ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

IN FRESHMAN YEAR EXPERIENCES:

A CASE STUDY AT PRINCE OF

SONGKLA UNIVERSITY,

HAT YAI, THAILAND

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of higher education, one vivid picture among many is a large group of energetic students with hope and potential to learn. The new students are stepping into their new routes that they have chosen to experience and hope to graduate successfully within the required duration of their programs. The fact is that many of those students develop both academically and socially. Success is within their reach. They learn and gain what they hope at the outset of attending an institution of higher education (Commission on Higher Education, 2006; Hauptman, 2007).

A large number of students from higher educational institutions accomplish professionally and start their careers. In the United States, the Department of Labor reported that about 90 % of the fastest-growing jobs of the future will require some postsecondary education or training (United States Department of Education, 2007). In addition, the report from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reveals that college graduates in the U.S. earn nearly twice as much as workers with just a high school diploma, one of the highest rates in the world (United States Department of Education, 2007). In Europe each year, three million students graduate from higher education (17% of all tertiary graduates worldwide). Nearly one quarter

of all students in the European Union (over 700,000 in 2003), graduate in math, science and technology (MST)—key areas for the knowledge based economy (Press Releases Rapid, 2005). In Thailand, the number of graduates with bachelor's degrees in 2006 was 261,663, and the number of new students enrolling in the 2007 academic year was 520,992 in public universities and 84,684 in private institutions (Commission on Higher Education, 2007). Clearly, higher education has the potential to affect countries all over the world. Students have high expectations from higher education, and higher education can change students who will in turn change the society.

Student success is so important that higher education institutions worldwide are putting efforts to help students succeed, especially freshman students. Helping freshmen will increase their chances to succeed, persist until graduation, and become productive citizens of their society.

Statement of the Problem

Many first year students are not retained in the second year of study in higher education institutions. In response to these numbers, many universities design interventions, including freshman orientation programs, to support first-year students adjust to their new environments and learning successfully so that they might be retained for their second year of study (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993) and beyond, going on to great success in their lives.

Despite the efforts of intervention programs and freshman orientation, a large number of students still encounter problems. Many first year students cannot adjust themselves appropriately and in a timely way to suit their novel environments, including academic surroundings, social environments, and personal living arrangements. They do

not know how to live their student lives, learn academic tasks effectively, and socialize productively. As a result, they face difficulties that lead to failure very early—in the first year of higher education (Cuseo, 1991; Lewington, 1996; United States Department of Education, 2007).

The literature on student success would explain the lack of success of students experiencing orientation programs on a lack of congruence between what the institution expects to provide for first year students in the orientation program and what students need to survive and succeed in first year learning (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Tinto, 1993; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). There might be a gap or mismatch between the provider's goals and the receivers' needs. Tinto (1993) would explain the mismatch in terms of the failure to provide essential components of his model of college student persistence: the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the institution. Academic integration involves academic performance and faculty/staff interactions whereas social integration includes extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. Tinto posits that an individual who does not gain adequate academic and social integration is likely to depart college. Conversely, if an individual is academically and socially integrated or is equipped with adequate academic and social integration, he or she is likely to persist in the institution.

Purpose of the Study

Through the lens of Tinto's (1993) model of college student persistence, specifically focusing on academic and social integration, the purpose of this study was to explore the needs and experiences of freshman students to see the congruence between what the institution provided for first-year students in the orientation program and what

students needed to survive and succeed academically and socially in their first year. This study also aimed to seek student voices from their experiences to inform the university, providing useful information pertinent to the benefit of an orientation program.

This study focused on providing answers to the following research questions.

1. From the students' perspectives, what did students need to be successful in their freshman year? Why?

2. From the university's perspective, what is provided to students through the freshman orientation program that will help them succeed and persist? Why?

3. Through the lens of Tinto's model of college student persistence (1993), what is the match between student needs and university orientation information and experiences provided?

4. What are other realities about freshman students' experiences that are revealed?

5. How useful is Tinto's model of college student persistence (Tinto, 1993) for understanding the phenomenon under review?

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's model of college student persistence (Tinto, 1993) was used as the orienting theoretical framework in this study. Several names are used to refer to this theory including Tinto's model of dropout, Tinto's theory of individual departure from institutions, Tinto's model of departure from institutions, and Tinto's interactionalist theory of college student departure (Braxton & Lee, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1975) posits that "given individual characteristics, prior experiences, and commitment, the

model argues that it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college" (p. 96). Tinto (1993) stresses that students are more likely to depart the institution if they fail to integrate themselves academically and socially in the college or university system. In other words, Tinto (1998) insists that the more students interact and form meaningful relationships with faculty and staff members as well as other students, the more they are likely to persist. Tinto (1993) emphasizes the importance of first year student experiences with the proposition that "institutions should frontload their efforts on behalf of student retention" (p.152) and further elaborates that:

> Given that student persistence and learning are shaped by all aspects of the first year experience and are influenced by students' very first encounter with the institution, it follows that institutions should begin to address student needs as early as possible so that potential problems do not become actual problems later in the student career. And they should work to coordinate the activities of all persons whose work shapes that year's character. For instance, the institution should coordinate the work of the faculty who teach freshman courses, those in admission, orientation… to insure that student academic and social needs are addressed from the very outset of their first year on campus. (p. 152)

Tinto (1993) additionally highlights the significance of orientation as bridging the gap to college. He agrees that most orientation programs stress the provision of information for new students. Importantly, he accentuates that the institution should provide the full range of information needed by students in a form readily available or understandable to the new students. He emphasizes that orientation programs need to

equally inform students both "the formal institutional requirements" and "the informal demands the institutions make upon new students" (p. 159). He points out that orientation programs frequently fail to provide new students an accurate view of the informal character of the social and intellectual communities that exist on campus.

According to Tinto (1993), orientation programs should provide information in a form that leads new students to establish personal, non-threatening contacts with the individuals and offices which are responsible for the information required by new students, for instance, advising and counseling services. This good relationship will help facilitate student access to needed information throughout their student career. In addition, he recommends that effective orientation programs assist new students in their often difficult transition to the institutions and help lay a good foundation of interpersonal relationships among students, faculty and staff members which in turn, facilitate and encourage students to become socially and academically integrated into the institutional system.

According to Tinto (1993), academic integration involves academic performance and faculty/staff interactions, whereas social integration includes extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. In this study, the concepts of academic and social integration in Tinto's framework were addressed in two dimensions. Regarding the institution as the provider, the scope of academic integration covered the provision of information relevant to academic experiences such as student handbook with content that was meaningful to new students. Academic integration also included the introduction of resources on campus that promoted and led students to intellectual development and academic performance, specifically library and computer center. And academic integration includes

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the promotion of responsive and supportive interactions between students and faculty members and staff both formally—inside the classroom or in an academic context, and informally—outside the classroom or in non-academic context. The scope of social integration covered varied extracurricular activities that promoted peer-group interactions.

Regarding the students, the scope of academic integration covered information related to academic performance and intellectual development for example, needs, concepts, and behaviors pertinent to studying and learning both inside and outside the classroom, and their interactions with faculty members and staff both formally and informally. Social integration covered information relevant to extracurricular activities and interactions among peers, for instance, participating in activities on campus.

In the literature, Goodsell, Maher, and Tinto (1992) emphasize that during the first several weeks of the freshman year, issues of social memberships play a very important role for new students, especially the young students who leave home after high school to attend universities. This underscores the necessity of support from the university to help new students feel secure in making new friends and in socialization processes in the beginning of their first year in a new place (Weidman, 1989). An intervention, like the orientation program, can provide useful information and engage students in activities that facilitate their adjustment and development both academically and socially. Braxton and Mcclendon (2001-2002) suggest that orientation programs should provide several opportunities for new first year students to socially interact with their peers.

The importance of students' first year experiences, of the orientation program, as well as academic and social integration, has been recognized and emphasized in the literature. The extent of the linkage and the interplay among students' first year experiences, orientation programs, and student academic and social integration would be intriguing to explore. Therefore, I proposed to employ the concepts of social and academic integration from Tinto's model of college student persistence in this study to reveal relevance and realities in practice in Thailand.

Procedures

Given that this study was focusing on exploring students' experiences and needs in their first year of university study, it was appropriate to employ qualitative research methods because this approach fits the research questions "about people's experiences; inquiry into the meaning people make of their experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 33). An overview of the researcher, data needs, sources, collection and analysis follows.

Researcher

I am an instructor who teaches English courses at Prince of Songkla University (PSU), a public university in the south of Thailand. Most of my students are first year students who are required to study two fundamental English courses. I also teach a course of reading in English, which is an elective course provided for students who have studied fundamental English courses and are interested in improving reading in English.

One of my determinations concerning my working career is how to help students learn more effectively. In addition, from my experience of teaching at university level for over a decade, I find many students need both guidance and support in learning and leading their lives successfully. A large number of first year students in particular

encounter problems adjusting and learning at the university. Some of them could have

progressed if they had learned and applied appropriate strategies or practices. I have

listened to students talked about their concerns and problems. I usually listen with

empathy—understanding, interest and caring (Patton, 2002), and I sometimes judge the

situation.   However, in doing qualitative inquiry, Patton (2002) pointed out that the

researcher should be open to the other person and non-judgmental in the openness.

Therefore, I need to have both empathy and neutrality—being non-judgmental when

conducting focus-group interviews in data collection.

My work environment is Prince of Songkla University (PSU), an institution with

a large number of students enrolling in different programs annually and with an

orientation program for first-year students before the commencement of the new

academic year. Interestingly, in the academic year 2007, a new type of freshman year

orientation was implemented for the first time with the main aim of assisting new

students in adjusting and acculturating living and studying in new environments of the

institution (Educational Services Division, 2007). This led me to plan a case study at my

own institution to see the outcome of the efforts in relation to how academic and social

integration was guided and promoted for new students in the orientation program, and

how new students implicitly perceived the two important concepts of academic and social

integration throughout their freshman year experiences.

Data Needs

This study focused on what students needed to be academically and socially

integrated in their first year of college. Given this focus, data detailing students' needs

and experiences in their first year program were needed. Specifically, I needed

information related to Tinto's model of college student persistence – the concepts of academic and social integration. I also needed data detailing why this information was important, from the student's perspective. Additionally, I needed information about the 2007 orientation program at Prince of Songkla University (PSU).

Data Sources

Given the data needs, I used multiple data sources. Students who attended the 2007 PSU orientation program and were sophomore students in the academic year 2008 served as one of the data sources. These students provided information about their experiences in the first year, the orientation program, and the significance of these experiences. I also needed information from the university about the activities and information provided during the freshman orientation.

Student participants. I employed purposive sampling in this study to achieve representativeness or typicality of the individuals selected (Maxwell, 1998). The participants or sample in this study was selected from sophomore students who attended the 2007 orientation program the previous year. Although the orientation program was available for students from all five campuses of PSU, only those from Hat Yai, the main campus, participated. The study targeted 26 participants. I selected two student participants from each of 13 faculties, at PSU. The participants were representatives of all the academic programs for undergraduates at the university main campus.

University participants. The study also enlisted the help of the administrator and staff members responsible for the orientation program. They were asked to provide information about the rationale, activities during the orientation, and the university expectations from the first-year participants.

Orientation materials. Materials that covered all details about the orientation program including rationale for establishing the program, procedure, content, student registration, schedule, and the evaluation and assessment of the program were needed.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the methods of focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, and document review.

Focus group interviews. The 26 participants for the focus group interviews were divided into three groups of 8, 8 and 10 students, respectively. This was in accordance with Patton's description that focus groups are typically 6-10 people with similar backgrounds who participate in the interview for one or two hours (2002). The first group of eight participants was from the four faculties of social science fields: Faculty of Management Sciences, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Law, and Faculty of Economics. The second group of eight students was from four faculties of pure science and applied science fields: Faculty of Science, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Natural Resources, and Faculty of Agro-Industry. The last group of 10 participants was from five faculties of health science fields: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Nursing, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Faculty of Traditional Thai Medicine.

The rationale for the organizing such three groups was that they shared similar backgrounds in terms of academics and interest in studying in the chosen faculties. In addition, conducting three focus groups of a total of 26 participants was aligned with the suggestion that a series of different focus groups should be conducted to get a variety of perspectives and increase confidence in whatever patterns emerge (Patton, 2002).

The focus group interviews were conducted twice. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The focus group interviews were used to get data on students' perspectives and examples of practice or actions that reflected things they needed, learned, and experienced.

Semi-structured interview. I conducted in-person interviews with the head of the committee for the 2007 PSU orientation program and 10 university staff responsible for the orientation program. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Document review. Orientation materials for the 2007 orientation program including rationale, procedure, content, student registration, schedule, and the evaluation and assessment of the program were collected. These materials were prepared by the committee for the freshman orientation program and distributed through the Office of PSU Educational Services Division.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through multiple steps. The first step of data analysis suggested by Patton (2002) is developing some manageable classification or coding scheme. In this study, the first step was that the data were categorized into two groups: the receivers including the data from the focus group interviews with 26 student participants, and the provider including data from semi-structured interviews with an administrator and staff responsible for the 2007 PSU orientation program, and from the orientation program materials.

The data from each group were analyzed with the same procedure as follows:

1. The data were examined to see what patterns emerged. To achieve the patterns, I used content analysis that involves identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the patterns (Patton, 2002).

2. The data were analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework of Tinto's model of college student persistence by employing an analytic technique called pattern matching (Yin, 2003). I matched or grouped patterns of the data from each group. Simply put, the patterns of the ideas or practices of the students were grouped into the appropriate category: academic integration or social integration.

Then the two groups of data derived from pattern matching were compared. At this stage the congruence or mismatch between what the institution expected to provide for first year students in the orientation program and what students needed to survive and succeed in first year learning were revealed. The next step was to describe others patterns emerging from the data analysis for better understanding of the study.

Significance of the Study

The study aiming to seek students' reflections on their first year experiences in higher education and the impact of a university orientation program have potential significance for theory, research, and practice as described in detail below.

Theory

Regarding student perspectives and experiences were analyzed through the lens of Tinto's model of college student persistence (1993) with the two domains of social and academic integration. The results potentially helped reflect the needs of the students who had passed their first year in a higher education institution and who have chosen to return to their university the following year. What types of needs were given? Were they

academic or social integration? Were the ideas, factors, or practices that helped first-year

students succeed in their first year and persist to the second year likely to be supported in

the area of social or academic integration? Through the same lens, the data from the

university were analyzed and categorized into the same two groups: social or academic

integration. Thus, the results could help support the importance of the concepts of social

or academic integration for both the institution and the students, and add new information

which is specific to the context of this study.

Research

The data obtained from semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews

are useful as Patton (2002) argued that "the raw data of interviews are the actual

quotations that nothing can substitute for" (p. 380). Therefore, the results derived added

to the knowledge base regarding student perspectives on their experiences and needs for

success in their freshman year, and the influence of orientation on their adjustment and

learning in higher education institution. Study findings can also expand the research in

academic and social integration into international contexts.

Practice

The results of the study revealed information useful for program development or

improvement for institutions that provide freshman orientation programs. The needs of

students for the success in their first year were revealed. The university as the provider

would be informed whether or not what the orientation program provided met the

students' needs for success in their first year. What the students gained and found useful

should be reinforced and sustained in the orientation program. On the contrary, what is

not covered in the program should be added to meet student needs in the program or other

interventions. However, this study was institution–specific. The results were directly specific to the institution where the students or participants of the study were from. The information regarding student perspectives and experiences would potentially be useful for the improvement of the orientation program that is still in its infancy. This is in accordance with the concept that "real problems always appear in particular contexts and, while relevant data leading to solution may come from many sources, their solutions are always bound by those contexts" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 13).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of students who had attended the orientation program regarding their first year experiences, what they needed for success and what they learned and applied to their adjustment and learning in their first year. Qualitative methods including focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis were employed for data collection. The theoretical framework of Tinto's college student persistence was used as a lens to reflect the patterns emerging from the data provided by participants and from the document review in the study.

Reporting

The dissertation is reported in six chapters. Chapter One consists of the design of the study. Chapter Two presents a literature review on first year experiences, problems with retention, intervention programs, and orientation programs which aim at assisting and supporting first-year students. The theoretical framework used in the study, Tinto's model of college student persistence was explained in detail in addition to the studies related to Tinto's model. Chapter Three is about methodology. It contains researcher and

participants' information, and procedures of data collection. Chapter Four presents the

information about study context and details the data. Chapter Five is about data analysis.

It portrays how the data were analyzed and interpreted. And Chapter Six, the final part,

covers a summary of the research, findings, conclusions, study implications,

recommendations for future research, and final statement.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of the literature in two areas that are relevant to this study. The first area is about freshman year experiences which included problems with retention, interventions for freshman students, and orientation programs. The second area is about Tinto's model of college student persistence. I covered history of Tinto's research, the importance of academic integration and social integration, and studies related to academic and social integration.

Overview of First-Year Experiences

The reference of first year experiences has been discussed a great deal among educators. In the United State, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has been established with its mission to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education (University of South Carolina, 2009). This reflects that the freshman year is a crucial factor in higher education. Research studies reveal that a student's initial college experiences have an impact on success and retention (Astin, 1996; Milem & Berger, 1997). In addition, Hunter (2006) claims that the importance of improving the transition experience for new students in their first year has been emphasized by most of higher

education institutions throughout the USA over the last three decades. The first year experience movement started in the late 1970, gained stability in the 1980s, prospered in the 1990s, and continues in practice today.

In the Developing Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) study of colleges and universities in the USA, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh,Whitt, and Associates (2005) conclude that an effective strategy used by these institutions is "front loading" resources to help students learn how to succeed as independent and interdependent learners. This is in concert with the concept emphasized by Tinto (1993) that involvement often leads to integration in the community which is a critical factor to retention. Therefore, in the academic community of the university, early involvement may lead to earlier integration which becomes helpful to first year students in adjusting themselves to fit new educational environments. Furthermore, in terms of educational attainment and persistence, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) who have synthesized the studies about how college affects students for over three decades assert that "academic achievement during a student's first year of college may be a particularly powerful influence on subsequent retention and degree completion" (p. 397).

Another fact about freshmen is the increasing numbers of students entering higher education annually. The ultimate goals for most freshmen are to survive the years of studying, learn and graduate the program they attend. However, a large number of freshmen depart the institutions (American College Testing program, 2006). This phenomenon has quite a long history. Student departure from higher education has been researched for over 70 years (Braxton, 2000). Models have been introduced and employed as frameworks for investigating means or actions to improve retention.

Problems with Retention

Higher education institutions all over the world have encountered the problems of retention, especially freshmen. Cuseo (1991) reports that about 39 % of first-year college students in the USA dropped out without earning degrees. More recent report from American College Testing informs that 25.9 % of freshmen at four-year colleges nationwide do not return to school the following year (Berger & Lyon, 2005). In addition, Lewington (1996) reports that in Canada between 10% and 50 % of first year students dropped out from colleges and universities.

