IMPACT OF FRESHMAN ORIENTATION CLASS ON SUBSEQUENT COLLEGE SUCCESS

By

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ABSTRACT

Retention of students in community colleges is a problem nation-wide. While there are many studies that have been performed to address this issue at the 4-year college level, very few studies have been conducted at community colleges. This study was conducted using the data pulled from a five-campus community college district. The findings are similar as to the limited number of other community college studies. Those students who received higher grades (A,B) in College 100 classes went on maintain higher GPA in the subsequent semester than those who received a lower grade (C or below).
SECTION ONE

BACKGROUND, INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND LITERATURES REVIEW

Background

Student success in college is vital not only to the student and their eventual career paths, but it is essential to the survival of colleges, universities and all institutions of higher learning. Without developing a pattern of student success from the very beginning of a student’s higher education journey, colleges and universities stand to lose in two critical areas – enrollment and retention. Toward that end, according to the University of South Carolina’s National Resource Center for First Year Experience & Students in Transition (2015), over 75% of all colleges and universities in the United States have deemed first-year experience classes important enough toward student success that they have developed some form of “freshman seminar” or “College 100” class worth 1 or 2 credit hours in the required curriculum for first-year students (University of South Carolina, 2015).

The purpose behind these seminar classes is to provide students with vital tips, tools, information, and, perhaps most importantly, the opportunities for one-on-one collaboration with their instructors so they can develop strategies and habits that will help them succeed throughout the rest of their college careers. The idea behind such classes is that by being successful in these seminar classes, it will enhance the likelihood the students will achieve success in their other courses as well and therefore experience the overall academic success for them to remain at school through graduation.
Practice under Investigations and/or Policy to be Informed by Study

Just as there are many ways to define “success” in college, there is nearly a study for every definition. This field study will focus on grades being the indicator of “success” and hopes to show there is a relationship between students who earn a high grade (A and B) in College 100 and their higher GPAs in the next semester than students who received lower grades (C,D,F) in College 100. Evidence has shown in other studies that regardless of how you define “success”, those students who did well in first-year seminar classes received positive benefits that helped to impact their success as they moved through their college experience (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

Conceptual Underpinning

Who benefits from a first-year seminar class? Research has shown that in colleges and universities where there is some sort of first-year experience class in existence, students who take these classes and are able to form a bond with either the instructor or at least one faculty or staff member, has a better chance of succeeding in their classes and continuing to pursue their education (National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE) (2015). First-year college students who present as “at risk” whether this be because they have lower GPAs and overall academic achievement in high school or if it is because they are non-traditional students who are returning to school after a significant break, can benefit from College 100 courses if they succeed in receiving a high grade by giving them the confidence and tools necessary to achieve higher grades in subsequent classes the following semester and beyond.
Statement of the Problem

According to the latest “Bringing the Institution Into Focus Annual Report” conducted by NSSE, “One in three first-year students rarely met with an advisor. The proportion who rarely sought advice was higher among commuting, nontraditional-aged, and part-time students—suggesting the need for special outreach efforts for such students” (NSSE, 2014). When students reach point of frustration and don’t know where to turn, they will very likely make the decision to quit school and leave without faculty, administration or advising ever understanding the real issue. According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (2010) national retention rates for first-time freshman returning for the second year at approximately 77%, with the higher percentages being in states like California and Florida (National Center, 2010). Even though this statistic seems high, it is carried by the results of only a handful of states where colleges and universities that believe student engagement is vital to long-term student success have different programs and classes in place to help address this issue. While it is true no one can make a student succeed in a College 100 class (or any class for that matter) it is important that institutions of higher learning have some sort of College 100 class experience in place for all first-year students so that they might be presented with a curriculum especially designed to provide tools for future success.

The latest findings by NSSE (2014) also supported the fact that first-year students who received higher grades than even the student anticipated were those who were engaged in learning and took advantage of the resources available to them.

As colleges and universities seek to find the solution to enrolling and retaining students through to graduation, it is imperative that we study the link College 100 and similar first-year
experience classes have on the long-term success of the students who do well in these classes. There are many 4-year liberal arts colleges in the country that use the first-year seminar class as a means to familiarize the new student with critical thinking skills, basic writing and communication skills. For instance, at the University of Mount Union in Alliance, Ohio (a 4-year liberal arts college) they offer this freshman seminar class as a semester long, 4-credit course that not only focuses on the basic skills for succeeding in college, but also closely works with each student through developing relationships with mentors, academic advisors and instructors. The students are required to pick five “courses” they want to include in the freshman seminar package (www.mountunion.edu/fys, 2015).

