comparison of the syllabi during the years 2001 and 2002 provided insight into what aspects of the course content were most associated with higher student graduation.

Analysis of Syllabi

The syllabi from the years 2001 and 2002 where statistically significant results were found were examined and comparisons drawn. The syllabi were grouped by year and then by overall code before being examined by the researcher. Each syllabus was analyzed in order to identify differences in the syllabi for that year which may help to explain the statistical differences previously identified.

2001: Social vs. Mixed

An examination of the eight socially coded syllabi and the six mixed coded syllabi discovered numerous differences between the syllabi. The presentation or look of the syllabi was the first noticeable difference. Syllabi coded as “social” had a central theme and utilized images (pictures) and graphics throughout (see Appendix B). In three cases, the syllabi utilized both a course theme and images. An example of the themes used in the socially coded syllabi
included Garnet & Gold Challenge, the ABCs of College, and the Weakest Link. The syllabi were also determined to have images and graphics either directly related to the course theme or to Florida State University. The utilization of specific fonts and Word Art not typically found in academic syllabi was also common in socially coded syllabi. The font used in a majority of the social syllabi was Comic Sans, a cartoonish font with a relaxed appearance.

Course themes, images, and graphics were not discovered in any of the syllabi coded as “mixed.” These syllabi included the required information for the course (course description, policies, requirements, grading, schedule) but did not include any other information. These syllabi were presented in a plain, somewhat sterile manner typical for an academic setting. The font choices were also identified as typical of an academic setting with five of the six syllabi utilizing Times New Roman font as opposed to Comic Sans font that was often found in the “social” syllabi.

The activities and schedule for the socially coded syllabi included multiple opportunities for peer interaction and group bonding, especially in the beginning of the course. The activities described in these syllabi included experiences to engage in together (bowling, pizza parties, attending a cultural or sporting event, meeting for lunch, community service, and scavenger hunts around campus) and opportunities to learn about one another (ice breakers, sharing opportunities focused on who they are and their experiences, and group projects that explore their leadership or personality type).

In a majority of these syllabi, the schedule was structured with many of these socially focused activities taking place in the first four weeks and utilizing the entire class period. The remaining five weeks of class sessions concentrated on campus resources, academic skills, and other topics. This is not to say that the socially focused activities were limited to the first four
weeks as a majority of these sections utilized small icebreakers and other short social activities on a regular basis throughout the course. These syllabi typically had four or more social activities scheduled during their nine-week session and did not cover all of the topics from the textbook during class time. In addition, two of the syllabi had meetings with no topics and allowed the students to select a topic of interest for them that would be covered during the session.

The activities and schedules for the mixed coded syllabi had limited social activities with more attention directed towards specific topics found in the required textbook for the course (see Appendix D). No more than two social activities (ice breakers and scavenger hunts) were identified in these syllabi and three syllabi contained no social activities at all. Topics from the textbook appeared to dominate the activities with a majority of the syllabi covering all content areas from the FYE textbook. A majority of these syllabi covered topics in a random order. The topics were not grouped by area (academic, personal health, campus resources, etc.) and instead were interspersed throughout the schedule. In syllabi coded “mixed” that included a social activity, the social event was scheduled later in the semester but were not included in the first four weeks of the course.

An examination of the assignments listed in social syllabi indicated a focus on group projects, self-reflection, and learning from one another. Presenting on campus resources and leading discussions on topic areas from the textbook were examples of group projects found in these syllabi. Self-reflection was another component identified in social syllabi as represented by weekly journals, personal assessments, scrapbooks, and letters to future first-year students.

A majority of the social syllabi indicated that these assignments were designed to provide students an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and transition into the college
environment. In particular, the weekly journals were typically guided by questions that prompted students to reflect on their experiences, relationships, and feelings. These journals were not focused on research, not directly related to classroom topics, and were usually 1-2 pages in length. An additional component of these syllabi was on peer-to-peer learning where students research topic areas in groups and facilitate classroom discussions on the material. Extra credit opportunities were also found in two of the eight socially coded syllabi.

Assignments from mixed syllabi were inclined to be more academic in nature and included tests, papers, and individual presentations. Quizzes and tests were common in these syllabi with three of the six utilizing quizzes and one a final examination. All of the syllabi required students to write papers on topics from the textbook or class meetings. These papers replaced the reflective journals typically found in the social syllabi in all but one of the sections where students were required to do both. In two of the syllabi, students were required to write a research paper of five to eight pages on current topics affecting students in college. Individual presentations were also required of students and concentrated on topics and chapters from the FYE textbook. Group projects were not part of the assignments for five of the six mixed syllabi.

An examination of the instructional approach and language in the syllabi found differences between the social and mixed sections. The instructional approach in socially coded syllabi sought to facilitate class discussions on topics in order to promote peer-to-peer and instructor-to-student learning. These syllabi focused away from the lecture style typically found in the academic setting. The language choices discovered in the socially coded syllabi were very inviting, welcoming, and supportive with a sense of excitement throughout the document. The instructional approach identified in mixed coded syllabi focused on the lecture method of
teaching even when students were presenting on topics. The language choices in the mixed syllabi were very sterile and calm but still felt supportive of the students.

**2002: Social vs. Academic vs. Mixed**

An examination of the eight syllabi coded as social, the four coded as mixed, and the twelve academic syllabi found multiple differences between the categories of syllabi. The first and most noticeable difference initially was the presentation and look of the syllabi. Social syllabi typically utilized a course theme or pictures throughout with four of the eight syllabi utilizing both. The course themes focused on team challenges, game shows, movies, and the history of Florida State University. These syllabi often used pictures and graphics either directly related to the main theme or to the university. The social syllabi used specific fonts, e.g. Comic Sans, and Word Art not typically found in academic syllabi.

All syllabi coded as “academic” did not contain a course theme, pictures, or images (see Appendix C). The syllabi included the required information for the course (course description, policies, requirements, grading, schedule) but did not include any additional information and were presented in a plain, sterile manner consistent with syllabi in academia. The font choices were also identified as typical of an academic setting with ten of the syllabi utilizing Times New Roman font.

