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This dissertation, **THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE ON AN URBAN CAMPUS: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF FIRST YEAR PROGRAMS ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF BELONGING, ADJUSTMENT, SUCCESS, AND SUPPORT**, by ZDUY P. CHU, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

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THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE ON AN URBAN CAMPUS: A CASE STUDY
EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF FIRST YEAR PROGRAMS ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS
OF BELONGING, ADJUSTMENT, SUCCESS, AND SUPPORT

by

ZDUY P. CHU

Under the Direction of James Kahrs

ABSTRACT

First-year experience programs on college and university campuses are designed to support the academic, social, and institutional transition needs of the first-year student. Retention on campuses has been an issue that educational leaders have been addressing for many years. On average, approximately 20% to 30% of first-year students will not return for the second year. A review of the literature shows that there is a positive impact of such programs on a student's achievement and retention on college campuses. It also reflects the various factors outside of an institution's control that can have an impact on the student's achievement. This qualitative study included one case study that analyzed the experiences of thirteen (13) first-year students who participated in a first-year experience program consisting of an extended orientation camp and an intentional programming model on large, public, 4-year, urban campus in the Southern United States. Findings and discussion from the study revealed: (a) the perceptions of impact that first-year programs have on a student's belonging, adjustment,

success, and support after the first semester of college; and (b) common themes and trends throughout the first six weeks of the participants related to their perceptions of belonging, adjustment, success, and support. Implications of this study also prescribe future research that could explore specific resources, learning outcomes, and retention rates across other urban institutions.

INDEX WORDS: Student retention, Orientation camp, First-year experience, Camp FYRE, First-year residential experience

THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE ON AN URBAN CAMPUS: A CASE STUDY
EXPLORING THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FIRST YEAR PROGRAMS ON STUDENT
PERCEPTIONS OF BELONGING, ADJUSTMENT, SUCCESS, AND SUPPORT

by

ZDUY P. CHU

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In

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Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Natalie Jane McManus Chu. There is no way that I would have even made it this far if it wasn't for your love and support.

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TABLE OF CONETNTS

LIST OF TABLES vi

1 CHAPTER 1: THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE 1

 Introduction..... 1

 Guiding Questions 1

 Review 2

 Pre-College Foundations..... 4

 Defining Belonging, Success, Adjustment and Support..... 6

 Historical Context 9

 First-Year Experience Programming 11

 Institution Buy-In..... 14

 Conclusion 15

 References..... 18

2 CHAPTER 2: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS 26

 Methodology 27

 The First-Year Residential Experience (FYRE)..... 30

 Case Study Methodology 34

 Participants, Methods, and Data Analysis 36

 Statement of Subjectivity 42

 Relevance of study 44

 Findings..... 45

 Theme 1: Sense of Belonging 47

Theme 2: Sense of Adjustment	49
Theme 3: Sense of Success	51
Theme 4: Sense of Support	53
Discussion	55
Limitations and Implications for Future Research.....	60
Conclusion	61
References	63
Appendices.....	67

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Total Enrollment.....	27
Table 2: Average First Year Entering Class	28
Table 3: Online Journal Submissions	39

1. THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

According to the literature, student attrition on college and university campuses has become one of the more pressing issues that educational leaders are facing (Hunter & Gahagan, 2003; Bliss, Webb, & St. Andre, 2012; Gardner & Upcraft, 1989). Every year, approximately 20% to 30% of students in four-year colleges and universities will drop out after their first semester (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Many institutions have as one of their goals to increase student retention and graduation rates, but they may not have the resources to implement the programs or services to support these goals (Hunter & Gahagan, 2003). Research has shown that there is a small window, usually two to six weeks, in which educational leaders, faculty, and/or administrators on college campuses have to make a positive and lasting impression on their first-year students (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Tinto, 1993; Kuh 1995). The first two to six weeks of a student's college career are the most important and have the biggest impact on his or her decision to stay at a university (Levitz et al., 1989). Even though this time period is pertinent to establishing a sense of belonging to a university or a level of connectedness to the university, Hunter and Gahagan (2003) state that efforts to retain first-year students should expand throughout the entire academic year. Because of this, approximately 85% to 95% of colleges and universities throughout the years have been trying to realign their resources towards the implementation of programs designed to aid students with their transition from high school to college (Bliss, Webb, & St. Andre, 2012).

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The major focus of this study is to determine to what extent first-year programs such as extended orientation camps and intentional programming have on a first-year student's

perception of belonging, adjustment, success, and support at a large, public, 4-year, urban university located in the Southern United States that will be referred to in the dissertation as Southern Urban University or SUU. The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of belonging?**
2. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of adjustment?**
3. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of success?**
4. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of support?**

REVIEW

Two of the more recent trends in higher education have been the development of extended orientation camps and an intentional programming model (Lien & Goldenberg 2012). These two initiatives have surfaced from research recently as being effective tools or programs utilized on college campuses to help retain students. They are very specific about the resources provided, have a captive audience, and often allow students an opportunity to participate in a shared experience (Brown, 2012; Crede & Neihorster, 2012; Wolfe & Kay, 2011) all the while securing an intent to stay and graduate. These initiatives and programs fall into what educational

leaders now refer to as the First-Year Experience (Gardner & Upcraft, 1989). John Gardner, who helped form the National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition Office, at the University of South Carolina, was at the forefront of the movement that helped reshape the constructs of higher education around the needs and issues of first-year students (Hunter & Gahagan, 2003). Even though extended orientation camps and intentional programming models play a large role within first-year experience programs, there are a number of factors that influence a first-year student's decision to stay on a particular campus and to graduate. Among these factors are pre-college indicators and experiences, interactions with faculty and staff, involvement on campus and in the community, social integration, involvement, pre-college expectations and preparedness, and an established support structure within the university (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012; Braxton, 2014; Crede & Neihorster, 2012).

Leading educators in the field of student affairs such as Alexander Astin (1984), Vincent Tinto (1987), Ernest Pascarella & Patrick Terenzini (1991), and Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993) have researched whether a student can experience many different milestones in college that can lead them to make the decision to stay and graduate or leave and follow another path outside of higher education. Within the last 20 to 30 years, educational leaders such as John Gardner and Lee Upcraft (1989, 2000) have provided research about the first-year success of students that include retention and matriculation through graduation. The First-Year Experience has become a high priority for many colleges and universities (Gardner & Upcraft, 2000). According to the research, the importance of this priority is not only for the betterment of the students in terms of graduation, but also for the reputation and financial stability of the institution (Palmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009). Along with retention efforts aiming to include a priority focus on the first-year experience, and the development of initiatives such as camps and

intentional programming, many institutions are also looking at other indicators previous to a student's entry into college to aid in the exploration of the success or lack thereof of their students (Braxton, 2000). The level of academic, social, and emotional preparedness with which a student enters the university impacts his or her performance and in turn his or her ability to stay within the higher educational system (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012). These factors of readiness include grade point average, social integration, pre-conceived notions about college, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence (Sparkman et al., 2012). Another important factor that impacts a student's retention is the culture and family background in which they were raised. If the guardians of a particular student are able to contribute and reflect on their own college experience with the student it is more than likely that he or she will have a higher chance in succeeding in college due to the greater support provided (MacCann, Fogarty, Zeidner & Roberts, 2011).

Pre-College Foundation

A student's high school grade point average (GPA) has consistently been an effective indicator of whether or not they will do well on the collegiate level. Research has shown that the correlation between the two is significant (Sparkman et al., 2012). Studies on GPA are usually paired with other pre-college predictors such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT). Even though these three factors are generally paired with one another in studies, results from these studies have found that either students do well on standardized tests, but not in the classroom; or students do well in the classroom, but not on standardized tests (Sparkman et al., 2012). The research around GPA as a pre-college determinate of student success also supports that, even though these three contributors may be grouped together, the significance of GPA scores is a consistent factor in the success of a student

during their first year (Honken & Ralston, 2013). In an earlier research study conducted on freshman persistence, Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) note that high school GPA is important to gauge student readiness for the academic rigor in a college and university environment. Having a high GPA (3.8+) has been supported in the research to have a positive impact on a student's grades during their first year of school. And inversely, having a low GPA (2.4 and below) has a negative effect on a student's grades during their first year (Coyle & Pillow, 2008). Although this is just one factor that contributes to the success of a student, it is one of the more salient ones.

As mentioned above, a student's grade point average is usually paired with standardized assessments such as the ACT or the SAT. Because these exams are usually taken as an entrance exam for college admission, therefore, it is important to list them as a major pre-college component to student achievement. These tests help determine the student's freshman index. The freshman index is a way for the university to establish a grouping of students which is then used, for admissions purposes. The research shows that the ACT and SAT scores can be a great way to measure for IQ and the readiness of a college student (Coyle & Pillow, 2008). Research done by Lowe and Tanner (2012) address an assessment called the Academic Performance Index or API. The API is utilized to calculate test scores and in turn a student's level of preparation for college. A study done in 1985 showed how the test scores of students have been inflated over the years; ultimately reducing the level of preparedness of students (Lowe & Tanner, 2012). A student that scored in the 50th percentile in vocabulary in 1980 would have only been in the 41st percentile in 1972. In math, a student in the 50th percentile is shown to have been assessed in 1972 as only being in the 45th percentile (Lowe & Tanner, 2012). Research has shown that these scores have an effect on a student's ability (or inability) to succeed in a college environment, and

with the changing questions and assessment, it may be that there is not enough being done to adequately prepare them for the next step post-graduation from secondary education.

Another pre-college factor impacting student achievement in college is Emotional Intelligence or EI. Emotional Intelligence is defined as the set of skills that a person needs to function effectively in the world; sometimes referred to as “common sense” (Sparkman et al., 2012). A person’s emotional intelligence is different from their IQ. It is a measure of their ability to transition and adapt to real life situations through experience. There are five main areas that are assessed through the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) survey that help determine the readiness of an individual to adapt to the transitional milestones that happen in college. Among these are intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood (Sparkman et al., 2012). For example, if a student’s parents did not have any higher education experience, it will be more difficult for them to relate on an emotional level to their child’s challenges and situations in college. In a study conducted by MacCann, Fogarty, Zeidner and Roberts (2011), coping skills can help a student mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. This research can aid educational leaders in understanding a student’s mindset on various issues that may contribute to their retention on a college campus.

