A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE A 2014 SUMMER TRANSITIONAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM HAD ON SELECTED STUDENTS

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by

Jonathan T. Ballard

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE A 2014 SUMMER TRANSITIONAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM HAD ON SELECTED STUDENTS

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Brief Literature Review

Higher education has integrated many new ways to support incoming freshmen at various universities in order to combat low student retention and completion rates. Many institutions are turning to summer transition programs to help bridge the gap between senior year at high school and freshman year at college. “Summer transition programs are designed to assist individuals to overcome or at least cope with the many social and academic difficulties that arise in the transition to college” (Tinto, 1993, p. 162). It is a struggle that many students face nationwide and a supportive bridge into the first year of college can make the first year experience much more enjoyable and successful as well. This study added to previous research on first-year students’ transitions and persistence beyond their first year. In particular, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, Astin’s Involvement Theory, research on student engagement, and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure were used to relate the findings of this study to the influence the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program had on selected participants (Schlossberg, 1981; Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Schlossberg’s Transition Theory was used to further analyze the
findings of this study (Schlossberg, 1981). The study showed the summer program, positively influenced the transition of participants to college and positively influenced their persistence beyond their first-year of enrollment at a large research University.

Statement of the Problem

The continued success and implementation of summer enrichment programs is significant in the field of higher education for institutions nationwide. It is essential that new students be prepared for their undergraduate career. Students need as much support and guidance as possible to aid in academic and social success. In order to continue to support marginalized students’ success transitioning from high school to their first year of college, institutions need to insure that summer programs are developing skills for success and geared toward improving retention rates. This study will examine the question if summer enrichment programs make students feel that they are better prepared academically, mentally, and socially for their first year of college. It is more important now than ever before to document for stakeholders how summer enrichment programs are beneficial to students and the campus as a whole. Frequently, these programs are being cut at many different institutions.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative method to conduct research on current second-year students who participated in the 2014 Summer Transitional Enrichment Program at a Northern California Research University. The interviews conducted used semi-structured questions. Five students participated in the research.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The outcomes of this research signified that the 2014 Summer Transitional Enrichment Program influenced participants’ transition to college, and clearly helped their success beyond the first year at the institution. This study’s research revealed five crucial findings on what the STEP program does to help students become successful. It encourages campus involvement, provides a helpful support system, creates lasting friendships, allows them to adjust to the college life, and lastly the opportunity for self-growth. These findings produced a deeper understanding of the importance of summer programs at institutions nationwide. Future research is needed to reveal the effects of the program on third, fourth, and fifth year students. Also, it is needed to look at the effects STEP had on students who did make it past their first year at the university. Finally, the researcher recommends that there be a comparison between STEP participants and non-participants who have not done the summer program. This potential study would offer insight into the differences of the transitions and successes of students.

Virginia Dixon, Ed.D

Date
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mama, my foundation, my inspiration. You provide constant strength, hope, peace, and sweet joy. You have fought daily battles with your health but continue to be the rock of our family and brighten up my day with your smile and comforting words. I am constantly reminded to never give up because of you. Life’s challenges are only bumps in the road and the success ahead is worth the struggle. I have been blessed with the best mother in the world and I thank God each and every day for allowing me to borrow one of his angels for my life.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Background of the Topic

Over the past decade, the need for a four-year degree has increased exponentially. In the United States, it has become one of the more reliable ways to attain many societal goals. Employers are increasingly highlighting the importance of a college education in order to be hired and stand out among all other potential job candidates. The share of jobs requiring postsecondary education has doubled over the last 40 years. Today, jobs require many more skills compared to the past (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). In order for youth to compete and become successful adults, colleges must become a priority for many. Yet, the difficulty of making this possible lies in the tuition costs and set up of the college system because students with severe financial restrictions cannot afford university costs.

More importantly, the backgrounds of such students have all the odds of succeeding against them (Bland, 2006). The United States Department of Education Administration has taken steps to address these challenges by doubling federal investment into Pell Grants and college tax credits, reforming student loans, taking new steps to reduce college costs, preparing high school students for their transition, and looking to improve the value of higher education (The Domestic Policy Council & The Council of Economic Advisors, 2014). While these necessary steps do continue to push for change to make college affordable for all students and families, there is still more to
do for underrepresented students who are enrolled in higher education and on track to graduate.

Statistics document that half of all people from high-income families have a bachelor’s degree by age 25; however, just 1 in 10 people from low-income families do (Dynarski & Bailey, 2011). This statistic, which is staggering in nature, is one of the reasons why more is needed to create a society in which all students have a chance to take the next step in fulfilling their hopes and making a college education a reality.

This qualitative study used selected participants in a summer transitional enrichment program (STEP) to describe their experiences. The study explained how the program influenced their transition to college and their persistence beyond their first-year of enrollment.

**STEP**

The Summer Transitional Enrichment Program is a program that helps students develop skills for success. STEP begins with a four-week summer residential program and continues for students’ first two years on campus. It typically runs through the end of their sophomore year. It provides transitional classes and skills development activities, along with intensive counseling and academic advising. Participation in STEP allows students to experience campus life and develop friendships.

Participation in the summer component of STEP allows students to:

- Complete intensive courses in writing, science, and math
- Connect with faculty across academic disciplines
- Sharpen their skills in preparation for a smooth transition to college
• Experience campus life and develop friendships while living in the residence halls
• Enroll in fall quarter classes
• Build relationships with key campus resources critical to student success
  (STEP, http://success.edu/programs/step/)

Background

With the beginning of their college career a few months away, incoming freshmen around the nation are eager to get the opportunity to succeed and grow at the college level. These students are coming from high schools all over the world to begin an adventure that can be daunting for the ill-prepared student. The K-12 schooling system around the world surely is not one of equality for each student. Several have more advanced placement classes to offer, higher test scores, more resources and opportunities for their students, and do not have to worry about many of the issues that underprivileged youth have to face on a daily basis, just to name a few. These realities provide an idea of how this transition from high school to college can be a challenge to new students.

As an incoming freshman, one needs to adjust and adapt to the life of a college student in order to succeed socially and academically. Not only do they have to do well in their new courses as new students, but also create meaningful relationships. They need to find out where they “fit in,” on a large campus which can be overwhelming for many. Some students are at a greater disadvantage due to their background as a traditionally underrepresented minority, first generation, or low-income student. These barriers that
many students may face can make the first year experience and transition much more problematic and difficult to overcome.

Therefore, numerous undergraduates get the opportunity to join summer enrichment programs, which help students succeed in their first year. These programs are focused on peer tutoring, academic preparation, and helping new students adapt to their new environment, which can be very beneficial to the first year experience. Many colleges all over the nation offer similar programs and they have found them to be very effective (Strayhorn, 2011). The outcomes and effects of summer transitional enrichment programs on first year students are important to investigate when considering retention and graduation rates of students around the nation.

**Statement of the Problem**

The continued success and implementation of summer enrichment programs is significant in the field of higher education for institutions nationwide. It is essential that new students be prepared for their undergraduate career. Students need as much support and guidance as possible to aid in academic and social success. In order to continue to support marginalized students’ success transitioning from high school to their first year of college, institutions need to insure that summer programs are developing skills for success and geared toward improving retention rates.

This study will examine the question if summer enrichment programs make students feel that they are better prepared academically, mentally, and socially for their first year of college. It is more important now than ever before to document for
stakeholders how summer enrichment programs are beneficial to students and the campus as a whole. Frequently, these programs are being cut at many institutions. This study addresses the following questions:

1. How did participants describe their summer transition program as influencing their transition from high school to college?
2. What role did the summer transition program have on participants’ involvement throughout their first-year of college?
3. What influence did the summer transition program have on students’ desire to remain enrolled at the University beyond their first-year?

**Definition of Terms**

Following are terms to be defined in order to understand this study’s discussion of summer transition enrichment programs and their effects on the first year experience of new college students.

*First Year Experience*

First year experience is defined as the experience of a first-year student at an American college or university.

*Student Retention*

Retention refers to students who remain enrolled full-time each semester/quarter until graduation.

*Transition*

“Any event or non-event in an individual’s life that alters one’s roles,
relationships, routines, and assumptions” (Schlossberg, 2008, p. 10).

**Involvement**

“The quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 528).

**Engagement**

“Engagement is the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes” (Hu & Kuh, 2002, p. 555).

**Persistence**

“Refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (Seidman, 2005, p. 7).

**Achievement Gap**

The achievement gap refers to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performances of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity and gender.

**Educational Disadvantage**

Educational disadvantage is defined as the gap between competency and disposition students bring to school and the competency and disposition found in schools. These factors are conceptualized in terms of three forms of “capital” (economic, cultural, social), which influence development of the competencies and dispositions (Kelleghan & Greaney, 2001).
**First-Generation Student**

First-generation college students are defined as a student with neither parent having graduated from a four-year college.

**Student Engagement**

Student Engagement is defined as the amount of time and energy that a student invests in their studies and extra-curricular involvement opportunities outside of the university classroom (Kuh, 2004)

**STEP**

STEP is a summer transitional enrichment program. This is a program that helps students develop skills for success. STEP begins with a four-week summer residential program and continues for students’ first two years on campus, typically through the end of their sophomore year. It provides transitional classes and skills development activities, along with intensive counseling and academic advising. Participation in STEP allows students to experience campus life and develop friendships.

**Stepper**

Students who have participated in the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program together and share that common experience commonly refer to themselves as Steppers.

**Limitations**

Limitations in a case study define the particular experience being studied “rather than predicting future behavior” (Merriam, 2009, p. 50). Numerous factors affected the findings of this study. The Summer Transitional Enrichment Program is
meant to meet the desires of students at the 28,000 enrollment Northern California Research University (NCRU). Therefore, the experiences students shared may not be the same if the study is duplicated at other institutions. Purposeful and convenient sampling was used in this study. Purposeful sampling is when the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Therefore, the experiences of these specific STEP participants who participated in this study may not be the same experiences of the entire class of 2014.

**Significance and Importance of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the transition of Summer Transitional Enrichment Program participants to college, and their persistence beyond their first year of enrollment. Participants’ academic and social transitions will be defined through their engagement, involvement, and desire to remain enrolled at the university beyond their first year.

Amid growing pressure on student retention and completion rates, much of the current research on factors in student success emphasizes both the importance of early intervention with educationally disadvantaged students and increased attention to obstacles that confront students in their first year. These factors include being at a disadvantage academically based on their high school workload and adjusting and adapting to the college lifestyle. Therefore, more institutions are turning to summer transition programs and mentoring programs like it to help bridge the gap between senior
year at high school and freshman year at college. It is a struggle that many students face nationwide and a supportive bridge into the first year of college can make the first year experience much more fruitful and successful, both academically and socially.

Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis

The study has been prepared and presented in five different chapters. Chapter Two contains a review of both the literature and existing research conducted on the topic. The literature review explores topics related to the theoretical frameworks, the student experience and effects of peer relationships. It also considers ways that summer enrichment programs provide support to a student’s sense of belonging, success in the classroom, and community on campus. Chapter Three covers the research methodology and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. In Chapter Four, the data from the interviews will be analyzed along with a presentation of the findings and interpretations of those findings. Chapter Five focuses on the overall thesis summary and provides conclusions and recommendations.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of Summer Transitional Enrichment Programs (STEP) and the effect they have on participants going through their first year of enrollment at Northern California Research University (NCRU). This study will analyze participants’ academic and social transitions through their engagement, involvement, and desire to remain enrolled at the university beyond their first year.