A different approach to a 4-credit hour semester-long course is the one adopted by many community colleges and other 2-year institutions. This semester course is taught in several different formats, most often you will see it in an eight-week configuration and sometimes a college will offer it in a 2-Saturday format where the students will attend all day on two Saturdays. You will also see it taught in a one class a week, 16-week format. Its content will focus mainly on subjects surrounding student success. Developing their skills in group work, teaching them to develop a sense of community within their campus, pointing to the resources on campus that are there to help make their college experience successful such as admissions, advising, counseling, tutors, extra-curricular groups and organizations, financial aid departments and more (Cuseo, 2010).

Need a transition paragraph that sets up why this study is necessary. Maybe talk about criticisms of FYE that is it a blow off course, a barrier to graduation for those who don’t complete, extra credit hours that cost the students money and time, etc. The study is important to establish the quality and credibility of the class.
Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to examine some of the first-year experience and College 100 courses that colleges and universities have designed and determine if there is a correlation between the average GPA with the prediction that students with higher grades will have a higher GPA in subsequent semesters.

Research Questions

The research questions to be examined:

1. Are students with higher grades in COLL 100 more likely to enroll in the next semester?
2. Students who earned higher grades (A,B) in College 100 will have higher GPAs in their next semester classes than students who have lower grades (C,D,F).

Hypothesis

Students who earned higher grades (A,B) in College 100 will have higher GPAs in their next semester classes than students who have lower grades (C,D,F).

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

By showing a correlation between higher grades earned in College 100 and higher grades earned in subsequent semesters, hopefully this study will confirm the need for continued first-year seminar classes that focus on student success throughout their college experience which will then lead to higher retention and graduation levels. It is also hoped that by identifying the reverse to be true (that students who don’t do well in College 100 won’t likely do well in subsequent courses) advisors, faculty members and others in charge of student success will seek
to find better ways to intervene and counsel these at-risk students while they are still in College 100 in order to achieve a better outcome.

Limitations and Delimitations

The data pulled for this study will be limited to information gathered from one large, urban two-year community college district located in Midwestern United States. There are, however, five distinct colleges within this district which may produce variations in data based on the different types of students who enroll in each campus. Additionally, this study examines the impact of a one-credit first year seminar class that may be unique from multiple credit classes.

Definitions of Terms

First-year seminar class. One semester freshman college orientation class.

First-year student. A first-year student is any enrolled college student who has accumulated less than 12 credit hours.

Traditional. Colleges and universities who have not utilized seminar classes.

Literature Review

College is a difficult transition for many students. Even first-year students (those defined as entering college soon after their graduation from high school) often have trouble trading the high school experiences they are used to for the more rigorous expectations of college (Bigger, 2005). A large percentage of students never make it to their sophomore year and this, of course, impacts not only the student’s ability to stay motivated to continue working
toward their degree, but it negatively impacts the college or university by hurting their retention numbers (Bigger, 2005).

“A study was conducted at Phillips County Community College (PCCC) to analyze the impact of freshman orientation classes on students' persistence and academic performance. The participants in the study were all first-time, full-time freshmen who entered PCCC during the fall 1982, spring 1983, or fall 1983 semesters. During the registration process, students were encouraged to enroll in an 8-week orientation class that included information on academic policies, college regulations, career counseling and testing, placement, financial aid, student services, and study skills. Study findings revealed that: (1) 79.7% of the experimental group had been retained at the end of one semester, compared to 43.1% of the control group; (2) the combined first semester mean grade point average for the experimental group was 2.28, compared to 1.72 for the control group.” (ERIC, 1984).

As the study from Phillips County Community College realized over 30 years ago, there is a significant need for some kind of freshman seminar, first-year orientation, class that is specifically designed to prepare students for success in their college courses in subsequent semesters.

While studies have been conducted by 2-year community colleges, 4-year colleges and universities and even business and technical certification programs for well over thirty years, the outcomes of the research done has been mostly consistent. Students who took advantage and performed well in freshman seminar classes tended to carry that GPA success into successive semesters. The need to retain students is a high priority for any school and the need to engage freshman and first-year students by giving them the necessary resources, tools and programs to
succeed is one way that has proven successful in the past. The method by which schools have chosen to accomplish the goal of cultivating successful students has varied; through having more advisors and counselors available for one-on-one interaction with “at-risk” students while other programs have focused on is more curriculum-based – through the formation of 8 and 16-week freshman seminar, College 100-type orientation courses. Based on their review of research on first-year seminars published in the Journal *The First-year Experience and Students in Transition*, Hunter and Linder (2005) observed, “The overwhelming majority of first-year seminar research has shown that these courses positively affect retention, grade point average, number of credit hours attempted and completed, graduation rates, student involvement in campus activities, and student attitudes and perceptions of higher education, as well as faculty development and methods of instruction (pg. 288).

