An Examination of First-Year Seminar Course Characteristics and Student Persistence from First Year to Second Year at a Regional Public State University

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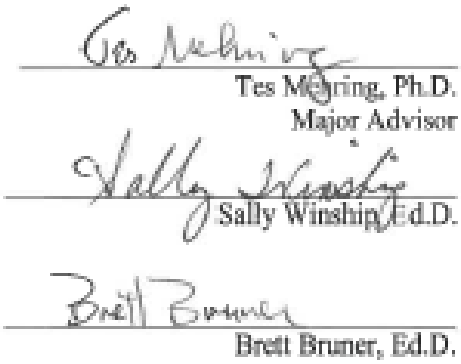

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Abstract

According to Levitz, Noel, and Richter (1999), colleges and universities should be focusing on undergraduate persistence during students' first year of postsecondary education. One strategy higher education institutions have been using for over 30 years to increase first-year to second-year student persistence in college is first year experience (FYE) initiatives (Tobolowsky, 2008). A specific FYE strategy many higher education institutions are using to increase persistence is the first year seminar (FYS). According to Barefoot's (2005) examination of the National Survey of First-Year Practices, 96% of four year colleges and universities currently provide FYS courses. Midwestern University (2016b) began requiring all first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students to participate in a FYS course in the fall of 2013 as a strategy to increase persistence. The current study examined the relationship between Midwestern University's first year seminar (FYS) course characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer mentor status) and student persistence from first to second year. Students, who participated in a living learning community as part of a FYS course were more likely to persist than students who did not participate. Students in FYS courses that included a peer mentor were more likely to persist than students with no peer mentor available. No relationship was found between FYS course size and persistence from first to second year. No relationship was observed between FYS instructor classification and student persistence from first to second year. The results of this study will provide data to guide future FYS course design at Midwestern University. In addition, this study will be advantageous to other colleges and

universities and provide data to support the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) strategic planning efforts for increasing higher education persistence.

Dedication

To God, for starting a fire in my heart and faithfully supporting every adventure in my life. To my husband, Luke, for your unconditional love, support, and encouragement to achieve my dreams. To my daughter, Wrenly, for being an incredible little girl. Wrenly, your energy, personality, and laughter helped your dad and me persevere through this adventure. To my parents, for patiently supporting my childhood hurdles. My parents could have given up on me after every parent teacher conference. They taught me if I work hard enough I can do anything. To Mimi and Papa, for spending extra time with Luke and Wrenly through *writing* weekends and weekdays. To my dear friend, Shi, for constant encouragement and support to keep my spirit alive. To my brothers and their families for checking in or sending prayers my way. To our puppy, Koba, for annoying me long enough to get me to take him for a run to burn off the extra stress. To the rest of my friends and family for believing in me yesterday and today.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Approximately 20 million people enroll or reenroll in postsecondary education (technical colleges, community colleges, four year higher education institutions, etc.) each year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), and of this population about four million people are attending colleges and universities for their first year (Upcraft, 2000). A significant concern for post-secondary institutions is the number of college students who do not graduate within six years. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) reported, "the 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2009 was 59 percent" (p. 2). For public state higher education institutions, funding may be determined by performance-based metrics like graduation rates, student debt, persistence to graduation, and job placement.

Undergraduates do not always complete their degrees in four to six years for a variety of reasons. Tinto (1975), Astin (1999), and Hawkins (2007) explained that students begin postsecondary education at different stages in their life and need different levels of development to progress through their higher education journey. Some students are dealing with personal or financial hardship or are disconnected academically or socially which can contribute to students transferring or dropping out (Astin 1999; Hawkins, 2007; Tinto, 1975). According to Hawkins (2007), students are dropping out at a high rate prior to the start of the second year of college. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) reported an undergraduate persistence rate of

about 60% from first to second year not including students who transfer to a different institution.

Spady (1970) explored postsecondary student matriculation in colleges and universities by examining first-year students at one public institution. Tinto (1975) and Bean (1980) continued to synthesize research exploring the undergraduate student drop out process impacting colleges and universities across the country. Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto (1975) determined the reason students fail to return to college after the initial year of study is because college academics are too rigorous in conjunction with the student's ongoing curricular and co-curricular experiences at an institution. The effect of the combined influence of academic rigor and co-curricular experiences influenced a student's reasoning for continuing to remain at a college. Tinto (1975) further elaborated that the combination of academic dedication and connection to the institution directly affects a students' attitudes and probability of withdrawing or persisting at the institution. Bean (1980) confirmed the research of Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto (1975) by demonstrating a correlation between dropout rates and lack of academic and social preparedness. Astin (1999) agreed that the high rate of student dropout was due to the impact of a student's interactions with the institution and the effect of those interactions with student engagement and commitment influencing college persistence.

Tinto (1975) addressed the effect of external environmental factors related to persistence, such as the job market or social inequalities. According to Tinto (1975), every student has a different set of circumstances and it is important to understand higher education administrators only have a certain amount of control over whether or not a student persists to graduation at their college or university. Students may choose to leave

college due to factors unrelated to the institution (Tinto, 1975). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) noted that external factors causing students to not attend or leave postsecondary education decrease after students register at a college or university. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Astin (1993) continued to authenticate and expand research to explain why higher education institutions grapple with retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) confirmed the significance of first-year experience initiatives in conjunction with determining if a student would drop out or matriculate to the next year. Astin (1993) agreed institutions have a substantial effect on undergraduates in fostering confidence and commitment to college during their first-year. "The first-to-second-year attrition rate is perhaps the most important determiner of an institution's graduation rate" (Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999, p. 36). Once students are admitted to an institution, it is the responsibility of the individual and the institution to foster success (Hawkins, 2007).

Colleges and universities have created initiatives and experiences to decrease the challenges of transitioning to postsecondary education (Daddona & Cooper, 2002). Hawkins (2007) explained how students assimilate and fuse to the institution after engaging in enriching academic and social encounters. As described above, 25 years earlier, Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto (1975) helped higher education administrators understand the challenges of college students. Schrader and Brown (2008) acknowledged students are continuing to experience personal, institutional, and societal challenges. Jamelske (2009) highlighted the need for higher education institutions to position financial assets to focus on first-year student strategies for success. According to Hawkins (2007), colleges and universities have discovered the need to assist and not just recruit students with the assumption they can succeed. Hawkins (2007) reiterated the

student development process in higher education and the benefit of providing an encouraging yet arduous environment for students.

Schrader and Brown (2008) dissected the research on first-year students by acknowledging the multitude of personal and institutional variables positively and negatively affecting undergraduate persistence rates. The scope of their study included an evaluation of first-year experience (FYE) strategies implemented over a decade at an institution (Schrader & Brown, 2008). Two variables which had significant effects according to Schrader and Brown (2008) were students understanding of resources and social networks, and experiences. Schrader and Brown (2008) reinforced the central idea for colleges and universities to redesign FYE strategies to engage undergraduate students to develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes about being successful in college. One strategy has been the development of first-year seminar (FYS) courses. FYSs are traditional classroom courses designed to combine curricular and co-curricular experiences, emphasizing relationships, support, and a sense of belonging (Carey & Ferguson, 2006). According to Tobolowsky (2008), FYS courses are designed to provide curricular and co-curricular resources and support to students as they begin postsecondary education. Tobolowsky (2008) identified FYS variables (types of seminar, class size, seminar length, curriculum components, course credit, and instructor) which target diverse first-year student populations. Tobolowsky (2008) acknowledged that institutions are broadening their traditional undergraduate demographics and strategies due to the diverse student population being enrolled. According to Schrader and Brown (2008), it is critical for higher education institutions to focus on student

success by establishing environments conducive to retention and persistence for all populations.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) reported a 1.5% decrease in persistence from 2009 to 2013. Transitional interventions addressed the developmental levels of first-year students, as well as characteristics such as a person's ability and academic and personal experiences that intentionally or unintentionally affect student success (Tinto, 1975). Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfle (1986) explained the assimilation of students into a new environment through orientation experiences offered by institutions. Through this assimilation, students are more likely to positively process, adapt, and integrate successfully in higher education (Pascarella et al., 1986). After institutions realized which dropout factors could be controlled, some administrators began centralized efforts on involvement strategies for students due to the correlation of student engagement with decreased dropout rates (Schrader & Brown, 2008). Over the past 25 years, interventions have occasionally impacted persistence year to year, but colleges and universities are still experiencing problems with student persistence.

Background

Invariably undergraduate students face social and academic challenges when entering college for the first time. Colleges and universities failed to acknowledge these challenges until nearly the end of the 1800s (Tobolowsky, 2008). Throughout the 1900s, colleges and universities provided orientation type programming to help students with adjustment to postsecondary education settings (Tobolowsky, 2008). During the 1970s and 1980s, student persistence became a prominent component of research in higher education (Hawkins, 2007; Spady 1970, 1971; Tinto 2006). By 1986, the University of

South Carolina created the National Resource Center for the First-year Experience and Students in Transition (National Resource Center on First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, n.d.). Lee College instituted the initial FYS in 1882 and in 1888 Boston College implemented an extended orientation (Tobolowsky, 2008). With the increase in the number of institutions providing orientation activities through the 1930s, over a third of colleges and universities added a FYS component, but a lack of interest in teaching FYS courses arose due to faculty concerns with having to teach transition skills to students (Tobolowsky, 2008). With a lack of faculty willingness to teach, institutions rarely provided this option for first-year students (Tobolowsky, 2008). This mindset lasted through the 1960s until institutional data distinguished the need to reinstate FYS courses in postsecondary education near the beginning of the 1970s (Tobolowsky, 2008).