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is twofold: first, to show how important summer enrichment programs are around the country. Second, to focus on “STEP,” the four-week residential program for incoming freshmen was created to help students develop the skills for success. In order to provide a thorough analysis, this study will perform its analysis under the backdrop of education theory, specifically utilizing the likes of Astin’s Involvement Theory, Student Engagement Theory, and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (Astin 1999; Tinto, 1993). After examining these, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981) will be used to examine what role other factors outside of academics play in a students’ life during their transition phase from high school to their first year of college. Lastly, four summer transition programs around the nation will be discussed to show the various influences on first year students’ success as they attempt to make thriving transitions into college.
These theoretical frameworks will mold the type of lens the researcher will use in exploring the topic at hand by helping the reader understand what data has been found from past researchers. The data found from each of these topics are significant because they lead to student transitions into a higher education setting and the researcher hopes to establish that there is an urgent need for transition programs to provide college success to first-generation and marginalized students.

To ensure the validity of this study, multiple books, journals and articles on higher education were read and analyzed. The search for specifics began to narrow as time progressed. Readings concentrated on topics ranging from transition programs, the first-year student experience, and a student’s persistence in higher education, engagement, and involvement while transitioning through college. While the literature found may not be exhaustive on this topic however, it provides a solid foundation for this study. This is done by showing the impact transition programs have on a student’s motivation to successfully persist through his or her first year of college and ultimately receive an undergraduate degree.

**Persistence**

Many new students who are beginning their college journey to earn a college degree strive to persist until graduation. Persistence in relation to higher education “refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (Seidman, 2005, p. 7). First year to second year persistence is of key importance because of “student vulnerability at the
beginning of college and because institutions can react quickly with interventions” (p. 37). Incoming college students deal with a diverse range of issues, such as: being economically and educationally disadvantaged, being homesick, college affordability, and other barriers that impede their ability to persist through degree attainment.

Therefore, the first year for a student is crucial to one’s overall success at the college level. “The character of one’s experience in that year does much to shape subsequent persistence” (Tinto, 1993, p. 14). Conversely, what is it that motivates students to persist beyond their first year? One can look to Astin’s Involvement Theory, Student Engagement Theory, and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure for answers (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993).

**Astin’s Theory of Involvement**

This theory of involvement is rooted in a longitudinal study of college student persistence from which Astin (1999) concluded that factors contributing to persistence were associated with students’ involvement in college life, whereas factors contributing to departure from college were associated with students’ noninvolvement (Milem & Berger, 1997).

**Student Involvement**

Student Involvement refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in their college experience. Such involvement takes many forms, such as absorption in extracurricular activities, academics, and interaction with faculty and other university employees (Astin, 1999).
This theory describes the importance of student involvement in college and what they do with their time at a university. It is not about what they think, how they feel, or the meanings they make of their experiences (Harper & Quaye, 2009). The theory was published in 1984. The core concept of the theory is based on three elements of inputs, environments, and outcomes, along with five basic postulates about involvement.

**Astin’s Five Postulates**

1. “Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects” (Astin, 1999, p. 519). The objects may be highly generalizable (the student experience) or highly specific like preparing for an intramural basketball championship game.

2. “Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum” (Astin, 1999, p. 519). That is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student’s involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours one may spend studying each night) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply daydreams and comprehends nothing at all).

4. “The amount of student learning and personnel development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student
involvement in that program” (Astin, 1999, p. 519). Therefore, the more that students put into an activity, the more they will get out of it.

5. “The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (Astin, 1999, p. 519).

Astin’s Theory of Involvement (Astin, 1999) focused on “factors that facilitate development” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010, p. 31). The rising interest on college campuses in volunteerism and service to the community can be the basis for the development of enriched curricular and co-curricular service learning programs by faculty and student affairs professionals. Alexander Astin’s Theory of Involvement provides a convincing rationalization for linking service learning experiences to student success in the university (Astin, 1999). Thus, in order for “student learning and growth to occur, students need to actively engage in their environment and educators need to create opportunities for in and out of classroom involvement” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 31).

One of the most significant out-of-classroom involvement factors that Astin highlights in his findings is a student’s living experience. As a first-year student, living in residence halls allows students to get involved in all aspects of campus life. Students who eat, sleep, and spend their waking hours on campus have a better chance of discovering their identity on campus and adjusting to college life than students who do not live in residence halls (Astin, 1999). Similarly, students who live in residence halls are “more likely to express satisfaction with their undergraduate experience, particularly
in the areas of student friendships, faculty-student relations, institutional relations, and social life” (Astin, 1999, p. 525).

In order to show how important the faculty’s role is to the student, it has been found that students who may be struggling socially with their peers may turn to the faculty for support (Berger & Milem, 1999, p. 658). Institutions have an obligation to endorse and support student learning. They should measure their success as institutions based upon how well their students learned. Indisputably, students have a great deal of responsibility for their own success, but in today’s society so does the university, and by association, the faculty members. Consequently, faculty involvement in a student’s first year experience is crucial to a pleasurable college experience. “Students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even administration of the institution” (Astin, 1999, p. 525). This is specifically critical for first-year students as “early involvement with faculty may help some students who are struggling to find a niche on campus” (Astin, 1999, p. 658). Retention is not only a growing expectation and essential necessity, but it is also an opportunity for faculty members to take the lead in modernizing, researching, and applying new strategies while exhibiting their effectiveness. This is both a challenge and opportunity for faculty members to take the lead in restructuring the college learning experience in ways that are more supportive and successful.
Being deeply invested in academics is crucial to first-year success; however, academic involvement may influence students in a variety of ways and could vary from student to student. “Being academically involved is strongly related to satisfaction with all aspects of college life except friendships with other students” (Astin, 1999, p. 525). When students are extremely involved in their academics, friendships in college have the potential to suffer. Students run the risk of over studying or constantly stressing themselves out over classes or grades to where they have no time for a social life. This is a significant challenge for the college transition because “peer involvement appears to strengthen perceptions of institutional and social support and ultimately persistence” (Bergen & Milen, 1999, p. 658). For this reason, summer transitional programs are needed to help students learn to find that balance where they may be able to balance academics and healthy friendships. “Early involvement in the fall semester positively predicts spring involvement and has significant indirect effects on special integration, academic integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and persistence” (Bergen & Milen, p. 659). Not only is student involvement important, student engagement also leads to a first year students’ persistence.

Student Engagement

The definition of student engagement is itself complex and broad. George Kuh’s definition illustrates this complexity:

The engagement premise is straightforward and easily understood: the more students study a subject, the more they know about it, and the more students
practice and get feedback from faculty and staff members on their writing and collaborative problem solving, the deeper they come to understand what they are learning and the more adept they become at managing complexity, tolerating ambiguity, and working with people from different backgrounds or with different views. (Kuh, 2009, p. 10).

In order to ensure a student’s success, it is important that institutions encourage students to engage the right people at the correct time with the best resources available on campus. To measure student engagement, George Kuh (2009) created a distinguished and enduring study called the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, n. d.), which has been used since 1999. The NSSE (n. d.) website states the project will involve in-depth investigation of institutions that show a pattern of improved NSSE (n. d.) results over time to identify the activities that led to improved performance and to draw lessons to inform improvement efforts on other campuses (NSSE, n. d.). This project is incredibly beneficial to higher education universities all over the world. It gives institutions the opportunity to adjust and adapt how they are supporting their own students based on the results. It also gives them the chance to model their strategies after other universities that may be succeeding in areas they are struggling. Many institutions all over the nation continue to use the NSSE (n. d.) survey as one instrument in an overall assessment plan. Students are asked to “indicate the frequency in which they engage in activities that represent good educational practice and are related to positive learning outcomes” (Pike & Kuh, 2005, p. 191). The National Survey of Student Engagement gives students the chance to self-report the effects that their institutions have on their
academic and social engagement (Pike & Kuh, 2005). When students fill out these surveys, institutions use their data to identify aspects of the undergraduate experience inside and outside the classroom that can be improved through modifications to policies and practices more consistent with good practices in undergraduate education.

Prospective college students, their parents, college counselors, academic advisers, institutional research officers, and researchers also use this data to learn more about how students spend their time at different colleges and universities and what they gain from their experiences (NSSE, n. d.).

Table 1

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<td><strong>Educational Practice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Academic Challenge</td>
<td>Working hard to meet professors’ expectations, analyzing and synthesizing ideas, applying theories and course concepts to practical situations, studying and academic preparation activities, and composing papers of various length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active and Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>Asking questions and contributing to class discussions, making class presentations, working with peers on projects during class, collaborating with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments, participating in community based projects as part of class activities, and discussing ideas from readings of course concepts with others outside of class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>Talking though career plans with professors and advisors, discussing ideas from readings are assignments with faculty outside of class, collaborating with faculty on committees and assorted campus activities, and working on research projects with professors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interacting across difference, taking foreign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enriching Educational Experiences

- language courses, completing a culminating senior-year experience (e.g., a senior thesis), and participating in a range of value-added activities, including student organizations and campus events, community service or volunteer work, study abroad programs, internships, faculty-supervised independent study experiences, and learning communities.

Supportive campus environment

- Students’ perceptions of the support needed to succeed academically, thrive socially, and cope with non-academic matters, as well as the self-reported quality of relationships with other students, faculty, administrators, and staff at the institution.

*Source: Harper & Quaye (2009, p. 5)*

**Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure**

Similar to Astin’s theory of student involvement, Tinto’s Theory of Institutional Departure (Astin 1999; Tinto 1993) supports “the critical role of student involvement in positive educational outcomes for college students” (Milem & Berger, 1997, p. 387). Vincent Tinto’s model of individual student departure is one of the most commonly discussed and studied theories in the higher education literature. “Tinto asserted that the process of becoming integrated into the academic and social systems of a college occurs when students successfully navigate the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation” (Milem & Berger, 1997, p. 388). Separation indicates that a student has detached themselves from the ways of his/her past communities, families, old friends, and other hometown ties of the past. Transition occurs after an effective compromise to implement separation. In transition, “students find themselves in a situation where they have separated themselves from the norms and patterns of their past lives but have not yet
adopted norms and behaviors from their new environment” (Milem & Berger, 1997, p. 388). Incorporation occurs when students begin to change their norms in favor of the ways of their institution that may attend. They begin to follow the patterns and norms of their new environments, new peers, and new university. “Once incorporated, the students become integrated, although successful integration does not necessarily ensure persistence” (Milem & Berger, 1997, p. 389).

Tinto (1993) identifies three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" (Tinto, 1999) states that, to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems (Milem & Berger, 1997).

Tinto (1993) produced a theoretical model of attrition and persistence that include the following components:

a) Pre-entry attributes (prior schooling and family background); b) goals/commitment (student aspirations and institutional goals); c) institutional experiences (academics, faculty interaction, co-curricular involvement, and peer group interaction; d) integration (academic and social); and e) outcome (departure decision—graduate, transfer, dropout) (Metz, 2004).

In order to better understand the finding of Vincent Tinto, below is a visual illustration of Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993).
Table 2

Tinto’s Visual Model of Student Departure

Going into one’s first year at a university, a student enters an institution with preconceived academic, family, and personal characteristics along with preconceived intentions on college attendance and personal goals (Tinto, 1993). Involvement occurs when students transition into academic and social systems of an institution; however, in order for this to happen, preconceived characteristics must become second nature. Students strive to adapt to the norms and behaviors of their new environment but it is a very challenging task for many new students (Milem & Berger, 1997). Once students have separated themselves from their pre-entry attributes and transitioned into academic and social systems, they become incorporated with their institution. Incorporation

Source: Tinto, V. (1975) "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of..."
happens when students adapt to and adopt the prevailing norms and behavior patterns of
their college or university population (Milem & Berger, 1997).

While student involvement and engagement is a twofold obligation for students
and institutions, college completion requires some effort and that effort is up to the
student (Tinto, 1993). Thus, students must have the aspiration to go to college and
embrace the transition of being a young high school student to being a successful mature
college student.

Tinto’s central idea is that of "integration": he claims that whether a student
persists or drops out is quite strongly predicted by their degree of academic integration,
and social integration (Tinto, 1999). These evolve over time, as integration and
commitment interact, with dropouts depending on commitment at the time of the
decision. However, in order to give a student the opportunity to integrate and commit,
they must transition to their new college setting. Examining Schlossberg’s Transition
Theory (Schlossberg, 1981) further explores this.

**Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1981) was established because she believed a
need existed to develop a systematic framework which would facilitate an understanding
of adults in transition and direct them to the help they needed to cope with the “ordinary
and extraordinary process of living” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010, p.
213). Often categorized as an adult development theory, Schlossberg’s theory (1981) is
also relevant to first-year college students (Evans et al., 2010).
According to Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), a transition is “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). Transitions can have outcomes that are positive, negative or neutral (Evans, Forney, & Guido, 1998). One could end up in a better place than where they started, a worse place, or may find that neither is remarkable. There are three types of transitions: the anticipated transition, the unanticipated transition, and the non-event transition. For example: going to college can be an anticipated transition, falling in love and getting married while in college can be an unanticipated transition. Nonevent transitions are considered transitions that are anticipated but do not occur (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995).

The transitions that occur for the students participating in the STEP program are anticipated transitions. They completed high school, filled out college applications, received acceptance letters to the University, and then decided to say “yes” to participate in the summer transitional enrichment program. Each student knew what to expect when the summer approached and knew how and where he or she would spend his or her summer before college.

Although each participant in the summer transition program shared the fact that they were transitioning from high school to college, they did not experience the transition in the same way.

While transitions may be related to one particular event or non-event, a transition is actually a process that extends over time (Goodman et al., 2006). At first, new students may be consumed by their new role in a new environment as a college student with new
responsibilities, new classes, and making new friends. Gradually, they begin to separate from the past and establish new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions.

Transitions may provide opportunities for growth, as well as regression. Goodman et al. (2006) endorsed the idea of transitions having three phases, which they called “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out.” People moving into a situation need to familiarize themselves with the rules, norms, and expectations of the new environment. Once in a new situation, individuals must learn to balance their activities with other areas of their lives as they move through the transition. Moving out can be seen as ending one transition and thinking about what comes next. This could be looked at in this study as a student first beginning their college experience by attending the STEP program, then adapting to the college lifestyle by participating in the summer program and growing during the first year in order to succeed and graduate, then lastly moving on to the next step which is surpassing their first year at the institution.

**The Four S’s**

Schlossberg (1981) identified the following four factors; these specifically have been seen as impacting how well an individual will cope with transition. These four elements are known as The 4 S’s. A person’s success in handling transition is based on his or her resources in these areas:

- Situation
- Self
- Support
- Strategies
**Situation.** Situation is based on having a clear understanding of what happened, why, and what it means. Schlossberg (1981) identified the following eight factors as important to fully examine an individual’s transition. These are:

- **Trigger:** What precipitated the transition?
- **Timing:** Was this a good time, bad time, and the right time, on time?
- **Control:** Where do you have it?
- **Role change:** Yes/No; Gain/Loss?
- **Duration:** How long will this last?
- **Previous Experience:** With transitions? With something similar?
- **Concurrent stress:** Your Liabilities or Load?
- **Assessment:** Determining responsibility and this impact on determination on your behavior (Evans, Forney, & Guido, 1998, p. 113)

**Self.** Self refers to the internal coping resources within an individual. Self consists of two categories, personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources (Evans et al., 2010).

An individual’s personal and demographic characteristics affect how they view life and include socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity/culture, age, stage of life, and stage of health. Psychological resources include ego development, outlook, personal values, spirituality, and resiliency (Evans, Forney, & Guido, 1998).

**Support.** Support refers to the external or social support available to an individual. The support that an individual has, influences one’s capacity to adjust to a transition. People receive support from family, friends, intimate relationships, and institutions and/or communities. Functions of support include affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (Evans et al., 2010).
Strategies. Strategies involves the merging of self and support in to the development of different types of strategies in order to change the transition, change the meaning of the transition, and/or manage any stress that may come with the transition (Evans et al., 2010). Also incorporated under strategies are four coping approaches: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. Individuals may use multiple strategies and coping methods when experiencing a transition (Evans et al., 2010).

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory & STEP

Schlossberg’s (1981) Transition Theory can be adapted to apply to first-year students who are just beginning to their collegiate experience, addressing issues that may arise as they familiarize themselves with college life. For example, the first S “situation” can be used when looking at a first year student’s challenge of learning to balance work, family, and school. It is often the first time away from home for marginalized students and this could be a challenge during the beginning of a college journey. The second S “support” can be useful when discussing if a first year student has financial help, a significant other, or even if they are enrolled in a support program on campus that can be a benefit their growth at the institution. The third S “self” is important when looking at a student’s background. One asks questions such as what role does their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and if they are a first generation college student play in their potential to succeed? The final S “strategies” is suitable when looking at if a first year student decides to get a job to pay for expenses, joins a club to feel more at home, or even
if one plays intramural sports. These strategies can play a huge role when coping with the transition to college. “Significant transitions, such as entering college, graduating from college, addressing relationship issues, and facing career decisions, can all be better understood and approached when using this model” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 235). Therefore, this model was used in the dialogue related to the 2014 STEP participant’s transitions to college.

**Transition Programs: A Prerequisite to Success**

Many obstacles stand between low-income students and a college education, even for those who beat the odds, graduate from high school, and gain acceptance into a post-secondary institution. Students from low-income families come in with less financial, emotional, and mental support than many of their peers. The literature states 20 percent of these young people will not make it past their first semester. This stark statistic raises questions: Why is this happening? And how do we fix it? According to authors Benjamin Castleman and Lindsay Page (2014), much of the problem is what happens (or does not) between the last day of high school and the first days of college. They call it the summer melt.

During this time, these kids are not being helped or supported during what is considered one of the most significant periods of their college career. They are instead doing things like working hard at a local fast food chain to support their families. In the meantime, they are struggling with things like stacks of enrollment paperwork, complicated financial forms, and daunting tuition bills, which prove to be substantial
hindrances for these students, many of whom are the first in their families to make it this far. Therefore, once they get to campus, they often lack the support to persevere through those difficult first months. In other words, preparing these youngsters for freshman year involves more than academics. Support well before college begins is necessary in order to help make sure that low-income students make the successful transition to college.

Transition programs at other universities were examined to show the significance of the programs to student’s transitions, and to offer an explanation into the uniqueness of the STEP program.

**Transition Programs Around the Nation**

Four summer transition programs around the nation will be discussed to illustrate the various influences on first year students’ success as they attempt to make thriving transitions into college. Opening up a new chapter in life at a new college, new environment, and around a new group of people can be a difficult task. University programs geared towards underserved populations seek to help new students find their way on campus to succeed and overcome the obstacles they will face in their first year. Some of these obstacles do in fact begin before they attend their summer enrichment program. Many students are coming from a low-income family or a family in which support financially and emotionally is sparse. Another challenge is academic workload at the college level because of the lack of high school preparation.

Lastly, the most difficult task for many incoming freshmen is leaving home and their comfort zone. Being away from parents, siblings, friends, and their hometown can
create a longing and sense of isolation that is not healthy for the transition phase into college. These are just a few of the challenges and influences on the disadvantaged first year student. Summer transitional enrichment programs like STEP seek to help and serve these students as much as possible and prepare them for the 4-6 college years ahead of them. It is important for the staff to know what these students bring each summer so that they can make sure their program is effective and successful for these students.

The first study examined the before-and-after effects of transitional summer programs at the University of Maryland–Eastern Shore, on first-year students’ perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and understanding of college. The study focused on academic, personal and social experiences, and how these transformed throughout the advancement of the summer program. The participants (n=197) of this study were conventional, first time, full-time, soon to be first-year students. The participants attended one of two six-week summer programs, the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program (LSAMP) or the Preparation and Adjustment for College Entrance Program (PACE). This study used a pre- and post-test, two-group comparison designs with a quantitative component for collecting the data. The study found statistically significant differences among pre-college students who participated in either a scholar’s pre-college summer residential program (LSAMP) or in an at-risk pre-college summer residential program (PACE). The study also documented the impact of an intervention that focused on the academic achievement, study skills and the participant’s perception of the academic, personal, and social aspects of attending college. Additionally, their
willingness to participate in an academic support intervention for pre-college students leveraged their crucial transition to a postsecondary setting.

The results of this study clearly suggested that summer programs for at-risk and low-income, minority students like the PACE, can help facilitate their transition and adjustment to college life and improve their persistence rates. Over the years PACE and LSAMP programs have proven that a strong curricular and counseling component can help teach students how to participate and succeed in an academic environment.

Research from this next study indicates that well-designed student learning communities lead to increased student engagement on campus and increased retention and graduation rates. This study focused specifically on an engineering student environment. They found that students were able to help each other with classes and use each other as resources in order to succeed academically. Underrepresented students benefited from being placed in learning communities with a focused assimilation into the university environment. They were introduced to various helpful departments on campus and also came to be well acquainted with the culture of the campus and to the staff.

In a longitudinal study of 13 two-year and six four-year institutions, Engstrom and Tinto (2008) found that, across institutions, students who participated in student learning communities were more engaged in the classroom, involved in student activities, had higher freshmen to sophomore retention rates, and perceived greater encouragement and support on campus. As a result, first-year students may feel a sense of community and belonging to an institution with embedded peer activities and components throughout their academic pathway that motivates them to continue in college. The programming in
EXCEED attempted to build a deliberate community that would last through the students’ first year and beyond.

The aim of the next study explored was to investigate the learning and study strategies and skills of students participating in a university summer bridge program at Temple University. The program was geared toward at-risk students who were coming into the university with a disadvantage according to the institution. The institution looked at factors like family income, geography, test scores, and family background in order to see if students qualified for their summer bridge program. The study focused on the strong effects that come with motivation. It was considered to be the most significant factor in this study. Students needed to have a desire to succeed in college and reach their ultimate goal of graduating college, and in turn start their professional career. Students who were able to implement strategies for success and take advantage of all the resources offered during their time at the summer bridge program did perform better in the long-term academic checkup. Motivation to study, grow, and specifically self-regulate him/her self as a student to perform at their highest level was proven to be the best strategy to succeed in the transition to higher education.

This final survey-based research study was conducted at The Ohio State University looking at the impact of summer bridge programs. This one in particular was given to past summer bridge members who had been enrolled at least a year which gave active participants a chance to express their feelings on their levels of success throughout their college experience thus far. The survey posed questions that attempted to measure feelings like a sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, and academic and social skills.
The ultimate goal was to solidify the goals of the summer bridge program, which is to successfully prepare incoming students for the academic year ahead of them. Moreover, they were becoming aware of all the resources that Ohio State has to offer. Results did suggest that there is a positive influence on these four areas of study from participating in the summer bridge program. Freshmen were shown to be more likely to believe in their academic skills that led to better grades and social skills when connecting with surrounding staff members and their peers. There was also a healthier sense of wellbeing on campus and overall college success as a first year student at their new institution that they now felt like they could call home.

The programs that have been discussed in this section have distinct features essential to their specific institution. However, the mission of these programs, to assist first-year students in their transition to college and support their persistence beyond their first-year is parallel. The analyses by each of these colleges were quantitative and mixed methods of research; therefore, this qualitative study is unique as student experiences during STEP were used to show the influence the program had on student transitions to college and their persistence beyond their first-year of enrollment in college.

**Rationale for the Study**

First-year students on college campuses, like NCRU, face unique challenges as they look to build community with peers, adjust to the rigor of academics, and integrate into the social life of the campus. To assist them in their development as a new college student, students are encouraged to get involved in extra-curricular engagement activities
that take place during their first year. A positive impact on personal development and an easier adjustment to college is directly correlated with a student’s engagement on campus. First-year students who look to acquire a sense of community often struggle with navigating and identifying ways to become engaged in extracurricular programming on campus. The challenge that is faced by students looking to get involved and build community on campus can, however, be alleviated with the use of summer transition programs.

These programs provide transitional classes and skills and development activities, along with intensive counseling and academic advising. Participation in STEP allows students to experience campus life and develop friendships. This summer opportunity mirrors very closely what they would experience in their first year as an incoming freshman. A further understanding of how students are currently being impacted by summer enrichment programs can help administrators discover which programs are successful, find new ways to support students, and navigate a better understanding as to how institutions can better retain them after their first year.

**Summary**

This chapter offered background information on student persistence, involvement, and engagement while showing the difficulties of student transitions to higher education and how summer transition programs can assist students. From the information provided in this literature review, a study on the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program would show the influence the program had on students as they transition to college and their
persistence beyond their first-year of admission. Chapter Three provides an in-depth
look into the methodology of this study and the interviews used to describe participants in
the 2014 Summer Transitional Enrichment Program experiences.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of Summer Transitional Enrichment Programs (STEP) and the effect they have on participants going through their first year of enrollment at a large Northern California research university. This study will analyze participants’ academic and social transitions through their engagement, involvement, and desire to remain enrolled at the university beyond their first year. A qualitative research design was used to conduct semi-structured interviews to answer the following research questions:

1. How did STEP prepare students academically and socially for their first-year of college?
2. What role did STEP play in your desire to persist beyond the first year?
3. What elements of STEP according to the students had an impact on engagement and their transition from high school to college involvements in their first year?

This chapter gives a thorough outline of the methodology and design in the formation, distribution, and collection methods of the research for this study.

Setting of the Study

This study was presented at a large Northern California Research University. The university is a research extensive, four-year institution with a total enrollment of 36,104
in the fall of 2015 (UC Davis Student Population Headcount, 2015). Fall quarter 2015, the undergraduate population was 28,384 (UC Davis Student Population Headcount, 2015).

In the year 2014 (the program year studied), the total enrollment was 34,508 with the undergraduate enrollment listed as 27,728 in the fall (UC Davis Student Population Headcount, 2014). The 2014 freshmen class enrollment was 5,377 (UC Davis Student Population Headcount, 2014). The institution distinguishes itself on its diverse range of educational opportunities, offering over 104 undergraduate majors from four different colleges (UC Davis Facts, 2015). Students have the opportunity to graduate from the college of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Biological Sciences, Engineering, and Letters and Science.

All interviews were conducted at a large Northern California Research University (NCRU). Participants were able to choose among three locations at the institution, including The Memorial Union, The Student Community Center, or a quiet secure and confidential environment that was determined once the interview had been finalized. These locations were chosen because the researcher was able to reserve quiet, meeting rooms in these locations. Quiet, meeting rooms were needed in order for the interviews to be audio recorded without any disturbance.
Research Design

Population and Sample

Current second-year students who participated in this study were chosen for this analysis using purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select persons and locations for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). Convenience sampling allows the researcher to choose locations or individuals from which the researcher can access and easily collect data (Creswell, 2007). The researcher chose students who had participated in Summer Transitional Enrichment Program in the year 2014 and who had persisted past their first year at the institution. The following criteria were considered while recruiting participants for the study: the first three females and the first three males to respond to the recruitment e-mail for the study would be the researcher’s participants. The STEP Coordinator provided participants’ names and email addresses to reach the potential participants.

Participants were given a pseudonym in this study in order to keep their identities confidential. The table below shows the interview number and the students’ pseudonym.

Table 3
Participants and Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Braden</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>James</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Angel</td>
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</table>
The student interviewees were conducted in their second-year so the research questions concerning their transition to college and their persistence beyond the first-year could be a focus.

**Design of the Study**

While research has been documented on summer transition programs, as discussed in Chapter Two, each university’s program is unique. A qualitative case study research method was used for this study because “qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. When the approach is applied correctly, it becomes a valuable method for educational research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 33). This method gave the researcher the opportunity to evaluate the perceived effects of the 2014 STEP program. Each new student at a university has a unique story that can only be shared by them so it is very important to understand their transition to college and how they feel they can and have succeeded in the new environment. One-on-one interviews with students allowed them to reflect on past experiences and express value to their very own specific transition and experience in the Summer Transition Enrichment Program outside of published research in the current field of higher education.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Once participants had responded to a recruitment e-mail (Appendix B) that he/she is willing to participate in the study, participants received an email message from the
primary researcher inviting them to participate in the interview. This email included an informed consent message (Appendix A). The participant at the beginning of the interview gave an oral consent and was also provided with a copy of the consent form. All forms and data were kept secure in a locked cabinet in a locked room. By agreeing to participate in the interview, students then agreed to set up a time for a 45-minute to an hour interview with the researcher at a selected location at a large NCRU. Each was presented with a series of 12 semi-structured questions. The data was then recorded on a mobile device. At the end of the interview process, the relationship between both interview and interview was terminated unless the interviewee requested a copy of the study.

**Instrumentation**

For the purpose of collecting data on the perceived effects of summer transitional enrichment programs on college students, the one-on-one interview method was the most appropriate in order to assemble desired quality information. An interview allowed for the exploration and investigation of the experiences of many second-year students who had participated in the program. A different method would not allow for such detailed stories to be shared and experiences to be expressed.

The interview contained 12 semi-structured questions along with probes meant to answer the three research questions and investigate the relationship between the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program and student persistence beyond their first-year at an institution (see Appendix B). Interview questions gathered student demographic
information based only on gender and age. Additional data was collected to explore the perceived effects of STEP on STEP participants in the year 2014. Additionally, questions primarily dealt with the perceived benefits that STEP had on a students’ involvement, engagement, and persistence to succeed beyond the first year at NCRU. To accomplish the data collection goals, the interview questions were created to specifically yield the most insight into how students truly feel about the effect of the summer they spent at a summer transitional program before beginning their college journey.

Data Analysis Procedures

Each interview was recorded on a mobile device after receiving permission to do so from the interviewee (Appendix A). The interview was later transcribed by the researcher and was read carefully for substance and overall meaning. The transcripts were then read an additional time to provide familiarity. Transcripts were read for a third time and notes were made in the margins to begin developing categories of themes to consider when comparing each of the students’ responses. Separate worksheets were then produced for each transcript pulling out the shared themes from each participant in the study. The themes that developed were: “Unpredictable Future,” “New Environment and Way of Living,” “Campus Involvement,” “Solid Support System,” and “Self Growth.”

After forming the themes, separate word documents for each theme were developed and participant quotations were copied and pasted into the relevant document. For each theme, subthemes were developed by thoroughly reading each quotation and
discovering shared experiences. Color-coded font was used to differentiate among the students. Data were analyzed and presented by theme in Chapter Four.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations in a case study define the particular experience being studied rather than projecting future outcomes (Merriam, 2009). Numerous factors affected the findings of this study. The Summer Transitional Enrichment Program is meant to meet the desires of students at NCRU; therefore, the experiences students shared may not be the same if the study is duplicated at other institutions. Purposeful and convenient sampling was used in this study. Purposeful sampling is when the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Therefore, the experiences of these specific STEP participants who participated in this study may not be the same experiences of the entire 2014 class.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology of this study. Before data collection started, approval was sought from the California State University, Sacramento IRB. Five semi-structured interviews were used to answer the proposed research questions of this study. The questions focused on each student’s engagement, campus involvement, transition to the university, and their academic success. As previously stated, all participants were requested with a consent and invitation letter. Afterward, consent
participants answered questions from the researcher and completed the one-on-one interview with a pseudonym given. No identifiers were added to the interview transcript and all responses remained anonymous throughout the study. Additionally, all participation was voluntary and was communicated as so in the recruitment e-mail. There was no incentive offered to second-year students and each participant knew her or she could abstain from participating in the interview at any time. Each interview was completed by participants willing to assist in furthering the investing of the NCRU STEP program. The data that was found was collected over a three-week period, where the researcher performed interviews at various locations at NCRU. These interviews led to five fundamental themes being discovered among participants and each will be discussed in Chapter Four.
Chapter 4

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the effectiveness of a Summer Transitional Enrichment Program (STEP) and the impact it had on participants going through their first year of enrollment at a large Northern California research university. This study will analyze participants’ academic and social transitions through their engagement, involvement, and desire to remain enrolled at the university beyond their first year.

Description of Participants

For this research study, the researcher began the study with six participants but one did not continue the study due to personal reasons. Thus, five students participated and met the following conditions: participated in the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program (“STEP”) at a Northern California research university in the summer of 2014, between the ages of 19-21, currently enrolled as a second year student, and succeeded beyond their first year of enrollment at the University.

Table 4

Participants

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Twelve emails or phone calls were made with five responders willing to take part in the research study. Three males and two females agreed to participate in the research. Each participant had his or her own individual belief of what the social, emotional, and academic atmosphere of a college institution would entail. The STEP program has affected students’ college experience in their own distinctive way. Hence, this chapter will assess each participant’s views on beginning their college journey, attending the Summer Transitional Enrichment (STEP) Program, and persisting beyond their first year of enrollment at the University.

All five participants of the study were given a pseudonym in order to keep their identities confidential. A description of each student involved will be provided so that the reader may get a better understanding of their upbringing, hometown, and who the participants are. You will be introduced to Braden, Jasmine, James, Sarah, and Angel.

Braden is a first generation college student who grew up in the region of South Central in Los Angeles, California. He comes from a middle class family where his parents run a family-owned business to support him and his two siblings. When Braden found out he was going to college, he felt overwhelmed with the fact that he was going to be very far from home. The thought of attending a large school that was nowhere near his family and friends worried Braden before he even began school. He attended a large high school with 2,400 students. While there, he joined the Upward Bound program and received exposure to various college campuses. However, he still did not know what to expect in his first year, but he decided that he was not going to let any fear or doubt stop him from pursuing his dream. Braden made it past his first-year at the University
because STEP helped ease his worries about college and laid out the “stepping stones” for him to succeed, find his fit, and grow individually at the institution.

Jasmine grew up in the third largest city in the San Francisco Bay Area, Oakland, California. She is also a first generation college student who is very proud of her background and wants to set an example to kids from her neighborhood for future generations. She emphasized the fact that she is “determined to prove that success is possible for someone who is Latina, from Oakland, and it is just a matter of making things happen.” She attended a small college prep high school with approximately 275 enrolled students. She felt prepared academically for classes, but found it very difficult to begin college due to family issues. She even considered bypassing the STEP program because her mind was not in the right place. Fortunately, she realized how important the STEP program was so she decided to do it. Jasmine succeeded beyond her first-year at the University because STEP gave her an opportunity to get away from those concerns and helped her adjust to college-style classes and establish a suitable group of friends who would be by her side for her college journey.

James is the first person to attend a university in his family. He grew up in a family of four with one younger brother in the San Joaquin Valley of California. He calls the city Lamont, California home. His little brother has always looked up to him and his accomplishments. Accordingly, when he got into college, it was an exciting and joyous moment for the whole family. James was excited to begin college and “try something new.” He attended a medium size high school with approximately 1,200 students. James found that applying to colleges while in high school was a challenge, and also when he
stepped onto a college campus, he needed even more help and guidance. Guidance from school administrators has always been a significant help in his academic successes. So when the faculty of STEP reached out, discussed the logistics of the program, and articulated what to expect in college, he became very appreciative. Being a first-generation college student and coming to a prestigious California college, James was full of anxiety, fear, and culture shock. However, he said that if it were not for the STEP program’s support staff helping him out and guiding his steps to success, he would not have made it beyond his first year at the University.

Sarah grew up in a small town nestled away in the Central Valley region of Shafter, California. She grew up in a large working class family of seven where she relied on her older brothers’ examples to work hard and pursue a college degree. Her parents have worked six days a week in the fields in order to pay for her and her siblings’ education. Sarah was ready to begin her “college adventure” and get out of her small town. She wants to make her parents proud and let them know that all of their hard work is not in vain. She attended a small high school where everyone knew each other. She was nervous about college life because everything was going to be completely new to her. Nevertheless, Sarah knew that STEP would be a great opportunity to learn how to make a positive transition, succeed academically and socially, and continue to make her parents proud. She made it through her first year of college because STEP gave her the resources necessary to succeed and seek continuous personal growth.

Angel grew up in Inglewood, California in a lower middle class family. Both of his parents work and he is the last of five kids to go to college. He was uneasy about
beginning his first quarter of college because it meant starting all over. Angel was going
to start off fresh with friendships, learning about his new community, and adapt to the
new academic workload. Nevertheless, he knew that if he worked hard, he would be able
to succeed and follow the footsteps of his brothers and sisters. He went to a large high
school with a student body of 2,500. In fact, his graduating class was the largest in
school history.

Angel made it past his first-year at college because STEP helped him prepare for
calculus, chemistry and physics, tough entry level courses known to push people out of
those majors. Yet, due to his participation in STEP, he was prepared for that challenge.
Angel believed that if it were not for STEP he would not have excelled, he would have
felt more isolated, and he would have eventually been expelled from the institution.

Research Questions

The following groups of questions were studied to determine how students felt
about the 2014 Summer Transitional Enrichment Program and its influence on their first
year success in college:

1. How did STEP prepare students academically and socially for their first-year
   of college?
2. What role did STEP play in your desire to succeed beyond the first year?
3. What elements of STEP, according to the students, impacted their engagement
   and transition from high school to college during their first year?
Examination of Themes and Subthemes

Chapter Four will explore the themes and subthemes that arose from participants’ assessment of their transition from high school to college. It will also look at how the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program influenced their success in college beyond their first year. From the research data provided, five themes and ten subthemes were developed and are shown in Table three.

The theme “Unpredictable Future” offered thoughts on how students felt about embarking on a new college journey. This theme was chosen because all participants were uncertain about their college journey ahead. Each participant was set to leave their sheltered comfort zones that they had known most of their lives and enter a new horizon in their life. They knew that the road ahead would include many struggles and successes. Excitement and nervousness for their next life adventure as college students was a common topic among each of the interviewees. The theme branches off into two subthemes: 1) “Enthusiastic yet nervous” and 2 “Common experience.”

“New Environment and Way of Living” theme offered thoughts on all of the adjustments and adapting that participants had to make in college to succeed. This theme was chosen because participants had to adjust to new surroundings, and relate to unfamiliar people during the first year of their college career. Meeting new students who are strangers at first often seems very different from family, friends and acquaintances from home. The participants who live away from home typically had to learn to relate to, learn about, and even negotiate conflicts with new friends and roommates. These students also experienced new expectations from adults at college. For example,
professors typically do not call if a class is missed, but will likely grade for attendance. In college, there is usually less interaction between parents and the school since students are age 18 and older. These research participants have been faced with the need to work out problems or concerns directly with professors, Residence Life, etc. The subthemes that surfaced were 1) “Being on my own,” and 2) “New responsibilities.”

The theme “Campus Involvement” explores the role that the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program had on participant’s involvement in their first year at the university. This theme has been chosen because student involvement has become so important to the participants; it is vital for their institution to create a desired culture, not just a campus. When participants progressed toward involvement and engagement, they felt like they were a part of something bigger than themselves. This sense of belonging has fostered loyalty and pride in their institution, as well as academic achievement, and community involvement. The two subthemes of this theme are 1) “STEP was a huge encouragement,” and 2) “I now knew the campus.”

“Solid Support System” theme shows the amount of support that was provided to STEP participants in order to help them transition and succeed. This theme was chosen because each participant found out through the STEP program that living on their own for the first time while going to college does not mean you are alone. Their college offers campus services which students can use when they need help with personal, social, health, financial or other issues. Help and guidance is provided all over campus and it is fundamental that students take advantage of the resources available. The subthemes 1) “Support staff,” and 2) “Valuable resources” emerged from this theme.
The last theme “Self Growth” describes the development students had to work on their own in order to make it past their first year at the institution. This theme was chosen because the first year for these participants was noteworthy because students learned what boundaries they can reach in completing schoolwork and having a social life. The first year was additionally full of challenges and growth, which is an important quality to hold onto throughout their adult lives. The subthemes that emerged are “Organization skills,” and “Failure is not an option.”

Table 5

Themes and Subthemes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Unpredictable Future</td>
<td>a. Enthusiastic yet nervous</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Common experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. New Environment and Way of Living</td>
<td>a. Being on my own</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. New responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Campus Involvement</td>
<td>a. STEP was a huge encouragement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. I now knew the campus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Valuable resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Self Growth</td>
<td>a. Organization skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Failure is not an option</td>
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**Themes and Subthemes**

**Theme: Unpredictable Future.** All five research participants were unsure about what to expect when starting their college journey as they expressed their feelings before starting their undergraduate experience. James stated:

Well to begin with, I’m the first person in my family to go to college so I had no idea what I was doing in regards to applying to colleges and once I got accepted to the University, I didn't know how to sign up for classes, where to live or any of that stuff. I did not have anybody telling me what to do and what to look forward to. I had only been to the University for one day for a tour before STEP on a weekend so I did not know what I was getting myself into here in the institution.

The college process confused James because he didn't know how to register for classes, find housing, let alone excel academically. Fortunately, STEP provided him an understanding of how to navigate college and know what to expect. Two other students were more worried about the size of the institution. Sarah said, “I am from a tiny town of 20,000 people which is less than the student population at the University and about a third of this city’s population so I was kind of worried about adjusting to a bigger city and more people, very scary.” Angel mentioned “I remember seeing tons of students on campus and buildings everywhere during my tour in high school my senior year, so I did not know how I would react with so much around me.”

Jasmine was unsure about beginning college and being away from her family at the time. She stated:

I was excited for college but I feel like there was a point in my life where I feel
like it was a drag because there was so much going on in my family life at that time and that made me feel really stressed out to even leave my home and transition into something so new, and being on my own. Obviously you have friends and all these people you make connections with in college but it's the never the same as being with your family. It just didn’t feel like the right time.

Jasmine’s decision to attend the STEP program and go ahead and begin her first year of college was influenced by the possibilities that the summer provided. She knew that STEP was a terrific opportunity to prepare for college and it was her way to get away from all the worries at home, meet new people, and continue to grow.

**Subtheme: Enthusiastic yet Nervous.** Angel and Jasmine felt ready for courses at the university level. They were prepared for the new journey and hoped to receive good grades. Jasmine believed that her high school workload was helpful so she was ready to perform well in college. However, she was also a bit nervous. She stated:

Well I went to a charter school. So it was very small, there was like 200 students overall and 60 in my graduating class, 50 or 60 around there. So we always had a lot of support with our academics. They were very strict you know like we actually had to wear uniforms and take community college classes and we had to take summer internships so I did feel prepared in some areas. That's where I feel like I was prepared. Definitely there are some areas where I didn't, for example like in chemistry. They didn't offer it in a like an actual classroom. I had to take it online in high school so I don't think it prepared me for my classes in college which is where I was a bit worried about my classes.
Though Jasmine was nervous, starting her new college career was exciting and she was ready to make the adjustments necessary to succeed. Jasmine, James, and Sarah were nervous regarding the size of the campus and being away from home. Sarah stated, “I was so used to small classes of 25 students or less so when I heard that classes could be in triple digits, I got crazy nervous.” James was concerned and stated:

As the time was getting closer to beginning STEP, I was thinking oh no my time here back home is coming to an end. I am going to be missing out on my family's lives, my friends, my little brother in high school where he is going to be getting really involved and I am going to miss out on a lot. My dad would tell me he didn't know how he felt about me leaving because he felt that I wasn't prepared. He would say yea you are book smart but not street smart. Can I handle being independent, paying bills, and can I handle being out by myself?

James was nervous that he would not be able to handle all of the new responsibilities that came with being a college student.

Although the participants were enthusiastic and nervous about the new college adventure, following the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program, they were ready in large part due to being surrounded by students with a common experience.

**Subtheme: Common Experience.** A large role in easing many participants’ worries of college was the experience they had with other students during STEP. Participants quickly learned that many of them came from similar backgrounds, similar households, and similar areas. Also, they each shared a common experience in participating in the 2014 Summer Transitional Enrichment Program. Braden stated:
We were all here before anyone else and we always think of ourselves as a little family because we started the college experience together. You may be a different race than I am, a different major, or doing your own thing but we always can fall back on that we did STEP together. That's the common bond and connection that continues to link us and motivate each other to do well.

Braden was unsure about his college journey and new surroundings. Nevertheless, when the first quarter began he realized he had plenty of peer support from fellow STEP participants.

James, Jasmine, and Sarah highlighted the fact that by the end of the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program, they no longer felt like they were on this college journey alone. Sarah felt more confident when the first quarter arrived because of this knowledge. She noted:

I felt a sense of comfort knowing that I was not doing this by myself. I had made new friends who were starting all over just like me. STEP opened my eyes to the idea of asking my peers for help if needed and they helped me realize that I could get through my first year of college.

Although Sarah was unsure about her college transition, she quickly realized that everyone around her was going through the same tough transition. She learned how to cope with the transition and rely on her peers for support and growth. Sarah also said having fellow STEP students in some of her first quarter classes helped her transition into her new environment as well.

*Theme: New environment and way of living.* The transition to a new
environment and new way of living was very difficult for many participants. For James and Sarah, the change in a number of responsibilities was a major adjustment and worry. Sarah explained:

> Once I moved away from home, I had a boatload of responsibilities to now worry about. I had to start waking up on my own, get to bed at a reasonable time, pay my own phone bill, and quickly find a way to organize my life in a way that will lead to success. All while getting used to a new environment where I felt completely lost.

Sarah felt overwhelmed with the new college lifestyle. It was a challenge that she encountered in her first year at the University. However, the STEP experience helped her learn how to balance her time and get organized in order to prepare for success once her first quarter began. The classes she took during STEP, the schedule she had to follow, and the continuous repetition of waking up early for STEP programming all played a significant role in her success.

 Angel, like Sarah, also felt overwhelmed with the new environment and his new responsibilities. He stated “college was a lot more than I expected, the freedom to do whatever I want, go where I wanted, and make any decisions I wanted quickly made me realize that I need to get my life in order.”

**Subtheme: Being on my own.** As the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program participants began to prepare for their first year of college, being on their own was a huge concern. Not only was it a concern of each student, but also for the participants’ parents. Sarah mentioned, “My parents did not want me to leave but in the end, knew that was
what is best for me.” James stated:

  My dad would say yea you are book smart but not street smart. Can you handle being independent, paying bills, and can you handle being out by yourself? My mom would be strict and kept us in the house and we did not have the chance to become street smart. I would say that I was pretty nervous and my dad would always say I don't know how I feel about you leaving. He thought that I am not gonna be able to be myself and handle the city life and do basic things to live like taking a bus or make sure no one bothers you. Can I handle adult responsibilities like bills, food, and things like that. It was definitely one of those things that I felt the intimidation from and was nervous about.

James finally had the chance to live on his own and not worry about the strict rules he had to follow back home. He was alone and had to figure out how to succeed on his own. Yet, participating in the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program helped him realize he was not beginning this college journey by himself. He had 200 other peers by his side willing to work with him in and outside of the classroom.

  Braden was not used to living on his own. He has two older brothers and a younger sister who were always around. Braden stated:

  I always… like always had family around me, close too, to help me with anything. So when I got here, it was tough, really tough…I had to begin to look elsewhere for help to do good in college and adjust to be all by myself hundreds of miles away from home.

Braden found it rough being away from his family. He found that STEP offered a new
family for him to become a part of. Building solid relationships where he felt comfortable with his peers was one of his biggest goals for college and the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program helped him find a second home.

**Subtheme: New Responsibilities.** Unlike grade school, middle school, or high school, all academic responsibilities fall on the student, not the parents, advisors or professors. It is the student’s responsibility to excel. Participants of the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program learned to constantly seek help and guidance because if they failed to do so, they would get behind on work and it may be too late to catch up when they realize it. Angel further explained:

In my first quarter of college, I got behind in classes…fast! I did not do my readings on time for classes; I didn’t care at all which led to failing to participate in class and do really bad on my first midterm. It was a big wake up call, like c’mon you can do better. I wasn’t used to these new responsibilities that came with me asking for help. See, I have a lot of pride that can be bad sometimes but STEP helped influence me to reach out for some guidance to succeed at the college.

Similar to Angel, James, Sarah, and Braden also struggled with their first quarter. The transition phase was a harsh road for these first year students. Braden, in particular, discussed the impact that classes taken during the summer program held on his success. Braden stated:

When I took classes like University Expectations, I was told it's not worth anything because the classes don't even go towards my G.P.A so I would
say that was the one downfall of the program because I came into the university with the mentality thinking it doesn't matter and I can get away with not doing much and I feel like that is what really ruined my first quarter. I knew that I had to do good but in the back of my mind still had that STEP mentality. With this, I took it as I was here to basically just have fun. I came here to enjoy myself, meet people, and explore as much as I can. So that was the downfall academically.

Braden learned the hard way that he needs to take responsibility and get his academics in order. He had a wakeup call just like his fellow Step program peer, Angel. The new responsibilities of college led to participants recognizing that they need to become more involved on campus in order to get assistance to get out of the hole they dug for themselves academically.

**Theme: Campus Involvement.** Being involved on campus is essential to the first-year experience of new arriving students. Involvement can range from participation in the classroom to participating in a club, event, or on-campus organization. The Summer Transitional Enrichment Program helped Sarah become involved on her campus and surroundings. She stated:

The cool thing was that when school started, we already had friends, knew fun places to go, kind of knew how classes would be, well we got a taste of it. Like we went bowling one time, to the movies downtown, and even took a late night trip to Inn N Out one night. Like stuff like that was fun to hang out and know all of that. We were kind of like the cool kids on campus when school started because we knew a lot more than other freshmen like us.
Sarah felt involved in her environment because she knew about college classes, knew her way around campus and the city, and knew what to expect from classes. Jasmine was also involved in her environment. Jasmine stated:

When I had my first day of classes, I remember helping out dorm mates find their classes and it felt cool being able to help people on my floor. I kinda felt like I was a high school senior all over again, helping out all the little freshmen. I’d already been there for about a month so I was pretty confident. I felt ready for the New Year, which eased my worries a bit.

Jasmine felt involved in her environment her first quarter because she spent four weeks on campus before school started as a Stepper. With this valuable knowledge, she was able to help others and become a significant part of her institution’s needs. Two subthemes emerged: “STEP was a huge encouragement,” and “I now know the campus.”

**Subtheme: STEP was a huge encouragement.** After participating in the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program, students were motivated to get involved on campus. STEP really emphasized finding a home away from home that will support each student’s endeavors and hobbies. This really resonated with James, Braden, and Sarah. They discussed the activities they introduced during their summer program. For example, they would organize outdoor games of basketball, Ultimate Frisbee, and volleyball. Jasmine was also involved in her hall government.

Angel, James, and Braden stated that they each of them became involved in Greek student organizations and their STEP friends played a significant role in the decision making process when joining. For James, it was the connection he made with one of his
peer advisors that influenced him to look into an organization. James mentioned:

Yea I already knew that some of the PACs (peer advising counselors) were already so involved with internships, Greek orgs, and they found their passion. They emphasized making your stay worth the while on campus and taking advantage of the opportunities. Get involved, get to know other people, and find people with the same interest as you in your major, a sport, or a hobby. I met one of the peer advisors who was part of a Greek organization whom was really close to the one I was interested in. She told me more about them, introduced me to some of the members, and even invited me to some of the upcoming events. She was really helpful and that was something I appreciated.

James felt STEP encouraged him to find a supportive group early on that would help him feel at home and comfortable. He has definitely continued that involvement beyond his first year and has quickly moved up on the executive board of his respective fraternity.

When joining an organization, there are also many factors that influence if first-year students feel welcomed. Braden discussed:

Well for me it wasn't about being overwhelmed with so many clubs on campus, it was a lot more about figuring out where I fit in. Because for example just clubs, I would see them but I didn't see any that attracted my attention to want to see like more from there. I wasn't scared to join, I just needed to see what they had to offer. That was very important.

Braden understood that there was a wide range of involvement opportunities that his college had to offer based on his STEP participation. That is why he sought out a club
that would benefit him and his future. His involvement at the institution has not only helped him create connections with other students on campus, but also continue to help him navigate his campus.

**Subtheme: I now knew my campus.** Each of the participants of the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program highlighted the significance of knowing their way around campus once their first quarter at the university began. Students were able to navigate throughout campus with ease, were comfortable with eating at the dining halls, and often times found themselves directing their peers from place to place. All five participants mentioned that they would always call or text their STEP friends to join them at the dining halls. Although the summer of STEP ended, they continued to bond over breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Angel said, “I texted my friends pretty much every day to find a time we were all free for lunch or dinner, I rarely ate breakfast, but yea we would always have a big group, always rollin deep.”

On the first day of the participants’ Fall quarter, the least of their worries was being able to find their classes and exploring their new surroundings. James stated:

Once I did the month long STEP program, I began to be able to recognize everything and learn about the campus over time. Not just the campus, but also exploring the city and downtown areas. So that definitely came in handy that I already knew where some of the main academic buildings were at like Wellman, Olson, and some of the more popular buildings. I didn’t have to worry about that at all like other new freshmen.

James was ready to begin his college journey and did not need a road map. Sarah had a
similar experience, she mentioned:

I did not realize how beneficial STEP was in regards to knowing my way around until my first week of classes, I knew where to go…on the other hand…my dorm mates were lost and confused, I was really grateful.

The Summer Transitional Enrichment Program has helped students feel comfortable on and off campus. It has given students the opportunity to grow accustomed to their institution’s campus all while exploring local restaurants, theatres, and social spaces for college students. Braden said “I knew how to get to the movie theatres for our movie nights and even the bike path to In N Out for our late night munchies.” Participants were incredibly comfortable with their environment, felt an untiring desire to be involved in their new surroundings, and this was all in large part due to the staff that supported them from their very first day on campus.

**Theme: Solid Support System.** When making the transition from high school to college, it is extremely important to have a reliable support system that can help a student with academic, social, and emotional concerns. The main objective of the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program at the University is to support all student endeavors that will aid in their success at their new institution. Students are encouraged by the professional staff to utilize all of the services available to them as STEP students, including each other. The Peer Advising Counselor (“PAC”) was able to direct participants to the appropriate resources. James, Angel, Braden, and Sarah each discussed how big of a role their PACs played in helping with their college transition. Braden stated:
For me in particular, I feel like it was the connection that I made with the peer advisors. They did show us around campus a lot and showed us the different tools and resources to help us. The SCC, EOP Office, clubs, organizations. What was most helpful for me was the peer advisor themselves was someone I could look up to, someone I can count on, get advice, have a good time with and then realize that they are almost done with their career here so let me buckle down and follow their steps and do the same.

For Braden, he found a trustworthy confidant in his STEP experience, someone who was very helpful beginning his college career and someone he felt he could create a connection and growing relationship with academically, socially, and emotionally. The great uniqueness about this program is that the peer advising counselors are students as well. The only thing that separates participants and PACs is the experience at the institution.

The PACs of the STEP program have been through a lot of the same situations and have had the same questions of their students. Sarah described it as: “When I got to school, anyone who was older than me and doing well in school, I admired! So when I met the peer advising counselors, I just wanted to pick their brains and learn all that I could in order to succeed like them.”

Braden and Sarah looked up to the PACs of their summer transitional enrichment program. They understood that their peers carried valuable knowledge that could be a huge benefit to their future. Each participant highlighted the importance of the professional support staff and the responsibility they have in helping the new class of
students strive for success. However, the peer-to-peer relationship has been the most significant influence on students of the STEP program.

**Subtheme: Support of Friends.** Students who have participated in the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program together and share that common experience commonly refer to themselves as Steppers. As participants have thrived past their first-year of college, they have found the relationships they have with fellow Steppers to be the most enduring and supportive. The friendships with other participants have lasted past the first year. All five participants knew each other really well and consistently interact with other STEP students. Braden sees STEP friends when he goes to the gym, student organization club meetings, and various classes. James recalls introducing his dorm mates to other STEP participants at the dining halls during his first-year and that began lasting friendships that are still strong today. James stated:

> When the quarter started, I would still hit up my STEP friends to eat so not much of others outside the group. We had a great group of friends who all supported each other. Every now and again I would meet really good people that didn’t do STEP and I would invite them to come eat with us. Today I have like three really good friends that didn’t do STEP and now they are all a part of my group of friends.

James was able to build fruitful friendships during his STEP experience and continue that throughout his first year. As he transitioned into a new environment, the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program helped him shape lasting friendships.

Braden, Angel, and Jasmine also highlighted how strong these bonds were
between STEP participants. Angel discussed how helpful one of his STEP friends was for one of his calculus classes. “I honestly don’t think I would have passed the class without him, we studied together all the time and he would force me to go to class, I hated him for it but loved him at the same time.” Jasmine related the relationship she had with her friend from STEP to be like that of a blood sister. She stated:

One of my friends even had issues with her apartment roommate so she stayed at my place for three weeks. No questions asked. I gave her blankets and pillows to use and even shared my bed with her. Like, that's how close we are.

Jasmine began her college career comfortably with a great group of STEP friends that she was willing to do anything for. She even mentioned that after her first year, all of her STEP friends made sure that they did not stray away too far from each other and decided to live in the same apartment complex. To this day, they still see each other just as much as their days at STEP. Each participant has grown to love one another and value the relationships that they have created during their first summer together. As participants transitioned to a new environment and developed friendships they also began to value the resources around them.

**Subtheme: Valuable resources.** Millions of college freshmen starting school have a lot on their minds, making the grade, meeting new friends, and being on their own. Another new challenge they’ll face is staying healthy. While students face a variety of health issues, including infections, stress, depression, and sexually transmitted diseases; the key to wellness is understanding the importance of the resources available on their campuses. For many students, up until this point, someone else has been actively
involved in their health care. The transition to college is a time when students assume responsibility for their wellbeing and one of the best ways to do that is by becoming familiar with the variety of health services offered on their campus. Angel, Jasmine, and Sarah have all had positive experiences with utilizing these resources. In particular, Jasmine felt comfortable enough to seek these services on her own. She stated:

Well Step was always big on using the resources on campus. So the fact that we were so encouraged to use the resources on campus, I felt comfortable enough to make an appointments at the Counseling Center in order to talk to someone when I was feeling stressed with classes. I usually wouldn't do that but STEP eased my worries and helped me feel comfortable with using all the resources available to me as a student. I don't think I would have been able to doing that in high school but STEP helped me realize it is necessary and okay.

Now that Jasmine is in college and has been through a year of college, she knows that counseling services for students are a great resource. Sarah has also used the Counseling Center for her needs. “I had a rough patch during my winter quarter last year when my mom was really sick and it was really hard to balance school and my worries back home, I appreciated having someone to talk to in that tough time.”

James, Sarah, Angel, and Braden also mentioned the importance that the Activities and Recreation Center has played in their first year. The gym has become a safe haven for many students and a great way to get away from all the academics including lectures, midterms, office hours, essays, and projects. Angel has used the gym after very stressful periods in the quarter. Angel stated:
For me, playing basketball is my go-to! Especially after a midterm or final! That is always the first place I go to after I put away that pencil and turn in my test. It is the perfect way to distress, take my mind off of my worries, and have some fun with good friends.

Angel is a big fan of sports and wants to do well in school. His institution has made a way for him to continue to enjoy his favorite hobby and perform in school. Braden is also a huge fan of the gym. “The gym is my personal time, I put my earphones in and just jam out, lift some heavy weights, and make sure to take care of my body because school alone can really damage my mental mindset and physical appearance if I let it.”

Angel and Braden have packed schedules with classes, employment, and family or social obligations that quickly fill up their calendars. Exercise for them has been great ways to boost their mood for the day and relieve all the stress that comes with being a college student. The STEP program has made sure that its participants understood how important it was that they use the resources they are paying for, and more importantly, resources that will aid their success. Being able to see the value of the campus resources has been something that these participants have learned over time and leads to continuous self-growth.

**Theme: Self-Growth.** Intellectual and social stimulation from the college setting can mix with the normal developmental patterns of becoming an adult in American society to produce profound changes in young people. Most parents expect their young adult children to change when they go to college, yet some parents are not prepared for the magnitude of those changes. Frequently, young adults themselves are not always
ready for the changes that college can produce in them either. During their first year of college, participants discussed their individual growth in regard to adapting to college demands, developing competence, managing emotions, becoming autonomous, establishing identity, clarifying purpose, and developing integrity or wholeness. Personal growth and interpersonal skills development are as much a part of the college experience as intellectual advancement and the mastery of work-related skills. College can be a tough transition to make and self-growth and encouragement over time is a major key to success. Jasmine stated:

I did feel super stressed out during my first quarter and I've always thought I could use the resources on campus and I could give myself a break. I have to realize that it's hard to adjust and figure things out. You will never have everything figured out and it takes time. You always have to push yourself to realize that times will get better.

Jasmine always tried to have an optimistic outlook on the future even when she was going through some challenges. She has continued to work on her own self-development and doing her best to get her life in order.

Subtheme: Organization Skills. For all five participants, developing organization and time management skills during the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program paid dividends in their first year of college. During the STEP program, students had the opportunity to really explore what works best for them to succeed. What time should I wake up for classes? What study space works best for me? How many hours of sleep do I need? Should I use a planner and how often should I feel it out? These are all questions
that were answered during their four-week summer program at their institution.

Participants learned from STEP how to organize their busy lives consisting of academics and co-curricular activities. It also gave them the chance to learn how to manage their own time by practicing planning and implementation into their daily collegiate lives as a new undergraduate student of the University. In particular, Sarah considered her time of learning to balance her life. Sarah stated:

One thing it (STEP) really did is helping me realize I need to get my mess in order. When I first arrived it was horrible, I didn’t have a planner, never used my Google Calendar, and had no idea how to balance all these new responsibilities. I learned quickly to start writing everything down, I mean everything going on in my life! My planner was always full and I loved it. The STEP program helped me realize that I need to hold myself to a higher standard and hold myself accountable for organizing my time and life for success.

Sarah had a rude awakening when she arrived to the university and decided to do something about it on her own. Angel had a similar story, “My life did a positive 180 when I started to use my planner, I always felt accomplished and on top of things at the end of the day.”

Angel, Jasmine, Braden, and James are much more confident with managing their time now that they are in their second year. James explained how early in college he was faced with deciding whether or not to join co-curricular activities. He said he drew on his high school experience balancing participation in various school clubs, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes, a part-time job and an
internship, all of which helped him develop time management skills. "To even attempt to do all these things, I had to have a clear and organized list of goals and priorities, I tried to tackle these in order of descending importance one at a time, with flexibility but persistence. I now use this same approach in my second year."

**Subtheme: Failure is not an option.** Many times, it takes a student to fail in order to realize their faults and decide to adjust and adapt. For example, The Summer Transitional Enrichment Program solely offered small class sizes for students, which turned out to be a disadvantage for participants when their first quarter began. Sarah and Jasmine highlighted the stress they went through trying to get used to classes in large lecture halls with hundreds of students. Jasmine mentioned:

> So I had a biology class with about five hundred students and I remember I would always Snapchat “this is such a big lecture hall!” It is so different because you don't have the same amount of attention from professors. Professors won't tell you to pay attention or threaten you like in high school so it is so easy to lose focus and get distracted. So I realized I wasn’t too attentive in class so I had to adjust. I always try to bring snacks or coffee to class or wake up earlier for class to make sure I can focus. For me, I feel like it really helps for me to have a routine and it helps me get in that mindset of getting work done. Without one, it is really easy for me to deviate from staying on task.

For Jasmine, class is very important and realized that if she did not want to fail the class, she needed to find out how to solve her problem of being present in the lecture. Not only did students have to adjust their decisions in the classroom but also outside of the
classroom. All five participants faced the predicament of attending social events with friends or studying. It was a tough decision that often times had negative consequences. James was affected by this dilemma early on in his first quarter. James mentioned:

Back in high school, I was a pretty social person but I never really went out, probably because my parents were strict so once I got here I would go to some of the parties or go out with my friends sometimes even at 2 am for some Jack in the Box. That was a major change for me that I thought was fun but in the end hurt me. I remember going to a party a night before a midterm and found myself stressing the next day before the test and doing horrible on the test. That’s when I knew I needed to get my priorities straight.

James learned from his mistake and has since learned to prioritize what is important and make sure his academics come first. That experience helped him get back on track and is a period of growth that he will never forget.

Braden, Sarah, Jasmine, and Angel stated their frustrations with going from a grading system that was not significant to one that affected their institutional G.P.A. During the STEP program, class grades were unimportant and played no role in their college grade point average. This negatively affected four participants. In particular, Braden was very unhappy with this situation. Braden stated:

I was told grades are not worth anything because the classes don't even go towards my G.P.A so I would say that was the one downfall of the program because I came into the university with the mentality thinking it doesn't matter and I can get away with mediocre work and effort. I feel like that is what really
ruined my first quarter. I knew that I had to do good but in the back of my mind had that STEP mentality.

Braden had to have a really bad first quarter at the University in order to realize that he needed to step up and do better. He had to remind himself that he earned his way into the institution and needs to take advantage of the opportunity at hand. He reached out for more help, tried harder, and dedicated himself to his academics. Each participant had a moment of revelation during his or her first year that led to a stage of self-growth and overcoming challenges.

Summary of Findings

Theme: Unpredictable Future

Participants quickly realized that only one thing was certain on their college journey: change was on its way. The students could not predict what was next and they faced an unpredictable future. The academic stress, size of the university, and being away from a well-known support system are some of the uncertainties that these participants faced. However, the excitement for the future and transition ahead was very evident.

The Summer Transitional Enrichment Program was their leading strategy to handle this transition. The experiences the participants had throughout the STEP program helped to assure them they will be all right and had built the necessary confidence needed to persist academically and socially as they began their first quarter at the University. More specifically, participants were confident to begin classes and
navigate their way throughout campus finding different buildings and activities on campus.

**Theme: New Environment and Way of Living**

As participants began their first quarter at the institution, all was new, including academic rigor, new social spaces, and taking on new responsibilities. Students had a clean slate to begin with and leave everything else in the past. This new college adventure, gave them the opportunity to chase new goals and aspirations in life. Although a new environment can be daunting, STEP allowed participants to prepare for different college classes and provide participants the chance to start their college journey with a reliable support system. This new group of friends shared a common experience, however, the common theme of all being a part of STEP has been the most significant influence in their lives as they continue beyond their first-year.

**Theme: Campus Involvement**

Getting and staying involved is one of the most important things you can do while in college. Being involved can take many forms, from being a member of a registered student organization (RSO), joining a fraternity or sorority, conducting research with a faculty member, going on an Alternative Spring Break (ASB) trip, or volunteering at a local social service agency. It does not matter how you are involved, it only matters that you are! Participants were involved in their campus life and became comfortable navigating their campus and community. STEP encouraged students’ involvement in student-run organizations and also provided them with the support necessary to find a place where they each “fit in.”
Theme: Solid Support System

Colleges offer a great deal of support services to assist students in coping with academic difficulties, personal issues, health problems, and other worries. Participants of the STEP program discovered where these support systems were located and sought help with college issues while on campus. The STEP support staff played a major role in their students’ successes by motivating them toward success, offering advice when needed and being an ideal role model to their students. Participants took advantage of the Counseling Center when dealing with family struggles going on back home and the stress that comes with the challenging academic workload. They also made sure to place an importance on their daily health by attending the school gym for exercise three to four times a week. Not only did they work on evolving their minds, but also their bodies.

Theme: Self-Growth

Small class sizes of roughly 20 students are implemented by STEP so that students can interact with their peers and engage in the classroom. However, smaller classes were not a great indicator of what college is holistically. Participants had to adjust and adapt to their environment individually when entering classrooms with upwards of 80 students. With self-growth, came adaptation for success. Students developed strategies to do better in large lecture halls like sitting in the front of the class or showing up early. Participants also had to learn from their mistakes in their first year, learning to get their schedules organized and reduce the amount of unproductive leisure time. This was essential to their individual growth. Lastly, the participants understood
that in order to obtain success during their undergraduate career, many of them had to fall on their face first. Their determination to pick themselves up is why they have succeeded beyond their first year.

Chapter Five examines the results of this case study, provides implications from the results, and will suggest recommendation for research in the future.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

This research study was conducted at Northern California Research University (NCRU) on second-year students who participated in a summer transitional enrichment program. The findings reveal first year student experiences located at this particular university. The research on transition programs for new students relays an increased presence on college campuses nationwide and the public readiness to prepare incoming students for the road ahead (The RP Group for California Community Colleges, 2010). Therefore, the researcher intended to investigate the effectiveness of the STEP program and look at the individual experiences of five specific students who have persisted beyond their first year. The findings from this research suggest new conclusions. Additionally, it strengthens studies already discovered from research on college transitional programs. Examples include the programs at the University of Maryland, Temple University, and the Ohio State University, all of which were discussed and evaluated in Chapter two. The researcher sought to explore NCRU’s summer program in its entirety, looking at the program from an all-inclusive perspective taking into consideration the benefits and possible shortcomings of the summer program. Therefore, the study was also created to openly expose the potential advantageous outcomes to a student’s individual success patterns and the qualities of the program that posed challenges for the students to overcome and from which to learn. A qualitative research
method was used to conduct one-on-one interviews and analyze data. This data helped the researcher determine if the summer experiences of each participant influenced their success beyond the first year of instruction. These questions were designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How did STEP prepare students academically and socially for their first-year of college?
2. What role did STEP play in your desire to persist beyond the first year?
3. What elements of STEP according to the students had an impact on engagement and their transition from high school to college involvements in their first year?

The findings of this study indicated that the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program had a positive influence on student’s transition to college and aiding them in making it past the first year of instruction. Each participant had an experience like no other, but highlighted the impact that STEP had on their sense of beginning their first quarter: noting that they were prepared academically and socially for the college experience. They felt comfortable navigating the college campus, seeking out and discovering available resources, and engaging with peers in-and-out of the classroom. Participants learned that asking for help from the support systems around them was essential to their success.

Socially, once the school year began, participants had a solid group of friends from the program. They shared a common experience that linked them together for the rest of their lives. Participants were not worried or concerned about eating at dining halls
alone because they had STEP friends as steady company. Their summer in STEP also encouraged them to get involved in groups outside of the classroom. These involvements included joining Greek organizations, cultural clubs, and playing intramural sports. This was their opportunity to find their group on campus where they truly felt they could be themselves and “fit in.” Participants had the chance to get to know their community over the summer as well, eating at the best restaurants and finding the nearest movie theatre with friends. These students have continued to be friends beyond their days at STEP and their first year at the university. More importantly, these friendships have also influenced their success and desire to remain at the institution beyond the first year.

**Conclusions**

**Why Does STEP Work?**

In order for other colleges around the nation to understand the value of a program like this one, they need to understand the inner workings of the program. This particular institution is not doing anything new in the field of higher education; they are simply implementing and doing what the literature has proven to be beneficial to first-year students. Each and every aspect of the design process in regards to this summer transition program has been used to help students. The support staff of the Summer Transitional Enrichment Program has taken time out of their demanding schedules to commit and invest in assuring the university that they are participating in the development of their youth. Students deserve nothing less than the best; here are five significant factors of the program that have led to the positive results of this study.
1. **Free of Charge**- STEP serves a student population that is predominately low-income and first generation college students. The fact that the program is free, removes the financial burden that low-income families commonly deal with. The program pays for a student’s room, board, meals, and all required textbooks.

2. **4-Week Program**- Participants spent four weeks in college level classes with professors and tutors who aided in their success. The summer program consisted of one week of orientation, advising and registration. During the remaining three weeks, students attended classes in writing or mathematics, and study skills Monday through Friday with class times very similar to college classes. There are evening programs that familiarize students about a variety of campus issues. There are social activities like dances, ice cream socials, a barbecue, and a talent show. The program is comprehensive and residential. That is, the students live together in the residence halls and get an excellent taste of what life during the academic year will be like. The time allotted was enough time for participants to develop skills necessary for their success once the first quarter began.

3. **Required Attendance**- The classes that students of the STEP program had to attend were all based on mandatory attendance. If a student missed a class, the STEP staff was immediately notified and there were severe consequences for the participants. These included being forbidden from attending social events or even being dismissed from the program after having too many
unexcused absences. By making class attendance mandatory, students quickly adapted to what college-style classes would entail. This includes developing organizational skills, figuring out what time to study, and determining when to incorporate co-curricular activities.

4. **Immersion** - The STEP program provides students the opportunity to immerse themselves in their community. They become immersed into college classes, residential life, support staff interactions, and their future community. This opportunity allows students to learn, develop, and thrive early on in their college career.

5. **Residential** – STEP students lived together in the residence halls on campus with Peer Advising Counselors (PACs), generally experienced students in their third or fourth year at the institution. They serve as resident advisors to students. Living on campus gave participants the chance to get to know their campus really well before school started, create lasting friendships, and experience the dorm life. Participants were introduced the various resources available to them on campus, their new college peers, and what it was like to be a first year student at the institution.

**Recommendations for further Study**

This study was initiated to examine how a summer transition program within higher education has impacted the way students succeed past their first year of college. This investigation led to an analysis of the NCRU program involving second-year
students. The outcomes of this research signified that the 2014 Summer Transitional Enrichment Program influenced participants’ transition to college, and clearly helped their success beyond the first year at the institution.

A student’s commitment to succeed in college is motivated by various factors: (1) family members were alumni of the institution; (2) family and/or peers encouraged attendance; or (3) the individual had a specific perception of the institution (Seidman, 2005). Participants in this study had never considered leaving the institution because of strong family inspiration and a positive opinion of the institution.

The conclusions of this study confirmed prior research on first-year student transitions and their success beyond the first-year. Yet, more qualitative research would allow participants in summer transition programs to share their experiences and researchers to hear their voices to gain further familiarity on first-year student transitions and successes. This study concentrated on five participants that finished the program in 2014 and were in their second year at the university. However, a recommendation would be to ask what about students who were in their third, fourth, or fifth year at the university? Did gender, socioeconomic status, or race impact their experience in the summer program? Did their previous experiences, such as being raised in low achievement school districts, influence their experience in the summer program and ultimately their success? Did the skills and tactics they absorbed in the STEP program, affect their perseverance to graduation? Do they still have the support system they gained during the program? These are all significant questions that would be beneficial to add to the field of higher education.
Additionally, this study showed why the participants succeeded beyond their first-year but did not focus on the participants of the 2014 STEP program who did not continue beyond their first-year. Thus, a recommendation would be to encourage having a discussion with the five participants of the 2014 STEP program who did not stay at the University after their first year. This will give researchers the opportunity to uncover what the program could have done differently to support their academic and social transition into the institution.

People face transitions in their lives on a daily basis that can be as difficult mentally as marathons are physically. Every college freshman must make the challenging transition to college. This analysis concentrated on five students who had participated in a summer transition program, but what about first-year students who did not participate? A final recommendation would be to conduct a qualitative study comparing and contrasting the transition and success rates of students who participated in STEP to students who did not participate in STEP. This potential study would offer insight into the differences of the transitions and successes of students.
Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
A Qualitative Research Study of the Influence a 2014 Summer Transitional Enrichment Program had on Selected Students

You are invited to participate in an IRB approved research study which will involve an approximately 45-minute, in-person interview. My name is Jonathan Ballard, and I am a master’s degree student at California State University, Sacramento, College of Education. The purpose of this study is for partial fulfillment for my degree.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Even after you agree to participate, you may decide to leave the study at any time.

The purpose of this research is to explore the transition of Summer Transitional Enrichment Program participants to college, and their persistence beyond their first year of enrollment at a large research university. Participants’ academic and social transitions will be defined through their engagement, involvement, and desire to remain enrolled at the university beyond their first year. This gathered information can be helpful to anyone interested in college transition programs for first year students. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your thoughts on how your participation in a summer transition program influences your persistence beyond the first year of enrollment at the university. Your participation in this study will last just for the one 45-minute session. By selecting to participate you will be granting permission to record the interview to the researcher as well. Risks associated with this study are not anticipated to be greater than those risks encountered in daily life. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to insure your confidentiality are keeping the data on a secure computer and not distributing it to anyone. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your oral agreement indicates that you have read and understand the information provided in the inform consent form and agree to participate. If you chose to not participate the interview will be terminated.
Discomfort and Risks

There is minimal to no risk to you as a participant if you decide to partake in this study. The principal investigator will implement every precaution to ensure that all information collected from the interviews are kept confidential. All paper documents and transcripts will be stored in an electronic file that is password encrypted on a personal computer for no longer than 3 years after the study is completed.

Should you experience any discomfort as it relates to stress or duress, it is recommended you contact the University Student Health and Wellness Center at 530-752-2300.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant of this study. However, the results of this study can contribute to the limited research on summer transition programs for the first year student in higher education. Your contribution will provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of students in this population, and will provide recommendations for additional research and study for this population and in this field.

Cost

There is no cost to you apart from the time and effort required to complete the interview with the co-principle investigator.

Compensation

Participants will not be paid for their participation in this study.

Questions? If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the co-principle investigator, Jonathan Ballard at (XXX) XXX-XXX. You may also contact Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento at 916-278-5674 or by email at irb@csus.edu
Appendix B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Recruitment E-mail

Dear Steppers of 2014,

My name is Jonathan Ballard and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education: Leadership Masters Program at California State University, Sacramento. I am also an alumna of the Step Program as well (Summer 2008).

I am currently conducting research for a master’s thesis and I need your help! The topic being studied is the persistence of STEP Program participants beyond their first-year at the University. You are a student who has been selected for this study because you were a part of STEP 2014.

A one-on-one interview that will last no longer than 45 minutes to one hour will be conducted in order to describe your transition to college, and how your STEP experience affected this transition. The interview will take place in an agreed upon location such as the Memorial Union, Student Community Center, or a quiet room of your choice. Would you be willing to be a part of this study? Please contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or jtbballard@ucdavis.edu.

Thank you!

Jonathan Ballard
Graduate Student
Higher Education: Leadership
STEP 2008
Thank you for agreeing to meet with me! My name is Jonathan Ballard and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education: Leadership Program at California State University, Sacramento. Before we begin talking about your STEP experience and your first quarter at the University, let's review this informed consent form. I will need your signature before we can proceed with the interview.

[WALK THROUGH PURPOSE OF RESEARCH, PROCEDURES, RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS, BENEFITS, CONFIDENTIALITY, COMPENSATION]. If you agree to this point, please initial here. [WALK THROUGH OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS, AND FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW]. Do not hesitate to stop me at any point throughout the interview to ask questions or to ask me to clarify. [WALK THROUGH CONSENT, RIGHT TO RECEIVE A COPY]. Please initial here if you agree to be audio recorded. Please sign and date here if you agree to be a part of this study. Thank you for signing! Here is a copy of the informed consent form for your records. Let’s get started!

QUESTIONS

This concludes the interview! Thank you so much for your time and answers! I really appreciate your help with my study! Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.
Appendix C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Name___________________
Date____________________
Location_________________

1. Describe your thoughts and experiences as you began your undergraduate career at the college. What elements of step do you describe as assisting the transition from high school to college?

2. Before attending STEP, how did you feel about beginning your first year of college at the University?
   - Probes: being away from home the first time; academic apprehension; social apprehensions; size of the University compared to hometown

3. Describe your experiences in the Step Program.
   - Probes: first quarter at the college

4. Before attending STEP, how did you feel about beginning college classes?

5. After attending STEP, how did you feel about beginning your first quarter?
   - Probes: How did your experiences in STEP affect your first quarter at the university?

6. After attending STEP, how did you feel about beginning college classes?
   - How did you feel about working with professors?
   - How did the small class size during STEP impact your experience?
     - Probes: Explain your experiences during the class you took throughout STEP?

7. Explain the friendships you made with other STEP participants.
   - What was it like beginning the first quarter knowing other STEP participants?
   - What are those friendships like now after you completed your first-year at college?
     - Probes: cope/handle, friends, roommates, STEP staff

8. Overall, how did STEP help you cope with your transition to the University from high school?
   - Probes: academically, socially, self

9. Did STEP encourage your involvements in the University?
   - Explain how STEP affected your involvements academically.
Did you attend class?
Did you feel comfortable in your classes?
Did you feel comfortable asking questions and generally participating in classes?

10. Explain how STEP affected your social involvement at college?
   • Did you feel comfortable going to the dining halls?
   • Did you feel comfortable finding activities outside of academics to participate in during your free time
     o Probes: plays, Campus Rec, movie theaters, etc.
     o In general, were you comfortable finding your way around campus?

11. Did STEP encourage you to become involved in student organizations or other co-curricular activities at college?
   • How?
   • Did these activities help you stay at the university beyond your first-year at the University?
     o Probe: Did your extracurricular involvement help you feel at home in college and increase your desire to stay at the University?
     o At any time over the last year, did you ever think about leaving the University?
       ▪ If yes, why?
       ▪ If no, why?
         • Probes: academically, socially, self

12. How did your participation in STEP encourage you to stay at the University beyond your first-year?
   • Probes: academically, socially, self
References


Lanham, MD: M. Evans.