The data presented here is based on first year students who took College 100 classes at a large Midwestern community college. It looks at the grade students received in that class compared to the grades they received for subsequent semester grades. The data from the Phillips study compared the grades and retention rates of students who took the class versus those who didn’t participate in the class. However, in the end, the resulting conclusion should be nearly the same – that students who scored high grades in College 100 also scored high grades in subsequent semester classes.
Summary

In today’s global economy a higher education of some sort is absolutely necessary in order to meet the demands of technology, business, health care and industry throughout the country and world. While a traditional college or university experience may not be the right choice for everyone, it is imperative that those same colleges and universities develop and maintain programs that make the transition from high school to college a success for those who chose the traditional path. Even though recent data has shown that first-year to second-year retention rates are fairly high (79.7% of those who successfully took a class vs. 43.1% who did not take the class (ERIC, 1984), the types of programs and classes that are set up to insure student success are not nearly as consistent. The presumption is if these classes are successfully completed, students will indeed have a more successful college experience and this will raise their retention rate for the subsequent semester and beyond. This study seeks to answer the question of whether students who earned higher grades (A,B) in College 100 will have higher GPAs in their next semester classes than students who have lower grades (C,D,F).
SECTION TWO

METHODS

Problem and Purposes Overview

Through extensive research it was discovered that first-year seminar classes (and those similar in function) can help give a student who is at risk gather the tools necessary to succeed in subsequent semesters.

Field Study Methods

Research Design

This study was performed with the help of Dr. Kristy Bishop, Director of Research and Assessment at Metropolitan Community Colleges-Kansas City. She pulled the research on my behalf after completing the IRB approval. The research utilized the following data from all MCCKC campuses: information on race, gender, age, GPA, whether they enrolled and completed the subsequent semester or withdrew during the College 100 course.

Variables Used in the Study

With the first research question, the grade the student received was analyzed for whether or not they enrolled and completed the spring semesters. For the second research question, analyzed the grade they received in College 100 was analyzed as well as the cumulative GPA they received for the fall and spring semester (if they enrolled in the spring).
Research questions and null hypothesis

The research questions to be examined:

Are students with higher grades in COLL 100 more likely to enroll in the next semester?
Students who earned higher grades (A,B) in College 100 will have higher GPAs in their
next semester classes than students who have lower grades (C,D,F).

Null Hypothesis

The grade a student receives in College 100 does not affect whether they enroll and
complete the subsequent semester, nor is it related to their cumulative GPA of that fall and
spring semester.

Study Group

The study group of this research consisted of all students enrolled in College 100 classes
in each of the campuses ranging in age between 15 and 63. This information was collected from
a database of all students enrolled in College 100. No names were collected, making the data
anonymous. Of these students 15 were American??, 84 were Asian, 643 were African-
American, 399 were Hispanic, 279 were Multi-racial, 10 were Pacific Islanders, 2,312 were
White and 4 were not specified. The sample has a gender distribution of 2,050 were female and
1,696 were male.

Data Collection and Instrumentation Utilized

Dr. Bishop, Director of the Institutional Research and Assessment, gathered all the
information from the database utilized by the Institutional Research and Assessment at MCCKC.
Data Analysis Strategies

For the first research question students were grouped into letter grade groups of A and B as well as C, D, F & withdraw and analyzed how many students in each group either did or did not enroll in the subsequent semester.

A T-test was also run on their enrollment status in the spring as it relates to their grade received in College 100 because the enrollment status only had two groups. For the second research question, A and B and C, D, F & withdraw were used and calculated the average cumulative GPA for the following semester. Students who withdrew from College 100 are not included in the average GPA because their GPAs are not applicable. An ANOVA was run on the grade received on the cumulative GPA as well as the grade received in College 100 because there were more than two possible grades to be received.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to discover the correlation if any, between success in College 100 courses and similar success in subsequent semesters. Numerous studies in recent decades have shown that students, who are prepared for their college experience, have more successful experiences in college usually resulting in a higher GPA than those who are not prepared for it. Students who complete College 100 classes with a high grade should show a similar higher GPA in subsequent semesters.
Research Question One: Are students with higher grades in COLL 100 more likely to enroll in the next semester?

All students enrolled in College 100 were divided into two groups by the grade received in the course. Group one consisted of students who received an A or B in the course and group two consisted of students who received a C, D, F or withdrew from the course. Of the 1,879 students in group one, all enrolled and completed the following spring semester. Of the 1,867 students in group two, only 866 enrolled and completed the spring semester while 1,001 did not.