Defining Belonging

A sense of belonging within the college educational environment can mean different things in different contexts to different people. Osterman (2000), defines a sense of belonging as “a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 324). Another definition of belonging that offers a similar approach refers to it as “students’ sense of being accepted, valued,

included, and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of life and activity of the class” (Goodenow, 1993, p. 25).

If we take a look further into the meaning of belonging, Maslow (1970) states that after one finds the basic need for the physiological aspects of life (food, water, shelter and warmth) along with fulfilling their safety needs (security, stability, freedom from fear), the next logical human need is belonging, which can be found within families, friendships, memberships in associations or within the community. Within his writing Maslow states that belonging is a pillar that has been missing from our educational structure:

If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs.... Now the person will feel keenly, as never before, the absence of friends, or a sweetheart, or a wife, or children. He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group or family, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal....he will feel sharply the pangs of loneliness, of ostracism, of rejection of friendlessness, of rootlessness.

I believe that the tremendous and rapid increase in...personal growth groups and intentional communities may in part be motivated by this unsatisfied hunger for contact, for intimacy, for belongingness and by the need to overcome the widespread feelings of alienation, aloneness, strangeness, and loneliness, which have been worsened by our mobility, by the break-down of traditional groupings, the scattering of families, the generation gap, the steady urbanization and disappearance of village face-to-faceness, and the resulting shallowness of American friendship. My strong impression is also that some proportion of youth rebellion groups -- I don't know how many or how much -- is motivated by the profound hunger for groupness, for contact, for real togetherness.... Any good society must satisfy this need, one way or another, if it is to survive and be healthy. (p. 43)

This study investigated the perception of a sense of belonging as it pertains to a students' perception of being valued within the academic system, within their family, and within the new social structure that will develop during their first semester of college.

Defining Success

Success is a term that can also be defined in various ways. In a study conducted by Nancy Jennings, Suzanne Lovett, Lee Cuba, Joe Swingle and Heather Lindkvist titled “ ‘What

Would Make This a Successful Year to You?’ How Students Define Success in College” (2013), four themes emerged as prevalent in the perceptions of students around success: academic achievement, social and residential living, life management, and academic engagement. For these students, academic achievement boiled down to getting good grades or improving one’s grades. Social and residential life constituted various factors such as making new friends, maintaining and strengthening friendships, and pursuing extracurricular activities. The life management theme included factors such as time management, study skills, and balancing life, work and school responsibilities. The last theme found in the study was around academic engagement which meant the student’s desire to learn or explore new areas. These four themes are supported in what some researchers are refer to as “holistic development” (Astin, 1991; Kuh, Shedd, & Whitt, 1987). Joe Cuseo (n.d) in his article on student success writes about the various dimensions in which a student can develop holistically as being:

- Intellectual Development: developing skills for acquiring and communicating knowledge, learning how to learn, and how to think deeply.
- Emotional Development: developing skills for understanding, controlling, and expressing emotions.
- Social Development: enhancing the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, leadership skills, and civic engagement.
- Ethical Development: formulating a clear value system that guides life choices and demonstrates personal character.
- Physical Development: acquiring and applying knowledge about the human body to prevent disease, maintain wellness, and promote peak performance.
- Spiritual Development: appreciating the search for personal meaning, the purpose of human existence, and questions that transcend the material or physical world (p. 2)

Throughout the study, the achievement of student success will be derived from the student’s perceived understanding of academic achievement and holistic development.

Defining Adjustment and Support

For the purposes of this study, college student adjustment will be defined by the participant around issues of academics, social, personal/emotional, and goal commitment or

institutional attachment (Baker & Siryk, 1984). Buote (2006) stated that the shift from high school to a college or university setting could be a major transition in a young adult's life and therefore plays an important factor in that students ability to stay and graduate or leave the university. Research has shown that even though some first-year students will be able to make the adjustment to college life successfully, others will feel overwhelmed and experience problems (Kuh, 2005; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

Support within the first year of a student's college career can come in a variety of ways. Academic support from faculty members or advisors, social support from friends or peers, and family support are a few that have been articulated as being important in the research (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo,; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). Other researchers have come to an agreement that support is actually multi-dimensional and can manifest itself in four different types, emotional (the ability to communicate that they are valued), practical or material assistance, informational (such as guidance or advice), and social companionship (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Cohen & Syme, 1985; Wong & Kwok, 1997). According to Thoitis (1986), when a student perceives his or her environment as being supportive, the psychological impact of stressful events is reduced. This study explored the notion of support from the perspective of the student within the first six weeks of the fall semester of their first year.

Historical Context

Retention is defined as a student's matriculation through a college or university, starting with the first semester and ending with graduation. A threat to successful matriculation and graduation is attrition. There are two definitions of attrition that are described in the literature: a dropout and a stopout (Herzog, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Hunter & Gahagan, 2003). For the purposes

of this review, a dropout is a student who leaves a university before graduation and does not return. A stopout is an individual who, for whatever reason, will leave the university for an extended period of time and then come back at a later time to finish his or her degree (Herzog, 2005). More recently educational leaders have referenced Vincent Tinto as an individual whose model of student departure has guided them in their efforts to combat low retention and high attrition rates (Schrader & Brown, 2008). Since Tinto's model of student departure in 1987, the theoretical framework of student retention has progressed to include not only how a student feels he or she can do within the educational system academically, but also how societal factors and demographics can play into his or her success (Tinto, 1993). With Tinto's original model of student departure, there was a focus on just academic and social integration. He later revised the model to include parameters outside of the institution including familial, individual, societal, and pre-college indicators (e.g. test scores, advanced placement courses) towards a student's success. Along with his 1993 revision came the notion of integrating one's self into the education system and the individuals within that system. A student would be more successful if he or she understood the value of separating himself or herself from what he or she is accustomed to and committing to the behaviors and values of students, faculty, and staff members with whom he or she interact on a daily basis (Tinto, 1993). In addition to the history discussed around retention, John Bean published a theory along with Shevawn Eaton (2000) that focused primarily on the psychological impacts of a student's experience on his or her retention. In an earlier edition, John Bean's model expressed value in environmental factors and the student's intentions as variables that could affect retention. These two important indicators were part of the reasoning behind Tinto's 1993 revision. A student's decision to persist in college depends on more than just his or her social and academic integration, but incorporates a wide range of factors that are

both in and out of the hands of educational leaders such as socioeconomic status, family background, and being a first generation college student. Throughout history an emphasis on student development theory such as Arthur Chickering's "Seven Vectors Theory" (1993), Marcia Baxter Magolda's "Model of Self-Authorship" (1999), and The Higher Education Research Institute's "Social Change Model" (1996) that have played a role in a student's retention on a college campus. Many institutions have implemented various combinations of resources, programs, theories, and initiatives to focus on increasing retention and graduation rates, many of which have varied in success (Schrader & Brown, 2008). Throughout the years of research conducted on this topic, a few themes emerge from the literature as being paramount to a student's retention in higher education. These include academic integration, social integration, pre-college existing factors, environment, and support. If educational leaders view a student holistically around these themes, and set up support systems to mirror them, chances of retaining a student will increase (Astin, 1984; Kuh 1995; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). The issue of student attrition continues to be an issue for educational leaders, but with a better understanding of student development, programs and services can be created to reduce this number.

First-Year Experience Programming

Many colleges and universities have tried a variety of program initiatives to increase the success rate of their students. At first, there was an increase in more tangible and physical resources provided by the institution including learning centers, tutoring centers, libraries, and work spaces (Miller & Pope, 2003). After these initiatives were implemented, colleges and universities started to fill in gaps around the social and academic integration through knowledge-based avenues such as orientation courses, seminars, and preparatory workshops (Howard & Jones, 2000). There are many programs and initiatives that have been put in place to address the

issue of retention (Barefoot, 2000). Around 94% of accredited four-year institutions in the United States offer some form of First-Year Experience (FYE) programming (Barefoot, 2000). For many institutions, FYE programs are not only designed with the interest of better serving students, but it is also to assure that the institution itself is flourishing. First-year programs are defined as institutional efforts to integrate incoming students to the academic and social aspects of the institution. They are also designed with the goal of reducing the attrition rates of first-year students through frequent and positive interactions (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 2005).

Out of the various programs that have been implemented to help with retention only a few have proven to be successful. Extended orientation camps and intentional programming have become two of the more effective ways to increase student achievement and retention on college campuses (Lien & Goldenberg, 2012). Extended orientation camps are typically offered to any incoming first-year student who has been accepted to the university. These camps focus mainly on university tradition, acclimation, and an introduction to resources and the university system in general (Brown, 2012; Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013; Gass, Garvey, & Sugerman, 2003). Students who attend such camps perceive a larger sense of pride in the school and tend to do better in their first year as opposed to students who do not attend (Wolfe & Gregor, 2011). This is in part due to the relationships, support, and connections that they are able to form with their classmates, peer leaders, and university administrators through interactions and experiences. The camps last anywhere from two days to an entire week, take place before classes begin, and usually have a main, shared experiential component that helps bond the student to the university (Wolfe & Gregor, 2011). The experiential programming piece that these camps offer through the social interactions with faculty, staff, and fellow students creates a special sense of belonging (Bell, Gass, Nafziger, & Starbuck, 2014). Intentional programming is

the other trend that is starting to take shape within the higher education system (Lien & Goldenberg, 2012). These intentional programs focus on the transitional issues of a college freshman that were explored by researchers such as Astin (1984); Tinto (1993); and Pascarella & Terenzini (1980) that included, but are not limited to: homesickness, social integration, and the freedom of being on your own (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). In order to address some of these issues, colleges and universities have been organizing their curricular and co-curricular resources to increase student-to-student interaction, faculty-to-student interaction, student involvement and time on campus, to link the curriculum and the co-curriculum, to increase academic expectations and levels of academic engagement, and to assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college (Barefoot, 2000). These camps and intentional programming efforts include a service learning or community service component that further strengthens the student's civility and connection to the campus and surrounding community (Zlotkowski, 2002). These two specific programs have added to the different ways and resources in which universities are increasing their student retention and success. They are also some of the more costly in terms of a financial aspect to implement.