Researchers have devoted significant efforts to understand why students fail to succeed in postsecondary education (Astin, 1999; Bean, 1980; Hawkins, 2007; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). The theory of student departure by Tinto (1988) and the input-environment-output model (Astin, 1999) are historically two significant theories which educate college and university professionals in determining how to support the retention of students from year to year. Astin's (1999) research provided data on factors related to college persistence. Tinto (1975) was known as the pioneer in dissecting Spady's (1970) work on student persistence from all angles. According to Tinto (1975), allegiance to an institution is based on the level of engagement the student has with the institution. Tinto (1975) reported a causal relationship between engagement and persistence. According to Hawkins (2007), Astin's (1999) research was limited to data about undergraduate students after enrolling at an institution, and failed to examine the student before and

after the start of the first-year in college. However, Tinto's (1988) theory of student departure provided a roadmap for postsecondary education institutions to understand the process of students assimilating to the environment. This process included pre-entry attributes, intentions, goals, and commitments, academic and social experiences prior to and during their higher education experience (Tinto, 1988).

In 1988, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition investigated postsecondary education persistence rates to learn and connect historical trends to expand the scope of research on transition initiatives, especially the FYS (National Resource Center on First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, n.d). Barefoot and Fidler (1996) described the FYS as a course either to aid students in transitioning and navigating college life or blending this with an academic or theme based subject. Keup and Barefoot (2005) explained the value of designing a FYS is to positively affect student retention rates by delivering interventions and experiences to assist undergraduate students with the transition to college. Tobolowsky, Cox, and Wagner (2005) described the transformation of the FYS dating back to 1994 and confirmed the research by Keup and Barefoot (2005) by providing data demonstrating the correlation between FYS courses and first-year to second year retention. According to Fidler and Moore (1996), Sidle and McReynolds (1999), Starke, Harth, and Sirianni (2001), Lang (2007), and Jamelske (2009), FYS courses directly correlate to an increase in student grade point average, involvement, and persistence to graduation. Higher education institutions are able to dissect these variables to further understand how to be proactive in supporting students and decreasing dropout rates (Fidler & Moore, 1996; Jamelske, 2009; Lang, 2007; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999; Starke et al., 2001). The FYS

strategy became a trend across the country during the 1980s, motivating postsecondary institutions to implement and enhance the initial year experience for undergraduate students (Tobolowsky, 2008).

Throughout the United States, FYS courses are not generally large with enrollments of 25 students or fewer. (Tobolowsky, 2008). Sections associated with a major, minor, or certificate program usually have even fewer individuals enrolled in the course as compared to non-academically themed seminars (Tobolowsky, 2008). On average, FYS postsecondary institution courses ranged from 10 to 25 undergraduates with nearly 40% of specialized (academic or co-curricular component) courses enrolling 16 to 20 undergraduates (Tobolowsky, 2008).

Barefoot and Fidler (1996) differentiated between FYS course sections. Courses have been designed to provide educational and social support with either a generic design or adding an intentional connection to an academic major or area of interest. One of the most prominent practices is utilizing learning communities (Kuh, 2008). Kuh defined learning communities as a set of two or more courses and experiences bringing the instructors and students together to foster rapport. Kuh indicated a key component for successful learning communities is to pair faculty with students who share similar attributes (e.g., academic major, first generation, etc.).

Tobolowsky (2008) evaluated institutions across the country and found that approximately 10% of institutions used student affairs professionals versus faculty as instructors to teach FYS courses. Public institutions rely on student affairs professionals and graduate assistants more frequently than private institutions (Tobolowsky, 2008). While Tobolowsky (2008) examined seminar instruction, workload, compensation, and

training, research is needed to explore the relationship between FYS instructor classification (faculty, staff, graduate assistant) and student persistence.

Astin (1993) highlighted peer to peer interactions as a critical component related to student success. He found that institutions implementing additional peer to peer strategies in FYE were more likely to have a positive influence on the development of first-year students (Astin, 1993). Due to the positive effect of peer to peer support, higher education institutions have implemented strategies to benefit from this resource (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

Midwestern University, where the current study was conducted, is part of the Kansas Board of Regents state system. The Kansas Board of Regents (2010) created intentional goals and a plan, called Foresight 2020, that all state funded higher education institutions must follow. Midwestern University created a Retention Committee to strategically focus on student persistence to graduation rates to align with the Foresight 2020 plan (Midwestern University, 2016e). The Retention Committee identified first-year to second-year persistence rates as a focal point for improving overall graduation rates (Midwestern University, 2016e). As the Retention Committee examined FYE initiatives, they identified the FYS as an opportunity to increase persistence from first to second year (Midwestern University, 2016e).

Researchers (Astin, 1993; Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Friedman & Marsh, 2009; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Hawkins, 2007; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) have examined FYS courses, specifically FYS course size, design, curriculum, and instructor classification. Tobolowsky (2008) concluded that FYS design will continue to evolve as colleges and universities examine the specific variables impacting student

success. Midwestern University has not examined these same FYS course characteristics (course size, instructor status, living learning community, and peer mentor support). At Midwestern University, FYS course sizes on average range between 10 to 30 students (Midwestern University, 2016a). Midwestern University offers two options of FYS: living learning community and no living learning community (Midwestern University, 2016a). Faculty and staff both instruct Midwestern University FYS courses (Midwestern University, 2016c). In addition, some FYS courses, at Midwestern University, provide mentor support through assignment of a peer mentor and other FYS courses provide no peer mentoring support (Midwestern University, 2016c).

Statement of the Problem

In 2013, Midwestern University (2016b) required all first-year students to enroll in a FYS course, UNIV 101, as one strategy to promote persistence from first to second year. Midwestern University (2016b) assumed strategies taught to students as part of the FYS course help incoming students transition successfully because all incoming new students are required to participate in a FYS course. However, it is unclear whether specific variables (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer support status) associated with the FYS courses at Midwestern University (2016b) impact student persistence. The goal at Midwestern University (2016b) for FYS courses was to aid students in making connections with their peers, provide resources to assist in navigating the academic and non-academic environment of the campus, and support persistence from first to second year.

While some findings have reaffirmed the research of previous scholars who reported a positive correlation between the successful completion of a FYS and increased

student engagement and persistence (Cambridge-Williams, Winsler, Kitsantas, & Bernard, 2013; Lang, 2007; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrig, 2001), other studies have reported neither a positive or negative effect (Erickson & Stone 2012; Hendel, 2001, 2007). Approximately 96% of four-year postsecondary institutions have incorporated a FYS component for students (Barefoot, 2005). However, there is limited research examining the impact of FYS course characteristics on persistence for traditional undergraduate students in medium sized, Midwestern regional, public universities. An examination of FYS course characteristics and their relationship to first to second year persistence at Midwestern University will provide data to guide future FYS course design.

Purpose of the Study

"As educators attempt to respond to increasingly diverse student populations with ever changing needs, the first-year seminar continues to play a critical role in helping students succeed" (Tobolowsky, 2008, p. 100). The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between each of the FYS course characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer mentor status) and first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking student persistence from first to second year at Midwestern University, a medium size regional public institution in Kansas. FYS course size categories were 10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more. FYS course living learning community status was defined as a student registered in a living learning community or no living learning community. FYS course instructor classification was either faculty or staff. FYS peer mentor status was defined as the FYS student having a peer mentor or no peer mentor.

Significance of the Study

Administrators, faculty, and staff at Midwestern University are interested in increased student persistence from first to second year. The results of this study may help Midwestern University to determine the impact a FYS has on persistence from the first to second year. The Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) (n.d.) may also have interest in results of this study since Midwestern University is a public higher education instituiton located in Kansas. In its strategic plan for higher education, Foresight 2020, KBOR (n.d.) has a goal of increasing graduation rates at all public higher education institutions. The FYS may be one means of improving first to second year persistence and may result in an increase in graduation rates. In addition, this research continues the work of previous researchers and could assist institutions in making adjustments in FYS courses to impact student success (Tobolowsky, 2008). At the time the current study was conducted, there was limited research on FYS courses at four-year public institutions, particularly in the Midwest. In addition, there was limited research focusing on whether or not FYS characteristics have an impact on persistence. The current research study contributed to the existing literature on the FYS and the effects FYS course characteristics have on student persistence.

Delimitations

"Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 134). The delimitations identified by the researcher for this study included the following:

1. The study was conducted at one Midwestern, regional, public, four-year higher education institution.

2. The sample for this study included fall semester, first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students who matriculated to Midwestern University during the 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 fall semesters. Virtual students were excluded from the study as they were not required to participate in a FYS course.
3. The study only included an examination of the relationship between FYS characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer mentor status) and persistence to the second year of college. Other variables that may have an impact on first to second year persistence were not examined in the current study.

Assumptions

"Assumptions are postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 135). This study was conducted under the following assumptions:

1. The archival data analyzed in the current study were up-to-date and accurate.
2. All students were correctly coded as fall semester, first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students at a Midwestern public university within the archival data.
3. All instructors were correctly classified as either faculty or staff within the institutions' database.

Research Questions

This section outlines the research questions used in the study to examine four FYS course characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor

classification, and peer mentor status). The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course size (10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more) and first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking student persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

RQ2. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking student persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

RQ3. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking student persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

RQ4. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course peer mentor status (peer mentor, no peer mentor) and first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking student persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

Definition of Terms

Researchers utilize terminology differently which can create discrepancies in analyzing data and interpreting studies (Astin, 1999). Furthermore, colleges and universities sometimes use terminology interchangeably which creates uncertainty with universal terminology between institutions (Astin, 1999). The following information defines specific terms used throughout the current study.

Credit Hour. Midwestern University (2016f) defined a credit hour as the equivalent to one credit per 16-week course meeting for fifty minutes a week.

Dropout. Hilton (1982) defined a dropout as a student who withdraws before completing a unit of instruction at the institution.

First-year student. Midwestern University (2016f) defined a first-year student as a student, who has completed 29 or fewer credit hours at Midwestern University (Midwestern University, 2016f).

Persistence. Habley, Bloom, & Robbins (2012) defined persistence as a student repeatedly registering at the college or university from year to year until graduating.

Retention. Habley et al. (2012) defined retention as the frequency of students continuing each academic semester to the next at the same institution.

