

Relationship between First Year Success Programs and Second-Year Persistence

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ABSTRACT

Much research has been conducted on the success and retention of first-year students. Little research has been done on second-year students and their experiences. This study was completed to understand the experience of second year students.

The purpose of this research study was to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of current second-year students who participated in the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University to determine if the skills gained during the program transfer to the second-year. Focus groups were conducted to collect data.

The results revealed that while the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University is a great opportunity for many students there are changes that could benefit many of the students. Results indicated that motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation, is a key factor in student success and retention.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Student success and retention are critical issues in higher education. Retention refers to the number of students who persist and continue at universities through graduation. With calls for accountability from external stakeholders, retention is an increasing concern for many universities (Schreiner, 1988). As a result, university administrators and faculty are increasing research and implementing programs designed to attract students and keep them enrolled. Retaining students at a university can be difficult because of the many factors that cause students to leave (Kiser & Price, 2007).

Retention and Accountability

Increasing retention has been a focus for institutions for many years (Schreiner, 1988). Universities are continuing to determine the reasons that students leave colleges and universities and take action to try to prevent the students from leaving. Some factors that contribute to student attrition are out of an institution's control, but there are others that administrators and faculty can influence, including finances, level of involvement, and attitude toward higher education (Kiser & Price, 2007). Astin (1984) defined involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy the student devotes to her or his experience and time at the institution. He found that retention levels increased if students were involved in athletics, honors, ROTC, and faculty projects. Retention levels were more likely to decrease if students worked an off-

campus job (Astin, 1984). Astin argued that a reason for persistence has to do with students' level of involvement, and the reasons students leave have to do with their reasons for noninvolvement with the institution. Examples of noninvolvement occur when a student spends a considerable amount of time off-campus such as working an off-campus job, getting married, and having children (Astin, 1984). These all take time away that the student could spend getting involved with the institution.

Academic and social integration has an effect on students' commitment to the institution; the greater the integration the greater the commitment (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). Among the social and environmental factors associated with retention include contact with faculty, interaction with mentors and advisors, orientation programs, outside employment, financial support, and living arrangements (Mohr, Eiche, & Sedlacek, 1998). Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, and Alkan (2008) supported these factors and divided them into themes including structural, ideological, financial, political, academic, and personal.

Student engagement is the term that describes students' involvement and connection to the institution. Tinto (1988) found that when students feel connected to the institution they are more likely to continue and succeed.

Academic Success

Academic performance is the primary factor associated with student success, though the discussion has recently broadened to student success outside the classroom. Academic preparation is the best predictor of whether a student will graduate (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). In this sense success is defined as what the students have learned or gained since coming to college. Even though many studies view success purely as academic, students also believe that gaining skills such as independence and building relationships indicate success

(Yazedjion, Toews, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008). Tinto (1988) viewed success as academic achievement as well as achievement in social settings and asserted that most of this occurs during students' first year because they experience many changes that challenge them to assimilate into their environment. Many higher education administrators have realized the impacts of students' success and have started creating programs to promote success of the students.

Students face many stressors in their college career, including making new friends, living on their own, and the increased academic demands from high school to college. Student affairs and academics have been joining forces to create academic-focused initiatives to help students with the stressors of college (Thompson, 2008; Whitt et al., 2008). These initiatives have been focused on academic support, first-year students, second-year students, and students at risk.

Academic support. Thompson (2008) found that peer support has played a positive role in students' decisions to persist at a university. Academic and social connections with their peers can help students become more integrated with the institution, which can help increase their likelihood of persistence. Many higher education administrators have realized the need for student support and created student academic support centers (Thompson, 2008). Academic success centers help with study habits, answering questions, and advising (Thompson, 2008). These formal centers focus on the support of academics, such as courses and homework, while peers tend to support students emotionally (Thompson, 2008). Many of these retention and academic programs have been directed towards first-year students.

First-year students. Many students enter college underprepared for the academic and social challenges that await them (Schrader & Brown, 2008). The first year of college is a critical transition period for most students (Gordon, Young, & Kalianov, 2001). Many students

feel uncomfortable with their abilities or roles as new college students (Rayle & Chung, 2007). Schlossberg (1989) found that many first-year students do not feel like they matter or make a difference in college. Incoming first-year students face many transitions when entering college including changes in living arrangements and living with a roommate, new academic settings on a college campus and harder coursework, a new group of friends, and greater independence from parents (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

Much of the research on retention of first-year students has led to developing appropriate learning environments to help improve the first-year retention rate (Gordon et al., 2001). While there are many programs focused towards first-year students and retention, there are fewer that focus on second-year students and their experiences and helping them to persist towards graduation.

Sophomores. Only recently have practitioners started looking at the success and retention of current sophomores who are moving into their junior year. Once students make it to their second year many universities switch their focus to the new incoming first-year students leaving the second-year student on their own (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). The sophomore year may be the year where the least amount of support is given to students (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Many of these second year students may not have completed their transitions during their first year and may require as much support as first-year students (Tobolowsky, 2008). The second-year experience is important in students' development which can occur through involvement or leadership (Tobolowsky, 2008). Factors institutions should consider with second-year students include retention, commitment, and the sophomore slump.

The sophomore year is a time where many students start to separate from academic life (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000, as cited in Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Students start to feel lost

if they are still undecided in their major. Sophomores can feel abandoned during the sophomore year because there are many programs for first-year students and very few for second-year students (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000, as cited in Schaller, 2010). Many institutions put much focus on incoming freshman and after the freshmen year there are not designated programs to help sophomore students continue through their transition. There are still students who have not completed their transition during their first year of school, and programs specifically designed to continue through the second year would be helpful to these students.

The second year is a time where major decisions must be made. Some students enter their sophomore year undecided in a major. Many institutions require that students have a decided major by the end of their sophomore year (Schaller, 2010). This decision can put a lot of stress on these second-year students. For some students this is the biggest decision they have had to make because it can be viewed as a determining factor of what they will do for the rest of their lives (Schaller, 2010).

While many institutions have focused first-year success programs, sometimes this can leave sophomores feeling abandoned because they are no longer part of a program (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). The academic demands for second-year students also increase because they are no longer taking all general education classes. This feeling of abandonment is sometimes referred to as the sophomore slump.

Many of the factors that attribute to the sophomore slump include choosing a major, academic self-efficacy, career development, connecting with faculty, and motivation (Schaller, 2010). Sanchez-Leguinel (2008) found that students who succeed and move past the sophomore slump develop autonomy, establish their identity, and find their purpose (Chickering

& Reisser, 1993) through academics, career development, and connecting with their peers and faculty.

High risk students. More students are given the opportunity to attend college than in the past. Many universities have allowed students who do not quite meet minimum acceptance requirements to be conditionally accepted. Programs have been implemented to assist disadvantaged students and help them achieve success and reach graduation. Some institutions require that high risk students or students on probation attend specific classes, tutoring, mentoring, or academic advising to help them succeed. These programs can help the students become connected with campus and develop academic skills (Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2007). Students have an opportunity to interact with other students, faculty, and staff and gain mentors. These interactions can help students become connected, which Tinto (1993) stated is the key to retention.

Flowers (2004) utilized Tinto's theory on student retention and institutional departure to examine African American students' experiences. He found that special programs, diversity training for faculty and staff, hiring more African American faculty, increased faculty interaction, opportunities for counseling, and planning campus events were important factors for African American student retention (Flowers, 2004).

Programs

Universities offer a variety of programs for first-year students to increase the chances that they will be retained, including living-learning communities, orientation, and residential programs (Andrade, 2007). Some universities also have specific programs and departments designed to help with student success (Farrell, 2007). One program that many institutions offer

is success coaches or mentors. The key to success for coaching programs is early intervention (Farrell, 2007).

Residential life programs also play an important part in student learning. Many institutions have developed living learning experiences for students in the residence halls. Organized living learning communities with program requirements have shown greater satisfaction and involvement with peers (Li et al., 2005). Only recently have schools started to focus on the second year. Second-year programs are few and far between but steadily increasing.

Some institutions have created programs that faculty of color lead to assist students of color in struggles that students of the majority may not be facing (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008). The focus is to improve relationships between peers, faculty, and the institution as a whole (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). The program in Grier-Reed et al.'s (2008) study was found to create a safe space for students where they can find support and validation. Students were given the opportunity to collaborate with faculty and other African American students and share experiences and culture (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). Effective attributes of these programs are leadership, faculty/student mentoring, financial aid counseling, and knowledge on retention issues (Grier-Reed et al., 2008).

Programs for at-risk students. Kutztown University is one institution that has had a program for first-year students who are conditionally admitted (Colton, Connor, Schultz, & Easter, 1999). Their program, titled Student Support Services Freshman Year Program, was federally funded and served high-risk students including first generation, economically disadvantaged, and students with a learning disability or physical disability (Colton et al., 1999). The requirements for this program included four meetings with an advisor, two required social

activities, ten weekly 1-hour sessions, assessment testing, and meetings with a mentor (Colton et al., 1999). They also required faculty progress reports, advisor follow-up, and continuous contact from mentors in which they contact students through email, and phone if not able to meet face to face (Colton et al., 1999).

The HORIZONS Student Support Program at Purdue University is part of the TRIO Program (Dale & Zych, 1996). This program supports approximately 330 students who are first-generation, low income, or physically disabled (Dale & Zych, 1996). During a study that began in 1990, this program was able to retain 85% of the students for ten semesters (Dale & Zych, 1996). A required course during the fall semester consists of two separate parts, one part being three hours a week to focus on the cognitive development of students, the second part is for two hours to focus on the emotional needs to the students (Dale & Zych, 1996).

Academic Opportunity Program

One first-year focused initiative at Indiana State University (ISU) is the Academic Opportunity Program (AOP). The program is specifically designed for first-year students who were conditionally admitted to the university (ISU, 2010a). The students are conditionally admitted because they did not meet all of the admission requirements, such as GPA or standardized test scores. AOP aims to help students develop strong academic skills and facilitate a positive transition to college. AOP offers a wide variety of services through the Student Academic Services Center (ISU, 2010a). Some programs that are offered and required of the students in AOP are academic advising, mentoring, and a first-year seminar class. Retention through developmental advisement is AOP's greatest achievement during the 2006-2007 academic year (AOP, 2006). The University 101 course has objectives that focus on student development, success, and retention. These include increased self-motivation, personal self-

management, thinking and studying skills, and an appreciation for diversity and multicultural perspectives (See Appendix A).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of students who participated in the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University. Focus groups examined information and students' perceptions and experiences of the program that cannot be gained through surveys or quantitative data. Students' perceptions can be used to determine which factors of AOP were most beneficial. Talking to students is also the only way to determine if outside factors played a role in their decision to continue at ISU. These focus groups provided information about the specific aspects of the program, and the information can then be used to make improvements to the program to help incoming students and help further their success. The following research question guided this study: What is the relationship between participation in a first-year success program and second-year persistence among conditionally admitted students? Specifically it addressed the following questions:

1. What are the effects of participating in AOP for students who are out of the program for at least four months?
2. What skills have second-year students gained from participating in AOP their first-year?
3. Do the positive effects of AOP help students after they have left the program?
4. What do the students need once they are finished with the program?
5. How do the students feel about their level of academic success after having completed the program?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because of the implications for future practice and research. The literature on second-year students is rich in content and helps to address the issue of the sophomore slump that occurs to many students in their second year at an institution. Little research has been focused on sophomore students who have completed a first-year academic success program. This study addressed issues concerning current sophomores and factors that played a role in their persistence to the sophomore year. In terms of practice, the study can be used to assess the effects of AOP which can assist in determining changes or improvements. This could be useful for the staff as well as faculty in determining the usefulness and effectiveness of the current program and how it affects the students who participate.

Current and future students in AOP as well as other programs and students around campus may also benefit from this study because it addressed current issues that second-year students who participated in AOP are experiencing and have experienced and trends that are occurring. Once these are determined, practitioners can research and develop new ideas and ways to address these issues through current or new programs.

If student affairs practitioners were to use this study and results they would be better able to assist their current students by better understanding their current needs as well as future needs once they are no longer part of the program. Student affairs practitioners could utilize this data in creating a sophomore experience learning program or learning communities that could be designed to specifically fit students' needs. The students could benefit from this study by realizing what types of things they are missing that could help them succeed. After determining what is missing for them they would be able to actively seek out activities, programs, or people that would fill the void.

Ultimately this study could be used across the country at other institutions to assess similar programs or to help implement programs that would better aid their students who are experiencing the similar needs. Overall it could improve retention and success for students who need help the most. Future research could be done on this topic and expanded at other institutions. Researchers could also take this further and look deeper into multiple programs or more specific population or the campus as a whole and compare and contrast different variables. This study could also be compared to students who did not take part in AOP.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

A review of the literature is essential to better understand the relationship between second year success and participating in a first year-focused academic program. This literature review presents a summary of the scholarship on retention and success, academics, first- and second-year students, and academic success programs.

Retention

Every year there are many students who leave colleges and universities for a variety of reasons. Continuing and persisting at an institution is important for students to complete a degree and be successful. Understanding why students leave an institution has been a focus for many researchers to help recognize the factors affecting students who are planning to leave (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). High school GPA has been linked as a key predictor to whether students will make it through their entire college career (DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009). Students with higher GPAs have a higher chance of completing the academics of college (Shaller 2010).

There are many reasons that students stay or leave a university. Some of these reasons include level of involvement, academic and social integration, engagement, and additional factors. Attrition occurs when these factors do not align with the students' beliefs. Students who were able to cope with their stress were more likely to continue at the institution (Pritchard &

Wilson, 2003). Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) explained that what students do in college has an impact on their persistence.

Level of involvement or engagement. Lack of commitment or involvement in a university or academic program is a leading factor in student retention. Involvement is defined as the amount of effort students put towards their experience in college including organizations, classes, and time spent making connections with peers and faculty (Astin, 1984). When students are more interested or committed to a class they are more likely to put forth more effort in attending and participating in the class or program (Gump, 2007).

Kuh (2009) defined engagement as time students devote to activities and organizations and what schools do to attempt to get students to participate, and Thisj and Verkuyten (2009) described engagement as getting involved in academics behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally. Engagement has a positive effect on learning and development (Kuh, 2009). Students who are engaged are more focused on their academics and emotions which lead to higher grades and higher retention rates (Thisj & Veruyten, 2009).

Astin (1984) found a direct correlation between student involvement and student development. Students must be actively engaged to further their development (Astin, 1984). Astin (1993) described five different varieties of involvement including academic involvement, involvement with faculty, involvement with peers, work involvement, and other involvement. These forms of involvement increase undergraduate student cognitive development (Astin, 1993). Retention is positively linked to academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with peers (Astin, 1993).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that involvement has an impact on student persistence. Persistence is also affected by the type of peers and level of involvement (Pascarella

& Terenzini, 2005). Involvement can expose students to a wide array of peer groups so that students can become connected with other students who are involved and success-oriented (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It can also help students set goals and become academically focused by gaining skills such as confidence and interpersonal skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Academic and social integration. Academic and social integration are important factors for student persistence (DaDeppo, 2009; Severiens & Schmidt, 2009). DaDeppo (2009) defined social integration as interactions between people and systems such as peers, faculty, staff, and activities. Severiens and Schmidt (2009) said that social and academic integration is the indirect route in the decision for students in whether to leave or persist. It is hard for students to graduate and persist at an institution without becoming socially integrated (Severiens & Wolff, 2008). Students who become involved with and get connected with organizations feel more at home and are more likely to persist (Severiens & Schmidt, 2009). Severiens and Schmidt found that students were more likely to be successful if they became integrated socially because they are more connected with their peers, which can impact them positively academically. Even though social integration may have a negative impact on grade point average, it has a positive impact on persistence and retention (Woosley & Miller, 2009).

Faculty and staff have to have an impact on students in order for them to become connected academically (Severiens & Schmidt, 2009). Academic integration is just as important as social integration and helps students integrate at their educational level (Severiens & Schmidt, 2009). DaDeppo (2009) found that even though academic integration is a good predictor of grade point average, social integration has a higher impact on persistence.

Integration can be formal or informal. Formal integration includes the interactions that occur with studying, such as interaction with faculty and peer groups, and joining clubs and organizations (Severiens & Schmidt, 2008; Severiens & Wolff, 2008). Informal integration deals more with the personal connections with peers or faculty that does not necessarily occur in the formal setting (Severiens & Schmidt, 2009). Tinto (1975) found that both academic and social integration increase the chances that a student will continue and persist in college.

Additional factors. Gohn, Swartz, and Donnelly (2001) found five major reasons that students choose to leave a university: adjusting to the stress that arises throughout the term, satisfaction with grades and academics, time management, finances, and commitment to career choice. Bray, Braxton, and Sullivan (1999) established that how students dealt with stress influenced their persistence. Students who accepted their stress and actively handled their stress had higher levels of persistence compared with students who denied their stress and became disconnected (Bray et al., 1999). Graunke and Woosley (2005) found that students' commitment to their major and their satisfaction with their professors were significant predictors in their grade point average and academic success. Thompson (2008) also found that time management was something that many students struggled with when they entered college. The amount of financial stress sometimes coincides with the stress that students have towards academics (Gohn et al. 2001). When students feel stressed about finances, their stress levels increase and can affect their academics such as classwork and homework. Some financial concerns are working through school, keeping or applying for scholarships or financial aid, and worrying about parents' ability to pay.

Success

Student success is defined as persisting towards graduation and what students have learned or gained since entering college, including academic achievement as well as life skills such as gaining independence and building relationships (Yazedjion, 2008). Recently researchers have broadened the definition to include student success as satisfaction, engagement, and student learning (Jones-White, Radcliffe, Huesman, & Kellog, 2009; Pattengale, 2002). Success encompasses many factors that affect retention but focuses on what the students gain during those experiences, rather than keeping them at an institution. Tinto (1988) viewed success as both academic achievement as well as achievement in social settings. For the purpose of this study, student success is defined as satisfaction, engagement, and student learning that leads students to persist at an institution.

Kuh et al. (2005) found that student engagement is a good predictor of student success. The level of involvement and integration with the institution helps create engagement and student learning, all leading to success for the student (Kuh et al., 2005). DaDeppo (2009) agreed that involvement can increase student success and retention.

Emotional states of students can have an effect on student success (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). It was found that students who experienced higher stress levels and greater fatigue had lower grade point averages (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). This can be negative or positive, which means that students with negative social states can have a negative impact on their academic success and social success (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003).

Academics. Academic stress at the college level has been on the rise (Thompson, 2008). College is also a time when students' academic load increases and they have more homework and reading assignments than they did during their high school years (Thompson, 2008). Time

management is an important skill many first-year students struggle with in terms of their academic and social life (Thompson, 2008).

Peer support. Research has shown that peer support is an important factor in the retention of students (Thompson, 2008). Since students are separated from their support sources including family members and parents, students reach out to their peers for support both academically and socially (Thompson, 2008). Both formal and informal types of support from peers are important and sometimes often disregarded by researchers (Thompson, 2008). The more social and academic connections students make in school, the more likely students stay at a university and persist academically (Thompson, 2008). Students indicated that academic support was more easily communicated with peers they knew as opposed to peers with whom they did not have a relationship (Thompson, 2008).

Faculty support. Faculty can play a large role in students' experience while at college. They interact with students on a regular basis primarily in the classroom. Faculty members are beginning to play a larger role in student learning by taking an active role in programs and living learning experiences (Armstrong, 1999). They are beginning to work with and collaborate with various offices such as office of campus activities and residence life to help strengthen their relationship with students to help further student development and learning (Armstrong, 1999).

Braxton et al. (2000) found that faculty teaching skills, such as organization, preparation, and clarity, may have an impact on students' decision to persist. Teachers who display these skills have a greater impact on students persisting and becoming engaged with the university (Braxton et al. 2000).

Students

Each student experiences college differently. First-year students have different experiences than students in their second year of school. At-risk students in both years have unique experiences.

First-year students. There are many first-year academic success programs at institutions around the country. First-year students need the most support both academically and socially (Thompson, 2008).

Freedom and autonomy. Responsibility and freedom are very different for college freshmen than for high school students (Thompson, 2008). For first-year students, this is the first time that they are living away from home and away from their parents. There is not someone always watching over them and checking up with them to make sure they are doing their homework and going to class (Thompson, 2008). Many first-year students have a hard time balancing their new freedom and schedule without someone helping them (Thompson, 2008).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) described their third vector, moving through autonomy toward interdependence as a stage where students develop an increased emotional independence. Emotional independence begins when students are separated from the pressure of affection and approval of others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Instrumental independence occurs when students are self-sufficient and can get to a new place (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students become autonomous when they can recognize their interdependence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as students' confidence in their ability to be successful. There are three primary beliefs for a student to be self-efficacious. One of them is persistence, the belief that one has the ability to complete a task such as completing college

(DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009). People with high self-efficacy believe that they have the ability to accomplish certain goals. If students believe in their ability to complete college they have a higher chance of doing so. Schaller (2010) also found that academic goals and self-efficacy are leading factors in whether a student decides to return for the following year.

Self-efficacy is a large factor for sophomore students because it is a time in their life when they experience high academic stress from choosing a major or starting major coursework (Schaller, 2010). Many students are forced to choose a major by their sophomore year, even though they may still be undecided about a major. This is a stressful time for students because it means deciding on a career plan and making long term decisions about what they are going to do for the rest of their lives. It is also a time when students transition from general education classes to major classes. This causes stress for students because these classes tend to increase in difficulty and the time demanded by the coursework.

Sophomores. Much focus has been put on the freshman year and the transition from high school to college but little research has been put into the second year. Issues facing sophomore students include commitment and persistence and the sophomore slump.

Commitment and persistence. The sophomore year is when students decide whether they are committed to their major or, if they are still undecided, they feel they need to commit. When students are committed to their major or program they are more likely to remain at a university or college and finish with their program because they have a goal of where they are going (Gohn, Swartz, & Donnelly, 2001). Students' motivation to attend college in the first place is different than their motivation to continue through college.

Clear goals lead to high persistence and motivation in college (Schaller, 2010). Motivation to continue through their program in college is related to self-efficacy and their

ability to accomplish their goals (Schaller, 2010). Long-term goals are good motivators of students completing their degree or academics.

Commitment is the fourth stage of the sophomore year that Schaller (2005) described. The other three stages of Schaller's (2005) stages of sophomore year are random explanation, focused exploration, and tentative choices. In the commitment stage, sophomore students have already committed to their majors and courses. They become more responsible for their academics and coursework (Schaller, 2005). When students take on responsibility for their coursework and study habits they become more committed to the institution and their academic major.

The sophomore slump. The sophomore slump is defined as the time during the second year of college when students struggle with increased expectations, intense academics, and higher standards (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008). Student development during this time is important. During this time where they are exploring their identity, second-year students are expected to be more independent in exploring their ideas and beliefs (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008). Many of the adjustment problems that first-year students face are similar to what second-year students face, which results in the sophomore slump (Gump, 2007). The sophomore slump leads to decreased interest, lower grades, more absences, and ultimately dropping out of school (Gump, 2007). Since there are many first-year success programs at institutions, many of the problems that first-year students typically experience are being pushed to the sophomore years when the programs end. Gump (2007) found that the realities of college hit in the sophomore year when students are left on their own to sort out their own problems such as choosing a major and attending class. Many students during their freshman year rely on the support of the programs and are faced with making decisions and new transitions when they are without this

support their sophomore year. When students are exploring possible academic majors, they are looking for their internal voice and what they should be doing (Schaller, 2005). Most students look for guidance during this time and since many schools do not offer programs that focus on the academic endeavors of sophomore students, many feel that they are left to figure it out on their own. Sometimes when they choose a major they are responding to the pressures of others such as peers and family (Schaller, 2005).

At-risk students. At-risk students are college students who are at increased risk for departure from a university. Many of these students are at risk because of weak academic skills, lack of preparation, and personal circumstances (Kamphoff et al., 2007). Isaak, Graves, and Mayers (2006) found that students who struggle academically face more emotional problems and have fewer social skills than students who succeed academically. These students also face greater social alienation, have less defined goals, and more financial difficulties (Isaak et al., 2006). Berkovitz and O'Quin (2006) found that support systems were important for students at risk. Some support systems include faculty support systems, counselor support systems, mentoring and social support systems, and tutoring and financial support (Berkovitz & O'Quin, 2006). It was also found that students also needed to be able to help themselves and not rely solely on these support systems (Berkovitz & O'Quin, 2006).

Retention of African American students is lower than White students (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). Some things these students face are lack of knowledge about college, institutional racism, social isolation, and family and economic problems (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). When African American students are attending a predominantly White institution their group of peers in the same racial group is smaller than those in the majority (Grier-Reed et al., 2008). With a smaller peer group, these students have fewer people to relate to and rely on.

There is a large number of first generation college students in the most underprivileged racial, income, and gendered groups (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Being the first person in a family adds struggles to the student that those who are not first generation students may not face (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). These students have been found to have higher dropout rates than other students (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that students who were Latino first generation, female first generation, and low income first generation had lower persistence rates from their freshman to sophomore year. These variables did not affect continuing generation college students (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Programs

There are multiple types of programs offered to students to help increase student success and retention, including living learning communities, mentoring programs, and academic success programs (Andrade, 2007; Nora & Crisp, 2007).

Living learning communities. There are multiple options for students when choosing a residence hall on campus including apartment style, suite style, or traditional style housing, themed communities, or living learning communities (Pike, 1999). Li, McCoy, Shelley, and Whalen (2005) found that out-of-class opportunities in the residence halls promote academic achievement. Astin (1984) stated that students who live in the residence halls have a greater chance of persisting and completing a degree. He also found that these students are more likely to get involved or become actively engaged in campus organizations and express their satisfaction.

To try and create more continuous learning environments, many institutions are designing environments in the residence halls that will promote student learning and development (Pike, 1999). Some learning communities are designed where students take classes together either in

the residence halls or out (Andrade, 2007). These communities are designed with specific learning goals in mind (Andrade, 2007). The four most common learning outcomes are persistence, academic achievement, involvement and support, and satisfaction (Andrade, 2007). It has been found that student satisfaction increased interaction with peers, improved academics, and promoted involvement and persistence (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999 as cited in Li et al., 2005). These environments are designed around a diverse curriculum with improved faculty-student interaction and a peer support structure (Pike, 1999). Learning communities vary by the institution based on the population and the needs of the students (Andrade, 2007). It has been found that students who live in learning communities have higher levels of engagement when compared with students who live in traditional style residence halls (Pike, 1999).

Mentoring. Mentoring is another program that multiple universities offer their students to help with persisting towards graduation (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Peer mentoring typically occurs between two students. The student with more experience becomes a role model to his or her mentee (Nora & Crisp, 2007). It has been found that students do not receive enough peer support which can help the development of students (Nora & Crisp, 2007; Swenson, 2008). The transition to college sometimes leaves students transitioning through friends or close relationships with their peers (Swenson, 2008). During high school many students are more connected with their parents and family, but upon arriving to college the focus shifts to relationships with peers to replace the connection students had with their families (Swenson, 2008). Swenson (2008) found that making new friends in college was important to adjusting to college.

There are many types of mentoring programs with various amounts of training for the mentors, but most programs are there for the same reason: to help students persist (Nora & Crisp,

2007). The underlying goal for mentoring is to create a support system for the mentee including both emotional and psychological support (Nora & Crisp, 2007).

Mentor programs have a variety of different names based on the institution. Our Lady of the Lake College calls its mentors “success coaches” (Farrell, 2007). These coaches are trained to motivate and help emphasize the importance of time management and other important skills students need to succeed in college (Farrell, 2007). The program is set up to help the students who need the most help (Farrell, 2007). Regardless of the various programs and how they are managed, one of the underlying goals for most mentoring programs is academic and student success as they persist toward graduation.

Academic success programs. There tend to be two types of programs for students who are on academic probation or have been conditionally admitted (Kamphoff et al., 2007). These two types are those that work in group settings in a classroom or those that work one-on-one with a counselor or mentor (Kamphoff et al., 2007). Some universities use a combination of both when creating their programs. Isaak et al. (2006) found that there were programs that help students make personal contact with faculty and include teaching on skills such as note-taking, test-taking, time management, and goal setting. These methods have helped to increase students’ grade point average (Isaak et al., 2006).

Academic Opportunity Program. ISU offers a program for first-year students to help promote academic success and persistence. AOP is an education-focused program primarily for first-year students who are conditionally admitted to the university (ISU, 2010a). The incoming AOP program for fall 2009 consisted 565 students (ISU, 2009). Of these students, 248 (44%) were women and 317 (56%) were men; 38% of the students were African American and 55% were White, with the remaining 43 students including Asian/Pacific Islander, international,

Hispanic, multiracial, and Native American students as well as those who did not indicate race or ethnicity (ISU, 2009).

AOP is a comprehensive program that has a combination of group classes and individual mentoring (J. Schriver, personal communication, September 24, 2010). To help students achieve success, the program requires that each student participate in five hours of study time each week in the designated space in the Student Academic Services Center (AOP, 2010). Students are also required to meet with a mentor for at least one hour each week and successfully enroll in and complete a University 101 course entitled “Learning in the University Community” (AOP, 2010). Students are required to participate in AOP until they meet the minimum grade point average to advance out of the program. Students in the program are also required to notify professors of any absences in advance and meet with their academic advisors before they schedule classes each semester.

Theoretical Framework

Second-year persistence and success will be examined through an environmental lens using Tinto’s (1988) theory of departure and Astin’s (1984) theory of involvement.

Tinto. There are many stages students go through when entering college and throughout their entire college experience. Each stage that students experience is a rite of passage to becoming an adult (Tinto, 1988).

Tinto (1988) described the three stages that students experience when deciding whether to stay or leave an institution: separation, transition, and incorporation. These stages describe how students interact with others. The separation stage includes the time in students’ lives where they leave high school and transition into the beginning of their college careers. They are experiencing the separation from high school and from organizations with which they were

associated (Tinto, 1988). The separation stage is typically stressful for first-year students (Tinto, 1988). Issues involved in separation include leaving childhood friends behind, being separated from family, some for the first time, and leaving a familiar environment.

Transition is the second stage (Tinto, 1988). During this stage students start to interact with new people, learn new skills, and take on new roles (Tinto, 1988). Many students move to a new city or community with which they are not familiar. Students successfully complete this stage when they have gained skills and knowledge to become a member in a new group (Tinto, 1988).

Incorporation is the final stage of development. This is where the members become fully integrated into the group (Tinto, 1988). Students become competent and participate as a full member of this group after successful completion of this stage (Tinto, 1988). Once students move through all three stages they are usually integrated into the community of college life. Many times this does not occur all in one year. All of these stages must be completed in order to be incorporated into the institution and community.

Another stage as described by Schaller (2005) is the tentative stage which occurs when students change their major multiple times. When students change their major they are uncertain of what their short-term and long-term goals are. They have to try to figure out what they want to do in the future, which is a new responsibility that they are experiencing (Schaller, 2005).

Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan, (2000) applied Tinto's theory to their research on the influence of active learning and student departure and found that the impact of active learning had an effect on social integration, commitment to the institution, and the student departure process. They found that class discussions and high order thinking activities had a positive impact on social integration (Braxton et al., 2000).

Braxton, Brier, and Steele (2007) used Tinto's theory to support their research on retention. They concluded that no single office is responsible for retaining students because there are many factors that affect retention and that offices such as advising, career centers, orientation, residential life, and activities can all assist in reducing student departure (Braxton et al., 2007).

Astin. Astin (1984) defined involvement as the amount of physical and emotional energy that students put toward their academic career. An involved student would be one who actively participates in everything a university has to offer including organizations and classes and would spend a good amount of time with peers or faculty and staff (Astin, 1984). An uninvolved student would spend little time on their academics and not get involved in campus organizations and interact very little with peers and faculty and staff (Astin, 1984).

There are five basic concepts to the theory of involvement (Astin, 1984). The first thought describes involvement as the investment of the physical and emotional energy into the various experiences (Astin, 1984). The second assumption is that each student gets involved with a different degree and at different times throughout his or her career (Astin, 1984). Involvement can be measured either qualitatively or quantitatively (Astin, 1984). The fourth hypothesis is that student learning and development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in a specific organization (Astin, 1984). The last assumption is that effectiveness of an educational policy or practice is directly related to an increase in involvement (Astin, 1984).

Astin (1984) asserted that the greater the level of involvement, the greater the student learning and development. Astin explained that one must actively participate to gain the benefits of the involvement. Curriculum must actively engage students and help them become involved

and not just simply be available to them; teachers must focus on the students and their motivations rather on just the content and their ability to teach (Astin, 1984). They must be able to understand the students and their level of involvement with the topic they teach.

Noble, Flynn, Lee, and Hilton (2007) utilized Astin's theory to support their research on first-year retention programs. They determined that first-year retention programs increased campus integration and grade point average (Noble et al., 2007). They found the level of integration to be beyond just living in the residence halls, and students were becoming integrated with the institution (Noble et al., 2007). As students become more integrated they become more involved with the institution because they have become more actively participating (Astin, 1984).

Mohr et al. (1998) applied Astin's theory of involvement to their research on retention of college seniors. They found that student perceptions and their level of academic involvement affect their decision to leave a university (Mohr et al., 1998). Students who had low levels of involvement with faculty and advisors were more likely to leave the university (Mohr et al., 1998). Astin (1984) supports this and stated that students who interact with faculty members are more likely to be satisfied with their experience at the institution.

Tinto's (1988) theory of departure and Astin's (1984) theory of involvement can be used to help first- and second-year students who are experiencing an important point in their life, many of whom are making decisions about whether to stay and continue on at the institution or to leave the institution for something else. Being able to understand students' reasons and stages of departure and their involvement with the institution can help practitioners assist students with their decision in hopes of increasing their success.

Summary

The literature supports that increased involvement and academic and social integration lead to higher retention rates. The literature also shows that universities have realized this and created programs to help combat students leaving the university. The literature supports the difference in needs between first-year and second-year college students. Some of these needs are not always explored because much of the research is focused on first-year students and sophomore students sometimes feel lost without the support they received as first-year students.

Although the literature provides examples and ideas of programs that have worked at other institutions, it is important to look at different types of programs, particularly the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University. Rather than making assumptions based on other programs at various institutions, it is important to conduct formal research which asks students who are alumni of the program how they feel after they are no longer a part of the program and no longer have the assistance and guidance provided to them when they were first-year students in the program.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This chapter presents the methods used in the present study. This includes the methodology, sample selection process, the instrument employed in the study, and the data collection and analysis procedures used in this study.

Because the purpose of the study was to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of students who participated in the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University, the methodological approach was qualitative in nature. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) explained that qualitative data help to better understand the lives of people. Qualitative data are not numerical and are difficult to categorize because perceptions are different for each individual.

Qualitative data provide depth in the data rather than breadth that quantitative data provide (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). Qualitative research samples a small group of people but gains deep insight based on their perceptions and experience (Ambert et al., 1995). The goal of qualitative research is to gain an understanding on how and why people behave and think and not on their specific actions (Ambert et al., 1995). Discovery is usually the context in which the data are collected; it brings up new thoughts or ideas rather than trying to verify already existing data (Ambert et al., 1995). Qualitative data allowed interaction with the participants to gain an understanding of their feelings and reasons they persisted at ISU. The

present study examined the relationship between first-year success programs and second-year persistence. Focus groups were facilitated to provide qualitative measures related to academic success of second-year students who took part in AOP.

Focus groups are designed to gather information about perceptions and attitudes from a group about their experience (Stage & Manning, 2003). They allow participants to clarify and challenge each other (Stage & Manning, 2003) in a comfortable setting and one in which students can feed off each other when they have similar feelings (Morgan, 1997). Data gathered from focus groups can be richer and stronger (Stage & Manning, 2003). This allows for themes to be easily discovered among the group. This could also be a weakness because some members of the focus group could be followers and not express as many of their own thoughts as they would in individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). The role of the researcher may have a negative impact on the focus group because the focus group may be led in the direction guided by the research (Morgan, 1997).

The purpose of this study was to determine the value of AOP from the perspective of students who have advanced beyond the program and are currently in their second year. Focus groups helped gain information about students' perceptions and experiences of the program that cannot be gained through surveys or quantitative data. Students' perceptions were used to determine which factors of the AOP were most beneficial. Talking to students is the most effective way to determine if outside factors played a role in their decision to continue at ISU. These focus groups provided information about the specific aspects of the program and the information can then be used to make improvements to the program to help incoming students and help further their success.

The following research question helped guide this study: What is the relationship between participation in a first-year success program and second-year persistence among conditionally admitted students? Specifically it was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the effects of participating in AOP for students who are out of the program for at least four months?
2. What skills have second-year students gained from participating in AOP their first-year?
3. Do the positive effects of AOP help students after they have left the program?
4. What do the students need once they are finished with the program?
5. How do the students feel about their level of academic success after having completed the program?

Sample Selection

This study was conducted at ISU, a mid-sized comprehensive university with a student body of approximately 9,000 undergraduates. Total enrollment of ISU students as of 2010 was 11,494; of those students 47% were men and 53% were women (ISU, 2010b). Approximately 78% are from the state of Indiana and only about 5% are from outside the United States (ISU, 2010b). About 75% are White and about 20% are minority (ISU, 2010b). Approximately 360 first-year students participated in AOP during the 2009-2010 academic year (J. Schriver, personal communication, June 15, 2011) .

This study was conducted in the spring 2011 semester. The sample population included second-year students who participated in AOP as first-year students. Following approval by the Institutional Review Board, Ms. Cynthia Evans, AOP Coordinator, sent a recruitment email (see Appendix B) to students who participated in AOP during 2009-2010 and were still enrolled at

the university. A follow-up email (see appendix C) was sent two days later to try to gain more student participation. No students responded to these emails.

Snowball sampling method occurs when people are asked to identify others who fit the sample population (Goodman, 1961). The snowball method was used by asking colleagues if they knew students who fit the sample population and might be interested in participating in a focus group to contact them asking them to respond. When only three participants were identified using snowball sampling, additional incentives were sought by requesting extra funds. A grant for ten \$20 gift cards through the Student Affairs and Higher Education program was applied for and received. New emails (see Appendices D and E) were sent by Cynthia Evans and the snowball sampling method was utilized again.

Procedure

The final sample consisted of six students in two focus groups. Before participating in the focus groups, students were informed as a group of the research procedures and their rights as research participants; they were then asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix F).

The focus groups were held in a classroom in University Hall. Pizza and pop were provided to participants. Each participant was given a \$20 gift card to the Indiana State University Bookstore. They were also entered in a drawing for a \$10.00 iTunes gift card. One card was given to one participant in each group. No visitors were allowed to observe the focus groups.

Julianne Arthur, a second-year graduate student in the Student Affairs and Higher Education program, helped facilitate the focus groups. The facilitator did not guide the discussion of the participants but acted as a second pair of eyes and ears in the collection of the

data. Both Ms. Arthur and I received training and guidance on focus group facilitation from Dr. Denise Collins, faculty sponsor of the research.

The small groups of students were asked to participate in an activity designed to focus on their experiences, feelings, and attitudes toward their academics, the institution, and AOP. The focus group finished with a discussion on the activity and their experience as a student independent of the program (see Appendix G for full protocol).

Data Collection Procedures

Since the data are qualitative in nature, the focus groups were recorded in order to reflect back on the discussion and the large amount of information that arose during the focus group. The focus groups were audio recorded with advanced knowledge of the participants. The co-facilitator helped record conversations and note themes that arose during the focus groups. The first step in collecting data included transcribing and writing up the data from the focus group conversations. The written notes were kept in a password protected computer file. Digital audio files were stored in a password protected computer file.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative research such as focus groups leads to a large amount of data collected (Morgan, 1997). Analysis followed a constant comparative method to examine themes where incidents were compared to develop tentative categories (Merriam, 2009). The transcriptions were read through multiple times and coded. Statements were included if they were relevant to the research questions and broadly coded and narrowed down. Coding occurs when data are being sorted into categories (Merriam, 2009). The data were read through carefully and each topic in each focus group was categorized and sorted into themes. The categories were created to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The groups became the groupings for the

conceptual data (Dye et al., 2000). The categories then were compared which lead to descriptive categories (Dye et al., 2000). The AOP objectives and goals of the program and University 101 course were taken into consideration when creating recommendations. Assumptions were determined based on the themes that arose in the conversations. Conclusions, recommendations, and implications were written and presented in a format for other professionals in the field.

The Researcher

I am currently a second-year graduate student in the Student Affairs and Higher Education master's program. I became interested in this topic during the first semester of my graduate work while researching for a class assignment. During my undergraduate education my sophomore year was the most difficult which helped me relate to the research I was doing. Although I did experience some difficulty my sophomore year, I did not participate in a first-year academic-based program.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was that it was only one specific population at one university. Students who are not part of AOP were not included.

Another limitation of this study was that it only occurred at one institution. This eliminates any comparative research to other types and sizes of institutions. The institution involved was a public, comprehensive, midsized university. Programs at other types of institutions such as private, research, or religiously affiliated were not included in the research.

The research did not include every second-year student on campus but only those students who participated in AOP as first-year students and returned to the university for the second year. These students most likely have similar characteristics and results would not be the same if the entire campus population were to be used.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of students who have completed the Academic Opportunity Program, a program designed to help increase student success and persistence. The following research question helped guide this study: What is the relationship between participation in a first-year success program and second-year persistence among conditionally admitted students? Specifically it was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the effects of participating in AOP for students who are out of the program for at least four months?
2. What skills have second-year students gained from participating in AOP their first-year?
3. Do the positive effects of AOP help students after they have left the program?
4. What do the students need once they are finished with the program?
5. How do the students feel about their level of academic success after having completed the program?

Focus groups were used in this study. Two focus groups were completed with three students in each group. The population of students from whom the sample was drawn consisted of current second-year students who completed the Academic Opportunity Program their first

year. The sample consisted of three male and three female students. There were two African American women, one Latina woman, one African American man, and two White men.

Focus Group Results

Focus groups were centered around two sets of questions. First, students reflected on components of AOP. They then responded to questions regarding AOP's effects on retention.

Components of AOP. Those aspects of AOP that students commented on were University 101, mentors, study tables, peer relationships, and involvement in service-learning and community engagement.

University 101. In response to the statement "University 101 gave me tools for success in other classes," some students felt that there were new things that they learned and others stated that they had already built those skills. One student said, "I feel like the stuff that they told us, I kind of already knew and lot of the stuff it just refreshed my memory. The tools were already there."

Another student discussed the skills she gained throughout the class and how they helped in other classes,

I think it discussed a lot of skills that you'll need during college and a big thing for me coming out of high school was public speaking and it forced us to do that. It prepared me later on down the line when I had to do presentations.

Additionally, one student discussed in general how the class helped to understand the campus. Another student stated,

I think it really helped me out with a lot aspects, with scheduling, planning my life out, time management and calculating GPA. Nobody on my floor knew how to calculate

GPA. I had to explain to everyone how to calculate GPA. It gave me a lot of tools I've kind of kept with me and try to work on a lot.

Another student mentioned how the AOP program in general helped but not specifically the University 101 class:

I took it last year, I'm just out of AOP now, but I took it last year and it was an easy "A" honestly. I didn't really learn too much from the class. I didn't have issues giving a presentation. It didn't give me major fundamental skills or things that I would need to know, but I know that AOP program helped me a little bit, but as far as University 101.

When asked if there was anything else that the class helped with, one student mentioned test taking skills. This participant stated,

That was another thing; it helped with test taking skills which I thought was really interesting. She talked about how sometimes when it comes to test; it is just about knowing how to take them. She gave us a nonsense test that had absolutely no right answer. It's just about picking out little things. If they go into an explanation it's probably the one. They're going to put a lot of effort into it so you'll guess it right.

Mentors. When asked if their mentors were helpful in their academic success, some participants indicated that their mentors were helpful while others felt their mentors were not as helpful. One student stated,

She was really friendly with me and she kind of helped me get accustomed to college life. She taught me a lot and gave me advice on different things. The big this she did was help me figure out my schedule and what classes I'm trying to take and what I need to take. She gave me a lot of good advice that has helped me out so far.

This student agreed that her mentor was helpful to her academic success in many ways by stating,

My mentor was like a friend to me. She was really helpful. She taught me and showed me a lot about the ins and outs about the university. She helped me a lot with me first two schedules that I had to make out. She helped me. I got more from her than University 101.

One student identified that his mentor was nice but did not help him with his academic success: “Mine was more of just like talk time, it was pretty nice, pretty cool but we didn’t talk about what I was doing. I was doing good so I told them I was doing good. That’s about it.”

Multiple students agreed that their mentors were not helpful but just tried to complete their required tasks. One student stated, “She didn’t really try to help me, she just tried to tell me what to do, or choose stuff for me, she really didn’t let me pick my own stuff. I didn’t like that.”

Another student stated a similar feeling,

She was a nice person and she did her job. She was supposed to report grades and stuff like that, but as far as reaching out and offering help I never really felt like she did that. She just got her job done.

Study tables. Participants were asked if study tables were a valuable aspect of the program. There were mixed reviews to study tables. One student reported,

I picked neutral because I feel like everyone has different study habits and I feel like sometimes the study tables can either be too quiet for a student or too distracting for a student. I feel like sometimes they weren’t regulated very good. You have people who were watching movies, playing music, cell phones going off. For me, I need a lot of

noise or else it's hard for me to sit in a room by myself and just kind of work on stuff. If I had a long paper to write it was the only reason to go to that.

One student discussed how he really enjoyed the atmosphere that the study tables provided them,

I'm on the opposite end. I kind of like a quiet space where I can just sit at a desk and focus. If I hear a noise or if the TV is on in my room, while I'm trying to study it's not going to happen. I get distracted, but the study tables definitely helped me because they kind of taught me it's important to study to get good grades. College is a lot different than high school where it's not just homework you have to do your own studying, your own reading. They help me.

One student agreed and described,

I kind of miss study tables. When I was required to do them my grades were a lot higher. My grades aren't horrible now but when I was having to do study tables it was more enforced. You could have your iPod but you couldn't be watching movies or on facebook and having someone be a hawk over your shoulder making sure you're doing what you're supposed to be doing helped me. I get distracted easily.

A few participants presented that study tables were not as beneficial. One student even had to be reminded of study tables because she did not utilize them.

My mentor actually told me that, the fact that I had good grades, that study tables, was just a way to back it up in case I did bad, I could say I was studying five hours a week. She said technically you don't have to go if you are doing good. So I never really went because she told me as long as I get good grades. I didn't go, not once.

Two others discussed what they did not like about study tables and how they could have been improved. One stated,

I didn't like those. We had to walk all the way over to that hall. We lived in the Quads so that was too far to walk in the winter time. If they would have had study tables in the quads, the library, some other places that were closer to where I was living. I didn't want to walk all the way over there.

The other student felt similar and compared study tables with studying in the residence hall rooms. This student claimed,

Well it was too far, like if they would have had it in other areas where people normally study like the library this part of campus. The good thing about it was that you were there so you had to do something not like in your room.

Peer Relationships. A statement was given to the participants asking if connecting with other AOP students was important to them. This statement received mixed reviews. One student claimed that it was nice to meet others:

I think it was nice to meet some other people just to have a passion like I did to get out of this, to help me. We kind of helped each other, pushed each other to get out first semester.

Another felt similarly and discussed more in-depth how the relationship with other students was built through various classes.

I like having the required University 101 and English 105 together. I met friends through that. I'm actually close to a lot of them now. It was helpful. We all pushed each other. We really don't want to be doing this next year we've got to get through this and get it done. I liked connecting with other AOP students in the University 101.

Others did not find it as important as the first student. One student reported, It really wasn't important to me. I made a lot of friends freshman year. The AOP program definitely helped me get accustomed to college, but as far as meeting other AOP students, it wasn't really important to me because it didn't help me. I was comfortable in the AOP program so I didn't need other people to make me feel comfortable.

While some students mentioned that connecting to other AOP students was important, others stated it was more important after they were out of the program. One student stated, As a staff member, I didn't really meet anyone my first year and talked to them. But as a staff member, to have had the AOP experience and bring that up, to just people and residents who are in the AOP and say I was there too and they can get through it.

This was a similar topic as it was discussed as another participant claimed,

It helped like last year and meeting people that were in it and this year being a staff member, to see how they did and be able to help other people that are in it or going into it as a freshman.

Involvement in service-learning. The participants were given the topic of service-learning and how AOP helped with involvement in service-learning. Two students discussed how AOP got them involved in other activities.

I think the program itself did help me get more involved. In University 101 class we had to get out and go to different events going on around campus. It taught me that college is really boring if you don't get out and do things, go to shows, if you don't just get out and do stuff. You have to be outgoing. You can't just sit in your dorm all the time. You have to hang out with friends.

The second student who felt similarly stated,

I definitely agree with what he said. I know we worked with relay for life which was really cool. It kind of got me involved with that and helping Saint Jude's. We did etiquette training too. It was kind of neat to learn all that stuff.

One student discussed her involvement through AOP but felt that much of her involvement came because of other venues: "University 101 required us to go to outside things, but since I was already a theater minor I was already there anyway so it was easy for me. I never went above and beyond."

Another student felt similarly as he discussed his involvement experience and the Leadership Learning Community (LLC). This student reported, "LLC got me involved in community engagement not AOP." Another student said, "So like the other student said LLC, had to do things outside and being an RA had to go to most of the organizations. AOP didn't really force me to go."

The final student described how her community service project flopped but was at least attempted by her University 101 class,

We didn't really do too much. We had a community service project but ours basically flopped in University 101 so we really didn't have to do it. We went on our trip to Springfield, IL to the Lincoln Memorial museum and it as more of a time to get out of class and goof off. It was one of those things that was just there, but it didn't inspire me to do community service like the other organizations I'm in, inspired me to do community service, but AOP program was just like here it is.

Involvement. When asked if the program helped students get involved the participants mentioned a variety of organizations. One participant said,

I got involved in Black Student Union, SAAS, and another organization that I quit this year. I got involved with other organizations. Having those organizations. It was something nice and if I leave I won't be able to come back to it.

Another student discussed his involvement and described how he would have continued that specific involvement had it not been for other commitments,

I got involved in the National Cross Country tournament which was a really fun experience. I would have done it again this year but it got pushed down. It was just cool to be able to go work with division one athletes who were at the national championship. It was pretty sweet.

One student discussed how he continued to remain involved:

I wouldn't say I specifically got involved in groups on campus. It did teach me to be more active. I've done a lot more. I've went to Sycamore Sessions and different shows around campus I signed up for two different honors programs. I got invited to them but I definitely signed up so I could get more involved. I always check Sycamore Update and my email. I always see what's going on around campus. It makes it more fun. So I go out and do stuff but I'm not specifically involved in any groups.

AOP effects on retention. Participants responded to questions about how AOP affected their decision to stay for the second year and how AOP might be improved to increase its retention rates

Decision to stay. Opportunity was the major topic discussed as to how AOP program affected participants' decision to stay at ISU. One student claimed, "It gave me an opportunity to go to college. I probably wouldn't have even come to a four-year university, but it gave me a chance." Another student agreed by stating,

That's the good thing about Indiana State; they give you a lot of chances and a lot of opportunities to really catch up. Now if people don't take them that's on them, but at the same time AOP could do some improvements. But it did help a lot of people just to get in the door by saying I go to a university versus I go to a community college or institutions.

A third student had similar views: "Yeah, I definitely agree. If it's either AOP or not get accepted into the school, I feel like it's great. I'm doing great now and I knew I could. It's just a matter of wanting to."

One student discussed the connections he made through the AOP program that affected his decision to stay:

I feel like it got me really involved with stuff and meet a lot of people. I met Al Perone, still a person I go to every day to talk about stuff. He was kind of my motivation and I had trouble with financial aid too and he through the class helped me out and pushed me to stay here.

Two students discussed the attributes that ISU and the AOP program had that aided them in their decision to stay. One participant described,

I kind of liked it because it was kind of a smaller school compared with IU and Purdue. Doing the AOP program helped me get accustomed to college so it made me enjoy myself more here at ISU. It made me go out and get more active and get better study habits so I can get good grades. So it helped me enjoy being here at ISU.

Another student said,

If it wasn't for AOP I probably would have transferred out my first semester and been at Ball State now. AOP kind of trapped me more or less having my advisor. She was really

helpful. I went through a lot my first year It was hard to say the least. Having her to go talk to and she was able to give me good feedback and with the campus size not being too terribly large and everything being kind of clustered together made it convenient. I'm still here, sadly. I'm kidding.

The participants were asked their views on why they persisted when other students did not. Topics that were discussed included involvement and the relationships they built both with peers and with mentors. One student claimed,

I had a couple reasons. One was I turned out to like ISU after my first year. I might as well. At first it was like, I was going to be here a year. Well that year turned into two years. I'm going into my third year now. The more you get involved on campus the more you have to do and you have an inspirational group or people to hang around with. And you're required to do certain things you have to do just about everything. When you're forced to do well and you have that inspiration to actually do more it makes you kind of want to linger around and feel yourself get a vibe for yourself on this campus.

The next student discussed the relationships with peers and the values that were developed through family.

For me, it's one, being surrounded by the right group of friends and people. Two it's just values. Throughout school growing up my mom always pushed it on me and my brother to get good grades and be successful. Coming to college, I knew a lot of people that first semester freshman year all they did was party all the time so they didn't worry as much about school and they ended up leaving second semester. With me, I just knew I can't go out and party all the time, I need to study. I went out every now and then, but I focused more on schoolwork than partying and my friends were kind of in that same situation, so

we kind of helped each other out to stay focused on school and get good grades stuff like that. I think people, kids need to know that college isn't all about partying. It is fun to go out and hang out with friends and stuff, but you have to be smart about it. This is your life. Once you get to college you're deciding what to do from here on out with the rest of your life. If you're going to be successful or not and you do decide to go out and party you're just throwing all that away all the tuition money and all the learning experiences.

While one student discussed relationship with peers, another discussed his relationship with his mentor that he met through the AOP program,

The biggest thing was meeting Al Perone and building a good relationship with him. He helped me get through so many things and so many financial problems and also I joined a fraternity and the fraternity had my back. I was thinking about transferring to go to Ivy Tech and they told me no. You'll make so much more money just stay here, keep on doing it, keep on pushing yourself. It was just the constant push from everybody that supported me.

The question was posed to the groups: "Why do you think you returned when others did not?" Multiple responses were gathered in response to this question including determination, change, and the opportunities provided at ISU. One student discussed,

They didn't want to change from high school. I know I didn't want to go back home. So I had to do what I had to do. I did my hours during the week and helped me do homework which I probably wouldn't do. I just didn't want to walk all the way in the cold but other than that.

Another participant explained that she wanted to continue to be a part of her organizations and continue to challenge herself.

I think it is mostly because there are a lot of things they offer, the school, here that I wanted to be a part of and try to challenge myself when it comes to being a staff member and being in the LLC and being a mentor for the LLCers. I wanted to try it. I wanted to help people and help them see that I was an AOP student and got good grades.

A third student discussed similar topics in regards to opportunities and also mentioned determination. This student said,

Determination. Also Indiana State has a lot of different opportunities that other schools don't have or a lot of different scholarships which makes it much easier for somebody to succeed at a college campus. Most schools don't. Knowing that I had an opportunity to go there if something was happening. Even a lot of people at this school still don't know about the opportunities that they could have. As far as like scholarships or study hours. Some people don't mostly know even if they are in AOP.

Suggestions to improve AOP. Each focus group was asked, "Is there anything you wish you had now that you look back, now that you are out of the program?" Some students discussed specific skills they wished they had developed further while other students mentioned relationships with their mentors. One student discussed motivation by stating,

That fire. I hate to say it but when I first came in I hated the way advisors talked to us and treated us how they didn't respect us as students. It kind of felt like you guys didn't try in high school. You guys suck. They put you in this class. That fire to do good. That fire to push yourself to get good grades.

Better study habits was a skill that was discussed by one student as something she wished she had now.

Better study habits. That's always good and a downfall for someone like me, but you get the work done regardless but it would be good to practice on that, study habits, time management, taking tests, stuff that is really important for the class. Most of the classes now I am taking it's just basically the test that's your grade. Studying, you've got the test, knowing how to do it. That's most of your grade right there, those four little tests. That would be something to focus on.

Another student discussed time management as a skill she wished that she had further developed currently now that she is out of the program.

Time management definitely. The agenda is something I discovered. Write everything down in agenda. It would have been nice to know that the first year if they would have mentioned it. I just never thought about it. Write everything down, that way you don't forget.

One participant explained that she wished that she had maintained a relationship with her mentor and the help that she had provided.

I honestly do miss my advisor; I was really close to her last year. I haven't been around her as much because it was a requirement then. I loved going to talk to her. She would get me through issues. She was always there to help and she was very understanding of me and my issues. Now that I don't have to see her as much, I don't because I don't have to. Now that I actually declared my major, I won't see her half as much. Now I have to make trips to Gillum Hall just because.

Conversely, one student said that he would not change anything now. He liked the relationship that he maintained with his teacher and advisor. He claimed,

With me, I wouldn't say anything. Everything is great now. Actually, my teacher and advisor for my University 101 class in the AOP program, I still go see her often. She still emails me to see how I am doing. We're close and we keep in contact with one another. It's the same idea with all my friends. We always push each other. We always focus on getting good grades and doing good in school. I pretty much have everything I need to do good in school. The AOP program did help, but now I think it adjusted me enough so I'm good on my own right now.

To increase student success. Participants were asked what the program could do to increase student success and multiple responses were gathered. One student requested more study hours and discussed how the environment was helpful:

Require more study hours, honestly. When you're forced to do homework in a set environment, you're more likely to do it than if you try to do it in your room. . . . When I go to the library there are too many distractions unless you get a personal study room. Having that environment where you are here to do homework, you do your homework. It helped a lot, having that and doing more of a campus tutorial, not necessarily University 101, because honestly I did not get much out of that class. . . . Teach more about the campus, I guess would be the thing I'm getting at.

A second student discussed similar ideas in regards to study tables and the skills taught in the University 101 class. This person reported,

I agree with everything she said. As far as requiring more study hours, the people on my floor. All of us were all friends there would always be music blaring and they would even drink in their own room. It was distracting and hard to do homework on that floor. So requiring more study hours would definitely teach kids to focus on their school rather

than hanging out and being lazy and partying. I agree with her and what she said, the University 101 class needs to teach more about the campus, but I do feel that the stuff they did teach was important so they should just mix in both rather than just staying in the classroom and learning the fundamentals of college. They should mix in more about campus, learning about different activities and different places you can go and all that.

One student recommended more ways to motivate students, including bringing in more motivational speakers.

More student motivation. Bring more motivational speakers in to the classroom. Will Keim came my freshman year when I was in there. That really helped out a lot and hearing him talk about school and his struggles and how he didn't do very good but now he has a PhD. It was cool to hear stories of people in the AOP program and come back and they kind of tell you what's going on.

Perceptions of AOP. At the end of the discussions the participants discussed their overall perceptions of the program and how it helped. One student claimed,

Overall at the end of AOP it really helped me. But coming into it, I felt stupid. I'm not even going to lie. I felt like they put me in remedial classes because I screwed up my first two years in high school and I really didn't start caring until the end of junior year, when I realize what am I going to because there is college on my hands. When I first came in I felt like AOP was going to separate me from everyone else and make me feel like a stupid outcast; I was going to be in all remedial classes. At the end of it and looking back it helped me a lot. I just wanted to tag that in.

A second student discussed the privilege of being in the program and how it helped him get accustomed to the overall demands of college. "It's a really good program. Any college

student, any freshman coming in would be lucky to do the program. Just because it really helped you get accustomed to college like and the work you're going to be facing."

A third student chimed in on the last comment saying that you just have to put forth effort by stating, "You just got to do the work."

Themes

The themes that emerged as a result of the focus groups and their responses are outlined in the results of this study. The results are clear through student responses and quotes. There were three major themes that emerged as a result of these discussions which includes involvement, skills, and building relationships. There were also smaller themes that emerged in one group or the other. These other themes include motivation, leadership, connecting with peers, transitioning to college, independence, and opportunities.

Involvement. Involvement was mentioned in both focus groups. Every student mentioned that they were in some way involved at the university. Five students were involved in formal organizations and the student who was not involved formally discussed multiple times about getting involved and attending Sycamore Sessions, shows, and campus events. This student also signed up in two honors societies. This student said,

I think the program itself did help me get more involved. In University 101 classes we had to get out and go to different events going on around campus. It taught me that college is really boring if you don't get out and do things, go to shows, if you don't just get out and do stuff.

Some of the students felt that the organizations they were involved in were one of the reasons they stayed. One student commented, "Having those organizations, it was something nice and if I leave I won't be able to come back to it."

Some students were more involved in organizations their first year and two students had quit organizations their second year but remain involved in other organizations in which they were more interested.

Skills. Another topic that was brought up regularly was the various skills that the student gained during their time in AOP. These were skills that they could use throughout their experience in college and throughout the rest of their lives. Some of these skills include public speaking, scheduling, time management, and test-taking skills. One student responded with,

I think it discussed a lot of skills that you'll need during college and a big thing for me coming out of high school was public speaking and it forced us to do that. It prepared me later on down the line when I had to do presentations.

Another student explained that it restored basic skills that they had already gained: "I feel like the stuff that they told us, I kind of already knew and a lot of the stuff it just refreshed my memory. The tools were already there."

Students need to find a way to find their motivation. Once they are out of the program they no longer have that specific attention and need to learn to motivate them. The students need to find ways to do that. When asked what they wished they had now that they are out of the program, one student mentioned, "That fire to do good. That fire to push yourself to get good grades."

Two students mentioned time management as something they wished they had. One student included study habits in addition to time management:

Better study habits. That's always good and a downfall for someone like me, but you get the work done regardless but it would be good to practice on that, study habits, time management, taking tests, stuff that is really important for the class.

Independence. Gaining independence was an aspect that multiple students mentioned either gaining or wanting. When asked what their reasons were for staying at ISU, one student stated, “I liked being out on my own. That’s the best part about. Doing something that everyone thought I couldn’t do.”

Living on campus seemed to help students gain independence and help them stay motivated towards their goals. One student mentioned,

Living on campus really helped you grow and become independent. I don’t know if I was an AOP student and I wasn’t even living on campus if I would want to come to study hours if I would want to put the extra effort forth when I could just go to a community college.

Other students made hints at wanting to gain some more independence and begin to think more independently. This occurred when discussing the formal mentoring role. One student said, “She didn’t try to help me. She just tried to tell me what to do or choose stuff for me. She really didn’t let me pick my own stuff. I didn’t like that.”

Gaining independence is a skill that many college students gain or hope to gain throughout college. This study produced mixed results with some students becoming more independent and others wishing that they had the opportunity with the mentor to become independent.

Building relationships. The most frequent topic mentioned by the students was the relationships that they had built with others. These relationships included their mentors, both formally and informally, as well as the relationships they built with other students in the program and current students who are going through the program now. In terms of the formal mentoring through the program, one student mentioned, “She was really friendly with me and she kind of

helped me get accustomed to college life. She taught me a lot and gave me advice on different things.”

The AOP program also brought various speakers into the University 101 class that the students were able to develop a relationship with. One student in particular stated,

I met Al Perone, still a person I go to every day to talk about stuff. He was kind of my motivation and I had trouble with financial aid too and he through the class helped me out and pushed me to stay here.

Another student was more connected with his University 101 teacher who he still kept in contact with. The teacher continues to email the students to see how they are doing which makes the students feel close to this professor. Two students mentioned that they are able to better connect with some of their residents who are currently going through the program because of their previous experience. They are able to give the students hope that they can make it too.

Other students built good peer relationships with their friends and classmates. One student said,

For me, it's one, being surrounded by the right group of friends and people. I focused more on schoolwork than partying and my friends kind of helped each other out to stay focused on school and get good grades stuff like that.

Even though these students had different types of relationships, including relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, these relationships were all very important to their success.

Motivation. A theme that arose in both groups was motivation. Some of this motivation stemmed from internal sources and others discussed outside sources that helped keep them motivated. As one student mentioned earlier, he was motivated by Al Perone and the relationship built with him. Others mentioned the motivation they found through their peers. One student mentioned,

I like having the required University 101 and English 105 together. I met friends through that. I'm actually close to a lot of them now. It was helpful. We all pushed each other. We really don't want to be doing this next year we've got to get through this and get it done.

Others were motivated by the cost of tuition and the experiences that they would lose out on. One student was motivated by other members of his fraternity who continued to motivate each other.

One student mentioned that he wanted to do something that others did not think he could do. This student said, "I liked being out on my own. That's the best part about it. Doing something that everyone thought I couldn't do."

Connecting with peers. Connecting with peers and other students was mentioned in both focus groups. The groups differed in this in that one group felt it was important to them to connect with students who were going through similar experiences either in the AOP program or as first-year students.

One student said,

I think it was nice to meet some other people just to have a passion like I did to get out of this, to help me. We kind of helped each other, pushed each other to get out first semester.

The other group discussed the role it has played with helping current first-year students with being a role model to them while showing those students that it is possible to succeed and advance out of the program. When asked if connecting with other AOP students was important, one student stated,

It helped like last year and meeting people that were in it and this year being a staff member to see how they did and be able to help other people that are in it or going into it as a freshman.

Opportunities. The greatest opportunity mentioned by almost every student was that they were grateful for AOP. Some mentioned that if it were not for AOP they would not have been able to attend a four-year college. One student stated, “If it’s either AOP or not get accepted into the school, I feel like it’s great. I’m doing great now and I knew I could. It’s just a matter of wanting to.”

Other opportunities that were mentioned were the clubs, organizations, and resources that were available to all students. One student wished that the AOP program would have showed her these opportunities earlier. She commented,

That could be something that can help improve a lot, if the AOP stressed how many opportunities there at Indiana State University and that Indiana State wants you to succeed and this is what they are doing for you. I was never told about those opportunities. They have tutoring for free. They have the writing center. You can become a staff member and get your room and board paid for. There are scholarships out there. There are a lot of things. The LLC even, you can become a family. These are all things that if they knew about maybe they would be willing to stay or stick it out for one more year.

Overall the students seemed grateful for the opportunity that was given to them, but would have liked to know of other opportunities that they could have taken advantage of.

Transition to college. Students experience the transition to college differently. This sometimes includes a roommate, academics, or learning to be independent. Some students

experience transitions on their own while others receive help from family, friends, peers, or mentors. In this study students explained both that they had people assist them through transitions and others wished they had someone. One student stated in regard to her [mentor? Instructor? Advisor?],

She was really friendly with me and she kind of helped me get accustomed to college life. She taught me a lot and gave me advice on different things. The big thing she did was help me figure out my schedule and what classes I'm trying to take and what I need to take. She gave me a lot of good advice that has helped me out so far.

Another student stated,

Doing the AOP program helped me get accustomed to college so it made me enjoy myself more here at ISU. It made me go out and get more active and get better study habits so I can get good grades.

One student discussed the opportunities that Indiana State University has to offer and wished that someone had told her about these opportunities early. These opportunities include tutoring, scholarships, and residence life learning communities. This student mentioned how she wished someone had helped her find these opportunities which could have helped other students stay.

Mentor. When asked what they wished they had, one student said that he liked everything just the way it was. His University 101 teacher continues to keep in contact and to be that mentor for that student. This student stated,

With me, I wouldn't say anything. Everything is great now. Actually, my teacher and advisor for my University 101 class in the AOP program, I still go see her often. She still emails me to see how I am doing. We're close and we keep in contact with one another.

It's the same idea with all my friends. We always push each other. We always focus on getting good grades and doing good in school. I pretty much have everything I need to do good in school. The AOP program did help, but now I think it adjusted me enough so I'm good on my own right now.

Conclusion

Overall, these students need to find the things that keep them motivated. Some students are not able to do that on their own. Students are more successful when they are able to motivate themselves to continue on and complete their academics. Some find that in support systems that they have continued to maintain and others are still looking at improving specific skills.

The important conclusions of this study include involvement, skills, and building relationships. Some findings coincided with previous research while brought up new ideas. Ways to improve and help student affairs practitioners will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of students who participated in the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University to determine if the skills gained during their first year transferred to their second-year.

Focus groups were facilitated and information gathered was categorized.

This chapter is organized into four sections beginning with a discussion of the results and comparison to previous research. Implications for future practice and research follow, then limitations and conclusions about the study.

Discussion of the Results

Themes emerged from the research during the focus groups with the participants. Some themes emerged in one focus group or the other while some overarching themes occurred during the discussions of both focus groups.

It is important to consider previous research when examining the perspectives and experiences of students in the AOP program. In some cases previous research supports the results that emerged in this study and in other cases it contradicted the results.

Involvement. Involvement and connection with the university was mentioned in both focus groups. Some students were involved through the AOP program while some were involved through outside organizations. Students reported that involvement with these activities

had a positive effect on their success and retention. This can include formal involvement with organizations or informal involvement with their academics such as becoming interested in their academics that occurs outside of the formal classroom setting. One student mentioned directly that her involvement with her organizations was one of the reasons she stayed at Indiana State University.

This study supports many previous research findings. One such example is that involvement has a positive effect on student persistence. Astin (1984) claimed that persistence is linked with students' level of involvement. The students who participated in this study were involved and persisted at ISU through the AOP program. Astin (1984) defined involvement as the amount of physical and emotional energy that students dedicate to their college experience. Each student who participated in the focus groups was involved at ISU. Some were involved in formal organizations, others involved with their mentors or peers, while some took time to attend campus sponsored events.

Skills. Various skills that the students gained or want to improve upon was another theme that arose during discussions. These were skills that could be utilized in future classes and some that could be used after graduation as life skills. Some of these skills include public speaking, scheduling, time management, and test taking skills. Some of these skills were learned during the program and others were skills the students wanted to continue to improve.

Previous research also supports the development of academic and life skills. This study discussed academic and life skills that students had either gained or wish to improve upon. Yazedjion, Toews, Sevin and Purswell (2008) support that gaining and developing these skills has been proven to help students become successful. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that

involvement can help students gain skills such as building confidence and interpersonal skills that can help them succeed academically.

Independence. Gaining independence was a skill that multiple students mentioned either gaining or wanting. Independence was gained by some students through decisions or actions, while other students wanted more opportunities through the program to develop their independence. Students gained independence in learning to make their own decisions in their academics and in social situations.

Building relationships. One of the most common topics mentioned by the students was the relationships that they had built with others, including relationships with a mentor or peers. Some relationships were formal and developed through the requirements of the program while others were informal and developed through other means. Some students continued to maintain these relationships while others wished that they had.

Yazedjion (2008) defined student success as persisting towards graduation and what students have learned or gained since entering college, including academic achievement as well as life skills such as gaining independence and building relationships. Gaining independence and building relationships were skills that students discussed in the focus groups as things they accomplished through participation in the program. The importance of relationship-building to the participants in this study indicates that this is a key aspect of the AOP program.

Motivation. A reoccurring theme that arose in both groups was motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were discovered through both discussion groups. Some extrinsic motivators included the motivation from others such as mentors or friends, the cost of tuition, and experiences in organizations. Intrinsic motivators include their internal motivation to want

to succeed or proving others wrong who believed that they could not succeed. Some students need help finding that motivation while others can find it on their own.

Astin (1984) explained that in order to gain benefits from involvement, one must be actively engaged. Students must be motivated to continue to maintain active involvement. Astin continued to explain that teachers must focus on the students and their motivations rather on just the content and their ability to teach. They must be able to understand the students and their level of involvement with the topic they teach.

Connecting with peers. Connecting with peers and other students was mentioned in both focus groups. The groups differed in that one group discussed the importance of connecting with peers to discuss similar experiences and help motivate each other and the other group discussed the importance of connecting with current students to help them stay motivated in the program by talking to someone who successfully completed the program.

Participants in this study indicated that it was important to them to connect with peers both in the AOP program and other students who were not in the AOP program. Research indicated that peer support has played a role in students' decision to continue at a university (Thompson, 2008). Both academic and social connecting with peers can help improve their chances of remaining at an institution.

Opportunities. Opportunities offered by the university was a topic mentioned by both groups. The most frequent opportunity mentioned by almost every student that participated in the study was that they were grateful for the opportunity that AOP existed. Some mentioned that if it weren't for the Academic Opportunity Program they would not have been able to attend college. Others discussed opportunities that the university offers, some that they took part in and others that they wished they had known about.

Participants in this study displayed interest in learning about more opportunities that the university has to offer. Flowers (2004) found that students displayed interest in having opportunities to partake in counseling and planning other campus events. The students in this study displayed interest in discovering opportunities such as tutor, writing center, and organizations.

Transition to college. The transition to college can be a difficult time for many students. Some challenges that students encounter during this transitional time include living with a roommate, different demands of academics, and learning to be independent. Some students experience transitions on their own while others received help from family, friends, peers, or mentors. In this study students explained both that they had people assist them through transitions and others wished they had someone.

Participants in this study described their experiences transitioning into college and discussed the support systems that helped them through their transitions. Tinto's (1988) second stage of departure is transition. During this stage students meet and interact with new people and learn and develop new skills (Tinto, 1988). This can sometimes include moving to a new city in which they are unfamiliar. During this time students may also transition through relationships or friendships with their peers as they leave their high school friends behind (Swenson, 2008).

Mentor. The mentoring aspect was discussed in both groups. Some discussed the formal aspect of mentoring in which some did not enjoy and others continued to keep in contact with their mentor. Outside mentor relationships were developed by some students who took it upon themselves to seek out people who could help them and related to their specific issues.

Some participants in this study discussed their relationship both with their formal mentor and some who found a mentor outside the program. Mohr et al. (1998) found that interaction

with a mentor was an important factor in students' retention. Berkovitz and O'Quin (2006) found that mentoring and social support systems were important but that students also need to not only rely on these support systems but also learn to help themselves.

One thing that occurred during the focus group that was not specifically stated in any particular response was the nonverbal communication and responses to some of the questions. One thing that I noticed was in regards to the mentoring questions from the students of color in the focus groups. While it was not specifically stated, their reactions indicated that they would have liked a mentor either formal or informal who was of a similar race who they could relate to. This was most noticeable during the first part of the discussion when participants were asked if their mentor was helpful to their academic success. The neutral facial expressions and initial pauses gave indication that they did not relate to their mentor. Their comments were general in terms of their mentors completing their tasks but indicated no personal relationship or connection and the inflection in their voices indicated that they would have liked a closer relationship with their mentors. One participant of color, through her verbal and nonverbal communication, indicated that she was extremely satisfied with her mentor relationships. She described her relationship in detail and explained how they have continued to stay in contact.

The role of student development. The students who participated in these focus groups appear to be at different stages in their own personal development on dimensions of identity, psychosocial, and cognitive development. Stages of development are a set of assumptions by which people organize their experiences and act as a lens to determine how people define these experiences (Evans et al., 2010). As students begin to experience new things, they try to categorize things with what they already know (Evans et al., 2010). When students are not familiar with an experience, they place it in a new category, indicating development along that

dimension (Evans et al., 2010). Students further in their development may understand more about the purposes and the intention behind many of the aspects and requirements of the University 101 class. Other students who are not as far in their development may view things differently and not understand the purpose; they may therefore view the aspects as basic requirements and hoops to pass through to get to the next step because that is what they were used to in high school.

For example, one of the African American students in this study who had a mentor with whom she could relate was in the early adulthood sector of racial identity (Cross & Fhagen, 2001 as cited in Evans et al., 2010). She has found a reference group and identifies with being African American and has developed her self-identity. She discussed how her mentor was friendly and helped her become accustomed to college life. This student stated that her mentor was the reason she remained at ISU. This student stated that she went through a lot during her first year and her mentor was someone she could always go to.

One of the students who wanted a relationship with his mentor is believed to be in the adolescence sector of racial identity (Cross & Fhagen, 2001 as cited in Evans et al., 2010). This student indicated this through his nonverbals during his response to the statement about the mentoring aspect of the program. He may have had low race salience because he did not have someone with whom he could relate and have in-depth conversations about being an African American student at ISU. This may have led to his reaction and statement during the study.

Another student described his experience with his mentor as not as helpful. Based on the responses that this student gave during the discussions, he was still developing self-direction and independence. This student viewed his mentor as making decisions for him and not allowing him to gain that independence which would put him in Chickering and Reisser's (1993, as cited

in Evans et al., 2010) stage of moving through autonomy toward interdependence. The student's expectations of the program and his mentor were in line with someone who has not yet gained those skills.

One of the students from the second session described his experience his freshman year with making the decision to study and choosing his friends wisely or choosing to party with many of his floor mates. This student is at what Baxter Magolda (2001 as cited in Evans et al., 2010) describes as the crossroads phase. In this phase students become unhappy with who they have become and create their own self-identity (Baxter Magolda, 2001 as cited in Evans et al., 2010). They no longer seek the approval of their peers and find relationships to be more genuine (Baxter Magolda, 2001 as cited in Evans et al., 2010). This student decided not to party with others on his floor and made the decision that his academics were his priority because he was focused on his future and needed to surround himself with others with the same goals.

Environmental analysis of AOP. The developmental level of the participants can also be examined in interaction with the environmental factors of AOP. Students may not realize everything that they have gained during their experiences or the effect of the AOP program if they did not take advantage of everything the program had to offer. The objectives and requirements of the University 101 class are attached in APPENDIX A.

There may be multiple outside factors that have an effect on the students and the learning objectives for the program. One thing is that multiple faculty and staff members teach the University 101 class, each with his or her own teaching style and knowledge about student learning styles. The instructors may not have held the same standards with the class requirements and may not have held the students accountable for missed assignments, which were put in place to benefit the students and to help with the programs' overall goals. Individual

learning styles may have affected the students' ability to meet the learning objectives.

Additionally, the degree to which students were held accountable for completing assignments and participating in class may have affected their learning

Another thing to consider is the level of motivation and development of the students entering the program. Some students begin the program with high levels of motivation to complete the program and persist at the university. Others arrive in hopes to find motivation or because it was their last option and may not have found the ability to maintain motivated on their own. This could affect their level of involvement and overall gains of the program. Even though AOP offers many opportunities to help students be successful, if the students do not take advantage of those opportunities and refuse to complete the requirements there may not be much the program can do for them.

Budgets are also a large factor in many departments at universities with the current economy. The budget may not allow for unlimited staff to give individual attention to each student and be able to hold them accountable for the requirements.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into students' experiences during their first year and their second year. Second-year students are at a point in their lives where their academic load increases and they are expected to become more independent after developing those skills during their freshman year. They are making major life decisions when deciding their major and what they would like to pursue for their future. The transition from freshman to sophomore can be a difficult transition for many because it is a turning point for them in college. Their academic load increases as they may no longer be taking general education courses, but instead their academic demands are increased with more difficult courses.

In this study it was found that second-year students needed to continue developing skills they learned their first year and learn new skills they did not gain, such as time management, organization, and study skills. The participants also indicated finding and maintaining positive relationships with peers with whom they could relate and who could help keep them motivated towards their goals. As their academic load increases, they need more support from their peers to push forward toward graduation. The transition can be difficult for some students because some of their friends may not continue to their sophomore year as many students drop out because they are unable to handle the academic demands of college.

Based on the results of this study and keeping in mind outside factors, there are implications for practice and implications for future research.

Implications for practice. One recommendation for this program or similar programs is to have the mentors have a more active role in both the first-year and continue that role throughout the sophomore year. Research has demonstrated that mentors play an important role in student retention (Berkovitz & O'Quin, 2006). The mentors could be helped to serve multiple purposes such as helping students develop relationships, gain independence, and help provide students with opportunities available at the university. The University 101 class requires that students have 10 meetings with their mentors (Appendix A) but does not discuss a specific format of those sessions. The mentors should be trained to help students develop independence when making decisions both academically and socially. These mentors could develop good relationships with their mentees and help students get connected. Getting connected and involved with an institution has been proven to help students succeed and persist at an institution (Tinto, 1988). If trained properly these mentors could help make students more aware of opportunities around campus such as scholarships and other leadership programs. The

recommendation is to have more structure and more focus with the mentor sessions to align with the program's goals.

The program could also provide planners or agendas for incoming first-year students. One student mentioned that she wished they would have known about planners during her first year. Providing a planner to the students gives them access and knowledge that they may not have; additionally, students may not have the money to purchase one. These planners can be used concurrently with the University 101 class through assignments that require the students to use them during the semester. Incorporating the planner regularly may help the students build regular time management skills that they might continue to use in future semesters. This could help students gain life skills and help them develop time management skills.

Accountability with the requirements of the program should be enforced. The students who participated in this program mentioned more than once that some of the requirements were not enforced or completed and the students were not held accountable. Some of these include study tables and community service involvement with the University 101 class. While a standard syllabus is issued to the professors it appeared as if not all professors enforced the requirements. The instructors and AOP staff could hold these students accountable for the requirements which may be able to help students become more involved with the university.

It seems as if motivation is the key indicator of student persistence and success. Something that could be done is to find a way to help students find what motivates them. Some students are motivated internally while others are motivated externally. This could be done in a combination of ways through the University 101 class as well as through individual discussions with a mentor. This could be a continual process that can be developed throughout the first semester.

The last recommendation is to have an exit session at the end of the first year when many students are advancing out of the program. This session should be designed to prepare students for the transitions and new challenges they may encounter during their second year. Some things that students mentioned they wished their study habits and time management skills were better. This session could consist of a panel of current students who are in their second year who could give advice for the first-year students leaving the program and describe their experiences during the sophomore year. Transition is the second stage of Tinto's (1988) departure theory. If the program could help ease this transition for students it may increase student persistence.

These implications could help students develop and maintain skills. The mentor could have a longer lasting relationship to offer support to these students who still need individual attention. The time management and organizational skills gained from using a planner regularly could help students when their academic load increases; with the program holding students more accountable, the students are more likely to actually utilize all of the resources offered by the program. Motivation is important for second-year students and could help them set goals and continue to strive towards their long-term goals and their future. The exit session could prepare students for the transitions they may face as a second-year student compared to a first-year student.

Implications for future research. Future research on this topic should reexamine the sophomore experience and further examine the perceptions of students. Research could further examine the sophomore year experience and the transitions that second-year students face and the struggles they face which impact their decision to return and persist at an institution. Further research should examine and compare students who persist to students who drop out.

A possible idea would be to perform a similar study across multiple programs at the same university or similar programs at multiple institutions. This could look at similar programs to see if students are facing similar things. This could determine if students gain the same benefits and have similar needs.

Another option would be to look at students who dropped out and compare their experiences with students who persisted. Comparing students' experiences of those who have persisted with those who have dropped out of the university would help gain deeper insight into what institutions could do to help those students who did not return. It could help determine specific aspects of the program that could be improved to help those students.

Continued research is needed to assess the needs of sophomore students and what administrators and student affairs professionals at institutions can do to assist.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be acknowledged concerning this study. First was that the sample population was smaller than expected since very few students volunteered to participate in this study. This did not allow for elaborate results to be drawn. A second limitation is that this only represents students who advanced past the AOP program. This excludes students who were not as successful and did not persist at Indiana State University. Vast samples of students who were not involved in campus or involved in other organizations were not included because of lack of participation.

Conclusion

The participants in this study were involved in the university through organizations and active participation in university events. Some participants connected with their mentors, gained independence, built relationships with peers, and developed time management skills while others

wished to improve upon these skills. The students who participated in this study had developed support systems and relationships to help them find their motivation and succeed in college.

Prior research has not focused on the experiences and perceptions of students who have passed out of the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University. This study will hopefully help administrators and faculty assist students and help them become more successful. As institutions develop academic programs for students who were conditionally admitted, the need for future research on practices to help students will continue to increase.

In conclusion, it appears that the most important thing faculty and administrators need to focus on is helping students find their motivations. Students who are unmotivated will not be able to be successful even if everything else is in place. Once students find their motivation the other things should fall into place including the skills they develop and the relationships they built if they can find a reason to continue.

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APPENDIX A: University 101 Syllabus

UNIVERSITY 101: LEARNING IN THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY
FALL 2010

INSTRUCTOR: Jennifer Schriver, Ph.D.
Phone: 237- 8378
Email: Jennifer.Schriver@indstate.edu
Office Location: Parsons 203
Office hours: By appointment

CLASS MEETINGS: Mondays & Wednesdays 1:00-1:50 p.m.
Dreiser Hall 305

COURSE DESCRIPTION: University 101 is a course to help students make a successful transition into the University by introducing the concepts and values of a university education; by fostering a sense of tradition, community, and the diversity of ideas and people; by developing critical thinking skills as well as academic and personal skills necessary for success; and by providing an introduction to the resources and services of the University.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

In this course, you will learn how to:

- **Take charge of your life.** You will learn how to take greater personal responsibility, gaining more control over the outcomes that you create both in college and in life.
- **Increase self-motivation.** You will learn to create greater inner motivation by setting your own personally meaningful goals.
- **Improve personal self-management.** You will learn numerous strategies for taking control of your time and energy, allowing you to move more effectively and efficiently toward the accomplishment of your goals and dreams.
- **Develop emotional intelligence.** You will learn effective strategies for managing your emotional life and decreasing stress and distress.
- **Improve critical thinking skills.**

- **Master effective study skills.** You will learn how to raise your grades in college by improving essential skills like reading, note taking, memorizing, studying, and test taking.
- **Develop an understanding of the University and its resources.**
- **Develop an appreciation for diversity and a multicultural perspective.**
- **Develop a sense of a broader learning community.** You will participate in co-curricular activities that broaden your view and understanding of the University's learning environment.
- **Increase professional behaviors.** You will learn how to communicate in professional settings including how to seek assistance and demonstrate respect for others.

REQUIRED TEXTS :

Gardner, J. N., Jewler, A. J., & Barefoot, B. O. (2011). *Your College Experience: Strategies for Success*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins.

A 2010-2011 planner is strongly recommended.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance: Attendance is crucial for successful completion of the course. If you are unable to attend, please make it a point to contact the instructor prior to class. Absences will be excused only for documented medical reasons or if you are engaged in a legitimate University activity. You are expected to be on time. Attendance will count toward 50 points of your final grade.
2. Participation: Participation in class discussions is expected, and participation will count toward 25 points of your final grade.
3. Quizzes: **Eleven quizzes will be given over material covered in the textbook**, and each is worth 5 points. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped, so quizzes will count toward 50 points of your final grade in this course. Quizzes cannot be made up unless your absence is excused.
4. Assignments: You will be required to complete **three writing assignments** during the course of the semester. Due dates and additional instructions for the assignments are listed in the "schedule of meetings" portion of the syllabus. All assignments are due at the beginning of class, and late assignments will receive reduced points. All written assignments should be spell-checked and proof-read. Each assignment will count toward 25 points of your final grade in the course, for a total of 75 points overall.
5. Co-curricular activities You will be required to **attend four campus presentations**, which can include lectures, theater productions, or musical performances. To document your attendance, you will turn in a brief paper (300 words) about each event in addition to

proof of your attendance, such as a program or ticket stub. Please staple these items together before handing them in. Some events have sign-in sheets, and you should sign in at those events and include your instructor's name.

Your papers should address the following;

- *What was the event?*
- *Who performed or spoke?*
- *Why did you choose to attend this event?*
- *What was the theme/main idea of the presentation?*
- *Did you enjoy it? Why or why not?*

Papers on each event should be turned into the instructor **within two weeks** of attending the event. Each paper will be worth 25 points of your final grade in the course, for a total of 100 points overall.

6. Mentoring: You will attend at least **10 weekly meetings with a peer mentor**. Mentoring meetings will count toward 25 points of your final grade in the course.

****** 10 meetings = 25 points**

8-9 meetings = 20 points

6-7 meetings = 15 points

5 meetings = 10 points

7. MAP-Works Survey: You will complete a survey during class about your transition to college. Completing the full survey will count toward 25 points of your final grade in the course. The survey will be taken during class.

8. Final Paper: You will reflect on the semester as a whole by developing a **5-page paper** that answers the following questions:

- Discuss your personal involvement with the Indiana State University campus community. Talk about your level of involvement and which activities you attended. Did attending campus events encourage your involvement?
- Overall, how has your transition to college been? What specifically assisted with your transition to ISU? What services or assistance could ISU have provided that would have made your transition easier?
- What changes did you make to your study habits/study skills over the course of the semester? What additional skills do you need to work on or improve in order to be successful in college?
- What are your academic and personal goals for the spring semester? For your second year of college? What assistance do you need to achieve these goals?

This paper will count toward 100 points of your final grade in the course. The paper is due on December 8. Late papers will receive reduced points.

****** Extra Credit:**

(1) You will receive **25 points of extra credit** for participating in at least 5 study hours per week, for 12 separate weeks, in a designated area within the Student Academic Services Center. These study hours are a requirement of the Academic Opportunity Program, and in order for your participation to be recorded, you must swipe your ID at the reception desk when checking in to study. Tutoring may also count as part of the 5 study hours.

***** 50 hours + = 25 points**
40 - 49 hours = 20 points
30 - 39 hours = 15 hours
25 - 29 hours = 10 points

APPENDIX B: First email to participants

Dear (Student's Name)

My name is Elissa Rupley and I am a master's student in the Student Affairs and Higher Education program. You are invited to take part in a research study on the perceptions and experiences of the Academic Opportunity Program as part of my thesis research for my Masters of Science in Education. The purpose of this research is to analyze the perceptions and feelings about the program.

Your participation in this focus group will take approximately one hour minutes to complete.

Food will be provided during the focus group and you will be entered in a drawing for a \$10.00 iTunes gift card. One winner will be drawn from each focus group.

If interested please respond no later than _____

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact Elissa L. Rupley at erupley@indstate.edu or Dr. Denise Collins, my thesis adviser, Denise.Collins@indstate.edu.

If you have any questions regarding participant rights, you may contact the IRB committee at irb@indstate.edu.

Elissa Rupley

APPENDIX C: Second email to participants

Dear (Student's Name)

My name is Elissa Rupley and I am a master's student in the Student Affairs and Higher Education program. You still have the chance are invited to take part in a research study on the perceptions and experiences of the Academic Opportunity Program as part of my thesis research for my Masters of Science in Education. The purpose of this research is to analyze the perceptions and feelings about the program.

Your participation in this focus group will take approximately one hour minutes to complete.

Food will be provided during the focus group and you will be entered in a drawing for a \$10.00 iTunes gift card. One winner will be drawn from each focus group.

If interested please respond no later than _____

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact Elissa L. Rupley at erupley@indstate.edu or Dr. Denise Collins, my thesis adviser, Denise.Collins@indstate.edu.

If you have any questions regarding participant rights, you may contact the IRB committee at irb@indstate.edu.

Elissa Rupley

APPENDIX D: First email to students after grant was received

Dear Student,

There is still one more chance to participate in a conversation about your success in the AOP program. Please see the note below for information and how to sign up. The first seven people to respond will receive a **\$20 gift card** to the ISU Bookstore and a chance to win an additional gift card for iTunes. Even though I won't know your individual responses, the information you share as a group may help improve the AOP program for future students.

Ms. Cynthia Evans

Hello!

My name is Elissa Rupley and I am a master's student in the Student Affairs and Higher Education program. You are invited to take part in a research study on the perceptions and experiences of the Academic Opportunity Program as part of my thesis research for my Master of Science in Education. The purpose of this research is to analyze your experiences in the program.

Your participation in this focus group will take approximately one hour to complete. No one in the AOP program office, including Ms. Evans, will know whether you participated in this study or not.

Every participant will receive a **\$20 gift card** to the ISU Bookstore.

Food will be provided during the focus group and you will be entered in a drawing for a **\$10.00 iTunes** gift card. One winner will be drawn from each focus group.

If interested please contact me at **erupley@indstate.edu** no later than Monday April 25th.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact Elissa L. Rupley at **erupley@indstate.edu** or Dr. Denise Collins, my thesis advisor, **Denise.Collins@indstate.edu**.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at **irb@indstate.edu**.

Thank you!
Elissa Rupley

APPENDIX E: Second email to students after grant was received

Dear Student,

There is still one more chance to participate in a conversation about your success in the AOP program. Please see the note below for information and how to sign up. The first seven people to respond will receive a **\$20 gift card** to the ISU Bookstore and a chance to win an additional gift card for iTunes. Even though I won't know your individual responses, the information you share as a group may help improve the AOP program for future students.

Ms. Cynthia Evans

Hello!

My name is Elissa Rupley and I am a master's student in the Student Affairs and Higher Education program. You are invited to take part in a research study on the perceptions and experiences of the Academic Opportunity Program as part of my thesis research for my Master of Science in Education. The purpose of this research is to analyze your experiences in the program.

Your participation in this focus group will take approximately one hour to complete. No one in the AOP program office, including Ms. Evans, will know whether you participated in this study or not.

Every participant will receive a **\$20 gift card** to the ISU Bookstore. Food will be provided during the focus group and you will be entered in a drawing for a **\$10.00 iTunes** gift card. One winner will be drawn from each focus group.

If interested please contact me at **erupley@indstate.edu** no later than Tuesday April 26th.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact Elissa L. Rupley at **erupley@indstate.edu** or Dr. Denise Collins, my thesis advisor, **Denise.Collins@indstate.edu**.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at **irb@indstate.edu**.

Thank you!
Elissa Rupley

APPENDIX F

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Relationship between First Year Success Programs and Second-Year Persistence

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Elissa Rupley and Denise Collins, from the Department of Student Affairs and Higher Education at Indiana State University. This study is being conducted as part of a master's thesis. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

OPTIONAL: You have been asked to participate in this study because you participate in the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University during your first year. The estimated number of students participating in this study is between 18-24 students.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of students who participated in the Academic Opportunity Program at Indiana State University.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Participate in an activity answering questions by walking around a classroom based on person feelings and experience with academic and the Academic Opportunity Program. This activity will take approximately five to ten minutes. After the activity participants will be asked to sit down and answer questions in a focus group setting about their experiences and feelings with the Academic Opportunity Program. The part of the study will take approximately 45 minutes. The overall focus group will take approximately one hour.

The subjects will be audiotaped. Only the researcher and

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Participants may feel uncomfortable answering questions regarding their experiences or feelings toward their academics or the Academic Opportunity Program. The study is optional and if students begin to feel uncomfortable they may quit at any time.

There are no physical or financial risks with participating in the study.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participants may better understand their feelings and experiences after reflecting upon their time in the Academic Opportunity Program.

- **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION (*Optional*)**

One participant from each focus group will be selected to receive a \$10 iTunes gift card.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of transcribing data and keeping it in a password protected computer file that only the researcher will have access to it.

The activities will be audiotaped and faculty sponsor will have access to the audiotapes. The audiotapes will be erased at the completion of the thesis submission.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you donot want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Elissa Rupley
AHD Blumberg Hall
Terre Haute, IN 47809
(812) 237-4280
erupley@indstate.edu

Denise Collins
University Hall
Terre Haute, IN 47809
(812) 237-2686
Denise.collins@indstate.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

APPENDIX G: Description of the Activity

A. Introduction of facilitators, Review of the procedure, and collect informed consent forms

B. Where I stand Activity

At the beginning of the focus group participants will be asked to participate in an activity where they walk around the room to answer questions based on how they feel.

The first section will have the following signs hung around the room as a scale:
Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree

University 101 gave me tools for success in other classes
My mentor was helpful in my academic success
Study tables are a valuable aspect of the program
Connecting with other AOP students was important to me
AOP got me involved in service learning and community engagement

After each question, students will be asked: Why did you choose this response? What are some examples of this?

C. Sit down: Open discussion questions

How did the AOP Program affect your decision to stay at ISU?
What should the AOP program do to increase student success?
Why did you return when others did not?

D. Wrap up. Thanks for coming.

Explain how data will be stored in password protected computer files.