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First-Year College Students and Faculty: A Comparison of Expectations for Success

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS AND FACULTY:

A COMPARISON OF EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

JODI ELLEN KOSLOW MARTIN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2010

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A dissertation is a long, arduous process that would not be possible without the support from a number of people. Being able to read critically, write thoughtfully, and work tenaciously has been essential to completing this dissertation study. For me, I believe the development of these academic skills began in the kitchen of my parents' house when I was five years old. Some mothers may have made homemade cakes and cookies from scratch but mine made homemade flashcards with tricky vocabulary words from scratch. When my dad would return home from work each day, handing me the day's newspaper went hand-in-hand with saying hello. Understanding current events, knowing big words, and a quality education were obviously valued in our house -- a house that produced my brother, a partner in a law firm, and me, a college educator with a doctorate. For all the gifts of love and support they have given me, I thank them for encouraging learning, and encouraging me. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Donald and Marilee Koslow.

During the entire process of crafting a dissertation as well as taking doctoral coursework, I have been married to a compassionate, understanding, and supportive best friend. Michael, by knowing me better than I know myself, motivates me in the perfect ways. He would surprise me by visiting me at the local coffee shop that has become my second home and send me encouraging text messages when I was in the throes of writing. Thank you, Michael, for your unconditional love and unending support – and for showing it.

A true friend is one who gets excited with you and for you. Kate Dockins is this true friend. She knows how to make the most mundane parts of a dissertation doable, lends me a hand in keeping myself organized (no small feat), and shows me I can break down the seemingly insurmountable tasks into reasonable undertakings. On top of it, Kate gets excited about it. Sharing her knack for organization is impressive, as is her kind spirit and love of laughter. Thank you, Kate, for sharing these parts of yourself with me.

I view my doctoral work as part of my goal to be a contributor to the higher education community and make a difference in the lives of college students. To complement my doctoral work, I work in a student-centered college environment. I am blessed to work for a provost, Dr. Andrew Manion, who creates this type of caring culture, and has supported my doctoral studies while opening many professional doors for me. Andrew is especially mindful of the study of first-year college students and his interest in my research has kept me inspired. Thank you, Andrew, for your continued support of my learning and my professional development.

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For my parents, Donald and Marile

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify and explore academic, social, and career-related expectations that first-year college students believe lead to their collegiate success as defined by their perception of persisting in higher education. Further investigation determines how these expectations align with faculty expectations of student success. Eight first-year college students and eight college instructors were interviewed about their expectations at a small, private college. Criteria for first-year students include residing on campus and graduating from high school within the last year. Eligible faculty teach at least one class at the first-year level.

The data from student interviews indicate students are optimistic and expect to be academically successful. Students expect college to be more academically difficult than it turns out to be. Furthermore, students expect academic success by managing their time, placing academic responsibilities as the highest priority in their lives, and being responsible for their own learning. These student expectations align with those of faculty who expect students not only to show up for class but also to be active participants in class discussions and to take their academic success seriously.

Data regarding social expectations indicate students expect to find both a good quantity and quality of friends. Both students and faculty believe the key to fitting into the college campus is to be authentic. Faculty believe students find friends in more

formalized activities, such as joining student organizations while students develop friendships informally, oftentimes in their residence halls.

The last category of expectations relates to student career plans. Both students and faculty expect college to prepare students for careers by learning general skills for the work world. In the first year of college, both faculty and students view coursework as building blocks for future classes. Limited examples were given as to how first-year coursework actually prepares students for a career. Yet, both students and faculty trust the educational process of college-level study in preparing students for their careers.

While student and faculty expectations of college might align in some ways in terms of academics, social life, and career paths, few themes are firmly identified when assessing why students leave college after the first semester or the first year. Students believe they would leave for unfulfilled social and career reasons. An inability to find friends or changing their major to one not offered at their current institution would lead students to consider changing schools. Faculty mention these similar reasons but offer many more, such as financial reasons or a lack of family support. Some faculty simply do not know why students would leave nor think of it very often.

This study shows how setting and communicating reasonable expectations about the college experience is important for first-year students. More collaboration between high schools and colleges would allow students to have a clear understanding of how to achieve success in college.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the college admission process, prospective students seek ways to understand what life would be like as a college student. On tours, students and their parents see buildings that house academic classrooms, computer labs used for drafting papers and staying electronically connected to old friends, and residence halls where bathroom size and roommate compatibility often hold great importance. As today's future students explore their college options, students are inevitably creating expectations of what the future holds in their first year of college.

These future students and their parents are not the only group on campus who hold expectations. The faculty, according to Tinto (1993), create the intellectual ethos of an institution, and develop their own set of expectations for students. Many hold varying expectations, oftentimes depending upon discipline as well as the type of institution where they teach (Wambach, 1998). Once students transition from being considered prospective to matriculated, faculty communicate their expectations in their classrooms, through requirements on their syllabi, and the rubrics for their assignments. Essentially faculty, as representatives of the institution, decide if the quality of student work and the evidence of their learning meet the expectations of the institution. If students are not able to meet these expectations, they often find themselves in academic jeopardy and may not be able to continue their studies. In turn, meeting faculty expectations becomes a key

component of a student's academic success and, possibly, his or her likelihood to persist at the institution.

Though all college students are affected by faculty expectations, the traditional-aged student is particularly influenced by expectations. These students are those who attend college soon after graduating from high school. College enrollment patterns suggest entrance into college immediately after high school remains a traditional path into higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Four-year institutions draw most of the students between the ages of 18 and 24. Between 1994 and 2004, the percentage increase of student enrollment for those under the age of 25 was 31% compared to 17% for those over the age of 25 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). More students are choosing, as well as being expected, to attend college immediately after high school. Despite this increased access to higher education, the college graduation rate of students does not match the rate by which students enroll in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). As such, some in American society have become increasingly suspicious of the value of a college degree if just over half of the students who begin college at four-year institutions graduate in five or six years (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2007).

Questions about the value of higher education have brought this industry into the national spotlight with the publication of *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, a report generated by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006). The document addresses a number of issues including accountability, student learning, institutional costs, and

college readiness. While the report begins with accolades that highlight the successes of American higher education, the bulk of the report calls for reform in the nation's colleges and universities.

The commission's report highlights the dramatic increase in college access over the last decade but also notes the enrollment rate of entering first-year students has slowed since the late 1990s (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Though more students are beginning college, these same students are not persisting to graduation. Those on the Spellings Commission state the problem as an "expectations gap" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Though the report does not specifically outline the expectations of students, its authors suggest many entering college students, especially those in minority populations, do not have adequate backgrounds in academic subjects such as math and English. Thus, the commission implies these students are attending college with the unrealistic expectation of being prepared for college-level academic work.

First-year students enter college with lofty expectations of success, believing that they will easily achieve academic success in an environment where they will fit in with the other students and easily make friends. Research findings from the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California-Los Angeles indicate a significant majority of first-year students believe there is "some chance or a very good chance that they would earn at least a B average (96.9%), be satisfied with their college (96.3%), socialize with someone of a different racial or ethnic group (95.3%), participate in student clubs and groups (86.1%), get a job to help pay for college expenses (81.3%), and

participate in volunteer/community service work (74.6%)” (Hurtado, S., Sax, L., Saenz, V., Harper, C. E., Oseguera, L., Curley, J., et al., 2007). First-year students, however, report meeting only one expectation, socialization with someone of a different racial or ethnic group (Hurtado et. al, 2007). In turn, the college experience of many first-year students is not what they thought it would be.

Expectations in Higher Education

Student expectations. Students begin college with academic and social expectations, and both play a significant role in student progress towards graduation. Tinto (1987) postulates that students leave college because of incongruence, a lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution (p.50). Astin (1975) claims students stay in college, not because of the academic selectivity of the institution, but rather because of their peers’ social backgrounds indicating the importance of the social experience in college retention.

A common misconception of attrition is the idea that first-year students leave college because they found academic coursework too difficult for them to persist. Interestingly, research suggests the opposite. “College is far less challenging than first-year students expect” (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005, p. 5). Students find they do not engage in reading and writing assignments and cultural experiences as much as expected (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). Tapscott and Williams (2006) suggest today’s generation of traditional-aged college students are so accustomed to interactivity through their use of social networks via the Internet that students are not eager to continue their education in traditional methods. With high expectations of college, they

expect the use of technology to be prevalent among their classes in the first year. Though many students are engaged in the college experience, Kuh, Gonyea, and Williams (2005) find most students ultimately do not face the intellectual challenge they expect upon entering a college classroom.

If students are finding college coursework easier than expected, they must not be leaving college for academic reasons alone. Social expectations are also important. Though students may encounter challenging situations engaging with people different from themselves, they also expect to find friends easily (Maitland Schilling & Schilling, 2005). This is one area of expectations where reality usually matches student expectations. Many students, with a traditional understanding of college, expect to engage in partying and finding new commitments through social activities (Maitland Schilling & Schilling, 2005). Essentially, students expect to fit in with the student body of the college they select. Many do, but some learn after arriving on campus they do not fit with the student culture.

Another area of student expectations relates to life after college. Students attend college to secure a career path for themselves after obtaining a degree. This has been revealed, especially in male students, by students' pursuit of a degree as career preparation rather than as an opportunity to learn (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005). Yet, the design of college coursework often forces students to wait until their later years to take classes linked to a chosen profession. Despite being eager to take courses related to their chosen career fields, students begin their college career with general

education courses that emphasize new learning in traditional academic areas (Maitland Schilling and Schilling, 2005).

Students expect to be successful by graduating from the institution where they begin their college coursework (DeBard, 2004). Also, successful students are more likely to have high expectations and fulfill their strong sense of self-efficacy (Howard, 2005). For students who leave, their expectations may be the first place to look to identify their reason for leaving. Miller (2005) describes how students who do not have their expectations met while in college will suffer greater stress than peers whose experiences meet their expectations. These students may not have the emotional competencies to adjust to life's transitions and leave school before they have developed them (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Faculty expectations. Faculty expectations are often inferred broadly through the perceived rigor of the curriculum and course syllabi. Faculty expect students to commit to learning the content of their courses while also developing critical thinking skills. Yet, faculty also expect students to be well prepared, and believe students should enter college with a strong set of academic skills, such as the ability to read critically and be able to write with proper grammar usage.

Faculty expect students to commit a significant amount of time to their studies. A common adage in academe is the devotion of two hours of study for every hour spent in class. Though students rarely follow this rule, many faculty subscribe to it. Faculty, especially at four-year institutions, believe meeting coursework expectations is the

primary job of a student. The time devoted to coursework should be the students' primary responsibility (Krebs & Krebs Flaherty, 2006).

Many faculty understand student desire to be prepared for a career. As such, faculty believe college graduates should have certain skills once they graduate. The idea that students should be able to work collaboratively is often part of faculty expectations. This belief is manifested in a prominence of group projects, especially in classes where small enrollment sizes offer opportunities for collaboration (Colbeck, Campbell, & Bjorklund, 2000).

Overview of the Problem

Though college enrollment continues to rise among young adults, these record numbers are not matched by graduation rates. Students enter higher education with expectations of success; they believe they will graduate from the institution where they begin their studies. Yet, only 56% of these students meet their expectations by graduating from a four-year institution in six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Low graduation rates have significant economic implications for both institutions and students and their families. Tuition at four-year public and private universities costs students and families thousands of dollars, and tuition does not include the cost of housing, meals, transportation needs, and books. Overall, one year of college is a significant investment for students and families. College costs are rising significantly and these dollar amounts influence student and parent expectations of college. Given the magnitude of such an investment, students and families expect that the first year of

college will be positive because of its price. The perception that a college education is a product with a high price tag underscores the notion of consumerism in higher education. Many students expect a good education and a successful first year of college in terms of high grades and abundant friendships because they have paid for it.

Faculty at four-year institutions often focus much less on the consumerism aspects of higher education than students. Faculty, who represent the academic culture at the institution, highlight the rigor of their curriculum and work to ensure their classes enable students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. In such an approach to education, responsibility for learning is shared between student and faculty. Yet, the body of research relating to faculty expectations is limited. Research on college teaching addresses how students learn, but not what faculty expect of students. Faculty have expectations of their students when they walk into their classrooms and oftentimes assume students have a certain level of college readiness. With many students entering remedial courses in their first-year and, thus, beginning their education at a pre-collegiate level, many faculty also realize students lack the skills to engage in college-level coursework.

The result could be a mismatch of expectations. Research suggests students have lofty, often unreasonable expectations for academic success (Kuh, Gonyea & Williams, 2005; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Faculty, along with administrators and policymakers, believe students are entering college unprepared and may set relatively low expectations for their students. These low expectations manifest in student perception that college is not as challenging as they thought it would be. Students enter college expecting

academic difficulty but still feeling capable of success. If faculty hold lower expectations for students they find unprepared and higher expectations for others, they may inadvertently compromise fairness. As such, misaligned expectations could be part of the reason behind grade inflation and questions regarding academic rigor.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify and explore academic, social, and career-related expectations that first-year students believe lead to their collegiate success and to identify whether these expectations align with those expectations for student success held by faculty who teach first-year students. Many students choose college immediately after high school because they believe they are expected to do so. First-year students also perceive college as a means of career preparation and believe higher education is their entrée to establishing a positive future with financial security. Along with expectations of career preparation, students expect to master the demands of college in a socially engaging atmosphere, and students overwhelmingly believe they will be satisfied with their first year of college.

Faculty are the evaluators of student academic success, and their expectations set the standard for academic success. If students meet faculty expectations, they will be academically successful. If they fail to meet faculty standards, they most likely will fail in college. The identification of faculty expectations highlights the importance of their role in the experience of first-year college students.

In this exploratory qualitative study, first-year students and the instructors who teach them will be asked to identify and reflect upon their expectations for academic

success. These reflections should assist in determining the extent to which student and faculty expectations are in alignment. Questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What academic, social, and career-related expectations regarding the collegiate experience do first-year students recount holding in the weeks prior to their enrollment in college?
2. What experiences prior to college do students recount that most influenced their expectations for their first year?
3. What academic, social, and career-related expectations do students hold during their first year of college that they believe will lead them to succeed at the college?
4. What academic, social, and career-related expectations do faculty hold for their first-year students that faculty believe are needed for student success?
5. To what extent and in what ways are student and faculty expectations for student success in alignment?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for three reasons: 1) aligning expectations may assist in establishing institutional fit between college and student, 2) identifying expectations may impact enrollment management strategies, and 3) outlining student and faculty expectations may impact curriculum design for first-year students.

Institutional fit. When experiences match expectations and students have positive interactions with the college environment, a student-institution fit exists (Williams, 1986). Yet, student perceptions play a vital role in determining fit. A challenging

curriculum is often determined in part by high school experience. Student perception of an inclusive and welcoming environment is also not uniform; student social types are extremely varied. Due to this variance, two students may select to attend the same institution and have very different impressions of the environment. When students find satisfaction in the academic and social atmosphere of the institution, they are thought to have found institutional fit.

Expectations impact student perception of institutional fit. When students find institutional fit, they believe their social and academic expectations have been met. Students who fit in with their college environment are more likely to become engaged in the college community and succeed in college. This increased likelihood directly relates to retention.

Retention. Students form expectations of colleges in many ways, from conversations with family and friends to college admission representatives. If aligning student expectations with experience leads to a greater chance of institutional fit, enabling students to have realistic expectations of college life will impact retention. If students are able to make friends, feel challenged by the level of academics, and find the institution can help them reach their professional goals, then the student is more likely to persist. An identification of expectations is essential in knowing if students will be able to meet their own expectations and those of their faculty.

Curriculum design. Specific to the analysis of student and faculty expectations, the degree to which students and faculty perceive student needs in the same way may be discovered. Oftentimes, faculty and administrators believe students do not have the

competencies to communicate the skills they need to hone. An examination of expectations may indicate that one population, student or faculty, have unmet expectations. If faculty are interested in aligning expectations, they may reflect upon their teaching and revise their curriculum to clarify expectations.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to introduce a study of student and faculty expectations in an effort to determine if the extent to which two sets of expectations are similar or different. Oftentimes, colleges assume they are meeting expectations by providing an education they believe to be best for students. An examination of expectations will determine what students hope to gain from a college experience and will illuminate any connections between student and faculty attitudes about college success and persistence.

The next two chapters offer detailed information about what is already known about student and faculty expectations. Chapter Two includes a review of empirical studies on student expectations and outlines what is known about faculty expectations. This chapter also provides greater insight regarding how expectations impact student retention. Chapter Three describes the methodology to be used in this study. Finding how well faculty expectations of student success align with student expectations of themselves will fill a gap in the research on college student expectations and benefit the higher education community.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

After high school graduation, students heading to college hold expectations of what will happen in the next few years of their lives. The faculty, as well, have expectations of their students that impact student experiences on their path towards success. Student success, for the purpose of this study, is defined by student perception to persist in their college studies to graduation. This chapter reviews the development of expectations for student success in higher education held by students and faculty. Research about the formation of expectations, predominantly based on the work of Bandura's (1995) self-efficacy theory, offers an explanation of how expectations are formed. The second part of this literature review describes the expectations students hold of college as demonstrated by empirical data from past studies as well as how these expectations match what researchers have found to be the reality of first-year college life. In this study, the focus of the research is on first-year students who are considered traditional in their path into college; thus, their entrance into college is immediately upon graduation from high school. The third section of the chapter reviews faculty expectations of students. Lastly, the final section incorporates research on the impact of expectations on student ability to find a good fit within the college environment and, in turn, persist to graduation.

Self-Efficacy and Formation of Expectations

Most empirical research on college student expectations relating to academics is predicated upon Albert Bandura's (1995) concept of self-efficacy, which addresses beliefs held by individuals about their level of personal capability. According to Bandura, one's perception of self-efficacy determines how expectations for a particular outcome influence the type of effort made by the individual (p. 231). Specifically applicable to academic competencies, self-efficacy influences one's ability to succeed in math, writing, science, or any college coursework as well as the skills required to achieve personal development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The level by which a student believes success is possible impacts the formation of expectations and, in turn, influences actions, efforts, and persistence (Devonport & Lane, 2006).

The impact of self-efficacy on the formation of expectations is cyclical in nature. Self-efficacy begets expectations, and expectations determine a person's level of self-efficacy. For example, if a student is confident in her abilities to succeed in math courses, the level of her persistence in challenging situations relating to math lessons will be stronger and last longer than if she was not confident in math. In turn, her persistence to learn math concepts will lead to the increased likelihood of mastering mathematical concepts. The outcome is not only more math knowledge and possible recognition for her accomplishment but also an increase in her self-efficacy relating to math. This student both expects to do well in math courses as well as holds a high level of self-efficacy in her competencies. This cycle represents a significant correlation between

self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent, Lopez, & Bieschke, 1991; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989; Zimmerman, 1995).

Gore, Leuwerke, and Turley (2006) found support for this cycle of self-efficacy and expectations through their study involving first-year college students using the College Self-Efficacy Inventory, an instrument designed to assess self-efficacy in college students. One of their significant findings from the study relates to student interaction with faculty. Students who held strong self-efficacy about academics often had more interaction with faculty. Conversely, students who had more interaction with their faculty than their peers demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy relating to overall academic performance. Gore et al. linked their research to college student retention. They found those students with higher self-efficacy than their peers and greater interaction with faculty were more likely than their peers to persist in college. They do not offer suggestions as to which factor, self-efficacy or faculty interaction, led a student to re-enroll. The combination of both factors may influence student likelihood to persist (Gore et al., 2006).

As noted, self-efficacy is related both to the formation of student expectations as well as outcomes. The interplay of two additional cognitive concepts also allows for a greater understanding of expectations: optimism and control which complement self-efficacy in explaining expectation formation. In general, most people are unrealistically optimistic; most believe they will not personally experience a traumatic event (Weinstein, 1980). Past experiences play a key role in one's level of optimism and shaping expectations; the more personal experience a person has relating to an event, the more

likely he or she shapes realistic expectations and has a greater sense of control over the event (Weinstein, 1980). Thus, people develop expectations with an optimistic bias, according to Weinstein, when they perceive an event as controllable and are committed to experiencing the likely outcome.

The research of Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) exemplifies the convergence of self-efficacy, optimism, and control in the formation of expectations in students. In their study of first-year students, they found levels of academic self-efficacy and optimism connect to student ability to evaluate difficult situations. Students may evaluate trying circumstances as either manageable challenges or as threats they are unable to address. Students who had positive expectations of themselves and their adjustment to college were those who were able to handle difficult situations as well as identify realistic goals. Optimistic students with positive expectations demonstrated feelings of enthusiasm about being in college and were able to effectively use coping mechanisms when faced with problems and stress (Chemers et al., 2001).

