

**THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CENTER AND THE FRESHMAN YEAR  
EXPERIENCE: A CASE STUDY AT A HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITY  
IN TEXAS**

A Dissertation

by

CARLA ANNE GARRETT

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2005

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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## ABSTRACT

The University College Center and the Freshman Year Experience: A Case Study at a  
Historically Black University in Texas. (May 2005)

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The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze activities, perceptions, and behaviors associated with the university college program at a historically Black University which contribute to a successful freshman year experience. The sample under investigation consisted of 15 students who attended Prairie View A&M University.

The selection of students was based on the students' current and prior affiliation with the University College program. The study participants were specifically chosen to include freshmen students who were enrolled in the University College at the time of the study and sophomore and junior level students who had been previously enrolled in the University College program during their freshman year.

The study was conducted during fall 2002 and during the months of March and April, 2003. Data collection was conducted in the following manner: (1) one-on-one interviews with study participants were conducted in order to obtain data about student perceptions; (2) study environment observations were conducted with passive, moderate and active submergence techniques in order to watch and record the activities within the study environment; (3) historical data were collected in order to provide background information about the research environment.

A major finding of this study is in keeping with retention theory which posits that institutions must formulate student centered programs that focus on meeting the students' academic and social needs as early as the summer prior to the freshman year. There were a variety of factors within the University College environment that influenced student success and development. While there were many elements that were put in place by Prairie View A&M University with the intent of encouraging and promoting student success, there were underlying personal factors that the students imposed upon the system that played an integral role in influencing the students' perceptions and outcomes.

## DEDICATION

To

My Parents

Delores Anne Payne White and Otis D. White, Jr.

Go ahead and rest in the arms of the LORD,

your baby girl has finally made it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank You, Heavenly Father. Thank You for loving me so much that you gave your only begotten Son so that I can live eternally. It is you who accomplished this goal. All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to THEE.

Thank you, Mama and Daddy. Although you are resting in the arms of the LORD, I have to say thank you Mama and Daddy for giving me such a solid foundation. Mama, it was you who showed me how to live for CHRIST. Your life was an example of how to be a virtuous woman. Thank you for the legacy of Delta Sigma Theta. “I got all my sisters with me.” You were my best friend and the best teacher a little girl could ever have. I could not have made it to the end of this journey without hearing your voice in my heart.

Daddy, thank you for showing me how to reinvent myself every day. It was you who showed me the answer to the question, “How can you go wrong when you serve a living GOD and live in a free country?” Thank you for all of the heartfelt conversations at the kitchen table. Thank you for fussing at me when I should have been working on my “Doctor Book.” Thank you for the Prairie View tradition. Most of all, thanks for just being Big O.

Reginald, a girl could not ask for a better husband. We are truly equally yoked. Thank you for seeing in me what I could not see in myself. I could not have finished this journey without you, nor would it have been as fun. Thank you for the “Garrett pep rallies” that gave me the daily encouragement to complete my studies. Most of all thank you for a life rich with laughter, family values and lots of love.

Carlton and Reginald III, thank you for being great children. It does my heart proud to hear people complement you about how wonderful you are. Thank you for bragging about mommy's "Doctor Book" to all of your teachers and friends. I never knew my true capacity to love until GOD blessed us with you.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Although Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) do a good job of nurturing students and "taking students under their wing", the freshman year dropout rate is highest at both open admissions 4-year institutions and at black colleges and universities (American College Testing Programs, 1993). The dropout rate is especially higher in the freshman year for a variety of reasons (Hurd, 2000).

Nationally, 16% to 40% percent of incoming freshmen for any given institution are, to some degree, inadequately prepared for college level academic work (Boylan,1995). Furthermore, the national dropout rate for white students is 40% and for African American students the rate is nearly 70% (Boylan,1995).

In order to curb freshman year attrition, once students arrive at the institution, they must establish relationships that foster social and academic growth, as well as go through what theorist Van Gennep (1960) calls the "rites of passage." Once the transition from high school to college begins, many students may discover that a particular institution does not meet their individual needs. The college experience then begins to overwhelm them, and the student opts to explore other options such as working full time instead of going to college at all. In spite of all of the pre-college factors, one of the strongest predictor of college student success is typically the initial social and academic adjustments the students have to experience at the institution (Tinto, 1993).

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The style and format of this dissertation follows that of the *Journal of Educational Research*.

African American students who attend historically black colleges and universities, as well as white students who attend predominantly white institutions, sustain fewer academic and social downfalls than those students who attend institutions where they are in the minority (Fleming,1984). This is due to cultural exchanges both in and out of the classroom setting (Fleming, 1984).

In an article published in *Black Issues in Higher Education*, entitled “Retention Depends on New Models of Student Development,” author Khandi Bourne-Bowie (2000) points out that studies that concentrate on the African American student college experience reveal that persistence and academic success are directly related to positive social interactions and cultural adjustments within the college environment. Although there are pre-college factors that have a bearing on the success of these students, the students’ experiences on the college campus determine whether these students will persist, stop-out, or drop-out.

Although there does not exist an all-purpose model for handling the daunting attrition problem across the country, Grossett (1989) suggests that each institution needs to develop its own retention model to address the needs of its particular student population. Retention was not the main focus for many institutions until fairly recently. Most institutions were mainly concerned with the number of students they could attract into the institutions (Hurd, 2000). The dilemma over how to retain and graduate students is an issue that all colleges and universities must tackle on a regular basis because institutions lose money when student enrollment is low.

In an effort to increase retention and improve the freshman year experience, Prairie View A&M University, an historically Black 4-year institution in Texas,

formulated the Panther Living and Academic Community Experience (PLACE) and the Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) Programs. These programs provide students with holistic, intrusive advisement, intensive academic enhancement, centralized support services, and mentoring within an academically focused residential facility.

The development of such programs emerged from mounting concerns about the freshman year departure of large numbers of under-prepared students enrolling in Texas institutions of higher education. During the fall of 1999, the ACCESS and PLACE programs were equipped to provide services to 550 incoming freshmen. This affected more than 30% of the total incoming freshman population. In the fall of 2000, the ACCESS and PLACE programs evolved into the University College. This allowed the institution to expand advisement, academic enhancement, and support services to the entire incoming freshman class within a centralized learning community.

Such learning communities serve to enhance as well as supplement the educational pursuits of college and university students. Although each institution attempts to provide supplemental learning experiences in different ways, the goal is simple: student success. These communities are important in every aspect of the student's academic and social life. Institutions are forced into the position of attempting to formulate the right combination of learning experiences that fit the needs of that institution's student population.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Conventional explanations for minority student attrition such as lack of motivation, lack of academic preparation, lack of family support and low socio-economic status failed to provide adequate rationale for such phenomenon (Treisman, 1985). Many minority students exhibit a pattern of social and intellectual isolation which lead to demoralization, disorientation and eventually dropping out of school. Factors attributing to such outcomes include many minority students studying alone and maintaining a rigid separation of their social and academic lives. Learning communities enable the student to bridge the gap between academic classes and social conduct within the first two years on campus (Moffat, 1989). Research indicates that cooperative learning environments have been instrumental in promoting academic success.

Only about 10% of under-prepared students would graduate from college without assistance outside of the classroom. The provision of personal support programs has proven to be helpful in promoting minority retention (Fleming, 1984). Students can profit from supportive individuals and networks to help them deal with their personal and collegiate experiences (Zimmer, 1989). Retention efforts that focus on the academic and social needs of the student promote higher achievement than traditional individualistic learning environments (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Furthermore, these learning environments tend to promote more frequent generation of knowledge into new situations, higher level reasoning and at the same time tend to lower the attrition rates in college (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Thus, discovering and understanding the components that comprise a successful “working” model may

enable institutions to design retention programs that insure increasing minority retention.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze activities, perceptions, and behavior associated with the University College program which contribute to a successful freshman year experience. Utilizing the interviewing method of data collection, the study will uncover attitudes and perceptions of students within the University College program.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What methodologies are being utilized within the University College to impact the freshman year retention rate?
2. How do students perceive their social environments within the University College? What are the experiences that influence their perception?
3. How do students perceive their academic environment within the University College? What are the experiences that influence their perceptions?
4. What impact have activities associated with the University College had on students' general success and development?

## Operational Definitions

In this study the following terms will be used:

**The University College** is a total intake model that consists of three basic divisions: intrusive advisement, academic enhancement, and centralized holistic support services provided in an academically focused residential environment.

**Intrusive Advisement** is a purposeful and intentional intervention that works to heighten the student's desire to remain in school. Intrusive advising encompasses a wide variety of strategies that promote intervention, interest and involvement on the part of the advisor in student affairs (Glennen,1995).

**Academic Enhancement** refers to departmentalized academically focused support services. These services may include tutoring services, laboratories, workshops, or classroom instruction.

**Centralized Holistic Support** describes the consolidation of institutional services that address academic and social needs of the student. Since freshmen are unfamiliar with the institution, students are able to find the help they need in one location.

**Mentoring** is a mutual relationship between an upper class student and a freshman student aimed at promoting social adjustment and academic success.

**Developmental Education** was once referred to as **remedial education**; this term now refers to supplemental academic support provided to students in order to ensure basic skills mastery, which may include remedial English and/or fundamental math classes.

**Cooperative Learning** is an instructional approach in which students work in small mixed-ability groups to meet common learning objectives (Webb, 1985).

**Attrition** is the decrease in the number of students attending an institution.

**Retention** is an institution's ability to maintain or increase the number of students in attendance.

### **Significance**

National statistics reveal that up to 40% percent of students are inadequately prepared for college (Boylan, 1995). Of these students, about 40% of white students and 70% of African American students drop out of college because of a lack of preparation, or because of a lack of academic and/or social support during the first year of college (Tinto, 1975). To combat these sobering statistics, the state of Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board mandated that all state-funded institutions provide developmental education programs that would curb the number of dropouts from Texas higher education institutions.

The solution to this problem might be to take a holistic approach to developmental education. One such approach is the incorporation of learning communities as opposed to conventional learning strategies. Studies such as those conducted by Tinto (1975) and Treisman (1985) uncover many of the underlying factors that contribute to the current dropout rate. These factors include student isolation, lack of basic skills, and the inability of the students to make the connection between their social and academic lives.

## **Organization of Study**

The study consists of five chapters followed by references and appendices. This chapter outlines the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research questions, and explains the operational definitions. Chapter II is a review of the literature. It will explore what retention theorists have uncovered about freshman year retention and the variables that influence student persistence beyond the freshman year. Chapter III explains the research methodology used to conduct this study. It includes the study design, population, sampling, procedures, and data analysis techniques utilized during the study. A report of the findings of the study is presented in Chapter IV. Finally, within Chapter V, the researcher makes recommendations based upon these research findings for future studies.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter contains five sections. Section one explores what retention theorists have uncovered about freshman year retention and the variables that influence student persistence. Section two explores the concept of academic enhancement and the components thereof. Section three explores support services offered by many institutions that lead to student success. Section four explores an existing retention model. Section five provides the reader with a summary of the literature review.

#### **Section One: Theoretical Framework for Student Retention**

Early theoretical studies sought to predict student retention by examining pre-matriculation variables such as ACT Test scores, ACT Math sub-scores, adequacy of pre-college preparation, high school grade point averages, high school rank, and other external factors (McDaniel & Graham, 2001). In an article published in the *Journal of College Counseling* entitled “Systematic Problem Solving: Retention and the Role of a Student Counseling Center,” authors Phillips-Miller and Morrison (1999) define retention as, “the process by which a college or university provides students with the academic, social and other support they need to maintain their enrollment through graduation”(p.181). Therefore, retention not only involves financial support for students (i.e, financial aid) but the core of the institution’s retention efforts must involve the social, emotional, and intellectual development of the student (Pascarella, 1986; Tinto, 1993).

The early theoretical models about retention are based upon the traditional four-year residential institution (Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). Most of the early retention models are conceptually based upon the Durkheim theory of suicide which states that an individual will be more likely to commit suicide if that individual feels estranged or separated from society. Within the academic culture, the Durkheim theory is applicable in that students are more likely to leave an institution if they feel marginalized due to the lack of connection between themselves and the institution. This marginalization can occur if there is a lack of satisfaction with the social and academic cultures within the institution. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) define marginality as “the perception that one does not fit in, is not significant, and is not needed” (p.164).

Durkheim prescribed the marriage between sociology and education as early as 1885 (Bierstedt, 1966). He establishes that there is a difference between education and pedagogy; more specifically, he explains that institutions must make the educational process meaningful through the interconnection of disciplines.

According to Durkheim,

Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is destined.

Whereas,

pedagogy concerns the techniques of teaching and accordingly utilizes psychological knowledge, both of a collective sort relative to the classroom group (p.58).

Durkheim viewed education as a socialization, which seeks to establish a sense of morality and responsibility within its pupils. Although he speaks of education and pedagogy in terms of a homogeneous society, his works had a far reaching impact on current higher educational retention theory. Theorists have associated Durkheim's theory of anomic suicide and related it to the student's involuntary departure from higher education (Lui & Lui, 1999). This concept also allows theorists to better explain external phenomena that affect student academic outcomes.

Early postmodern theorists, such as Spady (1970), Van Gennep (1960), Tinto (1975), Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), and Bean and Metzner (1985) in varying degrees, agree that there must be sufficient integration into both the social and academic culture for the student before the student can experience a willingness to persist at the institution. More recent theories delve into the rationale behind student retention and the institutional characteristics necessary to curb high student attrition.

Spady (1971) included many of Durkheim's concepts into his own theory, which became the very first college student attrition model. Spady (1970) discovered that the behavior of the student who drops out of school is similar to the behavior of a person who contemplates suicide. Those who contemplate suicide withdraw from society because there exists a lack of connection between the individual and society. There also exists a lack of shared values between the individual and the individual's immediate environment. Students persist or drop out of school based upon the degree of social and intellectual interaction they experience at school. The students must "fit in" to the college community culture.

He took the concepts a step further by comparing student dropout behavior to that of suicide and found that there were cultures and value systems established within each peer group that influenced the persistence and/or non-persistence of students. Spady (1971) also found that there was a correlation between student satisfaction and the student/faculty interaction. The theory uncovered the circumstances surrounding the student's characteristics and experiences and found that there was not only a correlation, but a direct positive relationship between the amount and the type of interaction the student shared with the faculty members and male student satisfaction. The student's ability to become acclimated into the institution's culture is an essential element for student retention. This is why student faculty relationships are so important.

Not only must the student establish relationships that foster social and academic growth, but the student must also go through what theorist Van Gennep (1960) calls the "rites of passage." The college experience, especially the freshman experience, is a transition period. More specifically, the freshman goes through a rite of passage when the separation from family and the transition into the new college environment occurs. Once the transition begins, the freshman student begins to incorporate new values and behaviors into old ones. Those students who do not make a smooth transition or those who fail to complete the rites of passage are more likely to drop out of college.

Vincent Tinto (1995) took the work of Durkheim, Spady and Van Gennep a step further by conducting a study that detailed the process that students undergo before dropping out of higher education. He developed an extensively tested model of

student retention that has influenced the popular mindset as it relates to the phenomena of student attrition in higher education. His model conceptualized higher education institutions as organizations that possess their own cultures. These cultures are comprised of two interacting subcultures: the academic subculture and the social subculture. Tinto (1975) posits that students are less likely to depart from college if the student's commitment to personal goals, the student's commitment to the institution, and the student's entering characteristics are positively affected by their social and academic experiences within the institution. This is especially true during the first year. Tinto's (1975) model of college student attrition is derived from Durkheim's notion of solidarity, which is a concept combining sociology and education (Lui & Lui, 1999). Within higher education, solidarity is the act of bridging the gap between the social and academic cultures so that students are able to make personal connections to the institutions.

What he discovered was that "forty-one percent of every 100 entrants will depart the higher educational system without earning a degree. Seventy-five percent of them will leave school within the first two years of college, the greatest portion occurring in the first year of college"(Tinto, 1987, p.47). Tinto (1987) set out to make sense of all of the literature that addressed the issue of students dropping out of higher education institutions. With this knowledge, he proposed a theory that explains the responsibility of the institution and the roles that these institutions play in the social and academic growth of each student. Within this theory, he prescribes a model that elicits a shift from institutional recruiting for the sake of boosting enrollment, to educators thinking and acting in terms a program development that

could influence student persistence and concentrate on student retention efforts. These efforts are geared toward a more student-centered institutional reform that promotes initial contact with students for the purpose of community building among freshman students. This contact begins as early as the student's initial arrival on campus (Tinto, 1987).