College campuses are experiencing a dropout rate, around 20% to 30%, of their first-year students. This is largely in part due to the lack of resources, lack of support, or feelings of not belonging on the part of the first-year student (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Because of this, colleges and universities are realigning a great deal of time and financial resources to implement programs designed to aid a student during their first year (Bliss, Webb, & St. Andre, 2012). Many factors can contribute to a student's decision to stay or leave a university especially within his or her first few weeks. Financial problems, classes not being what the students expected, the inability to make friends, a lack of contact with faculty members, a lack of

self-efficacy, and an undeveloped level of emotional readiness are some of the more common themes among those individuals who have chosen to leave (Brooman & Darwent, 2012). Even though the educational leaders and university cannot be solely responsible for the student's decision to stay or leave a college, they can play a major role in influencing his or her decision to continue on through graduation by the interactions they have with the student and the programs that they implement. Educational leaders are valuing the importance of First-Year Experience programs that include some component of camp or intentional programming, and are shifting resources and creating positions to help fulfil these first year needs (Pascarella et al., 1991, Dugan, 2011, Barefoot & Gardner, 1993).

Institutional Buy-In

Though the research has been around for the increase of First-Year Experience programs within colleges and universities, many institutions have failed to implement them correctly (Hunter & Gahagan, 2003; Barefoot, 2000; Alexander & Gardner, 2009). The main reason for the lack of success within these institutions is their ability to realign the number of resources to increase staffing, space, and longevity (Alexander & Gardner, 2009). Retention fatigue is something that Alexander and Gardner (2009) explain as focusing too much on the academic success of a student and ignoring the components of a successful social integration as well. A lack of institutional support around the social integration of a student can cause any well-intended First-Year Experience program to fail. In order to have a successful commitment from university officials, First-Year Experience programs will need to be part of a strategic plan, one that involves more than an individual, team, or department. It requires that the tasks and duties are inter-departmental and have multiple leaders (Alexander & Gardner, 2009; Barefoot, 2000). Hunter and Gahagan (2009) go on to clarify that efforts in First-Year Experience should focus on

the entire year. It does not benefit the college or university to frontload all of their resources into planning the first six weeks, and then let everything fall apart during the second semester.

Conversely, according to Tinto (2005), “institutional commitment is more than just words, more than mission statements issued in elaborate brochures; it is the willingness to invest the resources and provide the incentives and rewards needed to enhance student success. Without such commitment, programs for student success may begin, but rarely prosper in the long term” (p. 2).

Both accounts around institutional buy-in and support show the varying degree in which an institution can provide commitment to a student’s first year around programming and initiatives.

Another factor found throughout the literature to be an important piece of institutional support are individuals who are hired to implement the programs and initiatives for students. Far too often, staff members will champion programs and services designed to increase student success, but then find themselves leaving the position within five years (O’Keffee, 2013; Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosenstreich, & Dobson, 2014; Alexander & Gardner, 2009). This leaves the university with the question of whether to find another person who will be the champion of the same program or to start from scratch. This factor is a costly one in that it can lead to the institution spending more time and money rehiring for a position.

CONCLUSION

Educational leaders in a university setting should understand the students before developing initiatives and programs to help them. Students come from varied backgrounds with varied experiences, and developing programs and initiatives that are too overarching in nature will not satisfy the needs of all students (Brooman & Darwent, 2012; Cole & Korkmaz, 2010; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Wilcox et al., 2005). Students who are supported in their transition from high school to college throughout their first year are less likely to drop out (Tinto,

1993). It is the educational leader's role to help students become socially integrated through campus life and activities (Hunter & Gahagan, 2003). Varying programs have been implemented to address the issue of student retention and attrition. With orientation camps and intentional programming on the rise at many institutions, little research has been conducted on the specific components of these initiatives and their relevance to educational leaders, although research that exists supports having focused, intentional, and shared experiences has been the most effective (Hunter & Gahagan, 2003). Institutional commitment and support are important factors on student retention within the higher education setting. This commitment must incorporate a strategy that includes both an increase in physical space, programs, and monetary increases (Tinto, 2005), and rooted in the foundation of the individuals who are working on these goals for the students (Bean, 1990). This study explored the impact of extended orientation camps and intentional programming on students' perceptions regarding belonging, adjustment, success, and support. Increasing retention and decreasing the attrition of college students has been an issue that has persisted throughout the decades. In doing this research on these specific components, hopefully we as educational leaders can use our resources to better serve our students. The study will be guided by the following research questions.

1. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of belonging?**
2. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of adjustment?**

3. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of success**?
4. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of support**?

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2. THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE ON AN URBAN CAMPUS: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF FIRST YEAR-PROGRAMS ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF BELONGING, ADJUSTMENT, SUCCESS, AND SUPPORT

The major focus of this study was to determine to what extent do first-year programs impact a student's success at a large, four-year, public, urban institution in the Southern United States, SUU. Student success and retention rates among colleges and universities around the country have been an increasing issue for educational leaders. The participants in this study were selected from a group of students who participated in the university's First Year Residential Experience (FYRE) program through University Housing which included an extended orientation camp (Camp FYRE), a large welcome event (Playing with FYRE), and an intentional programming model (Catch the FYRE). The particular programs consisted of the following:

- Camp FYRE: A 3 day/2 night, overnight, extended orientation camp that takes place before the start of the fall semester
- Playing with FYRE: A welcome program open to all incoming first-year students that takes place during the first weekend of the fall semester
- Catch the FYRE: A seven-week intentional programming model focused on academic, personal, and institutional development for the student that takes place during the fall semester. There were a total of 36 programs offered in which the participants will have attended at least three programs

The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of belonging?**

2. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of adjustment?**
3. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of success?**
4. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of support?**

Methodology

This case study explored a university in the south that was established in 1913. The undergraduate and graduate student enrollment at the university at the time of the study was 32,000. According to a report from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (2015), the average total enrollment for the fall semester since 2007 has ranged from approximately 27,137 to 32,541 students (Table.1).

Table 1

COLLEGE	FA 2007	FA 2008	FA 2009	FA 2010	FA 2011	FA 2012	FA 2013	FA 2014	FA 2015
Arts And Sciences (AS)	11,732	12,423	13,207	14,001	14,355	14,731	14,937	15,378	15,168
Business (BU)	7,607	7,798	8,058	8,126	8,019	8,059	7,841	7,817	7,674
Edu. & Human Dev (EH)	3,057	3,279	3,810	3,732	3,630	3,359	3,193	3,282	2,954
Law (LW)	662	653	674	671	689	679	673	641	655
Nursing & HP (SNHP)	1,746	1,817	2,088	2,267	2,456	2,288	2,308	2,187	2,122
Policy Studies (PS)	1,447	1,475	1,732	1,921	2,050	2,112	2,233	2,208	2,122
S. Public Health (SH)	98	114	138	137	165	204	244	285	315
University College (00)	788	679	724	683	658	660	739	742	1,068
report total:	27,137	28,238	30,431	31,538	32,022	32,092	32,168	32,541	32,082

The incoming first-year class has averaged a little under 3,100 students for the fall semesters since 2007 (Table.2).

Table 2

LEVEL	FA 2007	FA 2008	FA 2009	FA 2010	FA 2011	FA 2012	FA 2013	FA 2014	FA 2015
Freshmen	2,750	2,879	3,075	2,953	2,847	3,158	3,308	3,371	3,400
Dual/Joint Enroll	79	75	87	71	102	120	121	106	168
Sophomore	859	887	941	946	1,122	1,113	1,062	1,205	1,008
Junior	747	768	854	984	1,016	1,040	977	997	868
Senior	247	260	331	446	437	414	395	392	369
Transient	102	87	105	103	123	122	100	95	91
Non-Degree Undergrad.	211	207	196	174	136	140	151	133	153
	4,995	5,163	5,589	5,677	5,783	6,107	6,114	6,299	6,057
Non-Degree Graduate	187	195	283	200	150	101	108	151	130
Graduate	1,301	1,399	1,702	1,577	1,624	1,536	1,603	1,495	1,477
Law	227	221	224	229	224	209	199	209	238
	1,715	1,815	2,209	2,006	1,998	1,846	1,910	1,855	1,845
	6,710	6,978	7,798	7,683	7,781	7,953	8,024	8,154	7,902

The average retention rate of first-year students on this campus matriculating to their sophomore year from 2006 – 2014 was 72% (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2015). The study included (a) a collection of online journals submitted through *123ContactForm.com*, (b) a focus group, and (c) individual interviews. All three methods of data collection took place over the course of the fall 2015 semester. The journaling occurred weekly for six weeks from September to October 2015. Both the individual interviews and the focus group took place in October 2015. The participants were able to complete the journals at their own pace after being provided a weekly reminder and link to the confidential form online. The individual interviews took place between the hours of 8am – 5pm, Monday - Friday. The focus group was conducted within this same timeframe. In summary, this study provides an analysis of the first-year programs in which the participants took part and the perceived impact that those programs had on their sense of belonging, adjustment, success, and support.

Research indicates that there is a small window of time in which educational leaders on college campuses have to make a positive and lasting impression on their first-year students (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Tinto, 1993; Kuh 1995). The first two to six weeks of a student's college career are important and have a big impact on his or her decision to stay at a university (Levitz et al., 1989). With this in mind, many colleges and universities throughout the years have realigned their resources towards the implementation of programs designed to aid students with their transition from high school to college (Bliss, Webb, & St. Andre, 2012). Two of the more recent trends in higher education have been the development of extended orientation camps and an intentional programming model (Lien & Goldenberg 2012). Extended Orientation Camps occur the summer before the initial fall semester of a student's first year in college. These camps are typically 3 – 5 days and have a common goal of establishing a relationship with the university and helping with the transition from high school to college (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007; Wolfe & Kay, 2011; Bell, Gas, Nafziger, 2014). An intentional programming model can vary from institution to institution, but is characterized by a set of programs and initiatives that takes place during a specific period of time. These programs are geared towards the common transitional issues of first-year students on a college or university campus (Kuh, 1995; Levitz & Noel, 1989; Astin, 1984; Barefoot, 2000). Extended orientation camps and intentional programming on college campuses have been linked to an increase in student academic achievement and holistic development (Waldron and Yungbluth, 2007). This study explored the impact of these programs on students' perceptions of their sense of belonging, adjustment, success, and support.