Howard (2005) explains why the work of Chemers et al. and any research relating to self-efficacy and expectations are important. Experiences constantly shape both self-efficacy and expectations. At times, an experience may greatly change the level of one's self-efficacy or turn positive expectations into negative ones. How students understand these incidents impacts their learning. Consequently, self-efficacy and expectations strongly influence if student choice is a fit with an institution, both academically and socially. Howard explains that students will be less likely to face experiences that contradict their levels of self-efficacy if they have realistic expectations of college, both

in the classroom and in their social lives. Thus, the more realistic the expectations, the more likely the student is able to understand the college environment, effectively face challenges in that environment and, ultimately, be retained as a student.

Student Expectations of College

High school students, on average, expect to go to college and graduate (Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001). The expectation to attend college has never before been such a popular path for life after high school. Higher education has had the highest number of enrolled students in the country's history with 17.5 million students taking college-level classes in 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Though this number includes returning adult students, the traditional college-age student population (18 – 24) increased by 15% between 1995 and 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Research from surveys on high school students indicate that 41% of 15 and 16 year-olds are certain they will go to college (Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001). In many places across the country, attending college has come to be an expected part of a person's life. Though high school students may expect to attend college, they may not have fully developed realistic expectations of what they will experience during their first year of college.

Academic and career expectations of students. “College is far less challenging than first-year students expect” (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005, p.5). This assertion, supported by the authors' review of data from the College Student Expectations Questionnaire, the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Annual Survey of College Freshmen, and Your First College Year Survey, calls into question both the

academic rigor and student expectations of the first year. When starting college, many traditional-aged first-year students believe what Stern (1966) called the “freshman myth,” that college will be more of a fulfilling experience than it actually turns out to be.

Entering college students envision their college courses will be conducted at a fast pace which will require more reading, writing, and cultural experiences than required in high school (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). As such, first-year students trust they will be able to meet the challenges of college course work by working harder and longer than they ever had in the past. They expect to engage in their academic work considerably more than they did in high school, especially more than the level of work they completed during their senior year (AAC&U, 2002). Incoming students expect to spend 30 to 40 hours a week devoted to their studies in addition to the time spent in class (Schilling & Schilling, 1999). These findings indicate the transition to college requires students to experience significant change in their academic schedules to meet their own expectations.

One of the most widely used tools for assessing student expectations is the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) developed by Drs. Robert Pace and George Kuh in 1996 (Williams, 2007). This survey, given to students prior to beginning the fall of their first year of college, assesses new student expectations in two areas: college activities and the college environment. Questions relating to college activities are broad, from library usage and interaction with faculty to fine art experiences and conversations with other students. Yet, the questions in each of these sections ask students their expectations relating to the frequency of the activity rather than the quality

of the experience. For example, a typical question asks about how frequent a student expects to have interactions with faculty outside of class. For the college environment questions, students are to assess their expectations for how much emphasis their institutions will place on certain activities, mainly those which relate to the development of student academic competencies. There are no open-ended questions on the survey that allow students to share their expectations for the quality and content of college activities or the college environment.

The counterpart survey, the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), offers data to determine if student expectations are met. The survey, administered to students at the end of their first year or in subsequent years, determines if students participated in college activities as often as they expected, and if they believe their institution placed emphasis on those items which they believed it would. Analysis by Kuh et al. (2005) of 38,000 student records from 43 colleges and universities offers insight into how students form their expectations of college and if these expectations are met. They found:

As expected, students entering the more selective, private institutions have slightly higher expectations, as do students entering doctoral-extensive, doctoral-intensive, and baccalaureate liberal arts colleges. At the student level, gender seems to make the largest single contribution, meaning that women expect to more frequently participate in a range of educationally purposeful activities. Race also makes a small contribution, indicating that students of color expect to take part more frequently in a wider range of activities than white students. (p. 50)

Kuh et al. found the main influences on the formation of expectations relate to academic ability. These include student ability, educational aspirations, motivation, and positive orientation to college (p. 51). The convergence of these influences is seen in the

assessment findings from various universities. At California State University at Fresno, 54.7% of students who completed the survey expected to earn a grade point average above a B+, but only 10.9 percent met this expectation in the fall of 2004 (Neff, 2005). Thus, these students overestimated their academic ability in being able to earn good grades and their level of commitment to reach their educational aspirations. At Appalachian State University, data from the students who entered the university in 2001 indicate gaps in student expectations and experiences in the academic practices of making use of the library, course learning, and writing skills (“Special Report: Expectations & Experiences,” 2001). These students overestimated how often they would use the library, how much they would learn from their courses, and how often they would engage in writing. It is possible these students were not motivated to engage in their studies as much as they thought they would be.

While the CSXQ and the CSEQ are the primary assessment tools in higher education that assess expectations and experiences of first-year college students, the tools are not flawless in design. The assessment uses frequency as the measure for expectations rather than quality or composition of experiences. Pryor (2005) asserts that the tools, when used together, do not account for the possibility of changing expectations. His example is of the student who believes she will play soccer frequently because she always has in the past. After being at college for a few months, she changes her level of participation in the sport upon discovering a new love for the debate club. In turn, the student chooses not to play soccer as often as expected and commits more time to her new interest in debate. When assessed through the CSXQ and the CSEQ, it appears her

participation in athletics did not meet her expectation when, in actuality, her interests simply changed (Pryor, 2005). In addition to the assessments' lack in accountability for a change in student interest, the survey tools do not account for the quality of an activity that may have been experienced. Nor does it account for the students' expectations of themselves. These surveys presume the institution creates the environment for meeting student expectations but does not account for students' self-efficacy and their own level of commitment to their success.

When high school seniors begin to envision college or university-level coursework, they believe their classes will relate distinctively to their academic major, which will prepare them for their careers (Keup, 2007). In Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler, (1995) student expectations of college were classified into three categories including one entirely devoted to career preparation. Many students view the acquisition of a college degree as a credential; they expect college to qualify them for a job that will guarantee them a reasonable income upon completion of college. In a study regarding a first-year seminar project at Eastern New Mexico University, upper-class peer instructors indicated that academic skills and career preparation should be the focus of the seminar for new first-year students (Brown, 2003). These data reflect a belief that their peers, the first-year students, would be best served if the seminar met student expectations about career development beginning with first semester of college. The faculty, on the other hand, were more interested in teaching critical thinking skills than career preparation (Brown, 2003).

Student expectations about a career ultimately relate to their hope to begin preparation for life after college immediately upon starting their first year. Yet, the design of college coursework often forces students to wait until their second or third years to take classes linked to a chosen profession. Oftentimes, students begin their college career with general education or liberal arts courses “emphasizing new learning in traditional academic areas” (Schilling & Schilling, 2005, p. 113). While these courses may help students find new areas of interest as well as help in the development of academic skills, the content of these courses may fail to meet student expectations. Chickering and Reisser (1993) find students first come to college with the need to develop competencies, especially cognitive competencies. The development of competencies takes time and may be a mismatch for students who Taylor (2006) describes as entitled and consumer-like and who often expect success immediately. For example, the student majoring in health science may become frustrated with rhetoric classes that teach writing skills. Or, the business major may not understand why he needs to take a class in western civilizations to meet general education requirements if he believes the content of the course has nothing to do with his major. Yet, the course may hone critical thinking skills that will be beneficial in later college courses and life after college. Institutions of higher education do not have environments designed for on-demand answers as the transformation that comes from learning often takes time. In turn, students who come to college expecting immediate results may find themselves with unmet expectations.

With a growing number of students attending college, consumeristic attitudes about higher education begin when students start their college search in high school. The marketing behavior of colleges and universities typically leads to students' first interaction with higher education as that of a consumer. It seems not to stop once students begin college as they "shop" for educational experiences that best match their expectations of an educational experience. The student-as-consumer metaphor first became popular when total quality management was applied to higher education (Cheney & McMillan, 1996). Montega and Kuh (2005) highlight the work of Schwartz who describes the college campus as an "intellectual shopping mall" where students receive the message to keep shopping for classes and majors until they find one they like most. Students demonstrate this consumerism in their academic expectations as well. In paying for a class, many expect a return that meets their expectations oftentimes resulting in the expectation of a good grade simply because they paid for it rather than because they worked for it (Twenge, 2006).

Student expectations of academic coursework change over the course of the first year. As students become acculturated into the campus their attitudes toward academics shift, resulting in students spending considerably less time studying than originally expected. Sixty-seven percent of students indicate they spend only four hours or less per week on a three-credit hour course (Hassel & Lourey, 2005). They miss class more than they thought they would and believe class attendance to be unnecessary if grades are not affected. Furthermore, continuing students experience an often accommodating nature of

faculty and come to expect extra credit offerings and extensions as standard fare in classes (Hassel & Lourey, 2005).

Social expectations of students. First-year students have given much thought about what college will be like. They have high social expectations in addition to high academic expectations (Keup, 2007). Social expectations often relate to students in two distinct ways; they see college as a means of independence from parents and an opportunity to develop lifelong friendships. Independence and life-long friendships are often separate from attitudes about classroom experience.

Students expect their college experience to involve a high level of independence, especially from their parents (Keup, 2007; Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000). For residential students, this expectation for independence relates to the transition of moving out of their parents' home and into an environment which they suspect will have limited rules. Despite the current generation's strong connection to their parents (Strauss & Howe, 2000), the move out of their parents' house symbolizes independence. First-year students may have close relationships to their parents and often ask them for advice. Yet, students ultimately expect their decisions to be their own. Decision-making is a key component of their perception of independence (Keup, 2007).

Another unique facet connected to student expectations regarding their independence also relates to their residential experience. Keup (2007) found first-year students who live on campus expect to have a close relationship with their roommate(s). First-year students expect these relationships to replace those with parents and siblings. Oftentimes in reality, students find that roommates cannot replace such familiar

relationships and are disappointed by their relationship with their roommates (Keup, 2007).

Student expectations relating to the development of lifelong friendships link to their hope to enter a “collegiate environment” (Braxton et al., 1995). Entering students expect to find friends through a multitude of college-sponsored activities. Many students, with a traditional understanding of college, expect to engage in partying and finding new commitments with social activities (Schilling & Schilling, 2005). Essentially, students expect to fit in with the student body of the college they select and develop extremely strong friendships.

Social expectations are closely linked to student adjustment issues. Pancer et al. (2000) describe the extent to which a student learns about the college experience prior to arrival as indicative of the integrative complexity of expectations. Their study indicates the more familiar students are with the college they attend, the more complex the set of expectations. Parents play a key role in the development of expectations. In addition to the increased likelihood for high school students to expect to attend college if they live with two biological parents (Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001), the complexity of their expectations increases if they receive information about college from their parents (Pancer et al., 2000). Becoming familiar with college prior to enrolling allows increases in student ability to face challenges in their college life and handle stress appropriately. In turn, a student with complex social expectations is able to adjust smoothly to college (Keup, 2007; Pancer et al., 2000). Those with the greatest risk of a difficult transition to

college are those who have difficulty handling stress and have simple, uninformed expectations of college (Pancer et al., 2000).

Within this section, student expectations have been reviewed. Students hold lofty academic and social expectations for their college experience. They believe they will spend a significant amount of time, more than they ever had in high school, on academic endeavors. First-year students expect to fit in with their peers and find lifelong friendships. Overall, students with the greatest understanding of college have the most complex expectations of college and, in turn, are most likely to transition smoothly into college.

Faculty Expectations of Students

Faculty expectations of their students are often implied through curricular design and academic standards. As such, faculty expectations can be found in class syllabi and how they manage their classes. Research indicates a disconnect between the skills high school teachers value from those viewed important by college instructors. In turn, student academic preparedness does not align with the expectations of college faculty. This section reviews the research literature on college faculty expectations.

Academic expectations of students held by faculty. Faculty expectations for students are based upon college readiness issues. In an effort to align high school standards with the expectations of both college faculty and employers, the founders of the American Diploma Project published a report outlining college faculty expectations for success. Faculty expect students to be able to acquire key academic skills by the time they reach the college classroom, namely the ability to read informational texts such as

textbooks, articles, and journals critically (Achieve, 2007; ACT, 2007). The skill of persuasion is particularly important to faculty who value strong reasoning skills and critical thinking skills in making arguments (Achieve, 2007). Writing skills are of exceptional importance to college faculty. Instructors at the college level expect students to be able to master grammar and language usage skills (ACT, 2003). First-year students who enter college classrooms are required to write essays to inform or persuade, rather than to simply tell a story. Yet, high schools have not emphasized argumentation in writing essays. This lack of attention comes to fruition in the number of students who find themselves in a remedial writing course. More than 40% of first-year students in both community colleges and 4-year universities are required to enroll in a remedial writing course in their first semester of college (ACT, 2007).

A prevalent issue related to faculty expectations is student investment of time in academic coursework. In Schilling and Schilling's (1999) research, faculty members have high expectations that students commit significant time to their educational goals. They found faculty expect students to regularly use the library, participate in campus events such as educational lectures, and read often and regularly, especially articles not assigned for class (Schilling & Schilling, 1999). In terms of time commitment to academic work, many faculty encourage students to spend the traditional two-to-three hours studying for every one hour spent in class (Hassel & Lourey, 2005).

Students entering college expect academic success to be a time-intensive commitment, and expect to put in significant amounts of time on coursework, more so than faculty members even thought necessary in some instances (Lammers, Kiesler,

Curren, Cours, & Connett, 2005). Students expect to study more than they had in high school and expect classes to be taught at a faster pace (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005).

Furthermore, entering first-year students expect the greatest difficulty in transition to college to relate to level of coursework (Keup, 2007).

The expectations students hold for themselves in terms of time commitments to academics are usually not met. They attend classes less than expected (Hassel & Lourey, 2005; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). They spend less time preparing for class, exams, and papers. Sixty-seven percent of students report they spend four hours or less per week studying for a three-credit hour course (Hassel & Lourey, 2005). Yet, students still attain levels of desired success. Kuh (2005) finds most students do not face the intellectual challenge they expect upon entering a college classroom and, as such, do not spend nearly as much time on their studies as they expected and as faculty had hoped. The result is a first-year college experience that is not nearly as challenging as students expect.

Social expectations of students held by faculty. Likely to be one of the most widely-known documents in higher education regarding expectations is the Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U) report titled *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation goes to College* (2002). As an organization with members from over 1,100 institutions, AAC&U furthers its mission of supporting liberal education by representing faculty views on curriculum and teaching philosophy. Published in 2002, *Greater Expectations* generated by a panel of higher education experts, has become, for many, higher education's call to action. The report outlines how

higher education needs to be reformed to effectively educate the population of students attending classes today and prepare them for today's workplace. In what the panel has named the new academy, students become "intentional learners" (p. 33). If faculty are centered on learning, they must create environments where students are "empowered, informed, and responsible" (p.33). The teaching strategies suggested by AAC&U to design such learning environments reflect faculty social expectations. Examples include teamwork, lab projects, and service learning exercises. In being able to work with others, AAC&U calls on faculty to teach students not only to appreciate other students for their differences but also to be civically mindful of the kind of social problems that face the community. Though the call for reform in the new academy to design intentional learning experiences applies to more than just the first-year of college, the authors of the report note the disconnect between the content taught at the high school level versus the kind of deep-level thinking required of first-year students to understand both concepts and working with others (AAC&U, 2002).

Though the social expectations faculty have for their students are limited to working well in groups (Achieve, 2007), faculty would need to reform their expectations if the new academy places emphasis on integrative learning. In facilitating this kind of learning environment, small group discussions and team problem-solving will become the norm. Some faculty have already incorporated this kind of learning in their curriculum through the implementation of learning communities. In learning communities, groups of 15 to 30 students take two or more classes together and may live near each other in the same residence hall (Jaffe, 2007). The intent of this curricular

design is to promote interaction with peers and discuss their perspectives on world issues (Staub & Finley, 2006). Learning communities offer a means for a small group of students to easily engage in conversations with the instructor as well.

In considering the social expectations faculty hold of their students, the term “social” implies something different to the faculty than it does to students. Social expectations for students relate to making friends and being involved in campus activities. To faculty, social engagement of students means being socially responsible. Thus, faculty may implement service learning pedagogy in their first-year classes as a means to teach students how to be socially mindful of community issues. Service-learning activities, in turn, are designed to help students be reflective of how they apply the theory they learn in the classroom into “real world” situations. Faculty intend this reflection of student knowledge and feeling to guide them in their future choices and be civically mindful of problems in society (Simons & Cleary, 2006).

Expectations and Retention Theory

Student attrition can be explained by a lack of fit between the student and the college or university. Describing student-institution fit is complicated, as a number of factors influence fit. Williams (1986) describes fit as the convergence of three sets of variables: student characteristics, institutional characteristics, and the results of the interaction of the two sets of characteristics. Students find a fit with their institution when their values and goals align with the mission and values of the institution.

Student-institution fit is a key component of retention research. As one of the most widely cited researchers on retention (Metz, 2004), Tinto’s (1993) notion of

integration relates to how well a student, both academically and socially, fits within the college or university community and how a student's personality fits with the college's culture. Tinto's idea of this student-institution fit is predicated on four facets of a student's transition to college, those considered the roots of student departure. The first, *adjustment*, is student ability to separate from the past, (i.e. from family, friends, former high school structure). Though the introduction of computer-mediated forms of communication allows for greater maintenance of past relationships, students find their relationships with family and friends change once they begin college (Keup, 2007; Miller, Bender, & Schuh, 2005). Tinto suggests this change is essential in order for a student to fit in a new collegiate environment. *Difficulty*, the second root cause of student attrition, refers to the academic rigor of college coursework. Student ability to adjust to the level of academic difficulty in the college classroom relates to academic preparedness. Student readiness depends in large part on how well the high school curriculum prepared them for college (Adelman, 2006). The third facet of fit, *incongruence*, relates to how well student skills and interests match the academic life of the college. Tinto notes students enter college with unique needs, interests, goals, and preferences. How the college addresses these student needs determines the extent of congruence with the college environment. The last root cause of student departure is *isolation*. The most closely linked facet to social integration, isolation results when a student's expectation to be a part of an acceptable social culture on campus is unmet. When students believe they cannot find a fit with a dominant social group on campus or

even some other non-dominant group, they feel isolated and, in turn, develop a desire to leave the institution.

In each of the above instances, expectations play a central role in determining a student's intent to leave college. Howard (2005) describes expectations as being so fundamental to human experience that they often act as a means to predict what will happen. Determining reasons for student departure links to expectations students have of their college experience. Tinto shows, especially in his labeling of congruence as one of the main root causes for student departure, how unmet student expectations may result in departure from an institution.

The role of expectations in retention theory is also directly related to institutional commitment. If a student sustains commitment to an institution, the student is likely to re-enroll at the institution (Tinto, 1993). Braxton et al. (1995) tested the role of expectations in institutional commitment and persistence. They categorized student expectations into three areas: academic and intellectual development, collegiate environment, and career development. The fulfillment of these expectations resulted in differing student attitudes. For academic and intellectual development expectations and for expectations relating to career development, Braxton et al. found the greater the extent to which academic and career expectations were fulfilled, the greater the level of both academic and social integration into the college community. Conversely, expectations regarding a traditional collegiate environment do not impact the level to which a student integrates into the college community but do impact the level of institutional commitment. Overall, the study indicates a significant relationship between

the degree to which student expectations were met and student persistence (Braxton et al., 1995).

In a follow-up study to Braxton et al., Helland, Stallings, and Braxton (2001) examined how expectations impact the social integration of students and how their fulfillment impacts retention. These authors found fulfillment of student social expectations impacts future institutional commitment as well as the intent to re-enroll in future classes (Helland et al., 2001). Furthermore, fulfillment of social expectations is more likely to be experienced by women and by students who come from families with higher incomes (Helland et al., 2001). From their study, social expectations influence both student level of social integration into the college environment as well as institutional commitment. Both factors, social integration and institutional commitment, directly impact student intention to re-enroll. Helland et al. note, “the fulfillment of social expectations plays a noteworthy role in the college departure process” (p.393).

The convergence of attitudes and self-efficacy is also prevalent in retention research. Bean (2005) highlights the role of self-efficacy in student-institution fit in his psychological model of retention. If a student develops one or more academic competencies valued by others, he or she feels welcomed in the academic community. In turn, student self-efficacy, in addition to that student’s likelihood to stay enrolled, increases.

External factors in addition to self-efficacy impact student sense of belonging. If the student culture is one that values something the student lacks, the student will likely feel disconnected from the student community and may want to leave the institution.

Bean (2005) gives the example of the student with limited financial support at a highly selective university with high tuition costs. If the student befriends a peer group comprised of financially well-off students, the student with limited resources may feel out of place and not welcomed. Essentially, student background can impact the ability to fit in with a peer group.

In summary, the student-institutional fit is important in understanding retention. Expectations, and the level at which they are met, play a key role in determining student fit with an institutional culture. Students begin college expecting to find their values and skills appreciated by their instructors and their peers within the college environment. Retention research suggests that when students perceive this fit, they stay enrolled. When they do not find a fit, they leave the institution.