The student/faculty model proposed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) found that Tinto's model showed validity when used to analyze the student attrition at four-year residential institutions. They measured such variables as grades, intellectual development, and faculty interaction with students and found that students were more likely to persist well into the sophomore year if there was a substantial amount of non-classroom contact with faculty members (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991a). This was especially true when the student/ faculty exchange related to intellectual matters (Lee, 1999). The student felt a connection to the faculty and knew that the faculty members were available if the student needed additional information related to coursework (Lee, 1999).

According to research conducted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991b),

Academic integration (as measured by such variables as grades, intellectual development, and contacts with faculty) has its strongest positive influence on persistence or degree attainment for students at the lowest levels of social integration (as measured by such variables as extracurricular involvement and informal interaction with peers). As a student's level of social integration increased, the importance of that student's academic integration for persistence or degree attainment diminished. The reverse was true for the influence of social integration on persistence or degree attainment at different levels of persistence or degree attainment for students at the lowest levels of academic integration, and as level of academic integration increased the importance of social integration diminished (p. 41).

Likewise, students whose family members have college degrees have a deeper commitment to goal attainment and graduation. First generation college students have the hardest time getting adjusted to the college setting (Chase, 1997). This is often true for the many minority students who come from either poor or middle class families (Chase, 1997).

There is also a cautionary finding, however. In a study conducted by Chapman & Pascarella (1983) findings reveal that commuter institutions provide fewer opportunities for students to become immersed in the institution's academic and social culture. This means that commuter students are often less integrated socially and academically into the campus environment than are students who reside on campus.

Bean's Student Attrition Model (1980, 1982, & 1983) emphasizes the role that external forces play in the persistence process: the encouragement of close friends may enhance a sense of commitment to the institution. Bean and Metzner (1985) formulated a student retention model based upon the supposition that student persistence is dependent upon academic variables, environment, finances, work schedule, and social integration within the institutional culture. Other external factors such as friends and significant others also have an impact on the student's decision to persist or drop out of school. This model suggests that the students' beliefs are influenced by his or her life experiences. Once the student enters college, these same beliefs affect the student's attitude toward college. This attitude in turn influences the student's intention to persist or withdraw from college.

## **Section Two: Academic Enhancement**

### **Constructing the Academic Enhancement Program**

Certain variables have more influence than others on freshman year success. For example, full time students have more of a tendency to continue their education than do their part time counterparts (Feldman, 1993). Another variable that has a bearing on freshman year persistence is the number of developmental courses and the grades a student earns in these courses (Ryland, 1992). The underlying factors that impact the freshman year attrition rate are variables related to student academic and social integration into college life (McDaniel & Graham, 2001).

According to Robinson, Burns and Gaw (1996) the collaborative learning concept seeks to combine academic and social skills enhancement with community building. Tinto, Goodsell-Love and Russo (1994), found that the most important function of the learning community is to promote social interaction among peers in and out of the traditional classroom setting. The learning community concept is a shift in paradigm from the traditional classroom to which students have grown accustomed. Learning communities and collaborative learning have increased in popularity since the late 1980's (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). Colleges and universities embraced this concept in an attempt to solve such problems as low student involvement and to increase student persistence (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

The learning community concept is defined as “deliberately structured clusters of courses that seek to foster communication among students, faculty, advisor, and administrators”( Matthews, 1993; Smith, 1991, p.27). Within each community,

students can be assigned to groups with similar interest or goals in order to promote collaborative efforts among students.

There are many attempts being made in higher education to offer academic support for a broad range of student populations (Commander & Stratton, 1996). Tinto (1993) reports that over 1.5 million of the 2.4 million freshmen students entering higher education will drop out before earning a degree. In the past, college and university retention efforts focused heavily on supplemental educational programs that focused on developmental classes for students identified as high risk students or on tutorial services available to any student experiencing difficulty in a particular course (Commander & Stratton, 1996). Although these support services are valuable on any campus, retention cannot be attained by just providing services for students who are on the extreme ends of the academic continuum (Commander & Stratton, 1996).

Keimig (1983) conceptualized a hierarchy of learning improvement programs that effect the students' academic and social integration into the institution's culture. Within this hierarchy, programs are ranked based upon the program's ability to effect long term student persistence and academic achievement. According to Keimig (1983), level one programs, remedial courses, are widely utilized course offerings that attempt to enhance students basic skills.

There are two basic assumptions behind remedial course programs: (1) the student has entered the institution with a lack of ability in basic reading, writing, and/or math skills that could interfere with the student's academic success. Once the student has passed the remedial course, the student has mastered the task and

overcome the academic deficit; (2) the higher level learning skills such as reasoning, synthesizing information, critical thinking, and problem solving are addressed in separate college level courses and transferred to other aspects of the academic experience.

Remedial courses are the lowest on Keimig's (1983) hierarchy since these courses are the least likely to have an effect on long term academic achievement and student persistence because they do not foster an environment that is necessary in the development of higher level learning skills. Students are basically involved in more traditional classroom learning activities instead of shared problem solving and cooperative learning experiences. Institutions that focus primarily on remediation fail to help the student with the social adjustment necessary during the freshman year experience.

Level II programs consist of learning assistance for individual students. These programs are formulated based upon the following assumptions: (1) It is the student who is experiencing the difficulties in school; therefore, it is the student who must seek help in order to solve the problem; (2) tutorials and outside classroom assistance can help students conquer their academic problems; (3) low self esteem and poor study habits can be conquered through the personal attention the student receives, consequently enabling the student to succeed in the classroom.

These types of programs became popular on college and university campuses since the 1960's. The advantage to having a learning assistance program is that students receive one-on-one help from a peer tutor which in turn supplements the classroom instruction. The tutorial sessions provide a more informal setting. This

allows the student to receive additional help with academic difficulties ,but this setting also allows the student to receive more social and psychological nurturing as well.

The Keimig (1983) model also suggests that providing learning assistance to individual students is not as effective as a comprehensive learning program (p.22). Tutorial services only address academic subject content while failing to address the student's ability to learn and comprehend the subject matter. Although this one-on-one approach to learning has its advantages, its disadvantages are: (1) services are utilized after the student has started to fail a course; (2) students who need the services the most usually avoid getting the help they need; (3) the services provided to the student are not structured; (4) services are usually sought too late in the academic term.

Level III programs are course-related services. Within these programs, supplemental learning experiences are combined with the classroom curriculum in order to enhance student knowledge. Activities may include group problem solving activities as well as the incorporation of technology and tutorials. Keimig (1983) states that the “systematic coordination of developmental objectives and activities into the academic course assignments distinguishes the Level III programs from the lower level programs. All the students within a given class or course have the opportunity to participate in the supplementary activities” (23).

The underlying assumption behind Level III programs is that the institution is responsible for bridging the gap between the student's skill and knowledge level upon entry into the institution and those skills needed to succeed in their courses. Program

coordinators may incorporate the mastery learning concept in order to assure that students are mastering learning based upon structured objectives. Course-related service programs focus on developing skills that are needed to master course content. These programs do not operate on the assumption that the student skill deficiencies will interfere with content mastery.

There are certain elements from the lower level programs integrated into the Level III program. These elements include combining remedial courses with supplemental laboratories and outside tutorials in order to enhance content mastery. Level III programs also link services to specific courses offered at the institution. This link enables instructors to reach students outside of the traditional classroom. There is a growing trend in higher education to replace traditional freshman classes and learning programs with learning centers that operate like Level III programs.

Learning centers serve three functions: services to students, teacher training, and research and development for the purpose of program and institutional enhancement (Maxwell, 1975). Level IV programs are ranked the highest in the hierarchy of learning improvement programs. Keimig (1983) refers to them as Comprehensive Learning Systems. The function of these programs is to contribute to the entire educational needs of all students by utilizing a variety of academic and social methods rather than merely the conventional methods utilized in the Level III programs.

The assumption behind the Level IV program is that “the total educational experience within the course should be systematically designed according to the principles of learning theory” (Keimig, 1983). Instructors are encouraged to use a

variety of learning and teaching tools in order to optimize the student participation within the classroom. This in turn strengthens the student's desire to persist in school. Concepts such as cooperative learning are heavily utilized in the level IV program.

According to Boylan (1995), learning centers such as the Level IV programs that incorporate a comprehensive learning system are most likely to positively affect student success. Student development through developmental education not only entails providing remedial education, it also involves pooling together both academically and socially focused support services for the student (Boylan, 1995). Instead of just focusing on a student's deficiency, the program includes both social and academic teaching and learning tools in order to do what works best for each individual student.

### **Cooperative Learning**

The cooperative learning concept was derived from theories of interdependence, cognitive-development, and behavioral learning (Morgan, 2000). Research indicates that cooperative learning positively affects interpersonal relationships, psychological health, and goal attainment, more so than the traditional individualistic competitive learning pattern (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994).

In sharp contrast to the traditional competitive classroom method of learning, educators have praised the cooperative learning concept as a productive teaching method to enhance student academic performance (Johnson & Johnson, 1980). It is a method of active learning in which peer groups rely upon one another to gain knowledge through peer instruction and teamwork (Kvam, 2000). Johnson & Johnson (1975) provide research that reveals a variety of situations in which

cooperative learning methods influence student success through the creation of active learning environments which act to put students in the position to ask questions comfortably about specific content matter. Cooperative learning is considered active learning because it incorporates the science of “doing” with the theoretical course content (Bruner, 1966). The concept entails providing learning opportunities that allow students to work within small groups so that content mastery is accomplished (Moorman, 1994). The students exhibit positive interdependence upon other group members as well as developing a sense of strong self reliability during the cooperative learning experience. Kvam (2000) argues that students reach their full academic potential when all of the five senses are utilized. Dale (1969) suggests that higher levels of learning take place when knowledge is utilized in more than one arena of a student’s life. This is further explained in Dale’s (1969) “cone of experience theory” where an individual’s memory is better able to retain information when more than one level of experiences can be incorporated into learning environment. Students are able to extend this knowledge far beyond the classroom experience.

From data secured from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Astin (1993) concluded that students who were involved in one or more college communities were more likely to further their education beyond the freshman year. Within the campus culture, it is assumed that the classroom is the only academic community many students will ever have the opportunity to experience (Boylan, 1999). This is why it is important for educators to capitalize on the resources available to them while the students are in the classroom.

Learning communities bridge the gap between the institution's academic and social environments (Tinto, 1997). Students are able to experience learning as a shared experience, rather than attempting to tackle the learning experience in isolation (Tinto, 1997). Collaborative learning methods may have proven to be particularly beneficial when utilized in classrooms where the students are from nontraditional backgrounds (Boylan, 1999).

### **What Is Developmental Education?**

Developmental education is not a synonym for remedial education (Boylan, 1995). Remedial education is the process of providing basic skills enhancement classes to students who require help with basic reading, writing and math. Developmental education not only entails providing remedial courses but it also involves providing socially and academically focused support services to the students (Boylan, 1995). Developmental education is a concept that involves pooling together several theoretical schools of thought from cognitive and developmental psychology (Chickering, 1969; Erickson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1975; & Perry, 1970). It encompasses a variety of services put together to encourage personal and academic development (Boylan, 1995). Among these services are academic advising, tutoring and remedial courses designed to promote improved study skills and critical thinking (Boylan, 1995). Over the past 50 years, developmental education has shifted from remedial courses being the primary focus to remediation becoming but one of the many components put in place in an attempt to expose students to the rigors and rewards of a college education (Boylan, 1995).

Most colleges and universities in the United States admit students who lack the necessary preparation to sustain the rigors of higher education as a part of their state-mandated mission (Boylan, 1995). The very reason these institutions were established was to make higher education accessible to the people in every region of the country (Boylan, 1995). In doing so, these institutions are faced with the task of producing a more literate, productive, and self-sustaining citizen. Since many institutions were faced with the dilemma of having to admit under-prepared students, these institutions had to offer pre-college/remedial courses as means of enhancing these students' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. As researchers began to examine the reasons why students succeed in college, they discovered that remedial courses were valuable but these courses alone were not enough to ensure student success (Maxwell, 1985). The lack of pre-college preparation is only one of many reasons students do not excel in college (Boylan, 1995). Other factors such as self-confidence, study habits, social competence and personal autonomy have a greater effect on grades and student retention than do reading, writing and mathematics (Astin, 1977, Chickering, 1969, Sedlacek, 1987).

Once these factors were uncovered, institutions began to incorporate personal and academic development into the basic skills course curriculum (Boylan, 1995). These same institutions began to incorporate elements of student and course assessment, counseling, learning centers and laboratories to address these other factors (Boylan, 1995). As a result, the remediation process began to address both the academic and the personal needs of the student. Developmental education took a

holistic approach to student development by incorporating support services coupled with basic skill enhancement.

### **Making the Case for Remedial Courses in Texas**

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board began to witness a rapid decline in the performance level of many of its students who were enrolled in its state-funded colleges and universities. This decline in performance was revealed through comparing Texas high school standardized test scores and grade point averages to national test scores and grade point averages, from the early 1970's to the late 1980's. Once these results were discovered, the state then began to initiate an ongoing major educational reform.

This reform was designed to provide Texas public colleges and universities the means to enhance student basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. The state of Texas mandated a system of checks and balances for higher education in the form of the Texas Academic Skills Proficiency (TASP) Test. TASP was formulated as a means of ensuring that state funded colleges and universities adequately guided students throughout the remediation process.

In *From Politics to Policy: A Case Study in Educational Reform*, the authors of chapter two, Carl A. Parker and Wilhelmina R. Delco state, "In 1987, the Texas Academic Skills Proficiency (TASP) Test was established as an assessment of each entering college student's ability to handle post- secondary coursework. The TASP Program was created by House Bill 2182. Beginning in fall, 1989, the statute required all students entering college to be tested for reading, writing, and mathematics skills.

Students who fail any part of the exam must receive remediation from the college” (p.21).

Once the TASP was initiated, the Coordinating Board was then charged with the duty of ensuring that all public institutions were provided with the funding that would facilitate the proper execution of this state mandate. The State of Texas utilized a very straightforward funding formula to determine the amount of money each institution should receive.

Appropriations for remedial education were based upon credit hour enrollment for public universities and contact hour enrollment for public community and technical colleges. For example, if the Institution A had students registered in one thousand (1000) credit or contact hours of developmental education and Institution B had students registered in five hundred (500) credit or contact hours of developmental education, both institutions would be funded, but Institution A would receive more money, based upon the number of developmental education hours for which students were registered.

During the first ten years of this educational reform, the State of Texas studied the effects of developmental education upon its public institutions. The state also conducted several feasibility studies to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of state appropriations.

### **Increased Credit/Contact Hour Enrollment**

A study conducted by the Coordinating Board entitled “Appropriations for Developmental Education in Texas Public Institutions of Higher Education” (1987) revealed an increase in credit and contact hour enrollment in developmental education

since the inception of the TASP test. This required an increase in developmental education appropriations. Within this study, the Coordinating Board reported:

The number of semester credit hours of developmental education offered by universities in the 1996-1997 base years was 44 percent higher than the number of semester credit hours offered during the base year 1986-1987. Community colleges reported a 307 percent increase in developmental contact hours between the 1986-1987 base year and the 1996-1997 base years...

General revenue appropriations for developmental education increased from \$38.6 million in the 1988-1989 biennium to \$172 million in the 1998-1999 biennium. This constitutes an increase of approximately 346 percent. This figure represents the funds granted to public community colleges, universities, and technical colleges in the state of Texas.

Developmental educational funding for higher education increased by 72% since the inception of the TASP program. Of the total \$172 million allotted for developmental education, community college funding has increased from \$29.5 million to \$145.7 million. This represents 84 percent of the total current appropriations. Funding for four-year institutions increased from \$9 million to \$20.9 million. Funding for technical colleges increased from zero funding to \$5.6 million.

### **Funding for Developmental Education by Discipline**

Students requiring help in mathematics account for the majority of the funding allocated for developmental instruction. Fifty-four percent of the funding provided for developmental education was allocated for mathematics, which amounts to \$85.8 million. Writing instruction received \$38.1 million (24 percent), while reading instruction received \$35.9 million (22 percent).