Independent samples t-Test was conducted to determine if a relationship between grades received in College 100 existed between two groups: those who did not enroll and complete the following spring semester (0), and those who did (1). The grades were equated into numbers (0= withdrawal, 1=F, 2=D, 3=C, 4=B, 5=A). The results were found to be statistically significant (MD = 1.834, t = 29.610, p = 0.00). The results indicate students with higher grades in College
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100 are more likely to enroll the next semester. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The T-test is analyzing whether or not students are enrolling in the subsequent spring semester based on the grade they received in College 100. On the X axis, 0 = not enrolling and 1 = enrolling.

Research Question Two: Students who earned higher grades (A, B) in College 100 will have higher GPAs in their next semester classes than students who have lower grades (C, D, and F).

The average spring 2015 GPA between students receiving an A or B was significantly higher from students receiving a C, D, or F. Students receiving an A or B had an average GPA of 2.7 while those receiving other grades had an average GPA of 0.749. The 1,001 students who withdrew from the course are not counted in the average GPA since they did not complete the course or receive a grade in the course.

As shown in Figure 2, within the group of students (n = 381) who received an F in the course had an average cumulative GPA of 1.181 (SD=1.188). Students (n = 203) that received a
D had a cumulative GPA average of 1.743 (SD= 1.215). Students \((n = 344)\) that received a C had a cumulative GPA average of 1.743 (SD= 1.215). Students \((n = 512)\) that received a B had a cumulative GPA average of 2.123 (SD= 1.174). Students \((n = 1157)\) that received an A had a cumulative GPA average of 2.690 (SD= 1.161). The ANOVA results indicate that the grade received and the cumulative GPA differed significantly. The ANOVA results indicated that they grade received and the cumulative GPA differed significantly.

**Summary**

Overall, the results indicate a higher grade received in College 100 is related to enrollment, completion and a higher GPA the following spring semester.
SECTION FOUR: DISCUSSION

Overview

With student enrollment and retention near the top of any college or universities priority list, ways in which to raise those numbers are constantly being studied. Enrollment and retention increases have obvious benefits for the colleges and universities, but arguably the ones most impacted by successful enrollment and retention are the students themselves. National studies have continually shown that students who are new to college (whether traditional students straight out of high school or those who are non-traditional and are in college for the first time) have a better chance at continued educational success if they are armed with some sort of semester course designed specifically for the first-year student. This study was designed to find if there is a difference in subsequent semester grade point average by the grade earned in the college 100 course.

Discussion of Findings

The average spring 2015 GPA between students receiving an A or B was significantly higher from students receiving a C, D, or F. Students receiving an A or B had an average GPA of 2.7 while those receiving other grades had an average GPA of 0.749.

The results indicate a higher grade received in College 100 is related to enrollment, completion and a higher GPA the following spring semester.

Conclusions and Implications and New Learning

Implications for Practitioners

Research has shown that the completion rate of students in community colleges falls significantly behind their four-year counterparts. There is much research done on the four-year
institutions and very little on community colleges. A fairly recent study, performed at a small, rural Virginia community college (Southwest Virginia Community College) found nearly the same results of this study. That study found the participants who had higher GPAs were more likely to be retained in the spring semester (Ellis-O’Quinn, 2012). This Virginia study dealt with other issues including long-term retention, re-enrollment in subsequent semesters, what delivery format the course was presented, etc. Other similar studies performed in community colleges in Florida have reached similar conclusions (source, year); however, as pointed out earlier, there is not a great deal of data on first-year seminar classes in community colleges.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

One obvious recommendation would be to have more community colleges focus and produce studies on this aspect of enrollment and retention so that a broader prospective could be reached as to whether or not first-year seminar courses do indeed impact future success of students through a correlation of higher GPA and re-enrollment in subsequent semesters.

**Summary**

Orientation courses were developed and designed to address a specific need – to assist first year students succeed in not only that class, but to set themselves up for success in future classes as well. This study and similar studies at other community colleges have found that students who did well in these courses and received higher grades were more likely to have higher GPA the following semester and to see success in their classes in subsequent semesters as well. There is still work to be done to ensure as many new students succeed as possible but it appears through these first-year seminar courses, colleges are on the right track for student success and retention.
REFERENCES


University of Mount Union. (2011). Retrieved from University of Mount Union: www.mountunion.edu/fys

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IRB Forms Below
June 9, 2015

Dear Northwest Missouri State University,

I have reviewed the proposal, "Impact of Freshman Orientation Class on Subsequent College Success" presented by Lee Ann Zech, a graduate student at Northwest Missouri State University. I understand that the purpose of the study is to determine if students who earned higher grades (A,B) in College 100 will have higher GPAs in their next semester classes than students who have lower grades (C,D,F).