The University Housing department at SUU was established in 1996 with the purchase of an existing structure. This structure was sold to a neighboring university in an effort to expand and grow closer to the center of campus. In 2002, the university opened the largest residence hall

in the nation, housing 2,000 students in one complex. The department of University Housing has continued to grow over the years to purchase, remodel, and build five additional buildings to house their on-campus population. University Housing at SUU is now home to 4,200 students, of which 2,100 are first-year students.

Recently, the Board of Regents approved a plan to enter into a Public Private Partnership that would offload existing debt on two buildings valuing approximately \$150 million dollars, and finance the costs of any new residence halls for the next 65 years. Public Private Partnerships or P3s are defined as a contractual arrangement between a public agency (federal, state or local) and a private sector entity. Through this agreement, the resources of each sector (public and private) are shared in delivering a service or facility for the use of the general public (NCP3P, 2014). With the case of SUU, the individuals who will utilize the new buildings are first year students living on campus. P3s have been around for a few decades, and have been utilized to fund financially the development of necessary resources such as academic and residential structures for specific constituents. Within the last 20 years, higher education institutions have been looking at P3 as an option to reduce the amount of debt on buildings and various projects within the university master plan (Kelderman, 2009; Van Der Werf, 1999). The Public Private Partnership at the time of the study had not influenced the programming structure within University Housing.

The First-Year Residential Experience (FYRE) Program

The First Year Residential Experience (FYRE) program is located within the University Housing department of SUU, and is the focus of this study. The FYRE program consists of three major components that take place within the first six weeks of an incoming student's first semester. The components of the FYRE program are as follows:

- Camp FYRE: A 3 day/2 night, overnight, extended orientation camp that has a cost of \$100 to participate (the \$100 covers lodging for 2 nights, meals for all 3 days, the experiential trip, and Camp FYRE merchandise). There is an opportunity for participants to defer the balance to their fall semester student account so that any financial assistance that they may receive during the year can cover the cost of the camp. Within the camp, the participants were able to select between three options for an experiential trip.
 - Experience Atlanta
 - With this option, participants visit the Georgia Aquarium, Georgia Dome, CNN Center, and Turner Field
 - White Water Rafting
 - With this option, participants take a white water rafting trip through the university's recreational services department
 - Heritage Atlanta
 - With this option, participants visit the Center for Human and Civil Rights, the CNN Center, Fox Theater, and the MLK Center, Museum, and place of residence

In addition to the three experiential trips, Camp FYRE participants also had the opportunity to experience the following:

- Faculty and Staff Involvement
 - There were 33 full time professional staff members from University Housing, Athletics, the Multicultural Center, the Dean of Student's Office, the Career Services Office, the Office of Undergraduate Studies, Campus Recreation, Office of Student Activities, and Financial Aid

- There were 6 faculty members who signed up as trip leaders for the experiential piece of the camp
 - Full schedule of tours (of the university campus, university buildings and campus resources, and surrounding community), tradition building (including a pep-rally with athletics to learn chants, cheers, and songs), programming (including team-builders, group activities, information sessions, and reflection), and peer interactive opportunities including meals, question and answer sessions, and reflection
- Playing with FYRE: A welcome program that is free and open to all incoming first-year students held in the recreation center and facilitated by *Playfair, Inc.* – a large team-building company in which the University Housing department contracts out at a cost of \$1,800 in which University Housing covers
 - This program is 90 minutes long and focuses on providing a high energy welcoming environment where the first-year students will have an opportunity to interact with fellow incoming peers and classmates through facilitated team building activities
- Catch the FYRE: A six-week intentional programming model focused on the academic, personal, and institutional knowledge development of the student
 - University Housing currently has a programming model in which all of the student leaders within University Housing use as a guide to develop and implement programs. The programming model uses an acronym of HOUSING to describe the specific learning outcomes that the department feels is important to

the successful development of their students. This HOUSING acronym stands for:

- H – Human Connection
 - O – Outreach
 - U – Understanding of Self & Others
 - S – Scholarship
 - I – Involvement in the Community
 - N – Navigating Life Skills
 - G – Global Inclusiveness
- Weeks 1 & 2
 - High School v College
 - Campus Resources
 - Changing relationships within the family, friends, partners, and roommates
 - Weeks 3 & 4
 - Study skills and time management
 - Health education and stress management
 - Learning styles
 - Values
 - Student involvement
 - Weeks 5 & 6
 - First Year Reader
 - Career exploration

- Multicultural competency
- Study abroad
- Self care/by-stander intervention
- Engaging the city and using it as a learning tool

Case Study Method

A single exploratory case study method was used for this study. Robert Stake (1995) states that by using a case study method, the importance lies with the information that is gathered through the various sub-methods such as interviews, focus groups, and journaling. Within this method, each participant was studied with the intent to form an understanding of the perceived impact of the FYRE program on the participants as a whole. The case was bound to the one institution in the Southern United States in which this study was conducted. It was also bound by the number of participants (13) and their involvement in the University Housing FYRE program.

Robert K. Yin (2002) in his book *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, explains that case studies describe an intervention and the real-life context in which they occur. Along these lines, they can also be used to explore situations or instances in which the intervention does not have a clear or single set of outcomes. The results of the study cannot be generalizable as there will be no attempt to compare the data to other urban institutions. The purpose of the case study is to share the information on the perceived impact that first-year programs have on a student's achievement as defined by his or her sense of belonging, adjustment, success, and support at a large, urban, 4-year institution in the Southern United States, or SUU. My purpose is to provide this information to any researcher that may be interested in such inquiries at similar institutions.

Triangulation is the use of multiple data sources in an investigation to provide an understanding of the research question (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999; Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2002).

Denzin (1978) identified four basic types of triangulation that can occur in a study:

- Data triangulation: which involves time, space, and persons
- Investigator triangulation: which involves multiple researchers
- Theory triangulation: which involves using more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon
- Methodological triangulation: which involves using more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents

For the purposes of this study, I utilized the methodological triangulation approach. Yin (2002) also states that case studies should include multiple sources of data. This particular case study included individual interviews, artifact collection (online journaling), and a focus group. Using these three different sources of data allowed for triangulation of the data to provide a more complete summary analysis than a case study only using one source of data (Yin, 2002).

The participants reviewed the transcribed interview and focus group notes of their respective sessions allowing them to make any corrections or clarify any thoughts prior to including them in the study. None of the participants had any changes to the transcribed notes. This member checking process increases accuracy and construct validity to the study (Yin, 2002).

This study assumed the validity and importance of constructivism, as I did not expect to find a particular answer to the questions, but rather explored the perceived impact of the programs on the participants. According to Guba & Lincoln (1989) constructivism is “the philosophical belief that people construct their own understanding of reality; we construct meaning based on our interactions with our surroundings” (p. 103). In doing so, constructivist theorists use their research to develop insight through the interpretation of the perceptions of research participants. This was very important to the study because of the data that was collected

from the participants. Utilizing the constructivism approach, the information gathered from the participants explored the outcome and impact of students' perception of their experiences on belonging, adjustment, success, and support.

Participants, Methods, and Data Analysis

The participants in the case study were selected from a pool of students who were identified as first-year students, living in University Housing in the fall of 2015, and signed up for the initial phase of the FYRE program, Camp FYRE. I sent an email (Appendix A) to the program administrator of the FYRE program requesting that information about the study be shared with the participants during their initial in-person check-in with the program which took place on July 30, 2015. During this check-in process, 20 individuals out of the 100 that attended the camp expressed an initial interest in participating in the case study. An additional email (Appendix B) was sent from the researcher to the administrator asking to forward a message to the Camp FYRE participants requesting that they email the researcher back with their interest in participating in the study. Seventeen (17) individuals, out of the 20, emailed back and stated that they were interested in the study and would like to participate. I then proceeded to move forward and asked each of the participants to meet me at a coffee shop near campus to explain the consent form and study procedures. In the end, thirteen (13) of the original 100 individuals agreed to participate in the study and moved forward with the process. Of these 13 individuals, 77% (10) were female and 23% (3) were male. Of these 13, 69% (9) identified as African-American, 16% (2) as Caucasian, 7.5% (1) identified as Indian, and 7.5% (1) identified as multi-racial. The age of the participants was either 18 years of age or 19 years of age.

I asked each of the participants to keep an online journal through *123ContactForm.com*, a free, online, electronic submission form. The link was secure and was only provided to the

individuals who agreed to participate in the study. This form was also confidential in that there was no ability for any of the participants to see the submissions of the other individuals. Once a week, I would send the participants the link to the survey reminding them to fill out the journal before the end of the week by responding to the prompt that was given asking the participants to detail any experiences around belonging, adjustment, success, and support (Appendix C). Eight (8) of the 13 participants actively engaged in the online journal method of data collection.

In addition to the camp, within the first six weeks of the fall semester, incoming first-year students had the opportunity to participate in “Playing with FYRE” – a welcome event for first-year students, and “Catch the FYRE” – an intentional six-week programming model. When the six week programming model was over, I sent another email (Appendix D) to the 13 participants requesting participation in either the focus group or the individual interview. Ten (10) of the participants decided to continue with the study in which seven (7) participated in the individual interview and three (3) participated in the focus group. Out of the three (3) individuals who chose not continue with the study, two (2) cited that they became too busy and no longer wanted to participate, and one (1) did not return the email. The selection criteria for the focus group and individual interviews were that they attended the Playing with FYRE program and at least three programs during the Catch the FYRE portion of intentional programming. The individual interview was scheduled for 60 minutes each to allow time for the semi-structured format of questions and the focus group was scheduled for 90 minutes to allow time for the presence of more than one participant in the room. The identities of all participants were masked in order to maintain confidentiality. The focus group and all of the individual interviews were recorded using the program “SuperNote”. SuperNote is a downloadable application for a smartphone that utilizes the microphone of the smartphone to record a conversation. This program was able to

record the interview and focus group and allowed me to transfer the recording to my computer. I then used the online service, *TranscribeMe*, to transcribe these interviews and focus groups for the data analysis section of the study. All of the notes from the online journals and transcriptions are located on my personal computer at home and are password protected.