### **Comparing Percentages**

The percentage of students who did not require developmental education was compared to the percentage of students who were provided developmental education.

The Coordinating Board looked at students who entered Texas public community and technical colleges in the summer or fall of 1990 as well as those who entered Texas public universities in the summer or fall of 1990.

The study revealed that, of the 81,368 students who entered public community and technical colleges, 43,678 students (or more than half) required developmental education. By the end of fiscal year 1996, eleven percent (11%) of the students receiving developmental education also received Associates degrees or technical certificates. Twenty two percent (22%) of those students were still enrolled.

Of the students entering public community and technical colleges who required no developmental education, 24 percent of the students received Associate degrees or technical certificates. Sixteen percent (16%) percent of those students were still enrolled.

The study also revealed that 47,487 students entered public universities in summer or fall of 1990. Of these students, 12,487 students received developmental education. Twenty four percent (24%) of the students who received developmental education received degrees while twenty eight percent (28%) were still enrolled. Of the students who received no developmental education, 53% received degrees while 20% remained enrolled.

### **Section Three: Support Services**

Along with the Keimig (1983) concept of learning centers, colleges and universities have incorporated a variety of elements that work together to improve the freshman year experience.

## **Academic Advising**

There are three prevailing academic advising models (Heisser and Parette, 2002). These models include the prescriptive, the developmental and the integrated models of academic advising (Heisser and Parette, 2002). Crookston (1972) first defined prescriptive advising as a relationship in which the advisor takes on the role of a authority figure. This authoritarian relationship allows the advisor to “diagnose the student’s needs and “prescribe” a course of action the student must take in order to fulfill these academic needs. The advisor utilizes six prescriptive tools which include: a) explaining graduation requirements, (b) course selection, (c) preparation of the student’s course of study; (d) talking with students about educational goals; (e) exploration of career choices and (f) clarifying the course registration process.

To further solidify the advisor’s authority, the student must follow the advisor’s prescription and assume no personal responsibility for the prescribed course action. The student depends heavily on the academic advisor’s input, which focuses on the selection of courses, prerequisites and registration (Crookston, 1972).

One of the negative aspects of this academic advising model is the absence of student input in the decision making process (Crookston, 1972). While there does exist a lack of student input in this advising model, 50% of students surveyed agreed that the advantages of the six prescriptive methods used in this advising model far outweigh any disadvantages.

Students begin to expect advisors to use the prescriptive advising method, because this is the only method that has been utilized throughout the student’s academic career (Heisset and Perette, 2002). According to Brown and Rivas (1994),

minority students seemingly prefer the prescriptive advising approach. They tend to have more trust an advisor who is direct and informative (Chando, 1997). These students perceive the advisor to be credible and appreciate the advisor's ability to inform them about not only the academic, but also about the social aspects of the college experience (Chando, 1997).

Developmental advising refers to the cooperative efforts of the student and the advisor that encourage persistence in the student (Crookston, 1972). The advisor encourages and directs the student to the appropriate support services. This type of advising encourages the student to become more self-sufficient during the decision making process (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Some of the downfalls associated with developmental advising include: (a) large advisor-to-student ratios, (b) time factors, (c) lack of training for advisors, (d) too many autonomous advising units and (d) underdeveloped evaluation strategies (Gordon, 1994).

Enders (1994) points out that many institutions rely heavily on part-time faculty to perform advising duties. This presents a problem because of the lack of commitment the part-time faculty may have to the institution. The use of full time faculty as advisors may be ineffective because institutions have a tendency to neglect reward incentives for already overextended faculty.

Integrated advising employs strategies from both the prescriptive advising model and the developmental advising model (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Much of the literature that pertains to academic advising describes advising models that are effective for advising at-risk student populations (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). One of the most important elements of effective advising for all student populations is

consistent faculty-student contact (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen & Vowel, 1995).

The one-on-one relationship between the student and the advisor helps the student develop a sense of belonging and commitment to the institution (Nutt, 2000). Many times, the academic advisor is the only connection between the student and the institution (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). This relationship can have a lasting effect on the student's decision to continue at the institution, as well as the student's social, academic and career choices (Glennen & Vowell, 1995; Nutt, 2000).

Along with the advisor's knowledge about academic requirements, the advisor's capacity to provide accurate and timely counsel is one of the student's main concerns (Creamer & Scott, 2000). In many instances, the advisor may only pay attention to the student's academic scheduling and neglect other student needs (Frost, 1991).

To achieve efficient and effective one-on-one student advising, Nutt (2000) suggests that advisors must hone their communication, questioning, and referral skills. In order to develop good communication skills, advisors, especially those working with at risk students, should build a strong rapport with their assigned student population.

The intrusive advising approach to advising has received much attention, especially as academic advising relates to at-risk students (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Earl (1988) describes this method of advising as purposeful and intentional intervention that works to heighten the student's desire to remain in school. Intrusive advising encompasses a wide variety of strategies that promote intervention, interest

and involvement on the part of the advisor in student affairs (Glennen, 1995). Heisserer & Parette (2002) define this advising approach as “intensive advising intervention with an at-risk student that is designed to (a) facilitate informed, responsible decision making, (b) increase student motivation toward activities in the student’s academic/social community and (c) ensure the probability of student academic success.”

Studies reveal that institutions that utilize the intrusive advising models report a decrease in student attrition and an increase in the number of credit hours completed (Bray, 1985; Brophy, 1984; Nichols, 1986); students raising cumulative grade point averages (Shultz, 1989; Spears, 1990); the student utilization of success building skills (Spears, 1990); and improved class attendance (Spears, 1990). In a series of reports summarized by Holmes (2000), research suggests that the benefits of intrusive advising were (a) constant contact from the advisor forced students to stay abreast of classroom responsibilities, (b) students’ financial concerns decreased, (c) advisors provided students with necessary retention services, therefore further securing the student’s link to the institution and (c) advisors refer students to support services which in turn implies to the student that someone at the institution cares about the student’s well-being.

Many other studies suggest that the intrusive advising model works best with special populations such as transfer students and students on academic probation (Cooper and Frank, 1992); minority students (Walton, 1979); and under-privileged students (Wagner & McKenzie, 1980). Graduation rates have also increased as a result of institutions employing the intrusive advising model (Glennen et al., 1996).

Many college and university administrators report that utilizing intrusive advising methods has increased retention, resulting in increased state funding over a 5-year period (Glennen & Farren, 1990).

### **Peer Tutoring**

According to Dolmans, Gijsselaers, Moust, DeGrave, Wolfhagan & Van der Vleuten, (2002) postmodern conceptions of human learning are grounded in the belief that knowledge is conditional and relies upon realities that are constructed by the learner based upon prior knowledge and the learner's perception of the world. The learning process is a result of interactions within the learner's environment; therefore the learner is herself the catalyst that constructs new knowledge. The learner is at the center of the learning process. This perception of human learning is known as the constructivist view of learning (Savery & Duffy, 1995).

Peer tutoring is consistent with the constructivist view of the learning process, because classroom teachers are not the sole disseminators of knowledge. Since learning is at the center of the process, programs that provide peer tutoring enable students to find the resources that enable optimal learning situations for each individual student (Dolmans, et al., 2002). The peer tutor relationship fosters a sense of openness and diminishes the threat of asking questions. The peer tutor concept has proven to be beneficial to student learning and retention by promoting such benefits as providing students with multiple learning perspectives, heightening student self esteem, enhancing utilization of learning tools, and fostering positive attitudes toward learning (Bergen & Mi, 2002).

The less obvious faculty and staff involvement, the more pure tutor potential can be maximized (Wadoodi & Crosby, 2002). One of the most valuable assets of the peer learning environment is the informality students feel toward peer tutors (Wadoodi & Crosby, 2002). Since the selection of peer tutors is voluntary, students are able to benefit from a variety teaching and mentoring strategies (Wadoodi & Crosby, 2002).

### **Mentoring**

There are only a few mentoring programs reported in the higher education literature (Haring, 1997). There are many of these programs that do not last for an extended period of time; moreover, once the program gets off to an enthusiastic start it has a tendency to stall soon after its inception (Haring, 1997). One of the primary reasons is that an unclear concept of mentoring is at the helm of program design. Most mentoring program administrators neither outline a distinct purpose for the mentoring program nor do the administrators develop a clear focus of the mentoring relationship (Haring, 1977). Many of the mentoring programs around the country share a similar design therefore suggesting that the same programs share similar weaknesses (Haring, 1977).

Most mentoring programs that are designed for minority students are similar because the objective of these programs is to match the minority student with a mentor. In most instances, the institution launches a recruiting effort in order to attract those who are interested in becoming mentors (Haring, 1999). They are then assigned to help a student who may be classified as provisional, probationary, undecided or at risk (Haring, 1999).

After recruitment, the matchmaking process takes place by arranging a meeting between the mentor and the student in an attempt to assess the viability of the match (Haring, 1999). Once a match has been determined, the expectation is that the pair will continue to stay in contact in order to help the student with any academic issues that arise. Program directors often assess the mentors' effectiveness by requesting feedback in the form of written questionnaires or informal interviews with either the student or the mentor.

The structure for this type of mentoring program relies mainly on the assumption that (a) mentoring will have a positive effect on the student (b) the mentor has some prior knowledge about the institution and is in the position to help the at risk student (c) there is professional chemistry between the student and the mentor and that this relationship could have occurred outside of the formal lines of communication (d) program functions such as clerical duties can be assigned to it a staff member outside of the mentor-student relationship. Relationships are founded on these assumptions, but the formality of these relationships may prove to be problematic.

Although many program directors initiate mentor programs based upon these assumptions, these same features may be the reason why many mentor programs lack longevity. Although the view of mentoring is continually positive and helpful, most mentoring program administrators neither outline a distinct purpose for the mentoring program nor do the administrators develop a clear focus of the mentoring relationship.

When distinct program goals are outlined for each participant, the mentor relationship can be optimized. Conversely, an uninformed mentor could prove to be a

source of misinformation for the student. Therefore, mentoring programs must utilize mentors who are knowledgeable about the institution and are in the position to help the at-risk student.

Understaffing is a common design flaw in most mentors programs. Without adequate funding to maintain such a program, a faculty or staff member is charged with the duty of upholding a less than sufficient program. This leaves the faculty or staff member (who may already have a full time assignment elsewhere on campus) in the position of having to handle clerical responsibilities, communicating with mentors and arranging in a meeting that takes place within the program, plus addressing day-to-day issues that arise between mentor and students (Brooks & Haring-Hedore, 1987).

Healy (1997) defined mentoring as “a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (student) aimed at promoting the career development of both” (p. 10). The advantages of this definition according to Haring (1999) are (1) there is reciprocity within the relationship (2) The definition allows for the match between student and mentor to be made by career stages rather than age and (3) there is clear definition of what is expected from the relationship. Haring (1999) defines mentoring as meaningful career support that is given by more experienced persons to less experienced ones while the latter transitions into the new role.

## **Models of Mentoring**

There are several models of mentoring that have been highlighted throughout the literature. Swoboda & Millar (1986) described existing models that serve as blueprints for mentoring and programs for minority students.

The “grooming mentor” model is the model that it is typically utilized in formal mentoring programs. The second model, a “networking mentor”, is a newer model and combines the ideas of networking and mentor. Both grooming and networking models have distinct differences. Characteristics such as who does the mentoring, expectations of benefits and how the program is structured help define the nature of individual models. The third model involves the combination of the grooming and networking models in an attempt to meet the very specific needs of individual students.

### **The Grooming Model**

Within the grooming mentoring model, a mentor is paired with a student to augment the student’s chances of transitioning into the freshman year. In most instances, the mentor is an upperclassman who has considerably more experience than the incoming student. The relationship is such that the student benefits more from the mentor’s knowledge and experience than does the mentor benefit from the student. This relationship creates a hierarchy that places the mentor in the leadership role where the mentor is in charge of enhancing the student’s freshman year experience. Thus, there is perceived power over the students.

It is the intent of the grooming mentor and model to support freshman students throughout the freshman year so that the student can successfully matriculate at the

institution. What occurs locally is that the freshman students are successfully assimilated into the institution because the mentor has taught the student how to handle the institution's culture the way the mentor handled it. The mentor has then groomed the freshmen in the ways of those who matriculated at the institution before the freshman's arrival. This mentoring model works best for those students who need to learn the institution's culture and who also need to learn how to survive the current college environment. Once the freshmen student has experience in a relationship with a growing mentor, the student then becomes an apprentice. This creates a new generation of grooming mentors.

### **Networking Mentoring**

Networking mentoring is a new concept of mentor ( Haring, 1993, 1997; Swoboda & Millar, 1986). It supplies a strong basis for mentoring programs that deviate from the traditional concept of mentor. Like the grooming concept, peers assisting one another in order to transition successfully by meeting psychosocial needs is a shared feature of the network mentor concept (Haring ,1999). The difference between the networking concept and the traditional mentoring concept is that there is a nonhierarchical relationship among a group of people who share benefits. The combination of these two characteristics creates the central characteristic of the network mentoring in concept: the presumption that the every person within the network has to contribute something that will benefit the other members. Consequently, each individual serves as both mentor and protégé at different times during the networking relationship.

Often this model is viewed as a way to enable students to strengthen their interpersonal and professional skills by allowing students the opportunity to function as viable components of the networking system. This particular networking model also promotes change within the institution by allowing contribution and feedback from newcomers. The best participants are those who are highly motivated and desire an environment of change and equality. This may result in students coming together in order to effect changes in curriculum, social activities, and academic programs. Haring (1997) posits that faculty members who serve as volunteer facilitators can provide outside resources to the student network so that the group can continue to focus on its objectives. The faculty volunteer provides consistent support to the student network, but does not serve as the center of the organization. If a faculty volunteer is not able to serve, the student network members are still able to continue to support one another. The network is able to continue regular activities. The same holds true if there are students who drop out of the network. The group is not dependent upon the actions of a few participants, because it is built upon mutual help and contributions from the existing members.

### **Combining Grooming and Networking Mentoring Models**

Some institutions combine both the grooming and the mentor models in order to provide students with the best support during the freshman year. For example, an institution may combine a group of three to five freshman students with an experienced upperclassman in order to help the freshmen students make the transition from high school to college. Although this strategic grouping of students does create a network among the freshmen students, there still exist a hierarchical relationship

between the upperclassmen and each freshman student. This particular program structure alleviates the potential for a lack of available grooming mentors, while enabling the freshmen students the opportunity to create strong peer relationships.

#### **Section Four: Existing Models**

##### **Freshman Year Retention Programs on a Predominantly**

##### **Black College Campus**

Pre-college academic preparation, the ability to adapt to the college environment, and a commitment to academic success are factors that will impact “at-risk minority student persistence” (Levin & Levin, 1991). Academic preparedness--high school performance as indicated by g.p.a and class rank, enrollment in college preparatory courses, adaptability, and commitment to educational goals--are student characteristics that have the largest impact on at-risk minority student persistence. Nettles, Theony and Gossman (1986) state that black students typically have lower levels of pre-college preparation than white students, are less academically integrated, have less satisfaction with their university, experience more interfering problems, and have less well-developed study habits than white students.

In many instances, minority students are not ready for the challenge of living away from home or they are not prepared for the rigors of the curriculum of a four-year institution (Leon, Dougherty, & Maitland, 1997). During the freshman year it is especially important for students to have constant access to faculty members as well as to have formal and informal interaction with faculty members (Lee, 1999). The amount of interaction a freshman student has with the faculty positively influences the student’s persistence to the sophomore year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). As for

the importance of the type of interaction students have with faculty members, the informal lines of communication weigh as heavily as do the formal lines of communication on the student's decision to persist beyond the freshman year at the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Although many of the studies that deal with the student dropout phenomenon suggest that minority students go through different freshman year experiences than non-minority students, minority students should not be clustered into a homogeneous group. The same hold true for studies conducted within each specific minority group (Van Gennep, 1960).

Researchers posit that academic assimilation has a significant influence on minority student persistence. In fact, in research based upon Tinto's (1975) model, Donovan (1984) suggests that college students' academic assimilation has more of an effect on African American student persistence than their pre-college characteristics. The results from interviews conducted with minority and non-minority students found that non-minority students were more concerned with social integration such as establishing friendships, and the social aspects of college life. Minority students, on the other hand, were more concerned with their own ability to handle the rigors of college academics (Terenzini, 1991).