I have granted permission for the researcher to use the following data elements from Metropolitan Community College:

All students who took COLL 100 for Fall 2014, grade in COLL 100, Term GPA for Spring 2015, Gender, Ethnicity, Age.

Approval is based on tentative IRB Human Participants exemption approval from the Northwest Missouri State University, a copy of the research proposal and the course syllabus. Appropriate data security and confidentiality must be maintained with the supplied data. Metropolitan Community College requests a copy of the completed research for our records.

If the IRB has any concerns about the permission being granted by this letter, please contact me at 816-604-1165 or kristy.bishop@mcckc.edu. Sincerely,

Kristy A. Bishop, Ph.D.
Director of Institutional Research and Assessment
Co-Chair of Institutional Review Board

3200 Broadway | Kansas City, MO 64111 | T (816) 759-1000 | F (816) 759-1158 | www.mcckc.edu
Request for Exemption from Review of Research to the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Participants Northwest Missouri State University

Attention: Form must be typed. Hand written forms will not be accepted.

DATE: June 11, 2015

NAME(S) OF INVESTIGATOR(S): Lee Ann Zech

ADDRESS: 9819 Liberty Hills Drive, Liberty, MO 64068

E-MAIL ADDRESS: Lee.Zech@mcckc.edu

PHONE: 816-830-8429

UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT: Education

ADVISOR'S NAME, ADDRESS, AND PHONE NUMBER (IF APPLICABLE): ______

Dr. Terry Barmann, NWMSU-Kansas City Center, 2601 NE Barry Road, KCMO 64156

PROJECT TITLE: Impact of Freshman Orientation Class on Subsequent College Success

SUMMARY OF PROJECT:

Examining the relationship (if any) between high grades earned (A,B) in College 100 and high grades earned in subsequent semester classes.

EXEMPTION CATEGORY:

Consult the document INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH for full descriptions of exempt categories. Using categories under Section II: Exempt Research Categories, list the category of exempt research activity that applies to your project. Read each category carefully, if your research does not fit under a category listed, you must submit your proposal to the expedited or full review process of the Institutional Review Board.

Remember that:
• Studies that involve minors and utilize survey or interview procedures are not eligible for exemption.
• Studies that involve the observation of minors are eligible for exemption only if the researcher does not participate in or manipulate the activity being observed.

CATEGORY: Choose an item.

EXEMPTION CRITERIA:

1. If your project uses a questionnaire or structured interview, attach a copy of the forms to this application. Have you attached documents? Choose an item.

2. Are all questionnaires prefaced with voluntariness and confidentiality issues written into questionnaire or verbally given to participants? (See section III of the document INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH) Choose an item.

3. Are privacy concerns and confidentiality procedures outlined for participants in a written or verbal form (as evidenced by attached documentation). If verbal, enclose a copy of the script. Choose an item.

4. If students or other vulnerable parties have a relationship with the researcher (e.g. professor/student), are steps taken by the researcher to avoid coercion (e.g. primary researcher has an assistant gather data)? Choose an item.

5. Age and number of participants (See section III of the document INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH)

   (NOTE: If participants are children under age 18 and the researcher is an agent outside the education system, research cannot be considered exempt and either expedited or full review is mandated by law).

   Adults (age 18 and over): Choose an item. Number: 3764
   Minors (under age 18): Choose an item. Number: Q

6. If minors are involved, are you functioning in the role of teacher for these participants? Choose an item.

Describe the nature of involvement of human participants (personal Interview, questionnaire, educational tests, etc.) AND the reason you believe this is an exempt project (Consult the document INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH).
• If using Category 1, be sure to explain how your project relates to instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
• If using Category 4, be sure to explain how you have access to a preexisting data base and how the data will be managed throughout the project.

HUMAN PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT: 0

I affirm that all materials submitted are accurate and that the statements I have made herein are truthful, to the best of my knowledge:

Signature of the Principal Investigator/Date

Advisor/Supervisor (if applicable)/Date

Prepared by/Date

Send an electronic copy of this form and necessary documentation to the Institutional Review Board Chair at IRBNWMS@nwmissouri.edu.

Prior to IRB approval, a printed copy of this application (containing all signatures) and necessary documentation should be sent to the IRB Chair. View the Faculty Senate list of committee members to find the current chair of the committee (find chair).