The data collection methods that were implemented in the study were threefold in order to triangulate the information. Again, triangulation plays an important part in research in that data triangulation can support and validate findings (Denzin, 1978). This triangulation supports the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes, and is done so by using multiple sources of data collection (Yin, 2002). The three sources that were employed were focus groups, interviews, and artifacts (participant journals). Below are the interview questions, the focus group questions, and the prompt given for the online journaling.

Focus Group Interviews (90 Minutes)

1. What were your initial thoughts coming into college around academics, personal life, and the institution?
2. What, if anything, has been a difficult transition for you from high school to college?
3. What has been your involvement on campus since the beginning of the school year?
4. What specific impact would you say Camp FYRE had on your experience as a first year student?

Individual Interview (60 minutes)

1. Please compare your thoughts now as opposed to when you initially entered college.
2. In your opinion, between high school and college, what is the difference, if any, among the following factors?
 - a. Belonging, Success, Adjustment, and Support

3. What would you say is one of the most important lessons you've learned since you've been here? Why?
4. How would you describe your involvement on campus?
5. What would you say was the impact of participating in the FYRE program on all of your experiences?

Artifact: Journal Experiences (6 weeks)

1. A link to the free online journaling website *123ContactForm* was given to each of the participants to fill out
2. The participants were asked to identify which week they were filling out the journal for by clicking on the drop down menu and selecting the specific week (e.g. Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, etc.) before moving forward with their respective responses
3. The prompt that was given weekly did not change: Please describe your experiences this week in relation to belonging, success, support, retention and adjustment. Please provide any specific examples that can support any of the above.

The journal prompt remained the same throughout the case study in order to provide consistency in the question being asked. By keeping the format and question consistent it can minimize the response time of the participant by their ability to anticipate the question in advance (Lichtman, 2010). Eight (8) of the participants answered the online journal prompt throughout the six weeks. The responses are indicated in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Student #	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
1	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y
3	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
4	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y

5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
8	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
11	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
12	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
13	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Total	8	7	7	4	4	6

Subsequent follow-up questions were posed during the focus group and individual interviews asking participants to clarify with specific examples their responses to their perceived belonging, adjustment, success, and support. This semi-structured interview format allowed myself to probe for additional useful information by using follow up questions such as: Could you explain more about that specific example, Could you go into detail about your experience with “x”, and Could you clarify what you meant by “y” (Glesne, 2011).

As with many case studies, some of the challenges included the amount of data that was collected for the dissertation. This data at first seemed fairly disorganized with the amount of information collected and seemed not to fall into any particular category beyond question 1, question 2, etc. A coding software system, NVivo, was used to analyze the data once it was collected to properly categorize trends throughout the information. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International. It has been designed for qualitative researchers working with very rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required.

For this study, the data was sorted and analyzed using an open and thematic coding approach. Open coding allowed the data to be sorted into a variety of points, by taking each interview, focus group, and journal and pulling key words that appear multiple times (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This process helped pinpoint commonalities within each of the methods and cases, and

helped to draw the information into one complete synthesis. After the initial open coding, a thematic coding took place to organize the information into categories or common themes which can provide more context for the data (Gibbs, 2007).

Ellingson (2011) states that it is important to categorize the data by separating it into smaller pieces for consideration, reflection, and interpretation. For this study, I took the approach presented by Creswell (2003) for data analysis and representation. The following data analysis approach was applied for each participant in this study:

- Organize Data – Once I received all of the data from interviews, focus groups, online journaling, I transferred the information into NVivo. I then utilized the software to group the information into relevant categories of for review and interpretation. This grouping was done by creating various relationships and nodes within the NVivo system around the research questions.
- Data Review – I reviewed institutional data such as enrollment numbers and retention rates for first year students, listened to and had the interviews transcribed, reviewed the online journal submissions, and identified themes that surfaced in the data.
- Data Coding – Data was sorted into themes that exemplified the same theoretical or descriptive ideas (Glesne, 2011). I coded the data once I reviewed it by utilizing what NVivo refers to as nodes.
 - I first performed a text search query within the NVivo software to identify how many times the key words within the research question appeared (belonging, adjustment, success, and support). This resulted in a small number, average of 1.2% throughout the documents.

- I then broadened my search to include any words that could be associated with the key words in the research questions such as belong, belonging, belonged, etc. This resulted in a much larger frequency (approximately 25%) throughout the data.
- After this text search, I then reviewed the data and utilized the relationships and nodes feature of the software to create categories guided by the research questions.
- I then ran a word frequency query within the software to understand which words the participants used the most as they were answering the interview questions.
- Interpretation – I identified themes in the data to define and demonstrate understanding of the information collected. This process was done by identifying commonalities, differences, associations, and correlations that surfaced through the data. The information was then organized in a clear and logical manner.
- Validation of Findings – Triangulation was used to assure the trustworthiness of the data, interpretations, and findings (responses from interview, focus groups, and the online journal submissions were used to explain themes).

Statement of Subjectivity

The summer before my first year of college I was involved in a program that was designed to help transition first year engineers to the university. This was an eight-week program in which I was able to take two core courses to help me adapt to the university's academic and social rigor. During that particular summer, I attended my first orientation session in June, but continued to go to the other orientation sessions offered because of the connections and relationships that I developed with the students and full-time staff. When I first entered the

university, my goal was to receive a chemical engineering degree as fast as I could in order to enter the work force and help provide for my family. My older siblings that went to college before me majored in some form of engineering or health field, therefore, I thought it was something that I needed to pursue. It was because of this summer initiative and programming throughout the semester that I was afforded the opportunity to interact with students and full-time staff whom I perceived to care for my well-being. My experiences in my first year of college have set me on a path to help find different ways to help first-year students on the campuses on which I work have a smooth transition from high school to college. I understand that I have a pre-conceived notion that programs such as extended orientation camps and intentional programming models should have a positive impact on a student's perception of belonging, adjustment, success, and support; however, with this case study, I have been open to the data and have remained objective in the analysis.

In the fall of 2011 the University Housing department at the university in the present study appointed a committee to look at the overall experience of the first-year students living in the residence halls. One of the charges of the committee was to develop a complete first-year experience curriculum centered on personal, academic, and institutional transition. The specific charge is below:

[University] has established a First-Year Experience committee to develop and oversee specific programming throughout the year to positively influence first-year students' holistic development while forging strong bonds at the institution through academic and social integration. The committee will take a look at FYE programs throughout the nation, and assess what the specific needs of our community will be.

- The committee will look to initiate a series of programs concentrating on:
 - The first six weeks of class
 - First year traditions
 - Integrating the urban experience
 - Developing a series of events to tackle common first year issues
 - Increased faculty/staff involvement
 - Creating a signature experience

I sat on the committee that developed the programs that have been analyzed within this case study and still have general oversight of the development, structuring, and implementation of the Camp FYRE, Playing with FYRE, and Catch the FYRE experiences within University Housing. Although the programs do fall within the parameters of my functional area, I do not have direct facilitation of the program or its outcomes anymore, as that duty has been reassigned. I do however understand that my position within the organization could have influenced some of the responses from the students as they may have seen me as being a representative of University Housing and the position of authority rather than a student researcher. The program administrators are also individuals whom I either directly or indirectly supervise, however, I attempted to remove influence of power from any requests around the research study by sending request through my student account. I believe that the individual participants were honest in their feedback and answers to the questions.

Relevance of the Study

Although there is literature around extended orientation camps and intentional programming models on urban campuses, like this study, much of it focuses on specific cases of urban campuses and single-institutional studies (Porter and Swing, 2006). In a study conducted by Chris Carey and Rowanna Carpenter (2009), they found that students who are enrolled at an urban institution (Portland State University) were more likely to live at home, which had no significant impact on their GPA or retention rate. In reviewing a conference program booklet and presentation notes on first-year experience programs on urban campuses with submissions from institutions such as Arizona State University, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Buffalo State College, Dekalb College, Essex County College, Georgetown University, La Salle University, Middle Tennessee State University, Pace University, The Ohio State University,

University of Houston, Seton Hall University, University of Missouri-Kansas City, University of Southern California, and Virginia Commonwealth University, a number of themes around the first-year experience were apparent (South Carolina University, C.E., 1994). These themes focused on programmatic initiatives to aid in retention of their first-year students. Some of the common trends were: establishing tutoring centers, mentoring programs, University 101 courses, First-Year Centers, early interventions from the office of Career Services, Living-Learning Communities, hosting extended orientation camps, and establishing an intentional programming model. This particular research study contributes to the literature around the impact of first-year programs on a student's experience around student achievement on an urban campus.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of first-year programs on student perceptions around the areas of belonging, adjustment, success, and support at a large, four-year, public, urban institution in the Southern United States, SUU. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of belonging?**
2. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of adjustment?**
3. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of success?**

4. To what extent do extended orientation camps and intentional programming during the first six weeks of a first-year student's college career impact his/her **perceived sense of support**?

In total, there were thirteen (13) participants in the study. All thirteen agreed to share some demographic information with me during the meeting to sign the consent form. This information included: race, gender, and age. This case study did not take into account the impact of the demographic information on the student's perception of belonging, adjustment, success, or support. The information was included in the dissertation for information purposes only and can be found in Appendix E.

The retention rate for individuals who attended these specific first-year programs has been 84%, 88%, and 90% respectively. Research indicates that the retention rates for students in their first year of college is approximately 70% - 80% (Waldron and Yungbluth, 2007). According to this university's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (2015) of the institution of the study, the current retention rate of first-year students has averaged 72% from 2006 – 2014. The FYRE program was established in the summer of 2012 with this past summer (2015) being its fourth year in operation.

By using the NVivo, I was able to categorize the data by the algorithms set within the software. I found that the participants mentioned the University Housing FYRE program, along with the three components of Camp FYRE, Playing with FYRE, and Catch the FYRE, more frequently (6 to 1) than other factors that may have contributed to their perception of belonging, adjustment, success, and support. These factors included parents, friends, classes, teachers, high school, and family. The next section was organized around the themes that surfaced throughout the case study from the NVivo software. These themes were identified by reviewing the text and

word frequency query in relation to where they were referenced in the participants' answers.

The themes include: (a) sense of belonging, (b) sense of adjustment, (c) sense of success, and (d) sense of support.

Theme 1: Sense of belonging

As I conducted the case study, I found that belonging was defined by each of the thirteen individual's through involvement in various student organizations, shared experiences, the number of friends (and how often they were around one another), and the participant's perception of how things felt easier than they had anticipated. One particular participant explained that,

...by the weekend I had already begun to reach out to people, get phone numbers, even invitations to hang out. I don't find myself wondering where I fit in on campus anymore because I have people in place to spend time with (Student 1, individual interview, October, 2015).

When expanding more on a shared experience, one participant stated,

...well, we all attended convocation. We all attended convocation together and we sat together and that was really fun because we're all kind of the same sort of people. Our sense of humor is really similar and so we were like talking...The second or third day that I was on campus, a group of us had gone to visit a friend over in one of the residence halls to look at their room, on the way back, it started to rain. No one brought an umbrella so we were literally walking in the rain. It was cool and funny because it was a shared experience that I think we still laugh about today, made me feel like I have something that is unique to this group of friends (Student 3, individual interview, October, 2015)

When asked about the specific experiences around Camp FYRE and intentional programming as it pertains to their sense of belonging, six of the seven interview participants expressed that it had a beneficial and positive impact on their belonging, while one stated that it was "ok". One individual stated,

My roommate [also] went to Camp FYRE, it was good to meet her and it was good to spend time with her before having to live together, that made a huge impact. I also think getting a feel of the city again before having to actually move here, even if it was just for

the weekend. It made me more comfortable with the idea that I'm going to go live in a city. I was a little anxious when I first decided to go here, but I enjoyed the programs, I was not 100% on going here until I attended Camp FYRE and some of the programs that were offered (Student 6, individual interview, October, 2015).

While another expressed:

I think that attending those programs just...it lends an air of community to the institution. Knowing that it is an urban campus, it can be difficult to kind of connect to all of the student on campus with whatever might be going on. But going to Camp FYRE, I didn't leave with the feeling that I'm really about to just be out in the city by myself (Student 1, individual interview, October, 2015).

Student 1 (2015) continues to say that "it was a real bonding experience" and that "Camp FYRE made me feel like I was a part of something bigger, not just another number." Even within the focus group and journaling, there were instances in which these patterns arose around friends, student organizations, and shared experiences. One participant in the focus group stated that she felt a large sense of belonging because of her involvement with a few organizations on campus (Student 9, focus group, October, 2015). When inquiring about the impact of Camp FYRE and the intentional programming model on their sense of belonging, the focus group participants stated that they met a lot of their new friends at Camp FYRE and at some of the earlier programs in the year, this in turn made them feel more welcomed and eased their transition during the first few weeks of school. Meanwhile, a member wrote in her journal that she felt as though she belonged because of the friendly atmosphere and environment that she has encountered (Student 12, journaling, September, 2015).

Not all of the data represented a positive impact towards one's sense of belonging. A participant in the individual interview as well as the online journaling felt alienated the first and second week of the semester stating:

I am perfectly fine with my classes, but I truly believe that I cannot be comfortable with myself going to school as of right now. I have adjusted fine but feel extremely lonely (Student 11, journaling, September, 2015).

This same participant later stated “...I officially give up, I don’t belong here, and I even called my mother and told her that I would rather get a random job than finish college” (Student 11, journaling, September, 2015). Further implications and analysis will be explored in the discussion portion of the dissertation.

Theme 2: Sense of Adjustment

When reviewing the data, a theme around the sense of adjustment did manifest itself within the interviews, focus group, and online journals. Adjustment for the participants focused on a sense of freedom, time management, academics, the urban city, and relationships. Four out of seven of the individual interview participants stated that the freedom around the lack of parental guidance for things (getting up, eating, going to class, doing homework, etc.) took them a few weeks to adjust (Student 1, 2, 3, and 5, individual interview, October, 2015). Nine of the thirteen participants stated that they bought or received planners from programs during their first or second week of school which aided in not only keeping track of their academic responsibilities, but also their involvement on campus. One participant noted:

It’s definitely a bigger adjustment. I had a car when I was in high school but still you were in school from 8am to 3:45, after that you had homework, chores, work, or babysitting. Here, I have one class on Tuesday and I’m done at noon. No one is here to tell you what to do, I feel lucky that I haven’t gone absolutely wild from it (Student 1, individual interview, October, 2015).

In understanding more about the circumstances of living in an urban environment one student participant noted:

It was an adjustment having to kind of increase my awareness of surroundings, just the safety factor here in comparison to where you lived before. There was no real security where I lived, we always kept our door unlocked in our neighborhood, so that’s been a weird adjustment for me (Student 5, individual interview, October, 2015).

This student went on to expand that for her, the adjustment did not stop there. It extended into the classroom with the style of exams, the amount of time spent in class relative to the amount of time outside of class, the size of the classes and the unspoken expectation of office hours was an adjustment during the first four weeks of class (Student 5, individual interview, October, 2015). Participants within the individual interview, focus group, and online journaling expressed the need to adjust to the changing relationships between their family and friends.

I felt pressured more and more each day to force my social life to fit the needs of my new organization. The two lives didn't mingle anymore (Student 11, journaling, October, 2011).

I had to let some old friends go. It was too hard to try to keep up with them and establish a new life here, especially since they were so far away and didn't understand what I was going through (Student 7, individual interview, October, 2015).

I am really close to my parents and thought that I would miss them a lot more than I actually do, not in a bad way, it's just that I talk about them and keep them updated in a different way than when I would when was staying at home (Student 9, focus group, October, 2015).

Adjustment for the participants seemed to vary depending on the level of involvement and participation in events and programs. When following up with the individuals about the impact that Camp FYRE and Catch the FYRE had on their sense of adjustment, seven of the thirteen participants elaborated on their responses to include details such as:

The Q&A (Question and Answer) at the camp was great. I really liked how honest it seemed like the mentors were, it made me think of things that I might come across this fall, so kind of gave me a heads up. The programs were extremely helpful. They were really thought provoking and were productive, even the social ones, I've developed more social networking skills from the programs (Student 1, individual interview, October, 2015).

I know that it would have been a lot worse if I did not go to Camp FYRE at all, I would have no friends here. It gave me a head start, and the mentors when I see them, they always say hi, so that's a good thing for me (Student 4, individual interview, October, 2015).

Camp FYRE and some of the programs that I went to really encouraged me to be myself, and that has really helped. I really didn't know what I was getting myself into, but when I went to these programs, it was like they knew what I needed that day or what I was going through, it was really nice to see that I was not alone in what I was doing (Student 6, individual interview, October, 2015).

These patterns around a sense of adjustment could be found in many of the responses that the participants gave to the questions. In the discussion section, the impact of Camp FYRE and Catch the FYRE will be explored further in detail.

Theme 3: Sense of Success

Next, within the theme of success, I found that throughout the study, the participants had varying contexts for the impact that the Camp FYRE initiative and intentional programming model had on their sense of success. Some participants viewed success through their academic progress. One participant expressed:

Academics have been really easy for me, easier than I thought it would be. If I had to define success, my classes being this easy would be one way (Student 4, individual interview, October, 2015).

While another pointed out:

I appreciate the challenge of college as compared to high school. I dual enrolled in high school, and so I thought it should be fine for me to take more classes, I was wrong, it was a little harder, but I liked that it was a challenge. I have been doing well in my classes, and so I feel like I have accomplished something (Student 6, individual interview, October, 2015).

While examining the online journals, I noticed that a few of the participants also listed that passing exams or improving grades from one test to the next made them feel like they were successful (Student 11 and 13, journaling, October, 2015). Another area that surfaced throughout the research study as a perception of success was the participants' ability to manage time. Four of the seven individual interview participants along with all three members of the focus group and two journal entries (2015) stated that time management was one of the biggest

challenges for them. Once they were able to find a system that worked for them, they felt as though they were more successful in college.

Another indicator of success for the participants was their ability to make friends or join organizations. A few of the participants indicated:

Things have been kind of easy for me because I was able to meet some friends at Camp FYRE and we would go to different events and programs together, it was always hard for me to make friends because I am kind of shy, but the camp made it easier (Student 2, individual interview, October, 2015).

I had in my mind that I was not going to do anything freshman year, but like through Camp FYRE I actually met a lot of people that now I'm involved with organizations with like I'm on the Quite Storm Steppers team with about six of the girls on the team I met through Camp FYRE. I am also doing Panther LEAP which a lot of the mentors said would be a good idea to do. So I feel like through Camp FYRE I ended up getting involved more than I thought I would (Student 3, individual interview, October, 2015).

I did actually meet a lot of my friends that I have now at Camp FYRE, and we are still to this day really good friends, but had I not went to Camp FYRE, I'd probably be here with absolutely no friends at all. So I mean, Camp FYRE in a sense really helped me learn the issue. It really helped me like get friends and really step out there and take a leap of faith. I've been successful at making and keeping friends (Student 8, focus group, October, 2015).

I went to a program today that had a lot of student organizations. It was cool see what I could do here. I even joined a few clubs that I saw, so that was cool (Student 11, journaling, September, 2015).

Lastly, a few participants defined success as an ability to understand the difference between high school and college when it comes to the academic rigor and teaching style of professors. One stated:

In high school if you were failing, the teachers would walk up and ask you if everything was ok, and give you extra credit opportunities. Here, in college, it's different, success is your own choice, they (the teachers) will check on you at first, but you are on your own after that (Student 1, individual interview, October, 2015).

These themes of grade improvement, building relationships, joining organizations and academic understanding were the main patterns that emerged from the study on success. The

discussion section will detail the impact that Camp FYRE and Catch the FYRE had on the participants' perception.