Conclusion

How do student expectations impact retention? How do faculty expectations of students influence student decision to persist towards graduation? Few research studies track students long enough to determine if their expectations about college at high school graduation affect their decision to a) persist towards graduation at their first college, b) to transfer and graduate from another institution, or c) drop out all together. A comprehensive study with implications for student expectations is the U.S. Department of Education's *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College* (Adelman, 2006). This study tracks 1992 high school graduates via transcript records for 8.5 years. Adelman (2006) describes the study as one that "follows the student, not the institution, because it is the student's success that matters..." (p. 16).

As many studies try and fail in an empirical sense to find the magic approach, method, or intervention that most impacts retention (Hossler, 2006), the U.S. Department of Education's study proves that "the academic intensity of the student's high school curriculum still counts more than anything else in precollege history in providing momentum toward completing a bachelor's degree" (p. 18). When viewed in the context of expectations, this finding makes sense. If self-efficacy helps determine student expectations for success, and finding success in academic endeavors raises a student's level of self-efficacy, then the student who has been exposed to a rigorous curriculum prior to college should have the highest level of self-efficacy and the best chance to succeed and persist. Adelman (2006) offers a suggestion to assist educators given his finding. He states, "expectations for their [colleges'] first-year students in ... gateway courses . . . need to be more public...There is no better way to enhance articulation and preparedness than to display what students can expect" (p. 19).

Colleges and universities look to retention research to identify a fix-it technique to ensure their first-year students re-enroll for the second year. While colleges want students to remain enrolled at their college after the first year, Adelman (2006) offers the suggestion that a different framework to retention research may be necessary. The focus should not be the institution; rather the focus on retention should be on students. *The Toolbox Revisited* research examined student stories through transcript analysis. The qualitative study proposed here illuminates student expectations about college and identifies how these expectations match those of faculty. In turn, the stories of

expectations, belonging both to students and faculty, will determine if alignment of expectations on a college campus can influence student path towards a degree.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The expectations of college students are of great importance as more students make their way into the American higher education system. Though more students are finding postsecondary education more accessible, the rate by which students are persisting to graduation has not increased (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This issue of college student retention highlights how important it is for prospective students to find a fit with the institutions they select in order to reach the goal of graduation.

Understanding student expectations is part of the framework of the literature relating to student retention issues. In order for colleges to meet student needs, they must know what students expect. Furthermore, alignment of expectations is equally important. Expectations must not only align with student experience but also with the expectations of those who play a key role in student success. As such, the identification of faculty expectations for college student success is an equally important component of this study.

Overall, the objective of this qualitative study is to identify first-year student expectations of college as well as expectations held by the instructors of first-year courses. Both groups will be asked to reflect upon those factors that lead to college student success, as measured by the likelihood to persist to graduation. A comparison of these expectations will identify if an alignment of expectations exists. Furthermore, empirical studies on retention provide a framework for making meaning of these

expectations by identifying if expectations held by both students and faculty impact student retention and persistence to graduation. This chapter describes the methodologies that are employed to reach the goals of this study.

Introduction: A Personal Journey

In any qualitative study, the view of the researcher is essential in understanding the context of the study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) express the importance of explaining the perspectives that impact the learning generated from a qualitative study. In noting this situated learning, the researcher acknowledges that learning from a qualitative study is occurring in a cultural context (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To adequately explain the context of this qualitative research, the following section outlines the development of my interest in the topic of first-year student expectations.

Upon graduating from high school, I had difficulty deciding if I wanted my college experience to be at a large university or a small college. With two members of my immediate family having degrees from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, I chose a big school. In my first year at U of I, I experienced many challenges common to first-year college students away from home for the first time. I did not find a group of friends with whom I connected, nor did I get along with my roommate. While feeling socially isolated, I flourished academically with near perfect grades. Not having found connections with others socially, I found myself studying hard and often. Though I was intensely challenged by the level of academics at the university, I committed myself only to my academic success.

Despite my good grades, I did not persist at the university. I transferred and later graduated from St. Norbert College, a small, faith-based liberal arts college. After earning a master's degree in Education, I began my professional career in student affairs administration. In my position as dean of first-year students at a private, independent university, I advised students who were having difficulty making the transition to college. In this role of retention specialist, I was responsible for intervening when students demonstrated behaviors that made them "at-risk," mostly poor academic performance and disciplinary problems in the residence halls. In these cases, I often found their decisions to attend my university were not based in reality. Whether they found they were not getting playing time on an athletic team or being overly challenged by managing their time, my conversations with them indicated they did not know what to expect in the first year of college. If they did have expectations, they were often too lofty as they described a pursuit towards "the best years of their lives."

In my first year as dean of first-year students, my institution was selected to be a founding institution in the Foundations of Excellence project with the Policy Center on the First Year of College (Policy Center on the First Year of College, 2007). As one of 24 institutions, my university assessed its approach to educating first-year students to test a national blueprint by which all higher education institutions could design first-year programs. My institution's acceptance into this program introduced me to national leaders in first-year efforts and further encouraged me to focus my professional niche on first-year student issues.

Since the Foundations of Excellence project, I have continued to work with first-year students but my professional role has evolved. I now direct a student success center where academic advising and career development are blended. I am a mid-level manager as I look at first-year retention issues systemically and find ways for staff to connect with students.

After a few years of professional experience, I realize that my college experience would not have necessarily categorized me as an “at-risk” student. I did not convey my unhappiness; only my family and a few acquaintances knew I was struggling. In turn, I left my chosen university for a place where I fit with both the academic and social culture. Retention research supports the outcome of my story; to persist in college, I needed a place where I felt socially connected and academically engaged. I did not know how to put these sentiments into words as an 18-year-old; the only expectation I had of college was that I would succeed academically, make friends, and, like many others, enjoy the best four years of my life.

As I continue to work in higher education, I find it essential to have an understanding of today’s college students. I am intrigued by the research as well as the stereotypes and misconceptions about the generation of traditionally-aged students currently on campus. Research by Strauss and Howe (2000), the experts credited with naming the Millennial Generation, is slowly being refuted by recent findings (Taylor, 2006). The millennial generation is not as accepting of authority as Strauss and Howe have suggested; rather these students question authority on campus frequently. Strauss and Howe’s research painted a positive picture of this collaborative generation that wants

to give back to its respective communities. However, Twenge (2006) made mainstream news by noting in her book, Generation Me, the narcissistic attitude and sense of entitlement among today's young adults (Associated Press, 2007).

My interest in first-year students, their transition to college, and the ability for colleges to address retention converge in this qualitative study. An identification of student expectations of college will help gain a greater understanding of first-year students. Conversations with faculty members will determine how college teachers perceive student success. This study represents my interest in knowing if faculty hold the same expectations for students as students hold for themselves, and how these expectations address retention. This chapter outlines how the methods to be used in this qualitative study will identify student and faculty expectations and how the convergence of the two may inform student retention.

Research Design

As outlined in Chapter Two, students entering college have complex expectations. They hold expectations about academic life, social experiences, and how college will prepare them for the future. These expectations represent their attitudes and feelings about being identified as a college student. Their persistence in college may relate to how well their expectations are met.

Faculty serve a key role in influencing the fulfillment of student expectations. The faculty's expectations of their students are important in understanding how the attitudes of entering students align with those who hold great influence in creating the culture of the institution. As such, this study offers comparisons between what students

expect of college in order to be successful and what faculty expect of their students in order to achieve success.

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) describe a qualitative study as a means to acquire knowledge about people. The study of expectations is an effort to better understand the experience (or hoped-for experience) of a group of individuals, and a study using a qualitative method will lead to a rich description of expectations held by students and faculty. Interviewing, as such, is an appropriate data collection tool for this study. Seidman (1998) indicates "...the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they made of that experience" (p. 3). Exploring the expectations of both students and faculty will allow for a better understanding of how the two groups of individuals share similar thoughts and experiences.

Student and faculty populations. Because higher education is becoming more accessible, it includes a diverse group of first-year students. The adult student who attends a community college on a part-time basis for the first time and a recent high school graduate who moves across the country to begin a college career at an Ivy League institution are both considered first-year students. This label may be their only similarity. In an effort to narrow the vastness of the first-year student population for this study, the student population of this study will be traditional-aged students living in campus residence halls at a small four-year university. They will be defined as traditional in that they will not have attended another college full-time and will have graduated from high school only a few months prior to the start of the college classes in the fall.

Studies on traditional-aged college students at small institutions are rarely the focus of empirical retention studies and, thus, demonstrate a need for study at a small college. A reason for this gap in the literature could be attributed to higher rates of degree completion at small, private colleges as compared to large, public institutions. Because of this difference, many articles relating to retention suggest that creating atmospheres that feel “small” to students (i.e. learning communities). Yet, small size does not ensure a higher retention rate, and Tinto (1993) suggests that individual studies are the best source of determining retention rates on individual campuses. Despite the slight difference in rates of retention between small and large institutions, retention remains a concern for all in higher education.

Furthermore, most empirical retention studies address individual students. Antley (1999) describes these studies as illustrating a micro-view of student retention. Researchers often identify at-risk student characteristics with the intent to develop college programs to identify students most likely to leave college. Many studies on students do not provide insight on a macro-level, which could uncover factors other than student characteristics that influence retention. This study, in investigating the alignment of student and faculty expectations, may contribute to the limited amount of literature that includes another important population on campus who may be able to influence retention trends.

Residential students at a small four-year institution are more likely to have greater interaction with faculty than commuter students (Astin, 1999). Despite the likelihood for interaction with faculty, residential students are not assured higher retention rates.

Terezini and Pascerella (1982) found that only among male students does retention increase in a residential setting. Given that more women attend and graduate from college (U.S. Department of Education, 2005), a residential experience does not ensure student persistence. Thus, a small, residential college is a suitable environment to identify the expectations of the students and faculty to determine how these expectations impact student retention.

Teaching faculty at all institutions vary greatly in terms of academic credentials and their teaching loads. The classes at small colleges are not always taught by full-time faculty. These campuses often employ part-time instructors who teach one or two class sections. At four-year institutions across the country, part-time instructors represent approximately 30 to 40 percent of the teaching faculty at four-year institutions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008; Winkun & Stanley, 2000). Two-year institutions are no longer the only employers of part-time faculty. As such, part-time instructors are common in sections of classes taught for first-year students at four-year institutions.

Sampling criteria for students. Given the two distinct populations in this study (students and faculty), two different criteria will be employed even though both populations will be drawn from the same institution. Sampling criteria for students ensure the sample represents the traditional-aged first-year student population. The students involved in this study will be enrolled in full-time course loads and reside on-campus. All student participants will have graduated from high school in the last year. The student sample size of eight will be reflective of the demographic composition of first-year students in four-year universities across the United States (Hurtado et al, 2007).

As such, five student participants will be women, and at least two participants will be students of color.

Sampling criteria for faculty. The criteria for faculty participants relate to faculty teaching load. Selected faculty must teach at least one class for first-year students at the time of their participation in the study. Faculty may teach general education classes or major classes and be at any rank as long as at least one of their classes has at least 50% of first-year students enrolled. Of a total sample size of eight, three will be part-time instructors to represent the national trend of staffing undergraduate sections with part-time faculty (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008; Winkun & Stanley, 2000). An effort will be made to equally represent both genders in the faculty sample. The organization of this sampling criteria reflects Seidman's (1998) concept of purposeful sampling. In selecting faculty who reflect a representative demographic, I am not using a random sample but rather one that appropriately represents the instructors who teach first-year students.

The faculty chosen for this study are instructors at the same institution as the students. The faculty will also be diverse, especially in terms of teaching loads. They will represent a range of disciplines, but will represent the subjects commonly covered in first-year student curriculum. Overall, the group of faculty selected will represent the type of instructors first-year students would most likely encounter in their first semester of college.

Gaining access to participants. In order to have access to faculty and students who meet the sampling criteria, an invitation to be a research liaison will be sent to two college administrators employed by a private four-year institution (Appendix A). Using

liaisons may increase students' level of trust by informing them their university is aware of the research project.

With the assistance of a liaison, I will make a proposal to the institutional review board of the selected college by stating my intent to conduct a study at the college in a cooperating institution letter (Appendix B). Once approved and with a commitment from a liaison to assist, the liaison will acquire an email contact list of 40 eligible students, a sample size likely to yield potentially eight student interviews. The invitation to participate (Appendix C) will be sent to students from the liaison via their university email account with a synopsis of the study attached (Appendix D). Those indicating a willingness to participate will respond directly to me via email. Thus, the liaison will not know which students agreed to participate.

To gather a faculty sample size of eight, I will identify 25 full-time faculty members and 10 adjunct instructors who teach first-year classes with the assistance of a liaison. The liaison will send letters of invitation to participate in the study (Appendix E) along with the synopsis to the potential faculty participants. Instructors who agree to participate will indicate their willingness directly to me via email.

If I am unable to get at least 8 in either group, I will work with a liaison to identify another group of students or instructors who meet the criteria. Subsequently, the liaison will send an invitation to this group of potential participants and repeat the same invitation process. Should I receive a willingness to participate from students or faculty who do not meet the criteria or are no longer needed, I will send the participant a letter indicating my appreciation for their interest but declining participation (Appendix F).

Obtaining participant consent. A complete understanding of the study and the level of commitment required to participate is essential in securing rich data (Seidman, 1998). In alignment with the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board's requirements for the study of human subjects, my study includes careful attention to obtaining participant consent. I will initiate email to the potential participants through my liaison (contact), fully explain the details of the study (conversation), and receive confirmation of participation from participants (confirmation) (Loyola University Chicago, 2007).

The approach to invite students and faculty will be fully considered to adequately inform and prepare the participant. I will obtain consent through the research ethics committee from the cooperating institution. I can then inform the potential participants of their institution's consent. The letters of invitation will be written in a manner that is appropriate for the represented population, student or faculty. For the student population, I will make clear the decision to participate will in no way impact grades or academic standing. For faculty, I will note the decision to participate will not impact their teaching status. The time commitment of the interview, approximately one hour, will also be outlined. Confidentiality will be ensured as I will select aliases for participants. For those who decide to participate and complete the interview, the researcher will provide a \$20 coupon to an online shopping site (Amazon.com). I will secure an on-campus location through my liaison to ensure participants do not need to access transportation to participate. I will communicate the times and locations of the interviews with the

students and faculty. My liaisons will not be informed of those who agreed to participate in the study.

To acquaint students and faculty with the study, I will send a copy of the interview protocol in advance to the participants. This will help the participants better understand the nature of the study to help ensure they are comfortable in granting consent to participate. A written informed consent requiring a signature at the time of the interview will be required. It will outline the research questions, the confidentiality of the information shared in the interviews, and the opportunity for a participant to withdraw from the study at any point for any reason (Appendix G). Through conversations and letters, I will ensure that students and instructors have all the necessary information to decide to participate in this qualitative study.

Data Collection

To understand how participants make sense of their experience in a qualitative study, interviews allow for greater understanding of participants' feelings and experiences. Interviews are particularly appropriate for this study because the most common way of measuring expectations is through survey research (Hurtado et. al, 2007; Kuh et. al, 2005). In survey research, the participant only responds to questions about certain expectations to the extent to which they are asked. The open-ended nature of interview questions allows for a greater understanding of how students and faculty define their expectations for student success.

Personal interviews with participants. Interviews that focus on identifying and making meaning of expectations are phenomenological in nature. In this study, the

identification of student and faculty expectations is not to be merely descriptive; rather, participants will be asked about the experiences that led them to hold the expectations that they have, either as a college student or as a college instructor. Van Manen (1990) describes reflections of experiences, or in these case expectations, in phenomenological studies as transformations of experiences. Given that data from participants are reflective in nature, the actual experience changes because it is reported through a reflective filter. Given my interest in relating the data from my interviews to retention research, asking participants targeted questions about the meaning of their expectations is important in identifying themes among participant responses.

The interview protocol for students (Appendix H) and the interview protocol for faculty (Appendix I) include a predominance of open-ended questions. Seidman (1998) indicates a variety of ways to phrase open-ended questions but notes the most useful are those that identify what the experience is like for the individual. Open-ended questions allow for limited presumptions on the part of researchers as they can never fully predict where an answer to an open-ended question may lead (Seidman, 1998).

As part of the interview process, I will tape record conversations with participants. The tape-recordings will be used by a hired transcription service to transcribe the interviews into text for analysis. The transcriber will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix J) to ensure the data are held in strict confidence.

Documents. Though interviews will be the primary method of data collection, the syllabi of courses taught by the selected faculty group will be reviewed. Students perceive syllabi as a means to determine faculty's expectations for how to be successful

in a course (Garavalia, Hummel, Wiley, & Huitt, 1999; Parkes, Fix, & Harris, 2003). For this reason, a review of faculty syllabi to determine faculty expectations is a key component in identifying their expectations of students.

Journal. The last method to be used consistently throughout the study will be the maintenance of an electronic journal to record data findings and my personal thoughts. Rossman and Rallis (2003) describe the importance of recording the researcher's emotional and analytical reaction to data gathering. Keeping my written thoughts in an organized electronic file will assist in the coding stages of data analysis.

Data Analysis

The primary means of data analysis for this study is transcript coding. Coding, according to Rossman and Rallis (2003), is the "formal representation of analytical thinking" (p. 286). Coding represents a method of identifying repeated patterns (Wolcott, 1994). In identifying these patterns, researchers recognize relationships and connections among the data collected in the interviews.

Coding provides researchers with a means of protecting their research from personal biases. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), coding allows the researcher to continually question the findings in the data. Analysis confirmed by findings that result from coding offers researchers an assuredness that their deductions are confirmable. The process by which I will code the data represents the suggestions of Rossman and Rallis (2003). Coding occurs continually throughout the study and begins with an identification of three or four emergent themes related to the study's research questions. An effective means of coding is using the literature review as clues for identifying categories for

coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). To code the data from interviews and my personal journal, I will begin by labeling categories relating to academic, social, and career expectations as these themes will serve as an outline for the results and discussion sections of the study. Further analysis will identify additional sub-themes.

To code the data from the faculty syllabi, I will identify if and how faculty communicate expectations in the description of course overviews, learning objectives, or other statements that give information about the class. I will also analyze the level of clarity by which faculty communicate their expectations in their syllabi by comparing the data acquired from interviews to the data acquired from a review of syllabi.

Trustworthiness

According to Donmeyer (1987), the seminal work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlines the foundation of trustworthiness in qualitative research. In a qualitative study, trustworthiness ensures a study is valid, reliable, and objective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In naturalistic inquiry, the foundation of qualitative study, Donmeyer (1987) summarizes Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of trustworthiness as follows:

Lincoln and Guba's version of naturalistic or qualitative methodology emphasizes avoiding the use of any social science constructs, reporting only interpretations consistent with the interpretations of the researchers' subjects, avoiding simple cause/effect analysis, avoiding anything resembling experimental manipulation, using the human being as a study's primary research instrument, and engaging in single-case rather than multiple-site studies. (p. 470)

In using naturalistic inquiry as the basis for qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer "four naturalistic analogues" (p. 189) by which to evaluate the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. They include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following sections provide information by which to evaluate the trustworthiness of my research study on student and faculty expectations.

Credibility. When researchers undertake qualitative research, the compilation of data is often in the form of description through notes, observations, and the transcription of interviews. Qualitative researchers encounter questions about these descriptions relating to their validity. How does the reader know what he or she is reading to be true? One way for a researcher to ensure the credibility of data is by incorporating member checks throughout the study (Janesick, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks allow the participant to review the data provided by that participant to ensure its accuracy. In this study, I will ensure all participants have an opportunity to review their own interview transcripts to ensure credibility. I will not move forward with an analysis until I receive confirmation of accuracy.

Another means to ensure credibility is to check the data in varying forms. Triangulation is the process by which a researcher employs several methods to answer a research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews will be the primary means of collecting data in this study but I will also employ document analysis of faculty syllabi and keep a detailed journal of my work. Each of these methods will allow me to answer my research questions and ensure the credibility of my study.

Transferability. With the increasing number of students attending college, the findings related to student expectations may have great impact on American institutions of higher education. The findings of this study are transferable and applicable to many

colleges and universities. By focusing on students and instructors representative of demographic trends in higher education, the findings may be transferable to many settings.

The nature of interviews helps in determining the level of transferability to similar college settings. With multiple interviews taking place over a period of time, I have the opportunity to ensure the transferability of interviews. Additionally, Rossman and Rallis (2003) discuss the importance of thick description, a concept posited by Geertz (1973). Geertz (1973) asserts that thick description requires completeness in describing the totality of a culture. Though this study is small in scope, ensuring great detail with thick description in the written dissertation increases the likelihood of transferability.

Dependability. Dependability is the term used in qualitative studies in reference to the reliability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability is synonymous to validity, and in the case of a qualitative study involving interviews, it involves reliability of the participants. Those participants who are most dependable are those who would be able to describe events because they experienced them first-hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). For this study, my participants are dependable because I will be asking them questions about their feelings, attitudes, and experiences. My study might be less dependable, for example, if I were to ask parents of first-year students what their sons and daughters expect of college.