Second year of college. Midwestern University (2016f) defined second year of college as a student, who has completed fewer than 50 credit hours, but more than 29 credit hours at Midwestern University.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation includes five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an overview of persistence of college students and the implementation of FYS in higher education and included an introduction, background information, statement of the problem, purpose, and research questions to describe the study. Chapter 1 also addressed the significance, delimitations, assumptions, and definition of terms to provide a common understanding of the study and its terminology. Chapter 2 presents a review of FYS literature including a definition of the history of higher education persistence and the need for implementing interventions to aid in student success. The third chapter includes an explanation of the

research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and limitations. Chapter 4 summarizes results of the data analysis and hypothesis testing. Chapter 5 includes a study summary and findings related to literature. The chapter also provides implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature related to higher education dropout, first to second year persistence studies, and first-year seminar (FYS) characteristics. The first section provides a historical overview of research on higher education dropout. The second section examines first-year students and characteristics influencing persistence. The third section describes the evolution of FYS programs. This section includes information on FYS characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer mentor status) addressed in this study. The chapter closes with a summary of the impact of FYS courses on first-year student persistence.

Higher Education Dropout

Bean (1980) conducted a meta-analysis of higher education dropout concerns through analyzing studies from varied researchers, including Astin (1993), Cope and Hannah (1975), Marks (1967), Pantages and Creedon (1978), Sexton (1965), Spady (1970), and Tinto (1975) encompassing nearly a 17-year timeframe. Bean (1980) highlighted the significance of Spady's (1970, 1971) and Tinto's (1975) examinations of the higher education dropout process. Spady (1970) was the first author who described the dropout process continuum. This continuum was based on the pre-college and college experiences which impact academic and institutional commitment from when a student registers until dropout or graduation (Spady, 1970, 1971). Tinto (1975) expanded Spady's (1970) work detailing the continuum related to dropout decisions. According to Tinto (1975), varying reasons cause students to drop out of college. He distinguished between the comprehensive progression of individual experiences in combination with

the individual's academic and social relations at an institution (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto (1975), experiences and relationships positively or negatively affect the individual during postsecondary education. Tinto (1975) introduced a conceptual schema for dropout from college. His model created a map of the dropout process, recognizing several components (family background, individual attributes, pre-college schooling) in combination with the higher education environment (academic and social system). Tinto (1975) claimed,

> The process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measured by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94)

Astin (1999) reported similar findings. He found that the academic and social environment developed by the institution and students impacts student dropout decisions.

Hilton (1982) explained students drop out of higher education for a multitude of reasons such as high school education experience and grade point average, and college grade point average and academic goals. He indicated each student has a different set of factors causing them not to persist. Hilton (1982) and Tinto (1988) continued to confirm the elongated development of dropout. Tinto (1988) reiterated that each individual requires varying levels of support primarily during the first year of college and the need for institutions to construct a developmental approach of institutional support (Tinto, 1988). Both Hilton (1982) and Tinto (1988) acknowledged the correlation of academic

and social variables affecting persistence. Hilton (1982) elaborated on the multifaceted process of influences leading individuals to dropout. He urged colleges and universities to be strategic in implementing prolonged interventions (first year experience programs, social and academic activities and organizations, residential life housing and organizations, student unions, and campus recreational programs), for individuals to utilize as they advance in postsecondary education (Tinto, 1975, 1988). Ultimately, Tinto (1975, 1988) implied that dropout occurs at different stages if the individual fails to assimilate into the academic and social environment of the institution. In 1993, Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda agreed with Tinto's findings and theoretical framework. Cabrera et al. (1993) advised institutions, as originally advised by Tinto (1975), to continue to recognize the reasons for dropout varies depending on the college or university. Colleges and universities should examine individual variables which have the most significant impact on persistence (Cabrera et al., 1993, Hawkins, 2007, Kuh 2008, & Tinto, 1988).

According to researchers (Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), Tinto and Astin are the most commonly known theorists on student dropout in higher education. Tinto (1988) and Astin (1993) both determined student dropout was a longitudinal process. Pascarella and Terezini (1991) and Milem and Berger (1997) examined the relationship of Tinto's theory of departure and Astin's theory of involvement to student dropout. Tinto's (1975) model specified the goal and institutional commitment before and after the student's curricular and co-curricular experiences at the institution because of the significant correlation between acclimatization into college and dropout decisions. In essence, the model suggested that students begin thinking about their success in college before entering college, which starts the dropout process, and

continue with the quandary throughout their college experience (Tinto, 1975). The student involvement theory created by Astin (1993) is broken into parts (inputs, environment, output). Astin (1993) argued that student involvement directly impacts student persistence based on the student's skillset before college, how the student navigates college, and what the student learns from college. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) determined that college success is a mix of personal effort and involvement in curricular and co-curricular areas of the institution. Pike and Kuh (2005) agreed there is a correlation with positive and negative interactions leading to a positive or negative experience with the college or university. Hawkins (2007) recognized positive and negative college experiences seriously impact student dropout rates between first and second year. "A central thesis underlying this research is that the first-year experience is the sum of many parts; it is more than a single seminar course, orientation program, or learning community" (Hawkins, 2007, p. 62). According to Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006), postsecondary institutions begin focusing on engaging students because engagement experiences can blend together the academic and social components of college.

Brock (2010) acknowledged the need for support, services, and policies to assist with student persistence, and insisted those in leadership positions must be forward thinking and adaptable to support ever-changing student demographics. Postsecondary education institutions have utilized the scholarly work of researchers (Astin, 1993; Brock, 2010; Cabrera et al., 1993; Cope & Hannah, 1975; Hawkins, 2007; Kuh et al., 2006; Levitz, Noel, and Richter, 1999; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Sexton, 1965; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975) to create

interventions to prevent dropout. Dropout interventions have included common intellectual experiences, first-year seminars and experiences, service learning and community based learning, writing intensive courses, undergraduate research, internships, collaborative assignments and projects, capstone courses, and learning communities (Kuh, 2008). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), from 2010 to 2015, four-year public institutions increased freshman to sophomore year persistence from 56% to 59% which created a 3% decrease in the amount of students dropping out of higher education.

First to Second-Year Persistence

Pascarella et al. (1986) acknowledged the work of other researchers (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2006; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975) in exploring the dropout phenomenon and effects on persistence of undergraduate students. Tinto (1975) stated that nearly 75% of all students failing to persist choose to drop out during the first-year, even more likely within the first half of the year. Spady (1970), Tinto (1975), and Bean (1980) drew the same conclusion that a combination of academic and non-academic components, interventions, and support highly impact student persistence from first to second year. Fidler (1996), Astin (1999), Daddona and Cooper (2002), Hawkins (2007) and Levitz, Noel, and Richter (1999) further investigated persistence and explained the need to focus on and invest in first-year student persistence due to the number of students dropping out before the second year of college, changing demographics and needs of students, and institutional efforts to develop well rounded students beginning in the first-year.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Goodman and Pascarella (2006), new student orientation experiences led to a decrease in dropout from first to

second year. Pascarella et al. (1986) explained that institutions have typically created an orientation experience to help students transition. Pascarella et al. (1986) and Goodman and Pascarella (2006) described how orientation experiences occur a couple of days before classes start and focus on social integration. The orientation experiences evolved into a first-year experience (FYE) approach that included comprehensive tactics to assist undergraduate transition and integration during the first-year (Gardner, 1980; Hawkins, 2007). According to Goodman and Pascarella (2006), Tinto (2006), and Schrader and Brown (2008), colleges and universities have expanded basic orientation events and programs to implement strategies to create a comprehensive FYE. Tinto (2006) created a comprehensive analysis of research in order to understand what colleges and universities still need to do in order to prevent dropout and increase student persistence to graduation. Tinto (2006), Tobolowsky (2008), and Schrader and Brown (2008) reiterated information of previous researchers (Astin, 1984; Hawkins, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella et al., 1986) and indicated a variety of factors (personal, financial, academic history, curricular and co-curricular experiences, and social support) negatively impact student persistence from first to second year. Alexander and Gardner (2009) and Jamelske (2009) expanded the research and added the recommendation for colleges and universities to financially invest in first-year experiences to increase persistence.

First-Year Experience

The initial year provides significant challenges to students and institutions, yet it is critical to postsecondary education success (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). During this year, colleges and universities must execute their responsibility to support first-year students (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). According to Tobolowsky (2008), colleges and

universities began embedding FYE programming in the 1880s and FYS courses in the 1920s. John Gardner and University of South Carolina professionals joined in 1982 to explore the effects of transition initiatives on student persistence (National Resource Center on First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, n.d,).

The FYE programming trend expanded 45% from 1987 to 1995, as higher education institutions implemented strategies to enhance FYEs for undergraduates (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). Barefoot and Fideler (1996) explained that 83% of colleges and universities implemented co-curricular strategies by 1995 to assist first-year students. Barefoot (2000) reaffirmed the FYE is crucial for students and colleges and universities to exist. Higher education institutions need students to persist (Barefoot, 2000). According to Barefoot's (2005) research, the National Survey of First-Year Practices indicated 96% of colleges and universities were providing FYE initiatives to support students.

Tinto (1998) and Pike and Kuh (2005) explained the value of dissecting institutional data and intervention strategies to determine how to increase persistence. Kuh et al. (2006) and Goodman and Pascarella (2006) discussed how every college and university has a different undergraduate culture determining the need to design an effective FYE. There is no single FYE design that will work for all postsecondary education institutions. Even when an institution implements a FYE, there should be continued evaluation and connection to undergraduate needs at the specific institution (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). However, some common FYE examples are orientation programs, extended orientation programs, welcome week programs, and FYS (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

Barefoot (2000) described how institutions are in the perfect position to utilize FYE research and interventions to positively impact undergraduates. While colleges and universities are proud of the practices, programs, and support which have been created, there is still discontentment "with the pervasive high rate of student dropout between the first and second year and with the difficulty we face in mainstreaming our efforts and gaining support across the campus, especially from faculty ranks" (Barefoot, 2000, p. 12). Researchers (Barefoot, 2000; Kuh et al., 2005; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006) described FYE tactics including recruitment, transition, and persistence strategies, which take place before and after applying for admission and throughout the first-year. Common examples include enrollment events, orientation, camps, student affairs support programs, and academic courses or seminars (Barefoot, 2000; Kuh et al., 2005; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006).