While many first year students drop out, a large number of students are at risk with critical grades. This suggests that they probably have problems learning. National Center for Education Statistics of the United States of America reports that nearly 30 percent of all undergraduates must take remedial coursework during their college career (United States Department of Education, 2007). Thus, these students need support to survive student lives and succeed in learning.

Interventions for Freshman Students

Thanks to previous research studies on retention and other topics suggesting guidelines, strategies or even ideas propelling freshmen in higher education to a better state, many institutions have designed efforts to retain their students. "Unfortunately, most institutions have not been able to translate what we know about student retention into forms of action that have led to substantial gain in student persistence and graduation"(Tinto, 2006-2007, p. 5).

A variety of interventions for freshmen has been practiced. In this study, I reviewed a number of interventions which were synthesized by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) as follows.

Developmental Studies and other Remedial Programs. These programs aim to boost the academic performance and persistence of under-prepared students. The impact of this kind of interventions is positive. Some remedial programs promote students' academic adjustment and persistence in the short term, for the following semester or year, while the others help increase the likelihood of persistence for the longer term, from two to six years or until degree completion (Braley & Ogden, 1997; Weissman, Silke, & Bulakowswi, 1997).

Instruction in Academic Skills. Supplemental Instruction (SI) is practiced extensively aiming at fostering academic performance and degree completion. The distinctive aspect of SI is that it focuses on interactive learning in groups with SI leaders who have previously succeeded in learning the course and got high grades. The content in the program covers basic study skills and learning strategies. The impact of SI is that the SI participants are more likely than non-participants to persist into the next semester.

First-year Seminars. First-year seminars are among initiatives to help first year students in first year learning and experience. First-year seminar (FYS) was introduced as "University 101"at the University of South Carolina in 1972 and the idea has been adopted or adapted expansively by a large number of colleges and universities in the USA. The seminars vary in content, structure, duration, and other aspects but all have the same goal of promoting academic performance, persistence and degree completion. The research studies report the benefits of FYS to different categories of students and

extendedly to the institutions in relation to student persistence and graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Additionally, Porter and Swing (2006) report in their study of first-year seminar that for first year students, studying skills and academic engagement are factors that have substantial impact on early intention to persist.

Learning Communities. According to Levine Laufgraben (2005), learning communities are clusters of courses organized around a curricular theme which students take as a group. These interventions aim at improving freshman experience by enhancing the curriculum, connecting students and peers and teachers, extending learning beyond the classroom and encouraging students to be active in learning. Regarding the impact of the program, the participants are satisfied with their classes and teachers and are more likely to participate in academic and social activities (Tinto, 1993).

These inventions and others that are implemented in different institutions may vary in some aspects but they directly aim at the same target—the students—to help them and improve their first-year experiences so that they persist into the second year and move on until graduation.

Orientation Programs

According to Upcraft and Farnsworth (1984), orientation is defined as "any effort on the part of the institution to help entering students make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and to enhance their success in college"(p. 27). Orientation programs are a kind of intervention with powerful impact. For many new students, the positive or negative impressions for the institution can be formed on the occasion they attend the orientation. The formats of the programs vary but typically, orientation programs include "providing information to entering students about

facilities, programs, and services of the institution and giving them the opportunity to meet faculty, staff, and other students" (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984, p. 27-28). Then it depends on individual institution to design, organize and manage the program to best respond to the new batch of freshmen each year. Additionally, Upcraft and Farnsworth (1984) argue that the orientation goals should include helping students with their academic and personal adjustment to college, helping students' families understand what their sons, daughters or relatives are going to experience, and helping the institution learn more about the new students.

The orientation program was first introduced at Lee College, Kentucky, in 1882 (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993) and it has been practiced until now. Though it needs some adjustments to suit the students in new context, the importance of it still recognized.

The Importance of Orientation Program

Pascarella , Terenzini, and Wolfle (1986) find that attending a two-day orientation program for first year students positively affects the social integration of students. The orientation program enables students to learn the behaviors, values, and attitudes needed to establish membership in the campus community. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that pre 1990 research found orientation programs designed to introduce students to the institution and to academic life promoted both persistence and degree completion. They also point out that an orientation program was one of many other college environments which include a peer culture and college-sponsored activities that help new students to develop academic survival skills. As a result, gaining these skills can maximize persistence and educational attainment. Furthermore, Braxton and McClendon (2001-

2002) emphasize that orientation programs should provide a variety of opportunities for first year students to socially interact with their peers.

Tinto's Model of College Student Persistence

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that Tinto's theory of student departure is probably the most widely used as a framework in guiding research about student departure and persistence.

History of Tinto's Research

Tinto (1975) introduces a longitudinal model of dropout, diagrammed in *Figure 1*. He shows that the process of dropout is a process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college. He further explains that individuals enter higher education with s a variety of differences. However, given individual characteristics, prior experiences, and commitments, he argues that it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems that has an impact on his/her continuance or persistence to that college. In other words, Tinto emphasizes the significance of academic and social integration. He also details that an individual's academic integration can be measured from grade performance and intellectual development while studying in the college. Regarding social integration, Tinto states that it involves informal peer group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and administrative personnel. He stresses the impact of social integration by stating that "Other things being equal, social integration should increase the likelihood that a person will remain in college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 107).

Subsequently, Tinto (1993) develops his first model. More keywords are added and there are some changes in *Figure 2*. Nevertheless, the concepts of academic and

social integration with some changes in detail are still central. In the current model, academic integration covers academic performance and faculty/staff interactions while social integration covers extracurricular activities and peer group interactions.
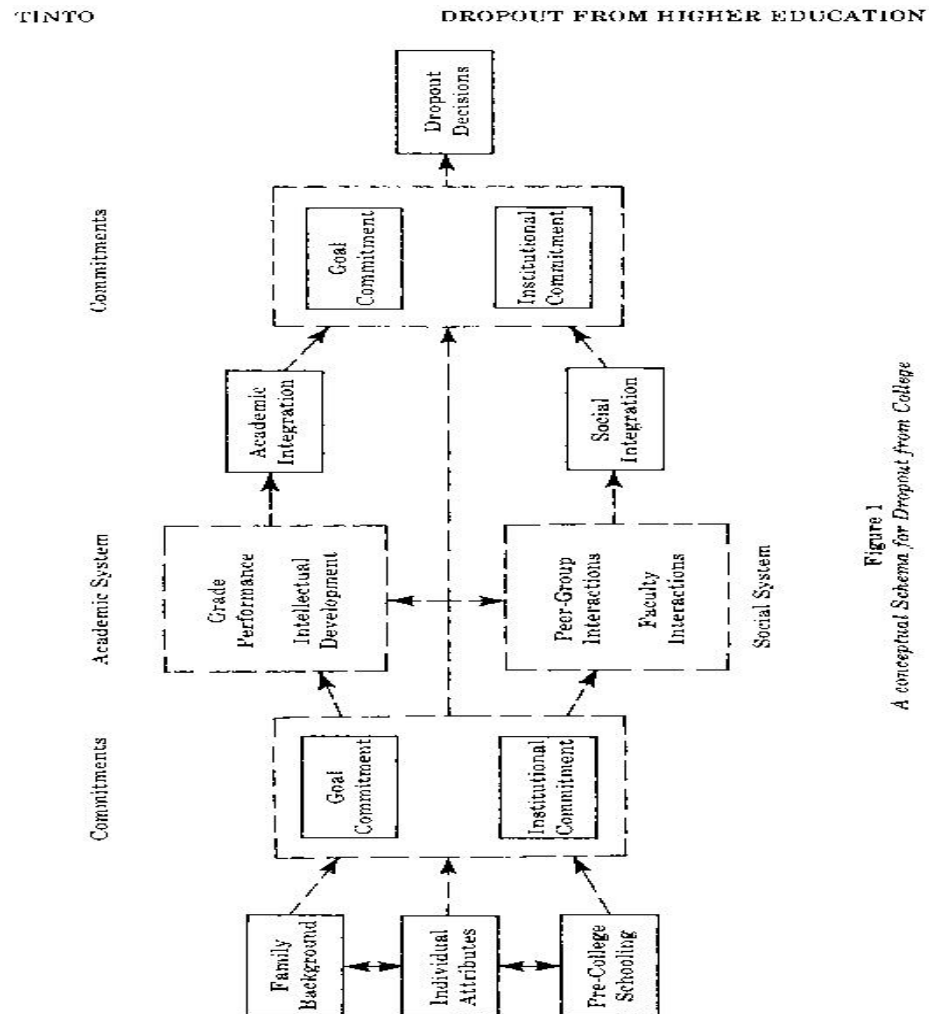
Figure 1. Tinto's Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College

Note. From "Dropping out from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research" by V. Tinto, 1975, *Review of Educational Research., 45*(1), p.95) Copyright 1975 by American Educational Research Association. Reprinted with permission.
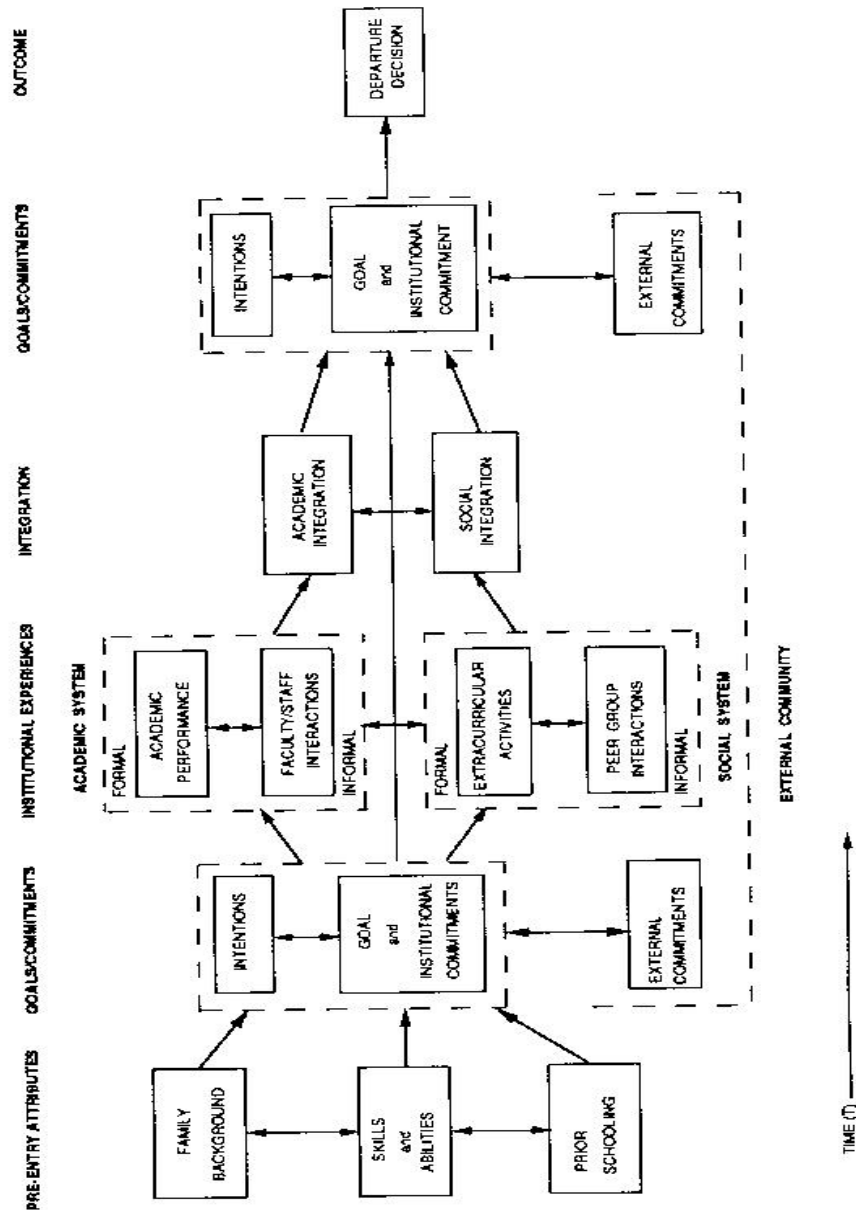
Figure 2. Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure

Note. From *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (p.114). by V. Tinto,1993, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Copyright 1993 by The University of Chicago. Reprinted with permission.

He emphasizes that the immediate focus on the model is on explaining why and how it is that some individuals come to depart the institution prior to completing their degree programs. The model explains how interactions among different individuals within the academic and social systems of the institution and the communities within the two systems lead individuals to withdraw from the institution prior to degree completion. Additionally, he shows that the model also aims at being a policy guideline that can be employed by institutions to retain more students until degree completion. Any elements in the institutional environment, academic and social, that are drawbacks or problematic should be altered to foster student retention.

Regarding students, they enter institutions with a range of differences in family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. These factors can affect individuals in forming intentions and commitments. These aspects are with the individuals prior to institution entry. While leading life at institution, individuals will have institutional experiences which comprise of academic system and social system. The interactions during the college experiences will lead individuals to become academically and socially integrated. Tinto points out that the interactions between the individuals and other members of the college, students, staff, and faculty are related to further continuance in that college. Interactive and positive experiences within the institution are likely to enhance individuals to persist.

The Importance of Academic Integration and Social Integration

According to Tinto (1993), colleges are made up of both academic and social systems. The academic side concerns itself with the formal education of students. Its activities center about the classroom settings and laboratories of the institutions and

involve interactions of various faculty members and staff whose primary responsibility is the education while social system centers on the daily life and personal needs, interactions in informal way for example outside the classroom, in the dormitories, at the cafeteria, or when joining in activities with peers.

Tinto (1993) also asserts that though it is accepted that individuals have much to do with their own leaving, part of the reference that has impact on their decision to leave might be the context they are in. That is the institutional environment. Therefore, the role of institution in shaping the challenging and supporting academic and social systems for students is very important.

Hagedorn (2005) points out that Tinto's integration concept is related to retention. She explains that the model suggests the need for a match between the institution environment and student commitment. A good match can have positive impact. It can lead students to higher integration in both academic and social environment and high probability of persistence in the institution.

Braxton and Lee (2005) review studies that test one or more of the 13 propositions of Tinto's model to gain reliable knowledge about college student departure and concluded that the three interrelated propositions with high reliability are: the greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the initial level of commitment to the institution affects the student's subsequent commitment to the institution, and subsequent commitment to the institution positively affects the probability of student persistence in college. From their review, they stressed the significance of social integration and recommended that orientation programs

for freshman students are essential. The programs should provide opportunities for new students to experience social interaction among friends.

Studies Related to Academic and Social Integration

Tinto's (1993) model is one of the theories that has been widely tested and used in research studies. Regarding the concepts of academic integration and social integration that are two components in his model, researchers have employed these concepts in a variety of contexts of research studies. In addition, the concepts of academic and social integration are quite open for researchers to address. The following recent studies support this.

Fowler and Zimitat (2008) conducted a study about a structured program designed to enhance the social and academic integration of a growing diverse student body on a new campus that draws its population from a low-socioeconomic area. The purpose of the study was to explore the efficacy of the program. The subjects of the study were first year students and the data were collected through a series of focus groups to gain students' perceptions. The findings revealed that students were very positive about the impact of the program. Four aspects they found useful were the opportunity to interact with staff, the opportunity to interact with their peers, the sense of social support they experienced and the opportunity to develop academic skills and knowledge. These findings support the importance of social and academic integration that should be instilled in students which in turn become useful to them.

Chhuon and Hudley (2008) examined the experiences of successful Cambodian American students, a unique ethnic group, to understand their patterns of academic and social college integration. The findings were that for Cambodian American students'

successful adjustment, integration into the campus environment and keeping contact with the prior community were essential.

Krause (2007) asserted the importance of students' social interactions. He conducted a qualitative study exploring the nature of undergraduate students' social involvement with peers during the first six months of university experience. The data were from focus group interviews with 46 participants. The results were that small group, and face-to-face discussions were important to them during the transition to higher education institution. These findings were in accordance with the concept of social interactions with peers that link to learning and persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Severeins, Dam, and Blom (2006), in the Netherlands, used the twin concepts of academic and social integration to explore the experiences of minority and majority students in Dutch higher engineering education. Through a small-scale interview study, they found that the ethnic background did not seem to be a decisive, obvious factor in the extent to which students are academically and socially integrated. Student answers showed differences according to ethnic background and different years they were found in both academic and social integration.

Rhodes and Nevill (2004) employed the concepts of academic and social integration in a survey of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within a first-year education studies cohort at a new university in England. The study aimed to seek factors that can lead to student satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the university experience and in turn have impact on academic and social integration and can lead to retention or departure. The findings showed that students recognize factors relevant to both academic and social integration. For example, factors most likely to lead to retention include chance of attain

desired career/life progress, good self-confidence resulting from success, stimulating/ interesting course, and support from family and peer group. These concepts are within the scope of academic and social integration.

Beil, Reisen, Zea and Caplan (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of the effects of academic and social integration and commitment on retention. The study was conducted with a sample of first year students at a private research university. The results revealed that commitment mediated the effect of both academic and social integration on retention. The findings support Tinto's (1993) model. Greater academic and social integration were related to greater commitment to college in the first year. Also, greater commitment to the university during the first semester is predictive of retention three years later.

In conclusion, Tinto's (1993) model has been used as theoretical framework in a great number of research studies. Based on the key concepts of academic and social integration, I employed this model as a theoretical framework in this study to find the evidence of the concepts put into practice or in real-life situations in relation to freshman year experiences.

Summary

The importance of freshman year experiences has been discussed a great deal because the initial college experiences have an impact on success and retention (Astin, 1996; Milem & Berger, 1997). Also, institutions in higher education worldwide encounter problems with retention. A large number of freshmen dropped out each year while many students in institutions had problems learning. Institutions, therefore, are putting efforts to help freshman students in the process of transition to adjust themselves

to fit new educational environments, to succeed and persist. Interventions including developmental studies, instructions in academic skills, first year seminars, learning communities, and orientation programs were reviewed. Regarding the theory used as a framework, it was Tinto's (1993) model of college student persistence which has been used widely in different contexts. I reviewed the history of Tinto's (1993) model. In the final part I reviewed the recent studies related to the concepts of academic and social integration.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the needs and experiences of freshman students to see the congruence between what the institution provided for first-year students in the orientation program and what students needed to survive and succeed academically and socially in their first year. This chapter begins with the information about the researcher and then the procedures of data collection are presented. The chapter ends with data analysis and the summary.

Researcher

Having been a teacher for a very long time, when I think of my work, I always think of my students. Additionally, when I think of conducting research, my initial interest focuses on an area about students. I started my teaching career as a teacher immediately after I graduated from university. My first workplace was a secondary school in a small town in the South of Thailand. It was a small school with about three hundred students from grades 7 to 12. The number of students at upper secondary level expecting to enter higher education was quite low. It seemed that the students did not aim at higher education because of their disadvantage in academic ability to compete in the university entrance examination and the high cost of studying and living in a new place.