The mixed syllabi were discovered to be more comparable to the academic syllabi than the social. The syllabi typically were without any pictures or course themes. Two of the four mixed syllabi did include graphics or Clip Art. Similar to the academic sections, the syllabi included only the required information for the course (course description, policies, requirements, grading, schedule) and were presented in a plain, sterile manner typically found in an academic
syllabus for a regular course. The font choices were also determined to be characteristic of an academic setting with five of the six syllabi utilizing Times New Roman font.

The activities and schedule for the syllabi coded as “social” included multiple opportunities for peer interaction and group bonding. The activities found in these syllabi can be divided into two areas: group engagement experiences that included bowling, pizza parties, attending a cultural event, community service, and scavenger hunts; and opportunities to learn about one another that included ice breakers, team building exercises, personality exercises, and opportunities to share about their experiences and background.

The schedule was structured for a majority of the social syllabi with the first three weeks of the course dedicated to social activities. While the remaining six weeks did not focus as intently on social activities, six of the eight sections utilized icebreakers, group exercises, and other interactive opportunities on a weekly basis throughout the remainder of the course. Two of the syllabi utilized the university’s ropes course as a team building exercise for students. These syllabi consistently had four or more social activities scheduled during their nine-week session. A majority of the sections assigned out of class readings in order to cover all of the topics from the textbook. In addition, five of the syllabi had dates on the schedule with no topics where the students were allowed to select a topic of interest that would be covered during those sessions.

Academically coded syllabi focused on topics from the textbook and skill development in their activities and schedule. A majority of these syllabi covered all topics from the textbook with an intense concentration on the development of academic skills, time management, and career planning. These academic skills included topics on learning styles, note and test taking, writing papers, library research, and academic integrity. The academic syllabi were determined to be without social activities in ten of the twelve syllabi and in those two cases, the social events
were limited to one each. The schedule for these syllabi was consistently grouped by topic and
delineated into three areas: campus resources, academic skills, and career planning. The
schedules for these syllabi occurred as very organized and systematic.

The activities and schedule for the syllabi coded as mixed directed attention towards
topics from the textbook while having minimal social activities. Each of the syllabi had one
social event planned and included bowling or attending a cultural event. The syllabi covered a
majority of topic areas found in the FYE textbook but did not cover all of them. The topics were
not grouped by area (academic, personal health, campus resources, etc.) and instead were
randomly interspersed throughout the schedule. Each section’s social activity was scheduled
during the semester but was not found in the first four weeks for any of the syllabi.

An examination of the assignments discovered in socially coded syllabi indicated a focus
on self-reflection, group projects, and learning from one another. Self-reflection was a major
component of social syllabi as indicated by weekly journals, personal assessments, photo
collages, and experience notebooks. These assignments, as stated in the syllabi, were designed
to provide students an opportunity to examine their transition into college and their new
relationships, experiences, and evolving beliefs. In particular, the weekly journals were typically
guided by questions that prompted students to reflect on their experiences, relationships, and
feelings. These journals were not focused on research or directly related to classroom materials.
Another component of these syllabi was group projects that included presentations on campus
resources, interviewing campus leaders, and leading class discussions on topics from the
textbook.

Syllabi coded as academic concentrated their assignments on academic skill development
and academic success. These assignments included tests, papers, individual presentations, and
other scholastically related projects. Tests and quizzes were utilized by five of the syllabi and focused on content from the textbook. Eleven of the twelve sections required a research paper that further explored a topic area and required prior approval by the instructor.

Journals were also a requirement in a majority of these syllabi. However, the journal requirement was more academic in nature as compared to the reflective, personal journals found in social syllabi. These journals, as indicated in the syllabi, provided an opportunity for students to explore and analyze topics covered during class or in their readings. Individual presentations were also identified in seven of these syllabi and were research based. In four of these cases, a research paper was the emphasis of the presentation. Several of these syllabi made use of additional academically related assignments during the semester. These individual assignments included visiting the academic help centers on campus, interviewing a faculty member, completing a self-directed search, and creating a portfolio that included their resume, coursework, leadership activities, awards, and community service reports.

Assignments from mixed syllabi were determined to be a hybrid of academic and social syllabi. Tests and quizzes were common in these syllabi along with papers on topics from the textbook or class meetings. These papers did not replace but were in addition to the reflective journals. Two of the syllabi required students to write a research paper of six to eight pages on a content topic. Individual presentations were also required of students in the mixed coded sections and concentrated on topics from the FYE textbook. Group projects were not part of the assignments in any of the mixed coded syllabi.

An examination of the instructional approach and language in the syllabi revealed differences between the coded groups. The instructional approach, as outlined in socially coded syllabi, was to facilitate class discussions in order to promote peer-to-peer and instructor-to-
student learning. The language choices discovered in the socially coded syllabi were very inviting, welcoming, and supportive with a feeling of excitement throughout. The instructional approach found in mixed and academically coded syllabi utilized the lecture method of teaching even when students were presenting on topics. The language choices in these syllabi were very succinct and calm but still felt supportive of the students.

Findings from the Syllabi

The examination of syllabi identified consistent findings by coded group for the syllabi and between years. Socially coded syllabi were found to utilize a central theme, graphics, or both in the design and presentation of the syllabi. Activities for socially coded syllabi focused on opportunities for group interactions and engagement and were a focus of the first four weeks of the course. While other topics were focused on during the remaining weeks, social activities remained a consistent part of the schedule for these sections. Social syllabi focused assignments on group projects, self-reflection, and peer-to-peer learning.

Syllabi coded as mixed did not make use of themes and rarely utilized graphics or images. The activities and schedule concentrated on topics from the textbook with limited to no social activities during the semester. A majority of these syllabi scheduled topics and activities in a random order. For mixed coded syllabi, the assignments were individually focused and included tests, papers, and presentations. The lecture method was typically utilized in these sections as the instructional approach and occurred even when students were presenting material.