In addition to including dependable interview subjects, other previously mentioned methodologies will also ensure dependability. When I use three methods of data collection (interviews, document analysis, and journaling), I am contributing to the

dependability of the data. With regards to the primary means of data collection via interviews, asking students and faculty to review the transcripts of their interviews will also ensure dependability.

Confirmability. Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe confirmability as “parallel to the conventional criterion of objectivity” (p. 242). Essentially, confirmability is the notion that data are real and not fictionalized by the researcher. Given that I am the only researcher in this study, the interpretation of data will be subjective but reliable. I will keep detailed notes of my data collection as well as chronicle my research through journaling. These notes, along with member checks of participants’ own interview transcripts, are two ways to support my study’s confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

As in any study, the researcher must consider any ethical dilemmas involving human subjects. My plan to address ethical considerations begins by receiving approval for my research from the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board. I will also seek approval from the ethics committee of the institution where I hope to conduct my interviews. I will ensure that both institutions are aware of the ethical considerations of my study.

For student and faculty participants, I will ensure their conversations with me are held in strict confidence. Upon completion of the transcription of the interviews, I will send each participant a copy to review. Only upon receiving confirmation that the interview accurately reflects thoughts conveyed in the interview will I continue my analysis. An assistant who aids in the transcription of data will not be affiliated with the

institution of the faculty and students. Furthermore, I will select pseudonyms for participants. I will also keep raw data in a locked safe until I destroy it two years following the completion of the study.

In addressing ethical considerations, I have consulted the code of ethics of The American Sociological Society (1999). These guidelines address professional competence, integrity, scientific responsibility, respect for people's rights, dignity, diversity, and social responsibility. Overall, the methods I use in this study will ensure I demonstrate the utmost respect for each participant.

Limitations of the Study

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) offer a number of means by which a researcher can ensure credibility and rigor in a quality study (p. 69). Yet, no study is without its limitations. For a qualitative dissertation study, the most common limitation is sample size. This study is no different. A combined total of 16 interviews is a reasonable size for the scope of this study. In order to best address this limitation I will use triangulation in the study. Thus, an analysis of syllabi and my reflective journal will complement the data gathered from interviews.

Another limitation of the study is the selection of one institution from which to draw participants. With diverse types of first-year students, from part-time adult students to commuting traditional-aged students, this study focuses only on one type of student – the traditional-aged, resident student. While I will make every effort to make the findings of this study transferable to other similar institutions, the study addresses only one segment of the student population.

Lastly, my experience as a professional in higher education is a limitation worth noting. As previously noted, I have worked with first-year students. Yet, I have not systematically explored their expectations of college in an empirical manner, and I have never explored how instructor expectations match student expectations. Furthermore, I have not had individual interaction with students or faculty who will participate in this study.

Conclusion

This study represents an attempt to close a gap in higher education research relating to college student expectations and retention. The alignment of student and faculty expectations, especially of those faculty who teach first-year classes, may assist institutions in preparing students for college success. With the identification of faculty expectations, students will be better prepared for college-level coursework. This preparedness is surely needed as more than 40% of first-year students enroll in a remedial course in their first semester of college (Schneider, 1999).

The methodology outlined in this chapter addresses the ethical considerations needed to conduct a study of strong quality. As the researcher, my hope is to do no harm in gathering comprehensive data for thoughtful analysis. As someone who hopes to contribute to higher education research, I find the alignment of student and faculty expectations in a retention framework closes one gap in the literature that, in the end, will benefit an increasing number of first-year college students.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

I was really expecting I would get a good education.
- Tyson

Introduction

The first two chapters of this study outline the many factors that impact student and faculty expectations for the first year of college, from personal expectations of students for success to faculty perceptions of contributors to student persistence. Though more students are attending college than ever before, graduation rates have not kept pace (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2007). Essentially, students begin college expecting to be successful and evidence of college drop-out rates do not influence student expectations as most first-year students believe they will graduate (Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001). Students who are most successful find a fit within the college campus, and are likely to have found their experiences in college meet their expectations.

In addition to student expectations, the expectations held by faculty play a role in creating an institutional culture for student success on a college campus. Faculty, according to Tinto (1993), create the intellectual ethos of an institution. Thus, faculty expectations of student success influence their interactions with first-year students and, in turn, impact the student experience of the newest college students on campus.

The literature review in Chapter Two highlights three themes among student expectations. Interviews with both first-year students and faculty who teach first-year students were organized around these three main themes of *academic expectations*, *social expectations*, and *career expectations*. In order to examine if and how faculty expectations align with student expectations of college, both faculty and students were asked questions that explore these themes. Students were asked if they believe meeting academic, social, and career expectations impacts their likelihood to persist in college. Faculty questions pertaining to student persistence were also raised during the interviews.

In addition to interviews, two additional forms of data collection included a review of all course syllabi contributed by the faculty members in the study as well as my personal research journal. The syllabi submitted for analysis were distributed in first-year classes taught by faculty participants. These data were used as a means of triangulation, a research method to manage bias in qualitative studies. The findings from these data sources are integrated into this report.

From the beginning of the study, one goal was to ensure a participant pool reflective of first-year students and faculty who teach first-year students across the country, even though the study offers only a snapshot of the demographics of first-year students. This study was conducted at a small private college in the Midwest with approximately 2,000 undergraduates (58% women and 42% men) and 350 graduate students with an entering first-year class size of 530. The average high school grade point average of these first-year students is 3.49. A total of 95% of the first-year class receive institutional grants to help cover the \$34,200 in tuition and housing costs. The college

has a 79% first-year retention rate and a 63 % six-year graduation rate. Eighty-eight percent of the first-year year class are considered in-state students. The college has a 15:1 student to faculty ratio and 88% of the faculty have terminal degrees. While a small, private, residential college does not reflect most college-going experiences of those across the country, the literature indicates a gap in research relating to small, private institutions that may be less prestigious than large schools, especially well-known research institutions, across the country.

In securing a participant pool, the original criteria as described in Chapter Three were met. The sampling parameters for the 8 student participants included: 1) all were to have graduated from high school in the last year; 2) five student participants are women; and 3) at least two participants are students of color. Only those students who were in the first year of college immediately following high school were asked to participate in the project. The following chart (Table 1) with the pseudonyms of the student interviewees, shows how sampling criteria were met.

Table 1

Student Participant Criteria

Student	Gender	Student of Color	Full-time Enrollment	Reside On-Campus	Graduated High School Last Year
Bob	Male	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cindy	Female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Giselle	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hannah	Female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lily	Female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shannon	Female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Steve	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tyson	Male	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Chapter Three also outlines the sampling criteria for the 8 faculty participants of the study. The faculty each taught courses designed for first-year students. Three participants do not have full-time faculty appointments. This number of part-time faculty reflects the proportion of instructors who teach first-year students across the county. I was pleased to have found that my attempts at purposeful sampling (Seidman, 1998) led to a diverse group of faculty members who taught a wide range of first-year classes. The following chart (Table 2) with pseudonyms shows how selection criteria were met within the faculty participant pool and lists the first-year class taught by each instructor.

Table 2

Faculty Participant Criteria

Faculty	Gender	First-year Course	Part-time/Full-time Instruction Load
Natalie Anderson	Female	Introduction to Psychology	Full-time
William Colfax	Male	Introduction to American Government	Part-time
Hope Harris	Female	English Seminar	Part-time
Mary Jackson	Female	English Seminar, Honors	Full-time
Silvina Jimenez	Female	Introduction to Spanish	Part-time
Julie Kingsley	Female	Introduction to Sociology	Full-time
Mark O'Neil	Male	Introduction to Latin	Full-time
Jim Stone	Male	Speech Communication	Full-time

This introduction outlines how sampling criteria were met for the purpose of this study. The next section outlines the findings that show how students shape their expectations of college and how faculty believe students shape their expectations. The following sections of this chapter include a review of student and faculty perceptions and conclude by describing the degree to which student and faculty expectations are in alignment.

The Shaping of Student Expectations

Prior to asking both students and faculty about their academic, social, and career expectations, I felt it was important to establish if both groups had given any thought about their expectations. One of my research questions for this study is: What

experiences prior to college do students recount that most influenced their expectations for their first year? As such, I asked students about the factors that shaped their expectations to answer my research question of how students form their expectations of college. These questions required them to reflect back on their experience prior to starting college. I asked the students who they felt influenced their expectations of college and if, overall, they felt prepared for college. Two themes emerged in characterizing the formation of student expectations: a) general expectations of college are academic in nature; and b) expectations were influenced by parents and high school English teachers.

Faculty questions led to descriptions of their educational backgrounds. Since each faculty member had unique educational experiences, I felt it was important to know how their own educational experiences shape their current perspectives. In asking these questions, though, I wanted to be sure that the faculty were responding to my questions about their expectations of students from their role as faculty and not as former college students looking back on their own experiences. Two themes emerged among faculty expectations: a) faculty believe students expect college to be about becoming independent and b) faculty believe family and college admission officers influence student expectations.

Student expectations. Overall, the students' general expectations about college related to academics. Though the nature of my questions presumed that all students had formed expectations about college, one student mentioned that she did not have expectations of college since she was, in her words, a first-generation college student.

Given the popularity of this term in higher education, I noted that Lily's acknowledgement seemed like someone else had used this term and she identified with it. Lily's answer, though, was the exception. The other seven students revealed an expectation that college was going to be challenging in some way, especially since the basis of comparison is their high school experiences. Tyson's answer reflects this idea. He says:

...well, I was really expecting that I would get a good education. You're in college versus high school so I figured the classes would be tougher. But, at the same time, it would focus more on you actually learning instead of just getting passed through like it was high school.

Bob, too, believes that college would be more challenging than high school, in terms of academics, and "not too much else." Giselle offered insights into her fears since she knew it would be different than her life before college. She goes beyond her academic expectations of college and talks about her first year being "crazy and difficult." Giselle thought she "was going to have a really hard time making friends, new classes, a new schedule, and new food." While Giselle incorporates her academic expectations into this broad question, she also alludes to social expectations. Overall, the students often use the word "hard" to describe what they generally expected of college. This description aligns with research that indicates students expect college to be harder than it later turns out to be (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

In the early questions of each interview when students talked about who influenced their expectations of college, they discussed parents and high school teachers. Parental influence was an expected answer since research about today's generation of

traditional-aged college students notes a general closeness between parents and children that lasts beyond the teen years (Strauss & Howe, 2000). Five of the eight students said their parents influenced their expectations of college. Tyson, when asked who influenced his expectations about college prior to enrolling, offered the following:

Well, probably my mom just because education was really big in our family and she's always been getting on my case about studying and stuff, but in a good way...She actually set guidelines for expectations...like my family is probably not the smartest family in the world, but...we really try hard and both my mom and dad's families stress education as being a top priority.

Other answers included family members, such as a sibling or a cousin, who has already entered college. Yet, students most likely referenced parents and teachers, as described in the next section, for influencing their expectations of college.

Half of the students mentioned high school teachers as impacting their expectations of college. Of the four students who mentioned high school teachers, three of them specifically mentioned their high school English teacher. Cindy describes how her English teacher influenced her expectations of college-level writing:

I really think my high school honors English teacher really prepared me for what to expect. Instead of just going over the high school [assignment] like "just write your paper," she was always very particular about stuff and I think drilled into us what's going to happen in college, this is what your professors are going to ask in your papers. So, I think she taught me what to expect.

In all three cases, the students had taken Advanced Placement (AP) English. Shannon notes she felt prepared for college because her English teacher and other AP teachers would present information or an assignment in class and say "this is what you are going to see in college." These high school teachers made the formation of academic expectations explicit. The students, in effect, not only formed their expectations from

their interaction with their high school English teacher, they also felt prepared because of their experience in their AP English course. Students mentioned the role of their high school English teacher later in the interview as well, especially when asked about academic expectations in particular.

Shannon's description demonstrates how high school teachers play a significant role in helping students feel prepared for college. Seven of the eight students felt they were prepared for college. Lily felt she was prepared because her teachers were "cracking down on us senior year." The one student who did not feel prepared said her high school did not have a good reputation for high academic standards and, as such, she did not feel prepared for college. All students answered the question relating to preparedness by talking about how they were prepared for the academic experience of college. Bob says, "I felt pretty well prepared. In high school I was an honors student, I got mostly A's throughout all four years so I wasn't really worried at all." Students report the influence of parents and teachers in shaping their expectations. The next section describes how faculty perceive the shaping of their student expectations.

Faculty expectations. As previously indicated, the eight faculty participants in this study represent a range of academic disciplines. Only two instructors teach the same subject which, in this case, is English. In addition to their teaching disciplines, I also wanted to learn about their academic background and undergraduate experience. All but one of the instructors attended medium to large state-funded institutions for their undergraduate degrees. Given this study was conducted at a small, private college, the faculty's undergraduate experiences were different than those of the students I

interviewed -- the students they teach. Furthermore, the faculty participants had a range of experience teaching first-year students, from two to thirteen years. Interestingly, a part-time instructor had the most years of experience teaching first-year students.

In terms of their qualifications for teaching, only three of the eight faculty members hold terminal degrees. However, four faculty members were currently enrolled in doctoral programs. While holding a terminal degree was not a criterion for instructors in this study, I feel this finding is worth noting. I believe that in my request for interview participants, faculty currently involved in doctoral study were sympathetic to my need for interview subjects and likely volunteered their time to help someone in a similar position.

Faculty members were asked how they believe students perceive the college experience prior to matriculation. Half of the faculty members said they believed students would expect college to offer them more autonomy, more freedom to make their own choices, and more personal responsibility than they had ever experienced. Professor Julie Kingsley offers the following:

I think there is a sense of just, uncertainty, as the norms are shifting from high school to college level expectations. I think they generally understand that it's going to be harder and that they'll have more autonomy. I guess those are the two things that I sort of recognize...I guess that is what they would expect -- sort of more autonomy in choosing their coursework, recognizing that they have more responsibility in that sense, also greater challenges.

Professors Jim Stone and William Colfax believe entering first-year students expect a relaxed approach to learning, one where students and faculty interact often and informally. Professor Mark O'Neil believes students attend college to become "closer to a professional level of being able to work, think, speak, and write." Professor Silvina

Jimenez notes her belief that students expect college to be like high school. She was not pleased with this expectation since it implies that college instructors will “hold their hands” through challenging coursework. Only Natalie Anderson answered that expectations of first-year students vary greatly by sharing the following:

Oh gosh, I think they anticipate it’s going to be a higher work load, and from there it seems like there is so much variation depending on what kind of quality of their high school experience was or what type of courses they were enrolled in high school and things like that, what level they were pushed to do critical thinking, how well they seemed to manage their own learning process...

The faculty’s reflections about *who* influences student expectations align with the students’ answers. Five of the eight faculty members talked about how family is influential in helping students shape their expectations of college. Professor Julie Kingsley offers an answer to explain why she believes parents influence student expectations:

Well, I think for students who have parents who are college graduates, that certainly is formative, the family being such a primary agent of socialization, giving them ideas about the responsibilities they’ll have... We do these visit days and I think those are generally helpful for the students. They come and meet the faculty and...typical with millennial students [they are] very intensively parented children so their parents will often be the ones that direct the conversation at those orientations.

Professors Mary Jackson and Mark O’Neil noted the role of admission in shaping expectations. Professor O’Neil says:

I wouldn’t be surprised if a lot, not even college admissions counselors, but also college advertising – that we have a lot of “grow,” “explore,” “discover” emphasis on individual instruction. Here I think there is a fair amount of carry-through on that but I can hardly imagine picking up any of those books (publicity) of liberal arts colleges, where there aren’t similar buzz works and so I think that may be a bigger source of influence than it was for me.

By comparison, students never mentioned admission representatives or admission materials influencing their expectations of college.

Alignment of student and faculty perceptions of how students shape expectations.

In this study, the students were more likely to believe they are prepared for college than the faculty believe their students to be ready. Half of the faculty in the study note seeing a range of readiness for college-level work, and some express a belief that those in high school honor classes are students significantly more ready than the rest of the student body. Professor Julie Kingsley offers the following example of this range when grading papers:

I just graded the first major paper two weeks ago in an intro class. And there were quite a number of A's. And there were also quite a number of F's, as well, for students just not following the directions, having major writing issues in terms of clarity, of being able to express their ideas.

It appears that the role of honors classes, for both faculty and students, implies a sense of readiness for students. If a student had honors courses in high school, they expect to be ready for college.

In terms of who shapes student expectations of college, students noted both high school teachers and parents were likely to help share their ideas of college. The faculty were able to predict the role of parents in the formation of student expectations. Yet, two faculty noted the admission office and the institution's publicity as playing a role in shaping expectations. Students, though, did not mention admission representatives. Yet, overall, faculty and students were in agreement of who and how student expectations are

shaped. The next section of this chapter describes in greater depth student and faculty expectations of academic success and how they align.

Academic Expectations

*“I expected a much greater challenge, which I haven’t yet found,
which is great so far.”-- Steve*

The interview questions in this study relating to academic expectations allow students to explain what they expected out of their academic experience now that they had been enrolled as a first-year student. Students offered specificity in terms of what it takes to be academically successful, what they believe faculty expect of them, and how prepared they felt for the academic experience of college. Three themes emerged within the data relating to academic expectations: a) perceived challenge of coursework is greater than its actual level of difficulty; b) time management is a key component of the academic experience of college; and c) ultimate responsibility for academic success lies with students. Each theme will be described with supporting data, first from student interviews and then from faculty interviews and syllabi. The first theme directly relates to the perception of challenge as it relates to academic rigor.

Student perception of challenge in coursework. The first theme that emerges from questions about academic expectations relates to the student perception of challenge. The data from this study, most notably those data from male interviewees, align with research from the literature review that students do not find college as difficult as they thought it would be (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Steve offers an explanation about finding college less difficult than expected:

I think it is a lot...I don't know how to say this... but college has been as hard as I expected it to be, granted I am only in what, my fifth or sixth week. But I expected a much greater challenge, which I haven't yet found, which is great so far.

His description shows that he is not disappointed that college is easier than he expected; rather he seems relieved. Other male students, too, indicated that they expected college to get harder than it currently is as a first-year student. Bob explains what he expects in his future college years:

For the future, it's probably going to continue to get more difficult, I guess. The things that I'm learning in classes are probably going to be more interesting. As time goes on, I'm going to be studying more, like, classes in your major as opposed to just general education classes. So you're going to be studying more of the stuff that you want to learn about as opposed to stuff that you have to learn about.

Another male of the group, Tyson, shared a similar feeling about managing what he has to learn and what he wants to learn. He says:

...one expectation I had in high school that I've changed [is that in] high school I was mainly working to get the GPA. So I felt my GPA spoke louder than my education. So, in college, I'm really trying to reverse that by, say, trying to apply the little things. Like, even if it is just a bogus math assignment or something that would be really easy to blow off and say, "I'm never going to use this," try to apply the little things and just trying to take little opportunities to learn instead of just trying to shoot for a perfect GPA.

Tyson's answer demonstrates the effort it takes to make meaning out of easy assignments, an effort he did not necessarily expect he would need to take because he figured college academics would be more challenging.

Female students, on the other hand, focused more on personal achievement for their academic expectations. Like the men, Lily says her expectation is that college will become more challenging with time. She explains:

...[college is] going to get harder, a lot harder. But all the work and the labor that I'll be doing with academics will be fruitful, and it will be good, and it will be stuff that I'll be able to carry throughout life.

Female students, unlike the men, were more likely to talk about grades when talking about academic expectations and perceived challenges. The women noted specific goals they have for themselves in terms of getting high grades and expressed a sense of pressure that accompanies these expectations. Hannah explains her academic expectation is to ensure she gets at least a B in all classes, and “usually an A.” She explains her motivation for good grades is to keep her scholarship.

My expectation, probably especially with my major courses and my education courses, [are that] I try to focus on making sure I get at least a “B” in the class, usually an “A” because first of all I have a scholarship here – academic – so I need to keep a certain GPA. So that helps me to keep my expectations for myself in line with that. I try to make sure that when I'm doing things for classes I have, I prioritize everything so that I'm not focusing solely on one course, if it is my major, but there's other courses that are also important that I'm taking.

The pressure she feels for keeping her scholarship forms her expectations; she expects to earn a GPA that enables her to maintain her scholarship. For Cindy, it was the expectations of others that pressured her to get good grades and shaped her expectations but, ultimately she reevaluated her own expectations after experiencing college. She explains:

In high school, my sister had a 4.0 all through high school. She's two years older than me so going into high school, I thought this is what I need to get – I have to have a 4.0 and get out of here with straight A's. After I came into college, I kind of still had that in mind, but I think, that just these past few weeks I've already started to get --- I don't have to have a 4.0 to be good at stuff...I don't want to say I've lowered my expectations...I guess I kind of realized that sometimes it's not like high school. It's harder to balance everything.