First-Year Seminars

One standard practice to increase persistence of first-year students is a First-Year Seminar (FYS) course (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996, Schnell & Doetkott, 2003, Levitz, Noel & Richter, 1999; Williford et al., 2001). For the past century, colleges and universities have been implementing freshman seminar courses (Hawkins, 2007). Barefoot and Fidler (1996) examined data from the 1994 National Survey on Freshman Seminars and discovered almost 72% of postsecondary institutions provided a FYS course by 1994.

Hawkins (2007), Hendel (2001, 2007) and Lang (2007) found FYS courses demonstrated the strongest impact of all of interventions affecting first to second year success in postsecondary education. Hawkins (2007) indicated that FYS courses were implemented across the United States at least a century ago due to the significant effect

on increasing undergraduate matriculation to graduation. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated a FYS course notably retains students during their first-year and decreases first to second year dropout rates. Keup and Barefoot (2005) described literature surrounding FYS courses, highlighting how co-curricular and classroom experiences combine to create a holistic approach to support student transition, retention, and success.

Within the last five years, Cambridge-Williams, Winsler, Kitsantas, and Bernard, (2013), Laudicina (2014), and Lafferty (2015) established a positive relationship between FYS participation and an increase in student success through curricular and co-curricular engagement. The persistence rate of all first-year students from fall 2009 to fall 2015 increased by 1.9% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center highlighted the increase of overall undergraduate persistence by 1% and retention by 1.1% from fall 2012 to fall 2013. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) reported an "81% overall retention rate" from freshman to sophomore year for 4-year public colleges and universities with a significant difference between "selective institutions at 96%" and only "62% at less selective institutions" (p. 2).

According to Hawkins (2007), the overall objectives of FYS courses are to assist students with learning how to navigate the collegiate environment, build relationships and a supportive network of people, and to increase educational curiosity, confidence, and motivation regardless of the specific design. Hawkins (2007) described how FYS courses are constructed differently depending on the college or university. Institutions designed seminar courses to aid students in their first-year success based on the examination of over 15 years of FYS data that significantly demonstrated a correlation

between adding FYS courses and an increase in graduation rates (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). According to Friedman and Marsh (2009), FYS courses began as an extension to orientation and the primary focus was to develop the general skills and knowledge to navigate college. Theme based seminars, including those with an academic focus, were then developed to enhance the initial seminar design (Friedman & Marsh, 2009). Various researchers (Erickson & Stone, 2012; Friedman & Marsh, 2009; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Hawkins, 2007; Laudicina, 2014) have argued that each postsecondary education institution should design FYS courses to fit the needs of undergraduate students while simultaneously helping students navigate the academic and social elements of the institution. FYS course characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer support status) can impact student engagement and integration with the institution (Tobolowsky, 2008). The next four sections describe research on each of FYS course characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, peer mentor status) included in the current research study.

Course Size. Barefoot, Warnock, Dickinson, Richardson, and Roberts (1998) examined data from a variety of postsecondary FYS courses. Of all the FYS courses at the 50 different colleges and universities studied, the course size ranged from 6 to 25 students per course (Barefoot et al., 1998). Cuseo (2007) examined class size and teaching on the impact of first-year student success. According to Cuseo (2007), "it may be more productive for administrators to move away from class-size decisions" but focus on the "range or distribution of class sizes available to students in a given term and at different stages of the college experience" (p. 13). Tobolowsky (2008) also examined FYS course sizes from all over the country and discovered differences based on the

institutional design. However, colleges and universities which have bachelor's degrees, tend to have larger course sizes and over 20 students in each FYS course (Tobolowsky, 2008). No other research was found that addressed the impact of course size on persistence.

Living Learning Community Status. FYS course sections are connected with an academic department, interest area, a living learning community, or have no theme (Kuh, 2008; Tobolowsky, 2008). Kuh (2008) described learning communities as one of several successful strategies to affect persistence. These strategies build intentional connections between students shared interests (Kuh, 2008). In addition, Kuh stated students within the learning community were enrolled in a multitude of curricular and co-curricular experiences in order to create a bridge of support (Kuh, 2008). Tobolowsky (2008) reported 75% of FYS courses were not learning communities. FYS courses which are connected with a learning community are based on an academic component or shared interest (Tobolowsky, 2008). For example, at some universities, an academic focused learning community might have all students with the same major live on the same floor in a residence hall. These students are also are enrolled in the same sections of one or more courses aligned with the major (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). Shared interest learning communities are categorized by themes outside the classroom. Inkelas and Weisman (2003) provided examples (clubs and organizations, fraternity and sorority organizations, community service organizations, or work interest) of different types of interest based learning communities.

Researchers (Pike, 1999; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) examined first-year living learning communities at one college. According to Pike (1999) and Zhao and Kuh (2004), living

learning community students had a more positive college experience than those not part of a living learning community. In addition, students affiliated with a living learning community were more likely to be more connected and engaged with college life (Pike, 1999; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). A limited number of institutions pair a FYS course with a living learning community. There is a need for additional research in this area.

Instructor Classification. Colleges and universities use faculty and staff members to teach FYS courses (Tobolowsky, 2008). Sometimes the institution's financial situation determines the need for courses to be taught by staff to decrease cost. At other institutions, the assignment of who will teach a FYS course may depend upon instructor availability (Bettinger & Long, 2010). According to Bettinger and Long (2010), there is concern among postsecondary institutions about whether or not anyone who is not classified as full-time faculty can provide the level of academic expertise needed to teach FYS courses. Tobolowsky (2008) and Bettinger and Long (2010) recognized the variety of instructors (faculty, staff, and/or graduate assistant) teaching FYS courses and payment, but there is limited research to explain the impact of instructor classification on student persistence. However, Braxton et al. (2000) and Bettinger and Long (2010) speculated there could be a correlation between instructor classification and course impact on students. Additional research examining the impact of FYS instructor classification on student persistence is needed.

Peer Mentor Status. Kram (1980) pioneered research on mentoring and reported a positive correlation between mentoring and career success. Astin (1993) focused on peer-to-peer relationships in postsecondary education and determined a significant impact on student success. One-on-one or group peer support can directly impact the

knowledge, skills, and behaviors of individuals (Astin, 1993). First-year students can be empowered by their peers. Astin (1993) recommended that colleges and universities should consider strategies to connect students. Researchers (Astin, 1993; Terrion & Leonard, 2007, Tsang, 2012) found a positive impact when utilizing peer support with the education process. However, Allen, Eby, and Lentz (2006) and Terrion and Leonard (2007) declared a need to dissect peer support in higher education according to institutional culture to determine effectiveness. Tsang (2012) acknowledged the value of peer mentoring in postsecondary education, especially with the change in student demographics and needs. Tsang's (2012) study also examined an online component of peer mentoring within an institution's first-year experience. The study identified a positive correlation between peer support and student success (Tsang, 2012). There is limited research to explain the impact of peer mentoring within FYS courses and persistence from first to second year.

Summary

Researchers (Astin 1993; Bean, 1980, Hawkins, 2007; Spady 1970; Tinto, 1988) identified issues within colleges and universities which suggested the need for developing initiatives to support student success. Several scholars (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Hendel, 2001, 2017; Kuh, 2008; Lang, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) have identified the need to target first-year students by building FYE initiatives. According to Cambridge-Williams et al. (2013), Laudicina (2014), Lafferty (2015), Miller and Lesik (2014) and The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017), FYS courses, one example of a FYE initiative, have proven to positively impact first-year student persistence. Barefoot, et al. (1998) and Tobolowsky (2008) examined FYS course size. Kuh (2008)

and Tobolowsky (2008) examined FYS living learning communities. Bettinger and Long (2010), Braxton et al. (2000) and Tobolowsky (2008) examined FYS instructor classification. Several researchers (Allen et al., 2006; Astin, 1993; Kram, 1980; Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Tsang, 2012) examined peer mentoring. While previous studies have examined course size, instructor status, living learning community, and peer mentor support, no research has specifically focused on Midwestern regional state higher education institutions. The current study examined the impact of FYS variables (course size, instructor status, living learning community, and peer mentor status) on student persistence from freshman to sophomore year at Midwestern University, a medium sized regional state university. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used in the current study including research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and limitations.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effects of the characteristics of FYS courses on first-year student persistence from first to second year. More specifically, the current research was conducted to determine the relationship between FYS characteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer support status) and student persistence to the second year at a Midwestern regional state university. This study expanded the research conducted by previous scholars (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013; Erickson & Stone, 2012; Hendel, 2001, 2007; Lang, 2007; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Williford et al., 2001) related to FYS courses. The current study also expanded previous researchers' (Astin, 1993; Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Friedman & Marsh, 2009; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Hawkins, 2007; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) investigations related to FYS chracteristics (course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer support status). This chapter provides an explanation of the research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and limitations of the current study.

Research Design

The researcher used a correlational research design in this study. The research focused on the relationship between persistence of students from first to second year. The dependent variable was persistence at Midwestern University from first to second year (persisted, did not persist). The dependent variable, persistence, was defined as enrollment in the second year of study by students who were first-year, full-time, on-

campus, degree-seeking a previous fall semester between 2013 and 2017. The independent variables were FYS course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer support status.

Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling was used to determine the sample for the current study. Included in the selection of participants for this study were all fall semester, first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students who were required to enroll in a FYS course during a fall semester between 2013 and 2017. Participants for this study were students at a medium sized Midwestern regional state university.

Measurement

The researcher used archival data available in Midwestern University's student database system. The dependent variable, persistence, was categorized as persisted or did not persist. A student was determined as having persisted when enrolled full-time on the 20th day of the second year of attendance at Midwestern University. The 20th day of enrollment was selected as the target date for determining persistence status because this is the date the KBOR (n.d.) uses as the official record of student attendance. Independent variables included course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer support status.

The variable of course size indicated the number of students enrolled in each FYS course. Three FYS course sizes were identified as 10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more based on the number of students enrolled in the course. The variable of living learning community status indicated if students were enrolled in a living learning community or not enrolled in a living learning community. Midwestern University (2016c) has defined

living learning communities as academic or theme-based FYS course sections. Students must apply to be admitted into a living learning community (Midwestern University, 2016c). Students participating in a living learning community live on the same floor in a residential hall, participate in the FYS class together, share a common interest defined by the learning community purpose, and have a faculty coordinator to provide support to the learning community (Midwestern University, 2016c). Students not in a living learning community enroll in one of the non-living learning community FYS course sections (Midwestern University, 2016c).