Theme 4: Sense of Support

The patterns around support manifested itself throughout the study to include family (immediate and extended) support, student support, and administrative (faculty and staff) support. In responding to questions on transitional issues for first-year students, the participants stated that much of the reason they were able to make it through a problem was because of the support that they felt they received from these various avenues. In particular:

The programs at the beginning of the year were good. The lessons that are offered to us are really great. I didn't know about certain resources here on campus until I heard about it from a professor, or was it a friend, I don't know, but someone told me about the writing center, and now I use it every day (Student 1, individual interview, October, 2015).

This student went on to speak about her relationship with her father and how it has changed into a more supporting role since entering college. When asked why she felt this way about the relationship, it was mentioned that "he's been here before...literally, he went to school here, so it was fun to share with him the different things that were going on (Student 1, individual interview, October, 2015). Along these same lines, Student 5 (2015) expressed that her brother is 3 years older than she is and when turning to him for support, he was able to offer up what he learned during his first semester that helped her get through the various challenges that she was facing.

He fell on his face when he was doing the same program that I did, he wanted to make sure that I didn't do the same, so we would talk almost every day about how to work through some issues (Student 5, individual interview, October, 2015).

A common pattern that arose around support was student staff. Many of the participants mentioned that their relationship with the FYRE mentor they met at camp, Peer Mentors, the

Resident Assistant of the floor, or the leaders in their respective organizations, have served as a great resource for them to turn to in times of need:

I can go to my RA if I have an issue with something. I feel like it is their job, but they also care about what you are going through and want to make sure that you are ok (Student 2, individual interview, October, 2015).

I feel like my family is giving me the same kind and amount of support, but from my peers here, I see a lot of change. Specifically, being in an organization, everyone wants to see each other do better. It's more like I want to motivate her to do better (Student 3, October, 2015).

I am in a FLC class, it's a section where you and like 20 other people take the same courses. That's been really helpful with support because it was easier to talk to someone who you know were probably struggling like you in the class (Student 12, journaling, September, 2015).

Some of the participants expressed how their need for support and obtaining it has changed since coming to college. Student 3 and Student 8 (2015) spoke about how they did not really understand the different situations in which they would need support, and how difficult it was compared to high school to get what they needed. They went on to explain that in high school, you had individuals who were trained to look for signs of struggle, but in college, you had to be the one to reach out most of the time if you needed help with something. One participant, Student 4, expressed how he struggled with support during his first 5 weeks of school, stating that he thought he did everything right, but still did not feel like he was supported by his friends, professors, or anyone:

My grades are fine, I have all A's and one A-, but I still really don't feel like I am being supported in things outside of the classroom. Sometimes, my friends are busy, and they don't have time. Maybe it's just because I am not going out looking for it like I don't have a guidance counselor or anything, but I don't feel like there is much, like there's anybody on staff that I can go to for help right now. I wish people would make more of an effort to reach out to students like me (Student 4, Individual interview, October, 2015).

When asked about Camp FYRE and Catch the FYRE, all of the participants expressed that there was an impact on their perceived sense of support:

I remember doing the Camp FYRE thing and made a really good circle of friends from that, we still text each other and meet up at least once or twice a week (Student 4, individual interview, October, 2015).

Two of the people that I met from Camp FYRE, I would consider them to be my core. It's been great to have them around and I'm glad we all met (Student 2, individual interview, October, 2015).

I met a lot of people at Camp FYRE that I still hang out with. It's weird because you don't think about it until it's over, but I see these people a lot in some of the organizations I'm in or in the dining hall, and it's neat to still talk to them about things like we did at camp (Student 3, individual interview, October, 2015).

Because I went to Camp FYRE, I already had a group of friends coming into college, so there was no need in feeling weird or like you have to find friends because you already have that core group of support that you can go to (Student 7, individual interview, October, 2015).

Support was a theme that appeared a number of times throughout the process in various areas outside of the prompted question. The impact that the extended orientation program and intentional programming model had on success will be explored further in the discussion section.

Discussion

Research has shown that many institutions across the nation are developing programs and initiatives to address the transitional issues of first-year students (Barefoot, 2000; Gardner & Upcraft, 1989; Parmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009). This increase of programming is in part due to universities and colleges still experiencing a steady dropout rate of approximately 20% - 30% of these first-year students (Waldron and Yungbluth, 2007). Although student departure is not a new issue in higher education (Tinto, 1993), specific resources have been developed to aid educational leaders in responding to such numbers (Lien & Goldenberg, 2012). Even within urban institutions, educational leaders have developed multiple programs and have added a number of resources in hopes of lowering the student attrition rate (South Carolina University, C.E., 1994).

The University Housing department of SUU implemented the first-year experience program in 2012 designed specifically to address common issues of transition for first year students. These issues include homesickness, social integration, academic integration, and the freedom of being on your own (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). At the time of the study, the FYRE program had been in existence for three years. Within these three years, the university has seen a steady increase in retention rates for students who participated in the program. The research case study explored the impact of the Camp FYRE program (an extended orientation camp) and the Catch the FYRE program (a six week intentional programming model) on a student's perception of belonging, adjustment, success, and support at a large, four-year, public, urban institution in the Southern United States. These two initiatives have become two of the more recent responses to the issue of student retention (Lien & Goldenberg, 2012).

A sense of belonging described by researchers as being something where an individual is valued or accepted by their family, peers, academic setting, or new social structure (Osterman, 2000; Goodenow, 1993; Maslow, 1970). Throughout the study, participants voiced through interviews, focus groups, and journaling how the extended orientation camp and intentional programming model impacted their sense of belonging. A majority of the participants, 92%, indicated in their responses that attending Camp FYRE or 3 or more programs of the Catch the FYRE initiative improved their sense of belonging at the institution. This is supported in the responses around questions of involvement, the difference they feel from being in high school to being in college, the most important lesson they have learned, and the impact that the first-year experience programming from the department had on their sense of belonging. Furthermore, the sense of belonging for the participants can be attributed to their academic success, ability to

interact meaningfully with their instructors or peers, and how prepared they feel about attending the institution. All of which were found to be established through either attending Camp FYRE or a number of programs offered by their resident assistants, peer mentors, or organizations. For the 8% of participants that did not feel this way, the conclusion could be drawn from the data that it may have come from the fact that they did not attend as many transitional programs offered through the initiative (Appendix E), struggled with defining their sense of self or who they were, or there was a change in their academic climate. The data reinforced that the content covered in both the extended orientation camp and the intentional programming model mirrored what researchers have stated as being important transitional issues commonly found in first-year students. This supports the research on needing an institution to buy-in to the programs and initiatives in order for them to remain successful and address the issue of student attrition (Tinto, 2005).

A sense of success is described by researchers as representing a holistic development of the student where various dimensions of their development are taken into consideration. These include but are not limited to academic engagement, academic achievement, social and residential life, and life management (Astin, 1991; Kuh, Shedd, & Whitt, 1987, Jennings, Lovett, Cuba, Swingle, & Lindkvist, 2013). Adjustment for a first-year student also takes into consideration his or her ability to understand and transition through academics, social interactions, personal/emotional capacity, and goal commitment or institutional attachment (Baker & Siryk, 1984). These two themes are being discussed together due to the way in which the findings from the study integrate aspects of both issues. This idea of a holistic development was demonstrated through the results of the study by the participants' responses to questions that specifically prompted them to think about their own definition of success and adjustment during

their first six weeks of college. The results of the study indicated that many of the responses were linked to both success and adjustment. When looking at the academic transition into college, 77% of the participants noted that they perceived to have a sense of success in the classroom when improving on their grades throughout the course. These participants also added that this academic success was a result of a number of adjustments that they made in regards to time management, study skills, and the academic rigor of the courses (tests, essays, papers). This could be due, in part, to their participation in the Camp FYRE and Catch the FYRE first-year programs offered through the University Housing office as the results indicated. When looking into the social aspect of the first six weeks, the participants felt successful if they were able to make new friends or join different organizations. The results from the individual interviews, focus group, and online journals showed that the adjustment here for 100% of the participants was to establish a new sense of direction or technique in developing these relationships. There was also a fear of failure in developing these relationships that caused 31% of the participants to hesitate on finding new friends or joining organizations until later in the semester. All 13 of the participants in the study did, however, credit Camp FYRE or one of the early programs in Catch the FYRE with helping them identify various resources to prepare them to be successful and adjust to college. Even though these programs and services were offered, 92% felt as though they were able to use the information effectively, and 8%, or one participant felt as though they were not helpful. This statistic could be useful in examining how the program can improve to reach 100% by further assessing the individuals who did not feel that it was helpful and why.

The theme of support manifested itself in a variety of ways. Academic support from faculty members or advisors, social support from friends or peers, and family support appear as a common thread throughout over two decades worth of numerous research studies and findings as

being an important piece of a first-year student's achievement (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, P.L. & Jalomo, 1994.; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). The results from the present study indicated that when the participant sought out and received support in academic and social settings, they were successful in navigating issues at hand such as: building successful relationships, managing time, managing freedom, and understanding the academic rigor of college. Conversely, when the support was not received, it led to feelings of loneliness, failure, or discouragement; all of which are primary markers of students who fail to continue with their education. The vast majority of the participants, 92%, stated that they were able to find support where needed, whether that be from new found friends, family members, peer leaders, academic support centers, faculty or staff members. For these participants, this support was reinforced or encouraged by attending Camp FYRE or a series of Catch the FYRE programs in which students had immediate access to a vast supply of academic and emotional support and resources. All 13 of the participants mentioned in their responses that Camp FYRE allowed them to establish new friendships and mentor/mentee relationships that did not end with the final day of Camp FYRE but rather continued on into the beginning of the fall academic term. However, not all of the relationships lasted throughout the semester as one participant described it as being a difficult balance to maintain between classes, homework, and other time consumers of a first-year student. The impact that these programs had on the participants' sense of support was one of the more mentioned of the six themes.