Cindy expresses her belief that college coursework did not pose enough of a challenge that she had to lower her expectations of herself. Rather, she reevaluated her expectations for herself once she experienced college life.

While students linked their academic expectations to the goals they place upon themselves for being academically successful, the responses of male students align more with recent research that college is not as hard as it is expected to be (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). The female students seem to talk more about specific pressures that shape their expectations for their own success. For example, Hannah's need to get good grades is linked to her need to keep her financial aid. In Cindy's case, it was the pressure she placed upon herself from being competitive with her sister that shaped her expectations for doing well academically. In the next section, I explain how faculty's perception of challenging academics.

Faculty perception of challenge in coursework. When asked about student academic expectations, the faculty offered answers that indicated they believe students expect college to be like high school. Professor Jim Stone answers the question about student expectations reflectively. He says:

Wow, I expect they (first-year students) think it is going to be – it is a really good question because I have a lot of students who I also coach [on] our speech team and a lot of students who come in have an expectation that it's going to be kind of like high school...But, at the same time, I think some students expect that it's going to be a little more relaxed, like they have more freedom to do what they want to do. So, I would say that a big difference I would think first-year students have... that they have options of things they can do.

Professor Silvina Jimenez also notes high school as a basis of comparison for college-level coursework as she describes what students expect of college. She says:

They (first-year students) expect that high school is going to continue and that the teachers need to be there for them and hold their hand and that the system is going to be the same as high school and it's not... You cannot expect your college teachers to be your high school teachers. It is a completely different system and I think that's where a lot of problems come in. They come in, which is natural, right out of high school expecting the same thing and then they get a big shock at the end of the term which they finally accept reality that its not the same thing...that they need to take responsibility and seek out help if they need help. The teacher's not there to give them everything processed already.

While both faculty members indicate they believe students expect college to be like high school, each respondent used a different tone in their answers. Professor Stone has more of a matter-of-fact nature than Professor Jimenez who demonstrates frustration with students who express, in some way, that they expect college to be like high school. Though the faculty note they expect the students to use high school as a basis for comparison, the students seem to indicate they expect college to be more challenging than high school.

Student expectations of time management as essential to academic success. Out of the discussion about academic expectations came the notion of defining academic success. In asking the students what they believe they need to do to be academically successful and asking them what they felt faculty expected of them, the theme of *time management* emerged from the data. Planning ahead is essential and, syllabi should be viewed as planning guides. For example, Shannon discusses finishing a paper by Thursday for a Monday deadline because weekends are "precious" in terms of being time to relax. Similarly, Steve advises finishing tasks early as well.

I'm a person who makes lists for everything. So I, every day, sit down to make a list of what I need to do that day, sometimes longer than others, but I think that's a good thing to be successful is know what you have to accomplish for that

particular day or week or however much time you want to set for yourself to get that task done...so just stay focused.

Cindy also notes the importance of time management and sees examples of time management, whether good or bad, from student leaders. She says:

Well, I think you really have to apply yourself and learn to balance your time. A lot of the people here, I've noticed, and if they are really involved in stuff, they're really good at time management and not worrying about the little things. Instead of worrying about this, fretting over this, like [a] workbook page you have to get done, get it done quickly and then study for the test instead. Like my RA is really involved in theater and stuff. And she really has to kind of learn to be sleep-deprived in order to be successful which I guess did go along with it. Which sounds bad, being sleep-deprived but I think that's something you have to get used to if you want to be successful. You have to get used to giving that extra little push to be good.

Cindy was not the only student to mention the issue of sleep while discussing time management. Giselle, too, notes her belief that sleep comes second to studying. She offers a light-hearted answer about being academically successful:

Go to class, do your homework, and go to sleep. That's it. Go to sleep. But, most importantly, do all your homework and do all of your reading even if it is three in the morning, you only have two pages done, you need to read 15 more pages, just read it. You can sleep later.

Her answer almost derails the many references to effective time management by suggesting students can just live their daily college lives without sleep. As students talked extensively about getting work done ahead of time, it became clear to me that students know time management is important, but being an effective time manager is difficult. Planning and getting course work done in advance would most likely help students avoid the very situation Giselle describes. Yet, as I listened to Giselle's

comment, I felt Giselle was being candid about her experience. She demonstrates that time management is not particularly easy for first-year students.

Faculty perception of time management as essential to academic success. One of the questions I asked faculty focused on the time commitment they expected of students. A “rule of thumb” in higher education says students should spend two hours studying for every hour they spend in class (Mundsack, Deese, & Deese, 2002). I wondered if faculty held this same belief.

The faculty in this study seems to expect more than those two hours for every one hour in class. Professors Mary Jackson and Mark O’Neil shared their expectation of *three* hours for every hour in class, one even saying that it is stated in the student handbook. Upon review of the student handbook, I did not find this statement, nor any statement about how much time should be devoted to studying. Yet, the adage of studying two hours for every hour of class is posted on an institutional website of tips for student-athletes on how to manage athletics and academics. Other faculty expectations about time management include Professor William Colfax’s expectation that students spend three to four hours a day preparing for his class. Professors Julie Kingsley and Jim Stone gave weekly tallies, noting 6-8 hours per week and fifteen hours a week with no less than ten respectively.

Answering a question about time was more difficult for the two instructors who teach language classes. They both talked about the need to memorize a new language in smaller chunks of time to study consistently throughout the week. The language

instructors do not expect less time but do believe smaller chunks of time is best.

Professor Silvina Jimenez explains:

...I give them tips on studying foreign language because for many students one hour of studying after one hour of class is too stressful for them. And so I tell them that Spanish - learning a foreign language - is like having a good diet. You need to eat many small meals and so if one hour is just way too much for them, they need to open their book ten minutes while they're waiting for someone. Open their book [for] ten minutes while they're waiting to speak to a teacher, while they're waiting for their friend in the car, while they're having lunch at the cafeteria. Just all those ten minutes add up and it's just that consistency and that repetition that will help them. Some people think they need to sit down and have a block of three hours and study Spanish and that's not how you study a foreign language. You learn patterns and you can only recognize patterns if you keep looking at them consistently in short blocks of time.

Faculty expressed they communicate their expectations to students by telling them in class as well as in writing in their syllabi. My review of the syllabi was helpful in seeing if the faculty statements communicated in the interviews about time management align with their expectations in the syllabi. Syllabi range greatly in terms of detail and length. Yet, it is in the seven page addendum that a faculty member wrote, "I try to make my expectations clear. How to succeed in this class should not be a mystery." A commonality throughout all the syllabi relating to how students spend their time was the presence of the attendance policy, explained near the beginning in each of the syllabi often listed after the learning objectives of the class and a listing of the texts for the class. Attendance policies represent faculty's expectations that they expect them to be in class. One instructor has a section in her syllabus labeled "Expectations" and the first paragraph of the two-paragraph section focuses on attendance:

Although attendance [is] mandatory, it is a valuable part of the course experience. Students are expected so [sic] come to class prepared and participate in class

discussions/activities. Frequent absenteeism and/or tardiness will impact the student's course experience. The instructor retains the right to reduce the overall grade for the course for students who demonstrate excessive absenteeism or tardiness.

As faculty expect students to be in class as indicated by interview responses and syllabi, the expectation for who is responsible for student success is solely the student.

Student expectations for academic responsibility. Many of the answers relating to how students view academic success can be summarized by taking responsibility for academic commitments. This third theme found within the data relating to academic expectations is a sense among students that they must *take responsibility for their own academic success*. The students note faculty expect them to take responsibility for their learning by demonstrating effort, showing up, participating, and being prepared for class. Tyson describes how he understands faculty expectations of him for taking responsibility for his own success. He explains:

I think they (faculty) expect me to show up to class, obviously come on time, but also to just try to show them that I want to learn and I'm not there just to get a grade but I am actually there to get an education and learn...

When Shannon acknowledges her faculty's expectation that she takes responsibility for her own learning, I ask her to describe this type of responsibility. She answered by offering an example:

I'd say just taking all the preparations that you need. Such as yesterday, actually, my English teacher kicked out two-thirds of the class out of class because we were supposed to have at least a page or two of your essay so we could actually talk about it. And a lot of them (students) didn't. So I guess they expect you to do what they want you to do and not to have to be reminded. They're not going to tolerate anything about that.

This expectation of taking responsibility for their own learning seems to have been shaped by faculty. While students understand this expectation, it seems to have been greatly defined by understanding their instructors' expectations of them.

Faculty expectations of students taking responsibility for their academic success.

As the faculty answered questions about what they expect of first-year students, they expressed an expectation of maturity from students as it relates to academic success. Faculty expect students to take responsibility for their learning and demonstrate this sense of responsibility by being active learners. Half of the faculty indicated that being an active participant in class discussion is essential. Professor Julie Kingsley expects "thoughtful contributions to discussing the reading" in her sociology class. Professor Hope Harris expects students to be communicative with her about their learning needs. Professor Jim Stone expects first-year students "to be present in class, not just be there, but also participate." He believes students need to be active in acquiring knowledge about current events as well and bringing this knowledge to class, all in an effort to best learn the concepts being taught in that class. Professor Mary Jackson offered clear expectations of class participation. To answer the question about what she expects first-year students to do to be successful, Professor Jackson says:

To participate in discussion once they're there. They'll get as much out of it as they put into it and if they don't, because I run discussion-oriented classes, they need to participate because it's their chance to rehearse their ideas, to rehearse what they might want to write a paper about, to generally practice analytical thinking.

Professor Jackson's syllabus reiterates her thoughts. She writes:

A large position of your grade is based upon class attendance and participation. You should be ready to write about and discuss readings assigned each day. Success in the course depends largely on attendance, completion of reading before class, participation in discussions and arguments, and revising your essays to improve your writing skills.

Student participation in class discussion was also the most commonly mentioned means by which faculty assess if students were meeting their expectations.

Faculty's explanation of their expectations of successful students mostly conveyed a sense of following class rules, attending classes, and investing time in their coursework. To my surprise, there was limited mention of learning; there was more acknowledgement of what students need to specifically do, or show, to be academically successful.

Alignment of student and faculty academic expectations. One of the primary goals of this study is to answer the research question asking if student and faculty expectations of success align. Within the theme of academic expectations, both students and faculty offered input relating to the challenge of academics. The students in this study, overall, seem to have a good understanding of what their professors expect of them. Their statements indicate the same ideas the faculty identified. Faculty seemed less inclined to know their student expectations. None of the students felt college would be like high school in terms of academics and yet the faculty seem to believe the students expect college to be a continuation of high school.

Faculty and student academic expectations and experience are the most defined way these two populations on campus interact. If faculty set the tone for academic success, it seems that this study indicates that students understand their expectations,

especially as students noted their understanding that their learning was their responsibility. Yet, it is not entirely clear if faculty believe their students have a true understanding of faculty expectations. In many of the interviews, faculty seemed distraught with students who do not feel they meet their expectations because they do not read the syllabus or expect too much of their instructors. Many of the questions led to faculty talking about their challenges in teaching. The students seem to know what is expected of them to be successful and expected college classes to be more academically challenging. They know that their learning and success are their own responsibility. Yet, faculty believe students do not embrace the level of academic maturity necessary to be successful. Students, though, think they “get it” and apparently do not seem to think college is all that hard.

Social Expectations

“Just do your own thing.” – Professor Jim Stone

In Chapter Two, the literature review on social expectations held by students relates to experiencing independence from parents and making life-long friends with roommates and peers (Braxton et al., 1995; Keup, 2007; Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000). In this study, findings confirm prior research as students found both a good quantity and quality of friends easily. Yet, students in this study did not expect the ease with which they were able to find these friends. Furthermore, the literature describes faculty’s view of social expectations as those related to the social activities within the class. Research (Achieve, 2007) indicates faculty want students to work well in groups, and have quality class discussions. Yet, when I asked the faculty in my study about

social expectations, they answered the questions as if the social experience is separate from academic coursework. As such, two sub-themes emerged regarding social expectations: a) many meaningful relationships develop at a small college and b) the best way for students to acquire friends is by being oneself. The first sub-theme relates to the ease with which students are able to find a good number of special friendships on a small campus.

Student expectations of forming many meaningful relationships at a small place.

Student answers about their social expectations of college emphasize their surprise that it was not as difficult to make friends as they expected. Steve offers the following:

I didn't expect to make as many friends as soon as I did because I felt that the second I walked on campus, like everyone I talked to I still see all the time and they're still like 'Hey, how are you?' So, I didn't expect that. And I think that had a lot to do with the school itself and the small community and the small student population.

I asked Steve why he felt this way. He compared his experience to those of his friends from high school who had chosen big universities. He said:

...I guess seeing maybe my other friends who go to larger universities and they have their close group of friends, but they don't walk down the hall or down the sidewalk and see a bunch of different people that they know necessarily. They might be walking amongst hundreds, thousands of strangers and see a few of their friends during the day. And none when they get back to their room at night. But I feel I can't step out of my dorm room without seeing a friend.

He did not sense they had the same kind of experience as he did. Shannon, too, was surprised by how easy it is to meet people. She explains:

Since it is a small campus, I knew that it would probably be "everyone knows everyone" environment, but I didn't expect it to be that extreme. Like, for example, my RA seems to know every single person that walks by and I was just really surprised.

Shannon offered that she liked this kind of environment and, like Steve, compared it to a big school experience. She continued:

I definitely like that because I mean there is the whole “being a number” thing at bigger schools. And I feel like one of the main reasons I want to be here [is] because it is more hands-on with the professors and its more hands-on with just meeting people.

Giselle offers similar surprise to finding friends in her humorous way.

I didn't think I would find very many friends. I didn't think I'd find people who shared my interests. I'm not going to lie, I consider myself a weird-o. I like weird things. I'll sit at home and watch the food network 24-7. I didn't think I'd find people like that here and then I come here [and] there is somebody who will also sit and watch the food network with you and complain about why they're using the wrong type of utensils.

Giselle's comments suggest an expectation that she would be too unique to find friends easily. Her experience altered these expectations as it turns out she is not as “weird” as she originally thought. Yet, it took her time in college to see that this was the case.

Students admitted that not everything about the small place was perfect. They talked about cliques on campus. Lily mentioned that she, like Steve, Shannon, and Giselle, was able to find friends quickly and this surprised her because of her negative social experience in high school. She talked about how relieved she was to find a small group of close friends, something she preferred, than having a lot of friends. Lily's comparison to high school indicated she did not want a social experience similar to high school for herself and was happy to find a social experience she wanted in college.

Faculty expectations of forming many, meaningful relationships at a small place.

When faculty described student engagement and students making meaningful

relationships, they often referenced formal opportunities designed to help students engage in their community. For example, student organizations and office hours were viewed by faculty as essential tools for students to involve themselves. Similar to how students are responsible for their own learning, faculty expect students to seek out ways to find connections with others on campus. Professor Silvina Jimenez offers the following:

...well, they should look into clubs right away, try to meet people through clubs. They should be open about social life and they should definitely talk to teachers. Maybe they aren't used to talking to their teachers. They have to communicate more. They have to go to all the orientations, all the lectures on becoming familiar with campus life, definitely have to do that. Anything that is offered to them, they need to take advantage of because it is going to make their experience much more rich and they're going to find success if they do that.

Professor Mark O'Neil, similar to Professor Jimenez, notes getting involved through co-curricular activities. Additionally, he notes that students' social lives are not something he often considers. When asked how he expects students to become engaged in the campus community, he offers the following:

I don't think about it that much to be perfectly honest. I would hope that all of them have one extra-curricular activity, at least one. If they're in my classes, they don't have time, they might not have time for lots and lots. I'd hope, I think it is really nice if they can live on campus and be around for some evening talks...so some extra-curricular activity plus occasional attendance at college events and preferably ones that are kind of fixed to have an academic angle I guess...they probably need to be taking advantage of office hours and the fact that faculty are around so much, expected to be around so much...I think that that's probably something they need to do if they're going to get the most out of this place.

These quotations from Professors Jimenez and O'Neil show how they believe students should take advantage of opportunities on campus to make the most of their social experience.

Student expectation of “being yourself.” If there was any question that had the most consistent theme throughout the participants’ answers in this study, it was related to student perceptions of how to fit in at college. Overwhelmingly, students said the key was to “be yourself.” Given the repetition of this answer, I believe there is more to this seemingly generic answer. Bob offers an example of how he has found this type of environment:

I think it is easier to fit in here than it was in high school because people are more accepting to different types of people. Even like the people that I hang out with, the people on my floor, I’m pretty different than the rest of them, but they really don’t care. They accept the fact that I’m in some ways different than them. They just accept that and I think if you just want to fit in, you have to find people that will accept you for who you are...So far, it has been [easy to find]. I’ve just been meeting random people I guess and most of the people I’ve met here have been pretty accepting. A lot people here seem really nice and it’s a lot easier for me to start up conversations with people I don’t know than it was back in high school.

Hannah mentions the notion of cliques in college but views them differently than those in the past. She seems to think that most students have friends. She says:

I feel like everyone has their own group here and it’s not like you’re really judging people. I feel that there is a lot less “cliques” like than in high school so...there are some people who don’t fit in but I feel like everybody has their own group of people that are their friends, friends to be with.

Steve offers a summary of this sentiment of being yourself.

I think it is just basically, I know this sounds so cliché, but really being yourself...I realized after meeting people, I was like “oh, well they do like me for who I am” so I don’t have to change anything.

Faculty expectation of “being yourself.” One of the questions in the faculty protocol addressed how they perceive that students “fit in” on their campus. Faculty

alluded to the notion of being oneself and comfortable with the idea that a student does not have to change in order to fit in on campus. Professor Jim Stone offers his thoughts:

...it feels like you almost know everyone and so I think here on campus you are allowed to just be you and follow your own interests...I think students are encouraged to kind of embrace the freedom to try different things...“just be yourself” and it sounds so cheesy as I’m saying it right now, but I’d say just do your own thing. I feel like students are encouraged to do that.

Professor Natalie Anderson offers a twist by suggesting that being yourself allows you to pursue activities with which students are most comfortable.

...A lot of them come in purposely because of the level of support they knew they would receive, access they would have to be able to do things like athletics, so they were able to be a part of things that really identify with who they were, whether it is the music program, the athletics, the clubs, things like that. It seems like it is a very supportive community so that it happens for them in being a small community, if they’re not initiating it, someone is probably identifying that and pulls them into it.

While Professor Anderson notes a supportive environment as part of the social landscape, this notion was implied by students who found finding friends easy.

Alignment of student and faculty social expectations. When comparing the students’ expectations to those of the faculty, some faculty offered perceptions similar to those of the students. Professor Hope Harris talks about what she thinks it takes for a student to fit in. “I think being open to your experience and different people is one of the keys to ‘fitting in.’” Professor Jim Stone also talks about fitting in for students. “...just be yourself. And it sounds so cheesy as I’m saying it right now, but I’d say....just do your own thing.”

Taken together, this perception of “being yourself” and “being open to others” is not necessarily cliché. Rather, there exists an openness to diversity among the students,

diversity broader than just racial differences but also preferences and hobbies and likes and dislikes. When the students find this kind of environment, they are surprised since it did not match their expectations. Students acknowledged their fear of not being able to find friends and were pleasantly surprised to find the opposite.

While few students noted an interest in getting involved in student organizations in their later college years, faculty mentioned clubs often. In asking faculty what students should do to feel engaged in the campus community, most said students should join student organizations. The implication is that faculty view student engagement in terms of formal opportunities provided by the college. Yet, students have a much more informal perspective of social life. They seemingly make friends more easily by those they come across, whether that is in their residence hall or in classes.

Another alignment of expectations relates to the balance of academic and social expectations. Both groups talked about making academics a priority. A few students talked about the challenge of managing their social expectations. Cindy gave the example of friends who want her to go to a movie when she needs to do her coursework. Yet, Cindy's example did not seem to be a constant challenge for her or for any of the students too often. Students acknowledged the pressure to hang out with friends in the first year of college but it is not strong enough for them to reconsider their academic priorities. Similarly, faculty express the same expectation. They realize the students want a good social experience but are not concerned about it. Professor Mary Jackson, in talking about managing academic and social expectations, says, "I don't have expectations around that. I think they have to learn it. I don't worry about it." Other

faculty members noted that students (simply) need to manage their time and their priorities. For two faculty, the expectation that students would have a difficult time managing their social expectations translated into their concern for students experiencing challenge in balancing their work hours and their academic responsibilities. Thus, the “traditional” trend that faculty are concerned with their students spending too much time partying seems to have changed. One even noted she does not know of much partying. Rather, the difficulty in managing time, as expressed by the students and faculty, is seen as the greatest challenge, and social pressures are a part of this challenge but a small one.

Thus far, the findings of this study outline the academic and social expectations of students and faculty. The last theme of career expectations addresses how students and faculty view college as a means to prepare future graduates for a career.

Career Expectations

“A lot of it is on me...” -- Cindy

The literature review indicates students enter college with the intent to graduate as a means of securing careers for themselves upon graduation (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995). Research also reveals faculty do not place much emphasis on career preparation but more emphasis on traditional academic subjects and developing skills such as critical thinking, reading, and writing (Brown, 2003). The findings from this study support the research in terms of both faculty and student expectations. Three sub-themes emerged when participants discussed career expectations: a) a general trust in the process that a college education prepares students for a career; b) first-year classes are more like building blocks of courses to help prepare students for later classes; and c) a sense of self-

ownership about career development. The last section, like those relating to academic and social expectations, identifies how student and faculty expectations align in the area of career expectations.

Students trust the process. Students answered questions about career expectations by conveying a sense of trust in higher education, specifically in the institution they chose to attend. They may not exactly be able to articulate *how* this will happen but they have put their trust in the reputation of the institution nonetheless. For example, five student participants indicated they had careers in mind and four of these students indicated teaching as their career choice. Students who referenced teaching as a career noted that a high school experience influenced this decision to teach. For example, Hannah was confident when I asked her if she had a good idea of what career she wanted to pursue. She states:

...when I was sophomore in high school I took an honors Chemistry class and I absolutely loved it and I knew that that's what I wanted to major in...from that point on I knew that was exactly what I wanted to major in and I've always loved helping kids and tutoring.

As such, Hannah is majoring in Chemistry and Education. Hannah shows decisions about her career path were made prior to entering college and she trusts her college to give her the education she needs to reach that goal. Shannon expresses a similar kind of trust with her decision to become a teacher as well. When asked how she expects her college to prepare her for a career she explains that she does not know how. Shannon states:

I guess just, since I haven't had any, I've mostly had gen ed classes currently, I don't know how they would prepare me. I guess I'd say I think that their

preparation would probably be the same as other schools. And I know as far as teaching goes, your third year or so you go out and do student teaching and things like that.

Shannon also says that she likes her college experience and does not mind taking general education classes, mostly because, as a number of the students state, the general education courses allow them to develop a strong foundation for later college coursework.

Other students indicated they had ideas of what they wanted as a career and trusted the reputation of the school they selected. Giselle says:

I'm a history major and a secondary education minor so I want to teach history someday in high school and I needed to find a college that had both of those [subjects]. Both of them are very strong departments...They seem to have very good standards.

Another aspect of trusting the institution was expressed by two male students who expect college to get them ready for life. Tyson and Bob talked more specifically about skills they were developing in response to questions relating to career, rather than academics. Bob said:

I think, obviously, you should be learning in your classes the knowledge you [are] going to need for the job you're going to pursue. But I think you should also be learning. I'm trying to figure out this common sense thing. You can have encyclopedic knowledge about dead English poets or whatever, but if you don't have common sense, you're not going to go anywhere. So that's sort of what I expect.

Bob implies (with humor) that he plans to learn what he needs to know for a job but also learn how to use common sense. In some circles of higher education, I believe the words "critical thinking" might describe Bob's idea of common sense.

Tyson trusts his college to help make him a better citizen. Tyson actually has a career goal of becoming a YMCA director, which he offers later in the interview. When he first talks about his career expectations, he says:

I expect them [faculty] to help me become a valuable person to society. I expect them to first and foremost help me to become the best, most informed, most helpful member of society that I can be. Then I want them to help me to become an academic or just like my major. I'd want that to be second.

The students did not necessarily know how they would be prepared for their careers or how they would learn “common sense.” Even Shannon, who mentions student teaching as a means to prepare her for the teaching profession, seems unsure how she will be ready for her future career. Regardless, they trust they are being prepared for their future careers and plan to stay enrolled to see how that will happen.

Faculty trust the process. Faculty express a similar trust that students will get ready for the future in their first-year coursework. Faculty responses are general in nature. Professor Mark O'Neil says:

I am reasonably confident that I will be able to turn loose graduates who would be well-suited to showing up at 8 or 9 a.m. and doing some kind of work where they have to interact with other people and manipulate words.

Professor Natalie Anderson also believes her psychology class “essentially” prepares students for their career. She says, “Our main theme is to understand human behaviors and to try to always make connections: how this will help in business, how it will help you in education, how this will help you in this or that.” In “trusting the process,” teaching and learning in college involve developing student skills required in

their future careers. As such, faculty believe they are preparing future workers by doing their teaching jobs.

Student expectation of building blocks for success. Faculty participant backgrounds in mostly traditional academic disciplines – from Latin and English to Sociology and Psychology – offered answers to career questions affirming the role of first-year classes as being the foundation for further learning. This idea, which I have labeled “building blocks for success,” was also raised by the students. It was reported enough that it became clear that first-year courses were generally expected to set a good foundation for future classes, more so than preparing students for a specific career.

Classes, especially general education courses, comprise most first-year students’ course schedules. General education requirements are essentially perceived as building blocks for future classes by both students and faculty. A student’s future classes are what help him or her get ready for a career. Students indicate they expected to take general education courses to get them ready for the next classes and, as reported by three students, to get them out of the way for their major courses. There was no remorse or anger about this, nor was there a sense of joy from taking general education courses either. Hannah says:

Right now, I am taking a lot of Gen Eds to just basically get them out of the way. But, I think that taking Gen Eds makes me more of a well-rounded candidate for the different jobs that I’ll be applying for.

Like Hannah, Shannon says it makes sense to take general education courses now to get them out of the way. Giselle says that her first-year is “just getting requirements out of the way.” Yet, she adds to her statement. “But, in the classes I’ve found here, a lot of

them are really interesting, like my sociology class that I might even consider changing my major, instead of being just history, to maybe more of a social science [major].”

Faculty perspective on general education courses as building blocks. Not surprisingly, faculty did not view any of the general education classes they taught as courses students took to “get them out of the way.” Faculty believe the general education courses they teach are preparing students for their futures. Professor Hope Harris explains:

I think it [composition] prepares them for their careers in the sense that they quickly have the understanding that not every situation is the same. Like not every rhetorical situation is the same. Not every situation where they’re going to be writing is going to [be the same]...there are different expectations for writing when it comes to science. There are different expectations for English. There are similar expectations, but there are some differences.

Professor Jim Stone shared the importance of his subject in terms of “emphasizing the personal and professional benefits of public speaking.” He likes to give students the example of an alum who was in an elevator with the CEO of the company for whom she worked. He asked her for her opinion on a project and she was able to answer him using a basic structure of a speech. The executive was impressed and she was promoted in a month. In sharing this story with me, he got my attention and helped me see the value of understanding public speaking. I would suspect his students feel the same way.

Professor Mary Jackson offers a similar insight to her students. She talks about having worked outside of academe and tells her students that “the thing that you use over and over and over again [is] the ability to write well and clearly and make an argument.”

As such, she is beginning to prepare students for their careers after they graduate by teaching writing skills.

Student expectation of a sense of ownership for their career paths. When talking about career expectations in college, students often discussed their personal journeys of career development. Most students noted it was not just the responsibility of the college to prepare them for their careers, but also up to the students themselves to find the right career path. Some students had already felt that they found their career paths by understanding their personal strengths and having these strengths confirmed by their experience in college. Steve feels his short time in college has encouraged him to pursue his career goal of becoming a choir director. He had a powerful experience in high school seeing a director blending lots of different talent from across the country to become a successful choir. Steve realized he wanted to be able to do the same. When he got to college he auditioned for a singing ensemble that traditionally had not accepted first-year students. When he was the only first-year student accepted in the 16 person ensemble, he felt affirmed and confident that he was making the right choice for himself. The combination of knowing himself and his goals along with the affirmation from faculty in the music department solidified his plans for a career path.

Cindy also believes it is not solely her college's responsibility to prepare her for a career. As an undecided student, she feels that while those at her college will help her with her career exploration, the onus is on Cindy to make her own career choices. She says:

I feel a lot the same way about careers as I do academics. A lot of it is on me and right now coming into college I kind of thought, “oh this is what I want to do” but it’s changing. Already I’m not sure what path I want to choose or anything but I think its on the professors to help and advisors. I think they need to help me to give me advice, to say you should look into some internships your sophomore year or stuff like that, but I think a lot of it. . . you need to do on your own and I don’t think I should expect them to hand me applications or anything like that. I think I should say OK, I need to go see them and get an application or whatever.

Tyson’s story meshes with Cindy’s. He expects faculty and staff at his college to help him explore career options but does not expect anyone to do it for him. Even when students consider changing their minds, they know it is up to them. Giselle, who seemed certain about being a teacher, talked about finding a love for her sociology class and is considering changing her major because of it. Overall, the students expect career preparation in college not to be a one-way street; the college should provide opportunities and advice but the students feel they are ultimately responsible for their career paths.

Faculty perception of career development as a shared responsibility. Faculty feel similarly in the sense that career development is a shared responsibility and not just theirs. Whereas they talked about giving students the opportunities to hone their skills, the faculty also mentioned services on campus, such as an office dedicated to career resources and a career week during the academic year. One faculty member also shared that she felt her institution could do better at helping students with their career exploration. Professor Julie Kingsley made the observation that the career development center does a good job of helping the students get their resumes together. Yet, she still knows of students who recently graduated and are now “working at a big-box store.” She reluctantly concludes that most of responsibility falls on the student by saying, “I think

they [students] are kind of just on their own to hit pavement and find out what's out there.”

Alignment of student and faculty career expectations. Professor Kingsley's comment that students are on their own to find career assistance reflects a difference in how faculty and students view the shared responsibility of career preparation. Students understand this responsibility and accept it willingly; Professor Kingsley's comment, as well as her wish to have more time to do more career preparation, implies the college landscape is not doing enough to help students with their careers. Regardless, the students and faculty expect career preparation to be shared.

The overall review of career expectations shows that students and faculty have similar expectations for career preparation. Both groups realize the need for skill development. Students hone their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills through general education courses. Both participant groups seem to trust that this curriculum will work for students and, as such, they “trust the process” that higher education prepares them for their careers.

One area of difference between the two groups relates to the expectation of students knowing in their first-year of college what they want to for a career. As mentioned, some of the students knew what they want to do as a career. If a student was unsure about his or her career trajectory, the student was often reluctant to admit this uncertainty. Faculty felt differently about this idea of knowing a career path as a first-year college student. I asked faculty if they expected first-year students to have a good idea of a career path. Professor Mark O'Neil hopes they would not know what they want

to do for a career. If they do know, Professor O'Neil says, "then they are not taking advantage of the liberal arts experience, I guess, of sampling and exploring different subject matters and different ways of looking at things and different career paths."

Professor Mary Jackson feels similarly:

I'm hoping in a way they [first-year students] don't [know what career they want to pursue] because, to me, the fun of a liberal arts education is the exploration. And, I'm starting to feel more and more that if you have the luxury in today's world.... they really need to fully enjoy while they're here.

In asking Professor Jackson about her thoughts on education as a luxury, she noted the cost of college and how she sees the students most able to afford college come from middle-to-upper class families.

To summarize the alignment of student and faculty expectations about having a career path chosen, students feel confident in their studies when they know their career paths. Students who want to explore career options and are undecided about their career path are regretful to be in such a position. The faculty, on the other hand, think it is good to be undecided and more hope, than expect, students to keep an open mind to determining what career paths are available to them.

The first sections of this chapter outlined findings relating to how student and faculty expectations are shaped as well as identifying expectations relating to the themes of academic, social, and career expectations. Each section concluded with a review of how faculty and student expectations align with each other. The next part of this chapter answers the research question of how expectations relate to student success. For the purpose of this study, student success is defined as the likelihood to persist at the college

where students began their studies or, from an institutional approach, how students are likely to be retained.

Retention

In addition to identifying student and faculty expectations and how they align, one of the core questions of this study is to identify which types of expectations students believe are most associated with student success. To answer this question, I asked students about the degree to which they would leave their institution if academic, social, or career expectations were not met. Asking this question at the end of each set of interview questions -- categorized as academic, social, and career -- shows which expectations are most important for students to meet in order to remain enrolled at their institution. While easy comparisons were hoped to be found, students had a hard time answering these questions.

At first, many students had difficulty answering the question since each student indicated at some point in their interview that they planned to stay enrolled at their institution. Students were asked *if* they would leave *if* certain expectations were not met. A common response from students was that they were not going to drop out of this college now or in the future. For example, in asking Steve to what extent he would consider leaving college if his academic expectations were not met, he indicated he does not think he will leave. "I guess at this point I don't see my expectations not being met. And, I think, I don't know, I think it would....I really don't know how to answer that question." Tyson offers a similar response. "Well, I think, I don't know if I can give you a straight answer." Tyson notes in his answer that his consideration to leave is related to

his perceived return on investment since he indicates his tuition of \$30,000 should ensure getting a quality education.

Even though students indicated they did not want to leave school, each were able to indicate which type of unmet expectations would most likely lead to a decision to depart. Four students indicated they would leave school if their career expectations were not met while three students indicated they would leave if their social expectations were not met. One student indicated she would leave if her academic expectations were not met.

Table 3

Type of Unmet Expectation Most Likely to Lead to Departure

Student	Type of Unmet Expectations Most Likely to Lead to Departure
Bob	Career
Cindy	Social
Giselle	Career
Hannah	Academic
Lily	Social
Shannon	Career
Steve	Career
Tyson	Social

Justifying departure by unmet career expectations. While students said they would leave college for unmet academic or career expectations, they also expressed a

rationale that leaving for social reasons did not seem “legitimate.” Giselle said that an inability to make friends was not reason enough to leave school since friendships were not the most important reason to be in college. Hannah, who would leave if her academic expectations were not met, said that social expectations do not matter since it is the academic experience that matters the most in college. She is the only student who cited unmet academic expectations as a reason for her to leave. Hannah believes that if her academic expectations were unmet she would assume she was not ready to move away to a four-year college. Instead, Hannah would continue her studies at a community college. Given she believes her academic expectations are being met, she does not plan to leave. Yet, it is worthy to note that she was the only student who cited unmet academic expectations as a possible reason for leaving school.

Students indicate they would leave college for career reasons if they decided to change their major to something that is not offered at their current institution. Shannon indicates her primary goal of attending college is to graduate in her intended major. If that changed, she would leave. In asking Steve if he would leave if he felt he was not making progress towards his career goals, he indicated he would leave but says he “doesn’t see that happening because I think the program [his music major] is great and I know I will do well.” In asking this question, many students implied that their major selections and their career expectations are tightly coupled.

Justifying departure by unmet social expectations. When students indicate they would leave for social reasons, it would be for an inability to find friends and a social

niche. Lily admits that unmet social expectations would be the reason for her departure.

She says:

If I didn't find anyone to be close with here, I would have an issue and I would want to leave. That's kind of how it was the first term when you really don't know anybody on campus. And, like in my mind, I was, 'I don't want to be here. I don't have any friends. I just want to go home where I'm comfortable.'

Things turned around for Lily. She found friends and does not want to leave college.

Similarly, Shannon felt she found friends after a few weeks of college and does not expect to leave. Similar to the other students who noted departure for social reasons, Tyson says that if his social expectations were unmet that it would be "a big disappointment."

The students shared that unmet social expectations would not be their fault; whereas, meeting academic and career expectations are mostly dependable on one's self. If a student could not find friends, the student is not to blame. For example, both Lily and Cindy say academic success and finding a career are "on me;" whereas, finding friends is dependent on the other people on campus. These data provide an interesting parallel to the social expectations reported by faculty and students that fitting in is a matter of "being yourself." Being yourself may be the best way to find friends but such a philosophy might not necessarily ensure friendships.

Alignment of faculty and student reasons for departure. At the conclusion of the faculty interviews, I asked participants if and why they believe students would leave college. Most believe that students will return for the sophomore year. Two faculty members were knowledgeable of retention efforts; one cited the college's retention rate

from the first to second year as 75% and one noted her participation on a retention committee. Two of the faculty participants were unsure why students would leave. Unmet career expectations was the most commonly mentioned reason, stated as the college did not have the major the student wanted. Three of the faculty participants suspected financial reasons and a lack of family support would also be common reasons for students to leave. Overall, though, there was limited consensus on why students would drop out after the first semester or year of college. This limited consensus is similar to the limited consensus offered by the students for reasons they would leave.

Conclusion

Chapter Four presents analysis of data collected in this exploratory, qualitative study about the academic, social, and career expectations held by first-year college students for success, and how these expectations align with faculty expectations of student success. Interviews with eight first-year students and eight faculty instructors at one small, private college in the Midwest offer insights into expectations for student success, as defined by the likelihood of students to persist in college beyond the first year.

The data from student interviews indicate students are optimistic and expect they will be academically successful. As reflected in the literature, students expect college to be more academically difficult than it turns out to be in actuality. Students expect academic success by managing their time, placing academic responsibilities as the highest priority in their lives, and being responsible for their own learning. These student expectations align with those of faculty who expect students not only to show up for class

but also to be active participants in class discussions and to take their academic success seriously.

Data regarding social expectations indicate students expect to find both a good quantity and quality of friends. In the small school setting of this study, these students were surprised it took less time to make friends than expected. Both students and faculty believe that the key to fitting into the college campus is to be yourself and not try to fit in with cliques of students but to find friends who are accepting of one's personality. In talking about social expectations, faculty believe students find friends in more formalized activities such as joining student organizations. Students, on the other hand, found friends more informally, oftentimes in residence halls.

The last category of expectations relates to student career plans. Both students and faculty expect college to prepare students for careers by learning general skills for the work world. In the first year of college, both faculty and students view coursework as building blocks for future classes. Limited examples were given as to how first-year coursework actually prepares students for a career. Yet, both students and faculty trust the educational process of college-level study in preparing students for their careers.

While student and faculty expectations of college might align in some ways in terms of academics, social life, and career paths, few themes are firmly identified when assessing why students leave college after the first semester or the first year. Students believe they would leave for unfulfilled social and career reasons. An inability to find friends or changing their major to one not offered at their current institution would lead students to consider changing schools. Faculty mention these similar reasons but offer

many more, such as financial reasons or a lack of family support. Some faculty simply do not know why students would leave nor think of it very often. Chapter Five offers more discussion of how an alignment of first-year students and faculty expectations for student success impact retention. Conclusions and recommendations for helping students and faculty form reasonable expectations of student success are also key components of Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher education in the U.S. is increasingly becoming a national priority as more and more students go to college. While students of all ages attend college, the traditional path of entering college immediately after high school remains common. Yet, the rates by which students are entering college do not match the rate by which students graduate (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2007). Furthermore, a majority of entering college students expect to be successful at college by graduating from the institution where they began their studies. Faculty, too, play a key role in the shaping of these expectations as they impart the intellectual culture of an institution. This study is an attempt to identify both student and faculty expectations of student success in college in three arenas: academic, social, and career expectations. Furthermore, the study addresses whether student expectations for college success align with those of faculty who teach first-year students.

Summary of Study

Chapter One reviews the concept of student expectations and provides a framework for understanding how expectations play a role in students finding a fit within their college or university. The first chapter also notes the purpose of the study as the identification and exploration of academic, social, and career-related expectations that first-year students believe lead to their collegiate success. Furthermore, the study

attempts to identify whether these expectations align with those expectations for student success held by faculty who teach first-year students. The first chapter explains why this study has significance in that it can shed light on how students find a fit within their college and increase their likelihood to persist to graduation.

In Chapter Two, expectations are conceptually framed by Bandura's (1995) theory of self-efficacy by describing how self-efficacy impacts outcome expectations. If, for example, a student expects to be successful in college, she has increased the likelihood that she would be successful. Reversely, if a student believes he will fail in college, he is more likely to do so. Furthermore, research indicates that those who believe they will be successful are more likely to persist towards graduation (Gore et al., 2006). In terms of student expectations, research indicates entering first-year students believe college will be more academically challenging than it turns out to be (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). They also expect to find friends and view college as a means of career preparation (Keup, 2007). Chapter Two also highlights the connection between expectations and integration with the campus for students (Braxton et al., 1995). Students are more likely to persist if they feel integrated into the college environment.

A detailed description of the research methodology is found in Chapter Three. In that chapter, I describe how I facilitate this study by interviewing eight first-year students, eight faculty members, maintain a personal journal, and review course syllabi. Student and faculty participants are from the same small, private Midwestern college. The research methodology describes how the interview questions are structured relating to academic, social, and career expectations along with questions asking how student

expectations impact the likelihood to persist at the school where they are enrolled.

Chapters IV and V describe findings and themes that emerge from the study as well as key conclusions and recommendations for future practice and research.

Key Findings

Students enter college with a set of expectations about their academic experience and their social lives. They expect a quality educational experience as noted by student interviewee Tyson who is quoted as saying, “I was really expecting I would get a good education.” First-year students enter college nervous about the transition from high school to college, yet positive they will be able to handle academic challenges and find friends. Students even find it less difficult than they expected. Student interviewee Steve’s quote relating to academic expectations summarizes this evidence: “I expected a much greater challenge, which I haven’t yet found, which is great so far.” Steve, like other students, is not disappointed by this finding; rather he, like his peers, is almost relieved. Faculty, on the other hand, believes students expect college academics will be similar to high school. Their responses allude to their perception that students expect answers to come to them without much work. This study indicates students understand their faculty’s academic expectations but faculty do not believe student behavior demonstrate this understanding of academic expectations.

Another key finding relates to student social expectations. Students expected to make friends but were surprised at how easy it was to develop relationships at their small residential campus. They relied on informal ways to make friends and often found friendships among those who lived with them in the residence halls. Students had given a

significant amount of thought to their social expectations and, prior to starting college, wondered how their social lives in college would compare to those in high school. Faculty, on the other hand, give little thought about student social expectations and how social life might have an impact on student success. Furthermore, faculty often thought of students' social experiences in the college community as involvement in student organizations and attending faculty office hours. These forms of socializing are more formalized than how students view social experiences. No student mentioned developing friends through student organizations at the beginning of their first year; rather, it was through conversations about their interests with their peers in their residence halls that led to friendships.

Career expectations became a category of interview questions in the protocol because the literature relating to academic expectations of students often included research on career expectations (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995). Entering students not only believe they will finish college but also believe they will become prepared for a career. Students seemingly do not know exactly how their education will prepare them for a career but they trust that it will. Students believe career preparation will become increasingly clearer to them as they take upper-division classes, especially those in their majors. Faculty who teach introductory classes also believe a college education prepares students for a career but exactly how was never stated. Furthermore, faculty did not believe first-year students should know what they want to do with their careers and would like the first year of college to be one of career exploration.

The last key finding relates to student expectations and retention. Students would be most likely to leave the college where they began their studies for either social or career reasons. The students who cited unmet career expectations are those who believe they would likely change their minds about what career they wanted for themselves and the college would not have a major to match this interest. Many of these students believe leaving college for social reasons is unjustified since making a better life for oneself through a career, to them, is the purpose of their college experience. On the other hand, some students believe the opposite. Some would leave college if their social expectations of meeting friends were unmet since finding a social network of friends is important to these students and those in previous studies (Keup, 2007). To these students, an inability to make friends was really a matter of the other students on campus not fitting into their idea of what a friend is to them. These opposing reasons – social and career -- make the matter of generalizing which category of expectations is most important difficult. Students' individual preferences seem to play a big role in determining if a student persists in college.

Conclusions and Discussion

In the prior chapter, I discuss the data collected in this study organized around the main themes of academic, social, and career expectations. In order to introduce the topic of expectations, I reviewed how student expectations are shaped. I also reviewed data that offer insight into student decisions to leave the college where they begin as first-year students. This section offers my conclusions by addressing each of the research questions while incorporating findings from the literature review. These conclusions offer a

foundation upon which I base my later recommendations for those who teach and support first-year students. Lastly, my suggestions for future research conclude the chapter.

The Formation of Student Expectations

The early research questions of this study focus on the identification of first-year students' academic, social, and career expectations both before and after matriculation to college and how these expectations were developed. The data offer support to findings in the literature, especially that students expect college to be more difficult than they later experience it (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

Academic expectations. Overall, students have academic expectations of college in which they expect coursework to be difficult but believe they are prepared for it.

Hannah, for example, shares the following:

I feel that I was pretty well-prepared from my coursework before. I'm pretty well self-driven and dedicated to everything that I do with school, so coming into college I didn't expect to have that many problems or to meet any expectations because of my past in high school.

While no interview question addressed how students became this confident, the students did note how they came to their understandings about college. By learning about the collegiate experience of their parents, siblings, and family members as well as gaining an understanding for college-level work from high school English teachers, students felt they were supported in becoming prepared for college. Shannon explains she expected an academic challenge by saying, "Well, everyone always says that there is a lot more reading involved and, personally with your professors, it is a lot more hands-on and you have more interaction with them." Similarly, Cindy says she "knew [she] was going

to have to do a lot of work.” Yet, both students believe they will be able to handle the academic challenge. Hannah further explains her confidence:

Well, in high school, I was involved in a lot of AP classes. I actually took five AP classes as a senior, so when coming into college I [thought] that I would have pretty much the same expectations I had in high school – getting all my work done ahead of time and studying hard and making sure school is my first priority.

As a result, students were confident in their academic abilities. This conclusion is similar to the findings in Lopez and Gromley’s (2002) study in which students who enter college with supportive family members are more confident in making a smooth transition.

Students were confident they would achieve academic success because they felt prepared.

This notion of confidence is closely related to the research on self-efficacy and optimism. Students who felt prepared for college by having supportive families and teachers who understood college felt that they had a greater sense of control of the transition to college. According to Weinstein (1980), the more personal experience a person has relating to an event, the more likely he or she shapes realistic expectations and senses greater control over it. Thus, people develop optimistic expectations, according to Weinstein, when they perceive an event as controllable. Bandura’s (1995) notion of self-efficacy supports the idea that students with clear expectations are often committed to ensuring they experience what they expect. As such, students who learned about college from family and teachers were prepared and subsequently confident in their academic abilities. Furthermore, student confidence is not unique; previous studies demonstrate how students often believe they will be more successful than they turn out to be

demonstrating students' occasional overconfidence (Neff, 2005; "Special Report: Expectations & Experiences," 2001).

Social expectations. Students hold high expectations for their social lives prior to beginning college in addition to their academic expectations (Keup, 2007). The literature demonstrates that students believe the development of strong friendships is a key part to the college experience (Braxton et al., 1995; Schilling & Schilling, 2005; Keup, 2007). The findings from this study support those found in the literature. Student interviewee Cindy describes her desire to make friends and believes she will find a few friends right away. Yet, the most striking finding is that students found it was easier to make friends than they expected. Student interviewee Shannon talks about making friends in her residence halls. When asked how to fit in socially, Cindy shares her initial apprehension and then surprise:

Well, I was really worried. I'm a really conservative person. I don't drink or anything like that so I was really worried that that would be something that you had to do to fit in, or to be social on a Friday you had to go to a party. But that hasn't really been the case here that I've noticed. There are a lot of different ways to get involved and fit in...I think my expectations of what I had to do to fit in socially were like much higher than I actually had to do. I was worried that I would have to change myself to find friends or find people to hang out with but I haven't had to do that thus far.

Coming to the realization they did not have to change who they were to fit in may indicate students had an expectation, perhaps based on the high school experience, that others would not be as accepting of each other as they turn out to be. As noted in Chapter Four, Giselle offers the most surprised response when she finds friends on her residence hall floor who have the same interests as she does. In her case, it is a shared love for the

Food Network. Students noted a confidence in their ability to continue to make friends by being genuine and authentic and not by pretending to be someone they are not. Making friends is a key part of adjusting to college and becoming more familiar with the college environment allows students to make friends more easily upon starting college (Pancer et al, 2000). In my study, students did not reference how much familiarity they had with campus prior to arrival. Given many were from various states across the country, their opportunities to visit campus would have been varied. Yet, all noted the ease with which they were able to find friends regardless of where they came from and without mentioning how familiar they were with the campus prior to beginning college.

The literature review does not indicate the ease with which students find friends. Friendships are undoubtedly important but research seems to focus on the difficulty students have in finding friends in the first year of college. Studies on friendsickness (Paul & Brier, 2001; Ishler & Schreiber, 2002) suggest the difficulty in transitioning to college for students who have trouble making new friends and accepting changed pre-college friendships. Unlike this study, these data are often collected on large college campuses suggesting the small, residential experience of the student participants in this study lends itself to making friendships rather easily.

Career expectations. Career expectations are closely related to academic expectations, especially within the literature review (Braxton, Vesper & Hossler, 1995; Brown, 2003; Keup, 2007). Students often view academic coursework as career preparation. Students believe they will have more career preparation in their upper-division courses as opposed to first-year classes. Prior to beginning their college

experiences, students expected to become prepared for a career after completing their education and trust the college will effectively prepare them. Similar to findings in research conducted by Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995), students in this study view college as a credential needed for college success. Brown (2003) found students want more career preparation in their first year. However, students in my study believed most of their career preparation would occur in the last two years of college.

Upon having experienced college for a few weeks, student expectations for college as career preparation did not significantly change. They were unsure how college prepares them for a career before and after starting college. Yet, as students began their coursework they found that their first-year classes are useful for later career preparation. Student responses to interview questions relating to career expectations were broad in nature or, in some cases, students were unsure how to answer. Hannah says:

I think, right now I'm taking a lot of Gen Eds to just basically get them out of the way. But, I think that taking Gen Eds makes me a more well-rounded candidate for the different jobs that I'll be applying for.

Students mostly believe career preparation in the first year is a matter of doing well in first-year classes as they view these classes as building blocks to upper-division courses that will provide more career preparation.

Retention and Expectations

One of the research questions for this study addresses not only the identification of student expectations but also student perceptions of what kind of expectations are most important to meet to find success. Student success in this study, as indicated earlier, is the likelihood to persist to the second year of college and later graduation. Data indicate

students would leave for either social or career reasons. Half of the students in this study report they would leave college if they had unmet career expectations. Others said they would leave if their social expectations were unmet.

Prior research supports findings in this study that unmet social and career expectations can cause student attrition. Tinto (1993) posits that one of the main reasons students leave college is an inability to find a fit within the social structure of the college environment. If students do not find friends, they may feel isolated and want to leave college. Student responses in this study show that students would agree that finding friends is an important part to persisting in college and, if they did not find friends, they would want to leave. Braxton et al (1995) added to Tinto's theory of student departure by finding the greater the extent to which academic and career expectations were fulfilled, the greater students felt academically and socially integrated to the campus community. As such, meeting both career and social expectations are important to increase students' likelihood to persist. My findings suggest that it is not just one category of expectations that is most important to ensure retention. Students have different perspectives as to which expectations are most important to meet.

Another noteworthy finding from my data is how quickly students assess if their social expectations are being met. Within a few weeks, students were able to talk with confidence about their impressions of their social experience. On the other hand, students were not able to gauge how well, or if, their career expectations were met so early in their college experience. This finding could suggest that meeting social

expectations in the first few weeks of students' first semester of college is of the utmost importance for them to feel integrated into the campus community.

Faculty Expectations of Students and Alignment to Student Expectations

One of the key questions of this study is related to the alignment of student and faculty expectations for success. Implications for future practice and research are mostly shaped by how well these expectations align with each other. If expectations are clear and students and faculty understand the same expectations, the college environment offers transparency for what it takes to be successful. Students do not need to guess how to be successful if they have accurate and reasonable expectations of college. Some faculty, like interviewee Julie Kingsley, try to make their expectations clear to minimize student feelings of uncertainty regarding her academic expectations. Professor Kingsley explains:

So I think I try to make it very clear cut about what requirements will be. There are no surprises and there's no change in that of what is laid out in the syllabus. And I try to make things reasonably well-paced throughout the term.

Academic expectations. Of the three categories of expectations – academic, social, and career – the clearest alignment of expectations between faculty and students is found among academically-related expectations. Data indicate students and faculty have similar expectations for student success. Both students and faculty report that success in college means attending class prepared and participating in class discussions. Faculty and students both agree that student success is achievable when students take responsibility for their own learning. Supported by findings in the research (Lammers et al, 2005; Schilling & Schilling, 1999), student commitment to investing time to completing

assigned work is essential to student success. Overall, students and faculty agree that the ultimate responsibility for student learning lies solely with the student.

Interestingly, my data indicate faculty might not believe that students and faculty are in agreement of what it takes to be academically successful. Professor Silvina

Jimenez describes her experience with student expectations:

They [first-year students] expect that high school is going to continue and that the teachers need to be there for them and hold their hand and that the system is going to be the same as high school and it's not. You cannot expect your college teachers to be your high school teachers. It is a completely different system and I think that's where a lot of problems come in. They come in [to college], which is natural, right out of high school expecting the same thing. And then they get a big shock at the end of the term when they finally accept reality that it's not the same thing – that they need to responsibility and seek out help if they need it.

Professor Jimenez's comment references the notion that faculty do not observe behavior from students that assures them students understand what is necessary for academic success. Faculty believe if the students knew what it takes to be successful, they would do it. Students, on the other hand, reported knowing how to be successful. They know completing assigned reading, getting help from a tutor, and managing their time are all practices for success. Whether first-year students do these things consistently, from a faculty perspective, is questionable.

Social expectations. This study confirms that meeting social expectations is an important part of the college experience. Whereas research indicates the importance of students finding friends (Keup, 2007; Schilling & Schilling, 2005), the research relating to faculty impressions of student social experience is limited. Some literature references social interaction among students through pedagogy, such as group work, team projects, and collaborative assignments (AAC&U, 2002; Achieve, 2007). The faculty in my study

did not reference these types of social interactions. Faculty, instead, referenced formalized opportunities outside of classes like student organizations as the best ways for students to find connections on campus. Additionally, faculty acknowledge that making friends is important for students but the faculty did not seem to know how students make friends. On the other hand, students did not reference student organizations as a means to make friends. They talked about how friendships develop informally in their residence halls. Though student organizations thrive on some campuses, and the college in this study references over 50 student organizations, the first-year students at this point in their college experience did not reference them as a means for making social connections.

Students and faculty agree on one aspect of social expectations. Whether through formal student organizations or informal interactions in a residential hallway, students and faculty recognize the key to making social connections is through authenticity, or as Professor Stone said, “just be yourself.” These responses suggest that both students and faculty view college differently from high school in terms of its social atmosphere. Noting the importance of being oneself may suggest that high school, as perceived by both faculty and students, was not thought of as a time when students could “be themselves” to make social connections.

Career expectations. Closely related to academic expectations is the examination of career expectations. Students felt it was important to know their career goals in their first year of college. Faculty, resoundingly, felt the opposite. They believed first-year students should poise themselves to be successful in their coursework, investigate their interests, and determine their career options later. Professor Hope Harris believes

students should be open to exploring career options and believes students' career plans will change. She explains:

I just think as they become more exposed to the different things and different experiences, especially in the classes...there is such a diversity of faculty and different approaches...that I think sometimes it could be as much as just listening to somebody's lecture or book that could change, completely change, someone's career path or what they choose to do – just as little as that – could do that.

Faculty interviewees Mark O'Neil and Natalie Anderson reference how their classes will teach students transferrable skills to the workplace by teaching responsibility and how to understand people. As is reflected in Brown (2003), faculty placed more emphasis on student academic skills such as critical thinking than on career preparation.

The alignment of career expectations among students and faculty is more complicated than the alignment of academic and social expectations. There is a clear difference of opinion as to whether first-year students should know what they want to pursue for a career. Faculty believe students should not make career decisions during their first year of college but rather be open to studying ideas and work that would be interesting. Students, on the other hand, believe they should have a good idea about their major and have a career direction. Yet, faculty and students do have similar but vague expectations of how college prepares students for a career. Professor William Colfax notes he "hopes" his class prepares students for a career. Student interviewee Hannah believes her general education courses make her a well-rounded candidate. While both groups believe college teaches responsibility and good decision-making, students and faculty did not give specific examples of how college teaches someone to be good in their career.

Recommendations for Future Practice

My recommendations for future practice are intended for college faculty and administrators who hope to ensure smooth transitions for students leaving high school and entering college. When institutions commit to creating supportive environments for students, they increase the likelihood of students being able to find a fit in college and persist to graduation. As such, my findings from this study lead me to suggest the following to those who work in higher education: 1) establish reasonable expectations for students' first year of college; 2) ensure faculty who teach first-year students are engaged members of the campus community; 3) increase dialogue and collaboration among those who design and implement high school and college curricula; and 4) create intentional spaces on campus for students to socialize.

Establish reasonable expectations for students' first year of college. When students have greater understanding of college, they develop reasonable expectations. In turn, students who have these reasonable expectations are prepared for the college experience and are able to manage the transition to college. Shaping reasonable expectations intentionally and programmatically will help students understand the college environment. New student orientation programs offer an excellent opportunity to shape student expectations and often take a variety of forms. Orientation programs include visits to campus the summer before classes begin to select courses and become familiar with the campus, welcome activities immediately preceding the start of the semester, and semester-long seminars for first-year students that include a focus on the transition to college. Many student affairs professionals administer orientation programs on campuses

and most know it often includes a challenging and often political planning process. Offices across campuses want “face time” with new students to ensure that new students access campus resources. While understandable, it is also difficult to teach students everything they need to know in orientation programs.

Given this study, I suggest making use of orientation programs to help students set reasonable academic, social, and career expectations for their college experience. In these programs, staff should include faculty so students can learn about faculty expectations. Before classes started, faculty could share with new students what they expect from students in order to be academically successful. Faculty could also share their approach to career development with students. Students would then expect their first classes to focus on the development of academic skills rather than on career training. Orientation programs could also offer opportunities for students to discuss majors, changing majors, and career expectations. Career development specialists and faculty might best serve students if they collaborated to teach students how to explore career opportunities and make informed decisions about selecting a major while learning how to be academically successful in college coursework.

Faculty as engaged members of the campus community. For this study, it was important to include part-time college instructors who are representative of the teachers in classes with first-year college students across the country. Even at a small, private institution, first-year students will likely have adjunct instructors as their teachers. The prevalence of adjunct instructors is a trend that has been emerging for some time since hiring adjuncts can be a cost-saving means of providing instruction. Some estimate

adjunct instructors make up 50% of the professoriate (June, 2009). Given institutions' increased reliance on adjunct instructors, making the decision to assign adjuncts to first-year courses is an important one.

It would be a misperception that all adjunct instructors are those with the least amount of teaching experience. On the contrary, it was an adjunct instructor in this study who had the most years of experience teaching first-year students. I did not receive interest in participating in my study by seasoned professors, or those with more than 13 years of experience teaching first-year students for that matter. The implication of this finding suggests seasoned faculty members may not be assigned to teach introductory classes (or the ones who are assigned are neither interested in nor have the time to participating in research studies for doctoral students).

From this exploratory study, adjunct instructors did not report greatly different expectations than full-time faculty. In some cases, adjunct instructors had higher expectations of the first-year students than full-time instructors. It was an adjunct instructor who had the highest expectations of reading load for first-year students. One key difference, though, is that adjunct instructors noted that they did not feel part of the college culture. Professor William Colfax, for example, answered questions about first-year students about what he *assumes* to be true without being confident he fully knew the students on campus.

Adjunct instructors who have a difficult time feeling part of the campus community may have difficulty communicating the culture of the campus along with the institution's values and expectations. Institutions value engagement of all campus

members as a means to help first-year students feel included in the campus community as much as possible. As such, faculty development programs that educate instructors, both full-time and part-time, who teach first-year students about the campus community might help in creating an inclusive environment for instructors that will translate into an inclusive community for students. Furthermore, conversations and meetings that include adjunct instructors about teaching first-year students would also help in creating a high level of engagement among all who teach introductory level classes.

High school and college collaboration. As mentioned in Chapter One, the most recent comprehensive report about higher education by the U.S government was the Spellings Report of 2006. Within that report, the authors describe an expectations gap between students feeling prepared to enter college and actually being ready to meet the academic requirements of higher education; yet, upon arriving at college they find they are not as prepared as they expected to be.

The matter of an expectations gap is complicated. There are students across the country who feel they are prepared but, in actuality, are not. There are students, like those in my study, who are well-prepared and find college less challenging than they expected. Is there a way to close these gaps in expectations?

One possible solution may be to engage high school teachers and college instructors in dialogue about student preparedness. College faculty who teach first-year college students rarely, if ever, interact with high school teachers. Our country's education system does not incorporate this level of collaboration. With efforts in some states to create a P-20 educational system (Achieve, 2007), one where students transition

seamlessly through their education, an essential component is cooperation between high school and college instructors to determine what they expect of students. While the logistics of such dialogue would be difficult to manage, it would be advantageous. First-year faculty and high school instructors could compare and discuss their expectations for academic success to better ensure new college students are ready for college-level work expected by their professors.

Creating social spaces for students. As a student affairs practitioner, I learned the value of creating meaningful spaces for students. How space is designed on a campus impacts how students make use of the space. The findings in my study indicate that how space is designed is directly connected to meeting students' social expectations. In this study, students noted they expected to make friends upon starting college but were surprised at how easy it was to find friends in a short amount of time. The first-year students in this study believed that friendships just "happened." The students attribute the small size of their college community as allowing for this to happen. I posit that friendships begin because of the layout and design of their living spaces. In comfortable, inviting, and small living spaces, students could be themselves and find friends easily.

Thus, design of campus spaces is of the utmost importance. Places must be created for all students, including commuter students, to allow for social connections if colleges want to encourage students to make friends easily. Students make friends in their residence halls and in other places on campus. Comfortable places are key for students to be themselves and make friends before, after, and between their classes as a

means to encourage them to spend time on campus, making friends, and feeling part of the community.