The variable of course instructor classification indicated whether the individual assigned to teach each course was a faculty member or staff member. The variable of peer mentor status indicated whether the FYS course included peer support or no peer support. Peer mentor status existed when a second-year, third-year, or fourth-year student was paired with a FYS seminar course. The peer provided additional peer support to the students in the class with one-on-one and group mentoring.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher submitted a request for approval to conduct the study through the Midwestern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) on April 30, 2018 (see Appendix A). The researcher was granted approval to conduct research from the Midwestern University IRB committee on May 4, 2018 (see Appendix B). In addition, a request to conduct research was submitted to the Baker University IRB on May 23, 2018 (see Appendix C). The researcher was granted approval to conduct research from Baker University IRB on May 23, 2018 (see Appendix D).

Once approval was received from both IRB committees, archival data were

collected from the student information system at Midwestern University. The data included the student identification number, FYS course section, FYS living learning community status, FYS course size, FYS course instructor classification, and persistence status the fall following matriculation to Midwestern University. Once all data were collected, student names were deleted, and each row of data was assigned a confidential identification number known only to the researcher for confidentiality purposes. Data were organized into a Microsoft Excel document and input into IBM SPSS Statistics 25 for analysis.

Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The following section includes the four research questions, the associated hypotheses, and statistical analyses.

RQ1. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course size (10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

H1. There is a relationship between FYS course size (10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H1. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS course size (10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more) and persistence (persisted, did not persist). The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ2. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

H2. There is a relationship between FYS living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H2. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and persistence (persisted, did not persist). The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ3. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

H3. There is a relationship between FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H3. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and persistence (persisted, did not persist). The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ4. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course peer mentor status (peer mentor, no peer mentor) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college?

H4. There is a relationship between FYS course peer mentor status (peer mentor, no peer mentor) and persistence (persisted, did not persist) to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H4. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS course peer mentor status (peer mentor, no peer mentor) and persistence (persisted, did not persist). The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05.

Limitations

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined limitations as components of the study which are not controlled. The current research had the following limitations:

1. Unknown factors (gender, race, socioeconomic status, residency status, or high school grade point average) could influence persistence. It is not known what impact these variables may have had on student persistence from first to second year.
2. Midwestern University required the FYS course for all first-time full-time freshmen during the years encompassed by the current study. It was not possible to compare FYS course participants with students not enrolled in a FYS course.
3. Instructor rank and experience may be factors which might affect student persistence from first to second year. The current study did not examine the relationship of either of these variables on persistence at Midwestern University.

Summary

Chapter 3 explained the methodological approach for this study. This chapter defined the research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and limitation of the current study. Chapter 4 presents descriptive statistics and the results of the hypothesis testing.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of the current study was to examine the effect of FYS course characteristics (course size, instructor classification, living learning community, and peer mentor status) on persistence to the second year of college for first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students at a Midwestern regional state university. Chapter 4 summarizes descriptive statistics and describes the results of hypothesis testing.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize persistence to second year for all first-time full-time students who matriculated at Midwestern University during a fall semester between 2013 and 2017, course size frequency, instructor classification, living learning community status, and peer mentor status. A frequency table was created to describe each variable. Table 1 disaggregates FYS course persistence frequency of the 3,462 students examined in this study. Table 1 indicates that 2,484 persisted and 979 did not persist. The majority of students persisted to the beginning of the second-year after participating in a FYS course during the first-year.

Table 1

Persistence Frequency Table

Variable	*n*	*%*
Persisted	2484	71.7
Did Not Persist	979	28.3

Table 2 describes FYS course size frequency. The majority of students were in a FYS course size of 20 or more. Less than 2% of students were in a FYS course with 10 or fewer enrollees.

Table 2

Course Size Frequency Table

Variable	*n*	*%*
10 or fewer	66	1.9
11-19	355	10.3
20 or more	3045	87.8

Table 3 explains FYS instructor classification frequency. A majority of students in FYS courses were taught by instructors who were staff members in Student Affairs.

Table 3

Instructor Classification Frequency Table

Variable	*n*	*%*
Faculty	782	22.6
Staff	2681	77.4

Table 4 disaggregates FYS living learning community frequency. The majority of students were not in a living learning community.

Table 4

Living Learning Community Status Frequency Table

Variable	*n*	*%*
Living Learning Community	928	26.8
No Living Learning Community	2535	73.2

Table 5 explains FYS peer mentor status frequency. The majority of students did not have a peer mentor in their FYS course.

Table 5

Peer Mentor Status Frequency Table

Variable	*n*	*%*
Peer Mentor	917	26.5
No Peer Mentor	2546	73.5

Hypothesis Testing

The results of the hypothesis testing that addressed the four research questions are reported below. Archival data were analyzed to determine the relationship between FYS course characteristics (course size, instructor classification, living learning community, and peer mentor status) on persistence to the second year of college for first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test each hypothesis.

RQ1. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course size (10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college?

H1. There is a relationship between FYS course size (10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H1. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS course size and persistence. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was

set at .05. The results of the χ^2 test of independence indicated no statistically significant difference between the observed and expected values, $\chi^2 = .827$, $df = 2$, $p = .647$. See Table 6 for the observed and expected frequencies. H1 was not supported. There is no relationship between FYS course size at Midwestern University and first to second year student persistence.

Table 6

Observed and Expected Frequencies for Hypothesis 1

Persistence	Course Size	Observed	Expected
Persisted	10 or fewer	49	47.3
	11-19	261	254.6
	20 or more	2174	2182.0
Did not Persist	10 or fewer	17	18.7
	11-19	94	100.4
	20 or more	868	860.0

RQ2. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college?

H2. There is a relationship between FYS living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H2. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and persistence. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05.

The results of the χ^2 test of independence indicated a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected values, $\chi^2 = 14.227$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$. See Table 7 for the observed and expected frequencies. The observed frequency for students who were enrolled in a course section associated with a learning community and persisted ($n = 710$) was higher than the expected frequency ($n = 665.7$). The observed frequency for students who were not enrolled in a course section associated with a learning community and did not persist ($n = 761$) was higher than the expected frequency ($n = 716.7$). H2 was supported. There is a relationship between FYS living learning community status at Midwestern University and first to second year student persistence.

Table 7

Observed and Expected Frequencies for Hypothesis 2

Persistence	Learning Community	Observed	Expected
Persisted	LC	710	665.7
	No LC	1774	1818.3
Did not Persist	LC	218	262.3
	No LC	761	716.7

Note: LC = Learning Community, No LC = No Learning community.

RQ3. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college?

H3. There is a relationship between FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H3. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff)

and persistence. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the χ^2 test of independence indicated no statistically significant difference between the observed and expected values, $\chi^2 = .126$, $df = 1$, $p = .723$. See Table 8 for the observed and expected frequencies. H3 was not supported. There is no relationship between FYS instructor classification at Midwestern University and first to second year student persistence.

Table 8

Observed and Expected Frequencies for Hypothesis 3

Persistence	Instructor	Observed	Expected
Persisted	Faculty	557	560.9
	Staff	1927	1923.1
Did not Persist	Faculty	225	221.1
	Staff	754	757.9

RQ4. To what extent is there a relationship between FYS course peer mentor status (peer mentor, no peer mentor) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college?

H4. There is a relationship between FYS course peer mentor status (peer mentor, no peer mentor) and persistence to the beginning of the second year of college.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test H4. The two categorical variables used in the analysis were FYS course peer mentor status (peer mentor, no peer mentor) and persistence. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the χ^2 test of independence indicated a statistically significant difference between the observed and

expected values, $\chi^2 = 5.833$, $df = 1$, $p = .016$. See Table 9 for the observed and expected frequencies. The observed frequency for students who were enrolled in a course section associated with a peer mentor and persisted ($n = 686$) was higher than the expected frequency ($n = 657.8$). The observed frequency for students who were not enrolled in a course section associated with a peer mentor and did not persist ($n = 748$) was higher than the expected frequency ($n = 719.8$). H4 was supported. There is a relationship between FYS course peer mentor status at Midwestern University and first to second year student persistence.

Table 9

Observed and Expected Frequencies for Hypothesis 4

Persistence	Peer Mentor	Observed	Expected
Persisted	PM	686	657.8
	No PM	1798	1826.2
Did not Persist	PM	231	259.9
	No PM	748	719.8

Note: PM = Peer Mentor, No PM = No Peer Mentor.

Summary

Chapter 4 described the results of the hypothesis testing connected to the four research questions for the study. Class size and instructor status in a FYS course were not found to have a significant relationship with persistence to the second year of college for first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students. Participation in a living learning community while enrolled in a FYS course was found to have a statistically significant relationship with persistence to the second year of college for first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students. Peer mentor support in a FYS

course was found to have a statistically significant relationship with persistence to the second year of college for first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students.

This study concludes with Chapter 5. In addition to implications for action and recommendations for future research, this chapter includes an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, and methodology, major findings, and findings related to the literature. Concluding remarks are also presented.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study including an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, review of the methodology, and major findings from the hypothesis testing. The major findings are then linked to literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter concludes with implications for action and recommendations for future research. Concluding remarks close the chapter.

Study Summary

The study summary provides an overview of the problem. An explanation of the purpose statement, research questions, and review of the methodology are provided. Results of the hypothesis testing are summarized.

Overview of the problem. Over a century ago, researchers (Astin, 1993; Bean, 1980; Spady 1970, 1971; Tinto, 1988) began exploring the problem of student persistence in colleges and universities across the country. With Spady (1970, 1971) leading investigations into postsecondary education persistence, Tinto (1988) and Astin (1993) helped higher education institutions understand the need to support students during the transition to college. A significant percentage (33%) of students who enroll in college do not return after the first year (Barefoot, 2000).