Academic syllabi never utilized a theme, graphics, or images and presented material in a sterile and plain manner. These syllabi focused on topics from the textbook with concentrated attention directed towards academic skill development and career planning. The schedule was structured in a methodical manner and delineated into the areas of campus resources, academic
skills, and career planning. Assignments identified in these syllabi included tests, research papers, individual presentations, and other academic and career planning projects. Similar to the mixed syllabi, the lecture method was acknowledged as the instructional approach in these sections.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between course content and the graduation of students who completed the First-Year Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. This study compared the three approaches to course content - academic, social, and mixed (both academic and social) - offered through the First-Year Experience program to determine which approach is associated with higher student graduation. This study compared sections with similar course-related characteristics to minimize the influence of outside factors on the results. This study analyzed 167 sections of the FYE course during the 2001 to 2006 Fall academic semesters with a total student enrollment of 3,377.

An analysis found statistically significant results in 2001 between social and mixed, in 2002 between social and mixed, and in 2002 between academic and mixed. An examination was then conducted comparing the syllabi for these years and groups to identify differences. An analysis of these findings will identify best practices for course content within first-year programs. A discussion of the course content and how it relates to students in transition and their academic success will provide insight into how institutions can better support students and promote persistence to graduation among these students.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between course content and the graduation of students who completed the First-Year Experience (FYE) program at Florida State University. This study compared three categories of course content as contained in the FYE course syllabi over a six-year period. Those categories were defined as academic, social, and mixed (containing both academic and social content). The study attempted to determine which category, if any, might be related to higher graduation rates among students who participated in FYE. To minimize the influence of outside factors, the study compared course sections with similar course-related characteristics, e.g. the year the course was taught, the number of students enrolled in the course section, and the number of instructors. The study analyzed data taken from 167 course sections of FYE over a six-year period from the 2001 to 2006. These course sections were taught in the Fall semesters of each year to a total of 3,377 first-year students.

The study determined that a relationship appears to exist between the course content and the graduation of students in the First-Year Experience program. In particular, the data analysis conducted in the study found that course sections coded as “social” had a higher graduation percentage each year than sections coded as “academic.” Course sections coded as social were also found to have higher student graduation when compared to the sections coded as “mixed” with the exception of the course sections offered in 2005.

The analysis of the syllabi also compared the graduation percentage for the FYE sections to the graduation percentage for the overall student population as well as to those students who did not participate in FYE. On average, students who participated in FYE had a higher graduation percentage when compared to non-participants and a higher percentage than the
overall student population. These results are generally supported by the literature and prior research that suggest that first-year seminars encourage persistence to graduation among students who participate in the course as compared to non-participants.

Students enrolled in course sections of FYE that used syllabi coded as “social” consistently had a higher graduation percentage as compared to non-participants and higher than the overall student population. FYE course sections that used syllabi coded as “academic” had a higher graduation percentage for enrolled students as compared to non-participants and higher than the overall student population in all years except 2005. Students enrolled in FYE course sections that used syllabi coded as “mixed” had a higher graduation percentage as compared to non-participants and higher than the overall student population in years 2003 – 2006 but was lower in 2001 and 2002.

Suggestions for Course Content

First-year programs on many campuses provide students with the opportunity to learn what the institution has to offer, how to engage with the campus through various activities and organizations, and delineate what is expected of students in terms of academic as well as non-academic opportunities (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). The FYE course is intentionally designed to assist students with the transition into college and to promote their social and academic development (Hunter & Linder, 2005). Tinto (1975) theorized that the student’s academic and social integration into the campus culture directly relates to their decision to continue at the institution. An examination of the FYE syllabi in the study provided deeper insight into how first-year programs address social integration, academic integration, and the transition process for new students. These insights offer further suggestions on how first-year programs can more effectively support students in transition and encourage their persistence to graduation.
An inclusion of and focus on social activities appears to be a key component for first-year programs and one that promotes persistence among students. Research indicates that social integration among first-year students is closely associated with institutional commitment and persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Many institutions have specifically designed first-year programs to promote positive peer interactions as a means to establish group bonding and affiliation for students (Barefoot, 2000). First-year programs utilize icebreakers, team exercises, group projects, and class experiences to promote greater interaction among students. These social activities are important for social integration and help new students assimilate and feel connected to other students but also to the instructors of the course. As was noted in Chapter 4, social activities should be a key focus of all FYE course sections at the beginning of the course and persist throughout the semester.

Creating a sense of community in the classroom is another key aspect of the FYE experience for students in first-year seminars. The classroom is often the first place that new students find a sense of community. By design, the FYE experience often serves as a springboard for establishing new relationships (Fleming, et. al., 2005). Research indicates that new students benefit more from classes that actively engage them in the learning process and promote interaction and participation (Fleming, et. al., 2005). Peer-to-peer and instructor-to-student interactions are essential in the integration of students to the institution on a social and academic level and in the creation of a sense of belonging between the student and the institution. First-year seminars need to actively engage participants where students are able to discuss ideas and interact with one another on both a social and academic level. This can be accomplished through the utilization of shared experiences and peer-to-peer engagement where students are able to learn about and with each other.
First-year programs also play a key role in assisting students with their transition into the college environment. Students face a number of academic, personal, and environmental challenges as they transition into the collegiate environment (Fleming, et. al., 2005). Colleges and universities have an ethical responsibility to the students they admit to support and encourage them (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). As such, institutions must find ways, such as FYE programs, that facilitate opportunities for new students to explore their experiences and needs during this time (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). First-year seminars can assist students with this challenging transition by providing opportunities for students to reflect on their feelings, experiences, and beliefs and how those are changing for them. Many FYE programs are designed to use reflective journals with specific prompts that promote self-reflection and the exploration of evolving principles and opinions for students. Personal assessments, scrapbooks, and other self-reflective activities can also be utilized within these programs to support students with their transition into the collegiate environment.