A recommendation for the institution would be to examine the possible gaps in learning by assessing students who participate in the programs on a weekly or monthly basis. In looking at the results, the critical timeframe within the two to six weeks was around weeks three and four. This information was articulated through the online journaling as I could see the varying

responses from week to week. Starting at week three, I saw a decline in responses from the journals and a few of them articulated that the transition was more difficult. This was also the time when many of the participants started to join organizations and establish what they referred to as good or bad habits. An exploration of what happens during these weeks in a first-year student's life would be vital in assuring that all students are able to receive the resources that they need.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This case includes only thirteen students, whom participated in the University Housing FYRE program at a large, four-year, public, urban institution in the Southern United States. The FYRE program consisted of an extended orientation camp (Camp FYRE) and an intentional programming model (Catch the FYRE). The third component of the program is entitled Playing with FYRE, which is a large first-year program that occurs during the university's welcome week. The findings from the study can be used by future researchers to support the impact that first-year programs have on student achievement on an urban campus, but the researcher would need to understand that since the number of participants was small, it cannot be inferred upon the entire entering class (Patton, 1999). Another limitation from the study was the fact that the researcher was also at one point the program administrator. Lincoln and Guba (1989) state that biased and subjectivity cannot fully be removed from a case study such as this because there is still value that will be placed by the inquirer to the participant. This could have an impact on the results of the study if not done properly with a solid method for data collection and data analysis. The participants in the study also self-selected into the study, and as a result, may then be inferred that there is a possibility for these individuals to already be highly motivated to attend college and be successful. For future research, it would be beneficial to increase the number of

participants in a similar study to support the findings of this smaller study. There is also room to investigate the perceptions and feelings of individuals who did not participate in any, one, two, or all three phases of the FYRE program around their sense of belonging, adjustment, success, and support. Further attention and questioning can also be developed to contain a sense of holistic development or retention. As the study was progressing, I did notice a trend that the participants who were more involved on campus tended to give more information in their responses. More criteria including the number of organizations a student is involved with, if they are first-generation, and if they work outside of the university can be used in a future study to further bind the case to see the relative impact of such programs on student achievement. Furthermore, the case study explored only programs that occurred in the fall semester and the impact that these programs had on the perceptions of first year students in the fall semester. A future study can be conducted to explore the impact of the perceptions of these same first year students through their entire first year of college at SUU.

Conclusion

This case study explored the impact of first-year programs on student perceptions of belonging, adjustment, success, and support at a large, public, four-year, urban institution in the Southern United States. The results indicate that the Camp FYRE program and Catch the FYRE program overall had a positive impact on student achievement. A majority of the participants in the study expressed that these programs aided in their ability to establish new friendships and adjust to the social and academic atmosphere of college. These first-year programs at this institution set out to address the issue of student attrition by focusing on common first-year transition topics researchers have found to be important to a student's development and achievement in college. These topics include financial problems, classes not being what the

students expected, the inability to make friends, a lack of contact with faculty members, a lack of self-efficacy, and an undeveloped level of emotional readiness (Brooman & Darwent, 2012)

The study only examined 13 individuals, but was able to indicate that 92% of the participants improved or had a positive experience towards their sense of belonging, success, adjustment, and support by attending the extended orientation camp and participating in the intentional programming model. Although the participants in the study did not go into much detail about their pre-college skillsets that may have prepared them for success in college during the data collection process, it can be inferred by the results that their family involvement, high school atmosphere, and peer relationships had some impact on their success. With the crucial point in a student's college career occurring within the first two to six weeks of their first semester (Levitz, et al., 1989), it was imperative that the institution have a program or initiative in place to provide the student with the necessary resources to adapt to the new college climate. The research has shown that allowing students to participate in a shared experience (Brown, 2012; Crede & Neihorster, 2012; Wolfe & Kay, 2011) and providing them with opportunities for interactions with faculty and staff, opportunities to become involved in the campus or community, and an established support structure within the university (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012; Braxton, 2014) can increase the student achievement and retention at an institution.

These two first-year programs within the first three years of operation have shown an increase in student retention at this institution. The data and results from this study show that the participants who attend Camp FYRE and at least three programs during Catch the FYRE are receiving vital information and knowledge on how to be successful and matriculate to their sophomore year.

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Appendix A: Email to program administrator

Good morning Naeshia,

Thank you so much allowing me to have this information at the front desk of your check-in process for Camp FYRE. If you could please print out the following text and have it available for individuals to read if they so choose, that would be great. Thank you.

Date: July 30 2015

Subject: Invitation to participate in the research project titled: The First-Year Experience on an Urban Campus: A Case Study Exploring the Impact of First-Year Programs on Student Success

Dear Camp FYRE participant,

I am conducting a research study to increase our understanding of the impact of first-year programs on student success. As a participant of the Camp FYRE program, you are an ideal position to give us valuable, firsthand information from your own perspective. The study will take no longer than 4.5 hours during the entire fall semester and will be comprised of two parts:

1. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to keep an online journal to record your experiences during 6 weeks of the fall semester. You will write about your experiences during the week in relation to belonging, success, support, adjustment, and retention. You will be sent a link each week from Zduy Chu, the student PI, as a reminder to do the journal entry.
2. You may also be selected to participate in a 90 minute focus group of 10 individuals where the student PI, Zduy Chu, will ask you four questions. Eight individuals will be selected to participate in 1 hour individual interviews, where the student PI, Zduy Chu, will ask them five questions. If you are selected for the focus group, you will not be selected to participate in the individual interview.

The interview and focus group will be informal and the journaling will happen at your own pace. We are simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be coded to ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could provide suggestions educational leadership teams to improve their practices around first-year programs.

If you are willing to participate please email me at zchu@student. I will contact you once selection of all participants are confirmed. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Appendix B: Email to participants

Date: August 24 2015

Subject: Invitation to participate in the research project titled: The First-Year Experience on an Urban Campus: A Case Study Exploring the Impact of First-Year Programs on Student Success

Dear participant,

I am conducting a research study to increase our understanding of the impact of first-year programs on student success. As a participant of the Camp FYRE program, you are an ideal position to give us valuable, firsthand information from your own perspective. The study will take no longer than 4.5 hours during the entire fall semester and will be comprised of two parts:

1. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to keep an online journal to record your experiences during 6 weeks of the fall semester. You will write about your experiences during the week in relation to belonging, success, support, adjustment, and retention. You will be sent a link each week from Zduy Chu, the student PI, as a reminder to do the journal entry.
2. You may also be selected to participate in a 90 minute focus group of 10 individuals where the student PI, Zduy Chu, will ask you four questions. Eight individuals will be selected to participate in 1 hour individual interviews, where the student PI, Zduy Chu, will ask them five questions. If you are selected for the focus group, you will not be selected to participate in the individual interview.

The interview and focus group will be informal and the journaling will happen at your own pace. We are simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be coded to ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could provide suggestions educational leadership teams to improve their practices around first-year programs.

If you are willing to participate please email me at zchu@student.gsu.edu. I will contact you once selection of all participants are confirmed. I have attached the consent form for your review. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Kind Regards,

Appendix C: Email to participants (journal)

[participant],

It was great to meet you the other day. Thank you so much again for helping me with my project. Here is the link for the survey. I will send you one each week for the next 6 weeks. Let me know if you need anything.

<http://www.123contactform.com/form-1581749/Online-Journaling-First-Year-Experience>

Zduy Chu

Appendix D: Email to participants

Good afternoon,

I hope that you are having a great semester so far. You are receiving this email because you attended [Universit's] First Year Experience Programs (Camp FYRE). Don't worry, you won't start receiving a lot of random emails, just this one to ask for your help. My name is Zduy Chu and I am a current Doctoral Student here at GSU. My study is to see the impact that First Year Programs like Camp FYRE and others that you may have attended have on your experience as a First Year Student here. The research will add to the knowledge of campus programs and help us better our services to meet your needs.

Like all of you, I am currently a student here and need some help with my project. I will need to meet with 10 students to talk about their experience here at GSU so far around issues of belonging, success, adjustment, and support. If you can please help, I would only need up to 90 minutes of your time. You can choose to be a part of a focus group where there are 8-10 of you answering the same 5 questions, or an individual interview where you will answer 5 questions.

Below are the times that the interviews would take place. If you are interested, please respond to this email with the times that you are available. The times in red are designated for the focus group. Thank you all again. And good luck with midterms!

Wednesday, October 14th 9am - 10:30am; 10:30am - 12:00pm; 3:00pm - 4:30pm

Thursday, October 15th 12:00pm - 1:30pm; 1:30pm - 3:00pm; 3:00pm - 4:30pm

Friday, October 16th 9:00am - 10:30am

Thursday, October 22nd 12:00pm - 1:30pm; 1:30pm - 3:00pm; 3:00pm - 4:30pm

Friday, October 23rd 9:00am - 10:30am; 10:30am - 12:00pm; 12:00pm - 1:30pm; 1:30pm - 3:00pm

Monday, October 26th 9:00am - 10:30am; 12:00pm - 1:30pm; 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Tuesday, October 27th 9:00am - 10:30am; 10:30am - 12:00pm; 12:00pm - 1:30pm; 1:30pm - 3:00pm

Thank You!

Zduy Chu, Doctoral Candidate
Educational Policy Studies

Appendix E: Participant information

Pseudonym	Age	Year	Race	Gender	Journalled as well?	Camp FYRE	# of programs
Individual Interview (7)							
Student 1	18	Freshman	Black	F	Y	Y	8
Student 2	18	Freshman	Black	F	N	Y	4
Student 3	18	Freshman	White	F	Y	Y	5
Student 4	19	Freshman	Black	M	Y	Y	2
Student 5	18	Freshman	White	F	Y	Y	5
Student 6	18	Freshman	Black	F	N	Y	7
Student 7	18	Freshman	Indian	F	N	Y	6
Focus Group (3)							
Student 8	18	Freshman	Multi	F	Y	Y	6
Student 9	18	Freshman	Black	F	N	Y	8
Student 10	18	Freshman	Black	F	N	Y	5
Online Journal Participants (8)							
Student 11	18	Freshman	Black	M	Y	Y	N/A
Student 12	19	Freshman	Black	M	Y	Y	N/A
Student 13	18	Freshman	Black	F	Y	Y	N/A
Student 3	18	Freshman	White	F	Y	Y	
Student 5	18	Freshman	White	F	Y	Y	
Student 8	18	Freshman	Multi	F	Y	Y	
Student 4	19	Freshman	Black	M	Y	Y	
Student 1	18	Freshman	Black	F	Y	Y	