Although many of the retention and persistence theories conclude that pre-college characteristics are determinants for minority persistence, many of these studies are based upon data gathered from minorities on predominantly white campuses (Fleming, 2001). Research models that deal directly with the subject of student retention and student persistence suggest that students graduate from college

as a result of the interaction of three factors: 1) pre-college factors such as student attendance at high schools that emphasize college preparation, family educational background and values and personal aspirations; 2) factors related to the institutional environment such as financial support, academic, and social support programs; and 3) personal factors such as the ability to balance academic and personal affairs, coping with homesickness, and social adaptation (Newman & Newman, 1999).

Although the freshman year attrition rate was highest at open admissions, four- year institutions and at black colleges and universities (American College Testing Program, 1993), African American students who attend historically black colleges and universities have a better chance of succeeding than those who attend white colleges (Fleming, 1984). The impact that historically Black colleges and universities have on students is positive (Fleming, 2001), even more positive than the impact of predominantly white colleges (Fleming, 2001). Although Black college campuses have limited resources, Black students find they attain psychological well being, cultural affinity, nurturing relationships, and overall happiness at such campuses (Allen, 1987). Black students who attend Black institutions are able to maintain, if not improve, the lifestyle to which they are accustomed, because these same students are engaged in both scholarly and personal relationships with peers, mentors, faculty and staff who share the same culture (Fleming, 2001). These same students also achieve a higher degree of physical and mental well- being than Black students who attend non-Black institutions (Cheatham, Slaney, & Coleman, 1990). As for social involvement, those students who attend historically Black colleges and

universities are reportedly more engaged academically (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996). These students also reported more educational fulfillment in more areas (Fleming, 2001).

The success of freshmen students is dependent upon the freshman year experience at the institution (Hudson, Henderson & Henderson, 2002). Factors such as inadequate advisement, academic under-preparedness, lack of the proper study skills, and selection of the wrong major are many of the reasons reported as causes for failure during the freshman year (Hudson, Henderson & Henderson, 2002). There are many programs on historically black college and university campuses where the main focus is to ensure the persistence of incoming freshmen. In a study conducted by Hudson, Henderson and Henderson (2002), the researchers discovered one such program is the School of General Studies at Florida A&M University, an historically black institution.

The program serves as “the academic unit for entering freshmen and returning students who are undecided about a major, are an undeclared major, and/or must meet remediation requirements” (Hudson, Henderson, & Henderson, 2002, p211). The goal of this academic unit is to keep students in school until the student is under the guidance of a major department.

Many of the students enrolled in the School of General Studies have the credentials to declare a major, but the majority of the students were admitted to the university as provisional students. This program, like many other freshman year retention programs on black college campuses, offers support services that enable its student population to succeed well into the sophomore year and beyond. The program is geared toward helping students determine what major they want to choose.

The students are then mentored so that they earn the required grade point average for their particular major. The students are enrolled in the program until they earn thirty semester credits or for two semesters. Hudson, Henderson and Henderson (2002) reviewed archival files in an attempt to analyze the retention rate of the students enrolled in the program.

Starting with the fall, 1997, semester transcripts, class schedules, program study forms, advisement forms, and advisee tracking sheets, all revealed that one-on-one advisor contact and student orientation played a major role in encouraging student persistence. These were the main factors that helped students transition from one stage to another. Whether the student was transitioning from high school to college or from an undeclared to a specific major, it was the mentoring and advising that helped the student bridge the gap. Not only were these transitional issues resolved, but they were resolved early enough in the semester so that the student had time to recoup any academic losses during the transition period.

While program administrators have researched and developed a number of strategies for the General Studies Program, only one of the strategies actually appeared to have a positive effect on student retention within the program. The strategy that seemed to have the most dramatic effect was a strategy formulated by Neisler (1992) involving the utilization of a summer program. The summer program allowed the students to make the transition from high school to college during the summer months instead of waiting until the fall semester.

Archival data revealed that as enrollment increased during the fall semesters, it also increased during the spring semesters. Not only was there an increase in

institutional enrollment, there was an increase in enrollment per academic major. Likewise, there was a slight decline in the number of students who were enrolled in the fall semester but did not return for the spring semester. This slight decline was also reflected in the overall institutional retention rates. The researchers found that while the School of General Studies tackled the retention problem for the undeclared student population, the institution still had to deal with freshman dropouts from another angle.

Several factors were revealed to have influenced the slight shift in enrollment. These factors include: 1) flourishing developmental education courses that help the students prepare for college level work, 2) the utilization of an interdisciplinary tutorial center, 3) readily available advisement and 4) changes in the attitude of the faculty and staff. The study goes on to reveal that although there was a slight increase on enrollment, there was also an increase in the number of students who did not return for the Spring semesters, which resulted in a decline in the student retention.

Although there were no definite answers as to why there was a decline in the number of students returning for the subsequent spring semester, the data collected by Hudson, Henderson, and Henderson (2002) point to several possible contributing factors: 1) financial difficulties, 2) transitional issues not addressed within the program, and 3) family difficulties.

### **Section Five: Conclusion**

Tinto (1975) formulated a model of student retention that seeks to explain the problem of attrition in higher education. Within his model, Tinto (1975) suggests that

there are two systems within the institution that interact closely: the academic system and the social system. Together, these two systems play an integral part in the freshman year retention rate for the institution. Retention is a direct result of the student's pre-college preparation, student commitment to the institution and their incorporation into the academic and social campus environments. During the freshman year, students are in a transition phase of their lives where they are breaking away from an ingrained culture that developed prior to college entrance to a new culture that is comprised of the institution's social and academic environments.

Although many studies have uncovered useful data for educators, academic outcome factors are typically related to academic performance at the end of the first academic year or to interpersonal activities as part of the campus experience. (McDaniel & Graham, 2001). In order to understand the variables that influence students to drop out of school, institutions need to devise a model that could effectively determine these variables and use the models simultaneously with whatever successful methods the institution already has in place (McDaniel & Graham, 2001). Institutions must discover ways to identify at risk students and strategies to help the student successfully matriculate at the institution, regardless of the student's level of preparation prior to attending the institution. Since there is not a generalized, all-purpose attrition model for all institutions; institutions need to develop their own models (Grosset, 1989).

Tinto (1990) found that colleges and universities supply students with sufficient means of attaining academic advising. He also found that most institutions provide adequately utilized faculty advisors, which in turn promotes student retention.

Similarly, other studies reveal that when an institution offered a variety of services such as developmental education, academic advising, and testing, these institutions retained a greater number of students at the freshman level (Dinoto, 1991; Glennen & Baxley, 1985).

In order to realize a student-centered paradigm within an institution, the student must be treated as an end, and not as the means to the other portions of the institution's mission, such as financial gain or departmental notoriety. The student-centered paradigm seeks to encourage institutions to work beyond just changing the traditional classroom curriculum. Institutions must play an active role in shaping the freshman year experience. This requires institutions to consider the needs of their students when formulating and evaluating programs and program outcomes. The student-centered concept enables faculty and staff coordinators to organize programs that help individual students realize their full academic potential and to better understand and attain success both socially and academically.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter recounts the research methodology used to conduct the study. The research procedures and methods utilized during this study are carefully laid out in this chapter. This chapter also provides details about the population, instrumentation, data collection process, and the process by which the data were analyzed.

#### **Selection of the Naturalistic Paradigm**

There are two prevailing research paradigms: the positivist research model and the naturalistic research model. Every researcher must decide which model provides the best approach to the research study. Not only that, the chosen research methodology has a significant impact on the potential use of the research findings once the study is conducted.

The positivist research paradigm is structured and produces results that are generalizable to other studies. While this paradigm functions within the parameters of the researcher's hypothesis and presuppositions, it does not take into account factors such as the influence that the human being has on the environment in question. However, the naturalistic paradigm sets out to uncover data that are distinctive to the particular project. All results that are uncovered from the study seek to explain the setting and the happenings that are unique to the study environment. The findings build meaning and distinct truths that define the setting within its own context. It is very important to note that, although the naturalist could possibly have an influence or

be influenced by those within the study environment, the human factors that the naturalist seeks to discover such as feelings, values, and judgments, play an integral part in the research project. These are the very elements that explain many of the nuances that shape the culture.

The purpose of this study was to uncover student perceptions, the factors that influence these perceptions and how these perceptions influenced students' actions and outcomes. Due to the nature of the study, the naturalistic axioms explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were fitting for such a study. It was very important that the study allowed students to voice their opinions openly within their natural setting. Since the researcher did not adhere to conventional methods of controlling for certain data outcomes, it was important to use an approach that would allow the content of the study to emerge.

### **Population**

The University College, a freshman year retention program at Prairie View A&M University, was identified for investigation. More specifically, the population of inquiry included the director of the University College, academic advisors within the University College, five freshmen students currently enrolled in the program at the time of the study, five sophomore and five junior students previously enrolled in the program.

The sampling procedures used in this study were guided by emerging realities about the culture and environment from which the research participants function on a daily basis. Therefore, purposive sampling was utilized in order to increase the range

of data so as to construct realities that were in keeping with those that are native to the culture and environment. Likewise, all printed documents, historical data, and other data sources were purposefully selected so that the researcher could more adequately provide detail and description of the respondents and their environment.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher used a series of qualitative inquiry methods during this study. These methods were employed in order to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions students held toward the effects of the program on the freshman year experience and the students' decision to persist in college.

The qualitative research method was used because it allowed the research participants to supply "unquantifiable" data in a manner that allowed the themes and categories to emerge naturally. The researcher relied heavily on the participants to supply reactions and responses to each open-ended question that would paint a clear picture of the student's experience while participating in the University College program.

### **Documentation**

The University College had an assortment of documents available to the general public. The documents used for this study were those pertaining to the creation of the program, statistical data pertaining to student enrollment and performance, and documents pertaining to the ACCESS and PLACE programs.

## **Observations**

Spradley (1980) posits that the participant observer enters into the study environment to participate in activities that are germane to the specific environment. Spradley (1980) adds that the participant observer enters the environment to observe the people as they react and interact within the environment so that the observer may become aware of all social interactions that take place during a typical day. Many of the people and events were observed without active participation from the researcher. This was done so that the natural flow of events would take place undisturbed.

For the purpose of this study, observations were done in order to “experience and record how the participants in the environment react not to an outsider but to a new member of the environment” (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 56). The researcher conducted observations of the student/faculty interactions, student residential activities, Learning Community Manager (LCM) /student interaction, student weekday and weekend activities, and weekly faculty meetings. The researcher spent one-year observing the study environment. Many of the observations took place under what Spradley (1980) suggests as complete, active, moderate, or passive submergence. For the purpose of this study, several of the forms of submergence were employed.

### **Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations were conducted with moderate submergence in order to watch and record the classroom environment. Many of the study participants became familiar with the researcher’s presence; therefore, the researcher could gain entry without becoming obtrusive to the environment.

Prior to the observations, the instructors and the researcher met to gain an understanding of the study as well as to establish a rapport with one another. One of the instructors suggested that the researcher establish a similar rapport with the students in order to establish familiarity with the students. She explained that this would enable the researcher to observe the students interacting “more truthfully” than walking into the classroom unannounced. Her fear was that an unannounced visit would make the students uneasy and they would not interact in their normal fashion. The researcher agreed and made note of this in her reflexive journal. This initial meeting took two hours and ended with both the researcher and the instructors agreeing that the study would benefit everyone involved.

Once the observations began, the researcher took special care not to interrupt the classroom activities. She entered the room with the students and took a seat in the far left corner of the classroom. Many of the instructors would greet the students as they entered the classroom in order to set the tone for the lesson. Upon entering the classroom, the researcher would greet the instructor and the students, since this was a part of the classroom protocol established by the instructors. Once the lesson began, the researcher made no attempt to take ownership of any of the classroom content. She observed the students interacting with both the instructor and the content. Once the researcher made several classroom visits, it became apparent that the students and the instructors were very comfortable with her presence.

### **Laboratory Observations**

There were instances where observations were conducted under active submergence. These instances occurred while studying the activities in the developmental studies supplemental instructional laboratory. On several occasions, the lab facilitator would solicit the researcher's help with providing answers to content-related questions. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to gain access to the general environment as well as the chance to ask questions of the students while they were interacting within the environment.

Field notes were maintained throughout this study. In addition, a reflexive journal was kept in order to record any partiality on the part of the researcher as well as any changes to specific methodology. The researcher also used the reflexive journal to record reactions to the research environment, people, culture, and descriptions of any and all study occurrences. The journal proved to be an integral resource throughout the course of the study.

### **Workshop Observations**

All of the students who were required to take developmental classes were required to attend content specific workshops. Workshops were scheduled twice a week: Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3:00 p.m. and Fridays at 11:00 a.m. In many instances this presented a scheduling conflict with many of the classroom observations, but the researcher was able to attend three of the eight scheduled workshops. The workshop observations were not interactive. Since there was limited seating availability for the students, the researcher entered the room once all of the seats were filled and made notes in her reflexive journal. The workshops were

between thirty and forty-five minutes long. Of the three that were observed, only one required student participation. The others were lecture-based.

### **Historical Data**

The archive department of the library provided historical data about the university. Historical data was necessary because it provided information about the university's mission statement and enabled the researcher to piece together information that led to the formation of the University College. It was important to understand the history of the institution in order to understand the current environment and the elements that shaped the culture of the institution. Other departments were also instrumental in providing historical data about the institution.

### **Procedures**

The selection of students was based on the students' current and prior affiliation with the University College program. Arranging interviews with freshman students was not difficult at all. Since the researcher was granted permission to observe classes, workshops and laboratories, it became a matter of the researcher asking the students whether or not they wanted to participate in the interview portion of the study. Once a particular student showed an interest in the study, the researcher began to inquire about any sophomores, juniors and seniors students who may have gone through the University College program during their freshman year. Many of the freshman respondents willingly referred the researcher to the sophomore and junior students. In fact, one of the freshman respondents contacted her sophomore and junior friends at that moment,

via cell phone, about the study. Those particular interviews were conducted later the same day.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to these types of referrals as snowball sampling. The authors note that, “in this form of sampling, one identifies, in whatever way one can, a few members of the phenomenal group one wishes to study. These members are used to identify others, and they in turn others” (p.233). As a result, there were fifteen respondents: Five freshmen, five sophomores, and five juniors. There were no seniors because the University College had not been in existence long enough to realize a senior class. These juniors were the students who had been out of the University College program the longest.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted in one-hour sessions. The researcher received valuable assistance from a graduate juvenile justice major, who served as the technician in charge of providing audio equipment such as tape recorders and audiotapes. The technician provided any other materials and assistance needed during each interview session so that the interviewer did not have to be bogged down with such physical details.

The primary responsibility of the researcher was to serve as the interviewer and pose open-ended questions to the respondents. The respondents' answers to these questions would provide data that uncovered a thorough understanding of the culture under investigation. The other responsibilities of the researcher included uncovering the thoughts and perceptions of the participants, probing, comparing and describing the different thoughts, ideas and perceptions of the participants. The

researcher took precautions not to impose any personal opinions or commentary onto the participants during the interview sessions.

Since the students were already attending classes and laboratories in the building, they were willing to participate in the study. Before each interview, the students were given a form that identified the interviewer, explained the purpose of the study and assured the students that their identities would remain confidential.

Since there are several elements believed to influence student perception of the program: 1) social integration into the campus culture, 2) academic integration into the college culture, and 3) student interaction with faculty and administrators, the researcher used the interview method to gather data. This method was chosen because it allowed data to emerge that would uncover the students' perceptions about the effects of the program on the student's freshman year experience and the student's decision to persist in college.

Interviews were conducted during observations. These interviews were conducted exclusively by the researcher in order to maintain the consistency of the data collection process. All interview participants signed a consent form granting the researcher permission to audio record each interview. Interview techniques were influenced by Spradley (1979) who suggests explaining the project; interview questions and the function the interview serves within the study; asking open-ended questions; repetition of the respondents' answers for clarity; and peer debriefing at the close of the interview.

Student participants answered questions that explained how the institution, instructors, administrators, and program activities as well as other variables affected

their experiences during the freshman year and their decision to remain in college. During the study, interviews were utilized so that the researcher could involve each student in meaningful dialogue about experiences each had while in the University College setting. Samples of questions asked include:

1. What methodologies are being utilized within the University College to impact the freshman year retention rate?
2. How do you perceive your social environment within the University College? What are the experiences that influence your perception?
3. How do you perceive your academic environment within the University College? What are the experiences that influence your perception?
4. What impact have activities associated with the University College had on your general success and development?