These recommendations are practical ways to shape student expectations about the college experience in ways that are more likely to encourage students to persist in college. Students were not in agreement as to what type of unmet expectations would result in a possible departure from college. For those who work at colleges and universities, thoughtful attention must be given to the decisions that impact how student expectations are met.

Recommendations for Future Research

In reviewing the data and extracting common themes to answer my research questions, many new questions emerged that led to the identification of future research questions. As such, I suggest further research in four areas: 1) the role of high school teaching in preparing students for college, especially in Advanced Placement classes; 2) effects on first-year students of a changing professoriate that includes more adjunct instructors; 3) the role of career education in a student's first year of college; and lastly 4) an examination of student persistence that is both qualitative and longitudinal.

High school as a means of college preparation. In this study, students stated their high school English teachers most influenced their expectations of college. This finding was unexpected, and this study did not explore this matter in detail. As such, questions emerge relating to the role high school teachers play in how they not only shape student expectations of college but also influence student level of college readiness. A worthwhile study would be to seek ways to understand if high school teachers, college

instructors, and students are in agreement as to what is necessary to learn in high school to be ready for college. One study indicates the college-ready student is “able to understand what is expected in a college course, can cope with the content knowledge presented and can take away from the course the key intellectual lessons and dispositions the course was designed to convey and develop” (Conley, 2007, p. 5). My study indicates that college readiness is not just about academic preparedness but also about being socially ready for college and clear about how college prepares students for a career. A study about the educational practices of high school teachers and college instructors with student perceptions of their own readiness would be valuable in guiding how best to prepare students for college.

Relating to the issue of high school teachers, college instructors, and college readiness is the apparent prevalence and influence of high school Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Both students and faculty believed AP courses in high school were the best classes at preparing students for college-level work. The question remains if students in AP classes might be more motivated to succeed in college or if AP classes are best designed to prepare students for college. Furthermore, a valuable question worth addressing is to determine what techniques used in AP courses do, in fact, help students become prepared for college. This study briefly addressed this question as one student interviewee mentioned her high school teacher would clearly say that the work in their AP English class would prepare the students for college. A more in-depth study identifying the connections between high school AP classes and college readiness from

the perspective of college instructors could influence how high school and college teachers align their teaching.

A question remains why college is not as difficult as students expect. Some posit students are selecting institutions that are “safe” and not as challenging as they can be (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009). From this study, I suspect how students form their expectations is part of the reason. Are students being intentionally scared into thinking college is too difficult while in high school? Research is needed on why college is not academically challenging for many students.

One way to research this perception would be to modify this study. Interviews with students and the same faculty who teach the students along with interviews of the high school teachers who taught the students might be able to shed light on the subject of academic difficulty. While I talked to students and faculty from the same institution, I did not ensure that the students had the very faculty I spoke with as their instructors. I also did not interview any high school teachers. Interviewing students, high school teachers, and college faculty could test if and how high school teachers and faculty communicate their expectations for student success and how the students understand these expectations.

Research on adjunct instructors. In this study, adjunct instructors noted feeling less connected to the campus community than their full-time colleagues. When I interviewed one of the adjunct instructors in his office, it was completely empty with only bare shelves, a desk, and chair. When Professor Colfax mentioned he did not have a sense of the college community outside of class, his office environment symbolized his

feeling. My experiences in interviewing the other two adjunct instructors were similar; the space where I interviewed them was neither private nor completely decorated. While adjuncts may not have as great a sense of connection to campus as full-time faculty, a valuable study would be to identify if this finding affects first-year students. Do students who have more adjunct instructors than full-time faculty have differing college experiences? As the use of adjunct instructors in higher education continues to rise, the impact of this strategic hiring decision would help colleges know how it affects students and how to train adjunct instructors.

Research on career education. With the current difficult economic times, students and their families want to ensure a college education offers a good return on investment. One way this return is measured is by student job placement after college. This study highlights a distinct question related to career matters for the curriculum for first-year college students. First-year students describe their first-year courses, especially those in general education areas, as something “to get out of the way.” Students in this study, though, seemed patient and understanding of the need to take these courses. Giselle, for example, even found a general education course intriguing enough to consider changing her major. And, most notably, these students indicated they trust their college to prepare them for a career. They might not know how this education will lead to a career but they do feel confident their college education will enable them to find a career.

A number of questions abound for further research relating to career education. Do most students trust their colleges to prepare them for a career? If so, how and why?

Should students be encouraged to enter college without a career track in mind? If first-year professors believe this to be the case, should curriculum that assists with career exploration be part of the first year of college? These questions, I believe, are timely and essential to address. More and more, colleges need to justify their existence and many students select colleges based upon the school's reputation for producing quality graduates in certain fields of work.

Qualitative, longitudinal research on student retention. When students begin college, they expect to graduate. The findings from this study indicate students hold onto this belief into their first year of college. While the only way to know for certain would be to continue this study to see how they progress through college and if they graduate, the students are quite confident they will obtain a bachelor's degree.

Tracking student stories as part of a longitudinal study on retention would not be an easy task but it would be a worthwhile one. Adelman (2006) has started this type of research quantitatively by tracking high school students through college graduation, including students who transfer among higher education institutions. This research is unique in that it focuses on the student and his/her college transitions rather than tracking retention from an institutional perspective. I suggest there is a need for similar research but qualitative in nature, where researchers find themes as to why students persist, others transfer, and still others drop out all together.

My study was small in that it was conducted over a short period of time. Following these students through their college experience to see if they do persist towards graduation would be a means to identify how their experiences and expectations

impact their persistence to graduation. Findings from this type of study could not only influence students' first year experience but also their subsequent years in college.

Limitations and Conclusion

The previous two sections of this chapter outlined my recommendations for practice based upon the findings and suggestions for future research. While a limitation of this study is its small scope with interviews of only 16 total participants, my research findings address a number of matters relating to college success, including student expectations, faculty expectations, the alignment of the two, and how students expect to persist to graduation.

The literature on student expectations focused primarily on academic and social expectations (Stern, 1966; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Keup, 2007). Some literature on academic expectations incorporated student career expectations (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995). Most first-year college students expect college to be difficult academically, to be inclusive enough to find friends, and to prepare them for careers. The students in this study viewed college similarly, yet also found that academic coursework and making friends were less challenging than they expected.

Faculty expectations focus primarily on academics. Faculty expects students to be engaged in the classroom, develop critical thinking skills, and spend a considerable amount of time on their studies (Achieve, 2007; AAC&U, 2002). In my study, faculty identified these expectations but, like the research, little literature exists on faculty perspectives regarding how students adjust socially to their new environment.

Furthermore, the faculty in this study prefer first-year students not to focus on career

preparation and more on learning and thinking skills. While the research did not specifically indicate that faculty, especially those who teach first-year students, do not like to discuss career (Brown, 2003), it became evident in my study that faculty trust their courses will teach students to be good employees in any field. First-year courses, as perceived by both faculty and students, are more likely to be building blocks for later learning in upper-division courses than for career preparation.

Student and faculty expectations for college success align most in terms of academics. Given this is the area in which faculty represent the culture of the university, aligned expectations imply students understand what it takes to achieve academic success. Yet, the faculty in my study did not seem to believe that students understand faculty expectations since students' actions do not reflect their knowledge of how to be successful. In terms of social and career expectations, students and faculty agree that to find friends, students should "be themselves" and be open to new experiences. Finding a career that is a fit is mainly a student responsibility as agreed by both students and faculty.

Given this study solely focused on student and faculty expectations for success as it pertains to student persistence, my suggestions could impact student retention. From this study, the literature review, and my personal experience, improving student retention rates involves more than just faculty and students. Graduating students from college must be a goal for secondary and post-secondary education, and inclusive of the high school system and the higher education community. In understanding student expectations, those who work in higher education can offer insight on how best to shape

reasonable expectations and design learning environments where students can be successful. By collaborating with high schools, college educators can help students become not only ready for college but also ready to *graduate* from college.

APPENDIX A:

INVITATION TO BECOME A LIAISON

Appendix A: Invitation to become a Liaison

Date

Name,
Title
Institution
Address

Dear _____:

I write to invite you to participate as an administrative liaison for a study examining student and faculty expectations of college success that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at Loyola University Chicago. This qualitative research seeks to a) identify first-year student expectations of college, b) identify faculty expectations of first-year students, and c) explore if, and how, the expectations of these two groups align.

My intention is to gain insight into this topic by interviewing 8 first-year students and 8 instructors of first-year students at the same institution. For my student sample, I seek to interview five women and three men including three students of color. For my faculty sample, I seek to interview six full-time and two part-time instructors.

If you are willing to serve as the liaison for this study, you would assist me in identifying and contacting the student and faculty sample from your institution. You would send students and faculty the materials I provide you including an Invitation to Participate, Synopsis of the Research Study, and Consent Form. Participants would indicate their willingness to participate by contacting me. The information gathered in interviews with students and faculty will only be used for the purpose of my research. Your identity, that of your institution, and those students and faculty who volunteer to participate will not be revealed. The enclosed Synopsis of the Research Study will provide you with more detailed information.

Thank you for considering my invitation to participate in this research project. If you are interested in participating, please contact me via email at jodi347@yahoo.com. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Jodi Koslow Martin
Email: jodi347@yahoo.com
Phone: 630-844-7510

APPENDIX B:
LETTER TO COOPERATING INSTITUTION

Appendix B: Letter to Cooperating Institution

Date
Name
Title
Institution
Address

Dear Ethics Committee Chair:

I write to inform you of my interest in conducting a study at your institution for my doctoral dissertation at Loyola University Chicago examining student and faculty expectations of college success. This qualitative research seeks to a) identify first-year student expectations of college, b) identify faculty expectations of first-year students, and c) explore if, and how, the expectations of these two groups align.

I seek approval from your institutional research board for my study. My intention is to gain insight into this topic by interviewing 8 first-year students and 8 instructors of first-year students at the same institution with the assistance of institutional liaisons. For my student sample, I seek to interview five women and three men including three students of color. For my faculty sample, I seek to interview six full-time and two part-time instructors.

The information gathered in interviews with students and faculty will only be used for the purpose of my research. The identity of your institution and those students and faculty who volunteer to participate will not be revealed. The enclosed Synopsis of the Research Study will provide you with more detailed information.

I hope to speak with you in more detail about the process by which to gain your ethics committee approval. Please contact me via email at jodi347@yahoo.com. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Jodi Koslow Martin
Email: jodi347@yahoo.com
Phone: 630-844-7510

APPENDIX C:

STUDENT INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Appendix C: Student Invitation to Participate

Date

Dear _____:

As a first-year college student, I invite you to participate in a research study examining first-year student expectations of college. As a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago, I am investigating the alignment of first-year student expectations of college with faculty expectations of their students.

My intent is to gain insight on this topic through personal interviews with eight first-year students and eight instructors. I am inviting you to participate because you are a resident first-year student at (*institution name*). If you accept my invitation to participate, I will ask to interview you for approximately 60 minutes. Our conversation will be audio taped and later transcribed, and I will ask you to review the transcription to ensure accuracy. Complete confidentiality is ensured as your input will not be used at your institution and, in no way, will impact any of your grades or academic standing at the university. Furthermore, I will not identify you by name in the study and instead will use a pseudonym in my analysis. The attached synopsis of the research study offers you further detail.

Should you decide to participate in this research by completing the interview, you will receive a \$20 gift card to amazon.com at the conclusion of the interview. To ensure the confidentiality of the study, please respond directly to me at jodi347@yahoo.com, and not to [liaison name here], if you are willing to participate in this study.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jodi Koslow Martin

Email: jodi347@yahoo.com

Phone: 630-844-7510

APPENDIX D:

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Appendix D: Synopsis of the Research Study

Researcher Background

My name is Jodi Koslow Martin and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the program in Higher Education in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. I received a master's degree in College Student Personnel from Ohio University. I am currently the Assistant to the Provost and Director of the Crouse Center for Student Success at Aurora University, where I oversee academic advising and career development.

Research Purposes

American society values access to college, so much that college enrollment across the country for students under the age of 25 is at an all time high. Yet, the rate at which students attend college is not matched by the rate at which they graduate. Only slightly more than half of students who enroll in 4-year institutions across the country earn a degree. Educators, policymakers, and researchers have investigated reasons students persist towards graduation and why others do not.

A review of literature indicates that expectations play a role in college retention issues. Do students go to college expecting to succeed? Is college less challenging than students expected? Do students make friends easily and experience independence from the families in their first year of college? The answers to these questions have not been compared to what faculty expect of students. Thus, the question remains to what extent if faculty expectations align with student expectations for college success. This study seeks to address this question to determine if such alignment plays a role in student decisions to persist towards college graduation.

Participant and Institutional Selection

A small, private college provides the student and faculty population of this study. Criteria for first-year students include residing on campus and graduating from high school within the last year. Eligible faculty teach at least one class at the first-year level. Eight students and eight instructors will be chosen. For the student sample, I seek to interview five women and three men including three students of color. For the faculty sample, I seek to interview six full-time and two part-time instructors.

Expectations of Participants

Consent to participate in this study is sought from all students and faculty. Faculty and student participants are asked to meet with the researcher for a 60 minute interview which will be audio-taped for later transcription and returned to the participant

for review. Faculty will also be asked to share a copy of their course syllabi of their first-year courses.

Potential Participant Benefits

This study offers a number of benefits. Students will be given the opportunity to reflect on their journey into college. Faculty will also be given chance to reflect on their experience in teaching first-year students. Lastly, this study helps institutions understand what students expect from college and what faculty expect of these students.

Potential Participant Risks and Ensuring Confidentiality

A potential risk exists if any personally identifiable data are inadvertently revealed. To address this risk, strict confidentiality of all records will be maintained and names of participants will be kept confidential with the use of pseudonyms. At the completion of the study, when data are permanently stored, the list of participant names will not be kept in the same location as the research data, preventing a link between the two. All raw data, including interview transcripts, will be destroyed within two years following completion of the study.

Treatment of Results

To ensure the accuracy of data collected, participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of their personal interview. Additionally, a summary of the dissertation will be made available for any interested participants.

APPENDIX E:

FACULTY INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Appendix E: Faculty Invitation to Participate

Date

Name

Address

Dear _____:

I write to invite you to participate in a research study for my doctoral dissertation examining the expectations of first-year college students and the faculty who teach them in a small, four-year university setting. As a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago, I hope to identify connections between what college students expect of themselves to be successful in college and what instructors expect of their students.

In addition to interviewing eight first-year students, I seek to interview eight instructors. Participation in the study will involve an audio-taped interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. I will later transcribe the interview and ask you to review the transcription for accuracy. Furthermore, I ask for a copy of any syllabi you use in teaching first-year students as part of an effort to include document analysis in my research study.

Your decision to participate in my study does not, in any way, influence your employment at your institution. I will hold the data from my interviews in strict confidence, and you will be identified through use of a pseudonym. Furthermore, all identifiable information on your syllabi will be removed prior to my analysis. No one at your institution will know of your involvement in the study should you decide to participate.

I have enclosed a synopsis of the research for your review in making a decision to participate. I appreciate your consideration. Please respond to me via email at jodi347@yahoo.com if you would like to participate or if you have any questions. I will acknowledge your email and am happy to contact you via phone to discuss the study in greater detail.

Many thanks,

Jodi Koslow Martin

Email: jodi347@yahoo.com

Phone: 630-844-7510

Encl

APPENDIX F:

LETTER TO DECLINE PARTICIPANT

Appendix F: Letter to Decline Participant

Date

Name

Address

Dear _____:

Thank you for responding to my invitation to participate in a research study for my doctoral dissertation examining the expectations of first-year college students and the faculty who teach them. Though your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated, I no longer need your participation at this time.

Please accept my appreciation of your willingness to help with my research project.

Sincerely,

Jodi Koslow Martin

Jodi347@yahoo.com

Phone: 630-844-7510

APPENDIX G:

SIGNED CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Appendix G: Signed Consent of Participants

Project Title: Student and Faculty Expectations for Success

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research project being conducted by Jodi Koslow Martin, a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago.

The purpose of this study is to determine if first-year student expectations of college success align with the expectations of faculty who teach them. The researcher will be conducting audio-taped interviews with 16 people (8 students and 8 faculty) at a small, private university. The interview will take place on the campus of the participants, and take approximately 60 minutes.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked questions about your background and expectations. To ensure confidentiality, your name and identity will not be used in the work; pseudonyms will be used in all writings, publications or presentations.

The interview is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions at any time or withdraw from participation completely without penalty. Furthermore, you may interrupt to ask questions concerning the research or research procedures at any time.

If you agree to participate, you will be adding to the body of knowledge about student expectations of college.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact the researcher, Jodi Koslow Martin, at jodi347@yahoo.com or the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Terry Williams of Loyola University at twillia@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Loyola University's Research Compliance Manager at (773)508-2689.

Your signature below indicates your consent to participation in this research project.

Signature of Interviewee

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX H:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS

Appendix H: Interview Protocol for Students

A. Expectations Prior to Matriculation

1. Prior to enrolling this fall please describe for me what expectations you had for your first year of college.
2. Please describe who or what you believe may have influenced the expectations that you brought with you to college this fall.
3. Prior to enrollment this fall, to what extent did you feel you were well prepared to be academically successful here?

B. Academic Expectations Post-Matriculation

1. Now that you are enrolled and have some experience at this university, please describe for me what kinds of expectations you have for your academic experiences here.
2. Please describe for me what you believe a first-year student like yourself needs to do at this university to be successful academically?
3. What do you think your faculty who teach you expect of you in terms of being successful here academically?
4. To what extent do you believe that you came to this school well prepared by your high school to succeed academically in your courses?
5. To what extent would you consider leaving this institution if your academic expectations were not to be met by the end of this semester or year? Why?

C. Social Expectations Post-Matriculation

1. As you consider your experience thus far at this university, please describe for me what your current expectations are for your social life here.
2. In what ways might your current expectations about your social life here be different from what you believed prior to your arrival here?
3. Please describe for me what you believe it takes to “fit in” socially at this university.
4. In what ways might your personal expectations for your social life here and your expectations to succeed in the classroom be a challenge for you?
5. To what extent would you consider leaving this university if your social expectations were not to be met by the semester or year? Why?

D. Career Expectations Post-Matriculation

1. What expectations do you have for how your institution should prepare you for a job or career following graduation?
2. To what extent do you feel that you are already being prepared in your first year for a career beyond graduation?
3. At this point in time, do you already have a good idea of what type of job or career you want to pursue following graduation? Why or why not?

4. To what extent would you consider leaving this university if your career expectations were not met by the end of this semester or year? Why?

APPENDIX I:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FACULTY

Appendix I: Interview Protocol for Faculty

A. Biographical Information

1. What academic degrees do you hold? What institutions granted your degrees?
2. What first-year classes do you teach?
3. How long have you been teaching first-year students?

B. Expectations of Students Prior to Matriculation

1. What do you believe first-year students expect in their first year of college prior to enrolling?
2. What or who do you believe influence student expectations of college?
3. To what extent are students well-prepared to be academically successful at your institution?

C. Academic Expectations of Students Post-Matriculation

1. Please describe for me what you expect first-year students to do to be academically successful in your class.
2. How much time do you expect your students to spend on preparing for each class session?
3. In what ways do you believe you communicate your expectations to the students in your class?
4. How would you describe students' perceptions of your expectations of them?
5. How do you assess if students are meeting your academic expectations?

D. Social Expectations of Students Post-Matriculation

1. What should first-year students do to feel engaged in the college community here?
2. Describe what you believe it takes for a student to "fit in" here.
3. How do you expect students to balance their academic responsibilities and their social life?

E. Career Expectations of Students Post-Matriculation

1. How do you believe your university prepares students for a job or career following graduation?
2. Do you feel your class prepares students for their careers? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Do you expect students to have a good idea of what they want to do for a career when they are first-year students? Why or why not?

F. Retention

1. Do you expect most of your first-year students to return to college for their second year at your institution? Why or why not?
2. Do you expect your students to graduate from your institution? Why or why not?

3. What do you believe are the reasons for students deciding not to return to your university after their first semester or year of college?

APPENDIX J:

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____, agree to transcribe the interviews for the

(Insert Printed Name)

doctoral research of Jodi Koslow Martin entitled “First-year College Students and Faculty: A Comparison of Expectations for Success.” I will maintain strict confidentiality of the data files and the transcripts. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- I will not discuss them with anyone but the researcher.
- I will not share copies with anyone except the researcher.
- I agree to turn over all copies of the transcripts to the researcher at conclusion of the contract.
- I will return the audio files to the researcher upon conclusion of the contract.

I have read and understood the information provided above.

Transcriber’s Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature

Date

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VITA

Jodi Koslow Martin was born and raised in Elmhurst, Illinois. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and Organizational Communication in 1997. From 1997 to 1999, she attended Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, where she received a Master of Education in College Student Personnel.

While a student at Loyola University Chicago, Jodi worked full-time at Aurora University. Her administrative responsibilities have included first-year programs, student activities, and academic advisement.

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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

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