Also, during that period of time, in the years 1983-1993, the system for university entry was extremely tough and highly competitive due to the limited number of students that a handful of universities could admit. However, some of them were successful in entering higher education.

Later on, I transferred my workplace to a school in another city in the South of Thailand. Almost all students at upper secondary level aimed at entering the university. Most of them were successful and became freshman students in different institutions. As a teacher, I was so proud of them. When these students had a chance to visit their school, I also had a chance to listen to their experiences as first year students. I often listened to interesting experiences they shared. The general topics were about studying, meeting new friends, and adjusting themselves to suit new environments. Some of them encountered problems and they tried to deal with them. I always appreciated those students who succeeded in adjusting themselves to suit new environments and pursue their goals.

In 1996, I transferred my workplace for the third time to become an instructor at a university where I still teach. I started teaching foundation courses for first year students and have been teaching first year students for over a decade now. I feel very close to first year students. Apart from the direct experience of teaching freshmen in the classrooms, I have communicated with them outside the classrooms quite often. I have also been an advisor for first year students of my own faculty twice. These activities allow me to meet with freshmen frequently. I sometimes wonder about some freshmen behaviors and when I talk with them, I understand them better. Furthermore, I have listened to their thoughts and opinions as well as problems and complaints. I find the occasions of talking and exchanging ideas with those students fascinating and worthwhile. They help build good

relationships and develop better understandings of instructors and students. This study became another good opportunity for me as a researcher to find out more deeply about freshmen experiences, and gain better understanding of the first year students' experiences.

Data Needs

Due to the fact that this study aimed to explore freshmen's experiences, I initially needed the data from the freshmen. In addition, my study was related to what the university provided freshman students during the orientation program. Therefore, I further needed data from university staff regarding the orientation program. Also, I needed additional information about the orientation from document review. Because I employed the concepts of academic and social integration from Tinto's (1993) model of college student persistence as a theoretical framework in this study, I also needed information on those concepts.

Data Sources

As a result of my data needs, three sources of data were used: students, faculty and documents. I needed freshmen students to provide perspectives of the orientation program and its impact on their retention from freshmen to sophomore year. University administrators and a number of staff members responsible for the orientation program for freshman students in the academic year 2007 were asked to provide information about the rationale, objectives, activities in the program, the university expectations from the student participants, and the overall opinions towards the orientation program. Documents regarding the orientation program that covered the details about rationale for

establishing the program, objectives, procedure, content, student registration, schedule, and the results of the program evaluation were needed as well.

<div align="center">*Data Collection*</div>

I needed data from three sources for this qualitative study. Therefore, I chose these methods: student focus group interviews, administrator and staff interviews, and document review.

Student Focus Group Interviews

They were altogether 26 students from 13 faculties at PSU, Hat Yai campus to participate in focus group interviews. I purposefully selected two student participants from each of 13 faculties to be representative of all the academic programs for undergraduates at the university's main campus. All of the student participants, now sophomores, attended the orientation program when they were freshmen in the academic year 2007.

When the first semester started around the first week of June, 2008, I was preparing for the procedure of focus group interviews. I got two folders of name lists of students attending the orientation program in the academic year 2007. The students were separated into two groups for management convenience. I selected one of the two from the same faculty from each group. One participant was a male and another was a female from the same faculty except from the Faculty of Nursing. Both of the participants were female because male students who attended the orientation program could not be contacted and the rest had changed their program of study.

After the participant selection, I wrote them an e-mail via the university system. Unfortunately, most of them did not check their email via this system. Only two of the 26

students answered and accepted the invitation. I needed to employ another channel of communication. I telephoned the university staff responsible for student affairs at each faculty and asked their assistance in providing students' current email addresses and their mobile phone numbers. Then I wrote another e-mail to the students with an attachment of a letter of invitation and called them to ask them to check their e-mail. Most of my selected student participants were surprised to get a telephone call from an instructor who did not teach them. However, after they listened to my explanation about the study and their role in this study, all of them accepted the invitation. I called all 26 students again to inform them about the date and place for the focus group interviews. Fortunately, students in each group for focus group interview were available at the arranged time.

There were three focus groups. Group I were eight students from the four faculties of social science field: Faculty of Management Sciences, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Law, and Faculty of Economics. Group II were eight students from the four faculties of pure science and applied science fields: Faculty of Science, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Natural Resources, and Faculty of Agro-Industry. Group III were ten students from the five faculties of health science fields: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Nursing, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Faculty of Traditional Thai Medicine.

The focus group interviews were conducted twice with the first round held on a weekend in July 2008. I conducted the three focus group interviews on Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning and Sunday afternoon respectively.

The focus group interview questions focused on the needs and experiences essential for success of freshman students. They were general and broad to elicit the

participants' perspectives about their needs and experiences. Then more specific

questions to seek answers to the research questions would be built upon the participants'

responses. Additional questions for clarification of the responses could be generated

during the focus group interviews because the guidelines may be "modified in response

to the discussion and interaction among the respondents" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998,

p. 513).

The guideline questions followed:

1. From your perspective, what did you need to be successful at PSU?
   Academically? Socially? Could you explain why?

2. What did you do to help you feel confident?

3. What did you do to help you succeed in your first year?

4. How satisfied are you with your progress in your program of study?

5. Describe your studying behavior in class and outside of class.

6. Describe your relationship with your instructors.

7. How satisfied are you with your out-of-class activities?

8. Describe social or non-academic activities you participated in your freshman
   year.

9. What kind of relationships did you have with other students?

10. What did you think of the orientation program?

11. What orientation topics were important and useful to you? Why? How did
    you apply them in your learning and living?

12. What other topics do you think needed to be included in the orientation
    program? Why?

13. What made you persist to the second year of studying at this institution?

14. What additional information do I need to know about your freshman year that I didn't ask you about?

The interviews were audio taped. Each interview lasted about two hours and 40 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. In September 2008 the second round of focus group interviews was conducted. All of student participants in group I and group II came to the interviews at the arranged time. However, three students in group 3 were not able to come at the arranged time because they joined volunteer work. They came to meet me later for a small focus group interview.

In the second round of focus group interviews, I gave the student participants the transcripts of what they said during the first focus group interviews to cross check the accuracy of their words of their own experiences. This was consistent with what Creswell (1994) describes about verification steps in qualitative research: to receive feedback from the informants or to have member checks. Some of the student participants changed or added some words to make their expressions clearer. During the second interview session, I also asked the students to provide personal information on a sheet of paper I provided. Also, the updated information in the transcript was added to the final transcript before it was analyzed.

Administrator and University Staff Semi-structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a university administrator, nine staff members, and a guest who were responsible for different sessions during the orientation. I planned to interview 14 university staff members. However, I encountered problems: two of them did not reply to the e-mail and could not be contacted by telephone and one

of the target participants had changed his telephone number and could not be reached by an e-mail.

I started the procedure of data collection by writing the target university participants an e-mail with an attachment of a file of a letter of invitation. Most of them accepted the invitation via email. There were several university participants who did not check email and who had some problems with their computers around that time. For the unanswered email messages, I decided to make a direct telephone call to each of them. The result was that all of the target participants accepted the invitation to participate in the study. The next step was that I wrote each an email, and for some participants I called, to make an arrangement for the semi- structured interview. Some of the participants asked for the guideline questions in advance while most of them did not. At the interview, I used guiding questions to elicit both the information, and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2003). All participants were cooperative and willing to provide the information. Besides, several of them asked me to share them the findings of the study because they were also interested in information regarding freshman students.

The guiding questions were:

1. Why did the university initiate and launch 2007 PSU orientation program?

2. How were the activities in the program designed and selected?

3. From your perspective, how useful were activities in the program to new students? How do you know this?

4. What does the university expect from students who attended the orientation program?

5. What is your overall opinion about the orientation program?

6. What additional information do I need to know about the orientation program that I didn't ask you about?

Questions 1-6 were used for the interview with the head of the committee and questions 2-6 were used for the interviews with the staff.

Document Review

Collected materials were relevant to the orientation program and included documents about rationales, objectives, content, student registration, schedule, the program evaluation and the supplementary materials given to students in some sessions during the orientation program. The rationales, objectives and content of the program were included in the same document provided by the Educational Services Division responsible for organizing and managing the orientation program. Student registration was the list of students who applied to attend the orientation via the Internet and whose names were recorded by the Educational Services Division. In the name lists of the freshmen attending the orientation program in academic year 2007, the total number was 1,399 and this big group was divided into two groups for management convenience (719 in group I and 680 in group II). The schedule detailed activities in each day during the orientation program. The program evaluation portrayed the results of the evaluation. Supplementary materials included materials about developing thinking skills, how to be prepared for studying at university, and techniques in course registration. I reviewed all the documents carefully and thoroughly to determine the information and cross-check with the data from other sources.

Data Analysis

After data collection, data from the three sources were categorized into two groups: the group of receivers consisting of data from student participants and the group of providers comprising of data from the university participants and document review. Data in each group were examined to see what pattern emerged. At this stage I employed content analysis that involved identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the patterns (Patton, 2002). The next step was to use the theoretical framework in analyzing. The data were then categorized into academic integration or social integration. Then the data from the group of receivers and the group of providers were compared to determine the congruence of what was offered and what was needed by the students. The presentation of the data is in the next chapter.

Summary

This study was an explanatory case study about freshman year experiences. Data from three sources were collected; student participants, university participants, and documents. I conducted focus group interviews with student participants, semi- structured interviews with university participants, and reviewed documents. In the data analysis process, after the data were categorized into two groups; the receivers and providers, I analyzed the data carefully to determine what patterns emerged. Furthermore, the concepts of academic integration and social integration in Tinto's (1993) Model of College Student Persistence were used as the theoretical framework through which to view the data. The next step was to compare patterns from the two groups to determine congruence or mismatch. The final step was to describe others patterns emerging from the data analysis for a better understanding of the study.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

In this chapter I present the data collected from student participants, university participants, and document review. The chapter begins with the context of the study consisting of setting and university profile and the orientation program profile. The university participant profile, the perspectives of the university providers, the student participant profile and the perspectives of the student receivers follow respectively. The chapter ends with the summary.

Context at PSU

Prince of Songkla University (PSU) main campus, Hat Yai Campus, is located close to the mountain of Kor Hong and not far from the downtown of Hat Yai city. The city itself is the center of a variety of commerce and big businesses in the South of Thailand. Economic growth is rapid and many people are visiting and settling in this fast-growing city of Hat Yai.

One advantage accompanying progress in this region of Thailand is the growth in education for people. More primary schools, secondary schools, vocational colleges, and even more higher education institutions have been established. Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai campus, established in 1967, has expanded to more colleges or faculties and more programs to serve student and country needs to become

a knowledge-based society. Currently, there are 14 faculties on Hat Yai campus. These include the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Natural Resources, Faculty of Agro-Industry, Faculty of Environmental Management (no undergraduate students), Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Nursing, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Faculty of Management Sciences, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics, and the latest newly set-up, Faculty of Traditional Thai Medicine (International Affairs Office, 2007). Because of the variety of faculties and programs, many students apply to study in this institution. As a result, the number of students enrolling each year has increased, and this leads to a great number of students on campus. The total number of students on Hat Yai campus in 2007 academic year was 18,523. This number included 15,113 undergraduates, 2,636 students in master's degree, 309 doctoral students, 13 students in post-graduate diploma program, and 252 students in advanced post-graduate diploma program (Planning Division, 2007). In 2007, the number of first year students totaled 3,975.

Table 1 summarizes the numbers of first year students compared to the number of second year students.

Table 1: Number of first year and second year students from the academic years 2002-
2007

Academic Year	Number of first year students	Number of second year students
2002	3,735	1,908
2003	4,130	2,212
2004	4,832	2,242
2005	5,200	3,252
2006	4,626	3,279
2007	3,975	3,342

Source: Adapted from Planning Division, 2007.

This table generates several questions to ponder: What happened to first year students when they became eligible to be second year students? Where have they gone? What can be done to retain more first year students in their second year? Are there any strategies to decrease first year student drop out rates and increase first year student retention rates? Among factors that can cause students to drop out and disappear after only the first year at the university is grade point average (GPA). Those students with low GPA's below 2.00 out of 4.00 must withdraw from the programs. University numbers indicate that 32% of first students from Hat Yai campus, 40% from Pattani, 31% from Phuket, 35% from Surat Thani and 32 % from Trang have GPA's below 2.00 in the first semester of their freshman year. Therefore, from all campuses, the number of first year students with GPA's lower than 2.00 rises to 3,247 out of the total number of 9,336 first year students (Siribumrungsukha, 2006).

These data also led the university to create various strategies to nurture this group of students. The academic orientation program which was first launched in 2007 academic year was one of the strategies to help a new set of first year students to be prepared for university living and learning and academic success.

The Orientation Program Profile

The program, PSU Academic Orientation Program, was a freshman preparatory orientation program about learning in higher education. The rationale of the program is:

New students in higher education institutions find teaching and learning process as well as living new experience which is much different from what they learn and experience in high schools. They need to adjust themselves to suit new situations. Therefore, to be well-prepared is essential to new students to help them adjust appropriately and cope with changes. As a result, they can learn more effectively and problems caused by mal-adjustment are likely to decrease. (Educational Services Division, 2007)

This program was held in the last two weeks of May, before the actual start of the first semester of the academic year in June 2007. The venue of the 8-day program was the Hat Yai Campus, the main campus of the university. New students from five university campuses were encouraged to participate in the preparatory program prior to and in addition to the regular orientation program held on each campus. Even though the orientation program was available for students from all five campuses of PSU, only those from Hat Yai, the main campus, participated in the orientation program in the academic year 2007.

The main content of the program covered the following topics:

- General knowledge on getting ready for learning in higher education

- Developing thinking skills

- Expectations of society on university students

- How to live a happy life while studying in higher education

- Developing skills essential for life including planning for learning and working as well as taking care of oneself physically, affectively and socially

- Developing English learning strategies and four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing

- Be prepared for learning English through the ELLIS program

- Using computers for learning in university

- Self-access learning including how to access Virtual Classroom, an electronic system of learning at university, and how to use the library effectively

- Techniques in course registration

- Learning and socializing with peers.

According to the document on the orientation program schedule provided by Educational Services Division (2007), the detailed agenda was as follows:

Monday May 14, 2007. Introduction to university day

Activities: student registration: students attending the orientation program signed their names to confirm the participation, Opening ceremony, Introduction to university, Teaching –learning system at PSU, How to be prepared for studying in university, and Group activities

Tuesday May 15, 2007. Thinking day

Activities: Developing thinking skills

Wednesday May 16, 2007. Science day

Activities: Activities focusing on science and mathematics

Thursday May 17, 2007. English camp day

Activities: Activities focusing on English skills: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing

Friday May 18, 2007. Science day

Activities: Activities focusing on science and mathematics (There were two science days during the orientation program.)

Saturday May 19, 2007. Aesthetics in life for effective learning day

Activities: Reflection on selected movies, and Music for aesthetic life

Monday May 20, 2007.Technology day

Activities: Using computers in the university, Introduction to Ellis program, Using e-learning in university, and Using university library.

Tuesday May 21, 2007. Effective learning and happy living day

Activities: The session of expectations of society on university students, A seminar on how to live a student life, Techniques in course registration, and The session of developing life skills for studying effectively and living happily.

The stated activities were designed and determined by the working committee for the orientation program. Although students were not involved in the planning of the orientation program, they were asked to be helpers in the sessions during the orientation.

University Participant Profile

For the 11 university participants, I used pseudonyms and limited their biographical information to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Six males and five

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females participated: eight were faculty members and there were non faculty (university administrator, university staff member, and government official). Table 2 presents these individuals.

Table 2

University Participant Demographics

Name	Sex	Position	Session responsible for during the orientation program
Laura	Female	An administrator	Head of working committee for the orientation program
Bill	Male	A faculty member	Using computers in university Testing on computer skills
George	Male	A government official	Group activities
John	Male	A faculty member	Being prepared for studying in university
James	Male	A faculty member	Reflection on selected movies
Ted	Male	A faculty member	Using E-learning in university
Lila	Female	University staff member	Using university library
Regina	Female	A faculty member	Techniques in course registration
Emily	Female	A faculty member	Introduction to Ellis Program
Elizabeth	Female	A faculty member	English camp
Smith	Male	A faculty member	Science day

The Perspectives of the Providers

The group of university participants in this research study was referred to as a group of providers because they were attached to, or worked for the university and were

responsible for providing information and services for the students. The data they provided were about freshman orientation. What I found from these participants was:

- The rationale for initiating and launching the special orientation

- A variety of activities for the orientation program

- The usefulness of the activities to freshman students

- University expectations from freshman students who attended the orientation program

- The overall opinions about the orientation program

- Other realities

The Rationale for Initiating and Launching the Orientation Program

The existing problems helped guide a new strategy as Laura explained:

It (the orientation program) was initiated because the university was aware of the fact that a large number of students had some problems about studying and the others, especially with low ability, struggled along the way while studying. Therefore, the working committee proposed that it would be better for new students if they were prepared for what they were going to encounter in the university. As a result, in the new, special orientation program which lasted around two weeks, we focused on preparing new students for effective university studying.

She also added that "…though we focused on the academic side, other involved aspects were also taken into account. We would like our students to be excellent at academic side as well as to live student lives happily."

This comment was consistent with the rationale in the document issued by the working committee through Educational Services Division for organizing this program:

New students in higher education institutions find teaching and learning process as well as living student lives a new experience which is much different from what they learn and experience in high schools. They need to adjust themselves to suit new situations. Therefore, to be well-prepared is essential to new students to help them adjust appropriately and cope with changes. As a result, they can learn more effectively and the problems caused by mal-adjustment are likely to decrease. (Educational Services Division, 2007)

Therefore, the importance of freshman students at PSU has been acknowledged at the onset with the evidence of a special orientation organized for the first time for them.

A Variety of Activities for the Orientation Program

A variety of activities occurred during the orientation scheduled for the duration of May 14, 2007, to May 25, 2007, at PSU, Hat Yai campus. According to the schedule, the 1,399 students attending the program were separated into two groups for management convenience. Each group participated in the activities at different time. On some days and for some particular activities, they gathered as one big group, for example, on English camp day and for the session of group activities. The data revealed the sub-themes as follows:

Activities determined by the university. A number of the activities were determined by the working committee of the university with the rationale to support. Bill, responsible for the session of using computers in the university, said "because the

lecturers in the university have considered and agreed that students should have knowledge on using computers."

James who was responsible for the session of reflection on selected movies, argued that:

I think one reason to have it on the program was that the objectives of the orientation were to get students to be open to express themselves and to develop thinking skills. These are in accordance with the activities conducted after watching the movies—the audiences are encouraged to give opinions about the movies.