For almost thirty years, researchers (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Hendel, 2001, 2017; Kuh 2008, Lang, 2007; Levitz, Noel & Richter, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) have investigated FYE initiatives that increase undergraduate persistence from first to second year. Several researchers (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013; Laudicina, 2014; Miller & Lesik, 2014; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017), have

investigated and confirmed FYS courses impact persistence of students from first to second year.

Midwestern University, the site for the current study, was concerned about student persistence (Midwestern University, 2016d). As Midwestern University (2016b) continued to expand FYE initiatives, the institution decided to require a FYS course to increase persistence of students from first to second year. By fall of 2013, Midwestern University (2016b) implemented a FYS course requirement for all first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking undergraduate students. The institution had not conducted any studies to determine what impact FYS course characteristics had on persistence from first to second year.

Purpose statement and research questions. This study examined the relationship between FYS course characteristics (course size, instructor status, living learning community, and peer mentor status) and student persistence from first to second year. Four research questions guided this study. The first research question examined the relationship between FYS course size (10 or fewer, 11-19, and 20 or more) and persistence. The second research question examined the relationship between FYS course living learning community status (living learning community, no living learning community) and persistence. The third research question examined the relationship between FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and persistence. The fourth research question examined the relationship between FYS course peer mentor status (peer teaching assistant, no peer teaching assistant) and persistence.

Review of the methodology. Midwestern University archival data were analyzed in this correlational research design to determine the relationship between FYS course

characteristics (course size, instructor status, living learning community, and peer mentor status) and student persistence from first to second year. The dependent variable was persistence at Midwestern University from first to second year (persisted, did not persist). The independent variables were FYS course size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer support status.

Major findings. Chi-square tests of independence were conducted to determine the relationship between each of the FYS course characteristics (class size, instructor status, living learning community, and peer mentor status) and persistence of first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students from first to second year. The four research questions were addressed using Chi-square tests of independence to test hypotheses for each research question. Chapter 4 provided an explanation of the results of the hypothesis testing that addressed each of the four research questions.

Hypotheses 1 and 3 were not supported. There was not a statistically significant relationship between FYS course size and persistence or between instructor classification and persistence to the second year of college for first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students. Hypothesis 1 examined FYS class size which was defined as 10 or fewer, 11-19, or 20 or more. Class size was not related to student persistence from first to second year. Hypothesis 3 examined FYS instructor classification which was defined as faculty or staff. Instructor classification was not related to student persistence from first to second year. According to the findings of this study, persistence from first to second year will not increase if Midwestern University increases or decreases class size or if they have a faculty or staff member teaching the course.

Hypotheses 2 and 4 were supported. There was a statistically significant result identifying a relationship between FYS course living learning community status and persistence and between peer mentor support status and persistence and peer mentor support and persistence to the second year of college for first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students. Hypothesis 2 examined FYS living learning community status which was defined as living learning community or no living learning community. Students, who participated in a FYS living learning community were more likely to persist than students who did not participate in a FYS living learning community. Hypothesis 4 examined FYS peer mentor status which was defined as peer mentor or no peer mentor. Students enrolled in a FYS which had an assigned peer mentor were more likely to persist than those FYS courses which did not have a peer mentor. According to the findings of this study, persistence from first to second year will increases if students participate in a FYS living learning community or if they have a peer mentor.

Findings Related to the Literature

Cambridge-Williams et al. (2013), Laudicina (2014), Lafferty (2015), Miller and Lesik (2014) and The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017), confirmed the increase in first-year students persisting to their second year due to participation in FYS courses. Since 2013, a majority of students persisted from first to second year after participating in Midwestern University's FYS course, confirming previous research.

The current study expanded upon the work of previous researchers (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013; Laudicina, 2014). According to Cambridge-Williams et al. (2013), students who were enrolled in a FYS course were more likely to persist. However, FYS

participation in living learning communities did not impact persistence from first to second year (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013). The results from the current study supported Cambridge-Williams et al. (2013). The research in the current study determined that students participating in a living learning community while enrolled in a FYS persisted at a higher rate than students not in a living learning community.

Laudicina (2014) examined FYS course persistence from first to second year in fall 2012 at one university. Students, who participated in a FYS, had a higher persistence rate from first to second year (Laudicina, 2014). According to Laudicina (2014), social integration components resulted in higher persistence. The research in the current study determined that students participating in a living learning community were more likely to persist than students not in a living learning community. The current research also determined that students with a FYS course peer mentor would be more likely to persist than students in a FYS course that did not have a peer mentor. Two social integration variables (living learning community and peer mentor support) in the current study supported Laudicina (2014).

While many researchers have examined FYS courses, there is limited research focusing on the impact of FYS class size or instructor status for traditional undergraduate students in medium sized, Midwestern regional, public universities. According to Cuseo (2007), "the research reviewed herein suggests that a class size of 15 or fewer students may represent a threshold point at which the benefits of smaller class size are most dramatically realized" (p.13). There was no relationship between FYS class size (10 or fewer, 11-19, 20 or more) and persistence at Midwestern University. The results from the current study did not agree with Cuseo's (2007) findings. However, it is important to

note that Cuseo (2007) only examined impact of class sizes for first-year students and not specifically first-year students enrolled in FYS courses.

In Chapter 2, two sets of researchers (Braxton et al., 2000; Bettinger & Long, 2010) speculated there could be a correlation between instructor classification and course impact on students. The current study did not find a relationship between FYS course instructor classification (faculty, staff) and student persistence from first to second year. According to Bettinger and Long (2010), "analysis suggests that the impact of alternative instructors varies by discipline" (p. 14). The research confirmed the investigation from Bettinger and Long (2010) that the impact of instructor classification depends on the course and field of study. In this study, FYS course instructors (faculty or staff) did not impact persistence from first to second year.

Conclusions

FYS course characteristics are important for colleges and universities to consider when designing FYS courses. At Midwestern University, students participating in courses who were also involved in a living learning community had a higher rate of persisting to the second year than those who did not participate in a living learning community. Students whose FYS course included a peer mentor also had higher persistence rates. In the current study, class size and type of FYS instructor (faculty or staff) did not demonstrate a relationship on student persistence to the second year. The next section will describe implications for action, recommendation for future research, and concluding remarks.

Implications for action. The results of this study can assist Midwestern University and other higher education institutions with FYS course design and decisions.

The current study found that student involvement in a living learning community while enrolled in a FYS course impacted persistence to the second year of enrollment. Midwestern University should consider requiring all first-time full-time freshmen to be assigned to a living learning community. Peer mentoring in the required FYS also had a positive relationship with persistence to the second year. Midwestern University should consider assigning a peer mentor to all FYS courses. The study indicated no relationship between class size and persistence to the second year of enrollment. Midwestern University should place less emphasis on class size. In addition, administrators do not need to focus on instructor status. There was no relationship between instructor status (faculty or staff) and persistence to the second year of enrollment.

Recommendations for future research. The findings from this study contributed to FYS research by examining course characteristics at a regional, public, Midwestern university. A recommendation for future research is to conduct similar studies at other Midwestern regional state institutions. Private higher education institutions may also benefit from studies focusing on FYS course characteristics (class size, living learning community status, instructor classification, and peer mentor status) and persistence. Future studies could also investigate the time of day the FYS course is taught, instructor credentials (degrees attained), and instructor employment history (number of years teaching).

The current study determined student participation in a living learning community and having a peer mentor in the FYS course had a statistically significant relationship with persistence to the second year of study. The FYS living learning community was only defined as students in a living learning community or not in a living learning

community. Future research could investigate the type of living learning community (academic or theme based) and the relationship to persistence. FYS peer mentor status was only defined as having a peer mentor or not having a peer mentor. Additional research could investigate the relationship between a FYS peer mentor's knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and persistence to the second year of study.

Personnel from other Midwestern public higher education institutions may be interested in the results from the current study and may consider a review of their FYS courses. This study only examined one midsized, public, regional institution. Future research on geographic location, size, and type of institution is needed. The current study only examined persistence rates during fall semesters from 2013 to 2017. Additional research could compare overall persistence rates of students from first to second year prior to implementation of a required FYS course in fall 2013. This study only examined one FYE strategy the FYS. Further research could examine the impact of other FYE strategies on persistence.

Concluding remarks. According to Hawkins (2007), while dropout rates have caused colleges and universities to be more proactive in supporting first-year students, the true value of investing in a FYE enhances the overall quality and merit of the institution. Hawkins (2007) reported that the institution and student are both responsible for student success. One measure of student success is persistence data. Researchers (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Hendel, 2001,2017; Lang, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) revealed the need for colleges and universities to focus on first to second year persistence. These researchers ignited the evolution of FYE strategies to expand beyond orientation. Kuh (2008) compiled information on successful practices to increase

persistence at colleges and universities. Of the various persistence strategies, FYS courses created a comprehensive approach to support undergraduates during the initial year at the institution (Kuh, 2008).

Higher education institutions have been attempting to increase student persistence for decades. One of the strategic planning expectations of the KBOR (n.d.) is to increase Kansas postsecondary education graduation rates. Midwestern University (2016g) is dedicated to supporting student success including graduation rates. In 2013, Midwestern University (2016b) implemented a required FYS component to increase persistence rates. The current study determined that between fall semesters of 2013 and 2017, 71.7% of students participating in the required FYS course persisted from first to second year. The results of the current study found that first-time full-time freshmen who resided in a living learning community and those who had a peer mentor while enrolled in a FYS had higher persistence rates than students whose FYS did not have a living learning community or peer mentor component. No relationship was found between FYS class size and instructor classification (faculty, staff) and persistence to the second year. The results of this study will continue to guide Midwestern University in exploring additional components of FYS courses and FYE initiatives. Other colleges and universities can use the data from the current study to examine FYS course characteristics at their respective institutions. Data from the current study provides evidence of Midwestern University's ongoing efforts to be responsive to KBOR's strategic plan to increase postsecondary education student persistence.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Midwestern University IRB Submission

[redacted]

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

NEW IRB SUBMISSION

I. Project Title and Research Team Members

Project Title:

An Examination of First Year Seminar Courses and Student Persistence.

Principal Investigator Name:

Taylor Kriley

Faculty Research Supervisor (If student is the PI):

Additional Team Members:

This form must be used to submit an application through the IRBNet system.
No other methods of submission will be accepted.