Promoting academic success and educating students on campus resources is another component of successful first-year programs. Research indicates that a large percentage of institutions approach first-year seminars as an extended orientation that encourages the development of academic skills and informs students of the campus resources and services available to them (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2012). These courses need to include academic skills and learning strategies for the college environment in their curriculum. This focus on intellectual competence includes strategies for lecture comprehension, note taking, reading comprehension, memory improvement, test taking, library research, and writing term papers and reports. First-year seminars can also serve to educate students on available resources and support services at the
institution. Many first-year courses bring in speakers from these groups or make class visits to these campus offices as a way to introduce the students to these resources.

First-year programs attempt to serve a lot of functions and to play a key role for new students at many colleges and universities. These programs are designed to assist students with their transition into the college community, promote their academic and social development, and provide tools and resources for their academic success (Hunter & Linder, 2005). Research indicates that first-year programs do demonstrate success in increasing student persistence and encouraging higher graduation rates (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). By utilizing social activities, creating community, supporting the transition process, and educating on skills and resources, first-year programs can become even more successful for students and their institution.

Opportunities for Future Research

This study explored the connection between course content and graduation of students in a first-year seminar at a single institution. The researcher acknowledges that since the study only examined one institution, the generalizability of the study is limited. Therefore, one opportunity for future research would be to replicate the study across multiple institutions. The institutions included in such a study could be similar in size and student population as a means of reducing outside variables. Institutions with varying size and student demographics could also be selected depending on the direction of the research. The examination of multiple institutions and students would provide more generalizable results to all institutions and first-year programs.

Another opportunity for future research is the examination of additional course components and their association with the academic success of students enrolled in first-year seminars. This study focused specifically on the course content (academic, social, and mixed)
and drew comparisons based on that evaluation. There are a multitude of course variables that could be examined including the number and experience level of instructors, the meeting time or space, and whether the FYE course is required or optional. An examination of these variables might also provide further insight into the course structure and its association with student success and persistence.

An examination on the relationship between first-year programs and student graduation by gender, race, or pre-college characteristics would also provide an opportunity for future research. While it is clear that first-year programs have a positive impact on student success and persistence, most of the research and literature has not been able to identify what specific aspects within first-year programs lead to this result. An in-depth study that explores the relationship between seminars and graduation by race, gender, or pre-college characteristics could provide insight into which students most benefit from these programs and how to structure the programs to best meet their specific needs.

Conclusion

First-year programs have become a cornerstone in the new student experience on a majority of college campuses. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) suggest that institutions of higher education utilize first-year seminars to address transition issues and challenges facing students as they integrate into college. Administrators employ these programs to promote social and academic integration and encourage persistence to graduation for new students. Studies on first-year programs indicate that students who enroll in these courses tend to perform better, are retained at higher levels, and persist to graduation at a higher rate than students who do not enroll (National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2003). An
analysis of multiple research studies suggests that first-year seminars are directly linked to persistence and degree completion for new students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Many institutions struggle to identify the approach for first-year seminars that will most support their students. This study explored the relationship between course content and student graduation to identify if a specific approach was associated with higher graduation rates. The analysis determined that the three approaches – academic, social, and mixed – utilized in FYE at a single institution over a six-year period consistently had higher graduation rates than non-FYE students and the overall student population. This finding suggests, however, that it is not a specific approach to course content but rather the seminars ability to create connections between students and the institution that is most associated with student success.

Peer interactions and opportunities for group bonding need to be a major focus for first-year programs. Research suggests that the most influential source for growth and development during the undergraduate years is the student’s peer group (Astin, 1993). Many institutions have specifically designed first-year programs to promote group affiliation by providing students with numerous concentrated experiences and interactions with peers (Barefoot, 2000). The opportunity to create a connection between the student and the institution through which the student feels a sense of belonging is another key component for first-year programs. Tinto (1975) argued that a sense of belonging is a key component of student persistence and predicted that students who become integrated into the campus community are less likely to withdraw as compared to students who do not become integrated.

The establishment of a connection with peers, faculty, and staff and a sense of belonging for the student to the institution promote persistence among students in first-year programs. It is our responsibility as stakeholders of the institution to support the students we admit and
encourage their persistence to graduation at our institutions. By creating more opportunities for students to connect to the institution, such as a first-year seminar, we can further support our students and their development through to graduation.
APPENDIX A

MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FYE PROGRAM

The mission of the First-Year Experience program at Florida State University is to:

- Facilitate transition to college
- Promote academic and personal success at FSU and beyond
- Facilitate holistic student development
  - Promote responsible freedom (ethics, integrity, values, expectations)
  - Encourage leadership in an academic community
  - Respect diversity
  - Promote development of positive personal relationships
  - Promote civic and global responsibility

The First-Year-Experience course seeks to achieve the following five objectives for students:

1. To introduce students to an education based in the liberal arts.
   - History and Mission of FSU
   - Importance of Liberal Studies
   - University Policies
   - Academic Integrity

2. To recognize and respect the dignity and worth of each person and the requirements for successful community life.
   - Civic Education
   - Values Clarification
   - Cultural Diversity
• Wellness Issues
• Stress and Time Management
• Financial Management
• Relationships

3. To acquire academic survival skills
• Academic Advising
• Academic Resources
• Library and Research Skills
• Academic Policies
• Study, Writing, & Presentation skills
• Note-Taking & Test-Taking skills

4. To challenge the student to become involved and in avenues in the university community for the development of the whole person.
• Campus Activities
• Developing Mentor

5. To develop a support group for successful transition
• Faculty and staff participants
• Peer Leaders / classmates
### Your First Year Experience

**Network**

**Fall Line Up:**
- (Class Information)

**Your Hosts:**
- (Instructional Team)

**Network Headquarters:**
- (Office Location / Hours)

**Preview:**
- (Course Description)

**First Year Experience**

Instructors name and contact information listed here

Peer leaders name and email listed here

Instructors office location and office hours listed here

This class will help you understand the importance of a liberal arts education, develop a framework for understanding your University experience, and become goal-oriented in your academic and extra-curricular experiences.

It is our hope that you will learn the history of FSU, including the values of the institution, and will explore the various University resources available to everyone. Active participation in learning and openness to discussing student issues will help you make the most of this FYE experience and will help facilitate your transition into Florida State University.

**The T.V. Guide:**
- (Textbook)


(This publication is available in alternative format)
Rules of the Game:
(Attendance & Participation)

Class attendance on the first day of a course is an FSU policy, and failure to attend will result in being dropped. In this section of FYE 5 points will be awarded each day for attendance and a possible 5 points for participation. Attending class guarantees 5 earned points, but does not guarantee the full amount of participation points for the class meeting. Successful students are limited to 2 absences from class for any reason. More than 2 absences will result in a "U" grade.

Score Board:
(Grading)

Attendance (18 x 10 pts) 180 pts
Participation (18 x 10 pts) 180 pts
*Advising Project 20 pts
Journals (4 x 20 pts) 80 pts
*Social Activities (50 pts each) 200 pts
*Campus Presentation 50 pts

Total 710 pts

710 - 497 Satisfactory (S)
496 - below Unsatisfactory (U)

Contestants’ Profile:
(Journals)

You will be asked to write a journal periodically. Please note that the due dates are listed in the schedule. Each of them are worth 20 points. They should be at least a paragraph in length. Please email them to both of your hosts to receive credit.

Journal 1 - Tell us about yourself
Journal 2 - Tell us about what you hope to do after graduation
Journal 3 - Tell us about your favorite trip or place you have visited
Journal 4 - Tell us about the toughest part for you this semester in adjusting to college

Round One: The class will be asked to bring one item that represents
(Show and Tell) him/her and share the meaning of this item with the class. This item will be used to start each class session during our daily check-in. Completing this activity will be reflected in your participation grade.

**Round Two:**
(Out of Class Participation)

There will be four (4) activities that you are required to attend during the semester. The class will agree on the dates for a movie night at the Student Life Center. Bowling night at Crenshaw Lanes will be on **Thursday August 31 from 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.** You will have the opportunity to select the other activities.

**Double F.Y.E.:**
(Advising Form)

You will need to meet with your Academic Advisor and complete page 81 and 82 of your text book by **September 19.**

**Final F.Y.E.:**
(Campus Presentation)

The class will be divided into groups and assigned fun activities around campus to learn more about and present on. The details of this activity will be given to you on the first day of class.

**FCC Regulations:**
(Academic Honor System)

**Academic Honor Code** - All students are expected to uphold the FSU Academic Honor Policy which is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility:

1. To uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work;
2. To refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the University community; and
3. To foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the University community.

**FSU Academic Honor Pledge** - I affirm my commitment to the concept of responsible freedom. I will be honest and truthful and will strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University. I will abide by the Academic Honor Policy at all times.

**(A.D.A. Academic Accommodations—Accessibility Statement**
This material can be provided to you in alternative format. Anyone who anticipates difficulties with the content or format of the course due to a physical or learning disability should see the instructor immediately in order to work out a plan.

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you need to provide documentation of your disability to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC), located on the main floor of the Student Services Building, Room 108, 850-644-9566 (V), 850-644-8504 (TDD), or email them at sdrc@admin.fsu.edu. They will provide a letter specifying reasonable and appropriate accommodations which you should give to the instructor during the first week of class or as soon as you obtain it so that your learning needs may be appropriately met.

**Shows:**

*(Dates to Remember)*

**Academic Dates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 31</td>
<td>Last day to Drop/Add and have fees adjusted. Students are liable for all fees for courses still on their schedules at 12:00 midnight. Last day to add a course without academic dean’s permission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1</td>
<td>Last day to cancel enrollment and have fees removed. Last day to submit waivers, billings or Veterans’ deferment. Registration for state employees (non-FSU employees) using State Employee Fee Waivers, 8:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 4</td>
<td>Labor Day. No Classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 6</td>
<td>Financial aid available via EFT in FSU Card accounts. First day to apply for financial aid deferments and delayed delivery loans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 8</td>
<td>Last day to pay or defer fees without a $100 late fee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2</td>
<td><em>Spring Registration Guide</em> available. Spring course listings available on <em>Course Lookup System</em>.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
October 13  
Last day to reduce course load without permission of academic dean. Dean’s permission required to drop below twelve (12) semester hours.
Last day to drop a course without receiving a grade.
Last day to withdraw without receiving a grade.
Last day to submit form requesting S/U grading or to change S/U option back to regular grade.

October 16  
Registration for Spring begins.

November 10  
Veteran’s Day Holiday. No Classes.

November 17  
Homecoming: No classes after 1:10 p.m.

November 24-25  
Thanksgiving Day Holiday. No classes.

December 11-15  
Final Examination Week.

December 15  
Semester Ends

December 16  
Residence Halls close at noon. Diplomas dated this date.
Commencement: Civic Center, 9:00 a.m.

On-Air:  

Football Schedule

(Dates to Remember)

September 4  
FSU @ Miami

September 9  
FSU v. Troy State (H)

September 16  
FSU v. Clemson (H)

September 23  
FSU v. Rice (H)

October 14  
FSU @ Duke

October 21  
FSU v. Boston College (H)

October 28  
FSU @ Maryland

November 4  
FSU v. VA (H)

November 11  
FSU v. Wake Forest (H)

November 18  
FSU v. W. Michigan (H)

November 25  
FSU v. UF (H)

December 3  
ACC Championship
### T.V. Guide

**Channel:**
(Schedule of Classes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment Given</th>
<th>Text Reading</th>
<th>Assignment Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/28</td>
<td>The Amazing Race</td>
<td>Show-n-Tell, Journal1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction of class and</td>
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<td>team; icebreakers</td>
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<td>8/30</td>
<td>Anything to Win</td>
<td>Advising Form, Campus Presentation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Icebreakers and Getting to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>know each other</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/31</td>
<td>The Dating Game</td>
<td>Meet at Crenshaw and bring socks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crenshaw Lanes 7-8:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/4</td>
<td>Labor Day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/6</td>
<td>The Price is Right</td>
<td>Ch. 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Journal 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Checks &amp; Balances</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>Family Feud</td>
<td>Journal 2</td>
<td>Ch. 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Welcome to FSU!</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/13</td>
<td>Lingo Tournament Library Tour</td>
<td>Meet at Strozier</td>
<td>Ch. 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/18</td>
<td>Let’s Make a Deal Get Involved</td>
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<td>Ch. 2</td>
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<td>9/20</td>
<td>Hollywood Squares Student Panel</td>
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<td>Journal 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/25</td>
<td>To Tell the Truth Values</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ch. 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>Survivor Campus Scavenger Hunt – class will be divided into teams</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/2</td>
<td>Jeopardy Keys to Academic Success</td>
<td>Journal 3</td>
<td>Ch. 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/4</td>
<td>$50,000 Pyramid Attend Market Wednesdays as Class and then lunch at Union</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advising Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/9</td>
<td>Chain Reaction Victim Advocate Program</td>
<td>True Color Survey</td>
<td>Ch. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>What’s My Line? Career Center Tour</td>
<td>Meet at the Career Center</td>
<td>Ch. 11</td>
<td>Journal 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/16</td>
<td>Survey Says True Colors</td>
<td>Journal 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/18</td>
<td>The Biggest Looser My Health and Wellness</td>
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<td>Ch. 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/23</td>
<td>Street Smarts Cultural Exploration</td>
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<td>Ch. 8</td>
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<td>Journal 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</table>
| 10/2 5 | **50 Greatest Game Shows of All Times**  
       | Campus Group Presentations                 | Ch. 12 |
| 10/3 0 | **Wheel of Fortune**                       |        |
|       | Pizza Party                                |        |
APPENDIX C
EXAMPLE OF SYLLABUS CODED AS ACADEMIC

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE
AMS1363

Instructor:

Peer Leader:

Office Hours: Wednesday, 3:30-4:30 pm (and by appointment)


You are required to bring your book to class daily.

Course Description:
This class will help you understand the importance of a liberal arts education, develop a framework for understanding your university experiences, and become more goal-oriented in your academic experiences. You will learn the history of FSU, including the values of the institution, and will explore the various University resources available to you. Active participation in learning and openness to discussing student issues will help to make the most of this FYE experience and will facilitate the transition into Florida State University. Please note that this course is designed exclusively for first-time-in-college students during their initial semester of enrollment.

Academic Honor System:
"The Academic Honor System of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility to: 1) Uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work, 2) Refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the academic community, and 3) Foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the University community."

Please note that violations of this Academic Honor System will not be tolerated in this class. Specifically, incidents of plagiarism of any type will be rigorously pursued by these instructors. Before submitting any work for this class, please read the "Academic Honor System" in its entirety (as found in the FSU General Bulletin and in the FSU Student Handbook) and ask the instructors to clarify any of its expectations that you do not understand.

FSU Academic Honor Pledge
I affirm my commitment to the concept of responsible freedom. I will be honest and truthful and will strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University. I will abide by the Academic Honor Policy at all times.
Academic Accommodations-Accessibility Statement:
This material can be provided to you in alternative format. Anyone who anticipates difficulties with the content or format of the course due to a physical or learning disability should see the instructor immediately in order to work out a plan.

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you need to provide documentation of your disability to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC), located on the main floor of the Student Services Building, Room 108, 850-644-9566 (V), 850-644-8504 (TDD), or email them at sdrc@admin.fsu.edu. They will provide a letter specifying reasonable and appropriate accommodations which you should give to the instructor during the first week of class or as soon as you obtain it so that your learning needs may be appropriately met.

Assignments/ Evaluation:
This course is graded on an “S/U” (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) basis. Satisfactory completion of the course is defined as earning a C- or above. There will be weekly essay assignments. There will be an individual project assigned that focuses on a topic from the text. Attendance will be taken daily. The only absences excused will be religious holidays, documented medical problems; other documented crises, or officially sanctioned University events. More than two unexcused absences will result in the assignment of an “Unsatisfactory” grade. Reading the assigned material and doing any other preparatory work assigned is essential. No extra credit is given. Eight essay assignments are required, each worth 10 points toward your grade. Each essay should be at least three pages in length, single-spaced, and in Times New Roman 12-point font in response to end of chapter questions. The responses should be e-mailed to the instructor. A visit to your academic advisor is required for you to get credit for the class. Read pages 81-82 and 87-89 of your text to understand the importance of the visit and what should occur during the visit. The visit is designed to insure that you know who your advisor is and where he or she is located so that you have an academic resource on campus. The Individual Project will be assigned and focus on a topic from the textbook. You will be required to write a five-page paper on the topic and give a 10-minute presentation to the class. Handouts are strongly encouraged.

Grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Project</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor Conference</td>
<td>Mandatory*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading Scale:

- 105-150 points = S
- <105 points = U

*Cannot receive a satisfactory grade without this!
AMS1363
FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

(1) Aug. 28: Course Structure and Assignments
• Buy book
• Read Chapters 1 & 9
• Essay 1 Assigned and due on Sept. 6

(2) Aug. 30: Values
• Making Decisions
• Ethics

(3) Sept. 6: Alcohol, Drugs, & Health Education
• Thagard Health Center Conference Room
• Read Chapter 6
• Essay 2 Assigned and due on Sept. 13

(4) Sept. 11: Diversity & Financial Management
• Read Chapters 7 & 8

(5) Sept. 13: Victim Advocate
• Read Chapter 3
• Essay 3 Assigned and due on Sept. 20

(6) Sept. 18: Student Organizations & Activities
• Read Chapter 2

*(7) Sept. 20: Library Resources
• Strozier Library Training Room
• Read Chapter 10
• Essay 4 Assigned and due on Sept. 27

*(8) Sept. 25: Time Management
• Read Chapter 5
• Do Activities 1, 2 & 3

(9) Sept. 27: Learning Styles (MBTI)
• Essay 5 Assigned and due on Oct. 4

*(10) Oct. 2: Test Taking and Presentation Skills
(11) Oct. 4: Conducting Research and Writing Papers  
• Essay 6 Assigned and due on Oct. 11

(12) Oct. 9: Note-Taking and Study Skills

(13) Oct. 11: Academic Requirements  
• Directory of Classes  
• General Bulletin  
• Read Chapters 4 & 5  
• Make an appointment with your academic advisor  
• Essay 7 Assigned and due on Oct. 18

(14) Oct. 16: Career Center  
• UCA 4145/4147  
• Career Portfolio  
• Tour and presentation  
• Read Chapter 11

• Academic Advisor Visit Form due  
• Essay 8 Assigned and due on Oct. 25

(16) Oct. 23: Job Interview Skills & Resume Workshop

(17) Oct. 25: Individual Presentations

(18) Oct. 30: Individual Presentations/Evaluations
APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE OF SYLLABUS CODED AS MIXED

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Instructors
Instructor’s names and contact information listed here.

Textbook

Florida State University Student Handbook 2002-2003 (Copies to be distributed in class)

Course Description
This class will help students understand the importance of a liberal arts education, develop a framework for understanding their university experiences, and become more goal-oriented in their academic and extra-curricular experiences. Student will learn the history of FSU, including values of the institution, and will explore various University resources available to them. Active participation in learning and openness to discussing issues will help to make the most of this FYE experience and will facilitate the transition into Florida State University. Please note that this course is designed exclusively for first-time-in-college students during their initial semester of enrollment.

Academic Honor System

“The Academic Honor System of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility to: 1) Uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student’s own work, 2) Refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the academic community, and 3) Foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the University community.”

Please note that violations of this Academic Honor System will not be tolerated in this class. Specifically, incidents of plagiarism of any type or referring to any unauthorized material during examinations will be rigorously pursued by the instructor. Before submitting any work for this class, please read the “Academic Honor System” in its entirety (as found in the FSU General Bulletin and in the FSU Student Handbook) and ask the instructor to clarify any of its expectations that you do not understand.

ADA Statement
Florida State University provides high-quality services to students with disabilities, and we encourage you to take advantage of them. Students with disabilities needing academic
accommodations should: 1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center in Kellum Hall (644-9566), and 2) bring a letter to the instructor from the SDRC indicating that you need academic accommodations. Please do this as soon as possible, within the first week of class.

Assignments and Evaluation

This course is graded on an “S/U” (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) basis. Satisfactory completion of the course is defined as earning a C- or above and the completion of all assignments. (All assignments must be completed to receive a grade of Satisfactory)

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading</th>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>A  94-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>A- 90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>B+ 87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>B 83-86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attendance and Class Participation

This course is designed as an interactive seminar. Therefore class participation and attendance are crucial to its success. It is important that you attend class and provide thoughtful comments and questions regarding the material and experiences during the course. Class attendance and participation will be a factor of your overall grade (see Grading).

The only absences excused will be religious holidays, documented medical problems; other documented crises, or officially sanctioned University events. More than one unexcused absence may result in the assignment of an Unsatisfactory grade.

Journal Entries

Journals allow students an opportunity to further explore the information provided to them in the course. Each student is required to submit 5 journals (250 words) from the eight journal topics/questions outlined below. Students are to turn in journal entries on the dates listed for the five they choose to complete.

Wednesday, August 28 (Campus Involvement)
Wednesday, September 4 (Faculty-Student Relationships)
Wednesday, September 11 (Academic Enhancement Skills)
Wednesday, September 18 (Time Management Skills)
Wednesday, September 25 (Cultural Issues)
Wednesday, October 2 (Learning Styles)
Wednesday, October 9 (Making Informed Choices/Drugs and Alcohol)
Wednesday, October 16 (Stress Management/Fitness)
**Academic Advisor Meeting**

All students are required to meet with their academic advisor and complete a sheet (distributed in class) documenting the outcome of their visit. This activity will be figured into the participation component of each student’s grade.

**Papers and Presentations**

Each student is required to interview a student leader/service on campus and write a short paper (250 – 500 words) on the person or service interviewed. Each student will then present a short presentation (7 minutes) in class. Students should focus on completing this assignment early in the semester, as time will pass quickly. Presentations are scheduled for October 21 and 23.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Aug. 26</td>
<td>Course Introduction Financial Management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Get Textbook and FSU Student Handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Sept. 2</td>
<td>Labor Day (No Classes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Sept. 4</td>
<td>Academic Advising/Campus Connections/Faculty-Student Relationships/Mentors</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Meeting with Advisor Assignment Discussion of Paper due for Oct. 23 Journal #2 Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Sept. 9</td>
<td>Victim Advocate Program*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Sept. 11</td>
<td>Academic Enhancement Skills Computing Your GPA</td>
<td>Chapter 8</td>
<td>Journal #3 Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Sept. 16</td>
<td>Time Management Skills</td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Sept. 18</td>
<td>Strozier Library Tour and Information*</td>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
<td>Journal #4 Due Meet in Strozier Lobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Sept. 23</td>
<td>FSU History/Future*</td>
<td>Handout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Sept. 25</td>
<td>Cultural Issues/Awareness*</td>
<td>Chapter 15</td>
<td>Journal #5 Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Sept. 30</td>
<td>Career Center* (UCA 4147)</td>
<td>Chapter 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday,</td>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Journal #6 Due</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Chapter(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Oct. 7</td>
<td>Making Informed Choices*</td>
<td>Chapter 14, 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Oct. 9</td>
<td>Bowling @ Crenshaw Lanes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Oct. 14</td>
<td>Drugs and Alcohol/Safety*</td>
<td>Chapter 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Oct. 16</td>
<td>Stress Management/Fitness*</td>
<td>Chapter 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Oct. 21</td>
<td>Presentations Campus Activities &amp; Involvements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Oct. 23</td>
<td>Presentations Campus Connections</td>
<td>Chapter 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Oct. 28</td>
<td>Course Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Journal #7 Due</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Journal #8 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Campus Activities &amp; Involvement Papers Due and Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Campus Connections Papers Due and Presentations</td>
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APPENDIX E

2001 CHI-SQUARE DATA COMPARISONS

Table 5 – 2001 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Academic Data

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>116 (110.64) [0.26]</td>
<td>31 (36.36) [0.79]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>243 (248.36) [0.12]</td>
<td>87 (81.64) [0.35]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 1.52. The P value is 0.217615. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 6 – 2001 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>116 (108.38) [0.54]</td>
<td>31 (38.62) [1.5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>72 (79.62) [0.73]</td>
<td>36 (28.38) [2.05]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 4.819. The P value is 0.028147. This result is significant at p < 0.05.