This research study investigated the effects of the University College (a freshman year retention effort) on the freshman year experience at Prairie View A&M University. The research design and methodology were guided by the naturalistic or constructivist research theory as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Erlandson (1993). The constructivist research paradigm enabled the researcher to understand and appreciate the multiple constructions that were established within the research environment. It further allowed the researcher to grasp the dynamic of human interactions and the behavioral aspects of these relationships as they evolved.

One-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to observe and document the interviewee's expressions and unspoken responses to the interview questions while

also permitting the researcher to further delve into unforeseen topics introduced during the course of these interviews.

The interviewer conducted member checks so as to insure that, “both data and interpretations obtained be verified by” the student (Erlandson, 1993, et. al, 1993, p31). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that member checks allow the researcher to test data by allowing stakeholders to confirm or negate any conclusions or interpretations drawn by the researcher. This decreases the likelihood of misinterpretations or false conclusions on the part of the researcher that do not truly reflect the realities of the stakeholders. Once the researcher reached the point of category saturation, data collection ceased (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). At this point in the study, collection of new information failed to provide any new significance to the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Unlike a traditional research study, the researcher made no attempt at separating data collection from the analysis of the data. Since the researcher was the primary instrument in the study, it was imperative that the study included the involvement of the human instrument in order to follow and analyze the construction of emergent realities. Data analysis took place both during and after data collection so that the researcher could be sure that interviews, observations and other elements of the research study were painting a truthful picture of the study environment.

In doing so, the researcher transcribed all data immediately after each interview. The researcher analysed all interview transcripts using the constant comparative method. Glaser and Strauss (1967) as well as Lincoln and Guba(1985)

described the constant comparative method as a means of analyzing data in order to derive theory created from data collection in the study.

In using the constant comparative method, it became apparent that many of the students shared similar perceptions and experiences. Therefore, once the interviews were transcribed, small amounts of data were transferred from the transcripts on to 3x5 cards. These cards were then arranged into units of information that emerged from recurring data within the transcripts. For example, although most of the students were pleased with their overall experiences within the University College setting, many of these same students voiced displeasure with individual program components. In order to unitize and categorize this information, the researcher labeled the unit that emerged from this particular outcome “comfortable” to indicate these were the students who responded positively to their overall University College experience. However, once these students began detailing specific unfavorable experiences, the researcher began to uncover categories within these units of data (i.e. students who liked the University College but disliked developmental reading laboratories).

These emerging units or unitizing refer to “chunks of meaning” (Marshall, 1981, p.396) which arise from the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Erlandson et al. 1993, unitizing is defined as “disaggregating data into the smallest pieces of information that may stand alone as independent thoughts in the absence of additional information other than a broad understanding of the context” (p.117).

Again, once the data were unitized, categories began to emerge from these units. These categories were formed by analyzing all of the data units, and sorting them into groups of similar themes or categories. Each unit of data was compared to

another related unit of data. The litmus test for final placement of each index card was the answer to the question: Does this unit of data look or feel like another unit of data? If the answer to the question was yes, then the card was placed in a particular category. If the answer was no, then the search continued to find the closest possible placement for the card, if any existed. The 3x5 index cards were moved and arranged from category to category until each card seemed to “fit” into a particular category.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Erlandson (1993), establishing trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry involves the use of four measures: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. All four measures were adhered to during this study. The following are the methods used to comply with each component of trustworthiness.

#### **Prolonged Engagement**

Prolonged engagement addresses the issue of credibility. As the term implies, prolonged engagement enables one to learn more about the research site, the people and its culture over an extended period of time (Erlandson, 1993). During the prolonged engagement, a rapport with all of the study participants was established. This type of engagement provided knowledge of many of the cultural idiosyncracies, which would otherwise be escaped by someone who is foreign to the environment. The researcher was able to recognize any distortions or cultural anomalies throughout data collection. Any information or occurrence that was not typical to the

environment was not mistakenly characterized as a cultural truth during data analysis. In this study, the researcher participated in a year-long engagement.

### **Persistent Observation**

Credibility was also addressed by conducting persistent observations. These observations enabled the researcher to distinguish relevant situations from those that were not relevant. Once identified, the researcher could focus on relevant issues as they related to the research problem instead of spending an inordinate amount of time on irrelevant issues within the study.

### **Referential Adequacy Material**

Background materials such as audiotapes, brochures, historical documents, computer floppy and compact disks all support credibility by providing tangible artifacts for the purpose of audit, analysis and interpretation. During the course of this study all of these materials were acquired.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation addresses credibility by using multiple or different sources of data. Each single piece of information in this study was expanded by using another source of information to verify data or to add depth to the data. One interview was compared to another in order to add dimension to the researcher's ability to gain insight about the stakeholders and their environment. For example, the researcher used information from students who both liked and disliked the University College setting to gain insight about many of the programs. In many instances, both categories of students gave similar responses relating to one or more of the programs.

From these responses, the researcher was able to gain insight about how the program had an impact on the students.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking allowed all research participants to examine interview data and conclusions drawn from data. Member checking was conducted with the participants at the research site. During each interview, the researcher would summarize the participant's comments. In turn the participants would then be asked if this interpretation was an accurate representation of the participant's response. Constant participant feed back was sought on a regular basis during the data collection phase of the study in order to obtain accurate interpretation of data (Erlandson, 1993).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This chapter provides an examination of the University College program at Prairie View A&M University and the students' perception of that program. The chapter begins with a profile of study respondents. Then, each of the study questions will be addressed based upon the results of the data analysis.

#### **Respondent Profiles**

Fifteen students from Prairie View University participated in the study. In order to participate in the study, the students were either freshmen who were currently participating in the University College Program at the time of the study, or they were sophomore and junior students who had participated in the study during their freshman year. There were no senior student respondents because the University College had been in existence for only three years at the time of the study.

During interviews, students were asked to provide the researcher with demographic information. The results were as follows:

Table 1: Respondent Profiles

Student Name	Age	Gender	Classification	Major/Minor	Extracurricular Activities	Researcher's Comments
Anita	19	Female	Freshman	Music	University Chorale and the Baptist Student Movement Gospel Choir	Anita became an eager study participant only after being reassured her true identity would not be revealed.
Tracy	19	Female	Freshman	Social Work	None, plans to pledge Greek letter organization during the following semester	Student contacted sophomore and junior respondents for study. She wanted to participate in the study because she is the third generation to attend Prairie View A&M University
Doug	19	Male	Freshman	Business Management	None	None
John	18	Male	Freshman	Undecided	None	None
Charles	19	Male	Freshman	Engineering	None	Charles described himself as a loner. Although he participated in the study, it was difficult to get him to respond to open ended questions.
Darius	20	Male	Sophomore	Agriculture	Prairie View A&M University Rodeo Club	Darius was a friend of Tracy's. He was very willing to provide input.
Walter	20	Male	Sophomore	Business Management	None	None
Sandra	19	Female	Sophomore	Education/ English	Student Government Association & the PVAMU Marching Band	None
Anthony	20	Male	Sophomore	Theater/ Communications	Drama Club & Concert Choir	None
Christina	19	Female	Sophomore	Mathematics	None	None
Linda	21	Female	Junior	Criminal Justice/ Psychology	Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., Honor Society & Baptist Student Movement	None
Cathy	22	Female	Junior	Biology	Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Toastmasters International	Well spoken and very outgoing
Pamela	21	Female	Junior	Nursing	Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc., Nursing Club & the Chicago Club	Pam was a friend of Tracy's who was extremely willing to participate in the study.
Jocelyn	22	Female	Junior	Elementary Education/ Math	Forensics Team & Toastmasters International	None
Michael	21	Male	Junior	Mechanical Engineering	Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Football	None

### **Findings Related to Research Question One**

What methodologies are being utilized within the University College to impact the freshman year experience?

The University College (UC) Program at Prairie View A&M University was comprised of two major components, the non-academic or the residential component and the academic component. Both components operated within a centralized organizational structure, yet each component contained subcomponents that were systematically coordinated. Although these subcomponents of the UC were hierarchically top down, the key players in the daily UC operations were the staff members who were involved in the one-on-one daily interactions with the students.

The methodologies utilized by the University College were: (1) implementation of academic and social immersion during the summer orientation program, (2) utilization of the intrusive advising model within the academic advising department and the residential communities, and (3) implementation of traditional and nontraditional instructional methods for basic skills enhancement within the academic subcomponent.

#### **The ACCESS Program**

The Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) program was a residential summer “boot camp” for entering “at risk” students. The program consisted of two components. The first component was a seven-week summer residential academic enhancement program. This component of the program provided an academic community that allowed students to take courses and receive academic advisement. Students received daily instruction within a nontraditional

setting in mathematics, reading, writing, critical thinking and problem solving. Students also attended structured workshops and study halls five nights a week during this seven week period. Along with skills enhancement, there were off-campus field experiences that served to connect the classroom concepts with real world experiences. Students took advantage of supplemental instruction and were able to start their freshman year experience before the fall semester began. During the summer, students were immersed and became acclimated to both the academic and social cultures of the campus.

Although the ACCESS program was sponsored and staffed by the University College, students were not officially enrolled into the UC program until the fall semester. The second component of the ACCESS experience took place during the fall semester and included the introduction into the UC program. Students who attended the ACCESS program during the summer were formally enrolled in the University College program, which included intrusive proactive advisement, academic enhancement, and centralized support services within a residential learning community.

The ACCESS program gave incoming freshmen students the chance to confront freshman year issues before the start of the fall semesters. Students were able to form friendships with their fellow students. These friendships played an integral part in helping students assuage feelings of loneliness and fear of the unknown. Students were also able to acquaint themselves with academic advisors and other UC personnel who could help the student transition from being a high school

student to becoming a seasoned college student. As Christina, a sophomore mathematics major, put it:

Me and my roommates met in the [ACCESS] program, so I knew what I was getting into with that. They told us which teachers to take and which teachers not to take. The teachers and advisors told us how to handle our schoolwork, so we could just sit back and chill. I kind of knew the ropes by the time the fall rolled around. I had my schedule and I knew my room number and roommates. I was chillin' while everybody else was running around like a chicken with their heads cut off.

While discussing the ACCESS program, many of the students recount experiences that helped them transition from high school to college. These experiences not only include the traditional classroom setting, but also include being taught how to read on the college level and how to ask questions. Most of the students admitted that their initial interactions within the UC environment made them uneasy because they did not know what to expect from the experience. It was when the students realized that they were being taught how to become college students and take care of themselves that they began to feel comfortable with their environment.

### **The Nonacademic/Residential Component**

The non-academic component of the University College model consisted of both residential and student activities. The University College complex was comprised of fourteen residential buildings and a main “commons” area that housed the academic advisors, mentors and the UC director.

Within the residential buildings, incoming students were housed on a first-come, first-serve basis. Some of the buildings were co-ed; because once the majority of the buildings were occupied by a single gender, last minute applicants were housed in the last remaining buildings.

Once the UC reached full housing capacity, the remaining applicants who were unable to be housed within the UC complex, were housed in the upper classmen housing complexes known as the “Phases” (named according to the time in which each building was constructed, i.e. Phase I, Phase II, etc).

Each of the UC residential buildings had three floors, which were supervised by the Learning Community Managers (LCM) and two Community Assistants (CAs). The LCM was located on the first floor of each of the residential buildings, while the CAs were located on the second and the third floors of each building. The LCM was usually a graduate student who served as the building director and was responsible for maintaining the daily activities of the building, supervising the CAs, and guiding student activities within the assigned building. The LCM also served as the Community Assistant for first floor resident. As Cathy student put it,

The LCM makes sure that the CA is doing her job and that the rest of us are not tearing the buildings up and going crazy. They walk around like they are the police looking around to see what everybody is doing and asking questions about what we’re doing. I guess they do it so we don’t get into nothing.

Many of the students commented on the advising approach utilized by the LCMs and the CAs. What Earls (1988) described as purposeful and intentional intervention, students perceived as ‘getting into their business’.

The CAs reported directly to the LCM, and were responsible for holding floor meetings, which disseminated information to and from students living on the second and third floors. These meetings also gave students the opportunity to voice opinions and concerns that related to their experiences within the building, the University College and the institution. Floor meetings were an integral part of the flow of communication between the students and the institution. After each floor meeting,

each CA and the LCM held a meeting to decide which staff or administrator would accommodate the students' concerns.

### **Intrusive Advising Model within the University College**

The intrusive advising approach was handled in two phases. During phase one, advisors and mentors met with students initially during the summer orientation program. At this time, students were taught how to coordinate their academic schedules as well as how to incorporate the amount of study time needed per course. Likewise, students were required to meet with their advisors during the summer so that the advisor could introduce the student to the advising process. Phase two of the University College intrusive advising approach took place during the academic year and did not conclude until the student mastered two collegiate mile stones: (1) satisfied all requirements to exit the developmental studies program and (2) successfully completed the freshman year with a 2.0 grade point average or better. Some students were required to continue to meet with UC academic advisors after the freshman year if the developmental course requirement had not been fulfilled.

Advisors used an intrusive approach which included encouraging students to take responsibility for their own academic outcomes, helping students view course work as career building, helping students work through social and academic problems that may interfere with academic progress, and helping students develop into lifelong independent thinkers. More specifically, advisors and mentors worked from the premise that many first time students had not developed the behavior patterns that motivated them to seek the help they needed to become successful. Therefore,

advisors initiated dialogue with students to motivate and encourage the development of such behavior patterns.

### **Traditional and Nontraditional Instructional Methods**

The Academic Enhancement (AE) Program provided a combination of supplemental instruction and course offerings. These offerings included academic developmental courses, workshops and basic skills laboratories. The AE program served as the primary academic vein of the University College. Unlike the other academic departments on the Prairie View A&M University campus, the Academic Enhancement Department did not offer degree applicable courses.

The program served over one thousand students which was about 25% of the entire student population. The purpose of the department was to offer basic skill courses (formerly referred to as remedial courses) so that students were able to handle regular college level courses once they exited the program. The program also offered a series of supplemental programs to help students through out the remediation process.

Much like many of the other academic departments on campus, the AE department was responsible for overseeing a specific series of courses offered at Prairie View more specifically developmental courses. The department's organizational chart depicts an Academic Enhancement Administrator who answers directly to the University College Director, a Math Coordinator and an English Coordinator who are responsible for the daily supervision and coordination of the course-based and non-course based classes and the faculty and specialists in their respective content areas. The Coordinators answer directly to the Academic

Enhancement Administrator. The Mathematics and English Faculty teach course based developmental courses. The English and Mathematics Specialist teach the non-course based developmental classes.

### **Summary and Analysis of the Findings Related to Questions One**

A thorough review of the literature shows that the responsibility of student retention not only falls on the student, but falls mainly on the institution. The institution must develop programs that encourage students to participate and feel welcomed. Although the marriage between sociology and education as prescribed by Durkheim (1885) serves as the catalyst for much of the student development theory utilized by institutions, it is the institution that is in the position of developing scholars by putting theory into practice.

The University College program was how Prairie View endeavored to put theory into practice. The institution put together components in hopes of meeting the needs of its particular student population. By assembling program components into a workable model, the institution attempted to create a one-stop-shop for students that provided centralized help for students as well as train the student how to relate academic knowledge so that the student could think and perform in a scholarly fashion.

Since many of the students who entered Prairie View required basic skills remediation, the administration adopted the Kemig (1983) Level IV approach as a model for its basic skills enhancement program. This was done in order to bridge the gap between the knowledge the students may be lacking and the higher order thinking skills required to master upper level college work.

Per their own admission, many of the sophomore and junior respondents stated that they recognized deficiencies in their own basic skill levels once they started taking courses during the summer enrichment program. When asked about his participation in the summer orientation program, Darius began to reflect upon how his experience in the ACCESS program helped him prepare for college level work:

High school was a lot different from college. We didn't have to do half of what we have to do here. In fact, I never had much homework in high school. All I remember doing in English class is looking at films about a book and taking a test over the film. That was our grade. Mrs.- never made us read a whole book. But when I got here, we have a lot of reading to do. They don't even make Cliff's Notes for the stuff we have to read here. And the test....[whew] they make you write a whole page to answer one or two questions.

Pamela made the following comment:

I see why some of these professors do the things they do. Although I had fun, they worked the hell out of us that summer. But like Mr.- always said, 'I know that I know what I know because I worked hard to know it.' Crabs [term referring to freshmen students on Prairie View's campus] need to know this kind of stuff, how to study, how to learn, when to study, so when they get in Dr.-'s class they won't flunk out. Most of the time these crabs come to the Yard [term referring to the Prairie View A&M campus] thinking they know everything, until one of these professors break 'em down like fractions...then they go home crying to their mamas.

It was apparent that in hindsight many of the sophomore and junior students appreciated the knowledge and experiences they acquired during their freshman summer orientation program. These same upper-class students were able to apply what they learned to other facets of the institution's culture. Moreover, as Pamela inferred, these same students were also able to understand why the institution implemented certain programs.

In relation to the residential component of the University College, the institution sought to house freshmen away from the general sophomore, junior and

senior student population so that the new students could experience the rite of passage from high school into college (Van Gennep, 1960) and benefit from being involved in a learning community that promoted social and academic interaction among peers in and out of the traditional classroom setting (Astin, 1993).

### **Findings Related to Research Question Two**

How do students perceive their social environment within the University College?

What are the experiences that influence these perceptions?

The nonacademic component provided a combination of academic advising, mentoring and social and academically related experiences within the residential community. Since the University College organizational chart was strategically divided into academic and nonacademic subcomponents, for the purpose of this study, the student experiences that were influenced by the nonacademic subcomponent were the focus of this question. There were a variety of responses. Students were initially asked to provide a single response that described the University College atmosphere-comfortable or uncomfortable. They were also asked to give a detailed account of the experiences that influenced their initial responses.

Several themes emerged from these responses. One of which was the fact that many of the students referred to the University College atmosphere as a “family-like” or a not so “family-like” setting. Twelve of the fifteen students felt that the UC environment was comfortable. Although these students responded favorably to the UC environment, some of these same students voiced displeasure with some of the dormitory experiences. Of the students who stated that the UC environment was

comfortable, these students noted that there was one underlying factor that influenced their perception. All of these students attended the UC sponsored summer orientation program prior to fall enrollment, which allowed them time to become acclimated to the UC environment prior to the fall semester. Conversely, three of the students responded that the UC environment was uncomfortable. The main factors that influenced their perceptions were the adjustment to dormitory living, lack of adjustment to the intrusive advising methods utilized by the UC advisors and the students' pre-college expectations.

### **Comfortable University College (UC) Environment**

Twelve of the fifteen students interviewed stated that the UC environment was comfortable. Many of these students credited their feelings of comfort to their participation in the summer orientation (ACCESS) program. The program mainly focuses on acclimating graduating high school seniors to college life: more specifically acclimating students to Prairie View A & M University college life. During the ACCESS program there were social activities planned that were designed to give students an idea of what the social climate was like on the campus. Cathy offered this response:

The UC was very comfortable. It felt like family because I was able to learn a lot during the summer. They [the UC staff] made sure we had everything we needed. It felt like family because all of the freshmen students got to know one another during the summer. We had the chance to go to movie night together and go to parties together without leaving the building or leaving campus. This was good because I didn't have a car back and Prairie View is located in the middle of nowhere.

Several of the sophomores and juniors reflected upon their continuing friendships with their fellow ACCESS colleagues. The students concluded that the

summer program provided them with the opportunity to bond and, according to Pamela, “learn the ropes” together. In retrospect, Darius offers the following response about the ACCESS experience:

I enjoyed the summer, because the college experience was different for me. When I got here I didn't know what to expect. I was glad to have the summer to learn everything I needed to know, instead of waiting until the fall. During the fall, everybody is back and people are too busy to help. The summer was a good head start for me.

Likewise, upperclassmen who deemed the UC experience a pleasurable one attributed this to their dormitory experience during the ACCESS program. Christina responded:

We saw each other in the dorm every day like a family. We solved each other's problems. We helped each other with our homework. The LCM and the CA's talked to us and gave us advice. When we had our floor meetings were able to talk about things that mattered to us. During the summer we talked about what we expected from college and during the regular school year we talked about what was going on then.

When asked to discuss the specific social activities that had an impact on the way they felt about the UC, the majority of the students noted that movie night, meeting famous people, and Pan Hellenic events were the activities that had the greatest influence on their overall perception of the UC social environment. Activities such as book signings by famous African American authors gave the students the opportunity to meet other African Americans who may have matriculated at a historically black college or university. Michael reflected:

During my first summer, I got a chance to meet three brothers who wrote a book about their lives. The book talks about how they grew up in the ghetto and now they are doctors. They made a promise to finish medical school together. That made me feel good because it let me know I can do it, too.

On that same note, Sandra responded:

I got the chance to meet Maya Angelou and Nikki Giovanni since I have been here. We took a field trip during the summer and the fall. I didn't even consider these to be real people, until I actually got a chance to meet them. Not only were they real, but they were cool and straightforward people. Meeting them let me know that I am capable of writing a book, too.

During this portion of the interview process, many of the respondents referred to the visits by the famous authors as positive life-altering events that left a lasting impression on them. Several of the students concluded that prior to these encounters, they [the students] had not considered anything beyond going to school and getting a job. Darius coined this period of discovery as the students' opportunity to "experience some 'outside of the box' kind of stuff."

### **Uncomfortable University College (UC) Environment**

As stated before, three of the fifteen students interviewed perceived the UC environment to be an uncomfortable environment. It is worth noting that none of the three respondents attended the ACCESS summer program. Likewise, these same students experienced freshman year adjustment issues that were addressed by their twelve aforementioned colleagues prior to the fall semester. Based upon the students' responses, there were two major factors that contributed to their feelings of discomfort: 1) the lack of compatibility between the students' own perception of college life and the reality of college life on this particular campus and 2) the students' experiences within the University College dormitories.

### **Student Pre-College Perceptions**

One of the factors that contributed to the students' feelings of discomfort was the lack of compatibility between the students' own perception of college life and the

reality of college life on this particular campus. Prior to the college experience, most of the fifteen respondents arrived at the institution with preconceived notions about the college experience. Only one of the respondents admitted to not “having a clue” about what to expect during the freshman year. The three students who responded unfavorably to the UC environment anticipated a hands-off approach to education once they left their parent’s home.

The main expectation the students had was that there would be no supervision of any form. Students expected autonomy in both the classroom and the dormitory. None of the students anticipated any type of intervention from the UC staff.

Of those respondents who had some pre-college ideas, these respondents revealed that many of their ideas came from what they had seen or heard from the media; while many of their ideas were formulated through listening to experiences handed down by family and friends who had already attended college. As the students admitted, none of these expectations were confirmed by any actual personal college experiences prior to this one. Charles explained that there was a gap between what he expected from college and what he actually experienced. He detailed his displeasure with the UC as he chronicled his family’s longstanding history of college attrition:

No one in my family has a degree. My dad, my brother and my mother started, but they didn’t finish. They told me that I would have a lot of freedom. My brother told me that I could go and come when and where I wanted to go. He said there wouldn’t be anyone telling me what to do as long as I did my schoolwork. When I got here, my LCM and CA were the first to give me orders. My academic advisor was always breathing down my neck about my classes. Plus, they do these room checks to see if you have a girl in your room. I thought we were grown.

Students whose family members have college degrees have a deeper commitment to goal attainment and graduation (Chase, 1997). Charles's family's inability to finish college shaped his perception about the college experience. Moreover, his conception of freedom and 'being grown' were confronted by the intrusive advising techniques used by the advisors and the dormitory personnel.

Tracy voiced her displeasure with the UC environment citing the infringement upon the freedom she expected as one of the factors for her displeasure. She described her UC encounter:

I thought you were grown when you turned 18 and moved away from home. My friends always told me that I would have a lot of freedom when I went to college. That's not true here. One night I was standing around talking to my friends in the hallway. My CA walked up to us and said, 'Don't you girls think its time to go to your rooms now? It is a school night.' We just looked at her. We turned our backs and kept talking. After that, she [the CA] kept spying on us. We couldn't do anything without her saying something to us. That's like being in prison.

The two female students, Linda and Tracy, stated that there was such a discrepancy between their expectations of independence and the UC intrusive advising model that they chose to leave the UC complex and live off campus before the end of the freshman year.

In general, the three students did not expect supervision of any type. Furthermore, the male student, Charles, who disliked the UC social environment, described himself as a loner who had no desire to interact "too much" with "too many people." He also stated that a person who shares this personality trait would not survive in this type of environment.

### **Intrusive Advising and Mentoring within the UC Dormitory Environment**

Another factor contributing to the students' feelings of discomfort was their experiences within the University College dormitories. One of the main objectives of the University College was to function as an impartial broker between the student and the academic choices available to the student. Since eighty-five percent of the students' time was spent outside of the classroom, the University College became more intrusive in the freshman students' experience by changing the traditional roles of the resident assistants and the academic advising staff members.

When asked about the role of the LCM and the CA, students offered a variety of responses. The overall consensus of the freshmen respondents was that the LCM and CA were acting more like parents and less like peers. Doug replied

It's like your LCM and your CA are watching you all of the time. When I came to college, they [friends] told me that you are on your own. They [friends] said nobody could tell you what to do. If you didn't want to do something, you didn't have to do it. When I got here, we couldn't have visitation. We couldn't hang out. We couldn't do anything. We have a TV room where people socialize. Our LCM would close it down at a certain times. He would tell us what we could and couldn't do in there. We couldn't even socialize in the hallway, but we are supposed to be college students.

Tracy student responded,

If you don't want your business to get back to your advisor, don't tell the LCM or the CA, because you are going to have to hear it again.

When asked what type of business Tracy was referring to, the student replied,

What you do in class, whether or not you are doing your homework, and whether or not you are going to class. The instructors even tell your advisors whether or not you go to class. I thought we were grown.

When sophomore and junior students were asked about the role of the LCM and the CA, the responses were different from the responses of the freshmen students.

Through hindsight, upperclassmen had a tendency to appreciate the intervention of the resident assistants. According to Walter:

My CA would always ask me questions about what I was doing or whether or not I needed some help with something. I used to get mad because I thought he was getting in my business. Now I understand why he did it. If he saw us hanging out too much instead of studying he would try to get us to do better. If we didn't, he would tell our advisors and we would hear it from him [the advisor].

The resident assistants and the academic advisors served as liaisons between the student and student services. The general consensus of the respondents was that the role of the LCM was that of a “parliamentarian, whose sole duty was to police the activities of all of the residents in his building“. According to several of the UC staff members, the original intent of the LCM position was to have an older student in the dorm setting who could serve as a role model, mentor, and a supervisor for the students.

### **Summary and Analysis of the Findings Related to Question Two**

According to Van Gennep (1960), students who do not make a smooth transition from high school to college or those who fail to complete the transition successfully are more likely to drop out of college. From the administration's perspective, the ACCESS program was the Prairie View's attempt to help students transition from their parents' home to living independently in an academic setting. The program also served as the students' initiation into higher education.

In response to question two, students were asked to describe the social environment within the University College as comfortable or uncomfortable. Twelve of the fifteen students stated that the U.C. social environment was comfortable.

Again, it is worth noting that all twelve of these students participated in the ACCESS summer program prior to their freshman year.

The summer orientation program incorporated a student-centered approach that promoted initial contact with students for the purpose of community building among freshman students (Tinto, 1987). Many of the study respondents adopted the term “boot camp” to describe the ACCESS experience. The term “boot camp” further adds validity to the concept of initiation. According to Walter:

We were in class most of the day. In the afternoons we had to talk to some kind of teacher or advisor about something. I wanted to take a nap during the day, but there was always something to do. Although some of the stuff was fun, we were constantly moving.

Of the twelve respondents who attended the “boot camp”, none of them harbored negative feelings about their experiences. In fact, all twelve of the respondents credited the ACCESS program with helping them become acclimated to the campus culture as well as helping them become acclimated to the rigors of the academic workload. By giving students the opportunity to experience college life prior to their fall enrollment, the institution formulated a model that influenced student persistence and concentrated on student retention (Tinto, 1987).

As for the three students who responded negatively to the U.C. environment, none of these students attended the summer orientation program. Furthermore, these students cited pre-college expectations and intrusive advising within the dormitories as the main reasons for their feelings of discomfort.

Statements such as ‘They told me I would have a lot of freedom,’ and ‘...they told me you are on your own,’ indicated that the students had formed opinions from information relayed by to them by the elusive “they.” The two female respondents

who were unhappy with the U.C environment, Linda and Tracy, classified their informants as friends. When asked about their friends' institutions, college experiences or successful college completion, neither of the respondents could provide concrete details about their friends' experiences. The two female respondents both moved off campus before the end of their freshman year.

Only Charles was able to pinpoint where he had received his information. Upon further inquiry, it was uncovered that his informants, his mother, father and brother, did not successfully finish college. Basically, the student's opinion was based upon the opinions of his family members who had unsuccessfully attempted degree attainment. Moreover, he later admitted that much of his disdain for the U.C. was prompted by his own disposition.

The relationship between the academic advisor and the student can have a lasting effect on the student's decision to continue at the institution, as well as the student's social, academic and career choices (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen & Vowel, 1995; Nutt, 2000). Yet, to achieve efficient and effective one-on-one student advising, advisors must hone their communication, questioning and referral skills (Nutt, 2000). Although the intrusive advising model seemed to work for the majority of the student respondents, it is this advising model that seemed to repel the three respondents who described the U.C environment as uncomfortable. It seems this advising model infringed upon the student's presuppositions of freedom and "being grown." The consistent inquiry on the part of the advisors and dormitory personnel was not in keeping with the students' expectations; therefore, the students

experienced a disconnection between what was and what the students perceived should be.

Charles described himself as a “loner” who had no desire to interact “too much” with “too many people.” This indicated that an intrusive advising environment may not be the best environment for a person with this type of disposition. Furthermore, varying the methods of inquiry to fit the students’ disposition may prove to be a better advising approach. In short, what the administrators perceived as showing care and attention to the students through intrusive advising was perceived by these three students, according to Linda , as “just pain nosy and getting into my business.”

### **Findings Related to Research Question Three**

How do students perceive their academic environment within the University College?

What are the experiences that influence their perception?

For the purpose of this study, the student experiences that were influenced by the academic subcomponent of the University College were the focus of this question. The aim of question three was twofold. The first goal was to determine whether the academic subcomponents were helpful in facilitating student success. The second goal was to uncover those experiences that influenced the students’ overall perception of the University College academic environment. Students were asked to give a general classification of their U.C academic experiences as helpful or not helpful. They were then asked to provide details about the experiences that helped them formulate this perception.

## **Developmental Courses**

Developmental courses were designed to help students master basic reading, writing and math skills so that the students would be able to perform successfully in college level courses. All colleges and universities in the state were required to offer these courses to students whose test scores on the state mandated standardized test fell below the passing score. The state granted autonomy to the institutions' administrators as to how remediation would be handled on each campus. Instead of having each subject area placed in separate academic departments, this particular institution formed a centralized developmental studies department and administered all developmental courses through the Academic Enhancement division of the University College.

All fifteen of the respondents were required to take developmental courses during their freshman year based upon their test scores. Likewise, all of the students required remediation in at least two of the three basic skills areas. When asked whether or not the courses helped them to master basic skills, all of the students agreed that the courses were helpful.

At the end of their developmental courses, the students were required to retake the state test. If the student passed the test, they were not required to take any more developmental courses in that content area and could register for college level courses. If students did not pass the test, they had to remain in developmental education until they were able to pass the test.

Although she agreed that the developmental courses helped her, Jocelyn stated:

It was sickening and embarrassing to have to go to those retarded classes. I had to take the reading classes. The only reason I had to take them was because I fell asleep on that stupid test. Those reading selections on the test are long and boring. I didn't know how to break that stuff down. When I took the class, my teacher taught me how to handle college level reading. I just hated going.

This was the consensus of all of the students who were required to take the reading courses.

The students' perceptions of the math and writing courses were slightly different from their perceptions of having to take the reading courses. Although the students viewed reading as a necessary skill, they perceived writing and math as marketable skills that would lead to future employment. This became apparent when interviewing students majoring in English, math, and engineering. Michael, a junior mechanical engineering major, explained:

I took math in high school, but I knew I wasn't ready for college level math when I saw my TASP scores. I didn't mind having to take developmental math because I'm pretty strong in it now. I learned a lot in those courses. I'm going to be an engineer. If I can't do math, I can't make money.

Many of the students perceived math and English as having a direct bearing on their future earning potential therefore making class attendance bearable.

Sandra, who plans to be an English teacher, stated:

I kind of liked my developmental English class. It refreshed my memory about the writing process. I would have preferred to go straight into freshman composition. If I'm going to be a teacher, I can't apply for a job if I've flunked all of my English classes because I can't write. Besides, its math I can't stand.

Although developmental courses were mandatory for these students, the courses were not a part of any of the institution's academic degree plans. The general student perception was that the courses were necessary.

## **Workshops**

Students enrolled in developmental courses were required to attend two content related workshops per developmental course in which they were enrolled. The purpose of the workshops was to supplement classroom instruction through the utilization of technology and additional instruction. The workshops served as abbreviated versions of the classroom environment. The instructors and specialists within the Academic Enhancement department facilitated each workshop. Therefore, students would attend workshops that may or may not be facilitated by their own classroom instructor.

When asked whether or not the students found the workshops to be helpful, ten of the respondents found the workshops helpful. However, five of the respondents did not find the workshops helpful.

Students who perceived that the workshops were helpful were asked what experiences made them feel that way. The majority of these respondents agreed that receiving instruction outside of the traditional classroom setting reinforced what was taught in the classroom. These same students also confer that it was helpful receiving supplemental instruction from a professional other than their regular classroom instructor.

Although the workshops were mandatory, the students were able to receive the outside help they needed without going to peer tutors who, in the students' opinion, may or may not have knowledge of the content area. Walter made the following comment about his experiences in the workshops:

At the beginning of the semester the instructors gave us the syllabus and a copy of the workshop schedule. I was able to determine what workshops to attend

early in the semester. All of the workshops covered a skill that the teacher had covered in class; so if I was having a problem with a skill, I could go to the workshop and hear the material presented again. We would even get a chance to work on the computers if we were having problems.

John commented on how workshop attendance affected the students' grade in the developmental courses:

Going to the workshops was the one of the easiest parts of the class. All you had to do was show up and listen. My teacher made workshop attendance ten percent of our grade. I think all of the teachers made the workshops worth a percentage of the grade in the class.

Again, five of the respondents stated that the workshops were not helpful. Two of the main reasons these students did not find the workshops to be helpful were time conflicts, and the location of the workshops. Christina complained that she was never able to go to the workshops because they were scheduled during her class time:

The workshops were always scheduled at 3:00p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays or at 11:00a.m. on Fridays. I had classes during those times. Whenever I asked to do make up workshops, it was always a hassle to get something scheduled. It wasn't like I didn't want to go, I just couldn't.

Both Christina and Anthony experienced the same dilemma with workshop scheduling. Anthony also said that he tried to adjust his schedule at the beginning of the semester to accommodate the workshop schedule; but was unsuccessful because he would have missed the opportunity to get one of his most difficult classes out of the way. He further commented about his time conflict:

I'm a theater major. My schedule is already tight. We have rehearsal calls all of the time. If its not listed on my fee receipt, then it might as well not exist. My advisor helped me make my schedule so that I would have time to study and rehearse. By the time I found out about the workshop times, I couldn't change my schedule because all of the good classes were already taken.

Although these five students expressed displeasure with the workshops, none of the respondents cited that any of the content within the workshops was a reason for their displeasure.

### **Basic Skills Laboratory**

Like the workshops, basic skills laboratory attendance was mandatory. Students were required to go to the lab outside of the classroom setting two hours per week. Each student had to complete a series of assignments scoring 80% or better on each assignment in order to complete the lab successfully. If the student did not earn 80% on a particular assignment, the student had the opportunity to do the same type of assignment until mastery was achieved. Since students were able to complete the lab assignments on the computer, the laboratory staff was able to track student performance and provide feedback to the specialists and instructors.

Each instructor designated a certain percentage of the student's final grade for lab attendance and performance. Depending upon the nature of the final classroom assessment, students either earned a letter grade or pass/fail for their lab performance.

Seven of the fifteen respondents deemed the lab to be a helpful resource. The two main reasons students responded favorably to the lab were: (1) Students were able to "re-do" assignments if they received a failing grade on a particular assignment and (2) unlike the classroom setting where there were due dates and deadlines places on the assignments, students could complete lab assignments at their own pace. These same students also commented on the relatedness of the lab assignments and the concepts covered in class.

Pamela made the following comment regarding her experience in the lab:

I had to take both the reading and the writing labs. A lot of the time, some of the assignments from the reading looked like the assignments from the writing. I could see how the two were alike. I also liked the fact that I could take my time and do the assignments when I wanted to do them. I could go to the lab right before class or before dinner and get it over with. One day I went three times so that I could get as many assignments as I could out of the way.

Pamela stated that she was able to successfully complete all of her lab assignments three weeks before final exams. Likewise, Jocelyn also completed the lab assignments several weeks prior to the end of the semester. Pamela also commented on the help she received within the lab:

I never felt rushed. I had to redo some of the assignments. If I got a wrong answer or if I scored below a 70 or 80, I had to go back and do it again. If I was having problems, the lady that worked in the lab always helped me. She would sit with me until I figured it out. Sometimes I wished she would go ahead and give me the answers, but she did help.

All of the students who found the lab to be helpful were able to complete the lab assignments several weeks prior to the end of the semester.

Eight of the fifteen respondents did not find the basic skills laboratory helpful. There were several underlying reasons why these students felt this way. When each of the students was asked to outline specific experiences within the lab that contributed to their general opinion, none of the students could recall any specific experiences.

However, all eight of the students voiced general displeasure with having to attend the lab as partial fulfillment for the class. This was the prevailing factor that shaped the students' opinions. They complained of having to "use free time" to do "extra" assignments. Although Michael had a positive perception of the UC

experience and successfully completed the lab, he complained of having to make adjustments to his schedule to fulfill this requirement.

Charles explained that many students felt that the lab was unnecessary and a waste of time.

It's one thing to have to go to class, but it's another to have to go to the lab. You [the students] have to spend as much time in the lab as you do in class. That's why some students decided not to go at all. It's just a waste of time to have to go do these lab assignments and not get a full class grade for it. It's only five or ten percent of your grade. If you pass the TASP, none of this matters anyway.

Doug shared the same sentiment to a certain extent. He felt that many of the lab assignments were covered in class.

When we registered for developmental classes, the lab requirement was printed on our fee receipts. My academic advisor helped me arrange my schedule so that I could fit the lab into my weekly schedule. My problem with the lab is that it is totally unnecessary. We could have done that stuff in class. I didn't need to waste two hours outside of class, trek over to an out of the way building to sit at a computer to fill in some blanks. I have a laptop. I could have done that junk online but they wouldn't let me.

It is worth noting that of the eight students who did not favor lab attendance, half of them did not successfully complete the lab.

### **Summary and Analysis of the Findings Related to Question Three**

Since most institutions have to admit students who lack the necessary preparation to sustain the rigors of higher education, these institutions are faced with the task of producing a more literate, self-sustaining student (Boylan, 1995). In order to do this, institutions must incorporate personal and academic development into basic skills course curriculum (Boylan, 1995)

The state of Texas required all state funded institutions to provide remediation to students who did not pass the state's mandatory standardized test. Moreover, the state left the decision of how to provide remediation to its students in the hands of each state funded institution. The development of the academic enhancement component of the University College was Prairie View's answer to how to provide basic skills enhancement to the large number of students requiring remediation in math, reading and English. More specifically, the academic enhancement department's solution for carrying out this mandate was to provide basic skills courses that required students to participate in traditional and nontraditional academic activities.

By providing a developmental studies program in a centralized department within the University College setting, instead of in separate academic departments, it was the institution's goal that students be able to make the connection between the institution's social and academic cultures. It was also the institution's goal for the student to have a variety of methods available to them to ensure content mastery. This was put into place by requiring that student not only attend traditional reading, writing and math courses but also requiring students to attend workshops and labs outside of the classroom setting that corresponded to the course content.

All fifteen of the respondents were required to take at least two basic skills courses based upon the results of their standardized test scores. The students were asked to give a classification of helpful or not helpful to describe their experiences within the academic enhancement program. They were then asked to describe the experiences that influenced their perceptions.

In relation to the basic skills courses, all of the students agreed that the courses were helpful. What emerged from their detailed accounts of their experiences was the degree to which the students assessed value to the courses. For the students who were required to take the developmental reading courses, the consensus was that the reading course was not as necessary or as valuable as the math and English courses. This was especially the case for those students whose majors were math or writing related. This means that the students could make a definite connection between the English and math courses and their future careers. As Christina, a sophomore math major, explained:

I have to know math to teach it. No one is going to let me teach their kid if I can't add 2 plus 2. I'm paying good money to get an education. I need to leave here so I can make some money. So, if I have to start at the very bottom, so be it. Just don't bore me to death with a lot of stuff I don't want to read. I already know how to read.

According to Tracy, a freshman social work major:

Teach us how to read in our majors instead of teaching us how to read for a stupid test. When I get a job, I'm going to have to write a bunch of reports and stuff. My writing class is helping me with that. I know where to put commas and semicolons. That kind of stuff is important because if my supervisor looks at my report and it has a lot of mistakes in it, then I'm in trouble. The stuff we did in our reading class could have been done in our other classes. They could have spread that stuff out and made us read stuff in our majors.

There was perceived long term financial payoff in taking the math and the English courses because these courses were job related. Yet, the students viewed the reading course as meaningless because there was no connection between the reading passages on the standardized test, the course content and the skills the students perceived they would need in the job market.

As for the corresponding workshops and labs, ten of the students successfully completed the workshops while seven of them successfully completed the labs. Prior to attending college, most of these students were accustomed to the traditional classroom setting where the textbook and the instructor were the basic tools utilized. Once some of the students began to participate in the academic enhancement program, anything outside of the traditional classroom setting proved to be problematic for them.

Due to workshop scheduling conflicts, three of the students were unable to attend. Although the workshops were mandatory, these students opted not to adjust their schedules in order to attend nor did they attempt to schedule make-up workshop sessions. Another significant finding was the fact that, like the labs, seven of the fifteen students were not willing to attend these content relevant activities because the activities did not take place within the classroom setting.

#### **Findings Related to Research Question Four**

What impact have activities associated with the University College had on students' general success and development?

For the purpose of this study it was important to define success and development from the students' perspective in order to answer this question. The respondents clearly defined success as achieving the following hallmarks: 1) completion of the freshman year with a C average or better; 2) completion of TASP requirements and 3) the students' decision to continue their education at Prairie View upon completion of the freshman year based upon their experiences in the UC. From

the students' perspective, if the activities within the UC helped them achieve one or more of the hallmarks, then a level of success had been achieved.

Although grade point average was one of the hallmarks of success, it was not the primary variable in defining the students' development during the freshman year. From the students' perspective, the hallmark for student development was the students' assurance that the successful completion of the freshman year prepared them for the next phase of their college career.

### **Impact of Nonacademic Activities**

Earlier in the study students were asked to give their perception of the activities that took place within the nonacademic component of the University College. In response to this question, twelve of the fifteen respondents found that the UC social environment was comfortable, while the remaining three respondents stated the UC was uncomfortable. However, in relation to the impact the activities of the nonacademic component had on the students' overall success and development, thirteen of the students stated that the mentoring relationships the students formed with their academic advisors had a positive impact on their successful completion of TASP requirements and their decision to persist beyond the freshman year.

Academic advisors were located in the commons area of the UC complex. This allowed students access to advisors within the residential setting without having to go to another building to get the help they needed. All of the students recalled being involved in some type of mentoring relationship during their University College tenure. Although this was the case, none of the students recalled being in a formal mentoring relationship with the campus peer mentors that were assigned to them. The

mentoring relationships that occurred between students and peer mentors was what Redman (1987) coined as a “quasi” mentoring relationship. Students reported the benefits of their peer mentoring relationships were gaining knowledge about the campus from an experienced upperclassman and discovering which instructors to take and which instructors to avoid. This type of relationship, albeit valuable, did not possess all of the elements the students sought in a mentor/protégé relationship. While students sought a mentoring relationship that would help them make academic decisions that would lead to career building, peer mentors could only provide information that apprised their protégés of campus culture and intricacies.

Formal mentoring surfaced as a result of the relationships the students formed with their academic advisors. According to Levinson (1978) the mentor/protégé relationship is one of ardent attentiveness and dedication between the mentor and the protégé for the purpose of advising and guiding the protégé over an extended time period. The assigned peer mentors served more as campus resources rather than mentors. As Anita put it:

The campus mentors had their own thing to do. They were students just like me. So I doubt if they had the time to lead some crab (term used to refer to freshmen students on Prairie View’s campus) around. They were cool to talk to and hang out with (whenever you saw them), but when I really needed somebody to talk to about campus problems or anything else for that matter, I went to my academic advisor. She was always there or she would come to me. She would never tell my business. Now, when I had been missing class, my reading teacher would have put my name on the list and send it to her, but my advisor would just write her a general letter telling her that I was absent for medical reasons. She (my advisor) would never tell her the exact reason why I had to leave school for two weeks.

Anita continued to explain that although she confided the details of her medical condition to her advisor, the advisor never divulged the specific reason for Anita's leave of absence.

All of the students noted that there was frequent contact with their academic advisors. On the average, students would visit their advisors once a week or once every other week. Likewise, advisors would make frequent visits to the dormitories. Depending on the advisor, these visits would occur as frequently as once every two weeks. During each encounter, students and advisors would discuss issues concerning: 1) classroom performance and adaptation; 2) information relayed from the dormitory assistants to the advisor pertaining to the student; 3) personal issues confronting the student; 4) counseling and advisement pertaining to academic choices and; 5) encouragement.

All of the students reported having more trusting relationships with their academic advisors because the advisor was older and had more life experiences. They also reported trusting the advisor more than the peer mentors because the advisor was accessible and there were more frequent encounters with the advisor than with the peer mentor. The main perception was that advisors made time for the student; while they perceived the peer mentor, as Doug put it, "being a fly-by-night student on duty waiting to tell your business."

Jocelyn stated the following about the peer mentor relationship:

They [peer mentors] only came around because they had to. And when they did, they would ask you if you were doing alright, talk about their classes, you would talk about your classes and then you wouldn't see them for another couple of months or so. I thought that since they were upperclassmen and older, they were supposed to be around to help us learn different things about

the campus and help us to get settled in. That's why I practically lived in my advisor's office my first semester.

Of note was the method of inquiry utilized by the advisors. Students repeatedly commented not only on the type of questions posed by the advisors, but the spirit in which the inquiry was conducted. The perception was that the advisor genuinely cared about the student's well being. Six of the respondents admitted that during the initial stages of their first semester they found the intrusive methods of the advisors to be too aggressive. In hindsight, all but one of these students perceived the method to be invaluable.

More specifically, students commented on the type of information that surfaced as a result of such inquiry. Darius recalled spending hours on several different occasions "just talking" to his advisor. As he recalled one of these encounters, he stated:

One day I went to talk to Mr. -. I was having a real bad time in my classes and I wanted to know what to do. I was also mad about having to take those developmental classes. I kind of felt like I was being held back in a way by these classes. Mr.- kept asking me about my expectations. He wanted to know what I wanted out of life. I kept wondering what this had to do with what I needed right then and there. I told him that I wanted to get through the class and make an A. He then told me to jot down what I had to do at that point to make an A. When I showed him my list, he showed me where I wasn't doing all that I could do to get the result I wanted. He started telling me how to get the things I wanted out of life (not just that class, but out of life). He said that if I did the best I could do and go above and beyond I would most likely succeed. He also told me that until I did those things there was no reason for me to complain about what anybody else was doing to me. He kind of taught me a lot about myself. I had a tendency to put my responsibilities on other people. I try not to do that any more.

Sandra recalled a similar encounter with her academic advisor:

Ms.- was a trip. She always had a life lesson for you. I went in to talk with her one day about dropping a class. When she asked me why I wanted to drop the class, I told her it was because I was failing. Her next question was why

was I failing the class. She knew I hadn't been going to class because my teachers had been sending attendance reports to her. Plus, we had already had the conversation about making decisions that would affect my college career. So, I went ahead and told her I was failing because I hadn't been going to class. I had to admit that more for me than for her. Instead of just signing my drop slip, she called my teacher and asked was there anything I could do to make up my work. My teacher told her that it would not be fair to the other students in the class if she let me make up all of that work at such a late date. She also told me that I could not drop a developmental class because of state law or something. I started crying. Instead of handing me some tissue, Ms.- started explaining the difference between taught sense and bought sense. She said taught sense is the lesson we learn and act on when someone else teaches it to us. Bought sense is the lesson we learn when we make a mistake. She also said that 90% of the lessons in life can be taught if we would just do what we are supposed to do. She told me that I had just bought a \$3,058 life lesson with my own money (the cost of the class, the textbooks and the TASP fees multiplied by two) which should have only cost me \$1529.00 in financial aid. My financial aid paid for the class the first time I took it. I had to pay for the second time I think. When I got through crying she smiled at me and told me never to buy what I could get for free.

Like Darius, Sandra credits her desire to persist (at Prairie View) beyond the freshman year to the "bond" she formed with her advisor. Although students are paired with new advisors once they leave the UC setting, many of the students find themselves seeking counsel from their UC advisors.

### **Impact of Academic Activities**

According to Kemig (1983) learning centers that incorporate a comprehensive learning system are most likely to affect student success. The system that is in place within in the University College is the developmental studies program that is managed by the Academic Enhancement Department. Keimig (1983) posits that within such a system, instructors are encouraged to use a variety of learning and teaching tools in order to optimize the student participation within the classroom. These tools strengthen the student's desire to persist in school. The components that

operate within this system include basic skills classes that incorporate self-paced, content-specific laboratories and workshops.

All of the students in the study were required by state mandate to take developmental courses. Likewise, all of the students required remediation in at least two of the three basic skills areas. All of the fifteen respondents expressed a general satisfaction with the U.C. academic offerings. Although there were some expressions of dissatisfaction in part with one or more of the elements of the academic subcomponent, all of the students agreed that the academic component was helpful in facilitating success and overall development.

The hallmarks that were affected the most by the academic subcomponent were the students' successful completion of the freshman year with a C average or better and the successful completion of TASP requirements. As for the students' overall development as a result of their participation in the developmental studies program, all of the five freshman respondents were confident that they would be able to perform at or above the sophomore level upon completion of the freshman year. As for the sophomore and junior respondents, all of the respondents attribute much of the development in their ability to handle the rigors of upper level courses to their participation in the developmental studies program.

Although the Academic Enhancement Department implemented a system of traditional classroom methodologies, supplemental instructional components and diverse teaching technologies, data uncovered in question two revealed that students found the combination of these elements had the greatest impact on student success if the student made a connection between the courses and their academic goals. The

degree to which the students assessed value to the courses depended upon the individual student's academic major and career goals. If the students perceived that their academic and career goals were directly related to the courses, then the students were more likely to be successful in the class. For example, Michael, the engineering major, perceived value in the developmental math course because the foundation of engineering is math. Likewise, Sandra, whose goal is to teach English, deemed it necessary to attend her developmental English classes. Therefore, the impact that the developmental courses had on the students was directly related to the value the students assessed to the courses.

Unlike the college level courses, the developmental courses carried the stigma of, as Anita put it, "dummy classes." According to John, many of the students made the decision to stop attending classes because of the stigma and because the students had an "out." He explained:

A lot of my friends decided not to go to class and just retake the test on their own. If you pass the test, you don't really have to go to class anyway. One of my friends bought the TASP study guide and prepared for the test that way.

When asked whether or not his friends passed the test, he said no.

From the students' perspective, they would not have been able to pass the TASP test if they had not taken the developmental courses. When asked if there were particular attributes within the classes, workshops or labs that helped them to form this perspective, the consensus was that there was not a single attribute about any single component that helped round the students' viewpoint. Even those students in question two who showed favor for one or more of the developmental studies

components reported that it was the combination of experiences that contributed to their success. According to Charles:

Once I left the class I saw how all knowledge was connected. I used to see how only some classes were alike. Now, I see how one class can lead to another and how I can use what I learn to make money in the future.

### **Summary and Analysis of the Findings Related to Question Four**

Question four required students to describe the impact that the University College activities had on their success and development. In order to answer the question, it was important to clearly define success and development from the students' perspective. Three hallmarks emerged. The respondents defined success by accomplishing at least one of the following upon completion of the freshman year: 1) completion of the freshman year with a C average or better; 2) completion of TASP requirements and 3) the students' decision to continue their education at Prairie View upon completion of the freshman year based upon their experiences in the UC. In relation to the impact the activities within the nonacademic component of the University College had on the students' success and development, thirteen of the fifteen students stated that the mentoring relationships they formed with their academic advisors had a positive impact on their successful completion of remediation requirements and their decision to persist at Prairie View beyond the freshman year.

Upon their arrival, freshman students were assigned "official" peer mentors. By doing this, the institution sought to link incoming students with older students who could guide their protégés through the rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960). Instead

of bonding with their peer mentors, the students established “unofficial” mentoring relationships with their academic advisors. The new students simply did not trust the peer mentors enough to talk with them because they perceived the peer mentors’ position to be lateral to theirs. It was difficult for the students to discuss issues of academic performance or feelings and perceptions related to institution with the peer mentor because the new students were afraid that the mentors would, “tell their business.” The only issues that the students felt comfortable discussing with their peer mentors were issues pertaining to social logistics (such as dates and times of social events) and which instructors the mentor deemed “easy” enough for the freshman to take.

An underlying factor was that the new students viewed the peer mentor as just another student or another kid to talk to. Although the students did not refrain from talking to the peer mentor altogether, As Anita elaborated,

Like my grandmother always told me, you have to feed some people with a long handled spoon. You can’t be telling everybody everything. Give them just enough information, but not enough to where they can use it against you. What would I look like telling another student something when I have to see that same student in Alumni Hall or under the Sigma tree? If they get mad at me about something or I hang out with somebody they don’t like, that person can start running their mouth and telling everything I ever said.

As for the students’ perception of their relationships with their academic advisors, the students viewed the advisors as professional adults who were hired to take care of them. The advisors’ position was not lateral to the students’ position. Yet, depending upon what the student needed from the advisor at any given time, the relationship shifted from a top down hierarchical relationship to that of a confidant. It is worth noting that although the students held this perception of the academic

advisors, this perception is in sharp contrast to their feelings of “being grown” which were uncovered in response to question two.

Although peer mentors were not as effective as the institution originally intended for them to be, interestingly enough, the dynamic that emerged between the students and their advisors was in keeping with the institution’s intent of opening formal and informal lines of communication with the students.

As for the impact of the activities within the academic component, all fifteen respondents express a general satisfaction with the academic offerings within the University College. The hallmarks that were affected by the academic component were: 1) the students’ completion of the freshman year with a C average or better and 2) the student’ completion of TASP requirements. Responses to question three uncovered the respondents’ perceptions of the University College course offerings. These responses reveal that in order for students to achieve the hallmarks of success and development, they must pass the developmental courses. The underlying factor that drives student success within the developmental courses is the degree to which the students assessed value to the courses. Depending upon the individual student, the value that was placed on the course determined whether or not the student would participate in traditional and nontraditional course components.

It was revealed that if the student saw a connection between his or her career goals and the course content, the student was more likely to successfully complete the course. Conversely, if the student did not perceive any value in the course, then the student would more than likely not assert any extra effort in attending the class or the

mandatory labs and workshops. These value laden perceptions had a direct impact on whether or not the students' achieved one or more of the hallmarks.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter provides a summary of the purpose, methodology, and major results of the research conducted for this study. Conclusions and implications are drawn and recommendations for further study and practice are offered.

#### **Summary**

##### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to identify and analyze activities, perceptions, and behavior associated with the university college program which contributed to a successful freshman year experience. Utilizing the interviewing method of data collection, the study uncovered attitudes and perceptions of students within the University College program. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What methodologies are being utilized within the University College to impact the freshman year retention rate?
2. How do students perceive their social environments within the University College? What are the experiences that influence their perception?
3. How do students perceive their academic environment within the University College? What are the experiences that influence their perceptions?
4. What impact have activities associated with the University College had on students' general success and development?

## **Methodology**

The study was conducted during fall 2002 and during the months of March and April, 2003. A purposive sample of students was selected from the fall 2002 and spring 2003 University College course rosters obtained from the Academic Enhancement Department and information provided by a student informants. Interview protocol was followed based upon the guidelines established for naturalistic by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Open-ended research questions served as the basis of inquiry for all respondents. The framework for the research questions was based upon a review of retention literature. A variety of data collection methods and member checking was used to establish credibility. Data sources included a reflexive journal, participant observations, and field notes. Prior to each interview, each student read and signed a consent form explaining the intent of the study. All fifteen of the student respondents agreed with and consented to all of the study parameters. All four research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics and constant comparative analysis.

## **Summary of the Analysis of Data**

The results of the study point to at least four major considerations: 1) the factors that contribute to a comfortable University College environment; 2) the factors that contribute to an uncomfortable University College environment; 3) the impact of the non-academic component on the students' success and development and 4) the impact of the academic component on the students' overall success and development.

## **Conclusions**

### **Factors That Contribute to a Comfortable University**

#### **College Environment**

Twelve of the fifteen students stated that the University College environment was comfortable. The students credited their perceptions to their participation in the U.C sponsored summer orientation program. The program enabled the students to become acquainted with the campus culture and the rigors of college level academic work. During the summer students were able to take courses and form alliances with fellow students and campus personnel prior to the fall semester.

### **Factors That Contributed to an Uncomfortable University**

#### **College Environment**

Three of the fifteen students stated that the University College environment was uncomfortable. The main factor that influenced the students' feelings of discomfort was the intrusive advising method utilized within the U.C. environment. Since these students entered the environment with expectations that differed from the actual environment, there was a lack of connection between the students' pre-college expectations and the actual college environment. The students also attributed their feeling of discomfort to the adjustments that had to be made to dormitory living. Results of the study reveal that these students did not attend the summer orientation program prior to entering the institution.

### **Impact of the Non-Academic Component on Student Success and Development**

In relation to the impact the activities that the nonacademic component had on the students' overall success and development, thirteen of the students stated that the mentoring relationships they formed with their academic advisors had a positive impact on their successful completion of TASP requirements and their decision to persist beyond the freshman year.

### **Impact of the Academic Component on Student Success and Development**

Based upon their test scores, all of the fifteen students were required to take at least two of the three developmental courses and the corresponding laboratories and workshops that accompanied the developmental courses during their freshman year. As for the workshops and basic skills laboratories, ten of the fifteen respondents found the workshops to be helpful, while seven of the fifteen respondents found the laboratories to be helpful. The students unanimously agreed that the developmental courses were helpful in preparing them for college level courses.

### **Implications**

A major outcome of this study is that there were a variety of factors within the University College environment that influenced student success and development. While there were many elements that were put in place by the institution with the intent of encouraging and promoting student success, there were underlying personal factors that the students imposed upon the system that played an integral role in influencing the students' perceptions and outcomes. Many of these factors were

interacting concurrently. The degree to which these interactions influenced one another is outside the scope of this study. What is uncovered in this study is the existence of the interaction of the students' perceptions upon the different components put into place by the institution. The implication is that there can be a probability of an increase in student success, development and retention within the U.C. by addressing many of the issues uncovered in this study.

### **Implication One**

One of the major implications of the study is that although the University College solicits the involvement of many of the institution's academic departments, it is not connected with any particular academic department or discipline. This neutrality enables the university college staff to develop relationships with students that are not bound by allegiances with academic departments. One of the main objectives of the university college is to function as an impartial broker between the student and the academic choices available to the student. Since most of the student's time is spent outside of the classroom, the university college initiates an advising model that engages student outside of the classroom setting. This allows the institution to provide services to students beyond the reach and scope of the academic departments. Students are able to explore the full range of academic and social possibilities offered by the university without regard to departmental preference. Many of the programs initiated through the university college model improve the institution's ability to meet the needs of incoming students. The university college serves as the storehouse of information for the incoming freshman class. Advisors and mentors are able to give the students the broad view of the institution's culture and environment. This enables students to transition

from one phase of their lives to another while under the guidance of an advisor or mentor. In most instances, university college staff members are the first to work with incoming freshmen students as these particular students transition from high school to college. The staff may also be the first to review students' academic records, the first to talk to the student about the student's goals, strengths, and need. The university college staff is also the first to help the student make use of the services and support programs available to the student at the institution. Advisors within the university college program provide students with information about campus wide programs, curricula, as well as departmental prerequisites and entrance requirements. Having a global perspective of the institution allows advisors to communicate institutional nuances, which eliminates potential biases within academic departments. Not only does the university college staff educate the student about the campus social and academic possibilities, it also teaches the institution's administrators, faculty and staff about its students. The University College advisors provide each department with pertinent information about prospective students through placement test results, pre-college academic assessment, orientation, and through information gathered by communicating with the students and their families. This enables the institution as a whole and each department more specifically, to plan and create programs that are specific to that particular student population.

### **Implication Two**

Another implication of the study is that student involvement in a summer orientation program allows the student to address freshman adjustment issues prior to the fall semester. Theorists, in varying degrees, agree that there must be sufficient integration into both the social and academic culture for students before the students

can experience a willingness to persist at the institution (Spady, 1970; VanGennep, 1960; Tinto, 1975; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; Bean and Metzner, 1985). The student's ability to become acclimated into the institution's culture is essential for student retention. The college experience, especially the freshman experience, is a transition period. Those students who do not make a smooth transition or those who fail to complete what VanGennep (1960) coined the "rites of passage" are more likely to drop out of college. The summer orientation program serves as a "rites of passage" boot camp that gives freshman students a head start on the acclimation process. The summer orientation model uncovered in the study follows the Tinto (1987) paradigm which elicits a shift from institutional recruiting for the sake of boosting enrollment, to educators thinking and acting in terms of program development that could influence student persistence and concentrates on student retention efforts. Most of the students who participated in the study had participated in the summer orientation program. During the summer, students were able to address housing issues and familiarize themselves with the academic culture. The respondents who felt comfortable had all attended the summer orientation program.

### **Implication Three**

Another implication that surfaced from this study was that the mentoring relationships the students formed with their advisors played a major role in the students' success and development. This finding is in keeping with the Chickering and Gamson, (1987) and Glennen, Farren and Vowel, (1996) assertion that students who have consistent contact with a significant person within an institution will decide to persist beyond the freshman year. Students who participated in the study often

stated that these relationships were the key element that allowed them to access the necessary information for both their academic and social needs. These relationships were constant throughout the freshman year and well into the sophomore and junior years. Although the institution assigned upper class student mentors to the freshmen students, the freshmen did not develop the same type of mentoring relationship, if any, with these student mentors. The two main reasons relationships were not formed between the freshmen students and the student mentors were 1) freshman students did not perceive the upper class students to have enough life experience or academic knowledge to adequately provide counsel to them and 2) student mentors did not have the time or interest in their protégés that the academic advisors had. Moreover, the intrusive advising model was an integral part of the mentoring relationship between the advisor and the student. This type of advising gave the students the perception that the advisors cared about them as people and not just as students. A recurring theme in many of the student responses in relation to the intrusive advising model was that not only would students go to their advisors but also advisors, would go to students to provide them with information and services the students needed before the students became aware of the need. For example, many of the advisors made frequent visits to dormitories to advise and register students prior to registration or pre-registration. This is consistent with Heisserer and Parette's (2002) contention that although institutions have professionals that serve as student advocates, such as administrators and student affairs personnel, the professionals who come in direct contact with students are more likely to impact the students perceptions and decisions to persist at the institution beyond the freshman year.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

### **Recommendation One**

This study was conducted on one small group of African American students attending a rural, open admissions, historically black university. Another valuable study would be to explore the perceptions of a similar student population on an urban historically black campus. The study would provide additional insight into the impact that institutional type has upon student perception and the influence this perception has upon persistence beyond the freshman year.

### **Recommendation Two**

It is recommended that further study be conducted on students who did not participate in the University College program during their freshman year. The findings from this study would help the University College extend its range of services to impact students who could not participate in the program.

### **Recommendation Three**

Further study should be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the intrusive advising model on students attending a nonresidential institution. In many instances commuter students do not become involved in campus activities because of the transient nature of the campus life. The findings from such a study would unveil the impact of not only the effectiveness the academic advising program but it would also reveal if there is a correlation between the type of advising model utilize by the institution and the formulation of mentoring relationships between students and their advisors.

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