Access the system here: www.irbnet.org
Student and Adjunct Faculty researchers: Please note that Faculty Research Supervisor approval is required prior to submission to IRB. The Faculty Research Supervisor signature in IRBNet indicates approval and agreement with section XII.
For faster processing, ensure all research team members have completed all required CITI training through https://www.citiprogram.org/ prior to submitting this application.

II. Type of investigator and nature of the activity: (Check all appropriate categories.)

A. Faculty/Staff at FHSU:
- ☐ Submitted for extramural funding to:
- ☐ Submitted for intramural funding to:
- ☑ Project unfunded
- ☐ Quality improvement/program evaluation
- ☐ Quality assurance
- ☐ Other (Please explain)

B. Student at FHSU: ☐ Graduate ☐ Undergraduate ☐ Independent Study
☐ Thesis ☐ Specialist Field Study ☐ Graduate Research Paper

C. Class Project (Course Number and Course Title), explain activity:

D. Other than faculty, staff, or student at FHSU (Unaffiliated with FHSU)
Please explain:

III. Human Subjects Research Ethics Training: The IRB will not review submissions without verification of appropriate CITI training. The Principal Investigator and all members of the research team must complete the appropriate CITI training modules. Faculty Research Advisors, when listed above, must also complete CITI training. If the PI is not affiliated with FHSU, documentation of CITI or other comparable training must be provided.
Date completed CITI training:

April 13, 2018

IV. Project Information
A. Expected study period from: 8/10/13 To: 9/20/18

B. Describe the purpose of the research. Explain what is intended to be discovered, including goals, aims, and objectives and/or state the hypothesis to be tested. Background: provide a brief scientific or scholarly rationale for the research activities, and address gaps in current knowledge.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect First Year Seminars (FYS) have on first-year students and their persistence from first to second year. More specifically, to determine the relationship between FYS characteristics (e.g. course size, section, instructor classification, and peer support) and second year student persistence.

Administrators, faculty, and staff at Midwestern University are interested in increased student persistenc[redacted]irst to second year. Therefore, Midwestern University required all first-year students to enroll in UNIV 101 First-Year Seminar in 2013 as one strategy to promote persistence from first to second year. The goal of the FYS at Midwestern University has been to aid students in making connections with their peers, provide resources to assist in navigating the academic and non-academic environment of the campus, and assist in the transition from first to second year.

The study will include a quantitative analysis of archival data from a Midwestern four-year higher educa[redacted]stitution. Archival data for all first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seek[redacted]ents who matriculated to Midwestern University during a fall semester between 2013 and 2017 who were required to enroll in FYS course were included in the study. The variables for this study were persistence and FYS course size, section, instructor classification, and peer support.

☑ Investigators NOT currently affiliated with [redacted] will collaborate on this project.

C. (If checked above) Identify any cooperating institutions by name.

Dissertation for Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership through Baker University. Baker University IRB review process required institution IRB approval for dissertations using institution archival data.

D. This study is being/has been reviewed by another IRB. Yes ◉ No ○
If yes, please attach relevant documentation.

V. Subject Information

A. Number of subjects:

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

B. Subject Age (Check all that apply):

- ☐ 1-7
- ☐ 8-17
- ☑ 18-65
- ☐ 65+

C. Special Populations (Check all that apply):

- ☐ Minors
- ☐ Non-English speaking
- ☐ Prisoners
- ☐ Individuals with impaired decision-making capacity
- ☐ Individuals who are economically or educationally disadvantaged
- ☐ Individuals with Legally Authorized Representatives
- ☐ Individuals who are vulnerable to coercion or undue influence

D. Describe target demographic of proposed subjects; explain how you will ensure that selection is equitable and that all relevant ethnic groups, genders, and populations have access to the study.

The archival data for this will will only including first-time, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students who had graduated high school within the preceding six months; since those students have been and are still required to take the First Year Seminar UNIV 101 course.

E. Describe any specific populations targeted for inclusion or exclusion: Justify criteria based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or origin.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

VI. Recruitment

A. Describe the recruitment process for the study. Explain in detail how you will gain access to and recruit participants for participation in this project. Upload scripts, emails, letters, advertising, and all marketing materials with your application. Provide a step-by-step description of how potential participants will be recruited.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

B. Identify all applicable recruitment methods. (Please provide copies of materials).

- ☐ Flyers
- ☐ Purchased Sample List
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Telephone
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Poster
- ☐ Class Announcement
- ☐ Departmental Communication
- ☐ Third Party (Professional or Charitable Organization)
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ Letter
- ☐ Personal or Professional Contacts
- ☐ Amazon MTurk
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ SONA
- ☐ Snowball method (if used, must describe process in detail)
- ☐ Other (describe)

C. Are you recruiting students from a class you teach or for which you have responsibility? ○ Yes ◉ No

D. Are you recruiting employees who directly or indirectly report to you? ○ Yes ◉ No

E. If yes to either VI C or D, please explain why this population is necessary and describe what precautions have been taken to minimize potential undue influence or coercion.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

VII. Compensation

- ☐ Participants will not receive compensation
- ☐ Students will receive extra credit or course credit
- ☐ Participants will receive monetary compensation
- ☐ Participants' names will be entered into a drawing for a prize

Describe the compensation or credit, including amount, scheduling and method.
Explain what will happen if participants withdraw from the study.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

VIII. Risks and Benefits

A. Describe the anticipated benefits of the research for individual subjects.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

B. Describe the anticipated benefits of the research for society or the discipline. Explain how the benefits outweigh the risks.

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be any risks to subjects.

Midwestern University has assumed strategies within the FYS help incoming students transition successfully because all incoming new students are required to participate in a first-year seminar course. However, it is unclear whether specific variables (e.g. course size, course section, instructor classification, and peer mentor support) associated with the FYS courses impact student persistence.

This research will expand upon the research conducted by previous scholars (Cambridge-Williams et. al, 2013; Erickson & Stone, 2012; Hendel, 2001, 2007; Lang, 2007; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Williford et al., 2001), and will contribute to the existing research related to FYS courses.

C. Does this study involve any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Deception
- ☐ Omission
- ☐ Misleading Information/false feedback
- ☐ Physical or mental stress
- ☐ Collection of fluids or tissue
- ☐ Substances taken internally or applied externally
- ☐ Information pertaining to illegal activity
- ☐ Information relating to sexual attitudes, orientation or practice
- ☐ Private identifiable information
- ☐ Personal or sensitive information
- ☐ Private records (academic or medical)
- ☐ Social or economic burden to participants
- ☐ Mechanical or electrical device applied to subjects
- ☐ Information pertaining to substance use
- ☐ DXA Scan, X-RAY, MRI
- ☐ Information that, if released, could damage an individual's financial standing, reputation, employability, or cause social stigmatization, discrimination, or embarrassment
- ☐ Other
- ☑ **None of these**

D. Describe the nature and degree of the risk or harm checked above. If using deception, include a justification for the deception.

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be any risks to subjects.

E. What steps will be taken to minimize risks or harm and to protect the subject's welfare (when risk is greater than minimal)?

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be any risks to subjects. Statistical analysis techniques will be used to an analyze the archival data.

IX. Emergencies

How will emergencies or unanticipated events related to the research be handled if they arise? (Please note that this refers to an emergency situation associated with the research activity not an emergency such as a fire alarm.)

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be any emergencies.

X. Data Collection and Security

A. Procedures: Describe the setting and tasks subjects will be asked to perform. Describe the frequency and duration of procedures, tests, and experiments. Include a timeline or a step-by-step description.

Once approval is received from [redacted] and [redacted] IRB committees, archival data will be collected from the student information system at [redacted] the selected institution site.

The data will include persistence and FYS course size, section, instructor classification, and peer support. The dependent variable is persistence of first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students who matriculated fall semesters between 2013 and 2017. Persistence is defined as a student still enrolled during the second year on the 20th day of classes. The independent variables are FYS course size, section, instructor classification, and peer support. FYS course class size is characterized by 8 or fewer, 9-16, 17-25, and over 25 enrolled students. FYS course section is characterized by living learning community or none. FYS course instructor classification is characterized by faculty or staff. FYS course peer support is characterized by peer support or none.

After collecting all the data, all student names will be deleted, and each row of data will be assigned to an identification number for confidentiality purposes. Data will then be organized into a Microsoft Excel document and input into IBM SPSS Statistics 24 for analysis.

B. Describe the steps that will be taken to secure the data during storage, use, and transmission. How and where will the data be stored, for how long will it be kept, when will it be destroyed, what safeguards are in place for data with identifying information? Include a description of physical and electronic security.

A university official will provide the data upon removal of the names and assign random numbers to each record. The primary investigator will store the information on a personal/professional drive at [redacted]; this drive is only accessible by secure password login. The primary investigator will keep the data for three years after the study is completed. The data will then be destroyed three years after the study is complete.

C. Identify any direct identifiers like name, unique identifier, address, email, etc. that will be kept with the records. Explain why it is necessary to record the identifiers and describe the coding system to be used.

There will not be any direct identifiers like name, unique identifier, address, email, etc. that will be kept with the records.

D. If retaining a link between study code numbers and direct identifiers after data collection is complete, please explain why this is necessary, how long the link will be kept, how it will be stored, and when it will be destroyed.

There will not be a link between study code numbers and direct identifiers.

E. Data collection methods (check all that apply)

- ☐ Observation
- ☐ Interviews
- ☐ Focus groups
- ☐ Surveys/Questionnaires
- ☐ Psychological tests
- ☐ Educational tests
- ☐ Blood draw, saliva swab, or other biological sampling
- ☐ Audio recording (see section X. F)
- ☐ Video Recording (see section X. F)
- ☐ Previously collected data (no individual identifiers)
- ☐ Previously collected data (with individual identifiers)
- ☐ Internet-based methods
- ☑ Other (describe)

Archival data for all first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students who matriculated to Fort Hays State University during a fall

F. If using audio or video recording, describe how the recordings will be used, how confidentiality will be maintained, who will have access, and how and when the recordings will be destroyed or completely deidentified.