Emily who was responsible for the session of Ellis program—an English learning software that combines graphic, full-motion video, sound, and texts to create a virtual language experience for English learners—explained that:

The session of introduction to Ellis program was scheduled in the orientation session because the Ellis program would be part of the course of Foundation English I, a required course for PSU students. Ellis is a new program sponsored by Stock Exchange Market of Thailand. To lessen the burden for instructors as well as to help students have a better understanding of the program, the program was set to be introduced to new students who would study this course soon.

Another research participant, Lila recounted how the session of introduction to the university library was scheduled in the orientation program. She said, "I was one of the committee members and worked on activities and resources to facilitate studying and learning at the university. The central library or university library was one of those essentially useful resources." Also, Ted stated that "The center of E-learning was newly

established. Therefore, it was a good chance for the university to introduce the center and inform the essence of the center—the E-learning system to new students."

A number of activities were determined by the university and the people responsible for them were approached. James confirmed this:

> The activity was set to be in the orientation because a member of the working committee for the orientation, who works in the library, recommended it and this idea was accepted. Then I was approached to be responsible for this activity in the orientation.

Another participant, John said, "Activities were designed by university and the university asked for cooperation from the lecturers. I was one of those to give a lecture on the topic of Be prepared for studying in university." This similar expression was from another research participant, Regina who said:

> The university set the session with the objective that students should have knowledge about how to take care of their own GPA. They should not be in trouble because of the GPA. Then I was approached to give a talk on this topic (Techniques in course registration).

Activities designed and selected by team members. Many of the activities in the orientation were designed and selected by team members. Laura, the head of the working committee for the orientation program stated that "of course, our team (working committee) designed activities to cover as many aspects as possible." George, responsible for the session of group activities, stated that, "I worked in a team and we brainstormed ideas before we set the activities. Our team consisted of 10 people including me." Emily, responsible for Ellis program said "My team consisted of three persons."

Smith taking care of a variety of activities on science day admitted that "oh, it was a huge team consisting of a lot of instructors and students." In addition, Elizabeth responsible for the session of English camp said:

> The university assigned the Department of Languages and Linguistics to take charge of the session and be free in designing the activities. Our department proposed an English Camp with a variety of activities about English. But before that we (instructors in the department) had several meetings to brainstorm ideas about the activities.

Activities for Introducing and Promoting the Use of the University Resources. In addition to the information on how the activities were designed and selected, I asked a question about the objectives of the activities. A number of those objectives are in the category of introducing and promoting the use of the university resources. Bill said," My session of lecture aimed to introduce students the services and facilities about computers available on campus. We emphasized the information resources and information technology that they should realize and can have access to while being students here." Ted also pointed out that "the first objective was to give introduction of the (E-learning) center and the second one was to help new students to understand better on how to use the system." James states that "we also took that opportunity (in the session of reflection on selected movies during the orientation) to inform new students that they could attend the session like this in the university library." And he added more information about the activity called reflection on selected movies:

> Actually, this kind of activity is held at the university library every week except during the examination weeks and vacation. So about 9-10 movies are seen and

discussed in a semester. … As for a regular session, audience interested in watching the selected movie watches the movie together. After watching the movie, the audience gives opinions about the issues from the movie.

More participants supported the objective of introducing and promoting the university resources. Lila emphasized that "so the main purpose of the activity was to introduce the freshman students to the library. The students would learn what facilities were available and how to use them". Emily said about the session of Ellis that "the program was set (in the orientation) to be introduced to new students who would study this course soon."

Activities for Studying Preparation. Smith, responsible for activities on science day stated that "our two main objectives were to prepare new students for studying science at university and to adjust students' attitudes toward studying science—it is not that difficult if you know how to." Another research participant, Emily said, "Regarding Ellis, we aimed to introduce new students the program that would be part of their compulsory English course." Regarding the activities for English camp, Elizabeth emphasized that:

> The main objectives of the English Camp were to stimulate students to be aware of the importance of the English subject and of the language itself and to motivate students to realize that English is not that difficult but fun. In addition, the next objective was to preview new students with what they were going to meet when they actually studied (English) in the university.

An activity for Collecting Basic Data about Students. Under the responsibility of Bill, there was a session of testing on computer skills. He explained that:

The objective of the test was to collect basic data about the students' knowledge

on information technology (IT) when they first entered university. Then the data

would be analyzed and be useful for the university in trying to implement

strategies to improve students' skills on IT.

Activities for Fostering Getting Familiar with Places in University and Making

Friends. This session was called group activities and lasted for 3 hours. George who

took care of the activities explained:

The main purposes--to get to know university and to make friends among new

Students--were kept but the activity was not restricted to only walk rally but more

flexible instead….. Finally, all students attending the orientation program - about

1400 students --got together at the indoors gymnasium and the activities were

held there. … Instead of introducing students to the different places on campus

through walk rally, our activities aimed at encouraging students to get to know

more friends. Later on they would get to know more places through these friends.

The Usefulness of Activities to Freshman Students

Different activities were useful to students in different ways.

Useful for Course Study. Elizabeth covered the usefulness of activities on English

camp day that can have impact on studying English by stating that:

In my opinion, of course, the activities were beneficial to new students. The first

benefit was that students were activated by the activities. Then they would be

active and energetic to learn more about English. Furthermore, new students

joined activities with friends or new friends. In addition, students got to know the

instructors who were going to teach them English courses when the first semester of their freshman year started.

Also, regarding studying English, Emily stated that, "Of course the session on Ellis would be very beneficial to students who were new to teaching-learning system at university level. ….After attending the session, students would have enough information to use the program effectively." Bill said about the role of computer that:

> Now the largest information resource in the world is the Internet. Therefore, when students have knowledge on how to search the Internet to gain their needed information, the students will have benefit. Also, it would be academically beneficial to the students.

Useful for Activating Thought. John who lectured on the topic: Be prepared for studying in university said, "They (students) need to think thoroughly, practice and groom themselves gradually in educational environment. This will lead to success." For the session of reflection on selected movies, James pointed out that, "in addition to entertainment from watching movies, there are morals, insights or issues that activate the audience to think along and think over."

University Expectations from Freshman Students who attended the Orientation Program

My research participants who were responsible for organizing activities during the orientation revealed their expectations from the students attending the program. Elizabeth said, "We hoped that those students would have good attitude toward English. When they have positive attitude at the beginning of their higher education, this would motivate and help them to carry on learning and developing English skills."

Emily pointed out that:

Regarding Ellis program, we expected that the students attending the session would gain basic information about the program and apply this when they were in real situation using the actual Ellis. We realized that we could cover only basic knowledge about the program within a short and limited period of time, about one hour. Thus we hoped that at least students would get basic or general ideas about the program.

While James said:

We expected people who prefer talking to have courage in expressing their opinions. For the ones who did not talk, they had an opportunity to listen to the opinions. We encouraged students to think that people with different ideas could live together happily. Some points in the discussion do not have the conclusions.

Expectations in relation to the use of university facilities are also shown. Ted said, "We expect to encourage new students to use the system. Also, E-Learning system can be another channel for communication between the instructors and the students. In addition, students can communicate among students themselves via web board." Bill from the computer center stressed that "we expect that students would widely and fully use the university services and facilities. We hope as many PSU students as possible to use computer center services and facilities." Regarding the library, Lila stated that "so we expect to see freshman students realize the importance of the library and make use of this place to full extent."

Smith explained his expectation that:

It was like opening a cork of a bottle of champagne. They had tasted some but not much. They were not drunk. It was that students did not get much. I think it

was exaggerating to say that students gained a lot. At least on that occasion, we opened one of the dimensions of studying at university. Overall, the program was useful. Then each faculty took the role of taking care of the students. What we expect from those students then depend on two factors: the potential of each faculty and the appropriate attention for their students such as what the faculty prepared for and how they took care of their students.

George revealed his view that "we hope that the activities the students joined fostered them to get to know one another. And their friendship will lead them to get to know more about the university." For the session of Techniques in course registration, Regina states that "when they know about how to plan to study, they will keep studying. They feel confident that they will graduate." Laura concluded that "we expect that the students will study and learn happily and effectively. Their achievement would be in higher level and their academic performance would be in a better shape. Furthermore, the drop-out rate would decrease."

The Overall Opinions about the Orientation Program

A majority of research participants have positive opinions about the orientation program. Ted said:

> I totally agree with the concept of having the orientation for the new students. In addition, it could reflect the good image of the organization. … I also agree with the timeframe of the orientation. I think due to the fact that the students are new to university, they are usually ready to accept what is offered.

Smith stated that:

It was a good program. It was like opening a new dimension of studying. Students

are prepared for what they are going to face in the university which is different

from what they experienced in secondary school. Also, I think attending the

program could reduce students' worries about studying at university.

Elizabeth, responsible for activities on English camp said:

It was good that they put English session in the program because English was one

of the courses the students would study in their freshman year. Not only English I

think, there were other sessions that would deal with things new students would

experience very soon. In addition, this activity was appropriate in that it was in

accordance with the principle of general education: university provides the

foundation, or the ideas first, then it would be students' responsibility to do more

research and learn more in the areas in which they were interested. In my opinion,

this activity should be carried on.

Emily expressed her view that:

I think the program was useful though not every freshman year student attended

the program—only students accepted to study via the direct entrance of the

university attending this program. At least when these students get the correct

information on various aspect of university including Ellis program during the

orientation program, we hope they can relay the right message to their friends

who did not attend the program.

In addition, Emily gave reasons to support her positive opinion about the program. She

said:

Different activities were helpful to them. To prepare freshman year students for

university study at the beginning of the first semester can decrease problems of the students themselves, of instructors and of university. The information they learned would be useful to new students in terms of helping them in adapting themselves to suit new situation and environments. During the orientation program, the students gained both knowledge and opportunities to join activities and do different tasks with friends. I think this helped build good relationship in the first place. Also, they realized their attitudes towards learning, learned how to learn in university, and met new friends in new a society which was larger than that at secondary school. Therefore, joining activities with friends could help new students feel more confident that at least they have some new friends in a new society.

James also expressed his positive view that:

 I totally agree with the idea of organizing this program. Actually, the preparatory programs were emphasized by a famous Thai educator, Dr Rung Kaewdang. But this idea and activities were not likely to be focused on in the higher education. For me, the level of higher education is very important, especially about studying system which is different from secondary school. Therefore, the orientation program was necessary. At this level, there are many things that students need to change. They reach the turning point, from childhood to adulthood. They need to make a paradigm shift of thinking. In fact, some activities that can activate the ideas of change are needed. In my opinion, in my session, if students were put into small groups and there were more working staff to help take care of the new students, the activities to stimulate thinking would be better.

Some participants with mixed feelings expressed their opinions. Lila said:

> The orientation program was very useful to students. But in my view, the duration of the program, about two weeks, was too long. The students were too tired, especially in the last few days. They were bombarded with a lot of activities and were exhausted in the last few days.

Bill stated his view that:

> It was a good program. However, it was held for the first time. From the results of program evaluation, some parts of the program need to be altered. One thing was that it was rather a long program, lasting for many days.

While Regina argued that:

> There were many sessions during the orientation program. I was told by the working committee that my session was very important and it was scheduled on the last day. I'm not sure whether on that day students were really interested (in the topic) and could concentrate on what I was talking because their parents were waiting for them to take them back home.

And, Laura claimed that:

> While preparing for this program, we were all aware that only students entering university by direct university entrance examination attended the program. It was a pity that all freshmen couldn't join. However, during the program, people responsible for the program felt good. We were active. And after the program we hope that what the students learn and gain would be beneficial to them.

Other Realities

I asked the research participants what additional information I needed to know

about the orientation program. Their responses were as follows:

All Freshman Students Should Attend the Program. Emily said, "I would like all freshman students to attend the program, not only the new students who entered university via direct entrance exam like the group in the year 2007." Smith stated that:

> The students attending the program were only a group of students from direct entrance examination set by university. Another group of students entering university through admission did not attend the orientation program. Then in that academic year, there was only about half of freshmen experienced what the university had provided for new students for preparation for university life. However, in the following year, 2008, freshman students from both groups joined the program that was held for the second time with some changes in the program. The number of participant was greater, but we could deal with it.

A Link from the Orientation Program to Concern for Freshman Students. John who gave the lecture on the topic of being prepared for studying in university pointed out that:

> Orientation is a starting point. Then what is next and how to carry on those concepts and actions. In my view, what the university organized in the orientation program covered what students should know about their university. Even though there might be some gaps but there were few. The weakness is how to keep those good ideas active and work for the students. So the policy guideline is important.

Ted, responsible for the session of using E-learning in university, expressed his concern about students first:

I think teaching and learning system at secondary school is problematic at some

parts. However, some of the products enter university. The university has to deal

with these students. The problem of these students is about their attitude toward

studying and learning. Many of them do not pay much attention to the process of

studying and learning. They aim only at passing the course but not gaining from

the course. They do not pay attention to how to learn, studying by themselves or

self-study, or taking responsibility in their studies. Adjusting attitudes toward

studying and learning is very important for freshmen. Studying at university has

the certain standards. Therefore, many students who do not know how to study or

learn do not succeed in studying. Many of them drop out.

He then concluded his ideas that:

I think what the university does for students in a big group like in the orientation

program aiming to impress and motivate students to study is fine. However, many

students cannot survive. Therefore, other activities or plans to help students are

also essential, for example tutorial sessions.

Another research participant, George said that:

In my view, the orientation program with some sessions triggering students'

reflection on living skills was held at the right time. How to live a life, and

weighing the goodness and badness in living are important. Freshmen are still

young and want to play and have fun. However, it would be nicer if they joined

activities with rationales behind. Developing thinking skills is important

And, Laura concluded that:

Because the orientation program like this was held was the first time, we expect to witness the continued development, for example the continuation of the special sessions about how to study and learn happily and successfully. Now as you are interviewing me, I can say that in the 2008 orientation program, there was an integration of academic preparation and social concerns for freshman students. Thus attending this program would be beneficial to students in helping them to adjust themselves to suit student life.

Student Participant Profile

As with student participants, I used pseudonyms and limited their biographical information to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Table 3 presents these individuals.

Table 3

Student Participant Demographics

Name	Sex	Age	Faculty	Club membership
Lisa	Female	20	Liberal Arts	Teaching children
Arthur	Male	20	Liberal Arts	English, Chinese, self-defense
Elenor	Female	19	Economics	-
Eric	Male	20	Economics	modern music
Mike	Male	20	Management Sciences	Chinese, English
Miley	Female	20	Management Sciences	gun shooting
Lee	Male	20	Law	speech club
Linda	Female	20	Law	environmental conservation
Edwin	Male	20	Engineering	environmental conservation , bird

				watching
Emma	Female	20	Engineering	foreign relations
Sam	Male	19	Science	physics , board games
Sara	Female	20	Science	softball
Albert	Male	19	Agro-Industry	seniors teach juniors, volunteering, SME, Agro-industry Music Club, food science, Thai classical music
Ann	Female	20	Agro-Industry	Southern Thai culture, swimming, small and medium enterprise (SME), Agro-industry Music Club (AMC), food science
Nathan	Male	20	Natural Resources	gun shooting
Rose	Female	19	Natural Resources	table tennis
Mathew	Male	20	Medicine	young blood of medical students, environmental conservation, volunteering
Mary	Female	19	Medicine	Chinese
Dan	Male	19	Dentistry	modern music
Dana	Female	19	Dentistry	sports
Philip	Male	19	Pharmaceutical Science	-
Paula	Female	19	Pharmaceutical Science	gun shooting
Tim	Male	20	Traditional Thai Medicine	Muslim
Tina	Female	20	Traditional Thai Medicine	Buddhist, environmental conservation
Nancy	Female	20	Nursing	environmental conservation, English
Nicole	Female	20	Nursing	volunteering, English, swimming

All student participants attended the orientation program when they were freshmen in the academic year 2007 and when they participated in my research in the academic year 2008, they were in their second year at PSU.

<p style="text-align:center">The Perspectives of the Receivers</p>

The group of student participants in this study was referred to as the receivers because they received what the university provided for them. Although I selected student representatives from all faculties with programs for undergraduates, I made no attempt to report or highlight the differences cross faculties. I presented the data as a whole picture of the students as the receivers. Three main themes emerged from the data: reflection on freshman year experiences, reflection on the orientation program, and what made the students persist into second year at PSU. Also, the detail was described in the sub-themes under the main themes.

Reflection on Freshman Year Experiences

Both academic needs and social needs for success were recalled.

Academic needs. Students mentioned a variety of academic needs. Eleanor said she needed special sessions. She said, "University students were from different schools and they needed to be well prepared for studying. I think university should have special sessions to adjust the level of ability of students." Mike added, "In the Faculty of Management Sciences, a number of students had a weakness in calculation and needed special sessions for enriching knowledge in this subject." Tina emphasized that "I needed more sessions focusing on preparing students to have a sound foundation for the courses. And these special sessions should be taught by the instructors." Lily also said, "I preferred to have extra activities for getting ready to study at university."

Mary asserted that "students from different school have different levels of foundation. Tutoring sessions would be good for students." Edwin stated that "I needed appropriate and good strategies for studying." Nicole said, "I needed good materials, such as books, multimedia materials, and CDs." And she added, "I also needed to have close relationships with the instructors for consultation and advice. I sometimes felt that the instructors seemed to be very busy." Mathew mentioned instructors' teaching approach, saying that, "I wish the instructors in science courses explained more so that the students could understand the content better. They could have explained more or adjusted the way they taught." Miley added:

> I needed the instructors to inspire students to be more active in studying. The teaching should not be restricted to only within the four walls of the classrooms in the building because sometimes students feel uncomfortable and cannot think much or are not able to create the right ideas in that environment. Therefore, I needed teaching and learning to take place outside the classrooms sometimes.

Paula stressed that "as for academic success, for some subjects, the instructor taught quite fast. I would like the instructors to teach step by step to prepare students, giving a good foundation, and not to skip out some parts. Students then could understand better."

Social needs. The words "activities' and "friends", were frequently mentioned by the participants. Nancy stated that, "I needed more activities to get to know more friends from other faculties." Eleanor said, "I needed university to organize a lot of activities so that students got to know more friends from different faculties." Edwin claimed, "I needed a lot of friends," Rose said, "So I needed to make friends. For me, I

needed many friends in order to learn together. Friends could be consultants when we had problems." Miley argued that, "students should join the activities organized by the university in order to get to know new friends, seniors and instructors." Lee asserted that:

We need friends from different faculties, and from the same faculty. I think life wouldn't be complete without friends even if I graduate with a first class honors degree. Friends can be seniors who are helpful when we study, and can give some advice about personal problems. Familiarity can lead to seeking for advice.

Dan argued:

I needed to join activities with students from other faculties more in order to get to know more new friends because when we are in the second year, we do not meet many other people. I needed to join more activities in my freshman year.

Nicole said:

I needed a pleasant environment, nice accommodation, convenient buildings and the most important thing was the interaction between students as well as between students and instructors.

Definitions of Success in Freshman Year

Emma said:

I could survive the freshman year. I could persist into the second year. I also got the grade that allowed me to study in the program I prefer. My success also includes the fact that I get to know friends that love me and I love them as well.

Nathan claimed that "I was glad that I could survive my freshman year and persist into the second year. Edwin stated that "my academic success was that I'm now in my desired program in my chosen faculty and my social success was that I got along well

with friends and lived with them happily." Mathew said, "My freshman year success was that it was worthwhile attending many activities in addition to academic activities. I played sports, traveled, attended activities and made friends. Furthermore, my academic performance was satisfactory." Nicole asserted that "my success was that I got C or above C for every course and got to attend a variety of activities and I got to know a lot of people." Dana pointed out that "I experienced new things and succeeded in doing many activities. For example, I read books all day long and went to bed very late. I had never done like this before. So what I experienced was my success." Albert said, "My success was that I got to know seniors and friends. We united and joined activities together…Regarding studying, when we know one another, it is helpful for studying because we can help one another. Paula defined her success that "I could get along well with other students who were from different places. I got to know a lot of new friends. In terms of academics, I was pleased with my grade performance." Lily claimed that "I feel I have grown up to a certain extent. I could manage time for studying and joining activities."

Using Simile. Ann claimed that "at first I felt like I was a seed without a bed. When I finished my freshman year, I felt that I was planted in a bed and was ready to grow." Eric said, "If success was like growing trees, my success in the first year was that this plant had a strong root and was ready to grow and face the up-coming year." Also, Tina argued that:

> My definition of success was like living in a new world. When I left home to study, I could survive. I looked after myself, got to know more friends, socialized with new people and joined in activities. These are my experiences.

Lee said:

For me, studying in university is like climbing up stairs of a 4-story building. To

pass the first year was like we passed the first floor. We might sometimes slip and

trip over along the way but we had climbed up the stairs. In retrospect, in my

freshman year, I thought the building was very high. Now I'm in my second year.

When I look up, the building is still high. I'm still in deep thought on how to

climb up successfully without tripping over and falling down.

What Students did to Help them Feel Confident and Succeed in Freshman Year

Students engaged in a variety of activities that they believed would help them feel

confident and succeed. They joined activities. Mike argued that, "for gaining confidence

in social matters, I joined activities on campus, for example, sports for freshman students.

The more I joined the activities, the more I felt confident," Arthur said, "In addition, I

participated in activities, and I got more friends of the same age. This also boosted my

confidence." Lily claimed that "since I joined a cheering meeting, I have started doing

things on my own and felt confident. By joining activities: the more activities I joined,

the more I became self-confident." Also, Philip stated that "what I did was to join

university and faculty activities and I got to know more people. When I feel close to

them, I tend to speak more and feel more confident." Albert added:

 My emphasis was on activities. When doing activities I had hands-on experience.

In some activities I did what other people told me. In the others, I told the others

what to do. Both strategies caused me to feel more confident.

Eric said, "In terms of academic success, if I can study well, I feel confident to

some extent." Edwin stated that "to gain more confidence in studying I read a lot,

especially before the exams, and am prepared for the exams." Arthur argued that "when I knew how to become successful, I devoted myself to those strategies….I tried many strategies in order to suit my character." Mike added:

A way to make myself feel confident is to be well-prepared for what I am going to do. For example, in studying, I needed to be well-prepared for the exams before the actual exams. Then I felt more confident and experienced success in the first year.

Sam explained in detail that:

During my first year, to be more confident I changed myself in three ways. First, I changed my study skills—listening, reading and doing revision after studying in class. Second, I dressed up more tidily and politely. And third, I chose to make friends with nice and good friends. I would like to ensure that my close friends should have the same purpose in studying, that is, to develop oneself. Also, I set a goal and followed strategies to achieve the goal. How to think and how to do are important to me.

Accepted assistance and support from others. Miley called parents and talked to friends. She said:

I did not feel confident about studying. When I felt discouraged, and worried, I called my parents and they drove from home to see me and support me. They felt happy to see me having a lot of friends. Also, I talked to my old friends. They comforted me and cheered me up. In addition, my roommates were so supportive.

Nathan argued that "friends are truly important. I learned with them and we helped one another. I also gained more confidence because of friends. I learned with friends and I got to make friends through friends." Nicole said, "I have good, close friends, and parents at home who are very supportive." And Linda added:

> One factor that made me feel confident was to have friends. Luckily, my roommates were my old friends from the same school. I talked to them and we supported one another so that we could study. We made more friends. As a result, we felt we studied better.

Behaviors Related to Studying and Academic Issues. The participants described in detail needed classroom behaviors. Paula said, "In class, I always paid attention, tried to follow the lecture, and tried to understand it at that time in order to remember it. Also I tried not to sleep in class." Nicole added, "In class, I listened carefully to the instructors. I also recorded the lecture on an MP 3 and listened to it later."

Dana claimed that "I tried to sit in the front rows because I am short-sighted. If I sat in the back, I wouldn't be able to concentrate and I would talk with friends." Albert argued that "for some subjects, I read the content before class and I understood better when I was in the class. I tried to understand what was being taught in the class." Ann added, "I also tried to attend every class. I gained a lot from the instructors. The important points were highlighted by the instructors." Nathan said, "I tried to attend every class. In the class I listened and took notes but I never asked." Miley stated:

> I attended every class. In the classroom, I paid attention to the lecture. I carefully listen to the lecturer without taking notes. After class, I borrowed my friend's

notebook and wrote down additional information. I attended every class on

schedule. When there were extra classes, I would attend as well.

Mike said:

 I tried to attend every class. I also tried to understand as much as possible in

class. However, if I didn't understand something, I tried to read up on that

particular topic and tried to understand it outside the classroom. I tried to attend

most of the classes because the essence of studying in class would be in the exam

paper.

Linda argued:

In the class, I took notes while listening to the lecturer. There were additional

slide and power point materials for some courses and I would add explanations

and information that were not in the given materials.

In terms of outside class, Eleanor said:

Outside the class, I would read on my own first, and marked the points that I

didn't understand. Then I went to see friends and asked them to explain those

problematic points. After that I would review those points on my own again.

Lily explained:

Outside the class, I didn't read much. I read only what was assigned by the

instructors. If I didn't get assigned reading, I did only the homework. I usually had

revision by reading one or two weeks before the exams.

Linda argued, "Outside the classroom, I read with friends before the exams."

Tim said, "I usually read with seniors and they had some suggestions about techniques in

reading and writing. Tina said, "I read on my own and formed a group to read with

friends for some subjects. Mathew said, "My friends and I formed a group, and revised lessons before the mid-term exams." Nathan stated that "I borrowed some friends' lecture notes and took some notes. I read with friends and sometimes on my own." Also, Albert explained, "I didn't read much. I played sports. I would read before the exams. Actually, my friends and I read and have tutorial sessions together." Sam described his behavior outside class, "For me, my revision was to teach friends. In addition, when I read, I wrote a summary."

Relationship with Instructors. The participants addressed interaction between the participants themselves and the instructors in large class, small class and outside class. Mathew said:

There was not much interaction in class because of too many students. When the instructors asked, students rarely answered. Some instructors left the room right away after class. So there was not much interaction, really. However, I usually greeted the instructors when I met them.

Dana added:

In large class students were not likely to talk to the instructors. We sometimes wanted to ask but didn't do so because there were many students and we might waste their time. Outside the class, I greeted the instructors but I felt closer to instructors teaching in the laboratory than the instructors for large classes. In the lab the instructors would walk to students' desks and ask if we had any problems and they would help solve them.

Mary explained:

When I studied in a large class with students from other faculties, the interaction with the instructors was rare. But in small classes the interaction between students and instructors was excellent. Sometimes they went beyond the content of that particular period, for example talking about politics, exchanging ideas with students. This made the students feel close to the instructors. Outside the class, I sometimes went to ask the instructors some questions.

Tina argued:

When students were taught in small groups, I felt that the instructors were close to the students. The instructors introduced themselves, were friendly and attentive to students. They tried to remember students. Even when students didn't submit assignments on time, the instructors would keep contacting those students. However, outside the class, I seldom went to see the instructors. I often asked friends if I had questions.

Emma added:

In large classes, students from many sections studied together. When the instructors wanted to check, they asked whether students understood the content or not and the students usually said yes. There were not a lot of interactions in class. However, in small classes, students in the same group consisting of about 40 students had closer relationships with the instructors who called on students by name to ask whether individual students understood the lecture or not. After classes, we could ask more questions.

Another participant, Albert shared his view. He said, "I was cooperative in class. If I knew the answer, I would answer sometimes. Outside the class, I went to see and felt close to some instructors depending on their character." Then Sara claimed:

In class, my friends and I often went to sit in the front row as a big group of around 20 students. When one student in the group started asking a question, the others in the group would ask more questions. I rarely went to see the instructors outside the class. When I met them, I paid them respect and they usually recognized me.

Eric gave information about his experience. He said:

Due to the small number of students in our faculty, the instructors could remember most of their students. The instructors were close to the students. They gave advice. When we met the instructors out side the class, we greeted them. There were some activities that students and instructors did together, for example, going to the temples, and building small dikes.

Lee added:

In the classroom, the interaction between the instructor and me as a student was rather little. For me, I didn't ask questions in class. Outside the class, I usually greeted the instructors when I met them. The instructors often gave advice on how to study.

Academic Activities Students Attend. Many of the participants reported that they attended PSU Open Week while the others participated in other academic activities. Arthur from the Faculty of Arts said:

About academic activities, I participated in the academic exhibitions during PSU

Open Week. I was responsible for the information boards about the Chinese

language. I myself also learned about ancient Chinese alphabet from this activity.

Furthermore, I joined academic tutorial sessions for different subjects. In the

second semester, I was on the staff team to organize tutoring sessions on English

course.

Paula added. "I helped organize the booth for the faculty during PSU Open Week.

I worked on academic information and explained it to the visitors." Donna said, "I helped

create an information board for visitors during PSU Open Week. In the program of To Be

Dent, I was responsible for an information board aiming at communication between

students at university and younger students from secondary schools."

Additionally, the student participants gave information on other activities. Linda

emphasized:

As for academic activities, I joined the tutoring sessions on every subject for

freshman students. The seniors informally taught us. I was impressed with this

because it made me understand the content of the subjects better and I felt ready

for the exams.

Eleanor added, "I also joined tutoring sessions on the subjects of math and

economics which were main courses of the faculty. Ann stated, "For me, I participated in

a project called "seniors help freshmen". It was very helpful." Also, Rose said, "I joined

tutorial sessions. Seniors at my faculty held tutorial sessions for freshman students. They

gave some guidelines about the exams." Edwin provided his information. He said, "I

joined tutorial sessions for the courses of foundation English 1 and 2. I also attended the

tutorial sessions for the courses of math and physics. Those sessions were for preparation for the mid-term exams." Philip added:

> I joined English Camp. My friends and I usually participated in academic seminars on campus. There were some presentations as part of the courses, which were done outside the class. It was fun and friends working together became close friends.

Satisfaction with the Program of Study. A number of student participants stated that they were very satisfied with the program they studied. Philip said:

> I'm very satisfied with my studies in this program because I have been determined to study in the Faculty of Dentistry since I was in primary school. When the time arrived, I chose only this faculty. I was also satisfied with the progress because my GPA increased. I am very pleased. I can say that the more attention I pay, the higher the grades I receive.

Lily argued, "My satisfaction is high because I like the languages I'm studying. I can apply them. They are useful to me and can be used as tool to help me be successful." Miley stated:

> I am very pleased with my progress in my studies. In the first semester of my freshman year my GPA was okay for me. My GPA in the second semester was higher. I understood and gained from what I learned though it was not at a very high level. To conclude, I'm pleased with both the knowledge and the grade performance I've gained**.**

From a different perspective, Lee said

I was satisfied to some extent. I was pleased that I studied the subjects I liked. But the part that I didn't like was that I got low scores. Though the grade was not high, I was proud and pleased to continue studying more courses and deeper in the content. I would learn more, understand more, and apply what I learn more effectively.

Mathew argued, "I was satisfied with my progress to a certain extent. I didn't feel too stressed out. The results were fine. The result of the study reflected the efforts I put. Thus I was satisfied." Nanny added, "I was satisfied to a certain extent. In terms of academic performance, it was better than my expectations."

Behaviors Related to Peer Group, Other Students and Social issues. The majority made friends through activities. Miley said:

I was the only student from my secondary school to come to study in this faculty. Then I got to make new friends in the sports competitions among freshman students. I was the manager of the softball team. I got to have two new friends in the same major and we became close friends. We talked and shared ideas about almost every topic. I can talk about general topics with other friends.

Lily said, "I attended the orientation program and joined in sports with freshman students. Through these activities, I got to know a lot of new friends and seniors. We were required to remember all new friends and seniors." Lee claimed, "I also got to make friends with students from other faculties during the sports competitions among students from thirteen faculties. In addition, playing the same sport helped me to enlarge my circle of friends." Edwin emphasized:

I got to know friends from other faculties when I attended the orientation program. However, my close friends were old friends from secondary school. Other opportunities to get to know friends were joining sports and living in the same dormitory. And I had these opportunities.

Another participant, Albert stated:

I had good relations with friends. Before the start of the first semester in my first year, students from the same faculty got together and I got to know a lot of new friends from different provinces. When I attended the university orientation, I got to know more friends from different faculties. When we did activities or worked together, I learned what my friends were like.

Tina said, "I know every student in my faculty very well. When I joined activities, I got to know more friends from other faculties." Mary added:

I knew students from the same faculty through sport activities. Friends from other faculties were first introduced to me by my current friends. I also get to know more friends when we were in the same clubs or joined sports.

Dan stressed:

All students in the same year in the same faculty knew one another. I had a group of close friends—a group of five. I also knew most seniors. I had more friends from other faculties through joining activities such as sports competitions.

Social Activities Students Attended. The student participants attended non-academic or social activities both on campus and outside the campus

In terms of on campus activities, Rose said:

In terms of social activities, I joined sports for freshman students and sports for

students from 13 faculties. I got to know more friends from participating in these

activities, such as freshman games and sports for students from 13 faculties.

Sam added, "I joined some activities, such as sports and they broadened my point

of view. These activities allowed me to get to know more new friends apart from friends

in the same faculty." And Mike said, "I also joined social activities such as sports for

freshman students."

With reference to outside campus activities, Mathew explained:

As for social activities, I was most impressed with the volunteer camp in

Phattalung province. The group of volunteers went to build a library for the

villagers. We stayed with the villagers for seven days. I saw what a close

relationship had been built between the students and the villagers. The villagers

were so kind and students were willing to be helpful to society.

Tim stated, "As for social activities, I joined a volunteer camp organized by the

Muslim club to build a new building for a school in Trang province. It was a big group

consisting of about two hundred volunteers." Philip added:

Regarding social activities, mostly there were faculty activities, for example, a

welcoming party for pharmaceutical freshman students from fourteen universities

in Thailand. I got to know more friends in the same field. I also joined a

pharmaceutical freshman students' meeting in Chiengmai.

Albert also has information. He said, "Regarding social activities, I was a

volunteer to help renovate a school for children in a rural area. We repainted the building,

taught the children and played games with them. I also joined a camp for developing a

rural area. It was held by students of the Faculty of Agro-Industry. We taught the local people how to make organic fertilizer and how to preserve food.

<center>*Reflection on the Orientation Program*</center>

The majority of student participants found the program good and useful. Nancy said, "It was a good program. It was also helpful to new students. I got to learn more information about the university. Importantly, I got to know more friends." Philip stated, "It was good. I got to know how to make use of the systems and facilities at university. If I hadn't attended the program, I wouldn't have known how to use such systems." Dan described, "It did not have much impact on studying, but for getting to know more friends, it was helpful. The activities were good and I made more friends. Emma supported the idea, She said, "It was a good program. When we were new students, we needed to adjust ourselves and we learned more about the university." Nathan added, "Attending the program made me know about how to study at university. Overall, it was good and it should be held every year." Eleanor also agreed. She said, "It was good. It was useful and many new students got to learn about some aspects of the university." Miley stated, "The program was good to some extent. It contained basic information about studying at university which was useful to the new students."

Important and Useful Topics

Student participants found a variety of topics and sessions during the orientation important and useful to them in varied ways. Philip claimed, "For me, the technology day was excellent. It included activities on how to use computers, how to search information, how to access information as well as introducing university to new students." Mathew explained:

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For me, introduction to university day was important. I learned about the learning

and teaching system in university. Then I knew how to prepare myself as a

student here. Also, group activities helped me get to know more friends. The

topic of developing thinking skills was excellent. I learned how to think

effectively. Life skills day was very useful, too. I learned how to live as a student

and to succeed in studying. I listened to seniors share their direct experiences and

I gained some new perspectives.

Another participant, Tina said,

I liked the last day of the program: the day of developing living skills to be good

at studying and to live happily. It was worth attending useful sessions involving

what society expects of university students, a talk on life as a student, techniques

in registering for courses, and developing living skills. I could make use of this

kind of knowledge and ideas. Also, I could pass on both knowledge and ideas to

friends who didn't attend the program.

Sara also described her view in detail:

The sessions I preferred and found useful included introduction to the university,

developing living skills and learning system in the university. I learned how to

prepare myself and how to study. Also, I found the session of group activities

helped me to know friends from different faculties. In terms of living skills, I

learned about life as a student and how to register for courses. The ideas from

these sessions are still practical.

Edwin stated his view that:

The topic of how to use the library was very useful. The session provided useful

information on how to find books, materials and other resources in the library. I

still use the knowledge because I go to the library everyday.

Miley said:

I liked the seventh day that was about developing skills for better learning and

happy living. I liked the session on talking about learning and living as happy

students. The university helped us to learn how to live student lives happily.

Several good seniors shared their experiences, making me think and I gained new

perspectives.

Suggested topics

The following topics are suggested to be included in the orientation program.

Miley said, "More detail on health. Students at this university should be informed

about their rights in receiving medical services." Ann added, "I would like to have more

detail about important places or classroom." And Arthur stated, "The topic of

introduction to important places on campus should be included in the program. For

freshman students, it took quite a long time to find rooms."

A number of students suggested topics regarding activities. Ann said, "A session

about activities—a list of activities with dates of events. This would be helpful to

freshman students to participate in activities with joy and do the exams with happiness."

Tim said, "I agree in the topic of information on activities. Then the students would

manage their time for selected activities and for studying accordingly." Rose added:

I suggest the topic on advice about activities. The list of activities freshman

students are required to join in each semester should be given. Then students can

set aside the time for those activities. So attending activities won't have an impact on studying.

Some students mentioned topics about studying at university level. Sara said, "I think the topic of learning at university which is very different from the secondary level is interesting. Students need to adjust themselves to suit a new system of learning." Tina added, "I would like to have more details about studying in each faculty, especially about the teaching-learning system. In the program there was a session about studying at university in general."

Mathew stated:

I would like to include topics on time management and how to motivate oneself in studying. Because time is limited, we need to manage it well. When we know how, we would spend time studying, joining in activities and managing our personal life appropriately."

What Made the Students Persist into the Second Year at PSU

The majority of student participants identified a variety of factors that made them persist into the second year at PSU. The following themes were found in their mixed reasons for persistence.

Individual Intention and Preference

Arthur said, "The most important factor is oneself. For me, my preference, and readiness to study further drove me to be determined and look forward to the second year." Tim argued, "For me, I persisted into the second year because it is my intention to study here. I have passed the freshman year. I think I can go on and graduate as planned.

University aspects

Miley claimed, "The university is not far from home and it's famous." Eleanor emphasized, "I chose to study at this university because it is in the South. It's not far from home. Linda explained, "The university is the first factor. I intended to study here in the first place. My fondness has increased over time." Arthur pointed out, "Furthermore, the university was ready to support students in both academic and social areas." Edwin stated, "To study in the Faculty of Engineering at this university was not my last choice. In fact, it was my first choice. I like studying here." Also, Lee claims:

> My reason for persisting here is that I trust the high standard of the university. In my opinion, it is the most famous university in the South. The standard of the university and the competent instructors can help me accomplish to be a qualified graduate.

> Sam stated, "Another factor was that the university was not far from my home. Its standard is equal to that of universities in Bangkok.

Academic Factors

Many students gave their reasons related to academic factors for their persistence. Mike described his reason. He said:

> I like the program I study and partly because there were scholarships to support the students who were good at studying: students who gain a GPA above 3 would get a scholarship for tuition fees. I was one of those students. Also, it was okay for me to continue studying here because I am okay with my performance both academically and socially.

Dan also stated:

And another reason was that I haven't studied any courses in my own faculty yet. All of the courses in freshman year were foundation courses. I don't have any ideas what studying in this faculty would be like. Thus I continued studying here. Philip said, "I really like my program of study. I aimed for this field of study when I was just in primary school. This is my future career."

Lily was happy to study here. She said, "I love the subjects—languages that I study." Sara added, "I love my program of study, chemistry." Paula claims, "I am now studying in the faculty I like. I'm satisfied with my studies." Philip: I really like my program of study. I aimed for this field of study when I was just in primary school. This is my future career." Ann who got a scholarship said:

I got a scholarship from the faculty with the requirement that I must study here for four years with a GPA above 2.5. This reminds me that I must do my best every semester to get the GPA as required. I must graduate.

Social Factors

A number of participants addressed friends, family, activities and other issues in social side in their reasons for persistence. For example, Dan claimed, "I don't want to start the freshman year again. I wouldn't have the same friends." Mike said, "…. In addition, my family supports me to study here." Albert added:

For me, the environment including friends, seniors and instructors at this university is very good. When we are worried we can seek advice from them. If the environment was not good, I couldn't go on despite my preference to continue. Environment is important.

Ann said, "Along with studying, I joined activities. This caused me to feel very close to the faculty." Also, Mathew stated, "I get to know a very good group of friends. Friends in the same year are also nice. The living condition is good." Philip agreed with the others and claimed, "In addition, the close knit relationships among friends and between freshmen and seniors were impressive. Seniors take very good care. Some instructors are ex-students of this university—our seniors." Tina concluded, "When I looked back, a lot of activities in the freshman year exhausted me and I sometimes felt discouraged. However, these activities did provide me with great experiences and these caused me to continue studying here."

<div align="center">*Other Realities*</div>

Student participants revealed a variety of topics in relation to their first year experiences when I asked them about additional information I needed to know but I did not ask them about. The themes follow.

Impressive Experiences

Mathew explained:

 I would like to emphasize the importance of cheering meetings. At university level the instructors do not tell the students about how to behave or suggest anything to us directly. When we join cheering meetings, seniors teach or tell us what we should do, what the rules and practices of the faculty are. When we have respect for the seniors, we do the right things according to the rules and discipline. If we do not attend this activity, we won't learn this. For me, joining cheering meetings creates good discipline, and magnifies the closeness between seniors and new students. I was very impressed with cheering meetings.

Emma detailed her impressive experiences in her freshman year. She mentioned activities she found helpful. She said:

Three activities in freshman year: the orientation program to build students' foundation, the cheering meeting to establish discipline and the welcoming party to get to know seniors and respect them. Attending these activities helped me know more friends and we could consult one another about studying and other topics.

Nathan also gave information on one of his impressive experiences while he was a freshman. He stated:

I did field work during the vacation after the end of the first semester. The duration of half a month of living and working together with friends in the same year and seniors as mentors developed closer friendships. This experience required participants to carry out and be patient with agricultural work. Participants needed to do everything including cooking. So we worked in harmony and helped one another. We had good working experience,

Sara, from the Faculty of Science, described what she learned in her freshman year. She said:

Working as a committee member for freshman students made me get to know new friends. In addition, it was good practice for me in managing time to do different tasks. Furthermore, I learned about the working procedure—what steps they were. Also, I have learned and improved social skills and I realized the importance of responsibility.

The student participants made remarks about their freshman year. For example, Nancy said:

> I would like to add that students should join as many activities as they want when they still have time in the first year. For me, I feel that I should have joined more activities. In the second year, I have more responsibilities and cannot attend as many activities as I would like to.

Dan also shared his view. He said:

> I would like to talk about my experience in terms of comparison. As a result of the cheering meeting of this year which was not very tough, it seems that the freshmen do not pay attention or pay respect to seniors. When compared to last year cheering meeting which was very tough, I found that seniors and freshman students were closer. Another topic was the difference between instructors at university and secondary school. I found the instructors at university did not pay attention to students at all except when giving exam scores. They did not ask the students whether they study or what else they can do. In addition to looking at the scores, the instructors should be more attentive to their students.

Another participant, Tina emphasized:

> About one's expectation. Some students were good at studying in secondary school. When they entered university, they had high expectations or were sure of themselves that they could gain what they expected. When the results were different, they were very disappointed. So I would like to emphasize that freshman students should not be overconfident. There might be some

disappointments and we should be prepared for them. Remember that everyone is smart and good at different things.

Remarks for University

A number of the participants made remarks in relation to studying and living student lives on campus. For example, Miley said:

> I would like to talk about the infrastructure system such as running water and electricity because it affects studying. Some mornings, there was no running water in the dormitory or there was power failure. And the fixing took a very long time. So the students were in trouble and did not attend classes those mornings. University should be aware of these problems, be well-prepared and find better solutions more quickly.

Also, the topic of activities was brought up. Tina said:

> I would like to share ideas about activities as well. In the 2007 academic year, the rule that engaging in activities would be recorded in the transcript was endorsed for the first time. (In other words, each student is required to accumulate the hours he/she engages in the preset activities according to the curriculum. These hours then are counted and recorded on that particular student's transcript.) I would like students to join the activity in a voluntary and willing spirit. Carrying out an activity is not only for the purpose of getting it on record and graduating. Joining activities allowed us to make friends, and getting to know seniors. Thus, let's join the activities with our spirit.

Also having some ideas about activities, Linda stated, "In my view, there were too many activities for freshman students especially in the first semester…. I would like the

university to reconsider the activities for students to be more appropriate and not too many. Another participant, Tim added;

> At the beginning of the freshman year, students had to adjust themselves, especially in studying to keep pace with others. Also, they had to attend university activities. There were some activities that could be stressful for some students who were not used to those kinds of activities.

Summary

I started the chapter by familiarizing the reader with the information about the study context. The study was conducted at a university in the south of Thailand. Currently, there is one faculty with only graduate programs available and there are 13 faculties with a variety of undergraduate programs of study that attracts a lot of freshman students annually. In the academic year 2007 the new orientation program was organized. A profile of the orientation program was presented. Regarding data collected, university staff responsible for different sessions of the orientation program provided me data that I presented in themes. The fist theme was the rationale for initiating and launching the special orientation. Next, a variety of activities was described: most were determined by university including activities for introducing and promoting the use of university resources, activities for study preparation, and group activities which promoted getting to know friends. The next theme was the usefulness of activities, which include useful for course study and useful for thought. The next theme was about university expectations from freshmen who attended the orientation program and followed by the overall opinion about the orientation. The majority had positive opinions. Also, under the theme; other

realities, the university participants added extra information. They preferred all freshman students to attend the program and they expressed some concern about freshman students.

Regarding the students, I presented data collected in three themes. The first theme was reflection on freshman year experiences. The students reported that they needed both academic and social needs for the success in their freshman year. They joined activities to help them feel more confident. Most of them tried to attend every class. However, the interactions with the instructors teaching in large classes were rare. They had close relationships with the instructors teaching in small classes. The students attended both academic and social activities, had good relationships with peers, and most of them liked their programs of study. The second theme was reflection on the orientation program. The students reported that they found the program good and useful. The activities they found important and useful varied, for example using computers in university, teaching-learning system, developing thinking skills, using the university library, and group activities. In addition, some suggested topics were introduction to important places on campus, and a session about activities for freshmen in detail. The third theme was what made students persist into the second year. Students reported mixed factors within the areas of their personal intentions, university aspects, and academic and social factors. And under the theme; other realities, students reported about their impressive experiences, remarks for thought, and for the university.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In this chapter, the concepts of academic integration and social integration in Tinto's Model of College Student Persistence are used as the theoretical framework through which to view the data collected in this study. I looked for patterns and themes across the two groups of participants: the student receivers and the university providers. Next I compared patterns from the two groups to see congruence or mismatch. The chapter ends with the summary.

How the Concepts of Academic and Social Integration were used in Analysis

Within the theoretical framework of Tinto's model of college student persistence, academic integration involves academic performance and faculty/staff interactions, whereas social integration includes extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. In this study, the concepts of academic and social integration in Tinto's framework were addressed in two dimensions: from student perspectives as the receivers and from the institution perspectives as the providers. Regarding student perspectives, I employed the concepts of academic and social integration to be references for both students' experiences in their freshman year and students' reflection on the freshman orientation program they attended. Regarding the institution perspectives, I employed the concepts of academic and social integration as a framework to determine how university

orientation information and experiences help promote academic and social integration

through the orientation program.

<p align="center">*Academic and Social Integration in Freshman Year Experiences*</p>

In the first year of studying at university level, students had a lot of experiences.

In their new institution, students were in new environments or systems that involved

academic and social systems. Therefore, the freshman students had experiences in both

systems and needed to adjust themselves to become system members. In other words,

freshman students were gradually academically and socially integrated.

Academic Integration

Regarding the students, the scope of academic integration covered information

related to academic performance and intellectual development, for example, needs,

concepts, and behaviors pertinent to studying and learning both inside and outside the

classroom. It also could involve their interactions with faculty members and staff, both

formally and informally. In this study, most of the student participants stated both

academic and social needs. However, the extent of importance of the needs for an

individual student might vary.

Academic Needs for Success in Freshman Year. The expressions from the student

participants showed their academic needs obviously. They needed the knowledge of

learning strategies and study skills for example "to be thorough in studying and to fully

understand issues" and "appropriate and good strategies for studying." In addition, many

student participants emphasized the need for special sessions or tutorial sessions, as

described from the excerpts as "a special session to adjust the level of ability of students,"

"tutorial sessions to gain a solid foundation in those subjects (general academic subjects,

for example, math, English, biology)," "a number of students have a weakness in calculation and need special sessions for enriching knowledge in this subject," and " I would like to have a solid foundation….to adjust and build up knowledge step by step." Students, thus, gave reasons to support their needs for tutorial sessions.

Students also stated their academic needs in relation to asking for assistance, cooperation and changes from the instructors. They reported needs for "…the instructors to pay more attention to students, and to have more time for students," "the instructors to teach step by step to prepare students, to give a good foundation, and not to skip out some parts," "I needed the instructors to inspire students to be more active in studying….I needed teaching and learning to take place outside the classrooms sometimes," "to have close relationships with the instructors for consultation and advice" and "… about the instructors' teaching approach. I wish the instructors in science courses explained more so that the students could understand the contents better. They could explain more or adjust the way they taught." So these are students' academic needs regarding the instructors.

The data showed that student participants recognized and were aware of the importance of the system of studying and learning in university and were becoming academically integrated. Furthermore, when their needs were responded to, they believed this would foster them to better fit into the academic system. In other words, they would be more academically integrated and this might help strengthen student persistence at the institution.

Social Integration

Social integration covered information relevant to extracurricular activities and interactions among peers, for instance, participating in activities on campus.

Social Needs for Success in Freshman Year. Most of students identified their social needs along with academic needs. Interestingly, they most frequently acknowledged "friends" and "activities" as social needs. They needed friends so they joined activities to make new friends. In some cases, joining the activities allowed them to have more opportunities in making friends and they had new friends. Thus, student participants needed the university to organize more and varied activities.

In addition, the activities tended to allow students to get to know seniors and instructors that they found very useful. A student participant, Ann, argued, "Outside the class, I joined activities which helped broaden my experience. I got to know seniors and they gave some advice on how to adjust oneself to survive the freshman year." For Lee, he stressed, "Friends can be seniors who are helpful when we study, and can give some advice about personal problems. Familiarity can lead to seeking for advice." Student participants stressed the benefits they gained from seniors they got to know in joining activities. They reasoned, "From them, I learned how to manage the time for studying and joining activities," and "…seniors gave useful information about how to study. They also introduced important resources such as the library."

Student participants also needed to extend their circles of friends from the same faculty to other faculties by joining more activities in the freshman year. They gave reasons that in their second year, they would not meet many other students except those within the same faculty. Student participants emphasized the importance of friends with

varied reasons for example "... to learn together" "they could help one another in learning," "I asked them for some help," "to consult with and to help one another in studying" and " friends can be consultants when we had problems."

In sum, most student participants highlighted social needs in terms of more activities and more friends are needed in their freshman year. This is related to social integration in terms of interactions among peers. When students feel contented with the interactions among peers, they feel the sense of belonging to the social system to a certain extent. This can foster social integration and help students to prefer persisting into the second year.

Definitions of Success in Freshman Year

Interestingly, both the concepts of academic and social integration were addressed simultaneously by most of the student participants. They talked about academic success in terms of satisfaction with their academic performance, and to be chosen to study in their desired program. (In some faculties at PSU, such as Engineering, the students are required to have a certain GPA to be accepted to study in a major or program.) These concepts fit into academic integration. In addition to academic success, most of student participants extended the definition of their success to social side. They said they got to attend a lot of activities, to know a lot of new friends, to experience new things, to get along well with friends, and to live with them happily. This revealed that those student participants were also socially integrated.

Satisfaction with the Program of Study

Intriguingly, most student participants were satisfied with the programs they were taking. They said they liked the program, liked what they were studying, were pleased

with the progress in their studies and were not very stressed out in their studies. Regarding the grade performance, most of them were pleased to some extent. They said it was acceptable, they got what they had expected, it was better than the expectation, and they could pass the freshman year with a satisfactory GPA. Among many responses, they shared one characteristic: they were pleased to study in their chosen program. This supported the concepts of academic performance and intellectual development. They were academically integrated.

<p align="center">*What Students Did to Help them Feel Confident*</p>

<p align="center">*and Succeed in Freshman Year*</p>

Most of the student participants stated that they joined activities, got to know more friends, and feel more confident in themselves. This reflected the importance of interactions among peers. Being with good, close friends, having social networks, and studying with fiends helped students feel confident. Furthermore, having an opportunity to be a leader and exercise leadership skills was helpful to students. One of the student participants, Mathew who was the president of first year medical students emphasized that being in such a position led him to be accepted by friends and seniors after he and his friends had successfully organizing a lot of activities. As a result, he was proud and confident. He then was able to make decisions by himself. Another student, Tina who claimed that she was from a small faculty, stressed that when she had an opportunity to take turn to be a leader and a member of the team in different activities, this caused her and friends working together to think and express opinions. Then this helped build confidence in her. Thus, joining activities and taking a leader role is related to the concept of social integration in terms of promoting peer group interactions.

Others had different ideas about what they did to help them feel confident. They said they read a lot before the exams, did exercises, changed study habits, and paid attention to the subjects they were studying. These caused them to feel confident and succeed in freshman year. What the student participants did would lead to success in studying and have impact on academic performance and intellectual development. This revealed academic integration.

Behaviors Related to Studying and Academic Issues

Student participants recalled their freshman year behaviors that were related to academic aspects. Most of them agreed with the fact that they tried to attend every class. They realized the importance of class attendance. In class, most of them had similar behaviors. They preferred to sit in the front row, paid attention to the lecture, took notes, and tried to understand the lecture at that time. One participant mentioned reading the content before class and one reported that outside the classroom, he tried to read up on what he did not understand in the class. Most of student participants agreed that they rarely asked questions in large class. Several student participants asked in class, after class, or went to see the instructors outside class. Most of them paid more attention to attending class. Outside class, many admitted that they were engaged with other activities. Most of them shared similar behavior again before the exams: they spent a lot of time reading and preparing for the exams.

In addition to behaviors in class and outside classroom, student participants joined academic activities. Most of them recounted their responsibility in the PSU Open Week which is held annually to welcome general visitors and students from schools in the South to visit the university where a variety of activities are being held to introduce the

university. Students taking some responsibility in the exhibition or other activities had to have some information about the university or about a particular topic they were required to do. Therefore, students need to have information or knowledge on that specific topic. Then joining this activity fit in academic integration. Additionally, many student participants joined tutorial sessions for the courses that freshman students were taking. They found those sessions very helpful. Then joining tutoring sessions was directly related to academic integration.

Relationships

For most of the student participants, the relationships between students and instructors were not very close. Especially in the large class, the interactions were scarce. On the contrary, in small classes, there were more interactions. Therefore, students felt closer with the instructors teaching in small classes and in the laboratories. However, most of student participants stressed that when they met the instructors outside the classroom, they usually greeted them. I consider the relationship between students and instructors is a good starting point and it can be built up. In this study students probably had distant relationships with the instructors teaching in large classes. However, in small classes, the interactions and the relationship were appropriate.

Most of the student participants reported that they got new friends and more friends because they joined activities. The activities included sports competitions among freshman students and the orientation program. Most of students also stated that they had good relationships with friends. In addition to joining the activities on campus, the students joined other social activities for example, volunteer camp or voluntary work that took place in the up-county or in rural areas. The students who joined voluntary work felt

proud that they were helpful to the others and to the society. For example, Albert from the Faculty of Agro-Industry said, "We taught local people how to make organic fertilizer and how to preserve food." And Mathew from the Faculty of Medicine asserted," I was most impressed with the volunteer camp…. I saw what a close relationship had been built between the students and the villagers. The villagers were so kind and students were willing to be helpful to society."

In conclusion, for student participants, joining activities both on campus and outside campus helped create good relationships with friends. This also fit in social integration—promoting interactions among peers.

How University Orientation Information and Experiences Help Promote

Academic and Social Integration through the Orientation Program

Regarding the institution as the provider, the scope of academic integration covered the provision of information relevant to academic experiences such as student handbook with content that was meaningful to new students. Academic integration also included the introduction of resources on campus that promoted and led students to intellectual development and academic performance, specifically library and computer center. And academic integration includes the promotion of responsive and supportive interactions between students and faculty members and staff both formally—inside the classroom or in an academic context, and informally—outside the classroom or in non-academic context. The scope of social integration covered varied extracurricular activities that promote peer-group interactions.

The orientation program was initiated and launched with good intentions for freshman students at PSU in the academic year 2007. A variety of activities were

scheduled in the orientation program. Each activity had its own objectives and the formats of the activities varied. The staff responsible for each activity also had expectations from the students who attended the program. Therefore, I analyzed the data collected in themes according to different sessions and simultaneously I addressed the concepts of academic and social integration to those sessions.

Individual Activity and the Concepts of Academic and Social Integration

According to the schedule, the first day of the orientation program was called introduction to the university day. After the students registered for attending the program, there was an opening ceremony and it was followed by a presentation on introduction to the university by the president of the university. The next session was about teaching-learning system at PSU by the vice-president for academic affairs. The next session was on to be prepared for studying in university, responsible by John, one of the university participants in this study. And the first day ended with the session of group activities, responsible by George, another university participant in this study.

From the schedule of first day, the twin concepts of academic and social integration were addressed. In the morning sessions, introduction to university, teaching-learning system at PSU and to be prepared for studying in university, were directly focusing on academic content. In addition, for the first two sessions, the presenters were in the administration team that directly administered the academic affairs. Therefore, the new students were first formally introduced to the academic system in university. In the afternoon session, group activities truly focused on making friends and building good relationships among new friends. This is directly concerned with social integration.

As for the session of to be prepared for studying in university John said;

Its content included what university provided for students, why and how we

provided those resources, and what we expected from the students…..

Additionally, what are duties of these people and factors such as teachers,

students, and textbooks? What factor causes success?

The information in the session was essential for new students. They were reminded of

their role as new students in a new educational environment called a university.

As for group activities, the students were divided into groups by ribbons in

different colors. They were engaged in activities in forms of friendly competitions first.

According to George, who was responsible for the session, there were five different

activities to attract students' interests. The same purposes of all activities were to build

harmony and spirit of the group and to exercise skills in solving problems and skills in

working in team. At the end of the session, George described:

Around the end of the activity, we concluded that whatever color of their group

was, actually they did not restrict themselves to and belong to only that color.

From different colors, all students were then in the same group, the group of blue

color--the color of the university. All were friends then.

In addition, the friendly atmosphere among new students could be seen from

George's words,

From my observation at the end of the session, most of the students left the gym

in pairs, in groups with smile on their face. This showed that at least they had

built relationships with the others. Only some students still walked alone.

From the varied activities described above, it can be concluded that the freshman

students were guided into the two main systems of the university: academic and social systems from the first day of the orientation program.

On the second day, there was only one session; developing thinking skills. Students were engaged in the activities that fostering thinking skills. One outstanding piece of content was that students were given a list of the ideas about and the advantages of positive thinking. This would be beneficial to students if they thought along and practice thinking positively. Thinking is the starting point of the action that can be about academic or social sides. Therefore, the session of developing thinking skills became another useful session for guiding students into academic and social integration.

The third day of the program was a science day. Students participated in several activities about science and studying science courses. With the explicit objectives: to prepare new students for studying science in university and to adjust students' attitudes toward studying science, all activities were guiding new students into the academic system. Also, the instructors and seniors had a chance to meet freshman students and got to know one another. In addition, students were divided into groups when participating in activities. This allowed students to have interactions among peer groups and develop social integration.

The next day was for a variety of activities on English camp. Like the previous day, students attended various activities. While attending activities, students were stimulated to be aware of the importance of the English language and were motivated that English was not very difficult for them to learn. Elizabeth, who was responsible for the activities emphasized, "…the main theme was that English was fun…. I would say that English activities were edutainment. Therefore, students gained both academic

knowledge and entertainment while working with friends." At the same time, students got to know the instructors who were going to teach them English courses. Therefore, activities on English camp were to promote both academic and social integration.

The session of reflection on selected movies was held on the following day. During the session, students had an opportunity to practice thinking skills because they were encouraged to express opinions about the movie they had just seen. James who was responsible for the session pointed out, "We encouraged students to think that people with different ideas could live together happily." Therefore, the ideas or concepts students gained from this session, such as courage in expressing ideas and opinions, and valuing different opinions, could be applied in both academic and social contexts in real life situations.

On technology day, various sessions were held. The day started with the session of using computers in university, followed by introduction to Ellis program, using E-learning in university and using university library respectively. The main objective of each session was to introduce the program or the resource like in the last session. The knowledge on the content of each program and on how to use it will promote the use of it to full extent. Students in higher education today are required to keep abreast with the technology, to have access to the appropriate resources and to monitor and manage the overwhelming information effectively. I, therefore, considered that all four activities help guide new students to be both academically and socially integrated.

On the last day of the program, several activities were held, including the session of expectations of society on university students, a seminar on how to live a student life, techniques in course registration, and developing life skills for studying effectively and

living happily. Most of the sessions were about life skills which were related to interactions with other people in society. For the session of techniques in course registration, it was directly related to academic integration because the knowledge of techniques in registration would be useful to students in planning about registration. Registering for the right course at the right time then would be the most beneficial to students who have problems with the grade performance; otherwise they can be dismissed from the university because of low grades.

In sum, each session or activity on each day during the orientation had its own characteristic that was worth examining to see the aspect that was related to academic or social integration.

The Match between What was Provided and What was Needed

The data from the university included the information and experiences provided for freshmen in the orientation program. The data from the students included what the students needed for the success in their freshman year or when they were freshmen. I made a comparison between these two sets of data to determine the match between what was provided in the orientation program and what the students needed only. When I compared the two groups of analyzed data –the university and the students–to see the match or congruence between what was provided and what was needed, the following was what I found.

Direct Match under the Theme of Social Needs

There was a direct match under the theme of social needs: students needed the university to organize more and varied activities and the orientation program organized by the university was one of those. Most of the student participants specified that to be

socially successful in their freshman year, they needed more activities in order to have more opportunities to make friends. They needed friends for multiple purposes. Thus, the orientation program became another good opportunity for students to make friends with new students and seniors.

During the orientation programs, there were a variety of activities that helped students to make friends. The first session was group activities. The activities in this session were specially designed for the purposes of building harmony and spirit of the group and exercising skills in dealing with problems and in working in team. To reach those purposes, for the students, as group or team members or team leaders, they needed to work hard and help one another. Therefore, when they were in groups, they got to talk and they made friends. George who supervised the activities emphasized, "Our activities aimed at encouraging students to get to know more friends. Later on they would get to know more places (on campus) through these friends."

From students' perspectives, a number of student participants found the session of group activities useful. Dan stated, "…there were good activities that help students get to know one another. I got to know friends and I still keep in touch with some of them." Mathew supported this idea. He said, "Group activities helped me get to know more friends." Sara claimed, "I found the session of group activities helped me get to know friends from different faculties." and Emma concluded, "Joining group activities helped me to have more friends."

Another session in the orientation program that promoted the concept of providing more opportunities to make friends was English camp day. Student could make friends while joining various activities in a small group of about 30 students throughout

the whole day. As one of participants in a group of the provider, Elizabeth claimed, "New

students joined activities with friends or new friends….Students gained both knowledge

and entertainment while working with friends." Even though students as the receivers

did not identify explicitly that they got to know friends from joining English camp

activities, the majority of the student participants agreed that joining the orientation

program helped them get to know more friends.

Therefore, I justified that there was a direct match between what was provided

and what was needed. It was a concept under the social needs: more activities and more

friends.

Indirect Match under the Theme of Academic Needs

I used the term indirect match to refer to what was provided was beyond what was

needed or what was needed was within the scope of what was provided.

The three distinctive needs under the theme of academic needs from students'

perspectives were the knowledge of learning strategies and study skills, special sessions

or tutorial sessions and asking for assistance, cooperation and changes from the

instructors. I considered these needs to be straight forward because student participants

had experienced their studying and perhaps obstacles that hindered their success in the

freshman year. As a result, they identified the instant ways to be used to solve such

problems. For example, Edwin stated, "I needed appropriate and good strategies for

studying, I didn't want to be too stressed." This suggested that he might have experienced

stress because of the study. If he had known about learning strategies, he might not have

been under stress. While students' needs were direct, what the university provided was

similar or the same thing but in complicated version. For example, a part of the content of

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the session; to be prepared for studying in university was about what university provided for student. The detail in this part was about learning resources such as library, friends, and the Internet. Therefore, these are useful resources for students to enrich the knowledge including learning strategies and to help them solve problems about studying and learning including stress. However, in my view, under the same scope, what was provided was general while what was needed was specific. Then there was no direct match.

This reason might be applied to another observation. The majority of the student participants agreed that the orientation program was good and useful. Many topics about academic side in the program were important, useful, and practical and they applied what they gained in their studies and in their life. However, the students did not mention any topic in the program or anything relevant to the content in the program when they identified their needs for success. It could be the same reason: no direct match. Also, for freshman students, direct and simple information might be more understandable and more useful to them. Institutions should be aware of the information provided for new students during the orientation because "that information is most often quite formal" (Tinto, 1993, p. 159). Then that information can be difficult for new students to understand.

<div align="center">*Summary*</div>

Within the theoretical framework of Tinto's (1993) model of college student persistence, the concepts of academic and social integration were used as an analytical lens to view the data. Regarding students' experiences in their freshman year, most of the student participants reported that they needed knowledge of learning strategies and study skills, special sessions or tutorial sessions, and assistance from the instructors. These

were academic needs. The majority also stated that they needed friends and activities which were social needs. Students also defined their freshman year success in both academic and social sides. Joining activities, social integration, could help many students felt confident. Regarding relationships with the instructors, academic integration, students had distant relationships with the instructors in large classes but close and good relationships with the ones who taught in small classes. Regarding relationships with friends, social integration, students joined activities and got to know friends.

In relation to what the university provided for freshman students, most of the information and experiences in various sessions during the orientation program helped promote academic integration and several helped promote social integration. However, when the data were compared to see the match between what was provided and what was needed, there was only one direct match: activities from the university and more activities and friends from students. That match helped promote interaction between peers or friends which was social integration. For other topics, I named indirect match which I referred to what the university provided was beyond what was needed. The indirect match was under the theme of academic integration.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH,

AND FINAL STATEMENT

Higher education institutions in different countries have encountered the problems of retention, especially freshman students. A recent report from American College Testing informs that 25.9 % of freshmen at four-year colleges nationwide do not return to school the following year (Berger & Lyon, 2005). In addition, Lewington (1996) reports that in Canada between 10% and 50 % of freshman students dropped out from colleges and universities. At Prince of Songkla University, from the academic years 2002 to 2007 about 36.4 % of freshman students did not return to the university the following year (Planning Division, 2007). As a result, various kinds of interventions including the orientation program have been implemented to encourage freshman students to remain in the institution.

The importance of an orientation program, of students' needs and experiences, and of the concepts of academic and social integration has been recognized and emphasized (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, I conducted a study at PSU to explore the extent of the linkage and relationships among freshman students' needs and experiences, orientation programs and student academic and social integration.

Purpose of the Study

　　　Through the lens of Tinto's (1993) model of college student persistence, specifically focusing on academic and social integration, the purpose of this study was to explore the needs and experiences of freshman students to determine the congruence between what the institution provided for first-year students in the orientation program and what students needed to survive and succeed academically and socially in their first year. This study also aimed to seek student voices from students' experiences to inform the university, providing useful information pertinent to the benefit of an orientation program.

　　　This study focused on providing answers to the following research questions.

1. From the students' perspectives, what did students need to be successful in their freshman year? Why?

2. From the university's perspective, what is provided to students through the freshman orientation program that will help them succeed and persist? Why?

3. Through the lens of Tinto's model of college student persistence (1993), what is the match between student needs and university orientation information and experiences provided?

4. What are other realities about freshman students' experiences that are revealed?

5. How useful is Tinto's model of college student persistence (Tinto, 1993) for understanding the phenomenon under review?

Procedures

  To explore freshmen's experiences, I primarily needed data from the freshmen. I also needed data from the university staff responsible for activities during the orientation program and university documents about the program since my study was related to what was provided for freshmen. In this study, I employed the concepts of academic and social integration from Tinto's (1993) model of college student persistence as a theoretical framework.

  Data collection. I conducted two sets of focus group interviews with 26 student participants from 13 faculties. They were representatives of all the academic programs for undergraduates at PSU, Hat Yai campus, my study context. They are now (2008) sophomores who attended the freshman orientation program in the academic year 2007. The participants were divided into three groups based on their fields of study. In addition, 11 university staff members responsible for the orientation program were interviewed and documents regarding the orientation program were collected.

  Data Analysis. Data from the three sources were categorized into two groups: the group of receivers consisting of data from student participants and the group of providers comprising of data from the university participants and document review. Data in each group were examined to see what pattern emerged. At this stage I employed analysis that involved identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the patterns (Patton, 2002). Next, I used the theoretical framework in categorizing the data into academic integration or social integration. Then the data from the group of receivers and the group of providers were compared to determine the congruence of what was provided by the university and what was needed by the students.

Findings

Findings from this study are presented here as answers to the five research questions.

Research Question One: From the students' perspectives, what did students need to be successful in their freshman year? Why?

Most of the student participants stated that they had both academic and social needs. Regarding academic needs, the majority needed the knowledge about learning strategies and studying, special sessions or tutorial sessions, and assistance from the instructors. The student participants gave reasons to support the ideas. For example, they could study without too much stress, adjust their level of ability, and understand the subject content better. The social needs of students included more friends and activities. They needed friends to consult with and to help one another in studying. They needed the university to organize more activities and to make friends with seniors because they gave useful information and introduced resources such as the library to new students.

Only a few stressed that they needed only one type of support. For example, one student participant said he could cope with social adjustment. On the other hand, he desperately needed a solid foundation in Chinese which was his major. His needs were academic. Another participant focused only on academic success even though he realized the importance of social needs, but he put the academic needs the first priority and focused solely on academic success. Another participant admitted that he and his friends did not pay much attention to studying. They were active in joining activities instead. Therefore, his social needs were friends and activities.

Research Question Two: From the university's perspective, what is provided to students

through the freshman orientation program that will help them succeed and persist? Why?

The orientation program was initiated and launched with the solid rationale to

prepare the new students for teaching and learning systems in the university as well as

living a student life. In other words, the program focused on preparing new students for

learning and living in higher education. Therefore every activity aimed at helping the

students to succeed and persist.

The activities that guided or promoted academic integration included an

introduction to the university, to the teaching-learning system at PSU, and how to be

prepared for studying in the university. The university provided a science day, and an

English camp day to expose students to the atmosphere and context of the academic

program. The university also provided sessions on how to use computers in university,

an introduction to the Ellis program, how to use E-learning in university, how to use the

library, and techniques in course registration. The university envisioned that new students

would gain knowledge and employ it when they start studying,

The activities that guided or promoted social integration included group activities,

expectations of society on university students, and a seminar on how to live a student life.

The university recognizing the importance of peer group provided group activities to

encourage new students to make friends. In addition, these incoming freshman students

had opportunities to meet seniors, listen to their experiences and ask questions about

living a student life. New friends freshman students had and the knowledge they gained

would be useful to them in adjusting life to the new environment. The content of positive

thinking in the session of developing thinking skills would be beneficial to new students in adjusting themselves as well.

Some activities guided or promoted both academic and social integration: a science day, English camp, developing thinking skills, and developing life skills for effective studying and happy living. The activities on science day were various and students were put into four groups: health science, physical science, biological science, and social science to attend some activities. Working in groups allowed new students to get to know more friends in addition to learning the content of the activity. Also, on English camp day, students joined different activities. A group of about 30 students attended each activity that lasted for about half an hour. Therefore, it was expected that while they were engaging in the activities, they also got to know new friends and develop interactions among peers. This then helped promote both academic and social integration. As for the sessions of developing thinking skills, and developing life skills for effective studying and happy living, the content or knowledge students gained could be applied in both academic and social contexts.

The university expected that freshman students would be equipped with essential academic and social knowledge, and that they would apply such knowledge in both studying and living. Then they would be successful and persist into the second year. The university expected that students would learn effectively and live happily.

Research Question Three: Through the lens of Tinto's model of college student persistence (1993), what is the match between student needs and university orientation information and experiences provided?

Through the lens of Tinto's (1993) model of college student persistence, the concepts of academic and social integration were employed in the process of data analysis. The student needs were grouped and related to academic and social integration. Similarly, what the university provided in the orientation was categorized into academic and social integration. Then the patterns in two groups were compared to see the match, only one direct match was found. It was under the group of social needs for students and social integration for university: the activity that provided an opportunity for students to make friends and know more friends. I considered that activity the orientation program itself with a particular session of group activities and several other sessions to encourage students to get to know more friends.

For other topics or patterns, I found indirect matches. What student needed and what the university provided were in the same group, academic integration, but the terms used and expectations were different. For example, the students identified their academic needs as learning strategies and study skills, special sessions or tutorial sessions, assistance from the instructors while the university provided the information about teaching learning in the sessions of teaching-learning system at PSU and to be prepared for studying in university. It could be that the university also expected students to access the information they needed via the Internet or by going to the library because the students should have learned the usefulness of the Internet and the library after they attended the sessions of using computers and using university library during the orientation. What the students needed was direct and explicit while what the university provided was vast and rather complicated. Students' needs were specific while university's provision of information was broad and general but it still covered the needs.

Regarding social integration, what the university provided was directly matched with students' needs: promoting peer group interactions.

Research Question Four: What are other realities about freshman students' experiences that are revealed?

Three distinctive realities about freshman students' experiences in addition to academic and social integration were revealed during this study are as follows.

Relationships between freshman students and the instructors.

According to Tinto (1993) , the experiences within the institution, especially the interactions between the individual and other members of the institution including student, staff, and faculty are notably related to further continuance in that institution. The interactions or relationship between students and the faculty or the instructors in this study thus are vital and should be established early in student lives. I believe the relationships will have impact on student's academic integration—the better the relationship, the higher student's academic integration. In this study, the data revealed that in small classes, students felt close to the instructors, often asked questions, and had good relationships with them. In addition, a number of student participants admired the instructors that were friendly, good at teaching, and attentive to students. This reflected close and good relationships. Also, this was a desired and satisfied phenomenon and should be sustained.

However, another reality from this study, the majority of the student participants agreed that they did not have close relationships with the instructors, especially who taught in large classes. The interactions in the classrooms were scarce. The students rarely asked questions in class. Surprisingly, one student participant said that throughout

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his freshman year he never talked to the instructors teaching in large classes. For some courses, the instructors took turns to teach only the part that each was responsible for. The students rarely saw that instructor after he or she finished his or her part of teaching. To me, the relationships between students and the instructors like this were vulnerable. There should be some approaches of teaching or activities to activate more interactions in large classes. Then this will help create and develop good relationships. As a result, students will be more academically integrated and other advantages will follow.

Suggested topics to be included in the orientation program.

The student participants in this study were in the first group of freshman students who attended the new orientation program. They experienced what the university provided for them in the orientation program. Then they experienced their freshman year. Therefore, in the section of reflection on the orientation program which was one of their freshman year experiences, what they suggested would be worth taking into account. They suggested several topics.

The majority of the student participants suggested the first topic: An introduction to important places on campus. They agreed that as a new student, this was extremely important. They said it really took their time to find a place, even a classroom. The second topic was about activities. They preferred to get a list of activities or events with set dates. They said this would be helpful to them in managing the time for the study and joining the activities. The third topic was about studying at university level. They said they needed more specific details for the courses. The session in the orientation program that they had attended was general. The last suggested topic was time management and how to motivate oneself in studying. The student who suggested this topic argued that for

new students time was limited and they needed to manage it well.

What made students persist into the second year at PSU.

Among varied reasons I got from the student participants, four themes emerged: personal intention and preference, university aspects, academic factors, and social factors. The first factor was the individual's personal intention and preference. This is not within the direct control of the university because personal attitudes belong to that person only.

The last three factors were extremely interesting in that they revealed valuable information to the university. University aspects became university assets and some assets could be upgraded, for example the standard of the university, the competence of the instructors, and the readiness for supporting students in both academic and social areas. Regarding the academic factors, the students reasoned that they liked their programs, loved what they were studying, and studied very hard to get the required grades due to the scholarship requirement. This showed the quality and strength of the academic system of the university. Also, this revealed the impact of academic factors on students or academic integration in students. The students persisted because they liked their program of study. This revealed that they were academically integrated.

Likewise, regarding social factors, the student participants indicated that they had good friends, lived in good environment, had close knit relationships with friends, and impressed with the relationship between freshmen and seniors. This revealed that the social system of the university was so good that it helped make students to persist. Additionally, most of the student participants had mixed reasons for their persistence. Therefore, all these factors become useful information to the university.

Research Question Five: How useful is Tinto's model of college student persistence

(Tinto, 1993) for understanding the phenomenon under review?

I found it very useful in explaining the phenomenon of freshman year experiences even though I used it with rather a complicated phenomenon. I considered my case study complicated because I addressed the concepts of academic and social integration in two dimensions: from the university participants' perspectives as the provider and from the perspectives of student participants as the receivers. This caused me to encounter a large amount of data. However, when I used the concepts of academic and social integration as a framework to view the data, I found the framework useful in helping me focus on the concepts and analyze the data in the right tack. Another point about the two concepts from Tinto's model of college student persistence is that I found them general but practical and they can be used universally in varied contexts including mine which is a university in a developing country. The findings from my study described above reflected this.

Conclusions

The study explored the needs and experiences of freshman students, and the congruence between what was offered in the orientation program and what the students needed for the success in their freshman year. Conclusions of the study can be found in three areas.

Theory

In this study the data collected were analyzed through the lens of Tinto's model of college student persistence (1993) focusing on the two concepts of academic and social integration. Regarding the student perspectives and experiences, the results revealed that

students needed both academic and social needs. In relation to the data from the university that were analyzed through the same framework, the results found also supported the concepts of academic and social integration. In addition, there was a match between what students needed and what the university offered in the orientation program. These results, therefore, helped support the importance of the concepts of academic and social integration for both the institution and the students.

I conclude that Tinto's (1993) concepts are important for understanding student success through the freshman year in my study context. His theory is useful and can serve as a valuable framework for understanding this phenomenon.

Research

This study with a qualitative research design yielded rich data from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews in addition to relevant document review. The data collected were analyzed and the findings derived were used to answer the research questions. Therefore, through the research methods stated earlier, the knowledge about the needs and experiences of freshman students and about what the university provided in the orientation for the success and persistence of freshman students is found. From students' perspectives, both academic and social needs were needed.

I now can conclude that the qualitative methods I used were useful. This research strategy holds promise for further research.

Practice

This study explored the needs and experiences of freshman students to see the congruence between what was offered in the orientation program and what the students needed for the success in their freshman year at an institution that organized a new type

of orientation program for the first time. Therefore, the results and information pertinent to the orientation program, for example students' needs, important and useful topics, suggested topics to be included in the program, can be used for the improvement of the program.

The institution is working diligently to retain its freshman students. More can be done. Study findings can be used to improve the orientation program by providing new activities and programs that will help students be successful academically and socially.

Study Implications

Study findings would have implications for the university and other educational institutions where the importance of freshman students is recognized and taken into account. Within the scope and findings of this study, the implications are as follows:

The first implication is that the university needs to acknowledge and respond to students' needs. The faster, the better for freshmen. In this case, students' needs in relation to academic integration included learning strategies, study skills, tutorial sessions, and assistance from the instructors. It is a common phenomenon for freshman students. They need to feel secure in the academic side in their new student life.   In the US higher education where the reference of first-year experience is widely recognized, one of first year programs is assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college which is in line with Tinto's concept of academic integration that "students must possess the requisite academic skills to do college wok in order to engage in ongoing academic conversation and to feel validated as a member of the academy" (Barefoot, 2000, p. 17). In Australia, Krause (2005) asserted that students thinking of dropping out are those "who fail to make a smooth adjustment to university, have

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difficulty understanding course material, feel overwhelmed by all they have to do at university..." (p. 59). Therefore, it is vital for institutions to pay attention to freshman students' academic needs early and timely. Otherwise, a number of students who feel insecure in their ability in university study or who actual face academic problems have high tendency to drop out.

The second implication is the need to augment peer group interactions. In addition to the orientation program that promotes social integration at the beginning of the academic year, more activities should be organized throughout the academic year to provide opportunities of making friends and augmenting peer group interactions. Peers here cover friends and seniors or upper-class students. Study findings reveal the importance of peers. Students need friends for multi-reasons, to consult with, to study together, and to help one another. Also, for many students, friends help them feel more confident and for the others, because of a group of good, close friends, they persist into the second year at university. The importance of peers in various aspects is in line with Tinto's concept on social interaction with peers that it is positively linked to the quality of student effort to learning and persistence (1993). The peer interactions then have an impact on academics.

The third implication is that the university needs to listen to student voices and involve students in planning of future orientation activities. As a teacher and a researcher, I find student voices worth listening to. And for this study, student voices would be heard by the university administrators. I believe study findings and the information relevant to the orientation program would be useful for the improvement of the program. And when students have a chance to participate and propose the ideas from students'

perspectives in the planning stage of the orientation program, it would be helpful to the program. And also the information from the students is useful to me for better understanding freshman students.

The final implication is that the idea of the year-long orientation is worth taking into consideration. When student needs are sought at the beginning of the first semester, they will be useful input for the university to plan the activities or programs throughout the year and arrange or provide resources to serve student needs and to enhance freshman year experiences to be more meaningful and helpful to new students. Hunter (2006) suggested some characteristics of efforts to enhance first-year experience that included the importance of understanding students, changing cultures and the nature of teaching and learning. In addition, extending the orientation or organizing more programs or activities to instill expected habits or necessary skills for freshmen is worth trying because these habits or practices are often sustained throughout college or create the foundation for the rest of their academic career (Schilling & Schilling 1999; Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989).

Furthermore, Schroeder (2003) suggested two web sites with resources on the first-year experience: the Policy Center on the first Year of College (www.brevard.edu/fye) and the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition (www.sc.edu/fye). With the information on their own students and the knowledge on how to enhance freshman year experiences, the institution will be ready for organizing a variety of activities or programs to help their freshmen to become academically and socially successful. To sum up, study implications focus on student issues that require cooperation from the university administrators and policy makers to

take into consideration, plan and put into practice.

Future Research

Regarding further research, some recommendations are proposed as follows:

First, further research with the same design and the theoretical framework can be conducted in other contexts to gain the findings or the answers for the research questions because this study was an explanatory case study with a qualitative research design and it yielded very useful findings but specific to the study context. In other words, the findings were institution-specific.

Second, in my view, the strengths of the study can be employed in further research. My study aimed to explore students' needs and experiences of students in their freshman year and I gained useful information for better understanding freshman students because the qualitative research methods allow the researcher to gain deeper data or information. Also, I employed the concepts of academic and social integration to see the match between what the university provided in the orientation program and what the students needed for the success in their freshman and the concepts are useful for understanding the phenomenon. Therefore, the two concepts can be employed in research about other interventions for students.

Third, exploring the needs of freshmen in different faculties and looking into the differences in student needs across different faculties can be alternatives for future research. Student needs in particular faculties will provide useful input for the faculties to prepare resources, activities, and assistance to serve student needs and will be helpful to freshmen in adjustment to the new experiences in the freshman year.

Fourth, the similar study can be conducted with the different groups of students.

My study focused on the successful students who participated in the orientation program and persisted into the second year. The future research might explore comparisons across those students who participated in the orientation program who were successful and those who were not. In addition, the study can be about the students who were successful and did not participate in the orientation program.

And finally, a longitudinal study of students' experiences in higher education can be conducted at the same study context. However, the study design needs some modifications to suit the current context. In my view, it would probably be interesting to see the growth of individuals through the lens of the concepts we employ in the study as well as the impact of the concepts of academic and social integration on student persistence.

Final Statement

My final thought keeps lingering with the concepts of academic and social integration, partly because I addressed them to a great extent in my study. However, another big part of my reason is that because of their simplicity. These two concepts are not difficult to understand especially when they are addressed in educational contexts. The two main systems in an institution are academic and social systems that need to be developed in parallel.

For the university, what it provides for students should help promote academic and social integration in students so that it can retain students. In addition, when that comes, not only can it retain students but also the growth of university will be highlighted.

As for students, freshmen in particular, when they can adjust themselves to fit in the systems or are academically and socially integrated, they will study effectively and live happily and they will persist. My final statement is that for the growth of the institution or individual, the concepts of academic and social integration are vital and should be promoted.

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APPENDICES

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Tuesday, June 10, 2008
IRB Application No	ED0894
Proposal Title:	Academic and Social Integration in Freshman Year Experiences: A Case Study at Prince of Songkla University, Hai Yai, Thailand
Reviewed and Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 6/9/2009

Principal Investigator(s):

Preeya Khamcharoen	Adrienne Hyle
91 South University Place	325D Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Appendix B
Faculty Consent Form

FACULTY (ADMINISTRATOR, FACULTY, AND STAFF) CONSENT

TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: Academic and Social Integration in Freshman Year Experiences: A Case Study at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand

INVESTIGATOR: Preeya Khamcharoen, an instructor in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University and a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University.

PURPOSE: This study is being conducted at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Songkhla, Thailand. Through the lens of Tinto's model of college student persistence, specifically focusing on academic and social integration, the purpose of the study is to explore the needs and experiences of freshman students to see the congruence between what the institution has provided for first year students in the orientation program and what students need to survive and succeed academically and socially in their first year. This study also aims to seek student voices from students' experiences to inform the university, providing useful information pertinent to the benefit of the orientation program.

PROCEDURES: You are invited to participate in the study because you are an important person who can provide useful information about the 2007 freshman year orientation program. You will be interviewed to provide the answers for the guiding questions and sub-questions related to the program.   Your participation is greatly appreciated.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: There are no risks associated with this project, including stress, psychological, social, physical, or legal risk which are greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If, however, you begin to experience discomfort or stress in this project, you may end your participation at any time.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: You may gain understanding of how research is conducted and an appreciation of participating in the research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. All information about you will be kept confidential and will not be released. Record forms will have identification numbers, rather than names, on them. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. This information will be saved as long as it is scientifically useful; typically, such information is kept for two years after publication of the results. Results from this study may be presented at professional meetings or in publications. You will not be identified individually; we will be looking at the group as a whole. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

CONTACTS: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Preeya Khamcharoen at preeya.kh@psu.ac.th or at (074) 286782 or Dr. Adrienne Hyle, Ph.D., 325 Willard Hall, Dept. of Educational Studies

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Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-9893. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION: I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in the study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix C

Student Consent Form

STUDENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: Academic and Social Integration in Freshman Year Experiences: A Case Study at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand

INVESTIGATOR: Preeya Khamcharoen, an instructor in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University and a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University.

PURPOSE: This study is being conducted at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Songkhla, Thailand. Through the lens of Tinto's model of college student persistence, specifically focusing on academic and social integration, the purpose is to explore the needs and experiences of freshman students to see the congruence between what the institution has provided for first year students in the orientation program and what students need to survive and succeed academically and socially in their first year. This study also aims to seek student voices from students' experiences to inform the university, providing useful information pertinent to the benefit of the orientation program.

PROCEDURES: You are invited to participate in the study because you can provide useful information for this research study about the needs and experiences that help students to survive and succeed in their first year of study at the university. The project will involve 2 focus group interviews. For focus group interviews, the researcher will employ guiding questions which ask about your needs and experiences in your freshman year. The interviews will be audio-taped. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: There are no risks associated with this project, including stress, psychological, social, physical, or legal risk which are greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If, however, you begin to experience discomfort or stress in this project, you may end your participation at any time.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: You may gain understanding of how research is conducted and an appreciation of working in groups with different students.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. All information about you will be kept confidential and will not be released. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. This information will be saved as long as it is scientifically useful; typically, such information is kept for two years after publication of the results. Results from this study may be presented at professional meetings or in publications. You will not be identified individually; we will be looking at the group as a whole. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

CONTACTS: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Preeya Khamcharoen at preeya.kh@psu.ac.th or at (074) 286782 or Dr. Adrienne Hyle, Ph.D., 325 Willard Hall, Dept. of Educational Studies Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-9893. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION: I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given tome. I hereby give permission for my participation in the study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix D

A Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Research

A Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Research Study

Dear …………… (the full name of the administrator and staff members will be identified)

My name is Preeya Khamcharoen. I am one of the instructors in the Department of Languages and Linguistics in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai campus.

Currently I am also a graduate student in the Department of Educational Studies, College of Education, Oklahoma State University. I am now conducting the dissertation on "Academic and Social Integration in Freshman Year Experiences: A Case Study at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand." The purpose of this study is to explore the needs and experiences of freshman students to see the congruence between what the institution has provided for first-year students in the orientation program and what students need to survive and succeed academically and socially in their first year at university. Moreover, conducting interviews with the administrator and staff members responsible for the 2007 freshman year orientation program is a part of my data collection.

You are invited to participate in this study because you are an important person who can provide useful information about the 2007 freshman year orientation program. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Your cooperation and participation in this study is totally voluntary. All the information that you provide will be protected in strict confidence. Please be informed that you are free to withdraw any time without any reprisal, penalties, or consequences of any kind. If you have additional questions, you may contact Preeya Khamcharoen at 074-286782 (office) or 089-7380088 (mobile phone) or Dr. Adrienne Hyle, Ph.D., 325 Willard Hall, Dept. of Educational Studies, Oklahoma State University. Stillwater, OK, 74078 or at 405-744-9893. If you wish further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078, telephone number: 405-744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Preeya Khamcharoen
Email address: preeya.kh@psu.ac.th

Appendix E

The Email Message to Students who are Invited to Participate

in the Research Study

The email message to students who are invited to participate in the research study

Dear ……………….. (name and surname will be identified)

My name is Preeya Khamcharoen. I am one of the instructors in the Department of Languages and Linguistics in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai campus.

Currently I am also a graduate student in the Department of Educational Studies, College of Education, Oklahoma State University. The topic of my dissertation is "Academic and Social Integration in Freshman Year Experiences: A Case Study at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand" The purpose of this study is to explore the needs and experiences of freshman students to see the congruence between what the institution has provided for first-year students in the orientation program and what students need to survive and succeed academically and socially in their first year at university.

You are now in your second year at PSU. So you are invited to participate in this study because you can provide useful information for this research study about the needs and experiences that help you to succeed in your first year of study at the university. Your participation is greatly appreciated. If you are interested in participating in this research study, please reply this email back to me at preeya.kh@psu.ac.th or call me at 074-286782 (office) or 089-7380088 (mobile phone) to accept the invitation.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Preeya Khamcharoen
Email: preeya.kh@psu.ac.th

VITA

Preeya Khamcharoen

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN FRESHMAN YEAR
                EXPERIENCES: A CASE STUDY AT PRINCE OF SONGKLA
                UNIVERSITY, HAT YAI, THAILAND

Major Field: Applied Educational Studies / College Interdisciplinary

Biographical:

        Personal Data: was born in Betong, Yala, Thailand

        Education:
        Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics from King Mongkut's University of
        Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Bangkok, Thailand in 2000
        Bachelor of Education from Srinakharinwirot University Songkhla campus,
        Songkhla, Thailand in 1983

        Experience:
        A faculty member at Department of Languages and Linguistics,
        Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Hat Yai, Songkhla,
        Thailand since 1997
        A teacher at Demonstration School, Faculty of Education, Prince of Songkla
        University, Pattani, Thailand, from 1994-1996
        A teacher at Raman Sirivit School, Raman district, Yala, Thailand, from 1983-
        1993

Name: Preeya Khamcharoen   Date of Degree: July, 2009

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN FRESHMAN YEAR
                        EXPERIENCES: A CASE STUDY AT PRINCE OF SONGKLA
                        UNIVERSITY, HAT YAI, THAILAND

Pages in Study: 144   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Applied Educational Studies / College Interdisciplinary

Scope and Method of Study: The study explored the needs and experiences of freshman students to determine the congruence between what the institution provided for first-year students in the orientation program and what students needed to survive and succeed academically and socially in their freshman year. The study also aimed to seek voices from students' experiences to inform the university, providing useful information pertinent to the benefit of the orientation program. The theoretical framework employed as the analytical lens to understand the phenomenon was Tinto's (1993) model of student college persistence, specially focusing on the concepts of academic and social integration. The data sources were students, university staff members responsible for the orientation program, and documents relevant to the orientation program. The data were collected through student focus group interviews, university staff interviews, and document review.

Findings and Conclusions: Data collected from the study revealed that students had both academic and social needs to help them be successful in their freshman year. Regarding academic needs, they needed the knowledge about learning strategies and study skills, tutorial sessions, assistance from the instructors. Regarding social needs, they needed friends and activities The direct match between students' needs and what the university provided in the orientation was that their needs were responded in terms of social needs or social integration in joining the orientation program because the students had more opportunities to join activities and make friends with new friends and seniors or upper-class students. In terms of academic needs, though the needs were not directly matched, what the university provided in the orientation program was beyond student needs. The conclusions were that the concepts of academic and social integration can serve as a valuable framework to understand students' experiences and success in their freshman year, the qualitative methods were useful and study findings can be used to improve the orientation program by providing new activities and programs that will help students be successful academically and socially.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Adrienne E. Hyle