Table 7 – 2001 Chi-Square Comparison of Academic and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>243 (237.33) [0.14]</td>
<td>87 (92.67) [0.35]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>72 (77.67) [0.41]</td>
<td>36 (30.33) [1.06]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 1.9571. The P value is 0.161819. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.
APPENDIX F

2002 CHI-SQUARE DATA COMPARISONS

Table 8 – 2002 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Academic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>126 (121.61) [0.16]</td>
<td>33 (37.39) [0.51]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>170 (174.39) [0.11]</td>
<td>58 (53.61) [0.36]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 1.1427. The P value is 0.285089. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 9 – 2002 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>126 (117.37) [0.63]</td>
<td>33 (41.63) [1.79]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>46 (54.63) [1.36]</td>
<td>28 (19.37) [3.84]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 7.6254. The P value is 0.005755. This result is significant at p < 0.05.

Table 10 – 2002 Chi-Square Comparison of Academic and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>170 (163.07) [0.29]</td>
<td>58 (64.93) [0.74]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>46 (52.93) [0.91]</td>
<td>28 (21.07) [2.28]</td>
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</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 4.2171. The P value is 0.040019. This result is significant at p < 0.05.
APPENDIX G

2003 CHI-SQUARE DATA COMPARISONS

Table 11 – 2003 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Academic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th></th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>157 (152.44) [0.14]</td>
<td>38 (42.56) [0.49]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>194 (198.56) [0.1]</td>
<td>60 (55.44) [0.38]</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 1.1054. The P value is 0.293092. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 12 – 2003 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th></th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>157 (156.16) [0]</td>
<td>38 (38.84) [0.02]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>225 (225.84) [0]</td>
<td>57 (56.16) [0.01]</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.0381. The P value is 0.845336. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 13 – 2003 Chi-Square Comparison of Academic and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th></th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>194 (198.56) [0.1]</td>
<td>60 (55.44) [0.37]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>225 (220.44) [0.09]</td>
<td>57 (61.56) [0.34]</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.9103. The P value is 0.340041. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.
### Table 14 – 2004 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Academic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>172 (167.73) [0.11]</td>
<td>39 (43.27) [0.42]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>142 (146.27) [0.12]</td>
<td>42 (37.73) [0.48]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 1.1371. The P value is 0.286267. This result is not significant at $p < 0.05$.

### Table 15 – 2004 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>172 (171.4) [0]</td>
<td>39 (39.6) [0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>118 (118.6) [0]</td>
<td>28 (27.4) [0.01]</td>
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</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.0273. The P value is 0.868732. This result is not significant at $p < 0.05$.

### Table 16 – 2004 Chi-Square Comparison of Academic and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>142 (144.97) [0.06]</td>
<td>42 (39.03) [0.23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>118 (115.03) [0.08]</td>
<td>28 (30.97) [0.28]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.6482. The P value is 0.420749. This result is not significant at $p < 0.05$. 
APPENDIX I

2005 CHI-SQUARE DATA COMPARISONS

Table 17 – 2005 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Academic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2005</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>104 (100.04) [0.16]</td>
<td>26 (29.96) [0.52]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>103 (106.96) [0.15]</td>
<td>36 (32.04) [0.49]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 1.3181. The P value is 0.250934. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 18 – 2005 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2005</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>104 (104.42) [0]</td>
<td>26 (25.58) [0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>145 (144.58) [0]</td>
<td>35 (35.42) [0]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.0147. The P value is 0.903367. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 19 – 2005 Chi-Square Comparison of Academic and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2005</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>103 (108.06) [0.24]</td>
<td>36 (30.94) [0.83]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>145 (139.94) [0.18]</td>
<td>35 (40.06) [0.64]</td>
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</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 1.8886. The P value is 0.169361. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.
APPENDIX J

2006 CHI-SQUARE DATA COMPARISONS

Table 20 – 2006 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Academic Data

<table>
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<th>Graduated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>151 (147.81)</td>
<td>37 (40.19)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>[0.07]</td>
<td>[0.25]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>180 (183.19)</td>
<td>53 (49.81)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[0.06]</td>
<td>[0.2]</td>
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</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.5819. The P value is 0.445568. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 21 – 2006 Chi-Square Comparison of Social and Mixed Data

<table>
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<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Not Graduated</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>151 (148.6)</td>
<td>37 (39.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.04]</td>
<td>[0.15]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>147 (149.4)</td>
<td>42 (39.6)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[0.04]</td>
<td>[0.14]</td>
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</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.3675. The P value is 0.544372. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 22 – 2006 Chi-Square Comparison of Academic and Mixed Data

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>180 (180.55)</td>
<td>53 (52.45)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<td>42 (42.55)</td>
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<td>[0]</td>
<td>[0.01]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chi-square statistic is 0.0165. The P value is 0.897912. This result is not significant at p < 0.05.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bradley Brock is currently the Associate Director for the School of Theatre at Florida State University. Bradley earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of Florida and a Master of Science in Higher Education from Florida State University. Prior to joining the School of Theatre, Bradley worked with the Dean of Students Office and Advising First at Florida State University. He served as the Community Engagement Manager and the Director of Marketing and Communications for the School of Theatre before assuming the role of Associate Director. Bradley is a proud husband and father and a native of Tallahassee, FL.