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be audio or video.

G. Protected data to be collected (check all that apply)
☐ Protected health Information (see Section X, Part H)
☐ Unique ID number (e.g. employee ID, driver's license number, student ID number, etc.)
☐ Academic records
☐ Social security number
☐ Other personally identifiable information

H. If the research involves protected health information, it must comply with the HIPAA Privacy Rule.
Select one:
☑ The research does not involve protected health information
Do you plan to use or disclose identifiable health information outside FHSU?
◯ Yes ◯ No
If yes, the consent form must include a release of protected health information.

The IRB may make a waiver of authorization for disclosure if criteria are met under the HIPAA Privacy Rule. *If a waiver of authorization is being requested, the researcher must contact the IRB administrator prior to submitting this application.*

Will the protected health information to be used or disclosed be deidentified, or will a limited data set be used or disclosed? *Please describe*:

No

I. Sharing results with subjects (Indicate if results, like tests or incidental findings, will be shared with the subject or others, and if so, indicate how it will be shared.)

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be any sharing results with subjects.

J. Withdrawal of subjects (Describe the procedures to be followed when subjects withdraw from research or under what circumstances subjects may be withdrawn without their consent.)

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be withdrawal of subjects.

XI. Informed Consent

A. Specify the type of informed consent you will use with this research project.

☐ **Signed Consent**

Consent forms included with this submission:

☐ Adult ☐ Assent Script/Procedures ☐ Parent/Guardian

☐ Foreign Language Version ☐ Agency Consent

☐ **Oral Consent** (Waiver of documentation of consent, include script with application)

☐ Signed consent form would be the only record linking the subject to the research, and the principal risk of signing a consent form would be the potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality.

☐ The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside the research context.

☐ **Information Statement** (include with application)

☐ **Debriefing Statement** (include with application)

B. Describe any potential concerns with obtaining informed consent (Foreign language, minimizing possibility of coercion, etc.)

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be an informed consent.

C. Describe the process you will follow to obtain consent and/or assent. Include names of individuals on the research team who will obtain consent, where and when the process will take place, and how you will ensure the subject's understanding.

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be an obtained consent.

All materials related to this study must be uploaded into your IRBNet study workspace. Instructions for using IRBNet are located at the [redacted] IRB website. Required materials may include, but are not limited to:

- Completed application
- Copies of all recruiting materials, including scripts, emails, letters, posters, advertising, etc.
- Copies of all measurements, instruments, surveys, interview questions being used, etc.
- All consent forms and assent forms or scripts (for children).
- Debriefing materials, if used.

Please note that all materials and scripts to be used for this study need to be reviewed and approved by the IRB.

XII Certifications:

I am familiar with the policies and procedures of [redacted] regarding human subjects in research. I subscribe to the university standards and applicable state and federal standards and will adhere to the policies and procedures of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. I will comply with all instructions from the IRB at the beginning and during the project or will stop the project.

AND

I am familiar with the published guidelines for the ethical treatment of human subjects associated with my particular field of study.

Statement of Agreement:

By electronically signing and submitting this application package, I certify that I am willing to conduct and /or supervise these activities in accordance with the guidelines for human subjects in research. Further, I certify that any changes in procedures from those outlined above or in the attached proposal will be cleared through the IRB.

If the Principal Investigator is a student, the electronic signature of the Faculty Advisor certifies:
1) Agreement to supervise the student research; and, 2) This application is ready for IRB review. The Student is the "Principal Investigator". The Faculty Research Advisor is the "Advisor". Designees may not sign the package. It is the student's responsibility to contact their Faculty Research Advisor when the study is ready for the Advisor's signature.

I certify the information provided in this application is complete and correct.
I understand that I have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study, the ethical performance of the project, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects and strict adherence to any stipulations imposed by the IRB.
I agree to comply with all [redacted] policies, as well as all federal, state and local laws on the protection of human subjects in research, including:

- Ensuring all study personnel satisfactorily complete human subjects research training.
- Performing the study according to the approved protocol.
- Implementing no changes in the approved study without IRB approval.
- Obtaining informed consent from subjects using only the currently approved process and form.
- Protecting identifiable health information in accordance with HIPAA Privacy rule.
- Promptly reporting significant or untoward adverse effects or unanticipated problems to the IRB.

Date: 04/30/2018 10:50 AM
To: [redacted]@[redacted]>, "[redacted]@[redacted]>
From: "Taylor Kriley" <no-reply@irbnet.org>
Reply To: "Taylor Kriley" <tlkriley2@[redacted]edu>
Subject: IRBNet Submission

Please note that the following has been submitted for review on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1237534-1] An Examination of First Year Seminar Courses and Student Persistence.

Principal Investigator: Taylor Kriley
Submission Type: New Project
Submitted To: [redacted]IRB
Submitted By: Taylor Kriley
Date Submitted: April 30, 2018

Message from Taylor Kriley:

Dissertation for Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership through Baker University. Should you have any questions you may contact Taylor Kriley at tlkriley2@[redacted]

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

www.irbnet.org

Appendix B: Midwestern University IRB Approval

Date: 05/04/2018 11:45 AM
To: "Taylor Kriley" <tlkriley2@[redacted]edu>
From: [redacted] <no-reply@irbnet.org>
Reply To: "[redacted]@[redacted]edu>
Subject: IRBNet Board Action

Please note that [redacted] State University IRB has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1237534-1] A Longitudinal Examination of First Year Seminar Courses (UNIV101) and Student Persistence.
Principal Investigator: Taylor Kriley

Submission Type: New Project
Date Submitted: April 30, 2018

Action: APPROVED
Effective Date: May 4, 2018
Review Type: Exempt Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Whitney Jeter at wkjeter@[redacted].edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

www.irbnet.org

Appendix C: Baker University IRB Submission

BAKER UNIVERSITY

IRB Request

Date 4/20/2018

IRB Protocol Number _____ (IRB use only)

I. Research Investigator(s) (students must list faculty sponsor)

Department(s) School of Education Graduate Department

	Name	Signature	
1.	Taylor Kriley	Taylor Kriley Digitally signed by Taylor Kriley Date: 2018.05.23 11:21:55 -05'00'	Principal Investigator
2.	Dr. Tes Mehring	Tes Mehring Digitally signed by Tes Mehring Date: 2018.05.23 11:19:49 -05'00'	☑ Check if faculty sponsor
3.	Dr. Peg Waterman	Margaret Waterman Digitally signed by Margaret Waterman Date: 2018.05.23 13:03:47 -05'00'	☐ Check if faculty sponsor
4.			☐ Check if faculty sponsor

Principal investigator contact information

Phone 316-655-2880

Email taylorlkriley@stu.bakeru.edu

Address 1916 Walnut

Ellis, KS 67637

Note: When submitting your finalized, signed form to the IRB, please ensure that you cc all investigators and faculty sponsors using their official Baker University (or respective organization's) email addresses.

Faculty sponsor contact information

Phone 913-344-1236

Email tmehring@bakeru.edu

Expected Category of Review: ☑ Exempt ☐ Expedited ☐ Full ☐ Renewal

II. Protocol Title

An Examination of First Year Seminar Courses and Student Persistence.

III. Summary:

The following questions must be answered. Be specific about exactly what participants will experience and about the protections that have been included to safeguard participants from harm.

A. In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect First Year Seminar (FYS) courses have on first-year students and their persistence from first to second year. The study will examine the relationship between FYS characteristics (e.g., course size, section, instructor classification, and peer support) and second year student persistence. This study will be conducted at a Midwestern mid-sized four-year institution to expand upon the research conducted by previous scholars (Cambridge-Williams et. al, 2013; Erickson & Stone, 2012; Hendel, 2001, 2007; Lang, 2007; Miller & Lesik, 2014; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Willifo

B. Briefly describe each condition, manipulation, or archival data set to be included within the study.

There are no conditions or manipulations in this study. The study will include a quantitative analysis of archival data from a Midwestern four-year higher education institution. Archival data for all first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students who matriculated to Midwestern University during a fall semester between 2013 and 2017 who were required to enroll in a FYS course were included in the study.

IV. Protocol Details

A. What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

The study is using archival data, therefore observations, questionnaires and other instruments will not be used.

B. Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.

The study is using archival data, therefore there will be no psychological, social, physical or legal risk.

C. Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

The study is using archival data, therefore there will be no stress involved in this study.

D. Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

The study is using archival data, therefore there will be no deception or misleading behavior.

E. Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

The study is using archival data, there will be no deception or misleading behavior.

F. Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

The study is using archival data, there will not be any materials presented.

G. Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

The study is using archival data, therefore no time commitment will be required.

H. Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

I. What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

J. How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

K. Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

L. Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher, or employer? If so, explain.

The study is using archival data and will not interact with subjects.

M. What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with the data after the study is completed?

Once IRB approval is received from Fort Hays State University and Baker University IRB committees, archival data will be collected form the student information system at Fort Hays State University, the selected institution site. Once data are received, the researcher will remove student names and will assign a random identification code to each record to preserve confidentiality. Data will then be organized into a Microsoft Excel document and input into IBM SPSS Statistics 24 for analysis.
The primary investigator will store the information on a personal/professional drive at Fort Hays State

N. If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

The study is using archival data, therefore there won't be any risks to subjects or any benefits accrued.

O. Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

The study will include a quantitative analysis of archival data from a Midwestern four-year higher education institution. Archival data for all first-year, full-time, on-campus, degree-seeking students who matriculated to Midwestern University during a fall semester between 2013 and 2017 who were required to enroll in a FYS course were included in the study. The independent variables for this study are FYS course size, section, instructor classification, and peer support. FYS course class size is characterized by 8 or fewer, 9-16, 17-25, and over 25 enrolled students. FYS course section is characterized by living

Appendix D: Baker University IRB Approval

Baker University Institutional Review Board

May 23rd, 2018

Dear Taylor Kriley and Tes Mehring,

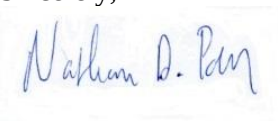
The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Exempt Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,



Nathan Poell, MA
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Scott Crenshaw
Erin Morris, PhD
Jamin Perry, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD