

A QUASI EXPERIMENT OF THE *FRESHMEN*
IN TRANSITION RESIDENTIAL
LEARNING PROGRAM

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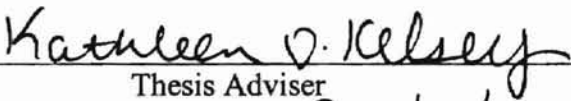
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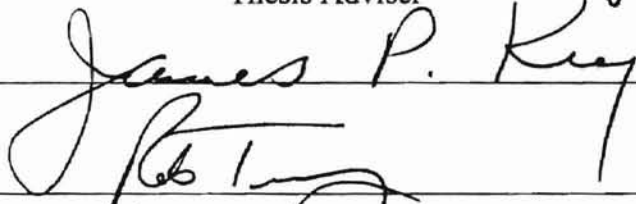
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Thesis Approved:



Thesis Adviser







Dean of the Graduate College

ages. My mother, my father, Mary Ellen, and Susan kept me in love and smiling, for that I
thank you. My family is my "home" and I am grateful to them for making me

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Growing up on a farm outside of Washington Court House, Ohio, I would dream about becoming a heart surgeon and marrying the Dallas Cowboys quarterback.

However, there have been several people in my life that have challenged me to do my best and made me realize that my true passion is to teach agriculture.

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Since those reports, colleges and universities have realized that a large part of the learning process takes place outside the classroom. Marshese (1994) suggested that the "classroom" could include the greatest opportunity for influence incorporation.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Setting

The primary mission of colleges and universities is to promote student learning and personal development. However, over the years many barriers to accomplishing this mission have developed such as: increasing enrollment, demographic shifts, changing economic agendas, faculty concerns about student learning, lack of public support, and greater demand for college and university responsibility (Schroeder, Mable, & Associates, 1994). In the report, *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education*, the authors charged that colleges and universities needed to reform higher education focusing on the connection between experiences and student learning and development (Wingspread Conference on Higher Education, 1993). Additionally, in 1994, The American College Personnel Association published *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Students Affairs* (SLI) that showed there was a need to connect students' in-class and out-of-class experiences in order to create an environment that promotes student learning and academic success. As a result of these reports, institutions began to evaluate their programs and services to determine how they could create a positive environment that connected student experiences and development.

Since those reports, colleges and universities have realized that a large part of students' learning takes place outside the classroom. Marchese (1994) suggested that residence halls could provide the greatest opportunity to influence undergraduate education because a large number of students live in the residence halls and programming is available to make connections to classroom instruction. Furthermore, Schroeder, Mable, & Associates, (1994) stated that residence halls have the potential to link learning experiences to real life experiences.

The idea of integrating formal learning into residence halls has been around for over a century, beginning with Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin (Vars, 1997). Today many institutions are turning back to residence halls to promote student learning and personal development (residence-based programs). Like many institutions, Oklahoma State University (OSU) has continually strived to encourage student learning and personal development in a variety of ways including creating themed residence halls. In summer 2000, Dr. Wesley Holley, Assistant Dean of Academic Programs in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at OSU initiated a pilot freshman residential learning community called Freshmen In Transition (FIT).

Implementation of the FIT Program at Oklahoma State University

The Need for the FIT Program

As the instructor for a required freshmen orientation course, Holley had the opportunity to observe many CASNR students begin their journey through college. Over several years, Holley noticed that a number of entering freshmen were not prepared to

face the challenges required to succeed in college. Additionally, he became concerned with an increase in student attrition (W. Holley, personal communication, December 21, 2000).

Holley stated that he began to think about what students needed in order to succeed in college, lead them to “strong academic efforts, value-based decisions, and high levels of involvement.” With those ideas in mind, he incorporated student mentors into his orientation course. The student mentors served as role models and interacted with the freshmen. Over the next few years, Holley watched as upper classmen interacted with the freshmen and gradually increased their interaction with the freshmen (W. Holley, personal communication, December 21, 2000).

While he made these changes to his course, he was also looking at the literature on retention and academic success. Additionally, he became aware of such programs like the Freshmen Interest Group (FIG) program at the University of Missouri- Columbia (2000) that were incorporating some of the same skills and ideas that he believed students needed in order to achieve success in college. However, Holley wanted to take some of the FIG elements a step further and develop a program that would have high expectations, which would eventually lead students to college success. Therefore, when OSU's Residential Life gave CASNR the chance to build a program in the new residential suites, Holley took the opportunity, even though he could have waited another year to refine the elements of the program. Hence, the FIT program was initiated in the summer of 2000 (W. Holley, personal communication, December 21, 2000).

The FIT program was developed with the following mission: “To provide CASNR freshmen with opportunities to excel in the university, community, and life”

(W. Holley, personal communication, September 19, 2000). According to Holley, the FIT program was created to challenge first time freshmen to “reach beyond their personal expectations and achieve a significant level of excellence in several areas” (W. Holley, personal communication, September 19, 2000).

The FIT Program

The FIT program was designed to allow freshmen students with agriculturally related majors to live and learn together in a residential community for one academic year. The program required the 72 freshmen and nine Student Academic Mentors (SAMs) to reside on the third and fourth floors of Jones Hall, a newly constructed suite-style residence hall. Although the floors were co-educational, each suite housed four students of the same gender. Additionally, each suite had two to four bedrooms (depending on the architecture of the suite), an adjoining living room area, and two bathrooms and was fully furnished. On the third floor, a full kitchen, laundry room, and commons area were available to the FIT students. A community-dining cart that served sandwiches, breakfast foods, snacks, and beverages was also available on the first floor commons area of the Jones/Patchin complex.

In addition to living in Jones Hall, the FIT students were required to meet thirteen categories of expectations (See Appendix A). In order to accomplish the expectations, a FIT web page was created and included: the program information, contact information, news, a monthly calendar, student, faculty, and guest articles, pictures of the FIT students and SAMs, and a discussion area for the SAMs. FIT students had access to two white dry-erase boards that include the activities for the current week. The FIT program

established an Advisory Council, Judiciary Board, as well as small groups (seven to eight FIT students and one SAM) to reflect on the activities and opportunities of the program.

The FIT program started when the students came to Camp Redlands in Stillwater, Oklahoma for Camp Cowboy, which was a three-day camp that introduced incoming freshmen to the traditions and other aspects of OSU. While at the camp, the students had the opportunity to meet other FIT students, their FIT SAMs, as well as other freshmen, upperclassmen, and faculty of CASNR. The FIT students had several opportunities to ask questions about college in small group sessions, campfires, and workshops.

The weekend prior to classes, students moved into their residence halls. Throughout the year, FIT students participated in several large group meetings and activities such as the semi-formal dance, formal dance, and a banquet. Additionally, FIT students attended weekly small group meetings where they talked about the program expectations and college experiences with seven to eight other FIT students and their SAM. The FIT program was modified throughout the year to meet the needs of the students.

Statement of Purpose

According to Angelo (2000), an assessment of a learning community can support the individual and program performance improvement, measure effectiveness, and provide evidence for accountability. He also stated that "assessment can increase a learning community's odds of success by illuminating the underlying theories of learning and by supporting the change process" (Angelo, 2000, p. 5).

Since this program was new, CASNR administrators commissioned an evaluation of the impact of the program on students' retention, academic achievement, and psychosocial development. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the Freshmen In Transition program on the participants' academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development. The following hypotheses guided this study:

H₁: FIT participants' academic achievement will be significantly greater than the non-participants' academic achievement.

H₁: FIT participants' retention will be significantly greater than the non-participants' retention.

H₁: FIT participants' psychosocial development will be significantly greater than the non-participants' psychosocial development.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the fact that the program was in its infancy, the impact of the program on FIT students' academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development had not been determined. Therefore, this study sought to determine the impact of the program by evaluating academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development of the FIT students.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined as follows:

1. Learning Community: An organization of curriculum to link together courses or course work in order to increase interaction with faculty and other students as

well as have a greater understanding for what students are learning (Gabelnick, Freshmen MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990).

2. Residential Learning Community: Can be used interchangeably with living-learning community in this study. A student living space with intentional academic programming and services incorporated into the residence halls (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

3. Psychosocial development: Psychosocial development can be used interchangeably with developmental task in this study. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), psychosocial development encompasses the following vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. The Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA) was used to measure psychosocial development.

4. Academic achievement: For this study, academic achievement was assessed through cumulative high school grade point averages, fall 2000, and spring 2001 grade point averages (GPA).

5. Academic aptitude: For this study academic aptitude was assessed through composite American College Test Program (ACT) scores.

6. SAM: A Student Academic Mentor who is a sophomore in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. The SAMs resided with the FIT students and served as mentors for a small group of six to eight students.

7. FIT student: A first-time freshman enrolled in a major in the College of

Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources who participated and lived in the Freshmen In Transition Residential Learning Community in Jones Hall.

8. College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources: The College within OSU that offers educational programs within the fields Agricultural Communication, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Education, Agronomy, Animal Science, Biochemistry, Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering, Entomology, Forestry, Horticulture, Landscape Architecture, and Pre Veterinary Medicine.

9. Traditional residence student: A first-time freshman enrolled in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and lived in a traditional residence hall during the entire 2000-2001 academic year.

10. Not-selected FIT student: A first-time freshman enrolled in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, lived in a traditional residence hall during the entire 2000-2001 academic year, and applied to the FIT program but was not randomly assigned to the program.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding this study:

1. The instruments used in the study elicited accurate responses from the participants.
2. The participants of this study answered the questions honestly and to the best of their ability.

who proposed a unique developmental life stage termed the young adult; Chickering (1969), who developed a theory

CHAPTER II

to Book

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Over the past several years, universities have created learning communities as a way to improve student learning and integration into the institution (Snider & Venable, 2000). Many universities have taken the idea of a learning community and implemented it into their residence halls. Along with the creation of these learning communities, universities have begun to assess program impacts on students. This research determined the impact of the FIT program on student academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development.

The literature on the impact of residence halls on student development was voluminous. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter was to present a review of literature relevant to the study. The review was divided into the following sections: a) learning communities, b) academic achievement, c) retention, and d) psychosocial development.

Theoretical Framework

The study was situated in the writings of Chickering (1969), who developed a unique developmental life stage termed the young adult; Chickering and Ressler (1993),

who refined Chickering's earlier work; and Tinto (1975, 1987) who developed a theory of student departure from the university.

Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson (1963, 1968) developed the first psychosocial development model.

The model consisted of eight stages with the final stage focusing on the development of the ego or self-identity. He believed that development was a life long process that continued from birth to death. Erikson suggested that as an adult person progressed through life, he would face crises. In order to cope with these crises, the person had to develop new skills, attitudes, and beliefs. As the person moved through the crises, he would build on his skills, attitudes, and beliefs that he previously acquired thus, developing his self-identity.

Arthur Chickering (1969) built on the work of Erikson, using Erikson's identity stage as his starting point. Additionally, Chickering focused on a different population when describing psychosocial development. He stated that with about 50% of 18 to 24 year old people in college, a new developmental stage had evolved within the American culture. This new developmental period was called the young adult and included people from the ages of 17 or 18 to the middle or late twenties. He stated that this new developmental stage needed to be examined separately because the tasks were pertinent to, but different from tasks of adolescence and adulthood.

With the new developmental stage, Chickering proposed seven developmental vectors or tasks. He called them "vectors" because the term "seems to have direction and magnitude" (Chickering, 1969, p. 8). He believed that college students encountered different tasks or challenges throughout their college career that required them to adapt

their behaviors and attitudes so that they could respond to the challenge. As students progressed through college the tasks became more complex and the students would build on their prior experiences and develop their identity. Additionally, he declared that students moved through these vectors and that each vector built upon the previous one. Finally, Chickering emphasized that students did not necessarily begin in the same developmental stage or develop at the same pace as some students may have a more difficult time managing certain tasks.

In 1993, Chickering and Reisser revised Education and Identity (Chickering, 1969), and created a comparable set of developmental vectors. These seven areas represented the major foundations of non-intellective development during the college years. The areas were identified as growth trends, developmental tasks, stages of development, personal development, needs and problem areas, or student typologies. The vectors were as follows:

1. *Developing competence.* Competence involved the development of intellectual, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. This vector reflected a “sense of competence” that “stems from the confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully” (p. 53).

2. *Managing emotions.* In this vector, students became aware of their emotions and accepted them, as well as to express and control them in an appropriate manner. Additionally, students learned to act on feelings in a responsible manner.

3. *Moving through autonomy toward interdependence.* Increased emotional independence, which is the “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others”, is the result of development in this vector

(Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.117). Additionally, students developed instrumental independence, which involved self-direction, ability to solve problems, and mobility. Moreover, a student with interdependence recognized that loving and being loved are interconnected.

4. *Developing mature interpersonal relationships.* Tasks within this vector included development of intercultural and interpersonal tolerance and appreciation for differences as well as the ability to hold healthy and lasting relationships with partners and close friends.

5. *Establishing identity.* Identity included comfort with one's body and appearance, comfort with one's gender and sexual orientation, a sense of one's social and cultural heritage, a clear self-concept and comfort with one's roles and lifestyle, a sense of self esteem, personal stability, and integration. Establishing identity "leads to clarity and stability and a feeling of warmth for this core self as capable, familiar, worthwhile" (p. 50).

6. *Developing purpose.* Development of purpose consisted of developing clear vocational goals, committing to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong interpersonal commitments. "Developing purpose entailed an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans for action" (Chickering & Reisser, 1994, p. 50).

7. *Developing Integrity.* Development of integrity involved humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Thus, this vector involved clarifying one's values and behaving based upon one's personalized values.

According to Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito (1998), Chickering's theory can be used to help with student affairs programming. They suggested that Chickering's model can be used for the following: 1) to develop overall program plans and goals; 2) to evaluate and explain the impact of a program; and 3) to develop programs to help diverse students with specific developmental issues.

Environmental Influences on psychosocial development. According to Chickering (1969), the educational environment in which the student interacts with can influence student development. He identified six key components that are essential if psychosocial development is to occur.

1. *Clarity and consistency of institutional objectives.* All who are involved with the institution need to have specific objectives, which they base their programs, services, policies, and practices around.

2. *Size of the institution.* In order for student development to occur, students must have participated in campus activities as well as be satisfied with their experiences. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that the more opportunities students have to be involved and are satisfied with their college experiences, the more development can occur.

3. *Student-faculty interactions.* Students need to interact with student often, but in varied situations. These interactions humanize the faculty showing the students that they are approachable and interested in the students outside of the classroom.

4. *Curriculum.* In order for development to occur, the curriculum needs to be flexible, diverse, and help the students relate what they are learning back to the real world.

5. *Teaching*. Teaching should involve the student as an active learner rather than as a passive learner. Faculty should interact with the students, provide them with feedback, and use various methods of teaching.

6. *Relationships and student communities*: Student should be exposed to diverse student communities and meaningful relationships through groups, organizations, classes, or even their residence halls. This exposure will encourage students to develop along all the vectors.

Effects of residence halls on student development. Chickering (1974) suggested that living in a residence hall affects student development. One way student development is affected is through the close relationships students first build with people who live near them. From these relationships, students develop or change their values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, future goals, and decisions. Second, a subculture with its own values and beliefs could be developed within the residence hall. Thus, the students adapt their attitudes and behaviors after this subculture. Third, the residence hall may provide an opportunity for a student to see how his behavior impacts others, therefore allowing the student to modify their behaviors. Chickering also noted that residence halls provide a great opportunity for the institution to create an environment that will enhance student development.

Retention

In Tinto's (1987) book, Leaving College, he stated that the key to retention was the "degree to which individual students complete the transition into the social and academic communities of the campus" (p. 68). In Tinto's (1975, 1987) theory of student departure, he stated that students enter the college or university with academic, personal,

and family characteristics and skills, including preconceived ideas about personal goals and college attendance. During college, interactions between individuals, and the institution's academic and social environments influence these preconceived ideas. He stated that the greater the student's positive interactions and experiences are the more integrated the student becomes into the systems and the more committed s/he is to the institution. Thus, the student will be retained to the institution. In short, if a student has a lower commitment to completing college then s/he is more likely to drop out of college. Figure 1 shows Tinto's (1975) conceptual model of dropout from college.

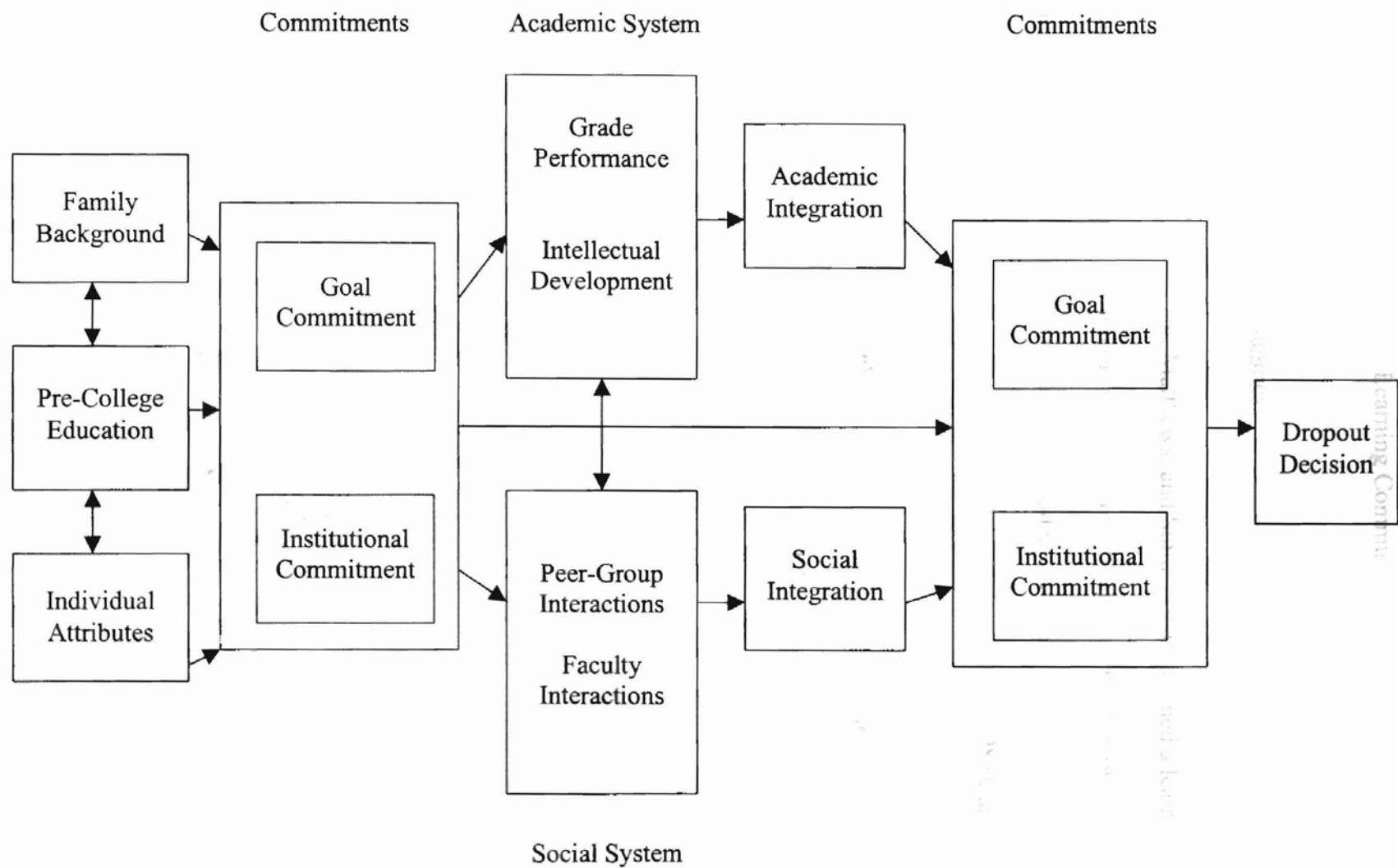


Figure 1. Model for Dropout from College (Tinto, 1975, p. 95)

Definition of Learning Communities

Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990) defined a learning community as a reorganization of curriculum to link together courses or course work in order to increase interaction with faculty and other students as well as have a greater understanding for what students are learning. According to Astin (1985), another definition of a learning community is a small group of students with a common purpose.

Bower and Dettinger (1998) stated that learning communities consist of three components: academic, physical, and social, which promote the development of students' professional, ethical, civic responsibilities. These three components of a learning community can be defined as the following: academic – the curriculum content; physical – the place where the community lives; and social – the interpersonal relations among students, faculty, and staff.

In order to understand how these components and responsibilities coincide with each other, Bower and Dettinger (1998) developed a Learning Community Model (See Figure 2).



Figure 2. Learning Community Pyramid (Bower & Dettinger, 1998. p. 17)

Shapiro and Levine (1999) conducted a review of the literature and concluded that the following characteristics that make up an effective learning community:

- Organization of students and faculty into smaller groups
- Encouragement of curriculum integration
- Establishment of academic and social support networks for students
- Creation an environment for students to learn about college expectations
- Union with faculty in more meaningful ways
- Focus of faculty and students on learning outcomes
- Establishment of an environment for community-based delivery of academic support programs
- Opportunity for examining the first-year experience

Theorists of Learning Communities

Although universities and colleges create different types and models of learning communities, they all share “a rich history with other educational reform movements that emphasizes community, social learning theory, and collaborative learning” (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 17).

The definitions and forms of today's learning communities were influenced to a great extent by the work of John Dewey, Alexander Meiklejohn, and Joseph Tussman. These three scholars promoted *connected knowledge* through the creation of “curricular structures that support learning as social integrations” (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 17).

John Dewey is considered one of the fathers of learning communities with his contribution to the teaching and learning process in learning communities, (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Snider & Venable, 2000). Dewey’s idea of education focused on “a student-centered social process that required a close relationship between the teacher and the student” (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 17).

Alexander Meiklejohn was another leader of the learning community concept. He believed that curriculum structure needed to be reorganized. Thus, he created one of the

earliest learning communities, the Experimental College, at the University of Wisconsin in 1927 (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Snider & Venable, 2000; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Similar to Dewey, Meiklejohn believed in the principles of connected and integrated learning (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

Joseph Tussman, a successor to Meiklejohn, created another example of an early learning community, Experiment at Berkeley, in 1969 at the University of California, Berkeley. He believed curriculum should be structured around programs rather than the courses. Additionally, these programs asked faculty members to reevaluate the content and purpose of courses and how they would interact among themselves and their students (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Snider & Venable, 2000). With the work of Dewey, Meiklejohn, and Tussman, learning communities have a basis to build on for the modern university.

Types of Learning Communities

Throughout the literature, several different names were used by different universities to describe their learning community type or model, such as Paired Courses, Triads, First Year Seminars, Team-Taught Programs, Residence Based Programs, and many more. Nevertheless, the literature identified five basic types of learning community curricular models. The five models are: a) linked courses, b) learning clusters, c) freshmen interest groups, d) federated learning communities, and e) coordinated studies (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Levine, 1998; Snider & Venable, 2000). Levine (1998) reduced the number of models to three: a) paired or cluster courses, b) student cohorts in larger classes, and c) team-taught programs.

The Linked Courses learning community is considered the simplest form of the five models. It pairs two courses allowing only a specific cohort of students to register for the courses. Two faculty members individually teach the two courses but coordinate assignments or syllabi or both (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Snider & Venable, 2000).

Learning Clusters are an extended version of the linked courses model. This model is a broader learning community as it links three or four courses and again, only allowing the cohort students to register for them. To insure consistency, all faculty members plan the courses (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Snider & Venable, 2000).

The Freshmen Interest Group (FIG) model is appropriate for large university or college environments and creates an instant support system for freshmen. FIGs link three theme-related courses together for which freshmen cohorts (about 25 students per cohort) can only register. Additionally, this model has a peer-advising element (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Snider & Venable, 2000).

The Federated Learning Community (FLC) model is also appropriate for larger institutions. This model is similar to Freshmen Interest Groups in that it combines several theme-related courses and provides faculty mentors for the students (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Snider & Venable, 2000).

The Coordinated Studies model demands the most restructuring of courses. Students (60) and faculty members (three to five) involved in this model engage in intense learning activities centered on themes. Each quarter or semester, students register

for one coordinated studies program that is team-taught by faculty members (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Snider & Venable, 2000).

Residence-Based Learning Communities

A residence-based program is an adaptation to the learning community models. A residential learning community, or a living-learning community, is defined as a student living space with intentional academic programming and services within the residence halls (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Incorporation of students' living and learning environments is the main goal of a residential learning community (Schroeder, Mable & Associates, 1994).

Residential learning communities strive toward "continuous quality improvement, establishing a sense of campus community, and promoting student learning".

Additionally, the creation of a residential learning community could allow for natural interaction among a diverse group of students, help undecided students choose a major, or offer freshmen integration and consistency that they lack the first year of college (Schroeder, Mable & Associates, 1994, p. 186).

Learning communities were created to serve different college student groups as well as address specific campus issues. Learning communities build a sense of community and group identity, provide a transition into social and academic communities, create a working relationship with faculty members, as well as increase retention (Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, & Gabelnick, 1996).

Examples of Learning Communities in Practice

As described previously, there are several different types of learning communities. Each one has a unique twist to it in order to meet the needs of the participants. The University of Oregon first developed the Freshmen Interest Group; however, their program was designed for first year students in a nonresidential setting. Approximately, 25 participants co-enrolled in three courses based around pre-major topics allowing students to spend the first semester helping each other. Additionally, peer mentors who were upperclassmen established seminars, study groups, or sessions to teach the freshmen about the campus. The faculty was involved in various ways such as collaborating on the course, syllabi, mentoring students, or attending the seminars (Brower & Dettinger, 1998).

At the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU), living-learning options have grown 64 percent from 1994 to 2000. Approximately 70 percent of the students who live on campus were involved in Living-Learning Experiences. The MU living-learning options focused on academic majors, interests and themes such as Spanish, Education, Journalism, and Agriculture. Residential colleges have also been established that are directed by a faculty member, last four semesters, have students co-enroll in classes, and hold classes and seminars in the residence halls (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000).

One part of the MU living-learning options was the Freshmen Interest Groups (FIG). The FIGs were designed to allow freshmen that share the same interests, major, or goal to live in the same residence hall community. A FIG group consisted of 15 to 20

students who were co-enrolled in three core courses that shared a common theme as well as the FIG Pro-seminar, which addressed issues and topics related to first-year students and the FIG theme. The FIG students worked with a peer adviser who was an undergraduate junior or senior that also lived in the same residence and helped the students adjust to college life. Additionally, a co-facilitator who was a faculty or staff member worked with the FIGs and served as an additional resource to the students. The peer adviser and co-facilitator taught the Pro-seminar (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000).

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (2001) also has a several learning community programs that focus on the freshmen year experience such as the University Honors Program, the J.D. Edwards Honors Program, and the University Learning Communities. Specifically, the University Learning Communities for freshmen consisted of several different communities. However, they were similar in that the students took at least two classes together, shared co-curricular activities, and had faculty-staff-student interaction. Several of the University Learning Communities were set in residential halls where members of the community lived in the same residence hall. There were three kinds of communities within the University Learning Communities: summer residential communities, non-residential fall communities, and residential fall communities (University of Nebraska, 2001).

Within the Residential University Learning Community, there were 11 communities that range from Agriculture to Music. The Achievement, Commitment, and Excellence (ACE) Learning Community was similar to the FIT program at OSU. It was established for freshmen interested in agricultural sciences, natural resources, human

resources, and family sciences who want to get involved in community service, academic advising, community self-governance, faculty dinners, community social events, in-hall tutoring, and field trips related to students' academic interests. Additionally, students enrolled in an agriculture course and a leadership course (University of Nebraska, 2001).

Academic Achievement in Residential Learning Communities

Past research shows mixed results of residential living on academic achievement (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994). However, in a review of literature, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling suggested that students living in residence halls that focus on academic subjects had higher levels of academic achievement. Nonetheless, some studies showed that students received higher grades, while other studies showed no differences between residential and non-residential students (Schroeder, Mable & Associates, 1994).

MacGregor, Linndblad, and Tinto (2000) reviewed 70 assessment studies of several types of learning communities and determined that generally learning community students' achieved academic success at higher rates than non-learning community students. In another study, researchers found that students living in the 1995 FIG cohort at the University of Missouri-Columbia earned significantly higher grade point averages than non-participants even after controlling for entering ability (Schroeder, Minor, Tarkow, 1999, Fall; Shapiro and Levine, 1999)

In an assessment of FIG students (residential learning community) verses non-FIG students (traditional residence hall) at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Pike, Schroeder, and Berry (1997) and Pike (1999) reported that the incorporation of the residential learning community did not have a direct effect on the participants' academic

achievement but rather an indirect effect. The learning community helped incorporate students into the institution, which in turn enhanced the participants' academic achievement. The researchers suggested several reasons for the lack of academic achievement between the two groups. First, they suggested that the residential learning community environment was not suitable for the development of academic achievement. Second, the researchers stated that the FIG program was in its initial year and may have not incorporated enough activities into its program in order to improve academic achievement. Third, academic achievement was not strongly related to interaction, which was what the FIG program was designed to accomplish. Additionally, Schroeder (1994) suggested that in order for a residence hall environment to significantly contribute to student success, it must be designed to reinforce the in-class learning.

Retention in Residential Learning Communities

One of the most pressing concerns of many universities and colleges is retention or student attrition (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990). Tinto (1987) stated that 41 out of every one hundred students drop out of the university without ever obtaining a degree. Furthermore, he suggested that the student drop out rate is the highest during the freshmen year of a student's college career.

While universities and colleges struggle with retention, Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990) suggested that learning communities create a setting that encourages a transition from high school to college. After reviewing the residence hall literature, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) stated that students living in residence halls that focus on academic subjects were retained at higher levels.

The literature reviewed provided several study examples that show a positive relationship between learning communities and retention. In a study comparing non-learning communities to learning communities, retention averaged ten to twenty percent higher at the end-of-quarter for students who participated in the learning community (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990). In a study of freshmen in a living-learning residence program, Pascarella and Terenzini (1981) found that the living learning residence had a significantly positive influence on freshmen cumulative academic achievement, retention to sophomore year, and attitudes toward the academic program.

Pike (1996) cited that in a study of the University of Missouri- Columbia 1995 FIG participants, retention was significantly higher when compared to the non-participants. He stated that the one-year retention rate was 87 percent for the FIGs and 81 percent for the non-participants. The University of Missouri-Columbia Student Life Studies (1997) conducted a follow-up study of the fall 1995 FIGs program and found that retention rates continued to be higher (8%) for students who had participated in the program.

In a study of the effects of residential learning communities on student retention, Pike, Schroeder, and Berry (1997) found that participants had substantially higher involvement and interaction than students who lived in traditional residence halls. This involvement and interaction led to greater retention. Also, peer interaction and support had a stronger effect on the participants' retention.

academic achievement would not be

academic achievement was not set up for academic success.

Summary of Review of Literature

In the review of literature the use of learning communities as an educational tool with regard to the freshmen year was reported. Topics such as the types, characteristics, theories, and examples of learning communities were explored. The effects of learning communities, specifically, residential learning communities on academic achievement and retention were also examined.

Literature showed that in its most basic form, a learning community is a small group of student who have a common purpose or vision. Five basic types of learning communities were identified: 1) linked courses, 2) learning clusters, 3) freshmen interest groups, 4) federated learning communities, and 5) coordinated studies. Research suggested that learning communities could be used in several different ways, such as in class cohorts or residence hall program. However, each type of learning community included different components and should be adapted to meet the institution's needs. However, in order for learning communities to be effective, they must include: small groups of students and faculty, curriculum integration, academic and social networks for the students, the creation of an environment that allows students to learn about college expectations, student-faculty interactions, and the opportunity to focus on learning outcomes and examine the first-year experience.

In looking at academic achievement in residential learning communities, the literature showed mixed results. Some studies found that participating in residential learning communities enhanced academic achievement. Other studies found that residential learning communities had an indirect effect on academic achievement as it enhanced the students' integration into the institution, which in turn effected academic

achievement. Nonetheless, the literature showed that academic achievement would not be enhanced if the learning environment was not set-up for academic success.

Research has shown that there was a positive relationship between participation in residential learning communities and retention. Literature has shown that residential learning communities enhanced student involvement and interaction, which effected retention rates.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology utilized to answer the hypotheses. This chapter includes the context of the research site, research design, and procedures for the population and sample selection, Institutional Review Board acceptance, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

The variables considered in this study were 1) academic achievement of FIT and non-FIT students, 2) retention of FIT and non-FIT students, and 3) psychosocial development of FIT and non-FIT students. These variables were observed and measured throughout the 2000-2001 school year.

Context of the Research Site

The first function for the FIT students was on July 21, 2000 a meeting where they learned about the expectations of the program and met faculty and staff involved with the FIT program. After the students finished the pretest (SDTLA), they spent three days at Camp Cowboy, a program developed to introduce incoming freshmen to OSU. The FIT students returned to OSU to start the fall semester on August 21, 2000. With the help of the FIT SAMs, the students participated in an orientation course for all first-time

CASNR students, for the first eight weeks of the 16-week semester. Additionally, the FIT SAMs met with the FIT students throughout the semester in small groups to mentor them and help them reach the expectations of the FIT program.

Some of the students in the control groups attended Camp Cowboy during the summer, but participation was not required. Also, the control groups participated in the orientation for eight weeks, but did not have any expectations to meet during the remainder of the academic year.

Design

The research design used in this study was a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest, non-equivalent group design to determine the impact of the program on participants' academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development during the 2000-2001 academic year. This design allowed the researcher to compare three groups, FIT students, non-selected FIT students, and traditional residence students. The design is portrayed in Figure 3.

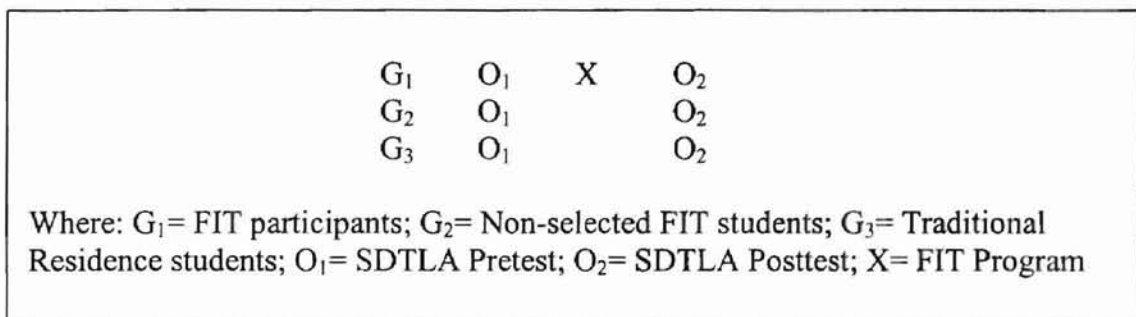


Figure 3. Study Design

Population and Sampling

The population for this study was all CASNR freshmen admitted for the 2000-2001 academic year who lived in traditional residences halls (N= 267). Because the focus of the research was on traditional residential students in CASNR, all students not enrolled in CASNR, living off campus (including Greek housing) and students that did not graduate high school in the spring of 2000 from were excluded from the study.

Sampling was done in two phases for the treatment group. In the first phase of the study, a self-selection method was used. Freshmen students accepted into CASNR for fall 2000 were sent information (a letter from the Assistant Academic Dean, brochure, and return post card) about the FIT program and were asked to indicate their preference for participating in the FIT program via a reply card. The returned reply cards were dated and numbered by support staff. A cut-off date was established to allow the researcher to proceed with the second phase of the sampling. One hundred and twenty students elected to participate in the FIT program.

The second phase of the sampling used random assignment. Of the 120 freshmen who elected to be in the program, 72 students were randomly assigned to the FIT program. The remaining 48 students were sent a letter informing them that they had not been chosen for the FIT program. Eighteen of the 48 decided to enroll in another college at OSU for fall 2000 or did not come to OSU. Therefore, two control groups were established for this study: 30 non-selected FIT students and the 165 students who elected not to participate in the FIT program (non-FIT). All three groups enrolled in AG 1011 and lived in campus residence halls. Table 1 summarizes the population for the study.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Population for the Study

<u>Group</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Potential participants for study	267	100.0
Applied to FIT Program	120	42.1
Randomly assigned to FIT program (experimental group)	72	60.0
Total non-selected for the FIT program	48	40.0
Of non-selected -did not come to OSU for fall 2000 or enrolled in another college at OSU	13	27.1
Of non-selected -enrolled in CASNR for fall 2000 but lived off campus	5	10.4
Total non-selected (control group)	30	62.5
Traditional residence students enrolled in CASNR for fall 2000 (control group)	165	57.9
Total population for study	267	96.8

Institutional Review Board

The proposal for this study was approved by the OSU University Assessment Office and was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. After reviewing the proposal, the IRB granted permission to proceed with the study for one year. The following research number was assigned: AG-01-2 (Appendix B).

Instrumentation

After reviewing several instruments commonly used to assess aspects of college life, the researcher decided to use the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA) developed by Winston, Miller, and Cooper (1999). The SDTLA was developed to assess the level of psychosocial development of college students between the ages of 17 and 25. The theoretical work in Chickering and Reisser's (1993)

book, Education and Identity, guided the SDTLA's creation and evolution. Chickering et al. (1992) postulated seven developmental factors, which served as a basis for the SDTLA.

The SDTLA was comprised of developmental tasks and subtasks as well as scales. Winston, Miller, & Cooper (1999) describe a task as "an interrelated set of behaviors and attitudes that the culture specifies should be exhibited at approximately the same time by a given age cohort in a designated context" (p. 10). A subtask was defined as "a more specific component or a part of a larger developmental task" (p. 10). A scale in the SDTLA was "the measure of the degree to which students report processing certain behavioral characteristics, attitudes, or feelings, but may not be directly affected by the higher education environment" (p. 10).

The SDTLA included three developmental tasks, Establishing and Clarifying Purposes (PUR), Developing Autonomy (AUT), and Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships (MIR), and two scales, Salubrious Lifestyles (SL) and Response Bias (RB).

The PUR task scores revealed the extent in which students have thoroughly explored their career goals and plans; have synthesized knowledge about themselves and the work world into appropriate career plans, in which case he/she develops an emotional commitment and take action to move toward career goals; have determined future plans that reflect their values, future family plans, and career objectives; and show an interest and active participation in culturally diverse activities. The PUR task consists of four subtasks: a) educational involvement (EI), which measures the degree to which students have identified and explored educational goals and plans and take initiative to accomplish those goals and plans; b) career planning (CP), which measures students knowledge of the work world, their abilities and limitations, and requirements of different kinds of jobs;

c) lifestyle planning (LP), which measures the degree to which students have established a personal plan that takes into account their career and educational objectives, values, and family plans; and d) cultural participation (CUP), which measured the extent to which students are involved in a variety of cultural and ethnic activities.

The Developing Autonomy Task (AUT) scores show that students can make decisions without continuous reassurance from others; can structure their lives and change their environment to meet their needs without extensive help from others; manage their time and use effective study strategies to meet academic expectations without the help from others; and realizes there is a reciprocal relationship between the individual and their community. The AUT task is comprised of four subtasks: a) emotional autonomy (EA), which measures students' ability to be free from the need for continuous approval and reassurance from others; b) interdependence (IND), which measures students' understanding of the mutual relationship between them and their community; c) academic autonomy (AA), which measures the extent to which students can develop and complete study plans, obtain grades that reflect their abilities and personal goals, are self-disciplined, self-directed; and d) instrumental autonomy (IA), which measures students' ability to manage their time and meet their daily needs and demands, solve problems, and fulfill family and community responsibilities.

The MIR task scores show that students have developed trusting, open, and honest relationships with peers and show acceptance and respect for different cultures, races, backgrounds, beliefs, lifestyles, and appearances. The MIR task is comprised of two subtasks: a) peer relationships (PR), which measures the extent to which students have open, honest, trusting, independent relationships with others; and b) tolerance (TOL),

which measures the extent to which students accept and respect others' beliefs, cultures, races, lifestyles, backgrounds, and appearances.

The two scales in the SDTLA are the Salubrious Lifestyle Scale (SL) and the Response Bias Scale (RB). The SL scale measures the degree to which the students' lifestyle promotes good health and wellness practices. A high score on the RB scale means that the student may not be telling the complete truth about him or herself, thus students who scored above a 4 on the RB scale were removed from the study.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Reliability estimates the extent to which the instrument results are due to variance (error). The SDTLA used two different reliability estimation, test-retest and internal consistency (Winston, Miller, & Cooper, 1999).

In order to estimate the stability of a measure over time, test-retest was used on the SDTLA. The SDTLA was given to three classes of students at two different institutions and then given again four weeks later (without any intervening instructions or practices). To determine the correlation for all tasks, subtasks, and scales, the researchers used the Pearson product-moment correlations. The analysis showed that the correlations clustered around .80 meaning that the SDTLA results would not be expected to vary over short period of time and was adequate for group data.

The researchers estimated the internal consistency as the second method of determining the reliability of the SDTLA. Data was collected from 1,822 students in 32 colleges during the fall and spring of 1994-1995 and spring 1996. Alpha coefficients ranged from .88 to .62.

To determine the validity of the various measures within SDTLA, the researchers used several approaches. Intercorrelations of tasks, subtasks, and scales were completed revealing that most of the measures were moderately correlated with each other. Additionally, in most cases, subtasks within a task were relatively highly correlated with each other and with the collection of items for the task, minus the items of the subtask under study.

Procedures for Data Collection

In this study, quantitative data was collected to better understand the factors that affected the participants' academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development. The Student Developmental Tasks and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller, & Cooper, 1999) and existing documents from the University Registrar's Office and OSU Student Information System (SIS) were used as information sources.

Collection Procedures for Psychosocial Development

The SDTLA pretest was administered in a classroom setting to 72 FIT students July 21, 2000, prior to Camp Cowboy. Both control groups completed the pretest on August 24, 2000 during their respective orientation sections (n=195).

The posttest was given near the end of the spring semester. The researcher administered the posttest to the FIT students during their small group meetings (n=62). Since the orientation course was not taught during the spring semester, the researcher worked with faculty to identify courses with high CASNR freshmen enrollment. Three courses were identified: Plant Science 1213, Agricultural Economics 1114, and Agricultural Computers 2112. These three faculty members allowed the researcher to administer the posttest to the freshmen students directly after their classes. Twenty-five

students who were identified in those classes completed the SDTLA posttest.

Additionally, a letter signed by the CASNR Associate Dean of Academic Programs was sent to the other 170 students asking them to complete the posttest during the week prior to finals in an established testing area. Eight students completed the SDTLA posttest after receiving the letter. Twenty-five traditional residence students and eight non-selected FIT students completed the SDTLA posttest, for a total response rate of 15.2 percent and 26.7 percent respectively.

Data Collection Procedures for Academic Achievement and Aptitude and Retention

The researcher collected data for academic achievement, academic aptitude, and retention throughout the academic year. The researcher acquired all participants' high school GPAs, ACT scores, fall, and spring semester grades through the university academic computer services with the aid of support staff.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel[®] (1997) for Windows. An alpha level of .05 was established a priori to determine statistical significance. Descriptive statistics and a one-tailed independent samples t-test were used to describe the SDTLA data, academic achievement, academic aptitude, and retention. A one-tailed test should be used when directional hypotheses are used and the researcher assumes that the difference can only occur in one direction (Gay 1996).

Findings Related to Hypothesis One

to determine whether FIT participants' academic achievement

was significantly higher than the control groups were compared for

- o traditional hall average and FIT composite scores, and
- FINDINGS**
- o a series of tables.

Introduction

The purpose of chapter four was to report the findings of the study. In order to analyze and interpret the information, the data were grouped according to the objectives of the study.

Data were collected for three variables: retention, academic achievement, and psychosocial development. Retention, academic achievement, and aptitude data were collected on 195 CASNR freshmen who lived in a traditional residence hall and the 72 FIT students at the end of each semester during the 2000-2001 academic year.

Independent samples t-tests were run to determine whether significant differences existed between the three groups' academic achievement, academic aptitude and retention. In order to measure the participants' psychosocial development, the SDTLA pretest and posttest were given in the fall and spring to 33 non-participants and 62 FIT participants. An independent samples t-test was used to determine whether significant differences existed between the FIT students' psychosocial development scores and the two control groups.

Findings Related to Hypothesis One

Objective one was to determine whether FIT participants' academic achievement was significantly greater than non-participants. Three groups were compared for differences in cumulative high school grade point averages, ACT composite scores, and fall 2000 and spring 2001 grade point averages (Table 2).

Table 2
Comparison of Academic Factors of FIT Students Versus Traditional Residence Students

Group	n	m	t
Composite ACT score			
FIT	72	24	1.20
Traditional residence	158	25	
Cumulative high school GPA			
FIT	70	3.62	0.49
Traditional residence	158	3.64	
Fall 2000 GPA			
FIT	72	2.81	-0.25
Traditional residence	165	2.77	
Spring 2001 GPA			
FIT	65	2.77	1.93*
Traditional residence	141	3.02	
Fall 2000 attempted credit hours			
FIT	72	14.49	-1.11
Traditional residence	165	14.21	
Fall 2000 earned credit hours			
FIT	72	13.74	-1.22
Traditional residence	165	13.26	
Spring 2001 attempted credit hours			
FIT	65	15.34	-1.62
Traditional residence	141	14.92	
Spring 2001 earned credit hours			
FIT	65	13.75	0.06
Traditional residence	141	13.78	

Note. * $p < .05$, one-tailed; t = Independent samples t-test between high school grade

point averages, composite ACT scores, fall 2000 and spring 2001 grade point

averages, and fall 2000 and spring 2001 of FIT students and Traditional FIT students.

The independent sample t-test showed a significant difference between spring 2001 grade point average of FIT versus traditional residence students (t 1.93). Students Differences between all other variables were not significant.

There was a negative significance difference between the FIT students and the non-selected FIT students when comparing high school grade point averages (t 3.50), ACT composite scores (t 2.10), and fall 2000 (t 1.94) and spring 2001 (t 2.38) semester grade point averages. There were no significant differences between FIT and non-selected FIT students' fall 2000 and spring 2000 attempted and earned credit hours (Table 3).

Table 3 Comparison of Academic Factors for FIT Students Versus Non-Selected FIT Students

Group	n	m	t
Composite ACT score			
FIT	72	24	2.10**
Non-selected FIT	30	26	
Cumulative high school GPA			
FIT	70	3.62	3.50*
Non-selected FIT	29	3.83	
Fall 2000 GPA			
FIT	72	2.81	1.94*
Non-selected FIT	30	3.17	
Spring 2001 GPA			
FIT	65	2.77	2.38*
Non-selected FIT	26	3.23	
Fall 2000 attempted credit hours			
FIT	72	14.49	-0.07
Non-selected FIT	30	14.47	
Fall 2000 earned credit hours			
FIT	72	13.74	-0.30
Non-selected FIT	30	13.57	
Spring 2001 attempted credit hours			
FIT	65	15.34	0.13
Non-selected FIT	26	15.38	
Spring 2001 completed credit hours			
FIT	65	13.75	1.38
Non-selected FIT	26	14.69	

Note. * $p < .05$, one-tailed; t = Independent samples t-test between high school grade

point averages, composite ACT scores, fall 2000 and spring 2001 grade point

averages and fall 2000 and spring 2001 of FIT students and Non-Selected FIT students.

In looking at FIT students' grades, it was determined that a majority (86.1%) of the FIT students achieved a 2.0 GPA for the fall semester. A majority (84.6%) of the FIT students achieved a 2.0 GPA for the spring semester. A summary of fall semester grade

point averages is shown in Table 4 and Table 5 shows the spring semester grade point averages.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentages of FIT Students' Fall Semester Grade Point Averages

Range	Frequency (N=72)	Percentage (%)
4.00-3.50	15	20.8
3.49-3.00	20	27.8
2.99-2.50	13	18.1
2.49-2.00	14	19.4
1.99-1.50	7	9.7
1.49-1.00	1	1.4
0.99-Below	2	2.8
Total	72	100.0

Table 5

Frequency and Percentages of FIT Students' Spring Semester Grade Point Averages

Range	Frequency (N=65)	Percentage (%)
4.00-3.50	15	23.0
3.49-3.00	17	26.2
2.99-2.50	7	10.8
2.49-2.00	16	24.6
1.99-1.50	4	6.2
1.49-1.00	5	7.7
0.99-Below	1	1.5
Total	65	100.0

Findings Related to Hypothesis 2

Objective two was to determine if FIT participants' retention was significantly greater than non-participants. After the researcher obtained records from university's Student Information System, retention status for each group was calculated and

Independent samples t-tests were used to determine significance. Results revealed that for spring 2001 FIT students were retained at a significantly higher rate in CASNR ($t -2.32$) and at OSU ($t -1.98$) than the traditional residence students (Table 6). There was no difference in spring 2001 and fall 2001 retention to CASNR and OSU when comparing FIT students and non-selected FIT students (Table 7).

Table 6

Comparison of Retention of Traditional Residence Students Versus FIT Students

Group	n	Number retained	m	t
Retention CASNR spring 2001				
FIT	72	68	0.94	2.32*
Traditional residence	165	141	0.85	
Retention OSU spring 2001				
FIT	72	69	0.96	-1.98*
Traditional residence	165	147	0.89	
Retention CASNR fall 2001				
FIT	72	55	0.76	-1.59
Traditional residence	165	109	0.66	
Retention OSU fall 2001				
FIT	72	59	0.82	-0.13
Traditional residence	165	134	0.81	

Note. * $p < .05$, one-tailed; t = Independent samples t-test between spring 2001 and fall

2001 retention of FIT students and traditional residence students.

Table 7

Graduate retention of non-selected FIT students were retained in

Comparison of Retention of Non-Selected FIT Students Versus FIT Students (Table 9)

Group	n	Number retained	m	t
Retention CASNR spring 2001				
FIT	72	68	0.94	-1.13
Non-selected FIT	30	26	0.87	
Retention OSU spring 2001				
FIT	72	69	0.96	-0.53
Non-selected FIT	30	28	0.93	
Retention CASNR fall 2001				
FIT	72	55	0.76	0.39
Non-selected FIT	30	24	0.80	
Retention OSU fall 2001				
FIT	72	59	0.82	0.58
Non-selected FIT	30	26	0.87	

Note. *p < .05, one-tailed; t = Independent samples t-test between spring 2001 and fall

2001 retention of non-selected FIT students and FIT students.

Sixty-five (91.6%) students were retained in the FIT program, 68 (94.4%) were retained in CASNR, and 69 (95.8%) were retained within OSU for spring 2001 (Table 8).

Table 8

Frequency and Percentages of FIT Students' Retention for Spring 2001

Status	n	Percentage
Randomly selected for the FIT program	72	100.0
Transferred to another university outside OSU spring 2001	3	4.2
Moved to another residence at OSU spring 2001 but remained in CASNR	1	1.4
Transferred to another college at OSU spring 2001	1	1.4
Removed from program but remained in CASNR spring 2001	2	2.8
Retained in FIT program spring 2001	65	90.3
Retained in CASNR for spring 2001	68	94.4
Retained at OSU for spring 2001	69	95.8

One hundred and forty-one (85.4%) traditional residence students were retained in CASNR and 147 (89.1%) students were retained within OSU for spring 2001 (Table 9).

Table 9

Frequency and Percentages of Traditional Residence Students' Retention for Spring 2001

Status	n	Percentage
Enrolled in CASNR fall 2000	165	100.0
Withdrew from university during fall 2000	4	2.4
Transferred to another college at OSU spring 2001	6	3.6
Not Retained in CASNR or OSU spring 2001	14	8.5
Retained in CASNR spring 2001	141	85.5
Retained at OSU spring 2001	147	89.1

Twenty-six (86.7%) non-selected FIT students were retained in CASNR and 28 (93.3%) students were retained within OSU for spring 2001 (Table 10).

Table 10

Frequency and Percentages of Non-Selected FIT Students' Retention for Spring 2001

Status	n	Percentage
Applied for the FIT program but were not randomly assigned to the program	48	100.0
Enrolled in another college at OSU fall 2000	3	6.3
Did not enroll in OSU fall 2000	10	20.8
Enrolled in CASNR fall 2000	35	72.9
Lived off campus and were not included in study	5	10.4
Enrolled in CASNR fall 2000 and lived in traditional residence	30	62.5
Transferred to another college at OSU spring 2001	2	6.7
Not retained in CASNR or OSU spring 2001	2	6.7
Retained in CASNR spring 2001	26	86.7
Retained at OSU spring 2001	28	93.3

For fall 2001 semester, 55 (80.9%) FIT students were retained in CASNR and 59 (85.5%) were retained at OSU for the fall 2001 semester (Table 11).

Table 11

134 FIT students were retained in CASNR and

Frequency and Percentages of FIT Students' Retention for Fall 2001

Status	n	Percentage
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 but did not return to OSU or CASNR fall 2001	10	14.7
Not retained at OSU or CASNR spring 2001 or fall 2001	3	4.2
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 but transferred to another college at OSU fall 2001	3	4.4
Transferred to another college at OSU spring 2001 and returned to that college fall 2001	1	1.4
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 and fall 2001	55	80.9
Retained at OSU spring 2001 and fall 2001	59	85.5

One hundred and nine (77.3%) traditional residence students were retained in CASNR and 134 (91.2%) were retained at OSU in fall 2001 (Table 12).

Table 12

Frequency and Percentages of Traditional Residence Students' Retention for Fall 2001

Status	n	Percentage
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 but did not return in fall 2001	15	10.6
Not retained in CASNR or OSU spring 2001 or fall 2001	13	7.9
Withdrew from CASNR and OSU fall 2001 and did not return spring 2001 or fall 2001	3	1.8
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 but transferred to another college at OSU fall 2001	18	12.8
Transferred to another college at OSU spring 2001 and were retained in that college fall 2001	6	4.1
Not retained in CASNR or OSU spring 2001 but returned to another college at OSU fall 2001	1	0.6
Withdrew from OSU and CASNR fall 2001 but returned to CASNR fall 2001	1	0.6
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 and fall 2001	109	77.3
Retained at OSU spring 2001 and fall 2001	134	91.2

In the fall 2001, 24 (92%) non-selected FIT students were retained in CASNR and 26 (92.9%) were retained at OSU (Table 13).

Table 13

Frequency and Percentages of Non-Selected FIT Students' Retention for Fall 2001

Status	n	Percentage
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 but did not return to OSU or CASNR fall 2001	1	3.8
Not retained in CASNR or OSU spring 2001 or fall 2001	2	6.6
Transferred to another college at OSU spring 2001 and retained to that college fall 2001	1	3.6
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 but transferred to another college at OSU fall 2001	1	3.8
Transferred to another college in OSU spring 2001 but did not return to OSU or CASNR fall 2001	1	3.6
Retained in CASNR spring 2001 and fall 2001	24	92.3
Retained at OSU spring 2001 and fall 2001	26	92.8

Findings Related to Hypothesis 3

Objective three determined if FIT participants' psychosocial development was significantly greater than non-participants. Psychosocial development was measured using the differences between the students' pretest and posttest scores for the SDTLA (Winston, Miller, & Cooper, 1999). An independent samples t-test was used to analyze the data. When comparing FIT students to traditional residence students there was a negatively significant difference in Mature Interpersonal Relationships Task (t 1.71) and Salubrious Lifestyle Scale (t 1.76). All other factors were statistically not significant (Table 14). Although the two groups were not statistically significant, the researcher noted that the FIT students' scores decreased in seven of the 14 factors when examining the pretest and the posttest means.

Table 14

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Differences of the SDTLA of FIT Students VersusTraditional Residence Students

Group	n	M		t
		Pretest	Posttest	
Career planning subtask				
FIT	62	2.82	3.06	-0.08
Traditional residence	25	2.80	3.03	
Lifestyle planning subtask				
FIT	62	3.34	3.38	0.28
Traditional residence	25	3.39	3.48	
Cultural participation subtask				
FIT	62	2.91	3.34	-0.56
Traditional residence	25	2.54	2.85	
Educational involvement subtask				
FIT	62	2.95	3.44	-0.77
Traditional residence	25	2.88	3.24	
Establishing and clarifying purpose task				
FIT	62	3.02	3.30	-0.36
Traditional residence	25	2.93	3.17	
Instrumental autonomy subtask				
FIT	62	3.37	3.47	-0.27
Traditional residence	25	3.41	3.46	
Emotional autonomy subtask				
FIT	62	3.71	3.54	1.26
Traditional residence	25	3.56	3.56	
Academic autonomy subtask				
FIT	62	3.83	3.52	0.90
Traditional residence	25	3.91	3.74	
Interdependence subtask				
FIT	62	3.33	3.36	0.10
Traditional Residence	25	3.12	3.16	
Developing autonomy task				
FIT	62	3.58	3.47	1.37
Traditional residence	25	3.43	3.47	
Peer relationships subtask				
FIT	62	3.75	3.73	0.93
Traditional residence	25	3.63	3.73	
Tolerance Subtask				
FIT	62	3.36	3.28	1.51
Traditional Residence	25	3.17	3.30	

Table 14 Cont'

Group	n	m		t
		Pretest	Posttest	
Mature Interpersonal Relationships Task				
FIT	62	3.54	3.47	1.71*
Traditional Residence	25	3.37	3.48	
Salubrious Lifestyle Scale				
FIT	62	3.26	3.11	1.76*
Traditional Residence	25	3.22	3.32	

Note. *p < .05, one-tailed; t = Independent samples t-test between gain scores of FIT

students and traditional residence students.

In a comparison of FIT and non-selected FIT students, all factors were statistically not significant (Table 15). However, when examining the pretest and posttest means, the FIT students' scores decreased in seven of the 14 factors and the non-selected FIT students decreased in four of the 14 factors.

Table 15

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Differences of the SDTLA of FIT Students Versus Non-Selected FIT Students

Group	n	m		t
		Pretest	Posttest	
Career planning subtask				
FIT	62	2.82	3.06	0.24
Non-selected FIT	8	2.63	2.91	
Lifestyle planning subtask				
FIT	62	3.34	3.38	0.42
Non-selected FIT	8	3.38	3.55	
Cultural participation subtask				
FIT	62	2.91	3.34	0.30
Non-selected FIT	8	2.31	2.85	

Table 15 Cont'

Group	n	m		t
		Pretest	Posttest	
Educational involvement subtask	62	2.95	3.44	1.07
	8	2.64	3.35	
Establishing and clarifying purpose task	62	3.02	3.30	0.94
FIT	62	3.02	3.30	0.94
Non-selected FIT	8	2.78	3.18	
Instrumental autonomy subtask	62	3.37	3.47	0.82
FIT	62	3.37	3.47	0.82
Non-selected FIT	8	3.35	3.60	
Emotional autonomy subtask	62	3.71	3.54	0.77
FIT	62	3.71	3.54	0.77
Non-selected FIT	8	3.67	3.61	
Academic autonomy subtask	62	3.83	3.52	0.29
FIT	62	3.83	3.52	0.29
Non-selected FIT	8	3.95	3.72	
Interdependence subtask	62	3.33	3.36	1.25
FIT	62	3.33	3.36	1.25
Non-selected FIT	8	2.83	3.14	
Developing autonomy task	62	3.58	3.47	1.40
FIT	62	3.58	3.47	1.40
Non-selected FIT	8	3.37	3.51	
Peer relationships subtask	62	3.75	3.73	0.06
FIT	62	3.75	3.73	0.06
Non-selected FIT	8	4.03	4.01	
Tolerance subtask	62	3.36	3.28	0.52
FIT	62	3.36	3.28	0.52
Non-selected FIT	8	3.13	3.13	
Mature interpersonal relationships task	62	3.54	3.47	0.26
FIT	62	3.54	3.47	0.26
Non-selected FIT	8	3.52	3.49	
Salubrious lifestyle scale	62	3.26	3.11	1.47
FIT	62	3.26	3.11	1.47
Non-selected FIT	8	3.16	3.34	

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five presents a summary of the research problem, the design of the study, and the major findings. Additionally, conclusions and recommendations that were based upon the findings and observations were presented.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine if the Freshmen In Transition program had a positive, significant difference on the participants' academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development when compared to other freshmen enrolled in CASNR and living in traditional residence halls.

The following hypotheses guided the study:

H₁: FIT participants' academic achievement will be significantly greater than the non-participants' academic achievement.

H₁: FIT participants' retention will be significantly greater than the non-participants' retention.

H₁: FIT participants' psychosocial development will be significantly greater than the non-participants' psychosocial development.

The study used a quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest non-equivalent group design. The population consisted of three groups of freshmen students who were enrolled in CASNR for the 2000-2001 academic year and lived in a traditional residence hall: FIT students, traditional residence students, and students who applied for the FIT program but were not randomly assigned to be in the program (non-selected FIT) (N=267).

The research utilized the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller, and Cooper, 1999) for the pretest and posttest to assess the students' psychosocial development. The SDTLA consisted of three developmental tasks, 10 subtasks, and two scales that measure different aspects of psychosocial development.

To collect data for psychosocial development, 72 FIT students were asked to complete the SDTLA pretest prior to their participation in Camp Cowboy in July 2000. One hundred and ninety-five students were asked to complete the SDTLA pretest in their Agricultural College orientation, which was during the first week of classes in August 2000. At the end of the spring semester, FIT students were asked to complete the posttest questionnaire. Sixty-two of the FIT students completed the SDTLA posttest during their small group meetings. Of the 165 traditional residence students and 30 non-selected FIT students asked to complete the posttest during the week prior to finals, 25 traditional residence students and eight non-selected FIT students completed the posttest. The researcher collected data on the students' academic achievement academic aptitude, and retention from the University Registrar's office as well as the Student Information System. Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were used to analyze the data. Statistics used included frequencies, means, percentages, and t-values.

Significance of the Study

As a result of this study, Oklahoma State University and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources have evaluative data that sheds light on the impact of a residential learning community on students' academic achievement, retention, and psychosocial development. Additionally, the FIT program has been evaluated and thus, CASNR administrators have base-line data to continue measuring effectiveness of the FIT program. With a better understanding and functioning knowledge of the full impact of the FIT program, decision-makers will be able to adapt this program to be more educational for future participants.

Limitations

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, there was a low response rate for the SDTLA posttest, which measured psychosocial development. Therefore, readers should take this in consideration when interpreting the results of the independent samples t-test for psychosocial development. Second, the scope of this study included freshmen of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University who expressed interest in the program, thus selection bias may have skewed the results. Third, the FIT program was in its infancy, thus, the program was changing throughout the year to accommodate students' emerging needs. Fourth, this study did not control for background characteristics, which could highly influence psychosocial development and retention outcomes as well as academic achievement. Therefore, the results of this study should not

be generalized beyond Oklahoma State University, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

Major Findings of Study

Academic Achievement

Three groups were compared for differences in cumulative high school grade point averages, composite ACT scores, and fall 2000 and spring 2001 grade point averages. The FIT students had slightly lower cumulative high school grade point averages, composite ACT scores, and significantly lower spring 2001 grade point averages when compared to the traditional residence students. FIT students had slightly higher fall 2000 grade point averages than traditional residence students. Non-selected FIT students had significantly higher cumulative high school grade point averages, composite ACT scores, and fall 2000 and spring 2001 grade point averages (alpha .05)

The majority of the FIT students achieved a 2.0 grade point average for the fall 2000 semester (86.1%) and the spring 2001 semester (84.6%).

Retention

The FIT students were retained in CASNR and OSU at a rate of 94.4% for spring 2001 and 95.8% for fall 2001. There was a positive significant difference between the FIT students and traditional residence students' retention. There were no significant differences between non-selected FIT and FIT students' spring 2001 retention. For the fall 2001 retention, the data showed that there were no significant differences between FIT students and traditional residence or non-selected FIT students.

Psychosocial Development The Freshmen In Transition program did not have a positive effect on the students' psychosocial development. FIT students had a negative significant difference in Mature and Interpersonal Relationships Task and Salubrious Lifestyle Scale. All other factors were insignificant.

Conclusions and Discussion

Conclusions were determined based on the findings from the data collected. The FIT program did not have a positive, significant effect on participants' academic achievement. Therefore, the FIT program interventions did not enhance academic achievement.

Even though the treatment (FIT students) and control groups (non-selected FIT students) were randomly separated, they were significantly different in high school grade point averages and composite ACT scores, perhaps leading to significantly lower collegiate grade point averages for the fall 2000 and spring 2001. One explanation for this selection bias could be attributed to the fact that more males were needed to fill the residence hall for the FIT program. Therefore, the program director removed some of the randomly selected FIT females from the FIT program and replaced them with non-randomly selected males prior to fall 2000. However, equivalence was established between the FIT students and the traditional residence students (no significant differences in high school grade point average or ACT composite scores), indicating that the FIT program negatively impacted the participants' spring 2001 grade point averages.

The FIT program required students to complete other activities that may have taken time away from their academics. The findings of this study support the literature on academic achievement (Pike, Schroeder, & Berry, 1997), stating that if the learning community environment was not supportive of academic achievement then there would be no increase in this variable.

The FIT program did have a positive effect on participants' spring 2001 retention status. Therefore, the FIT program was successful in enhancing student retention during the 2000-2001 academic year.

The FIT program did not have a positive, significant difference on participants' psychosocial development. Therefore the FIT program did not enhance psychosocial development. According to the data, the FIT students regressed psychosocially rather than advancing in the tasks over the year. This finding contradicts what was expected, as maturation over time should have produced a positive gain in psychosocial development regardless of interventions. However, according to Chickering (1969), students start in different stages of development and develop psychosocially at different rates.

There were two areas of development that showed a negative, significant difference when comparing FIT students to traditional residence students. These areas were: Mature Interpersonal Relationships Task (MIR) and Salubrious Lifestyle Scale. Mature Interpersonal Relationships Task focused on a student having open, honest and trusting relationships with peers and showing tolerance for others of different backgrounds, beliefs, cultures, races, lifestyles, and appearances. Salubrious Lifestyle Scale focused on a student reporting a lifestyle that promotes good health and wellness practices.

One explanation for the decrease in students' development in the MIR task could have been that ethnic and cultural diversity was not a strong suit of the program as all participants were agriculture majors and 96% were white. As for the Salubrious Lifestyle Scale, one possible reason for a decrease could be due to the fact that the FIT students were more aware of their lifestyles. The students were required to have a wellness assessment done each semester, thus they were told about their percent body fat and other health-related facts.

Implications and Recommendations for the FIT Program

The findings and conclusions of this study served as a basis for making the following recommendations for practice and research:

1. The FIT coordinator and director should review the program expectations and relieve their intensity so that students can focus more on academic achievement and less on meeting program expectations, which were unrelated to academic achievement.
2. The program should place more emphasis on academic achievement by evaluating tutoring sessions for effectiveness. Possible suggestions include not requiring the tutoring sessions or moving them to a different location so those students who do not need the session will not interrupt others who are studying. Additionally, the FIT coordinator should work with residential life staff to ensure that quiet hours are enforced to allow for a more ideal learning environment within the residence hall.
3. The program should provide more academically oriented programs and opportunities for improving academic skills such as speed-reading, note taking, test taking, and writing improvement within the residence hall.

4. Student should be allowed to establish their own study sessions that match their unique needs and learning styles.
5. The FIT coordinator, director, and SAMs should continue to support and encourage the students, but in a less structured manner.
6. In order to increase diversity, the FIT program coordinator and director should include a more diverse group of students as well as encourage activities that focus on diversity.
7. To encourage higher academic achievement, the FIT program should have the students enroll in three core classes together and then tie what is taught in those classes back into seminars and workshops provided by the program.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following issues should be addressed in future research concerning the FIT program:

1. Research should be conducted on individual aspects of the program such as the tutoring sessions, faculty discussion session, the SAM mentoring, leadership as well as other aspects of the program.
2. A study controlling for participants' background characteristics should be conducted to see if there are any differences in results.
3. A Freshmen In Transition questionnaire should be developed to more specifically evaluate the program.
4. Additional research should be conducted of a longitudinal nature in which the graduates of the FIT program are tracked over their college careers to determine the long-

term impacts of the program on academic achievement, retention and psychosocial development.

5. Qualitative data should be collected to capture the richness of the program from the students' perspective.

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APPENDIXES

Freshmen In Transition Program Expectations

Workshop (Tutorial Session) (MANDATORY):

As the "mentor" and "peer" instructor, your tutor will help (be a success) in your field.

...with your...

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APPENDIX A

FRESHMEN IN TRANSITION PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

Freshmen In Transition Program Expectations

Academic Excellence Workshop (Tutorial Sessions) (MANDATORY):

-Students enrolled in a course in the tutor's area (i.e. Chemistry tutor will help Chemistry students) must attend the session held in Jones Hall. each semester.

Allied Arts:

-Participate in 3 Allied Arts activities each semester.

Leadership:

-Participate in 2 leadership activities at the University level each semester.

-Participate in 2 leadership activities at the College level each semester.

Community Service:

-Participate in 8 hours of university or community service each semester.

College and University Clubs and Associations:

-Associate with a College or University club or organization and be an active member each semester.

-Attend Resident Hall Association (RHA) each semester.

-Attend 2 Student Government Association (SGA) each semester.

General University Educational Activities:

-Attend 2 seminars or educational presentations on subjects in your chosen major or general university educational presentations each semester.

Wellness Program:

-Participate in 1 wellness assessment program.

-Attend and plan 1 wellness education program each semester in the Ag House.

Intramurals:

-Participate in Intramural team competitions as a House member.

Social Activities:

-Plan and attend 1 social activity each month as a House member.

-Be active in Homecoming activities- participating in events at the University, College, and Ag House levels.

Career Development:

-Register with CASNR Career Services Office by the end of the spring semester.

-Attend at least 2 career exploration events at the University or College level each semester.

Faculty Discussions:

-Attend 3 Faculty Discussion sessions in the Ag House each semester.

Academic Expectations:

-Obtain a 2.5 or greater GPA after the first semester.

-Obtain a 3.0 or greater GPA after the second semester.

Others (Mandatory):

-Attend Camp Cowboy.

-Live in Jones Hall.

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol # _____ / 11/2011

IRB Application # _____

PROJECT TITLE: _____
PI: _____

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) FORM AND EXTENSION

Oklahoma State University
Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 6/8/02
Protocol Expires: 7/17/01

Date : Wednesday, July 19, 2000

IRB Application No AG012

Proposal Title: **A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF FRESHMEN IN TRANSITION RETENTION
PROGRAM FOR AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND NATURAL RESOURCE STUDENTS**

Principal
Investigator(s) :

Kathleen Kelsey
466 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Alison Sexten
466 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature :



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Wednesday, July 19, 2000

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 5/8/02

Date : Wednesday, May 09, 2001

IRB Application No AG012

Proposal Title: A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF FRESHMEN IN TRANSITION RETENTION
PROGRAM FOR AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND NATURAL RESOURCE STUDENTS

Principal
Investigator(s) :

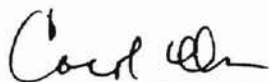
Kathleen Kelsey
466 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Alison Sexten
466 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed
and Expedited **Continuation**

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature :



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Wednesday, May 09, 2001
Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

Consent Form - FIT Study

100 I have read and understand the following information about the proposed research project titled *A Case Study of the Impact of Freshmen*
 101 *General Sciences and Natural Resources Students*
 102 *and Faculty on the Department's Performance*
 103 *and the University's Reputation*

104 I have read and understand the following information
 105 about the proposed research project

106 I have read and understand the following information

107 I have read and understand the following information

108 I have read and understand the following information

APPENDIX C

109 I have read and understand the following information

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form – FIT Study

I am **consenting to participate** in a study titled *A Case Study of the Impact of Freshmen in Transition Retention Program for Agricultural Science and Natural Resource Students* by Kathleen D. Kelsey. This study is designed to evaluate the program for effectiveness and improvement, and to record your experiences with the program.

- ❖ I will be asked to fill out **several multiple-choice questionnaires** as well as to participate in an **interview** with the researchers working on the project at a later time.
- ❖ I understand that the research team will access my **grade point average and retention status** from the registrar's office as measures for the effectiveness of the program. This data will be held in the **strictest confidence** and will only be reported as group data.
- ❖ I understand that my responses are **anonymous**, and that the only people who will see the documents are Kathleen D. Kelsey, and her research assistant.
- ❖ I understand that my participation is **voluntary**, and that I may withdraw at any time with no penalty.
- ❖ I understand that there will be **no harmful effects** by participating in this study.

Thank you for your participation!

Signature

Date

Student ID number

Birth Date

Fold and tear off below this line for contact information

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Alison Marie Sexten

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: A QUASI EXPERIMENT OF THE *FRESHMEN IN TRANSITION*
RESIDENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAM

Major Field: Agricultural Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Washington Court House, Ohio, February 8, 1978, the daughter of Bill and Nanci Sexten.

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